A Method to Assess Work Task Preferences

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Abstract: Persons with intellectual disability may encounter difficulties in making choices and expressing preferences because of restricted communication skills or a tendency to acquiesce. In addition, many studies provide evidence that these persons have less opportunity to make choices and express their preferences. The aim of this study was to conduct a field test of an innovative method to assess vocational preferences using choice and task completion observations. Sixteen educators were trained to use this method. They were recruited through local developmental disability agencies specializing in services for persons with intellectual disability in the Province of Quebec (Canada). Nineteen persons with intellectual disability were assessed. Occurrences of four types of behaviors (choice, refusal, positive emotional and off-task behaviors), as well as length of time spent working on the task, were computed to determine levels of preferences. Interviews were conducted with the educators to collect their perceptions regarding the effectiveness and usefulness of the method as a measure of its value in use. Results suggest that this method is useful to assess vocational preferences with persons with intellectual disability. Interviews conducted with educators reveal a high satisfaction with the method. Vocational preferences assessment should rely on frequency of choices, as other behaviors previously considered as expressing preferences are not reliable. This study also provides further evidence that proxy opinions may differ from one’s actual preferences.

The aim of supporting persons with intellectual disability is to provide them with a good quality of life, as well as self-determined life outcomes. Current legislation and policies uphold these major objectives and recommend that professionals and caregivers take the preferences and personal goals of these persons into account when making decisions concerning their lives. Recently, assessing choices and preferences, which are defined as repeated choices of a same option, was highlighted as one of the main relevant research domains (Emerson, Hatton, Thompson, & Parmenter, 2004). Direct measures of preferences are necessary since preferences expressed by the person him- or herself may differ from those hypothesized by proxies, especially if the latter rely on subjective information (Perry & Felce, 2002; Reid, Everson, & Green, 1999; Stancliffe, 1995). However, all direct measures may not be suitable for every person with intellectual disability. Questionnaires and interviews may be ineffective with persons with intellectual disability because of limitations in their receptive or expressive communication skills (Cameron & Murphy, 2002). Persons with intellectual disability also have a tendency to acquiesce on yes-saying questions or to choose the second of two parallel either/or questions (Finlay & Lyons, 2002; Perry & Felce, 2002). Cognitive limitations are other important barriers to expression of preferences, particularly on complex abstract issues (Perry, 2004). Consequently, persons with intellectual disability...
may benefit from direct observation while they are manipulating or consuming options presented during a valid preference assessment procedure. Pictorial presentations using still pictures or videos are likely to compromise preferences assessment as they may be too abstract, given an individual’s cognitive skills. Most of the studies on direct observation assessment methods describe assessment of preferences for tangible stimuli (edibles, sensory activity, etc). Further research is needed to implement direct observation methods for assessing more symbolic objects that represent important life outcomes, such as vocational activities (Cobigo, Morin, & Lachapelle, 2007; Hatton, 2004; Hughes, Pitkin, & Lorden, 1998; Lohrmann-O’Rourke & Browder, 1998). This study aims to present field test results of a method to assess vocational preferences using direct observation while a person selects an option and works on the corresponding task. Furthermore, it assesses the value in use of the assessment method by interviewing the 16 job coaches who conducted assessment on 19 persons with intellectual disability.

Method

Participants

Sixteen job coaches (all women) were recruited through four local developmental disability agencies that provide public services to persons with intellectual disability in the Province of Quebec (Canada). Fourteen had a college or university degree. Fourteen of them had worked with persons with intellectual disability for at least 10 years. They assessed work task preferences for nineteen persons with intellectual disability (8 women, 11 men) who encountered difficulties expressing their preferences verbally. The evaluated persons were between 23 to 58 years old (mean = 35). Their levels of adaptive behaviors were assessed using the Échelle québécoise des comportements adaptatifs (Quebec Adaptive Behavior Scale; Maurice, Morin, Tasse, Garcin, & Vaillant, 1997) which is a reliable French instrument to assess adaptive behaviors of persons with intellectual disability aged 3 years and older. It gives reliable and comparable descriptions of the participants, using a global score which describes the general adaptive skills of each participant. It also provides seven partial scores, including communication and vocational skills levels. These two scores provided interesting information on the participants’ functioning in terms of the research goals. The computed global scores indicated that all the evaluated persons had a severe to profound deficit in their adaptive skills, except for one who had a mild deficit (participant 14). Their deficits in communication skills were severe to profound, except for one who was reported as having a mild deficit (participant 16). All were assessed as having important limitations in expressing or understanding complex language. One had no deficit in his vocational skills (participant 14), five had a mild deficit (participants 3, 4, 6, 7, 15), seven a moderate deficit, and six a severe to profound deficit in their vocational skills. Most of them received constant supervision, and had held the same job for more than a year. Work settings were diverse: participants worked in schools, stores or community centers. Consequently, work tasks presented during the assessment were different from one participant to another (for example, sorting clothes, counting 100 screws with a caliper, putting price stickers on products, shredding paper, etc.). Three of them were in an assessment period to determine which job best suited them. Twelve had known the evaluator for at least a year, and six had got to know her within the last six months. They all had weekly contact with the evaluators, except for one who saw his or her evaluator once a month.

Research Design

A work task preference assessment method was designed following an integrative review (Jackson, 1989) of studies assessing vocational preferences in persons with intellectual disability or evaluating the reliability of such assessment methods (Cobigo, Morin et al., 2007). This review allowed the researcher to make decisions on stimuli presented, assessment context and procedure, as well as behaviors to observe and to design a valid and reliable method to assess vocational preferences with persons with intellectual disability. The designed method was then validated by five experts in the intellectual disability field, and pre-experimentation was conducted with two job coaches (Cobigo, Lachapelle, & Morin,
The 16 job coaches who agreed to participate were trained to conduct work task preference assessment using the method designed by the researcher. They chose one or two persons they wished to assess. Job coaches chose four tasks that existed at each person’s work setting. If necessary, the person was trained beforehand to know which behaviors were needed to complete a task.

During the assessment, two choices were presented simultaneously using tangible objects normally required to complete the tasks. Pictograms were used with two participants (participants 6 and 14) as they already communicate using images at the job site. Objects or pictograms were presented at an equal distance from the person, so he could reach both of them. The evaluator asked the person to pick one of the objects, without naming the corresponding activities. The evaluator recorded selections and refusals on an observation grid. Selection was defined as pointing to an object, touching it or naming the activity it represented. The person being evaluated was allowed to change his choice within a five-second period, in which case the second choice was considered as selected. Refusals were defined as throwing an object away, pushing it away, or refusing to choose one of the options. If both options were refused, the pair of objects was removed and the next pair was presented. Once a choice was recorded, the person being evaluated was prompted to work on the selected task within a three-minute period. The evaluator used a chronometer to assess the length of time spent working on the task in the three-minute period. The evaluator also recorded off-task behaviors which were what the person did when the chronometer was off (off-task behaviors). The evaluator also observed positive emotional behaviors such as smiling and laughing, as well as idiosyncratic vocalizations or gestures expressing pleasure. A timer rang when the three minutes were up. The task was removed and the second pair of choices was presented following the same procedure. The sequences of the pairs were predetermined randomly, as well as alternating object presentation side (right and left). In a session, all possible pairs had to be presented. In this study, four tasks were presented, so six pairs were possible. Evaluators were provided with observation grids that included information about sequences in pair presentations and alternating right-left positions. Seven sessions were conducted in an eight-week maximum period. Research assistants observed 30% of the assessment sessions in order to conduct reliability checks. The first two sessions were not included in the assessment results, as they were designed for making any necessary adjustments to the set-up, and for acquainting both the evaluator and the person being evaluated with the assessment procedure. For the behaviors recorded during sessions three to seven, the evaluator computed percentages of choice and refusal for each task. Percentages of off-task and positive emotional behaviors were calculated on the number of choices for each task. The evaluator also calculated the mean duration of on-task behavior in a three-minute period. This provided a profile of the most and least preferred activities among the four tasks presented. In concordance with previous research (Lancioni, O’Reilly, Campodonico, & Mantini, 1998a; Lancioni, O’Reilly, Campodonico, & Mantini, 1998b; Parsons, Reid, & Green, 1998; Reid, Parsons, & Green, 1998), we expected that the most preferred activities were chosen over 70% of the time they were presented, they had the longest duration of on-task behaviors, the highest frequency of positive emotional behaviors, and the lowest frequency of off-task behaviors. In contrast, a least-preferred activity is expected to be chosen less than 50% of the time it was presented; to have the highest frequency of off-task behaviors, the lowest duration of on-task behaviors and lowest frequency of positive emotional behaviors. For each participant, tasks were classified from most to least preferred using frequencies of choice. We analyzed if levels of preferences have an impact on emotional and off-task behavior frequencies, using repeated measures ANOVA.

Once the assessment was finished, a research assistant conducted a semi-structured interview with each job coach to collect data on her perceptions of the assessment method. Interviews were designed following the utilization-focused assessment approach (Patton, 1997) to assess the method’s value in use. It could be defined as the value of an instrument or a product in relation to its users’ needs and use conditions. Thus, interviewers were trained...
to follow an interview guide that listed specific questions and topics to be covered. Interview themes were: 1. general perceptions of the method used; 2. facilitating factors observed; 3. barriers encountered; 4. assessment outcomes; 5. assessment of the expected and unexpected outcomes; and 6. perceptions of the advantages of the method. Interviews lasted about 30 to 60 minutes. Research assistants transcribed audi-taped interviews, and an independent assistant checked all the transcripts.

Qualitative data were analyzed in six recommended steps to prevent bias in interpretation (L’Écuyer, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994; 2003). First, the experimenter read transcripts twice to get an overall understanding of the material. Transcripts were cut into meaningful segments. Each passage was categorized using a grid of codes. This grid was developed according to interview themes and study goals. Two assistants tried this grid with 30% of the transcripts and made comments to enhance its reliability. The experimenter then analyzed the material and assigned a code to each section following the modified grid. Two other assistants independently analyzed 30% of the transcripts using the same grid to check inter-coder agreement. The grid contained 29 codes in six categories (general perceptions, facilitating factors, barriers encountered, assessment outcomes, other instruments to assess preferences and how to enhance the assessment method) and these are described in Table 1. Descriptive analyses were conducted to describe the experience and perceptions of participants in terms of the above-mentioned themes.

Results

Preference Assessment

The percentage of inter-observer agreement was estimated by dividing the number of agreements by the number of agreements plus disagreements and multiplying by 100%. Inter-observer agreement ranged between 73% and 100%, depending on the participants, with overall inter-observer agreement being 85%. Inter-observer agreement also varied depending on the kind of behaviors recorded. Agreement was lower for positive emotional behaviors (71%) which are discrete and sometimes idiosyncratic. Furthermore, evaluators may have wrongly recorded participant characteris-tics, such as attentiveness or degree of concentration, as positive emotional behaviors. These observation errors were corrected before calculating frequencies of emotional behaviors. Other agreements ranged from 82% (off-task behaviors) to 98% (selection). However, the off-task behavior category was misunderstood by several observers who recorded off-task behaviors even if the person being evaluated did not stop working on the task. Once these errors were corrected, inter-observer agreement on off-task behaviors was 88%.

Overall, results show that most preferred work tasks could be evaluated for 12 participants out of 19. Figures 1 and 2 show assessment results for each participant. Results vary considerably among participants. The percentages of choices clearly demonstrate the most-preferred and less-preferred work tasks for the majority of participants. However, no obvious preference profile could be demonstrated for participants 2, 6, 14 and 18 as frequencies of choice were equivalent for all the four tasks (around 40% and 60%). Participants 11 and 12 demonstrated no most-preferred activity, but frequencies of choice for moderately-preferred and non-preferred activities vary between 27% and 67%. The percentages of choices were not reliable for participant 10. Throughout the assessment, he chose the left-positioned stimulus. Experimenters were careful not to present the same stimulus always on the right or left side, but did not equally balance right and left positions for each task. Task 1 was presented 80% of the time on the left side.

Only four participants exhibited refusals during the assessment. Frequency of refusals for participant 12 should be interpreted with caution since refusals were hard to distinguish from his epileptic symptoms. Participant 5 exhibited refusals with two tasks that he selected at least 80% of the time they were presented. However, each task was only refused once. It is interesting to note that participant 5 is diagnosed with a pervasive developmental disorder. Participants 7 and 14 exhibited refusals with moderately-preferred tasks. No refusal was exhibited with non-preferred activities.

Only four participants did not exhibit off-task behaviors during the assessment. Nonetheless, no concordance was observed be-
between the frequency of choices and the frequency of off-task behaviors. Repeated measures ANOVA were non significant ($p < 0.05$), suggesting that there is no impact of the level of preference on the frequency of off-task behaviors. Off-task behaviors were exhibited with most-preferred as well as less-preferred activities. For example, participant 9 exhibited off-task behaviors while completing his two most-preferred tasks, but none with his less-preferred ones. Participant 13 exhibited off-task behaviors in almost 100% of the observation periods. The length of time spent working on the task was also recorded but is not reported in this article because no significant difference between tasks and participants is clearly demonstrated. All the computed means are above two minutes on a three-minute period and are not congruent with other behaviors recorded.

Most of the time, positive emotional behaviors were exhibited while completing a task that was selected over 70% of the time it was presented. However, positive emotional behaviors were also exhibited with less-preferred and non-preferred tasks. Repeated measures ANOVA were not significant ($p < 0.05$). Fre-

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tr>
<td>General perceptions</td>
<td>a) Satisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Dissatisfaction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Reluctance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Persons who could benefit from the assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Professionals who could use the method.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitating factors</td>
<td>a) Related to the assessment context</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Related to the evaluated person’s characteristics</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Related to the assessment method itself</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Related to the training received on the assessment method</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Related to the evaluator’s professional training and experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) Other facilitating factors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barriers encountered</td>
<td>a) Related to the assessment context</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Related to the evaluated person’s characteristics</td>
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<td>c) Related to the assessment method itself</td>
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<td>d) Related to the training received on the assessment method</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Related to the evaluator’s professional training and experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) Other barriers encountered.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment outcomes</td>
<td>a) Knowledge of the evaluated person’s preferences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Agreement between assessed preferences and preferences assumed by the evaluator before the assessment</td>
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<td>c) Lack of agreement between assessed and assumed preferences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d) Knowledge of working condition preferences</td>
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<td></td>
<td>e) Planning vocational activities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>f) Other outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other instruments to assess preferences</td>
<td>a) Validated instrument</td>
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<td></td>
<td>b) Informal tool</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) No other tool known</td>
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<tr>
<td>How to enhance the assessment method</td>
<td>a) Suggestions for enhancing the assessment method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Expression of no possible improvements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c) Expression of no known improvements</td>
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frequency of positive emotional behaviors did not vary proportionally to frequency of choices.

Utilization-focused Assessment

Codes utilized to analyze transcripts of interviews with the job coaches were divided in 6 categories: 1. general perceptions of interviewees concerning the assessment method, 2. facilitating factors in the implementation of the method, 3. barriers encountered, 4. appreciation of the assessment outcomes, 5. other tools to assess vocational preferences known by interviewees, 6. recommendations to enhance the assessment method. To facilitate readers’
comprehension, results for both category 2 and 3 will be presented in the same paragraph.

**General Perceptions**

All interviewees expressed their appreciation of the method and recommended its use since they need such assessment methods to enhance observation and understanding of their clients. They found the method pleasant and easy to use. However, three of them were dissatisfied with the assessment results which they qualified as insufficient or unclear. These three job coaches respectively assessed participants 10, 12 and 13, and 17. Participant 10 is the person who chose all objects presented on his left. Results for participants 12, 13 and 17 are ambiguous because of a lack of congruence among behaviors observed. Only one job coach declared that she was not interested in using the assessment method since she was already aware of her clients' preferences before the assessment. However, she thought that young job coaches could find the method useful. According to the interviewees, the method could be used by various types of professionals, irrespective of their academic background, since it is easy to implement. Job coaches and psychologists were the most common professional categories cited. Two interviewees also recommended that school professionals use this method to help students discover their vocational orientation. Furthermore, some interviewees thought that the method could be useful for assessing interests for leisure and home tasks. Interviewees highlighted the usefulness of this method for assessing the preferences of persons who have limited communication skills, especially those who have not been trained to communicate using alternative communication means (signs, pictograms, etc.). Most of the interviewees added that persons with intellectual disabilities may have difficulty expressing their preferences because of a tendency to acquiesce with or to please their caregivers, even if they have no major communication limitations. Persons with or without intellectual disability may benefit from this method if they have language, auditory or visual difficulties. Several interviewees said that the method is useful for quickly identifying a new client’s preferences in order to plan his vocational orientation. Twelve interviewees were reluctant to use the assessment method. They feared that they would not have enough time to conduct the assessment, they would be disturbed by other clients, the person being evaluated would not cooperate, or the method would be too complicated. All of their fears disappeared when they used the method.

**Facilitating Factors and Barriers Encountered**

More than 80% of the interviewees identified contextual factors as conditions that would facilitate implementation of the method, and 75% found that contextual factors could be barriers to its use (see Figure 3). The assessment context seems to be an important issue to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of the method. Job coaches could choose to either conduct the assessment in the natural work setting or in a separate room in a one-on-one situation with the person being evaluated. Those who chose to conduct the assessment in a separate room identified this factor as a facilitator. Natural work conditions make the assessment more difficult since other clients may need attention or someone could interrupt a session. The person being evaluated is also more distracted because of interactions with peers. If the assessment is conducted in a natural work setting, interviewees recommended that a colleague take over from them and that tasks be assigned to the other clients so they will not disturb the assessment. They also recommended choosing an appropriate time for conducting a session. Most of them chose times when some clients were absent, or when there was no rush in the production schedule, etc. Other contextual factors identified as facilitators or barriers had an impact on the client’s motivation to complete the task. For example, it is necessary to prepare enough material to last the entire session. When material was insufficient and the evaluated person completed the task before the three minutes were over, the evaluator had to undo the work already completed and then prompt the client to redo the same task. Interviewees observed a lack of interest in their clients for redoing a task they had already done. A solution could be having separate work stations for each task and prompting the client to walk toward the corresponding work station after his choice. This would also reduce the time needed to pre-
pare the material during a session. A similar impact on the client’s motivation to choose and complete a task could be the sequence of work tasks he had completed before the assessment. He could be prone to choosing different tasks from those he had already done.

More than 80% of interviewees listed characteristics of the person being evaluated as facilitating conditions: his cooperation during the assessment and his concentration and attention skills. On the other hand, 56% of interviewees described personal characteris-
tics as barriers, especially dual diagnoses that could interfere with the assessment, such as pervasive developmental disorders or mental health disorders.

In accordance with the general positive perception expressed by interviewees, most of the factors related to the method were considered to be facilitating conditions. Ninety-four percent of the interviewees appreciated the flexibility of the method which allowed for interruptions and provided choice of an appropriate time to conduct a session, the length of time needed, and the first two training sessions. Seventy-five percent of interviewees identified barriers related to the method itself. Some behaviors to be observed were too ambiguous or difficult to observe. Calculating the results was also considered to be difficult. Some job coaches thought that the method restricted the choice of tasks to be assessed. For example, they would have liked to include in the assessment tasks that were unknown to the client.

Training in the method seems to be an important facilitating factor. Interviewees highlighted the importance of the supervision given by a research assistant and the experimenter in choosing the tasks and preparing

![Figure 3. Facilitating factors and barriers encountered by job coaches.](image-url)
the material during the first two sessions. They also found the document describing the method, which they received during the training, to be very useful. However, some clients were distracted by the presence of the research assistant during the assessment. Professional experience and academic background, as well as an ongoing relationship with the client, were considered to be assets in observing and interpreting behavior. They facilitate the recognition of undesirable variables that could interfere with the assessment.

Assessment Outcomes

Twelve job coaches reported a lack of concordance between preferences assessed and the preferences they had hypothesized before the assessment. Eleven interviewees found preference assessment useful for planning vocational activities best suited to clients. Twelve interviewees reported unexpected outcomes. The assessment allowed them to stop and think about their clients, the number of tasks they were able to do, and the concordance between client preferences and task planning. Another important outcome was the significant impact on the quality of life of clients as the method helps job coaches introduce choices on a daily basis and plan preferred vocational activities. Furthermore, some job coaches felt that this experience enhanced their competencies in observing and understanding their clients.

Other Preference Assessment Tools

Forty-four percent of interviewees did not know of other tools for assessing work task preferences. Forty-four percent cited the Inventaire visuel des intérêts professionnels (Dupont, Gingras, & Tétrault, 2000) which is an instrument for assessing vocational interests using 80 pictures of work areas. They described its inadequacies for assessing the work task preferences of persons with intellectual disability since it is not concrete enough for some of them. Some persons with intellectual disability lack the necessary language and insight skills that are required for assessments which use pictures. One interviewee also mentioned a computerized assessment tool. Consequently, job coaches tend to assess vocational preferences by giving choices that are embedded in the client’s routine.

How Can the Assessment Method Be Enhanced?

Thirteen interviewees suggested enhancements to the method. They recommended more concrete and detailed definitions of behaviors to observe since some were ambiguous. They also suggested decreasing the time needed for the evaluation, for example, by holding 4 to 5 sessions instead of 7. They asked that a way be found to make calculation of the results easier. Furthermore, they suggested integrating the assessment into a more complete assessment program that would include more tasks, including tasks unknown to the client. The assessment should help to estimate performance on the tasks and the influence of variables such as diversity versus repetition of the tasks or interactions with peers on the expressed preferences. A more detailed assessment would be helpful in planning a client’s vocational orientation, which is more useful than just knowing which tasks are preferred.

Discussion

This study provides further evidence of the behaviors which should be considered when assessing or defining choices and preferences. It is also a first attempt to assess the value in use of a work task preference assessment. Its important findings will help to provide job coaches with an effective tool for assessing preferences. This kind of program evaluation is of particular interest as it assesses the adequacy between a product and its users’ needs. It also provides important information on how to enhance the product to best suited its users’ competencies and work habits. As a consequence, this approach is a useful link between research and practice as it could help to transfer research results into practice. Results from this study suggest that the assessment method responds to diverse needs expressed by job coaches, especially considering the lack of instrument to assess vocational preferences. In addition, an important difference between existing instruments and this assessment method is that it assesses preferences for tasks available in the person’s work environment. Existing
instruments rely on a standard set of tasks that captures important dimensions of vocational tasks. However, some of these predetermined tasks are not always available for the person being assessed and, consequently, are not useful for vocational planning.

Most of the participants expressed preferences by selecting objects or pictograms representing work tasks. This study supports previous studies which indicate that selection behaviors are reliable indicators for assessing preferences (Mithaug & Hanawalt, 1978; Mithaug & Mar, 1980; Parsons et al., 1998; Reid et al., 1998). Few refusals were observed during the assessment, and they were not consistent with frequency of choice. We could wonder if the tendency to acquiescence and social desirability had an impact on the frequency of refusals. On-task and off-task behaviors appeared to be unreliable indicators for assessing preferences. Contradictory results have been published with regards to these behaviors (Hatton, 2004; Worsdell, Iwata, & Wallace, 2002), but we could hypothesize that task engagement increases in conditions where there is choice, but not necessarily with preferred tasks. Positive emotional behaviors are also inconsistent in assessment sessions. Previous research argues that persons with greater communication limitations are likely to exhibit more emotional behaviors in order to communicate their preferences (Campbell & Fletcher, 1993). In this study, all participants had important communication limitations but they did not all exhibit emotional behavior. Furthermore, evaluators observed the impact of contextual variables (for example, interactions with a peer) on the occurrence of positive emotional behaviors. Consequently, preference assessment should rely on frequency of choices defined as physical selection of an option. Task engagement and positive emotional behaviors are useful for gathering information on the influence of contextual factors which are important variables to consider when planning vocational tasks that best suit the person. Further research is needed to determine which personal or contextual factors have an impact on the reliability and efficiency of the assessment method. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs should be used to accurately assess the impact of contextual and personal variables. Interviewees gave useful suggestions on how to identify the variables to target. Their comments also highlighted the importance of training. Evaluators should be trained to observe relevant behaviors in order to assess preferences. This training should include operational definitions of behaviors to avoid confusion with personal characteristics or personal judgment, such as attentiveness or degree of concentration. Supervision in the first sessions also seems to be appreciated by the evaluators and could increase reliability of the method. Interviewees insisted on the need to make the assessment easier and quicker. Multiple stimuli without replacement method (MSWO) is currently considered to be the easiest and quickest assessment procedure (Hagopian, Long, & Rush, 2004). It consists on the simultaneous presentation of all possible pairs as opposed to the pair presentation. Once a stimulus chosen, it is not presented again to the person being assessed. However, no research has assessed reliability of MSWO for assessing work tasks preferences. Further research is still needed to extend findings from previous studies on the assessment of tangible stimuli preferences to vocational activity preferences. The results of this study support the idea that the preference assessment method could be embedded into routine staff practice. Future research will help to identify conditions for its use and its reliability and validity. To conclude, this study provides additional evidence that proxies are not always reliable when determining a person’s preferences, since the preferences attributed by proxies may differ from those assessed using direct measures.

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