

## VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY -- APPLICATION\*

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In his earlier writings, Super indicated that "vocational choice" conveyed a sense of neatness and precision unrelated to reality, the choice was not a one-shot process. I have no doubt that this is absolutely true after twelve years in college counseling and having gone through the successes and failures of probably 1500 college and high school cases.

At the same time I have also become aware of the fact that the concept of "vocational development" conveys a sense of orderly movement and regular growth which is not altogether appropriate in many cases. On the whole, vocational development theory has tended to be based on the concept that the vocationally mature individual, the person who receives the highest scores for coping with educational and vocational problems, is that person who understands himself, his interests and his abilities, understands the requirements of various occupations and is moving or has moved steadily and persistently toward an occupation which will permit him expression of his self-concept. This evaluation of vocational development theory is not altogether original with me, of course. The point has also been made by Ralph LoCascio in the Personnel and Guidance Journal for May, 1964 and by Rhee Lyon in the Summer, 1965 issue of the Journal of Counseling Psychology.

The basic assumption in the vocational development theories, it would seem, is that with a sufficient correct information about self and the world of work and the insights to connect the two, trial-error will be reduced

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and the individual should be able to make more rational choices at appropriate points as he progresses in goal-directed determination through life. Thus fewer people who might be judged more vocationally mature or who appear to be coping best with vocational developmental tasks should be faced with failure, frustration or boredom in their later job activities because they, perhaps with the help of a counselor, will have been able to select those careers which are expressions of their self-concept. Theoretically the most mature and most adequately coping person will know who he is; he will know what occupations will best be an expression of his ego identity and he will set a proper course toward his goal.

There is no doubt in my mind that the study of career development is contributing much to our knowledge of the psychological factors related to later vocational adjustment. The theories now being tested are giving counselors one framework within which to place our evaluation of client behavior in relation to vocational and educational decisions. These theories are placing test results, occupational information, peer group relations, etc. in sharper perspective by calling attention to the potential relationship of these factors in vocational decision making. The focus of vocational development theory on the individual has given to counselors some guidelines in working with the individual client in the counseling relationship. For the thoughtful counselor, the theories have replaced, simply by their existence, several of the less adequate approaches to assisting clients. There is little doubt, for instance, that simple test interpretation is no longer recognized as an adequate counseling program for a client, although in too many counseling situations expediency leads to the continued use of this method of vocational decision making.

Nevertheless, the theories, as they now stand, are basically culture-static

theories. I do not mean to imply that the society in which the decision-maker operates when using these theories has been altogether ignored, but I do not feel that the impact of the varied social and cultural environments from which clients are drawn play a particularly important part in the consideration of the present theorists. The theories of individual vocational development are, it seems to me, posed against a rather fixed concept of a culture. The decision-maker is judged mature or not mature, coping or not coping, on the basis of what he does or what he is thinking about decision making regardless of the potential for decision making inherent in his environment.

The theories are predicated on the assumption that the individual, no matter who he is or where he is, has freedom to make decisions during his lifetime. But clients have greater or lesser degrees of freedom for making decisions depending on the cultural and societal groups from which they come. Present theories seem most adequate as a framework for testing the potential development of upper middle class young people - best, perhaps, for the northeastern Ivy League type, by which I mean a young man from an essentially urban environment whose parents are oriented toward education, whose family resources are such that the son can select from a number of educational or training possibilities, whose secondary school experiences have provided preparation for and exposure to these possibilities, and whose basic set incorporates a potential for career planning. If this young man does not use his resources adequately, he is, indeed, vocationally immature. I question, however, the appropriateness for the counselor's attempting to apply the same dimensions in evaluating the coping behaviors of the boy from Fossil, Oregon or Broken Bow, Nebraska.

To take one of the developmental periods as an example, trial behavior as a coping mechanism in vocational development is quite logical within a framework

where free choice is possible. But when the client is limited in his choice possibilities, trial behavior may not be a realistic consideration in decision making. On the other side of the coin, the counselor may recognize very definite trial behavior which, given the resources of the client, can only come to naught because factors outside the control of the counselor and the client prevent the client's bringing his trial behavior to the instrumentation stage. An example of the former situation would be the young man in a small town who has shown very definite scientific interests and abilities but who has been forced by an early marriage and the arrival of one or more children to hold a succession of unrelated non-scientific jobs simply to insure his family's survival. He has not chosen to flounder, but he has not been able, because of the job limitations within his community, to try out scientific job possibilities. An example of the second situation is the young man who has done moderately well through school in scientific and mathematical courses and who has developed a very specific interest in electronics. In fact, his interest is so keen that he spends considerable time in the library reading electronic books, conducting his own experiments, and setting up the lighting systems for community and school theater productions. He has done everything possible to prepare for a specific type of outlet for his skills and interests by the time he reaches the counselor. He has a firm grasp on the future, except for two or three complications: he has been unable to succeed in the full-blown engineering program in the local college; he does not have the financial resources to attend the technical school a couple hundred miles away; and there is no outlet for his unique talents in the community - except for amateur theater lighting. He recognizes that he could get the type of training he needs in the service; however, he has a physical problem which has resulted in his being rejected for the service. At the moment, he is

effectively blocked from a logical steady progression toward what he and the counselor consider to be good career choices, at least from the standpoint of internal consistency.

As a counselor, I would prefer to believe that my clients have been and are free to make appropriate decisions about themselves. I would prefer to believe that by evaluating and working only with the internal resources of the individual I can help him to live a better life or come to a better educational or vocational decision. I am basically sympathetic with the striving toward self-actualization. However, as a practicing counselor, I have come to the conclusion that only a fraction of my clients have the freedom to act on decisions made without consideration of some contingency factors in the environment. I am aware that a college such as the one in which I function (a state land grant institution) serves students who have "chosen" it for one basic reason: "It's there." Many undergraduate students who present themselves for counseling have not necessarily chosen to come to my institution because it offers them the program which fits best with their interests or abilities. A large percentage of our undergraduate students live within commuting distance. Because Oregon State happens to be located where it is, a disproportionate number of male students in Benton and adjoining counties "choose" to become engineers or foresters; because the University of Oregon happens to be located where it is, a disproportionate number of male students in Lane and adjoining counties "choose" to major in liberal arts, in the theoretical sciences or in business administration. Since our state legislature has allocated certain studies to each institution, there is relatively little overlap. I have counseled students at both institutions and found quite frequently that students who have begun to recognize the inappropriateness of the program in which they have enrolled are limited to a choice of another program in the same institution

by the fact that they do not have the resources to move to the other school where a more appropriate program exists. Can we evaluate them as less mature, in their floundering through programs that they and the counselor recognize to be inappropriate, than the student who can make steady progress toward a goal which fits his interests and abilities simply because he has an appropriate program near his home or the resources needed to leave home for appropriate training?

At another level, in evaluating MOTA training programs in the Los Angeles and Fresno areas a couple of years ago, it became obvious to me that training programs which were appropriate for certain young people in terms of their skills and interests were denied these youngsters because of transportation difficulties. Although the policy has since been changed, programs were denied to some youngsters because they lacked some fundamental academic skills. In both cases, factors outside the control of the young people blocked their vocational development.

There is another fact to be considered in a discussion of career development theory and counseling practice. I work at a level of education where the young men have more or less committed themselves to careers. Many of them will fail, but at least initially I think we can assume that most of those males entering college are considering occupational fields and levels which are reached by movement through the stages in our vocational development models. A career does involve trial activities and a zeroing in on a field or specialty; it does or should culminate in the individual's achieving a degree of self-fulfillment. But I would agree with Arthur Pearl and Frank Reissman in their evaluation that we are deceiving ourselves if we think that the large segment of the population which we can variously describe as "the poor", "the underprivileged", "the lower classes" or what have you can be

defined in our usual career development terms. Society has not really set up career lines for these people. Even our present training programs for this group are designed as job preparation - a set of slots into which the worker can be fitted to do some task; establishment is expected at the completion of training. If thought has been given to the potential movement into career lines of the grape pruners, the waiters, or the short-order cooks trained by the MOTA programs or the body and fender repair men, the picnic table builders, or the forest crews of the Job Corps programs, I am unaware of the fact. There cannot be careers for a large segment of our population unless the society establishes new career lines. Art Pearl and Frank Reissman treat this topic at length in their book "New Careers For The Poor" and I will not elaborate on it at this time.

The counselor is likely to deal with clients from one of three groups: a group which is passing through - or has passed through - the series of coping behaviors defined in the career development theories. This group is composed of those people who have been relatively free to make appropriate decisions; they may have made errors in decision-making in the past and may not have been aware of factors which should have been taken into account in making wise decisions. With this group, the counselor can make greatest use of current vocational development theory and can use it to judge maturity and the coping progress of the client.

The second group is composed of those who aim at careers but whose decision-making is or has been very seriously limited because of lack of some resource in carrying through on potential decisions. For these people the counselor may be able to draw on certain aspects of developmental theory but he is severely handicapped in making full application because both he and the client can recognize that orderly progression toward a self-fulfilling goal has not or

cannot be reached simply by helping the client to greater vocational maturity or self-insight. In his work with the client who has had limited degrees of freedom in decision-making, the counselor who attempts to evaluate the client's coping behavior on the basis of developmental theory will most likely find himself frustrated in helping the client to solutions to his vocational problem by the effects of uncontrolled contingency factors.

The third group is composed of that great number of workers for whom, at the present time, the concept of careers does not seem to apply. This group is blocked by a variety of factors, personal, cultural and societal from even considering a planful approach to a career. The society is now in the process of trying to prepare these workers for a job which has value to the society. Few questions are being asked about the fulfilling value of the jobs to the worker - other than that the jobs will help the individual become financially less dependent on the society.

Where developmental theorists have raised the question about delayed or impaired development (as in LoCascio's article in the May, 1964 issue of the Personnel and Guidance Journal) it seems to me that the burden is still left on the individual to produce successful learnings or be adjudged inadequate in relation to the developmental tasks. It has probably been necessary to hold cultural and societal factors constant in order to observe individual psychological factors in operation; nevertheless, a counselor is handicapped in applying present vocational development theory because he cannot hold these factors constant when working with a client. In counseling one must take into consideration factors outside the client which, to some extent, are presently of little consequence in vocational development theorizing.

As Stewart and I have indicated in our book The Counselor and Society, free choices can be made only as long as two conditions exist. First, the individual

must have the necessary requisities - skills, knowledge and attitudes - for making free choices. Second, society must provide the individual with some reasonable probability that certain aspirations are possible for him. From a counselor's point of view, the vocational development theories have concentrated almost exclusively on the first of these conditions. Evaluations and judgements are hypothesized as the decision-maker is aware of his own capabilities and the requirements of occupations. However, since I see the counselor in a much more active role in improving the choice possibilities of a client, the theories go only part way in helping do the job. I cannot make evaluations of the client as if he were free to make realistic decisions if, in fact, he is prevented or has been prevented from making appropriate decisions. If the barriers to his making appropriate decisions are in the environment, it may be up to the counselor to make some effort to change the environmental situation so that this client and others like him can be free to make appropriate decisions. Vocational development theories are not presently posed in terms of helping the counselor make judgements about the environment and its effect on decision making.

In my opinion, what counselors will need eventually will be measures of how well the individual is coping with his particular environment. The counselor needs to know whether the client with whom he is working is doing well or poorly with the equipment that he has and in terms of the factors with which he has to cope. We are discovering that group tests discriminate against persons from certain cultural groups and we are now able to take the steps necessary to develop materials which will permit deprived people to exhibit their potentials in ways which are meaningful to them. Vocational development theory should be phrased in terms which will permit us to compare persons with whom we are dealing with others in that same environment rather than against a total framework of vocational development or against a series of idealized coping mechanisms. With

any individual client, we need to know whether he is doing better or more poorly than others who have the same opportunities and the same environmental factors operating on them. Until this is done, vocational development theory will have limited value for the practitioner.