VECAP WHITE PAPER ON "FUNCTIONAL VOCATIONAL EVALUATION"

(in support of requirements in IDEIA)

SAMUEL CASTIGLIONE, DEd
Workgroup Contributors:
JOSEPH M. ASHLEY, RhD
MICHELLE HAMILTON PhD
PAMELA J. LECONTE, EdD
JEAN MCCONNELL MS, CVE
MICHAEL O'BRIEN, EdD
NANCY SCOTT, MS
DIANE ULIANA, MS, CVE

ABSTRACT

Developments stemming from changed language in IDEIA 2004 have put a renewed spotlight on the concepts, importance, and practices of functional vocational evaluation (FVE). This paper presents the national VECAP workgroup examination of the foundations of (and contrasting opinions about) the topic, discusses the transition requirement of functional vocational evaluation and proposes a working definition as a framework and set of strategies for practical implementation of FVE, and as a platform for dialogue with other professional groups having an intrinsic interest in the topic.

(This project is the result of a national VECAP workgroup, with the primary author compiling and synthesizing the discussions, references, feedback from several conferences and views that represent the major workgroup findings.)

RATIONALE

Recent developments stemming from changed language in IDEIA 2004 have put a renewed emphasis on the concepts, importance, and practices of "Functional Vocational Evaluation" (FVE). Vocational Evaluation and Ca-reer Assessment Professionals (VECAP) both have special interest and special expertise in this topic and also have a collaborative leadership role in pro-moting meaningful concepts; situating the importance within a context of students making a transition to the adult world of work; and fostering practices that are current, ethical, professional and empirically sound.

HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

The general concept of functional assessment is hardly new, even with regard to the particular population of students with disabilities who are nearing their transition to the adult world of work and independent living. At least an intrinsic nod to this was contained within the original PL 94-142 as it noted the need to comprehensively assess students' abilities and needs. Many students it addressed were not compatible subjects with many of the typical standardized academic tests used to assess students. Similarly in the overall rehabilitation community, the 1973 Rehabilitation Act specifically directed further investigation into how better to assess the needs of persons

with severe disabilities. The specific term of "functional vocational evaluation" emerged from IDEA in 1990 as an optional service within the Transition Services definition. In IDEIA 2004 it became a required service.

However, as often happens with legislation, some of the expert advisors to Congress came from vocational rehabilitation backgrounds where the word "functional" has specific meaning, such as "what is the person able to do?" or "what is the person limited in doing?" But at the other end, people responsible for implementing FVE had little guidance.

Many efforts have come previously in this area. In their introductory section of the Functional Assessment Inventory manual, Crewe and Athelstan (1984) cited some of the many conferences, symposia, and institutes on the topic of functional assessment in the rehabilitation community in the mid- to late 1970's and early 1980's. Various frameworks and discussions have been proposed since then. (cf, NICHCY, 1990; Brolin & Thomas, 1995; Friedman, et al, 1996; Gregg & Curtis, 1996; Wheeler, 1996; Duffy, 1997; Dean, et al., 2006).

There should be at least some recognition that what continues to drive this topic involves forces outside of education. It has already been noted above that students with disabilities were not always well served by traditional academic tests. Indeed, in the traditional world of the comprehensive vocational evaluation, the evaluation was defined by its basis in work, real and simulated. But a variety of economic forces – including the demands of employers for more pre-qualified applicants and the drive to serve more persons with less resources, among others – led to what Woodford and Modahl (1999) observed: that from the 1980's forward, Vocational Evaluation has trended toward shorter, more uniform and more psychometric evaluations. Frankly, this has mirrored what has happened in the larger, non-rehabilitation world of career assessment and employment services – more testing of employee-applicants as regards to skills, trustworthiness, general cognitive ability, and academic or certification credentials.

ATTEMPTS AT CONSENSUS

Various state transition forums, as well as advocates for adult persons with more severe disabilities, in recent years have decried this trend and demanded more of evaluation in terms of practicality based on actual work situations. VECAP initiated a national committee on the topic of FVE, and attempted to draw out views leading to consensus by a special session at the 2006 Virginia Transition Forum; the session was attended by over 100 participants, but no consensus resulted. Two competing perspectives came into play, one from vocational rehabilitation where the focus was on vocational and work abilities; the other from special educators and adult caregivers whose focus was on independent living issues. It should be noted that the vocational rehabilitation focus overlaps with that of occupational therapists, who provide what is known as "functional capacity evaluation" with regard to work abilities. The current draft was further vetted by various participants at a session of the 2008 Virginia Transition Forum.

In the absence of clear guidance and consensus, several states have also put forth definitions and manuals related to the topic (cf, Washington State [The Center for Change, 2004]; Wisconsin [Kellogg, 1995]; Montana [Lehman, 2001]; Virginia [O'Leary & Collison, 2004]):

- Washington's definition essentially describes a full comprehensive vocational evaluation and ties the findings to the student's IEP.
- Wisconsin's definition specifies the kinds of information that should result from FVE such as student preferences,

behavior, learning style, need for AT, physical/mental endurance, medical status, work skills, training methods.

- Montana's definition 1) suggests using existing functional information, 2) says FVE should be about job or career characteristics, and 3) is gathered via situational assessments in the setting where the job is performed.
- Virginia adopts parts of Montana's definition as above, and says the information can be gathered by observations, informal or formal measures, and should be "practical."

This position paper attempts to help address the need for clarity and for professional input in order to fulfill the regulatory requirement.

PROPOSED DEFINITION

-Functional Vocational Evaluation (FVE) is a systematic assessment process used to identify practical useable career and employment-related information about an individual.
-FVE incorporates multiple formal and informal assessment techniques to observe, describe, measure, and predict vocational potential.
-A distinctive feature in all FVE's is that FVE includes (and may emphasize) individualized experiential and performance-based opportunities, in natural vocational or work environments.

IMPORTANT CONTEXT FOR DEFINITION

As an organization, VECAP recognizes that the topic of FVE builds upon, and is intrinsically related to, an established pyramid of levels of assessment services:

- Level III at the top of the pyramid is the Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation/ Career Assessment.
- Level II is a diagnostic and prognostic exploratory process, that moves on to the third level only if more information is needed to make significant decision.
- Level I is to make quick decisions where minimal assessment is required.

FVE is most closely related to level III comprehensive vocational evaluation which is a comprehensive process with work as the focal point. This level is not necessary for all students, if reasonable and specific post secondary goals have been determined through Level 1 and 2 assessments. Level III is most appropriate for students 1) who would benefit from the "hands-on" experience afforded by work sampling, 2) who might typically be unsure of their career interests, 3) who may not have had opportunity to explore different careers and 4) who may need to showcase talents other than those limited to academic classes where they traditionally have been unsuccessful. The information from comprehensive vocational evaluations, and by extension FVE, is easily transferable to the Present Level of Performance of the I.E.P and to the Summary of Performance at exit from school.

EXPANSION OF DEFINITION

First, due to a somewhat disconnected body of knowledge and a blurring of terms in the varied literature, this paper uses the specific term "Functional Vocational Evaluation" (a.k.a. FVE) as addressing the requirement of IDEIA 2004; it also considers the term Functional Vocational Assessment as an over-arching concept in which FVE is a specific category. But the term Functional Assessment is considered a broad and general concept that may apply to a variety of other situations (e.g., academic, medical, pre-vocational, independent living, or leisure), will not be used as the equivalent of FVE, and practices mentioned in the literature on functional assessment may or may not be adopted for the current purpose.

Second, to further operationalize the proposed FVE definition, this position paper

agrees with, acknowledges, and repeats some of the concepts, tools and procedures set forth in several of the various sources cited earlier (Washington State, NICHCY 1990, Wisconsin, Montana, Virginia). Many of those statements are themselves reformulations of traditional vocational evaluation principles, and as they also overlap among the documents, will be assimilated here:

- FVE is a strategy, a framework, and a process for gathering and interpreting relevant information regarding a student's vocational potential and planning.
- FVE incorporates a systematic method of valid assessments, formal and informal, to collect, synthesize, and communicate student-centered information.
- The kinds of vocationally-relevant information collected includes stu-dent preferences, career interests, aptitudes and abilities, specific skills, personality factors such as temperament, values, attitudes, motivation, social skills and emotional intelligence; medical status, physical capacity and work tolerance; employability and work behaviors; learning style; need for assistive devices; employment-related reasonable accommodations; transportation; methods of training needed and Response-To-Intervention data; and analyses of work environments against students' worker characteristics.
- The FVE can include formal or commercial assessment; interviews, systematic observations and surveys; but a key element of "functionality" is the student involvement in real or simulated work and work environments that can include work sampling, situational assessments, job site visits, and community based (vocational) assessments, job try-outs, and job analyses of real-life student outside employment and volunteer work.
- The goal of the FVE is to guide the development of the student's program in order to move the student from high school towards achieving their vocational potential in a post-high school setting.
- The FVE should be conducted and have results communicated within the context of the collaboration between the appropriate education team (of various designations in various states) and the post-secondary vocational team.
- Results should be reported in the IEP document and in the dynamically evolving Summary of Performance to measure and document student progress, to evaluate appropriateness of program re-sources, and match/place students in appropriate vocational/work placements.
- Results should be communicated with students to assist them to understand their strengths and limitations in terms of the job market and to make career decisions and with instructors, guidance counselors, employers and community service staff to provide necessary supports and adaptations for successful vocational experiences.
- FVE should be conducted by, or overseen by, trained professionals in the field of vocational evaluation, whose skill set specifically prepares them to take individual performance information and relate it to the world of work.

WHAT FVE IS NOT

Because changes in laws and regulations sometimes create a "bandwagon" effect with momentum carrying undesirable practices along with preferred practices, it may be important to add some cautions about what functional vocational evaluation is <u>not</u>.

First, it is not simply a narrative description of a set of actions, typical or otherwise, that a student performs, as an illustration of "functioning". Illustration is not evaluation, and might not even be assessment.

Second, as assessment, FVE is not exempt from fundamental assumptions about assessment, such as listed in clearest fashion by early and later editions (1978, 1982, 1995) of Salvia & Ysseldyke's handbook on Assessment (in Special and Remedial Education): Namely, that a) the assessor is skilled, b) error will be present, c) acculturation of comparison groups and target populations is comparable to students being assessed, d) behavior sampling is adequate, and e) present behaviors are observed but future behaviors are inferred. For example, regarding item (b), reliability is as essential for functional vocational evaluation as for any other type; what proof is there that a FVE today will give comparable results tomorrow, or by a different assessor? Those who produce and publish tools for functional vocational evaluations are not exempt from making readily available the technical information for consumers (e.g. vocational evaluators, educators, transition specialists), as recommended by the national guidelines for test publishers.

Third, regarding (d) and (e), FVE is not simply curriculum-based assessment, even if the curriculum now incorporates "career" information. The functional evaluation must be "vocation-ally relevant" (Brolin & Thomas, 1995).

Fourth, in contrast to comments from some quarters (for example, see Duffy, 1997), FVE should not be assumed to be less expensive, easier, or less time consuming than other assessments. As mentioned earlier, the trend had been towards shorter, more uniform and more psychometric assessments. But the quality of the FVE, the depth and accuracy of information about the individual, and the link to meaningful work may be the determining factors as to the cost, time, or difficulty of conducting the evaluation.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS TOWARDS FUNCTIONAL VOCATIONAL EVALUATION

This is not intended to be a guide to all the elements of how to conduct a FVE. There will be various ways to do that, according to the intentions and needs for a particular individual, the purposes of specific programs, and variations in local initiatives. But some things should be considered.

One: As noted in the proposed definition, a distinctive feature of FVE is the prominent role of individualized experiential opportunities in providing practical information about a student's work performance and potential. How this meshes with other formal and informal parts of the evaluation partially depends on whether one presupposes a "match-to-fit" employment model, or a "fit-to-match" model. Both are being used currently, but with very different impacts. The former is more traditional; an individual's employability character-istics (KSA's, interests, personality style, etc) are matched as to how they fit known job openings and career path-ways. Most people (with and without disabilities) probably use a variant of this approach. But it underlies the trend of career testing, of matching to O*NET/DOT aptitude/physical demand/ environmental feature categories of job analysis (also used by OT's and PT's in physical capacity evaluation), and with a variety of functional vocational assessment frameworks that have been published (see Brolin, 1995; Crewe, 1984; Gregg, 1996). It also underlies the expectations that students will meet the SCANS skill standards (1991) and Educating For the Future Standards (Stein, 2000).

However, some people with anomalous profiles (and persons with

significant disabilities often have this issue) do not fit neatly into pre-existing openings or pathways. Consequently functional vocational evaluations may presuppose a fit-to-match model to reveal how much these people fit desired situations, and then prescribe what work situation elements may have to be taught, accommodated, modified or eliminated in order to fit the person into a more-or-less match with a crafted employment position. This type of approach forms the framework for tools like the Transition-to-Work-Inventory (Friedman, et al, 1996) or the Goodness-of-Fit model by Wheeler (1996).

The closing list of frameworks has been ranged from the most comprehensive profile related to all employment without regard to the presence of disabilities to those profiles used for fitting persons with the most severe disabilities to match possible employment situations.

Two: Other current trends are not yet represented in functional vocational evaluation thinking, and should be. One is that the provision in IDEIA 2004 for Response To Intervention (RTI) as an assessment approach should also be considered as a potential FVE element. A typical RTI assessment incorporates graphs of evidence-based interventions and results on the functioning of students. This has vocational relevance not only for identifying the student's present learning behavior but for providing vocationally directed info-rmation that predicts how the student may need to address occupational training and workplace retention. A second trend is the IDEIA requirement for a Summary of Performance at school exit. Rather than an education-centered and jargon-filled document like the IEP to contain vocational information, the SOP is vocationally-centered and should contain FVE profile information useful to employers and post-secondary settings.

Three: Functional vocational evaluation should also increasingly incorporate a flexible and evolving body of information, a type of progressive career assessment, which would be the considered and documented set of career development interventions and exploration results over time – 2, 3. or 4 years, for example. This approach would also allow for more consideration of career development models such as the INCOME model (Beveridge, et al., 2002) that does not rest on a linear model of career development, and accounts for the impact of disability status (pre-career, mid-career, or episodic) on career development status.

It is not clearly evident what the framers of the language in IDEIA 2004 had in mind when they included "functional vocational evaluation" as part of their revision. It is also not predestined as to what the shape of regulations implementing FVE will. There are certainly other stakeholders who have a part in this discussion. But participants such as VECAP who have both interest and expertise in the matter wish to advance the proposition so that best practices take root while popular but less desirable practices do not supplant limited resources.

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Comparisons of Frameworks in thinking about Functional Vocational Evaluation

Samuel Castiglione, D.Ed. Spring 2006, revised 5/08

Traditional – DOT Factors:	**Traditional VR Categories:**	**SCANS Skills:**	**Equipped For the Future (EFF) Standards**
GED Factors- Reasoning Math Language	Mobility	Foundation Skills: Academics- Reading Listening Math Writing	(NIFL, 3rd ed. July 2001) ---------- *Communication* >Read with understanding. >Convey ideas in writing. >Speak so others can understand. >Listen actively. >Observe critically
Specific Aptitudes General Learning Verbal Numerical Visual-Spatial Form Perception Clerical Perceptn. Motor Coordina. Finger Dexterity Hand Dexterity Eye-Hand-Foot Coordination Color Discrimin.	Communication Self Care Self Direction Interpersonal Skills Work Tolerance Work Skills	Thinking skills Personal qualities Job Specific skills: Using resources Working with others Acquiring information Understanding systems Using technology	*Decision-making* >Solve problems & make decisions. >Plan >Use math to solve problems & communicate. *Interpersonal* >Cooperate with others. >Guide others. >Advocate and Influence. >Resolve conflict and Negotiate.
Strength-S,L,M,H Climbing Balancing Stooping Kneeling Crouching Crawling Reaching Handling Fingering Feeling Talking Hearing Tasting/smelling Near Acuity Far Acuity Depth Perception Accommodation Color vision Field of Vision			*Lifelong Learning* >Take responsibility for learning. >Learn through research. >Reflect and Evaluate. >Use Information & Communication Technology.
Weather exposure Extreme heat/cold Noise Intensity Moving machines Fumes, chemicals			

LD Functional Training Manual: *A Guide to Assessment & Accommodation*
Learning Styles Checklist-
Broad Reasoning
Holistic thinking
Verbal problem Solving
Sequential thinking , Non verbal problem solving

Cognitive:
Memory,
Perception,
Motor,
Attention/Focus,
Processing speed

Oral Language:
Phonology,
Understanding language, Word finding,
Sentences,
Pragmatics.

Areas Affected:
Job/task mgmt.,
Time mgmt.,
Reading-decoding or comprehension
Math-calculation, applied prob. Solving.
Written Exp.
Mechanics,
Organizing ideas.
Handwriting/ Keyboarding.

Social/ Emotional

LDR&TC,
Univ of GA
Gregg, Curtis, et al. 1996

INCOME:
Career Develop. Framework f/ Persons w/ Disabilities

Statuses:

Imagining

iNforming

Choosing

Obtaining

Maintaining

Exiting

_____
3 subgroups each status:
Onset of Dis.
Pre-career
Mid-career
Episodic

Beveridge, Craddock, Liesener, Stapleton, Hershenson.

RCB 45:4
pp. 195-206
(2002)

FAI Manual
Crewe & Athlestan, 1984
Areas of Possible Functional Limitations
1. Learning ability
2. Ability to read & write in English
3. Memory
4. Spatial & Form perception
5. Vision
6. Hearing
7. Speech
8. Language Functioning
9. Upper Extremity Function
10. Hand Functioning
11. Motor Speed
12. Ambulation or Mobility
13. Capactity for Exertion
14. Endurance
15. Loss of Time from Work
16. Stability of Condition
17. Work History
18, Acceptabiity to Employers
19. Personal Attractiveness
20. Skills
21. Economic Disincentives
22. Access to job Opportunities
23. Requirement for Special Work Conditions
24. Work Habits
25. Social Support System
26. Accurate Perception of Capabilities & Limitations
27. Effective Interaction with Employers/co-workers
28. Judgment
29. Congruence of Behavior with Rehabilitation Goals
30. Initiative and Problem Solving Ability
Possible Strength Items
31. Unusually attractive personal appearance
32. Exceptionally pleasing personality
33. Extremely bright or verbally fluent
34. Has vocational skill in great demand
35. Excellent educational credentials
36. Highly supportive family
37. Sufficient personal financial resources
38. Extremely motivated to succeed
39. Job available w/ previous or current employer.

Transition To Work Inventory model:
"Fit to Match"
Job Analysis, Worker Analysis

Grasping/holding

Releasing items

Applying pressure to items

Fine Motor Dexterity

Fine Muscle control

Muscle strength

Touch Sensitivity

Work Pace

Decision Making/ Reasoning

Social Interaction

Oral Comprehension

Figure-ground Discrimination

Estimating spatial relations

Working under distractions

Equipment/ safety

Balance

Goodness of Fit: FVA model,
Jill Wheeler,PhD
Stout, 1996

A. Individual's assessment

1. Indiv. Prefer.
2. Indiv. Strengths
3. Work History
4. Functional Use of academics
5. Following directions
6. Behavior
7. Learning style
8. Social skills/ Interactions
9. Communication skills
10. Work endurance/ stamina
11.Medical/ physical status
12. Orientation/ Mobility skills
13. Fine/Gross motor coordinatn.
14. Work Related skills/ concerns
15. Transportation needs
16. Current financial Information/ concerns
17. Special considerat./needs
18.Recommendations.

(Note philosoph. comparison to TWI)

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