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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to describe the job and required competencies of local coordinators of vocational education programs in Minnesota for handicapped and disadvantaged students. The approach taken to the job description was a competency-based training design, calling for the specification of the competencies required by the position. A list of 44 competency statements was developed and submitted to the 33 incumbent coordinators who had responded to a questionnaire asking for a description of their programs and individual characteristics. The ratings of the 44 competency statements as made by the 33 incumbents, presented in tabular form, showed that most of the statements were considered important or essential to the job. It was therefore concluded that the competencies were descriptive of a single job class. The longer-range objective of the study was to provide a base for a proposed inservice training program for this new class of educational personnel, called coordinators of special needs. The competencies required also imply program needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education. (MF)

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COMPETENCIES OF SPECIAL NEEDS COORDINATORS

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Competencies of Special Needs Coordinators

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This study undertook to describe the job and the required competencies of local coordinators of special needs in vocational education in Minnesota. Foundation was sought for a competency based training program. The coordinators constitute a new class of educational personnel. Competency statements were generated and were submitted to the 33 incumbents in vocational education in Minnesota for rating, together with a questionnaire of personal and position data. The presented competency statements were mostly rated as important or essential. No subgroups were found among the incumbents. It was concluded that the competencies were descriptive of a single job. Other conclusions and recommendations were presented.

This study was supported in part by funds from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, United States Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Office of Education, and official endorsement by the Office of Education should not be inferred.

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COMPETENCIES OF SPECIAL NEEDS COORDINATORS

Objectives

The short-range purpose of this study was to describe the competency needs encountered by a new class of educational personnel. These personnel are those persons who, at the level of the local education agency, are responsible for the design and conduct of vocational education programs for handicapped and disadvantaged students. Indirectly, a description of these competencies was expected to imply the emergent program needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students (called students with special needs) in vocational education. Field-based descriptions of these students' needs are very limited, and no other description of this class of personnel, called coordinators of special needs, was available in the literature.

The longer-range objective of the study was to provide a basis for a proposed inservice training program for coordinators of special needs. No such specific program was available at the time of this study, nor is it known to be available at the present time. There are, however, preservice and inservice training programs available in various parts of the United States for other classes of special needs personnel and for mainstream vocational educators.

Background

Programming for students with special needs in vocational education has an official history that dates from the Vocational Education Act Amendments of 1968. These Amendments defined the students who are to receive special needs services as being the handicapped and the disadvantaged.

Some states have designated a position for the local coordination of special needs programs. Under the responsibility of a more general

vocational education administrator, the coordinator is responsible for the design and provision of special needs services as well as (in many instances) for the provision of direct services. Minnesota has 33 such local coordinator positions with more anticipated.

The position of coordinator of special needs programs has not been previously defined except in the brief job specification of the State Plan for Vocational Education. The designation of such a position in Minnesota was seen as an opportunity to examine both the position and the characteristics of the program for which the coordinator is responsible. In addition, a potential benefit was seen for designing training programs to meet inservice and preservice training needs of this class of personnel.

Method

A competency-based training design was chosen for the approach to this description and determination. The first major phase of such a design calls for the specification of the competencies required by the position. Because no field-derived job specifications of sufficient complexity were available, the method chosen was that of generating statements of probable competency needs with the assistance of an expert jury.

A nominating panel of experts were asked to propose names of experts who could reasonably generate the competency statements. Using the most frequent nominations, a panel of nine experts was chosen: the State Coordinator of Vocational Special Needs Program; the State Coordinators of Vocational Programs for the Handicapped; a University of Minnesota professor of Vocational Education; the President of the State Association of Special Needs Personnel (also a local coordinator); the manager of special needs programming in a large vocational education district; a professor of Educational Administration; the Coordinator of Special Needs in a medium-sized area vocational technical institute; and a project coordinator who

was engaged in developing a state-wide management information system for special needs programs. These persons were chosen to represent those who were knowledgeable about special needs programming and about the requirements of the coordinator job and of similar jobs.

Each member of the expert jury first submitted an independent list of competencies that might be required of a coordinator of special needs. The submitted statements ranged widely in format and content. The submitted lists were reduced by the investigator to an unduplicated list of approximately 135 statements.

The expert jury was then convened for a full day to refine the unduplicated competency statements. The statements were presented to the jury with contents preserved, but regularized into the format of "The coordinator of special needs must be able to ..." The statements were written on two by three foot sheets of paper and posted about the meeting room. The jury removed items that could not be made into meaningful competency statements; they then merged redundant statements of the same content; and finally, added statements that appeared to have been omitted. The jury determined rules for editing the statements.

The investigator then edited the statements in accordance with the rules. The edited list consisting of 65 statements was mailed to each member of the expert jury. The members were requested to mail corrections and recommendations back to the investigator. No corrections were submitted, but informal contacts revealed that two members of the jury were dissatisfied with some of the statements.

The jury convened again for a half day with a task similar to that of the previous assembled day. The result of this second work session was to reduce the competency statements to 44 in number. Editing rules were determined.

The investigator then cast the statements into edited format and mailed them to the jurors for verification. No changes in this list were deemed necessary by the jury and the 44 statements were taken to comprise the list to be submitted to role incumbents for rating.

Meanwhile, the 33 incumbent coordinators responded to a questionnaire which called for a description of their programs (organizational variables and such program variables as size of student body) and the individual characteristics of the incumbent such as training and experience and professional affiliation. This resulted in a report which described the position in those terms.

The list of 44 competencies was then submitted to each of the local coordinators who rated each competency statement as to its priority. Four levels of priority were used.

Not needed: In your particular situation, the ability to do this is not evidently needed.

Useful: In your situation, the ability to do this is a useful competency, but the program can be operated without significant loss if you do not use this competency.

Important: In your situation, the program can be operated if you do not use this competency, but there will be loss in program effectiveness.

Essential: In your situation, the program cannot be operated with reasonable effectiveness if this competency is not used.

One hundred percent of the coordinators completed and returned both questionnaires.

Results

The coordinators were found to have a range of position and personal characteristics. Secondary, post-secondary and adult programs were represented, ranging in size from fewer than 24 to more than 300 students in

segregated and integrated programs. Personnel supervised by the coordinators numbered from 0 to over 50, in six major job classifications. The coordinators came from varied experiential backgrounds, with previous positions in vocational education and special education predominating.

The ratings of the competencies as made by the incumbent coordinators are shown as Table 1.

On a four point scale, the most commonly used rating for the 44 competency statements was the highest rating, Essential to performance in the coordinator's position. Over two-thirds of the ratings were at or above the third level, Important, operationally defined to mean that the local program would be significantly impaired if the competency were not exercised. On the other hand, only five of the 44 competencies failed to receive a rating of Not Needed by at least one of the 33 coordinators. The report of the study entables the ratings for each competency. The ratings are interpreted as field validation of the competency statements that had been generated.

Of 119 plausible contingencies checked between coordinator or position characteristic and competency rating, four contingencies at the .05 probability level were found. This was interpreted to mean that subgroups of coordinators were not found whose positions differ in competency requirement; the Minnesota Coordinators of Special Needs may be considered to occupy a single job class.

The study derived other conclusions and proposed recommendations for further research as well as for field developments. The proposed inservice training program for special needs coordinators has not been implemented at the University of Minnesota.

Table 1

Ratings of Competencies as Reported by the 33 Coordinators of Special Needs in Minnesota, Tallied by Number of Coordinators Giving Each of Four Ratings for Each Competency (Items 28 and 44 each rated by 32 coordinators)

Competencies	Ratings ^a			
	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse
"IN MY SITUATION, THE COORDINATOR OF SPECIAL NEEDS MUST BE ABLE TO				
1. ...evaluate the performance of Special Needs staff members and recommend their retention or separation.	1	3	12	17
2. ...maintain a current knowledge of research, trends, and new developments in Special Needs programming.	1	4	17	11
3. ...maintain a record system for the Special Needs program which is consistent with state regulations and format.	0	7	9	17
4. ...provide and/or secure inservice training regarding special needs, for Special Needs and regular vocational staff.	0	3	14	16
5. ...lead a multidisciplinary team meeting regarding a student with special needs.	4	5	14	10
6. ...communicate with district board(s) so that the Special Needs program is effectively understood and its purposes integrated into those of the school(s).	3	4	12	14
7. ...interview, and recommend for employment by the district, Special Needs personnel.	3	6	11	11
8. ...authorize purchases and expenditures in accordance with standard educational book-keeping practices and in conformity with the state Department of Education's Administrative Manual.	5	6	11	11
9. ...design a system for vocational evaluation of students, using real or simulated work as the medium.	5	11	9	8

^a Rating abbreviations: NotN = Not Needed; Usef = Useful; Impt = Important; Esse = Essential.

Table 1 (continued)

"IN MY SITUATION, THE COORDINATOR OF SPECIAL NEEDS MUST BE ABLE TO	Ratings ^a			
	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse
10. ...assist vocational instructors to modify their programs to meet the needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students.	3	5	8	17
11. ...develop an individualized prescriptive program plan with an individual student who has special needs.	2	3	14	14
12. ...integrate the Special Needs program into the comprehensive vocational and other agency services of the community.	0	6	12	15
13. ...effectively organize and use advisory committees.	3	4	11	15
14. ...establish formal communication channels among units within the district, and/or among component districts, regarding the operation of the Special Needs program.	0	6	12	15
15. ...acquire funding from a variety of sources to support the Special Needs program.	4	8	8	13
16. ...establish effective means for communication and dissemination of information within the Special Needs staff.	1	1	14	17
17. ...assist students with special needs to solve problems in interpersonal relations with peers, teachers and family.	3	6	12	12
18. ...specify role descriptions and qualifications for Special Needs positions and personnel.	1	7	14	11
19. ...use styles of leadership appropriate to different situations in relation to delegation of authority, accountability and supervision.	3	4	7	19

^a Rating abbreviations: NotN = Not Needed; Usef = Useful; Impt = Important; Esse = Essential.

Table 1 (continued)

"IN MY SITUATION, THE COORDINATOR OF SPECIAL NEEDS MUST BE ABLE TO	Ratings ^a			
	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse
20. ...design and implement a program evaluation process to monitor the operations of the Special Needs program.	0	4	13	16
21. ...select and acquire instructional materials that are appropriate for use by students with special needs.	1	7	11	14
22. ...design and implement a process that will identify students who may have special needs, and will determine their eligibility for Special Needs services.	2	3	8	20
23. ...develop, and integrate into district policy, Special Needs policies that are consistent with state and local requirements and with the rights of students with special needs.	2	4	12	15
24. ...insure that legally acceptable due process is followed in district actions that affect students with special needs.	4	8	13	8
25. ...make a determination of the nature of a student's needs and potentials, using refer- ral information, interview, and measuring instruments for the assessment of the student's vocational interests, aptitudes and potentials, and learning characteris- tics.	2	7	9	15
26. ...mediate conflict within the staff.	5	6	11	11
27. ...plan specific modifications in voca- tional curriculum and methods to make them appropriate for students with special needs.	3	5	14	11
28. ...interpret and implement at the local level the guidelines and philosophy of the state Plan and of the state Unit for Special Needs, consistent with the accepted philosophy and practices of vocational education.	1	6	13	12

^aRating abbreviations: NotN = Not Needed; Usef = Useful; Impt = Important; Esse = Essential.

Table 1 (continued)

"IN MY SITUATION, THE COORDINATOR OF SPECIAL NEEDS MUST BE ABLE TO	Competencies				Ratings ^a			
	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse
29. ...carry out effective public relations with various audiences on behalf of the Special Needs program, using both oral and written formats.	1	6	9	17				
30. ...assist a student with special needs to take an active part in the planning of his educational placement and vocational program.	1	7	12	13				
31. ...supervise the activities of Special Needs professional personnel.	1	2	11	19				
32. ...coordinate student transportation with component school districts.	19	9	3	2				
33. ...design and conduct a follow-up study of students with special needs.	3	9	12	9				
34. ...provide vocational counseling and guidance to students with special needs.	3	5	7	18				
35. ...design a student evaluation that will indicate student progress in a vocational program.	4	6	14	9				
36. ...identify, plan, and recommend facility (physical plant) requirements of the Special Needs program within the district.	2	9	15	7				
37. ...secure financial aid for individual students, using alternative sources.	7	6	10	10				
38. ...comply with state and federal laws, regulations, and guidelines, interpreting them and reporting so as to show that all criteria are met for Special Needs program approval and funding.	4	4	9	16				
39. ...design and implement a formal needs assessment process to determine the necessary size and type of Special Needs program.	3	5	12	13				

^aRating abbreviations: NotN = Not Needed; Usef = Useful; Impt = Important; Esse = Essential.

Table 1 (continued)

Competencies "IN MY SITUATION, THE COORDINATOR OF SPECIAL NEEDS MUST BE ABLE TO	Ratings ^a			
	NotN	Usef	Impt	Esse
40. ...develop and maintain a Special Needs budget that appropriately accounts for funds from several sources.	2	4	11	16
41. ...prepare students with special needs to effectively use community resources and agencies to meet their long term needs after they leave the school.	2	11	10	10
42. ...assist an employer in developing an affirmative action plan for employment of handicapped persons, and/or in securing a Wages and Hours certificate for less than minimum wage.	9	14	7	3
43. ...provide remedial and developmental instruction in basic skills, such as reading and math, to students with special needs.	4	7	8	14
44. ...apply basic learning theory and principles of behavior management to the design of instructional programs for individual students with special needs.	1	5	14	12

Educational Importance

Information is provided about a new class of educational personnel whose competency needs have not been previously described. The competencies have possible additional utility for investigating the performance requirements of special needs programs in vocational education, and for investigating the required, delegated responsibilities of other personnel in the programs.

The defined and rated competency statements provide foundation for the development of training programs for coordinators, which training is not now provided.

The class of personnel described is new to education within the past few years, mostly within the past three years. It is also novel in being a class of administrative (line, program responsible) personnel in vocational education which is not trade-specific nor the director of a school, and it creates or imports a technology not previously found in vocational education. The competencies required in this job imply the program needs of handicapped and disadvantaged students in vocational education.

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