

COMBINING DIDACTIC AND PRACTICAL TRAINING TO PRODUCE PROFESSIONAL VOCATIONAL EVALUATORS

Judith K. Early

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how a vocational evaluation educational program and a direct service facility can work together to provide students with both the academic and practical experiences to ensure that graduates fulfill the requirements for CCWAVES certification. In order to achieve this goal, a preliminary model for combining all coursework with practical, hands-on experiences is presented in order to develop a professional training program for vocational evaluation students which would enable them to become certified vocational evaluators.

Introduction

The issue of certifying vocational evaluators and work adjustment personnel has been vociferously discussed by Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA) members since 1972. In 1981, the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) was formed to develop and implement the certification process. Last year marked the end of the grandfathering period for vocational evaluators and work adjustment specialists. The advent of CCWAVES, and the subsequent identification and definition of the knowledge and performance areas of competency for vocational evaluators and work adjustment specialists, has played a major role in the establishment of both positions to professional status within the field of rehabilitation. Because the certification process is an innovation in the fields of vocational evaluation and work adjustment, the Standards for CCWAVES Certification have been revised and refined several times. The most recent revisions in the CCWAVES Standards were announced in the Winter, 1987 edition of the VEWAA Newsletter. Specific core competency areas have been established. And major, and more stringent, educational requirements for both professions are scheduled to become effective in 1992 (VEWAA, 1987).

This refinement of the Standards for CCWAVES Certification should serve as a mandate to institutions of higher learning offering graduate programs in vocational evaluation and work adjustment services. The review of pertinent course offerings to ensure that students are receiving all the didactic and practical training necessary to not only become successfully employed in the field of rehabilitation, but also to successfully pass the CCWAVES examination should be a primary goal of training programs.

Field experience, concurrent with theoretical coursework, would enhance classroom lectures, projects, and discussions. On-site facility training would also provide a learning environment in which students can not only interact with practicing professionals, but also begin to develop an understanding of how the the course work applies to everyday situations. Students often have no contact with "real world" activities until practicum or internship time, unless a graduate assistantship is obtained at a rehabilitation facility offering direct client service delivery programs.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how an educational program and a direct service facility can work together to provide students with both the academic and practical experiences to ensure that graduates fulfill the requirements for CCWAVES certification. In order to achieve this goal, a model for combining all coursework with hands-on experiences is presented. The use of facility resources to augment course work is addressed and practical applications are offered to support this model. Suggestions for the development of a manual to familiarize students with the philosophical orientation of the facility as well as established policies and procedures are discussed. In addition, guidelines are offered for the establishment of individual program goals for practicum and internship students.

A Model for Training Competent Vocational Evaluators

The framework for this model is guided by the twelve knowledge and performance areas designated by CCWAVES.

These twelve areas are: individualized vocational evaluation planning, psychometric testing, report development and communication, job analysis, occupational information, work samples, situational assessment, functional aspects of disability, vocational interviewing, learning style assessment, functional living skills, and adaption of jobs and vocational training (CCWAVES, 1987). This model was developed to show how the 12 knowledge and performance areas (as defined by CCWAVES) could be incorporated into a training program by educational institutions offering graduate degrees in vocational evaluation.

FIRST SEMESTER

Functional Aspects of Disability. This course would familiarize students with the different types of disabilities such as visual impairments, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, mental and emotional impairments, etc. Included in this course would be medical information, pharmacological treatments, psycho-social aspects of disability, and vocational implications of the disability.

Psychological Testing. This basic course on testing would familiarize students with instruments within the five basic areas of intelligence, academic, aptitude, interest, and personality. The course should also cover concepts such as basic knowledge of reliability, validity, standard error of measurement, standard deviation, z-scores, t-scores, etc. Students would be taking tests in order to form an understanding of some of the feelings and apprehensions clients experience.

Tools of Vocational Evaluation. This course would be designed to acquaint students with the various methods and instruments of vocational evaluation. In addition to psychological and worksample testing, the course should also cover situational assessments, behavior observations, simulated work stations, and on-the-job evaluations. Sources of occupational information would also be discussed and utilized during this class.

Field Experience. Field experience courses were designed to gradually familiarize students with the methods, philosophies, and procedures utilized by practicing vocational evaluators. This course should be conducted at a rehabilitation facility and students would obtain college credit for participation in the courses. During the initial field experience course students would primarily observe evaluators at work, and compile weekly reports of their activities, observations and insights.

SECOND SEMESTER

Evaluation Planning. In this course students would become familiar with the various types of forms used to plan evaluations. Information typically found in evaluation plans would be discussed and students should be given the opportunity not only to write several practice plans, but also to develop alternative forms designed to meet individual planning needs.

Work Samples. This course would be designed to familiarize students with the various worksample systems currently on the market. Students should obtain hands-on experience administering various work sample components to each other. They should also be required to conduct research about various systems for class presentation. If possible, this class would provide an excellent forum for students to receive any basic training that is offered or required by the system's developer, such as McCarron-Dial, Valpar, JEVS, etc.

Vocational Interviewing. This course would be designed to familiarize students with the process of the initial interview, and other counseling situations within vocational evaluation. Students should practice interviewing and

counseling techniques through the use of videotape and audio equipment. Students should also develop a personal interview form.

Field Experience. Students would build upon the experiences gained through participation in the field experience course of the previous semester by not only continuing to observe practitioners at work, but also to observe interviews, and begin conducting interviews and planning sessions with clients.

THIRD SEMESTER

Assessing Client Learning Styles and Making Behavioral Observations. This course would be optional for students. Various styles of learning would be discussed such as visual, aural, oral, kinesthetic, etc. The integration of learning style assessments into vocational evaluation would also be discussed. In addition, basic styles of completing behavior observations on clients would be discussed and practiced. Through the use of role play situations, students should be given the opportunity to practice skills needed to assess individual learning styles and to record behavior observations.

Field Experience. This course would increase students' duties to include conducting behavior observations on site, as well as continuing initial interviewing and evaluation planning activities.

FOURTH SEMESTER

Report Writing. Report writing is one of the the most basic skills of evaluation. The course material should explore various formats of vocational evaluations reports such as the narrative, checklist, and combined checklist/narrative styles as well as commercial formats such as those provided by MESA and Datamaster. Students should receive intensive practice in writing the various sections of reports. These exercises would be followed by the development or creation of several complete vocational evaluation reports including vocational goals and objectives.

Occupational Information. This class would be optional. Students would become familiar with such resource tools as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Guide to Occupational Information, Occupational Outlook Handbook, and other various sources of employment information.

Adaptation of Materials. This required class would involve exploring various ways to adapt tests, materials, and equipment, job descriptions, and work sites to meet individual client needs. Students would be responsible for using various occupational information materials as research tools leading to the development of adaptations for tests, work sites, and/or job descriptions, and the presentation of these adaptations to the class.

Practicum. The initial practicum experience should be designed to enhance individual strengths as well as remediate weaknesses. It is vital that communication lines between the academic advisor, student, and on-site supervisor remain open throughout the entire period. In order to ascertain individual capabilities, an extensive interview with students should be conducted by the on-site supervisor prior to the start of the practicum experience.

A practicum manual should be developed which outlines the mission of the facility as well as the individual service unit. The manual should specifically state general expectations of students including general demeanor and appearance, filing procedures, confidentiality rules, other programs offered, staff roster and delineation of authority, absence procedures, etc. It is crucial that students be provided with this information, preferably in written form, in order to facilitate individual assimilation into the workplace. This

manual should also state the role and function of both the academic advisor and the on-site supervisor so that all parties involved in this process are aware of individual responsibilities and duties. The student manual should enclose copies of all rating forms used during practica experiences. It would also be helpful for the on-site supervisor to provide a narrative report of students' progress to the academic advisor. Students should be given the opportunity to evaluate the on-site supervisor and the overall experience gained through practica experiences.

Students should be provided with forms for recording activities on at least a weekly basis in order to record activities and problems in a timely manner so that, at the end of the program, students would have a written diary of experiences and impressions for future reference. A written contract stating goals for each practicum should be developed by students and the on-site supervisor during the first week of the practicum. This document should clearly state individual goals and objectives for the program including a time frame for completion of specified projects and established dates and times for reviewing the contract and student progress towards completing the stated goals and objectives. Copies of the contract should be provided to both students and the academic advisor. The original contract should remain with the on-site supervisor.

FIFTH SEMESTER

Job Analysis. This optional course should probe such topics as physical demands analysis, training requirements, worker traits assessments, etc. Students would develop skills needed to complete labor market surveys as well as physical demands and job analyses.

Functional Living Skills. This optional course would explore methods of assessing an individual's ability to independently cope with every day activities such as cooking, cleaning, grooming, handling money, etc. Adaptive devices and alternative instructional methods and materials should also be discussed and developed by students for presentation in class.

Professional Seminar in Vocational Evaluation. This course would involve presentations on current research, applied practices and innovations in vocational evaluation. Guest lectures should be provided by a variety of professionals such as educators, advanced students and community practitioners.

Practicum. This second practicum experience should enable students to continue to build upon previous experiences. During this practicum students should receive their first case assignment to be completed independently. Students, however, should be assigned only one client at a time. By fostering independence in case management procedures, students should develop their own philosophy of practice and would finally be given the opportunity to totally synthesize theoretical and practical experiences.

SIXTH SEMESTER

Internship. The internship semester is the final link for students between the educational institution and the real world. Students would be expected to work at a rehabilitation facility on a full-time basis. During students' internship programs, individuals should be treated as a practicing team member of the facility with its accompanying benefits (i.e., desk space, telephone, unlimited access to materials, and resources) and responsibilities. An experienced and currently certified vocational evaluator employed by the facility and approved by the educational institution will serve as the on-site supervisor. Students should evaluate at least one client per week.

Discussion

This paper has demonstrated how an educational program and a direct service facility can work together to provide students with both the academic and practical experiences to ensure that graduates fulfill the requirements for CCWAVES certification. The incorporation of hands-on training concurrent with coursework should produce a dynamic opportunity for students to practice skills as they learn them. By experiencing the processes of vocational evaluation on a step-by-step, first hand basis, it is also more likely that students would be able to retain the didactic lessons taught in the classroom.

The ability to transfer abstract ideas and methods into action-oriented and responsible decisions in an actual work setting is a crucial skill for vocational evaluators. At this time, students frequently receive little or no hands-on training until the end of their educational program, unless they are fortunate enough to obtain a graduate assistantship at a direct service delivery facility. Students unable to locate, or obtain, such a position are frequently not exposed to direct client service delivery until they are ready for practica experiences. The addition of practical experiences which should enhance theoretical coursework would provide all students with at least a minimum level of exposure to the practical side of vocational evaluation, prior to practica experiences.

Situations in which practica students have no actual experience working with clients frequently force the on-site supervisors to function in two roles: that of the supervisor and that of the instructor. During practica experiences, frequently too little time is spent supervising students performing actual service delivery, while much time is devoted to reteaching students the methods, techniques and concepts that have been learned and forgotten from the classroom experiences.

Persons with training at the bachelor degree level will no longer be eligible to apply for certification as vocational evaluators after 1992. CCWAVES and, subsequently, VEWA have established that minimum competency for future vocational evaluators will include graduate level training. This requirement will only enhance the status of vocational evaluation as a profession.

Vocational evaluation is frequently viewed as a stepping stone to more responsible jobs. In other words, it is an entry level position which could lead to administrative opportunities for its practitioners. The certification process mandates that vocational evaluation should no longer be viewed as an entry level position. Because of these new and more stringent requirements for certification applicants, the challenge to improve or alter existing curricula to enable graduates to pass the CCWAVES competency examination should be a primary goal of educational programs offering graduate training for potential vocational evaluators. This goal cannot be achieved, however, unless practical hands-on training is offered concurrently with theoretical coursework.

The continued success of CCWAVES and the certification process, in conjunction with the improvement in vocational evaluation curricula by institutions of higher learning should enhance vocational evaluation as a profession. The combination of theoretical coursework and accompanying practical, hands-on training should be considered by administrators of all graduate training programs in vocational evaluation. CCWAVES is challenging institutions of higher education to offer students training in vocational evaluation that would prepare them for the certification examination. It is time for these institutions to rise to this challenge and review, revise, amend and/or improve curricula offerings in order to prepare students for this examination. Ultimately, the competence of its graduates should be a primary indicator of a program's commitment to quality training of students by producing evaluators who deliver high quality services to

people with disabilities.

References

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Author:

Judith K. Early, M.S., CVE
Evaluation and Developmental Center
Rehabilitation Institute
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale
Carbondale, IL 62901
