

THE TOWER SYSTEM AS A VOCATIONAL TEST FOR THE DEAF CLIENT

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In 1956 the Institute for the Crippled and Disabled in New York City developed the various vocational evaluative techniques they had assembled specifically for the physically handicapped client into the TOWER system. The name TOWER derives from the words "Testing, Orientation and Work Evaluation in Rehabilitation." The system is composed of over one hundred specific job sampling tests in thirteen broad job families. The system, however, is open-ended with continuous development and additions of new job samples encouraged as industrial changes and local conditions demand.

Before discussing the application and results of this system with deaf clients, let us first review the vocational evaluative data that the rehabilitation counselor is usually able to obtain. Vocational interest and aptitude tests, partially or wholly applicable to the deaf, that are most frequently mentioned in the literature include the Kuder Preference Record, the Strong Vocational Interest Tests, Geist Interest Inventory for Deaf Males, Bennett Hand-Tool Dexterity Test, Crawford Small Parts Test, the Minnesota Paper Form Board Test and the General Aptitude Test Battery given by the United States Employment Service. The above list is by no means complete; the tests listed are those more widely in use.

A few of the above, such as the Kuder and Strong Tests, are highly verbal in nature and therefore applicable only with verbally proficient deaf clients. None of the above tests is sufficiently specific to assist the deaf client in narrowing his occupational choices to one or two possibilities with any valid degree of confidence. Tests of vocational interest

necessarily presuppose a level of occupational information which most young deaf adults do not possess unless they have been exposed to an effective formal guidance program on occupational information.

The General Aptitude Test Battery has been widely used in recent years with deaf clients. Increased usage perhaps can be interpreted as indicative of a reasonable degree of validity. It also may be that personnel officers in industry are requesting such information. Whatever the reasons for this increased usage, the GATB does have some limited value in predicting general vocational aptitudes. Verbal sections of this test, however, have no valid vocational value beyond restating what is likely already in the client's file regarding his verbal strengths and weaknesses.

In addition to the above-mentioned tests, it has long been traditional in rehabilitation work to advocate the "job tryout method" in either actual employment or in a vocational evaluation unit. Advocacy of this method has been based more on necessity due to lack of confidence in the predictive value of vocational instruments with deaf clients than on any great faith in the adequacy of the job tryout approach. In brief, the job tryout approach has appeared to many counselors to be the more reliable of two inefficient methods.

In the case of the job tryout on an actual employment basis, the temptation to encourage the client to continue on permanently if he proves able to handle the task can and frequently does lead to serious underemployment conditions. Job tryouts in a vocational training setting are usually preferred because of the above-stated risk, but here the client is limited to the number of work exploratory opportunities offered. This limitation in the training setting can also lead to vocational stereotyping which in turn leads to underemployment problems.

With the above less-than-optimal conditions set forth, the value of the TOWER system perhaps can be more objectively reviewed. The TOWER (1959) test is by no means a panacea for the above problems, having its own limitations and disadvantages. This system has been used with deaf clients only for a short time and to a limited degree. In fact, this preliminary discussion may in itself be premature. It is being presented at this time only because a more objective means of vocational evaluation of deaf clients is vitally needed, and those who have had some contact with the TOWER system have been encouraged by its potentialities.

This system has been used on an intermittent basis in an evaluation unit for deaf adult clients located on the campus of the Tennessee School for the Deaf. The evaluation unit is in operation only when the

Tennessee Vocational Rehabilitation agency requests evaluations. While the results of the TOWER technique as a formal means of vocationally evaluating the deaf adult clients are very encouraging, for the most part only clients presenting severe rehabilitation problems have been evaluated with this system. Its fullest potentialities are thus largely unknown from the evidence garnered to date. However, there is every reason to believe that even more definitive vocational information would be attained with the average and above average adult client. Even to the uninitiated, the controlled manner and natural interest of the varied test procedures and materials suggest a most applicable test for deaf clients.

This system is fully a vocational evaluation instrument. As in any type of vocational instrument constructed to determine an individual's best occupational potential, a certain amount of personal vocational sophistication must be present in the client. No test can determine the vocational interest and predict the best performance of a testee unless the individual is functioning within his capacity in a sufficiently mature manner.

It is essential to state the above because it is a known maxim that many deaf clients need prevocational level services in order to raise their level of maturity to the point where valid vocational measurement and counseling are possible. In addition to personal adjustment assistance, a concerted effort is usually needed in raising the client's level of occupational information. Only after a client has developed a reasonable understanding of the world of work commensurate with his age, intelligence, and experience can he be expected to participate effectively in reaching a valid vocational measure of his capabilities.

From the above, it can thus be stated that adequate vocational assessment with the TOWER or any other instrument must be preceded by proper prevocational screening. For these reasons also, the TOWER system would be limited in validity for use in shop programs of most schools for the deaf. However, where an effective guidance program is an integral part of both the academic and vocational departments of schools for the deaf, the TOWER evaluation would then likely yield very significant results for further vocational training and planning purposes. Administration of the TOWER at the end of the last year of school enrollment would be more valid in such instances where an effective guidance program exists.

Precisely what is a job sampling test as utilized in the TOWER system? Each of the tests given is an exact duplication of a piece of work existing in the world of work, whether it be in an office, factory, or

other work setting. Each job sample is rated as being either inferior, below average, average, above average, or superior. The ratings are based on the factors of performance which the job supervisor in the field has assigned, not on what the test administrator believes to be important. In addition to a performance rating on each job sample, there is a similar five scale rating on the time factor for that particular job sample. Again, the time standards are based on actual time standards in the field, not a "pretty good for the kind of clients we have here" rating. Also, each job sample is rated on the basis of the client's expressed and demonstrated interest in that type of work. A sufficient period of practice with each job sample is permitted before all final ratings are taken.

Where a particular piece of work is normally performed on the job by reading directions which are written at the fourth-grade level, for instance, then the directions for this particular job sample test will also be written on the fourth-grade level. On the few job samples in the TOWER system where reading is essential to a specific job assignment, the client will have to attempt the job sample on the basis of its written directions. Inability to do so in such an instance constitutes a failure on that particular job sample. Where a particular job sample does not require reading, as is the case with the majority of TOWER job samples, then the manner of accomplishing that particular job sample can be demonstrated to the client by the vocational evaluator.

The step-by-step breakdown of vocational tasks and the formal guides for assessing the individual's performance are very fundamental to a deaf client's needs. Psychologically, the process is positive since the deaf client does not feel embarrassed by obviously detailed explanations and directions which are frequently a necessary addition to many other tests with the deaf. The detailed directions, as the client can readily see, are built into this technique. Another psychological asset for both the client and the counselor is that the test data can be used for job development purposes and in actual placement.

To elaborate, the client possesses both some specific job familiarity and, more important, confidence that he can successfully handle the assignment when he is presented with an actual placement opportunity in a TOWER job area in which he has scored well. Secondly, the counselor when developing a job situation can speak to personnel officers with the added confidence that the client has tentatively demonstrated that he can meet the actual performance standards for the type of work he seeks.

An additional merit of the TOWER system results from its breadth

of testing opportunities. It tends to work against the problem of vocational stereotyping of deaf clients. Job possibilities that one ordinarily would not consider for a particular client are forced to the evaluator's attention by the client's interest and performance during the evaluation.

The present thirteen job families constituting the TOWER system are: clerical, drafting, drawing, electronics assembly, jewelry manufacturing, leathersgoods, lettering, mail clerk, optical mechanics, receptionist, sewing machine operating, welding, and workshop assembly. In these thirteen areas, in a few of the many job samples included, communication is essential to the degree that most deaf clients could not meet the basic requirements. It is frequently demonstrated at the Institute for the Crippled and Disabled that there are many specific jobs that ordinarily are judged to require the use of two good arms or two good legs in which individuals with the use of only one arm or one leg proved to be able to perform at average and above average levels in both quality of performance and in other factors involved. In this sense also, the TOWER provides an opportunity for the client to demonstrate what he can do; he is not arbitrarily limited, as is too often the case, by the subjective decisions of others.

From the foregoing explanation it can be seen that a TOWER evaluation cannot be conducted in an office setting, nor is it usually included within the province of a clinical psychologist's responsibility. The TOWER test is distributed only by the Institute for the Crippled and Disabled after an evaluator is trained at that facility during a five-week orientation period. Currently, training continues to be available from the Institute through grants awarded by the Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. In order to utilize the TOWER approach, a shop setting must be created. In my opinion, this can frequently be integrated with an evaluation center serving a normal-hearing client population provided that the vocational evaluator for deaf clients can communicate easily and effectively. However, when one considers that the TOWER evaluation should follow prevocational adjustment services, it may be that in many cases a more comprehensive program designed specifically for deaf clients will be needed in order to more fully meet the rehabilitation needs which usually prevail.

For most deaf clients, a three-week evaluation period is sufficient for the TOWER vocational evaluation phase. While this may seem unduly long for "a test," the results obtained in most instances will more than justify this investment in time. In terms of currently allowable extended evaluation referral time, the three-week period involved is actually short, leaving ample time for the prevocational adjustment phase.

The vocational evaluator should ideally be an individual with some test experience background such as that provided in courses leading to a counseling and guidance major or a vocational rehabilitation counseling major. He also should have formal training leading to thorough understanding of the problems involved in the educational, vocational, social, and psychological areas of work with the deaf.

Individuals desiring more detailed information on this subject should write directly to the Institute for the Crippled and Disabled or refer to the references that follow.

REFERENCES

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