

EVALUATION SERVICES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS:

A JOINT PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the results of a cooperative effort by local school systems, state-agency vocational rehabilitation, and undergraduate rehabilitation training to provide transitional services for special education students. To date, over 25 students have received vocational assessment or workshop evaluation services geared toward the transition from school to work. Although students have begun in both Phases I and II, future goals indicate a sequential process that is initiated in junior high school and continues through follow-up placement.

Rationale for the Project

Special education students with diagnosed physical and/or mental disabilities have been referred to state vocational rehabilitation agencies for many years. This usually occurred after they completed, or more often terminated early, their secondary schooling. However, this decade has seen an emphasis on early intervention (Steimke, Van Ningen, & Clark, 1982), cooperative planning between education and rehabilitation (Cavanagh, 1983; Langone & Gill, 1986), and the inclusion of learning disabled persons (Buchanan & Weller, 1984) in the process of helping special education students prepare for and satisfactorily engage in the transition from school to work.

The legislative rationale for this focus is clear to both educators and rehabilitation professionals:

1. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142);
2. The Vocational Education Act of 1963 (Public Law 88-210) as amended in 1968 (Public Law 90-576), 1976 (Public Law 94-482), and 1984 (Public Law 98-524);
3. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112) as amended in 1978 (Public Law 95-602).

The application of these mandates has occurred because the cooperative programs share the common goal of improving the quantity and quality of services to disabled students and clients (Ashby & Bensberg, 1983). In order to meet this challenge, however, both education and rehabilitation have had to confront past procedures and adapt to an expanded and better coordination system of planning for these persons' futures.

School systems have had to respond to the increasing demand by parents and students to provide relevant career awareness, career exploration, vocational evaluation, vocational training, and independent living skills for special needs students. Traditionally, school counselors and special education teachers have been trained in remedial and compensatory methods for helping these students. Frequently they have not been trained to address the specific and often unique vocational or long-range career needs of this population. As a result, they are seeking assistance with these students early in the transition process from both rehabilitation services providers and university-based educators.

Likewise, state vocational rehabilitation agencies have had to address the issue to when to initiate the process with a handicapped student. Field counselors assigned to school systems no longer wait until the student has graduated or

terminated from the educational process. In addition to diagnostic services, extended evaluation is being utilized effectively to assist educators with work evaluation and situational assessment, as well as to determine the appropriateness of adjustment services and job-seeking skills training.

Universities can be useful to both education and rehabilitation primarily by the person-power that they can provide. Undergraduate and graduation rehabilitation training programs can place practicum and/or internship level trainees in these settings work directly with handicapped students/clients. This not only meets the university's responsibilities of providing services to and interacting effectively with the community, but enables trainees to receive valuable and supervised experience.

The introduction of vocational evaluation services into school settings began during the 1970s (Ashby & Bensberg, 1983; McCray, 1981). However, school programs have tended to utilize evaluation for developmental and educational purposes (McCray, 1984). In its attempts to meet the mandates of the Carl Perkins Act, vocational counselors within this state's school systems were given the charge to implement a plan of action to provide career exploration, vocational assessment for job training, and career guidance services for special needs students. Two potential resources for meeting this challenge were identified: (a) counselors and evaluators in state rehabilitation agencies; and (b) trainees in university assessment laboratories and practica.

Conceptually, the cooperative program in this state was based on theoretical (Buchanan & Weller, 1984; Cavanagh, 1983; Langone & Gill, 1986) and applied (Steimke, Van Ningen, & Clark, 1982; Peterson, 1981) examples. Each organization entered into the effort with different needs as well as specific objectives. Nonetheless, the shared mission was to assist special education students in their transition from school to the world of work. Implementation came to fruition because of the commitment of each system and its personnel to adapting the process to meet local needs.

For example, a goal of local school systems is to secure resources for their special needs students. Even though schools continue to be responsible for academic/vocational training and counseling, teachers and counselors who work directly with special education students have realized that many need additional assistance before they are job ready. It is usually beyond the scope of educational settings to help students establish themselves in the role of workers. Therefore, educators have requested assistance with preparing the students for job training and transition to employment.

A goal of university-based rehabilitation educators is to train students in the knowledge and skill acquisition of providing counseling and evaluation services to handicapped persons. In conjunction with a Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) training grant, this

university has developed an undergraduate practicum in vocational assessment. Student examiners, under the supervision of a licensed psychologist and certified rehabilitation counselor, are learning to interview persons, administer, score, and interpret evaluation instruments, provide occupational information, and give feedback to students enrolled in a local school system. The undergraduate trainees benefit from the practical application of these concepts while the evaluatees receive individualized vocational assessment services.

State vocational rehabilitation agencies provide a wide range of services to vocationally handicapped persons that will increase the person's employability. In 1981, federal legislation focused on a particular group of special education students that had previously been ineligible--learning disabled persons. One example of beginning the evaluation process prior to the completion of educational services has been operationalized by the coordination of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) for these students (Thomas, 1981). This type of planning is designed to positively impact their transition from primarily academic settings to job training and employment. The assignment of specific field counselors to school programs facilitates referrals and communication between the two organizations.

Background

What follows is a description of the implementation of the overall program, the function of each organization, the evolution of three distinct phases, and demographic information about the participants. Issues related to adapting and continuing the program are also addressed. Plans for expansion are under consideration.

The vocational counselor from a local school and the university faculty member met at a regional meeting concerning implementation of the Carl Perkins Act. Specifically, this counselor was interested in resources for career awareness, career exploration, and vocational assessment for this new program. Although well-grounded in the process of vocational counseling, the need for adapting concepts and assessing special needs students was expressed. In the process of consulting with the counselor, it became clear that both parties could benefit from a process that provided educators with assessments services and university trainees with practicum experience.

Upon the realization that many of the mentally retarded and learning disabled persons were not being served, a plan was devised for coordinating the services of school systems and vocational rehabilitation. A program whereby they could work together and use the resources of each for the common good of students resulted. Major obstacles were identified and discussed: staff, transportation, and criteria for selecting students.

Description of Services

Phase I

Beginning with the fall semester, 1986, five undergraduate rehabilitation students, who had completed coursework in testing and assessment, vocational development theory, counseling theory and practice, vocational evaluation, and medical aspects of rehabilitation, were accepted into a practicum in vocational evaluation. Prior to assignment of a special education student, university trainees demonstrated competency in the following: interviewing; administering, scoring, and interpreting selected psychometrics, vocational interest inventories, and the Talent Assessment Program (TAP) work samples; developing an evaluation plan; providing feedback to the student; writing a report for the school; and writing a summary for the parents.

Phase II

A joint meeting between the school systems, university faculty, and vocational rehabilitation personnel was held to determine the kind and number of persons that could be served by Phase II--facility evaluation. The following process was outlined: a referral list would be completed; the vocational rehabilitation counselor would meet with selected students and their parents or guardians to explain the goals and objectives of the program; completion of the application process would require them to obtain a general medical examination, specialist reports if needed, and signed releases for interagency communication.

Students who wished to participate would be provided a two-hour per day, five-day per week workshop evaluation. Their results from a battery of tests and work samples systems (VALPAR, McCarron-Dial Work Evaluation System) would enable a decision for eligibility or the need for extended evaluation services to be made.

Three local school systems were involved in this project. Each school would be allotted an equal number of students per day. Schools would assume responsibility for transportation of the students to and from the workshop for both morning and afternoon sessions. Monies were equally divided between the three participating schools for the provision of one certified special education teacher to serve as academic instructor and workshop supervisor of the students. The workshop would provide a separate room for academic and functional skills instruction when contract work was not available.

Vocational rehabilitation agreed to provide a field counselor, evaluator, and program coordinator for each student. Students would be assigned to work stations and be remunerated according to wage and hour standards for their production. On-going work adjustment services, counseling, and work skills instructions were provided by workshop personnel.

Phase III

Hopefully clients will reach a point in their growth so they can be referred to Job Club. This service is designed to provide further

assistance in learning how to apply for a job, in developing the skills needed for maintaining a job, and in practicing job-seeking activities. The goal of this service is job placement. In addition, the field counselor continues to assist with guidance and counseling, job development, placement, and follow-up services in order to ensure successful closure.

The university assessment laboratory is developing a local job bank, which will be made available to Job Club counselors and local vocational rehabilitation offices. The computer program, ValSearch 12,000+ can be utilized when an employability profile is developed for the students/clients. This information can be used by school counselors for assistance in career exploration and by vocational rehabilitation counselors and evaluators in formulating realistic vocational objectives.

Implementation

Phase I

The vocational counselor and coordinator of special education services selected students from the junior high school to begin assessment as part of career awareness and exploration. Early intervention has been mandated by legislation and supported in the literature (Cavanagh, 1983; McCray, 1982; Steimke, Van Ningen, & Clark, 1982). The opportunity to impact at the career awareness and career exploration stages was attractive to both the school and the university. A letter signed by the special education teacher, the vocational counselor, and the university faculty member explaining the program, its services, and asking for permission for the student to participate was sent to selected students. The parents/guardians of each student signed a release for their child's involvement.

From instruments available in the Assessment Laboratory, practicum trainees developed a battery based on referral information. The following instruments were utilized for each student: Peabody's Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R); Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised (WRAT-R); Wide Range Interest and Opinion Test (WRIOT); Talent Assessment Program work sample system. The supervising licensed psychologist also collected data from the Goodenough-Harris Drawing Test and the Kinetic Family Drawing.

The assessment process lasted approximately ten hours: three, 3-hour days of interviewing, relationship building, planning, and testing followed by a one-hour feedback and discussion session. The first day practicum trainees interviewed the students at their school and the drawing tests were administered. For the next two sessions, the school counselor brought the students to the University where the remaining tests were administered. Feedback and discussion was provided at the school.

Following the analysis and synthesis of the data, confidential reports were provided to the school. Areas for occupational exploration, student's strengths, and suggestions for services to minimize limitations were provided in letter form to the parents. This supplemented verbal

feedback to the school and student.

During the spring semester, 1987, four trainees were enrolled in the practicum. The process was essentially the same with the following exceptions:

1. Parents signed releases for data from student records to be provided. This resulted in deletion of the PPVT-R and the WRAT-R from the battery.
2. Acquisition of the VALPAR Guide to Occupational Exploration Vocational Interest Inventory was substituted for the WRIOT. This was administered audio-visually in a group.
3. Because the students were older, all had some type of work experience, thus enabling a transferability worksheet to be utilized in conjunction with the ValSearch 12,000+ computer program for generating job information.
4. The disabling conditions of two evaluatees resulted in the Bender-Gestalt being administered by the supervising psychologist.

Phase II

When the referral list was completed, the vocational rehabilitation counselor met with selected students and their parents or guardians to explain the goals and objectives of the program. In order to complete the application process, each would need to obtain a general medical examination, specialist reports if needed, and signed releases for interagency communication.

Three local schools were involved in this joint project. It was determined that the workshop could accommodate 30 students per day. This allowed each school to send ten per day, five for the morning and five in the afternoon. Since the three schools already were transporting students to the vocational-technical school on the same bus, this bus was utilized to bring the evaluatees to the workshop and return them to school at lunch or home in the afternoon. The morning session lasted from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.; the afternoon session was from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

During the two-hour session the following services were provided: diagnostic evaluation including psychometric tests (e.g., achievement, intellectual, social maturity, aptitude, and personality), work samples (VALPAR, McCarron-Dial), and observation of work and adaptive behavior; work adjustment services; personal and vocational counseling; situational assessment; socialization skills; and development of worker behaviors.

Students utilized the workshop time clock to record their time and attendance. Each day they reported to the classroom to receive their assignments for activities (i.e., evaluation, work station, instruction). The teacher maintained daily records in accordance with school policy. Instructors recorded the students' behavior and production rate which determined the wages received by the students. Weekly reports for students were provided by the instructors and the teacher in turn reported to the school. These reports focused on the

individual's strengths and areas for improvement. This information provided the basis for the grades received by the students. Disciplinary actions were handled in accordance with combined workshop and school policies.

Demographic Information

Phase I

Nine persons have participated in the university/local school phase of the project (Group I, Table I). Of these, eight are males and two are Blacks. The mean age for the group is 15.77 years, with a range of 13-18. Although there were significant variations in the tested intelligence quotients (IQs) of the persons in the group, the mean for the group (on all measures) was within the mild range of mental retardation. For the five students diagnosed as learning disabled, differences in performance in verbal and non-verbal measures often associated with this group were observed. In contrast, those diagnosed as mentally retarded did not demonstrate this type of variation.

All of the participants lived with at least one natural parent, except for one student who lived with a grandparent. The family support for the students seemed optimal. Each unit expressed concern and a desire to help with future planning for the child. The parents' focus on immediate services were a reflection of the child's developmental stage (i.e., remedial, academic services for the junior high group and job training or preparation for the older students).

This group of special education students were found to be heterogeneous in their strengths and weaknesses, as well as their interests. Although the majority of students performed well on the color discrimination work sample, evaluatees varied both in the level and order of their aptitudes as demonstrated on the Talent Assessment Program. This was in contrast to their uniform poor performance on academic measures; rarely did these rise above the third or fourth grade levels.

With regard to tested vocational interests, over half of the evaluatees expressed an above average interest in the areas of protective services and mechanical/machine operation. Despite their difficulties with reading, two evaluatees results indicated high interest in literature. Overall, fifteen different areas were identified by collecting the highest three areas for each individual. According to the evaluators, some students showed differences in their expressed and tested vocational interests. This could result from several variables (e.g., failure to comprehend the pictures, level of vocational awareness, motivation regarding the instrument, or even attempts to please others).

Personality assessment revealed characteristics that may be associated with adolescence/young adulthood--the striving for power, feelings of conflict and ambivalence, and anxiety. However the feelings of isolation, rejection, defensiveness, and guardedness that were consistently expressed in their drawings and frequently supported in interactions with the

evaluators can continue to impact negatively on their success in school and adulthood if not addressed. Research has suggested (Blalock, 1982; Brown, 1982; Horn, O'Donnell, & Vitulano, 1983; Koppitz, 1971; Minskoff, 1982) that learning disabled students demonstrate the type of characteristics that hinder employability. The possibility of working with these students in group counseling was discussed with the school counselor.

Recommendations for the nine students who were involved in Phase I (in-school vocational assessment) included the following:

1. The five junior high school students will continue in school and receive further career exploration, remedial academic support, counseling, and follow-up.
2. Two of the four high school students will receive job training through the local vocational-technical school in addition to functional skills training and academic support related to training and activities of daily living.
3. Two of the four high school students will be referred to vocational rehabilitation for extended evaluation services to determine feasibility of gainful employment. The school will continue to provide functional skills training and participate in planning for community placement for these two students.

Phase II

Thirty-three students were referred by the county school system for participation in the joint school and workshop program. An application for vocational rehabilitation services was initiated. Eleven students did not follow through with the process (Group II A). This group was male (72%), white (81%), and learning disabled (81%). The mean age of the group was 17.7 years.

Twenty-two high school students were provided diagnostic services and determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Nine of these students subsequently did not complete the program (Group II B). Diagnostically they were mentally retarded (56%) and learning disabled (44%), Black (56%) and White (44%), and predominantly male (78%). Their mean age was 17.78 years.

Two students did not begin the program at the facility and one attended for only three days. Length of evaluation for the remaining six averaged 42 days, with a range of 28 to 160 days. Reasons for withdrawing from the program included disciplinary actions, inability to assume the role of worker, and lack of interest. During the time they attended the facility, this group achieved an average production wage of \$1.49 per hour.

Table I: Phase I and II Demographics

	Age	Diagnosis		Sex		Race	
		M	MR	LD	F	M	B
I A	15.8	3	6	1	8	2	7
II A	17.7	2	9	3	8	2	9
II B	17.8	5	4	2	7	5	4
II C	17.5	11	2	1	12	7	6
TOTAL		21	21	7	35	16	26

Thirteen students remained in the workshop for the school year (Group II C). These individuals were more often diagnosed as mentally retarded (84%), male (93%), and slightly younger (mean age of 17.46 years). The length of their evaluation ranged from 160 to 190 days; mean attendance was 183.84 days. This group achieved a production rate averaging \$1.80 per hour. These students will continue with facility services and move into Phase III (placement activities) within the next year.

Summary and Conclusions

During the 1986-1987 academic year, three organizations combined their energies and resources to increase transitional services to special education students. Forty-four students were offered services; thirty-one became involved in the process. Twenty-two students received either in-school vocational assessment or workshop evaluation. The five junior high school students will be receiving continued support from the school and will be considered for additional services when they reach high school. Of the high school students, two will be placed in vocational training this year and two will be referred for independent living skills assessment and community placement. Ten high school students will be ready for Phase III with emphasis on job placement.

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