

# Psychological Tools

## Assist the Teacher

Standardized tests and other instruments, techniques and understandings are modern psychology's contribution to an improved program of teaching and learning. This author indicates how these tools can help the teacher better understand and provide for individual differences.

**T**HERE MUST HAVE BEEN a day when being a teacher was simple—when there were no social studies or science to bother with, when there were fewer children attending school and those brighter, when there was no compulsory education law restraining reluctant students until their sixteenth birthday, when the teacher wasn't faced with pupils challenging his authority, and when there was no competition with television nor reckoning with principals and supervisors. Perhaps this was true in the days of the hornbook and the "blab-school" when the responsibility for learning lay with the children and if they didn't it was due to their innate perversity and wickedness which was best drummed out of them.

But whatever the circumstances in those hallowed and sublime days of the past, such is not the case today. The teacher in today's classroom is confronted with the complete range of human ability and charged with the

task of not only the scholastic development of his pupils but also their personal-social development. And he knows enough of human behavior to realize that he cannot attribute to innate perversity or wickedness the failure of the child to develop desirable behavior patterns. He is confronted with the task of analyzing the behavior he observes and making judgments regarding its causation.

Phrases such as attention-seeking, insecure, aggressive, not working up to ability, not trying, inattentive, poor word recognition, slow learning, pleasing personality, bright child, and daydreams, reflect the impressions and judgments of the teacher and his attempts to analyze or explain a child's behavior. It is inevitable that teachers should arrive at judgments or conclusions regarding the behavior of children. Attempts to guide the development of children toward socially desirable goals require constant observation and evaluation of progress and problems encountered. The very nature of teaching necessitates making many judgments regarding human behavior. Unfortunately, such judgments

---

*Ralph Garry is associate professor of education, Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts.*

---

are frequently faulty due to insufficient information, inaccurate information, or inability to interpret the information and put it to use. A brief excerpt from a teacher's report will serve to illustrate:

"Jimmy (age 7) comes from a semi-well-to-do-home. The mother is a socialite so she doesn't spend too much time with Jimmy. Most of his time is spent with his nurse. Jimmy is an only child who has been given everything . . . He doesn't get along with the other boys his age, says they bore him . . . He never received much affection so he became very cold emotionally. He looks for sympathy but never received it. . . ."

The explicit judgments in this excerpt: socialites don't spend time with their children; only children are given everything; lack of affection produces unresponsive children, lead one to question both the information and the inferences made in this report.

It is important, if their judgments are to be sound, that teachers have sufficient information that is accurate. If anything, the basic premise upon which the behavioral sciences operate is that behavior is caused. If behavior is caused, and the sum total of research verifies the assumption, then it can be explained, given knowledge of the antecedent facts and the immediate situation, and what is more, it can be modified. If one would understand and explain behavior one is committed to a fact-gathering and fact-facing program. The question becomes one of knowing what facts to gather, how to get them, and how to interpret and put them to use.

### **Individual and Group**

Broadly speaking, information is

needed in three main areas: about the child as an individual, about his world and about his relationships. Information about the child includes knowledge of his physical growth and development including height, weight, vision, hearing, motor coordination, energy output, etc.; knowledge about his intellectual development, both actual and potential, which includes intelligence, aptitudes and achievement of diverse sorts; and knowledge about the child's emotional development including his motives, fears, worries, attitude toward self, level of aspiration, adjustment problems, etc.; in short the set of characteristics called individual differences which distinguishes each child from the other. Information about the child's world includes knowledge about the family background and socio-economic status, the number of persons, adult and child living in the home, the leisure, social and athletic activities engaged in out-of-school. Similarly the child's world includes his in-school world, in the classroom and on the playground, the activities and the groups in which he participates. A vital area of information is that regarding the child's relationships with the people in his world. The parent's behavior towards the child, accepting, rejecting, protecting, indulging, dominating, and the child's reaction to this treatment; his relationships with his brothers and sisters; his degree of acceptance and status with his peers and classmates; and his relationships with his teachers are a dynamic set of factors about which information is needed if the teacher is to understand and aid the child to a mature and wholesome adjustment.

The teacher's problem is to have sufficient information that is accurate in these areas to permit him to make sound deductions and judgments about individual children in order that he may effectively guide their development. There are many procedures, from simple to complex, that have been developed for gathering information, ranging from those that teachers can readily use in practice to those that require skilled clinical personnel. The particular technique to be used depends upon the information needed by the teacher in order to answer questions essential to the successful performance of his tasks as a teacher. The first problem is to determine what he wishes to know about all of the children in the classroom—the minimum amount of information needed about every child, then subsequently, what more he wishes to know about particular children.

The gathering of data is not an end in itself, pleasurable though it may be to some school administrators. The school exists for the education of children, not for the accumulation of records. Cumulative records which remain in the principal's office unused by teachers may be a source of satisfaction to the principal but they are scarcely a labor of love for his faculty. Effectively used, cumulative records can prevent each teacher's having to repeat the task from scratch of gathering essential information about children, and can, when expertly used, provide the teacher with a broader basis for wise judgment than he is likely to obtain by his own efforts. It is unfortunately true that unless teachers have had training in observing and

recording behavioral descriptions the cumulative records are too often replete with evaluative and interpretive statements of little value, such as: Harriet is a precious child, so sweet—a teacher's way of saying she liked Harriet because she always did exactly what the teacher wanted; or John has been a disturbing influence all year—a teacher's way of saying John breaks more pencils and takes more trips to the pencil sharpener; or Bill daydreams too much—probably referring to his thinking about the "Junior Prom" instead of Macbeth's soliloquy. Thus initially the task is to know what information is wanted, then to systematically organize to obtain and maintain the flow of data from trained teachers.

Standardized tests are probably the most widely used of the psychological tools available to teachers. Intelligence tests, readiness tests, aptitude tests, achievement tests, performance tests, and personality and interest inventories permit a wide sampling in the area of individual differences. Given individually are several intelligence tests, such as the Stanford-Binet or Kuhlmann-Anderson. Given in groups are the majority of achievement batteries such as the Iowa, Metropolitan, and Stanford, the reading or arithmetic readiness tests, aptitude batteries such as Thurstone's Primary Mental Abilities or the Differential Aptitude Tests, or personality and interest inventories such as the California, Strong, Kuder, Bell, etc. These instruments provide information about pupil ability which makes reliable comparison with other students possible because of the availability of test

norms. In the course of a few hours one is able to obtain a measure of aptitude and achievement which permits a teacher to determine the level at which instruction must be pitched and the rate of progress that can be anticipated from individuals and from groups of students. Special disabilities can be identified for remedial instruction. Failure of a child to progress according to expectations immediately suggests more detailed analysis of possible causes, e.g. inaccurate test score, inappropriate teaching approach, problem of personal adjustment, etc.

In view of the extent of individual differences in children with which teachers and supervisors have to work, the variations that occur from class to class and school to school, no single psychological device is as useful to teachers and supervisors in planning their programs as standardized tests. When systematically applied by administration in order to provide periodic measures of growth and development, and when supplemented by informal teacher-made tests, the information obtained suggests important instructional and curricular adjustments. The older the child the wider the variety of tests available, which is particularly helpful on the secondary level with its departmentalized program in which economical methods of gathering necessary information for large groups are essential.

Tests have several serious limitations. Instead of recognizing that any single score provides a very limited aspect of human ability and behavior, we tend to over-generalize; second, we are prone to focus on the test score rather than on the individual making

it—it is the individual who is to be changed not the score; third, tests of themselves are incapable of improving instruction—the measure is a result not a cause. In addition, personality tests have the serious liability of being dependent upon the individual's willingness to reveal the way he feels, which all are not willing to do.

### Relationships with Others

Whether or not our use of tests has led us to overlook the broad areas of the child's relationships with others and his private world in our concentration on academic progress is not clear. However, the teacher or supervisor concerned with the personal-social development of children soon recognizes the limitations of tests and the necessity of using his eyes and ears skillfully. If a teacher who is puzzled, concerned or disturbed about a child will consistently record the events that he sees occurring in that child's life, very often the isolated events, meaningless in themselves, will begin to form a pattern, that may become evident, if not to the teacher, then to a child specialist. If he will record on cards brief descriptions of the events of behavior during the day which he considers problems, or if an administrator encourages his faculty to do so, points of conflict between individuals or between procedures will frequently be found which can be resolved.

A brief illustration will help—in a fifth grade class an overage boy was a continual source of trouble to the teacher. He knocked books off desks when walking down the aisle, crowded to be first in line, would strike or poke other children. He responded to a rep-

rimand about crowding in line by turning out the basement light while a number of children were still in the basement. The principal's calling him back to turn on the light resulted in his sulking during the rest of the afternoon. Over the week-end he joined another boy in breaking into the school and scattering papers around the rooms. Regular observation and recording of events and their antecedents led to the discovery that the hostile acts occurred under two circumstances: generally on Mondays or following a failure, a reprimand or a criticism. Even though an investigation revealed a seriously disturbed relationship with parents about which the school could do little, the teacher was able to modify her techniques for handling the boy to reduce the stimuli (the types of events or situations) which gave rise to aggressive behavior, thus more effectively controlling the behavior in school and, of greater importance, permitting the same attention to be devoted to constructive relationships rather than to a negative one. Systematic observation by an alert teacher will provide essential information for understanding children especially when supplemented by questionnaires, to obtain personal history information, by group discussions of personal feelings and attitudes, and particularly by a willingness to listen.

#### *Use of the Sociogram*

The interpersonal relationships among the pupils in a classroom and between the teacher and the pupils are the matrix within which teachers can hope to modify behavior, yet systematic effort to understand the group

processes at play in a classroom and a school and to manipulate the processes to create healthy interpersonal relationships and attitudes for all pupils is too frequently lacking. It is equally as important for the kindergartner to learn to play with others, for the second grader to develop a friendship which expands to a group relationship by fourth or fifth grade, for the junior high student to "be one of the gang," and for the high school student to have status with his peers, as it is for any of them to learn the various "fundamentals."

One of the devices through which teachers can obtain insight into the group structure is the sociogram, a procedure for graphically showing who chose whom in a class when the pupils are asked to choose the persons with whom they desire to sit, or work, or some similar question which is real to them. The sociogram permits the teacher to identify the highly chosen and the isolates, those in need of special assistance in this vital area of human growth, and permits him to recognize the natural groupings and the cleavages which separate groups. With this information he can organize his group arrangements in a way to foster both scholastic and personal-social development. It invariably surprises teachers to discover that some children whom they thought would be highly chosen by their classmates are not, though the reverse is also frequently true.

One ninth grade teacher, who discovered that an intelligent boy whom she thought would be highly chosen in her homeroom was not, on subsequent observation also noted that

he wore slacks when the others wore jeans, never wore sneakers on the day the gymnasium was used for recreation activity, did not share in any of the homeroom activities. By indirect suggestions and by permitting the boy to overhear her inquiring from another boy regarding why he wore certain clothes on a certain day, the teacher was able to eliminate these barriers that apparently contributed to preventing the boy's sharing the companionship of his classmates. To be sure, she was so successful that she soon found him sharing his homework, but that too could be worked out.

The net result of a fact-gathering and fact-using procedure is that teachers become more realistic in their expectations of children. They recognize that change comes gradually and irregularly, and that impatience is a waste of effort. At first teachers are prone to think in broad terms of affection and security as magic keys, but gradually, perhaps in self-defense in accepting their own limitations, they adopt a more analytical and diagnostic approach in identifying the changes they are capable of bringing about as well as immovable barriers or conflicts which they cannot resolve.



LESLEE J. BISHOP

## PLANNING PATTERNS *in a Core Program*

**An analysis of planning patterns in a core program indicates significant variation over a period of time in the way pupils go about planning.**

**W**HEN DO YOU DO your class unit planning?" is a question often asked of core teachers and others who employ teacher-pupil planning. The only answer that can easily be given is, "It depends. . . ."

It depends on the experience and maturity of the group, the nature of the contemplated work, the grade level, the morale of the class, the degree of student leadership, the role of the teacher in the planning process and many other factors. Furthermore, a comprehensive discussion of plan-

ning would be long and involved. It would include the planning done at home as pupils do assignments leading up to the actual class organization of a unit. It would include informal business meetings in class, teacher-pupil conferences, accounts of the work of the planning committee, as well as sessions before and after school, in the classroom, library, bus or wherever pupils interested in the content and direction of the unit might gather. This account considers only major class time devoted to unit planning.

Copyright © 1955 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.