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Vocational Evaluation – Deafness

Steven R. Silgar

Vocational Evaluator at the Southwest Center for the Hearing Impaired, San Antonio, Texas

S Tandy Culpepper

Psychologist and coordinator of Vocational Evaluation at the Special Technical Facility, Department of Adult Deaf and Blind, Talladega, Alabama

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VOCATIONAL EVALUATION - DEAFNESS

Steven R. Sligar
S. Tandy Culpepper

Introduction

Tandy Culpepper and I would like to talk to you all this morning for a few minutes about vocational evaluation and deafness. We're going to present some ideas and thoughts about the vocational evaluation process and would like to keep this meeting informal and invite you to ask questions at any time during the presentation. When the presentation is completed, we will throw open the floor for solicitation of comments and questions.

Tandy is going to speak first.

PRESENTATION BY TANDY CULPEPPER

I would like to talk to y'all this morning about that part of vocational evaluation called initial assessment. As many of you are probably aware, evaluation centers serving the hard-of-hearing or deaf are not receiving the really sharp folks that we did a few years ago. As you know, it is now primarily the severely disabled. This initial assessment phase is a time when the person enters the program and the primary concern should not be his deafness or what jobs he's going to do. This is the time to get to know the client as a person, making him feel at home, and a time of building trust and rapport. Because this is the initial assessment phase, I feel it's time to clear up the question, "Is this person really ready for a vocational evaluation?" This could include such things as, "Does the client need some more basic education, language development, or the other

adjustment services we talk about so much in working with the deaf and hard-of-hearing population. I strongly believe that an evaluation program for the deaf client should be linked closely with adjustment services. My definition of adjustment is: provision of whatever it takes to get the person ready for work. This takes into account anything that hasn't happened up to this point in time to make the client ready for three main things: work, jobs, and money.

This initial assessment phase is an integral part of getting the client ready for work, jobs, and money, and was touched on briefly in this publication (*Deaf Adjustment and Feasibility, Guidelines for Vocational Evaluation of the Deaf*; Douglas Watson, editor, 1976). This publication does touch on it briefly and is not a definitive answer but only a starting point that will need to be further defined over the next few years.

One of the reasons I feel strongly about this initial assessment period is it is instrumental in planning the appropriate services necessary for getting the client job-ready. For example, you may stop the evaluation process now and say, "This client needs to learn how to read; he needs some more language; he needs some more fingerspelling, etc." It is really too soon to say if this client is going to be a laundry worker or a printer or this job or the other kind of job. It is necessary to stop the evaluation program and begin provision of adjustment services.

I have heard people talking about a 6- to

Mr. Sligar is the Vocational Evaluator at the Southwest Center for the Hearing Impaired in San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Culpepper is a psychologist and coordinator of Vocational Evaluation at the Special Technical Facility, Department of Adult Deaf and Blind, Talladega, Alabama.

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12-month vocational evaluation and really, what I think is happening is an incorrect use of words. It just doesn't take that long to find out the basic needs of the deaf client. What I feel is happening is that adjustment services are being provided and being termed a vocational evaluation.

We began to go out and ask employers, "Would you hire this deaf person if we train him? The employer would reply, "Maybe I'd hire him, but I just don't know." "Would you hire him for this job if we could evaluate and train him for this job?" Employer: "Yes, I guess I would." We would then go back and, using the knowledge of the engineers and our own industrial arts shop, simulate the job to find out if this person could, in fact, do that particular job.

Let me throw out another idea that is very important in vocational evaluation of the hearing impaired client. That is, the type of report written. It is very important to know who is going to be reading and using the report. Some counselors want a list of jobs that the client can do. This specific job listing is one kind of report. Other counselors would like to have an evaluation report that ends up something like this: "This client can be successful at jobs requiring these skills -or- work abilities."

In any evaluation unit, it is very important that the evaluator knows the consumer and what type of report he or she wants.

I would like to say one more thing, especially to you folks that have vocational training areas in your facility. After the client has completed this initial assessment phase but is not ready for the real vocational evaluation and you're still looking around for a job area, it may be a good idea to place him for a short time in the available training areas. However, it's not too smart to leave the client in areas he or she doesn't like for a long time. You know, the client may like squash but not well enough to eat it.

That's about all I have to say, and we'll be talking about these and some other things after Steve gets through talking.

PRESENTATION BY STEVE SLIGAR

I would like to begin by congratulating those of you who attended the Pearl Brewery barbecue and survived the Jalapeno Pepper Polka for having made it this morning.

I am going to present some ideas about vocational evaluation and deafness that I hope will stimulate your thinking this morning and generate some conversation.

First of all, I feel it's necessary to explain the need for a thorough vocational assessment of a hearing impaired person. First, most clients, at the time of entry into the evaluation process have extremely limited knowledge of vocations or an exposure to various types of jobs. This need lends itself to one of the many byproducts of a good and thorough vocational evaluation, and that is provision of occupational information. Regardless of the tools or techniques utilized in evaluation, such as work samples, situational assessment, on-the-job evaluations, etc., the client must begin to know himself and gather some knowledge of various jobs and their requirements.

This is very easily illustrated by the old story that most of you have heard concerning a deaf client's occupational goal. When you ask the client what job he would like to have, he states he would like to become a printer; when asked why he would like to become a printer, he says because his friend is a printer.

The second reason for a need of a thorough vocational assessment is that the evaluator may hit upon some job areas not traditionally associated with the deaf.

Frequently, evaluators become locked into making the same types of job recommendations, and these are often entry-level service jobs with the low level clients, and craftsman jobs for the higher functioning clients. Whole job categories, such as an inventory clerk or cashier, are often overlooked because the client has a hearing impairment and would be unable to communicate with his co-workers and the public. However, these jobs are well within the grasp of many hard-of-hearing

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clients with only some modification to the job.

Next, I would like to talk about the necessity of doing two types of vocational evaluation.

The first could be called a functional vocational evaluation. This is an assessment of the client's skills to answer questions like "What job is this client capable of doing right now?" or "What specific job skills does the client currently possess?" This functional assessment of skills provides a realistic picture of the client at present, and also offers a starting point.

The second type could be called a prognostic vocational evaluation. This is an assessment of the client's ability to learn new work behaviors. This evaluation would answer questions like, "What jobs can this client do after receiving the appropriate supportive services?" or even more basic, the vocational evaluator should provide as thorough a listing as possible of what types of services are really necessary to get this client rehabilitated or habilitated, whatever the case may be.

Next, I would like to discuss ideas I have about the vocational evaluation process of hearing impaired individuals. Of course, when the topic of deafness arises, the No. 1 priority is communication skills. Within this area, it is necessary to evaluate the client's communication skills (sign language) in light of the job he or she will be entering and what type of community the client will be residing in. For example, if the client shows an interest in and an aptitude for becoming a chicken eviscerator, then communication skills (sign language) are not that essential for job performance. It is true, these are essential for success after hours and in establishing and maintaining co-worker relationships.

If the client is going to return to Boerne, Texas; Snellville, Georgia; or Rock Run, Alabama; then he or she will probably not need sophisticated communication (sign language) skills. If the client has been in Harlingen, Texas, picking onions for 20 years, and has communicated with his wife well enough to produce 10 children, then he is probably doing okay without formalized skills. The point I am trying to make is, don't get all hung up on communication skills during the evaluation process.

The evaluator does need to know and be proficient in both sign language and finger-spelling, but it is even more important to look at where the client will be living and working after evaluation. If the client is returning to a large town with a deaf community, then it would be advisable to provide communication skills training, but if the client is not, then this recommendation could be a waste of time.

Next, I would like to discuss a need for a change in the evaluation process. I have seen in numerous facilities that, after the client enters the evaluation unit and the initial interview has been completed, he or she is given a battery of psychological and achievement tests. In reality, what is taking place is that the client is being hit and hit hard with probably that person's weakest mode of communication.

I would like to state again that initial assessment is a time of finding out what the client's functional skills are. This includes such things as how well the client can read and write, level of language development, and his or her ability to get along with other folks. This is also a time to find out the client's ideas about work, jobs, and money.

One good example of finding out about the client's expectations of the facility happened to me just the other week. I was working with this young deaf man who had just entered the facility, and asked him if he knew his ABC's. His response was, "Hell, no; I just got here." It was obvious that this man was looking to improve his academic skills.

Another important aspect of initial assessment is that it will help in shortening the time of the real vocational evaluation. It just doesn't take that long to discover what the client's areas of needs are. If you can stop the vocational evaluation process at this point and provide some classes in language or reading or writing, then the real evaluation can follow at a later time. It just doesn't make sense to use all these systems and come up with a list of jobs a mile long when a client's going to go through adjustment services and probably be a different person in another year or so.

You can also find out during this time if the client's expectations are realistic or not. I believe in the right to permit the client to bump

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his head too. This client comes in and says he wants to be an underwater basket weaver. Then it may be necessary to go out and get the reeds and the water and let the client try that. If the client succeeds, then that's super, but if he fails then the evaluator is there to provide the necessary support to make this a good learning experience.

In summary, this initial assessment phase is a time of getting to know the client as a person, finding out what kinds of adjustment services or classes he needs to prepare him/her for a real vocational evaluation, and to find out what the client's expectations are. I think I've said enough about this initial assessment phase, and I would like to go on to a couple of other areas.

The first of these is the relationship between the evaluation center and the person doing job placement. You can have the best evaluation and training program in the world, but if the recommendations are not followed through, then what good is it? I guess this is sort of the proof of the pudding. Being concerned about this placement angle just makes sense. You can evaluate all day long, but if someone is not hitting you with some sort of feedback from the community, then the evaluator just won't know if he's doing the job or not.

I also think it is very important that the vocational evaluator should be aware of things that can be done with industrial engineering. More specifically, this concerns the use of jigs and fixtures. I've been working with severely handicapped deaf and deaf-blind clients for several years now. It was almost impossible to get people to think of placement. This was a real strain on the evaluation unit. We were all getting together and straining to come up with a job recommendation, and then the problem hit us in the face of who's going to give him a job. We have found that by talking with engineers, they have helped us make jigs and fixtures that make hard jobs easy to do. After this, placement began to happen more often. It is much more advisable and advantageous to begin the evaluation process with a positive and successful experience. This can be accomplished through administration of some

very simple work samples. For example, I have yet to have a client that was unable to complete the nuts-bolts-washer assembly from the JEVS, or Valpar's size discrimination component work sample.

After the completion of this physical capacity/worker trait assessment, a good working relationship or rapport will most likely be established with the client. At this point in time, psychometric or achievement testing could be more successfully attempted. Furthermore, by this time the evaluator should have some knowledge of the client's level and primary mode of communication, and be better able to select appropriate measurement instruments. Upon completion of the testing phase of evaluation, then more in-depth and job-specific work samples can be administered. This may also be an appropriate time to begin assessment of independent living skills.

This brings me to the final consideration of the vocational evaluation process of hearing impaired persons; that is, the need for a thorough assessment of the client's level of independent living skills. Not only is it important to know what types of jobs the client is capable of performing, but also how well he or she will perform while off the job. It is of equal importance to relate the client's skills and abilities to both on- and off-the-job requirements.

I would like to thank you for your attentiveness and open up for discussion at this time:

Question to (Culpepper): You used the phrase, "getting to know him as a person", in your talk a little while ago. You stated that this orientation lasted a few days, and I would like to know how many days and what do you do for eight hours a day?

Answer (Culpepper): We involve things like recreation, how well the client gets along in the dormitory, trips to town, and other types of exploration. Mainly, it involves the client in the total activity of the program. We do a lot of letting him take a look at what's available in the facility. The client is permitted to visit some of the actual training areas and placements in the town. We have a horticultural training area, and throwing away the word

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“horticulture”, we just look at plants. That’s just one example. Also, we try to get some feedback from the recreation and dormitory people.

Another important part of this “getting to know the client as a person”, is finding out his needs. For example, about a week ago I had a guy come in who had finished public school, lost his hearing at about age 3 or 4, and was on approximately a 5th or 6th-grade level. He was really a pretty sharp guy who had no fingerspelling or signs, but good lipreading skills. The Speech Pathology Department was jumping up and down to improve client’s oral skills and the Total Communication people wanted to pump some sign language into the client. I suggested seeing how he does and just using the functional approach. Or, “don’t worry about the mules; load the wagon.” Through feedback from the Residential staff we found out that he would not participate in any activity. A loner. Well, he has a right to be a loner, but he also has a right to get involved in playing, jumping, and having a good time. So we’re going to give him a choice to take a class of understanding signs or not.

Question to (Sligar): What did you mean when you said that communication wasn’t that important in placement consideration?

Answer (Sligar): It is important to look at the client and look at the job the client’s going to be doing. What communication skills does the client need for that job? If the job doesn’t require communication skills and the client doesn’t have formal communication skills, he’s okay. I’m only talking about the job — not about the other 16 hours of the day. Does that clarify it?

Question: Some; but don’t clients need communication skills on the job? And don’t all jobs require some communication skills?

Answer (Sligar): Yes, they all require communication skills. But what I am referring to is formal communication skills, or sign language, speech reading, etc. I am assuming that the client is able to pantomime very basic wants and needs. For example, I have yet to meet a low-level deaf client who could not communicate the need to go to the bathroom. Furthermore, this low-level deaf client will most

likely have some entry level type of job. The work instructions will probably be demonstrated or done through the show-and-do approach. There seems to be some confusion here, and I think an example is in order to clarify my point. About 8 or 9 months ago, the Southwest Center got in a client from Houston. He had attended the Trinidad School for the Deaf for approximately 1 year and really didn’t learn any sign language there. He had no formal sign language, but exceptional pantomime skills. He was able to explain himself very, very clearly with these skills or his old homemade sign language. After evaluation, he showed a lot of potential for furniture upholstery work, was placed in training, successfully completed it, and is now returning to Houston with a job waiting on him. This client did not have formalized or standardized communication or sign language skills but was able to successfully enter and complete a vocational training program while in competition with hearing persons.

Audience Reaction: I would like to comment for a minute about the client who is referred to an evaluation with no communication skills. It is my opinion that clients should be given the opportunity to learn communication skills before entering an evaluation. The referring VR counselor should provide that. Frequently, I have seen VR counselors referring clients with no communication skills for a comprehensive work evaluation. I feel that is a big mistake and puts an undue burden on the evaluator to assess the client before he or she is ready for a vocational evaluation.

Response (Culpepper): I agree with what you’re talking about, but I found that it’s necessary to combine this with other services, mainly because it’s just not available. The question to be answered is, “Will vocational rehabilitation service pay for this communication skills development?” They won’t do it. It must be something leading to work, job, or money. Maybe it’s the fault of the system that it can’t be provided prior to evaluation, and realizing that, we give them as much communication training as they can take. This is done through classes, and even some language development is provided while they’re on the job.

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They're going to need this language development while they're at work and training. Or he may be the best auto mechanic in the world, or the best tune-up man; if he can't read the tune-up machine and manual, then the job won't get done.

Question: It has been my observation as a placement specialist, that the evaluator sees the client maybe only during the evaluation process whereas I see the client 4 or 5 times, especially after he or she has lost 4 or 5 jobs. It is my observation that clients can do the job but have problems with co-workers. What are your feelings on this?

Answer (Sligar): A definition of those kinds of problems is definitely part of the evaluator's responsibility. If the evaluator is making behavioral observations during the evaluation process, then he or she should not only recommend adjustment training but assist in setting up an adjustment plan. If you find these behaviors are not being identified during an evaluation, then you've got to sit on the evaluator and say, "Just what are you doing?"

Question: I would like for you to address the problem of the inexperienced who frequently becomes trapped into doing an assessment only by testing. I think it is extremely important that it is not the available tools utilized but the skill of the evaluator in the assessment process.

Answer (Sligar): I know the evaluator, especially the new evaluator, frequently does become trapped into using all of the systems or tests that he or she can get ahold of. This is probably done to keep the client busy and make it look like something is happening during evaluation. However, you can use all the tests and systems in the world and come up with a list of jobs that the client can supposedly do, recommend the client for placement, and fail. What it really boils down to is that the evaluator must have the "common sense" to select the appropriate tools and techniques to measure that client's abilities as related to working. It is the evaluator's responsibility to learn about the job market and to make recommendations that will relate to what is happening within the community. An experienced evaluator also knows the various

measurement devices and techniques and utilizes those that are most appropriate for the client being served.

Question: What about vocational exploration? How are some of the ways that you go about doing this?

Answer (Sligar): There are several different ways of going about this. I would like to talk about a few, and I am sure Tandy will have some input also. First of all, if you have work samples, you will be able to get some idea across to the client by using these. Such questions as "Does the client want to sit down and work all day? Stand up? Get dirty? Work with his hands?" These basic types of job information can be provided to the client through work samples. Also, some work samples are very, very job specific. If you have drafting or auto mechanic work samples, then give them out. Permit the client to try what you have. That not only offers the client opportunity to try these jobs in a simulated way, but also gives the opportunity for the evaluator to observe the client while he's working on those jobs.

Even if the client is not able to verbalize his or her reactions to these job samples, the attentive evaluator can observe what the client's behavior is showing about his feelings toward this area of work. For example, is the client working on something and being really attentive to the task at hand? Is the client showing motivation and interest? If so, then he's probably hitting on a pretty good area. If the client's going to the bathroom every 5 minutes, talking to other people, and not showing much interest, then you better try another area.

Also, keep in mind what the client's doing — not specifically that one particular job sample, but what jobs does that sample relate to? That is one way of providing occupational information and gathering client's interests. Another way is through use of training stations and job sites. Tandy, would you like to talk about these.?

Answer (Culpepper): Yes; at the facility in Talladega we're doing something along those lines right now. We have a person called a power man and his job is to do what you're talking about. That is, explore as much as possible some of the different jobs in the com-

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munity where we are.

Of course, part of the limitation may be that the client is from a port city like Mobile, Alabama, where there is a great deal of fishing going on. This problem will happen a lot if you are serving clients from other than your immediate geographic area. But what we've found is beneficial is to spend time in each of the available vocational training areas and to go into the community and to spend a little time with some selective people that have been cooperative in the past. One side benefit of doing this is that we have gotten a few deaf folks some pretty good-paying jobs as a result of the community contact. For example, there was a lens grinding training school not far from our facility, and as a result of this orientation contact, we were able to place people in this school. I would never have thought about that and it was only 20 miles from us. But it was a training school for hearing people that had never had a deaf person before, and they showed an interest in training the deaf clients.

We also get a lot of service from vocational education. We have found a group of instructors in voc-ed that will share their time with us in their technical trade schools. This is especially helpful, since they teach different trade areas from the ones in our program.

You can provide job samples all day long, but you really can't experience the pressures that the client will face in the textile training area. And even sometimes that's just not as good as seeing the real thing. Body and fender repair is an example. It may be fun for a while, but it might not be so much fun if you're trying to make a living doing that.

To sum up, we spend a lot of time visiting some places and involving the community as much as possible to help us.

Question: Could you explain a little about your program? Specifically, what is the standard evaluation and the specific purpose?

Answer (Culpepper): Most all of our clients are VR clients from Alabama. We do have some out-of-state deaf clients from Florida, Georgia, and other southeast states. For the most part, these are severely disabled deaf, blind, and deaf-blind clients. We give them evaluation and comprehensive services from

adjustment to speech and hearing therapy, audiological services, adult basic education, G.E.D., vocational training, and placement. This whole ball of wax is a package deal.

Answer (Sligar): The two main goals of the Southwest Center for the Hearing Impaired are to assist deaf clients to obtain competitive employment and optimal level of independent living skills. Specific services provided include a comprehensive vocational evaluation lasting approximately 4 to 6 weeks, independent living skills training, G.E.D., personal/social adjustment counseling, work adjustment training, and work orientation training. We're also a residential facility and have an independent living training program set up. This program is for clients who have almost completed their stay at the facility and are working in the community. They are housed in mobile homes (for the men) and in a house (for the women). They are required to pay their own bills, purchase and prepare their own food, and perform other activities necessary for success after they finish the program here.

Question: How do you arrive at a fee for your services? What are your fees?

Answer (Culpepper): At a special technical facility, I think it's set up on a daily basis, and the charge is about \$18 per day.

Answer (Sligar): A comprehensive vocational evaluations costs \$350, and there is a monthly charge of \$545 that covers all of the services I talked about a minute ago.

Question: I would like for you to address the issue of the 18-month evaluation that VR uses to determine eligibility for services.

Answer (Culpepper): Right now, VR seems to be getting hung up on the 2-month evaluation. It appears that there were a lot of counselors abusing this 18-month evaluation, and pressure has been put on to make a determination in 2 months. Consequently, they have been sending some clients for a determination of feasibility to be done in 2 months, when it really should require the full 18. It would seem to me that when they do this they have already answered the question of feasibility and they are just looking for us to provide a vocational objective. This cannot be done appropriately in 2 months. However,

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within this time, we usually come up with some broad occupational categories and place the client in "vocational training" that is really nothing more than adjustment services.

Question: I know this may be a little off the topic, but what do you feel about a report being done after the client has completed training?

Answer (Culpepper): I feel that is very important. In Talladega, we have a little packet that is a checklist of the skills the client has acquired through training. This report is given to the referral counselor, placement specialist, and to the prospective employer. This is really helpful; for example, an auto mechanic in Birmingham, Alabama, is a whole lot different from one in south Alabama where there aren't many cars. So we want to make sure that the guy hiring the client knows what he had in his training. That just seems fair to me. If they've had tune-ups, then it's important to let the employer know if they can operate the equipment. The different types of training that the client has successfully completed are all listed out in this report.

Another point I would like to bring up here before time runs out is the issue of under-employment. I heard a lot of rehab counselors and other people talking about the client, saying that he can do better than the job that is open right now. Well, I think I'm under-employed myself. I think I oughta be making a

lot more money than I am. What I'm talking about is in the economic world, unemployment is running high, and we're having a hard enough time trying to find jobs for folks that have the inside track. Sometimes I find it necessary to suggest to a deaf or hard-of-hearing client to "go to work, this is a job and I know that you probably can do better things, but we'll have to look at that tomorrow; this is the only thing we've got and it's a job where you can go out and learn about work, jobs, and money and make a living." If that's under-employment, I can't help it. I do encourage people to go to work.

Audience Comment: I would like to inform the group about a very interesting report from the Arkansas Research and Training Center. This report analyzes the vocational evaluation and skill training process in vocational rehabilitation. It is indicated that there are a very few clients that go through this rehabilitation process and actually get a job within their area of training.

Sligar: Please excuse the interruption but it is now 10:00 and time to go on to the next meeting. I would like to briefly thank you for your attention and feedback. I hope we have provided you with some information on vocational evaluation and deafness.

Thank you.