

Practicing What We Preach: Multiple Measures for the CVE Examination

Lisa Blakeney, CVE
Private Practitioner, Vocation Validation

Abstract

Vocational Evaluators are trained to evaluate clients based on their individual needs, learning styles, performance preferences, and functional strength. During a vocational evaluation they provide a client with oral, demonstrative and/or written directions and the opportunity to demonstrate their skills hands-on, orally, and/or in writing. However, the current Certified Vocational Evaluator (CVE) examination does not mirror the very process evaluator's use with clients because it is only available in written format. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate the inconsistency between how CCWAVES assesses Vocational Evaluators' knowledge and skills in order to achieve Certification, and the philosophy of Vocational Evaluator practices in conducting a Vocational Evaluation in regards to learning styles, Universal Design for Learning, Authentic Assessments, and testing format options. Additionally, recommendations for providing alternative formats for the CVE examination will be made in order to meet the needs and preferences of the Vocational Evaluators taking the exam which would be consistent with 'effective assessment practices' as established by CCWAVES.

Introduction

The Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) is a certifying body which determines if a professional engaged in vocational evaluation, career assessment or work adjustment meets acceptable standards of quality. In order for Vocational Evaluators to become certified by CCWAVES, they must demonstrate an acceptable minimum level of knowledge with regard to the practice of their profession by receiving a passing score on an exam designed by CCWAVES (CCWAVES, 2007). The certification examination consists of 120 multiple-choice questions offered in a paper and pencil format which is to be completed in three hours in the following content areas: Principles of Vocational Evaluation, Standardized Assessment, Occupational Information, Implications of Disability, and Professional Communication.

The core of a Vocational Evaluator's job duties and responsibilities involves individualized, hands-on techniques, behavioral observations and a variety of techniques, methods and tools to assess a client's vocational interests, skills and potential for training and employment. Therefore, in preparation to become a Vocational Evaluator there is specific coursework offered at only select Universities and internship opportunities in the United States and Canada that focus on teaching Vocational Evaluators how to effectively

serve clients based on their individual needs, learning styles, performance preferences, functional strengths and limitations. Vocational Evaluators are taught formally and/or informally how to provide a client with oral, demonstrative and/or written directions; and how to assess a client's skills hands-on, orally, or with paper/pencil tests. They also need to learn how to provide clients with information about different careers determine needs for community and employment resources; and learn how

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to synthesize and analyze the data obtained in order to make realistic and effective vocational recommendations. In addition, 3 of the 7 CCWAVES Guiding Principles which form the basis of best practices in vocational evaluation and assessment require the use of individuation, variety and accommodating the needs of clients served in a vocational evaluation – as demonstrated by the following:

A variety of methods, tools and approaches should be used to provide accurate vocational evaluations and assessments. A broad range of questions must be posed to determine what makes an individual, as well as his/her abilities and needs, unique. Separating an individual's attributes into categories such as interest, aptitude, or learning style preferences help organize assessment.

Vocational evaluation and assessment information should be verified by using different methods, tools and approaches. Using alternative methods or approaches to validate findings can usually be achieved by: (a) observing an individual's demonstrated or manifested behaviors, such as performances on actual work; (b) using an individual's self-report or expressed statements; and (c) administering some type of survey, inventory, structured interview or test.

Behavioral observation is essential in any vocational evaluation and assessment process. Behavioral observation (e.g. observing physical performance, social characteristics, interactions with people and other aspects of the environment) occurs throughout the evaluation and assessment process. The observation process can be: (a) informal or formal, (b) occur in a variety of environments, (c) made by a variety of people, and (d) should be documented and presented in an objective, non-biased manner (CCWAVES, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of this article is

to demonstrate the inconsistency with how CCWAVES assesses Vocational Evaluators knowledge and skills in order to achieve Certification, and the philosophy of Vocational Evaluator practices in conducting a Vocational Evaluation in regards to learning styles, Universal Design for Learning, Authentic Assessments, and testing format options. Additionally, recommendations for providing alternative formats of the CVE examination are made in order to meet the needs and preferences of the Vocational Evaluators taking the exam which would be consistent with "effective assessment practices" as established by CCWAVES.

Diversity of Learning Styles

In order to effectively meet the needs of clients and test takers, it is important to determine and accommodate an individual's preferred learning style which will assist with increasing their comprehension and performance. The 3 most common learning styles are Auditory, Visual and Kinesthetic-Tactile. Auditory learners learn best by hearing information; Visual learners learn best by seeing and reading the information that they are learning about; and Kinesthetic-Tactile learners learn best hands-on and by being involved in making something or actually working on a project for the topic being taught (LdPride, 2007). There are also individual's that perform and learn best when they are able to express themselves orally or in written format – Expressiveness-Oral and Expressiveness-Written (WVABE Instructor Handbook, Section 3, 2003-04). It is imperative, therefore, that instructions and testing formats meet or accommodate the preferred learning styles of individuals being served whenever possible. Additionally, it is important for a person to inform his or her instructor or employer about their preferred learning style so that it can be addressed and accommodated.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a theoretical framework developed by the Center of Applied Special Technology (CAST) to guide the development of curricula that are flexible and supportive of all students (CAST, 2006). According to Rose & Meyer (2002) there are barriers to traditional assessments (paper and pencils tests) and giving the same written test to all students is neither fair nor accurate (p.

137). These authors recommend development of clear goals of the test and provision and access to flexible methods and materials to most effectively assess what a student has learned (p. 155). Furthermore, according to CAST's philosophy of UDL:

- Products and/or environments need to be designed, from the outset, to accommodate individuals with a range of abilities and disabilities;
- Learning environments should not contain barriers;
- There should be flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments that accommodate learner differences; and
- "Universal" does not imply a single optimal solution for everyone.

Instead, it is meant to underscore the need for multiple approaches to meet the needs of diverse learners (CAST, 2006)

Some examples of universally designed technology include: ergonomic keyboards, computers, wrist rests, copy holders, curb cuts, adjustable chairs, speech to text software programs, power point, calculators, group and individual group projects, and instruction and assignments that include auditory, written and kinesthetic formats and opportunities (such as students being able to provide oral, written or demonstrative exams and activities), etc. All of the tools, materials, and methods are designed with ALL students/learners in mind, not just individuals with disabilities and limitations.

Authentic Assessments

Jon Mueller who is a Professor of Psychology from North Central College in Illinois created the term Authentic Assessment which is defined as "a form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills" (Mueller, 2006). Mueller states that an assessment needs to determine the curriculum taught by determining tasks that you want a student to demonstrate to mastery.

Testing Format

Just as there are differing learning styles, there are also a variety of testing formats that can enhance the test taker's performance. According to Indiana University's guide on 'How to Write Better Tests' (2004), the most objective testing formats are True and False, Multiple Choice and Matching. A True and False testing format presents a statement that needs to be marked as True or False. A Multiple Choice test provides a question or incomplete statement and a list of possible solutions where only one solution or answer can be selected. A Matching test consists of a list of questions or problems to be answered along with a list of responses and the examinee selects the correct response to each question. However, a test developer may also select an Essay test format which requires a detailed written answer based on a scenario or situation; a Completion test which requires an answer to a question or the completion of an incomplete statement; or an Oral Exam which requires the person to answer questions verbally before a panel about how they would handle a situation or scenario. Finally, the last two types of exams that most people are unfamiliar with include the Work Sample Test and Work Sample Test-Simulation. A Work Sample Test requires a test taker to perform tasks that are similar to those that are performed on the job, and a Work Sample Test-Simulation of an Event presents the test taker with a picture of an incident along with quotations from those involved in the incident and then the test taker responds to a series of questions in which they write or describe the decisions they would make.

With all testing formats there are advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages of these individual formats (True and False, Multiple Choice, Matching and Completion Items) are objectivity, ease in developing and scoring, less time to take the test, and the test can cover more material by asking more questions. However, there are as many disadvantages for the same tests. Test takers may perceive questions to be tricky or too picky. They may believe that the test does not allow them to demonstrate their knowledge beyond the options provided, encourages guessing, or that questions may be misinterpreted. As for the Essay, Oral and the two types of Work Sample tests the advantages

are that they provide the test taker with the opportunity to more fully demonstrate their knowledge of techniques and skills, they can assess more complex problems, assess writing and/or speaking skills, and it is difficult for test takers to fake their knowledge of skills and abilities. However, the disadvantages of these same types of tests are that they are more time consuming to create, take and score; they can be scored subjectively; and as for the Work Sample or Oral formats, they can be costly to administer since only one person can be tested at a time (Jacobs, 2004).

Test Preference Responses

In an attempt to explore test takers preferences, this writer polled forty (40) individuals to select their preferred testing method, and received 50% of the responses back. The survey participants were current and past master’s degree program students, and professionals who are working in vocational evaluation/human services, environmental sciences, veterinary medicine, or business management. The responses, presented in Table 1., indicated that multiple choice and essay were the most preferred testing method. This was surprising to this writer based on thinking that more people would have selected one of the Work Sample testing formats, because it would provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills hands-on in lieu of a paper/pencil format. However, many expressed that they selected multiple

(CVE) requires demonstration of knowledge on how to effectively and professionally complete vocational evaluations in 5 content areas that require use of a “variety of techniques, methods and approaches” (CCWAVES, 2006). However, the current CVE examination is only available in one testing format of a paper and pencil, multiple choice test. Since the very essence of what a Vocational Evaluator does to conduct an evaluation is hands-on, individualized and addresses a variety of learning styles and demonstrations of performance, there is a major conflict in how a potential CVE is assessed, based on the lack of individuation.

The inconsistencies are further noted in light of the principles of Universal Design for Learning in that “provision and access to flexible methods and materials should be made available to most effectively assess what a student has learned” (Rose & Meyer, 2002). Also, based on the variety of learning styles and preferences, and testing format options, and the theory of Authentic Assessment which is “a form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills” (Mueller, 2007), there is more than enough documentation to support a change in the way that Vocational Evaluators skills and knowledge are assessed by CCWAVES.

have themselves videotaped (possibly by a Test Proctor) while conducting a vocational evaluation with permission from the client or client’s, (b) to go before a panel of Test Proctor’s to respond to specific scenarios and have their responses taped to provide to the CCWAVES board for final review, or (c) choose a Multiple Choice, or Essay Format. This writer is not recommending a Matching, True or False or Completion testing formats unless they are included in a Multiple Choice test since I do not feel that they are enough to stand alone – but this should be further determined by a focus or test development group. With these options, everyone will have the opportunity to select a test that matches their learning styles while accurately assessing their skills and knowledge. Furthermore, Standards would have to be developed in order to make the testing formats fair and more easily to be scored, and in order to meet the needs of delivering the alternative testing formats, additional Test Proctors would be required to provide panels and/or to video tape a Work Sample format.

As CCWAVES moves in the direction of incorporating Principles of Universal Design for Learning into the CVE exam, they can lead the organization in providing a universal exam. Also, if it would become necessary to seek out additional Test Proctors to administer and observe the tests; which would create additional costs, CCWAVES could collaborate with another

Types of tests	True & False	Multiple Choice	Essay	Completion Items	Matching	Oral	Work Sample Test	Simulation of an Event
Responses	1	4	6	0	2	3	2	2
Percentage	5%	20%	30%	0%	10%	15%	10%	10%

(Table 1)

choice because that is what they are use to, or the Essay format because it gave them an opportunity to elaborate and demonstrate their knowledge on a subject or they could creatively explain their answers.

Inconsistencies with CVE Examination and Recommendations

CCWAVES which is the certifying body for Vocational Evaluators interested in becoming Certified Vocational Evaluators

Recommendations and Conclusions

Therefore, in light of the supporting documentation and current format of the CCWAVES Certification Examination, it is recommended that CCWAVES provide alternative testing formats to assess the knowledge and skills of a Vocational Evaluator; especially the Work Sample Test and Work Sample Test/simulation of an Event. These two formats would provide the applicants with the option to: (a) choose to

university or entity to seek out possible funding options, such as the Institute of Education Sciences who funds a network of Pre- and Postdoctoral Interdisciplinary Research Training Programs in the Education Sciences. Participants in these training programs will be prepared to contribute to the field of education sciences by conducting rigorous evaluation studies, developing new products and approaches that are grounded in a science of learning, and designing valid

tests and measures. Facilities that receive financial support also have access to specialized resources and experts in the field of study and become part of an emerging national network of students, faculty and practitioners conducting interdisciplinary research in the education sciences (IES, 2006).

This proposal needs to be presented to the Heads of Departments that provide

related Vocational Evaluation training at the University level and related organizations such as Vocational Evaluation and Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) who are key stakeholders in this process of reforming the CVE exam. VECAP is an organization designed to promote the professions and services of vocational evaluation and work adjustment (VECAP, 2006) in order to receive their feedback,

recommendations and support. Then once a final proposal is created, to present to the CCWAVES Board members, and offer to develop a focus group to assist with the design of the universally designed CVE Exam. By having alternative formats that are performance based and meet the Guiding Principles of CCWAVES, the profession of Vocational Evaluation will be inline and practicing what it preaches.

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