

Testing in Tomorrow's School

*Self appraisal
increasingly will be
the goal of testing.*

A SEPARATE curriculum coordinator or supervisor, as this staff person is known today, may be obsolete in the school of 1985. In that new age, the curricular demands and competencies required of the general curriculum person will be so great that many of these specialists prepared before 1960 will be unable to function with a high degree of success.

Many of the technological advances of the present day, which are related to curriculum, are outside the realm of responsibility of some of our better supervisors. New systems of instruction and evaluation are springing into being without the knowledge, guidance or control of present curricular authorities.

The introduction of automated tutoring devices, experimentation with closed systems of instruction, and the development of newer communication media for instructional purposes, mean that cur-

ricular and evaluative functions will be merged in the school of 1985. Our present chaotic separation of testing functions and curricular functions has contributed to this very imminent obsolescence of the curriculum and the testing specialist.

Supervision in a New Role

For too long, supervisors and curriculum authorities have demonstrated an "ostrich orientation" regarding continuous evaluation and measurement of instructional process and curriculum effectiveness. We have indicated a naive assumption that because we "believe" certain points of view regarding content, scope, sequence, process and objectives, that such decisions are not only above evaluation, but also that testing of their implications is not even necessary. Maintaining such attitudes will mark the present curriculum authority for early extinction. There will be no place for such attitudes in the school of 1985.

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A research orientation, and devotion to critical curricular evaluation, will be the distinguishing marks of the curriculum specialist in the future. The critical expansion of new knowledge will require that contemporary learning patterns and procedures be subjected to constant scrutiny and evaluation. The implications for required new skills are tremendous. Increasingly we recognize that our in-service development of present day supervisors, and the preservice preparation of new supervisors must change radically if *professional educators are to remain responsible* for the development and supervision of the instructional programs and processes for children.

Inadequate Tests

By default almost, test construction and design responsibilities have gravitated from the hands of those most intimately connected with classrooms and children. As a result, most of our standardized tests of today possess severe deficiencies which may make them completely inappropriate for use in the schools of 1985.

The author is presently involved in a major research project related to uses of standardized tests by school systems in four different states. In this research we have made some interesting discoveries.

Several of the major achievement tests, widely used by school systems for status studies of achievement, have been found to be greatly limited in their utility for system-wide analyses of curricular achievement. Some of the most recently standardized tests have been constructed according to outmoded organizational patterns, and cannot efficiently be used with our modern electronic data processing equipment. One of the best

known achievement test series, apparently, has not even been constructed to measure identifiable learning factors. The publishers agree, privately, that *neither they nor the authors know* what individual test items are supposed to measure; and, furthermore, they have no reasonable explanation for the inclusion of specific test items. In other words, there is no clear-cut rationale underlying the design and development of the test. Survey tests of achievement, in particular, vary greatly in their length, design, and inclusion of sub-tests.

Test designers and publishers are aware of many of these deficiencies. Apparently the general lay public, and, unfortunately, too many educators accept uncritically all tests and measures of intelligence, and expect application of their findings without regard to adequate safeguards and cautions for individual interpretation.

Inappropriate Use of Tests

Test designers and publishers are perhaps more cautious in recommending uses of tests than are teachers and parents. Relationship studies are rampant between "I.Q. measures" and indices of achievement. As yet, however, we do not have an adequate definition of intelligence, much less an adequate measure of it. Research into creativity and dimensions of intellect constantly indicates to us new levels, factors, and forces to be considered in any description of human personality, ability and achievement. We continue to segregate children for instruction based upon indices only slightly removed from witchcraft symbolism.

In 1985 our schools will possess measures of intellect and mental capacity which will allow us to judge individual efficiency of teaching and learning, for

individuals, rather than on a comparative or competitive basis.

At present many intellectual outrages are perpetrated in the name of "merit rating," "master teacher bonus," or differential salary schedules. Attempts to evaluate the relative efficiency of teaching by a simple comparison of class medians or means on a national standardized achievement test represent not only the sheerest folly, but also a sort of intellectual dishonesty which seeks to prove a point by the selective display of partial evidence. Our school of the future will have access to materials of evaluation which will make available, for supervisory and curricular adjustment purposes, information which will indicate the relative efficiency of learning by different methods, by different media and resources, and by different teaching-learning situations.

Reliable test publishers have insisted that their test norms are not standards of achievement to which all schools should necessarily aim their instructional programs. Administrators and teachers less sophisticated in the ways of appraisal and statistics, however, have continued to use national norms—in achievement tests particularly—as a criterion of excellence. To surpass national norms in the "Spring administration" of a test is cause for glee in the individual classroom, pride in the principal's newsletter, and the source of a public relations "release" from the superintendent's office to the local press. Everyone is hoodwinked by the same myth—that norms are a standard for measuring achievement, when no other factors are considered.

The school of the future will have access to measures of achievement which will be valid for measuring progress within a system from year to year at

the same levels, and for measuring progress of the same population of students from point to point as they progress through their school careers. Such instruments will be so constructed that they can be applied to an analysis of the curriculum of a specific school system, at specified grade levels, and even allow for such variables as socioeconomic differences among school populations within the same system.

Many students have been tested almost to the point of exhaustion, and yet still have not had access to adequate information about their test results. Many decisions on scholastic placement, study programs, even career preparation, have been made by school officials with reference to test scores, but without reference to the student's own aspirations, latent abilities, and personal goals. In the school of the future, the person with the *most complete information* about any one student will be that student. Increasingly, self-appraisal and evaluation will be considered the central goal of testing and evaluation; and curricular adjustments, themselves, will be made by many students with the assistance of new tests and counseling procedures.

Dangers of Tests

As testing programs assume a larger role in the curricular structure, and as decisions of increasing importance are made with reference to class and school achievement test results, many teachers and administrators find themselves giving way to the pressures induced by indiscriminate testing. When the unsophisticated person places so much emphasis on a single score, the groundwork is laid for an erosion of ethics related to test administration, scoring, reporting, and to the teaching experience which

precedes a testing session. Because of the undue stress some administrators have placed on meeting or exceeding test norms, some teachers have begun to teach material specifically related to test items they anticipate will be given to their students. Tampering with the scales has never corrected a weight problem, and manipulating an academic environment before a testing session does not provide reliable information about general scholastic achievement.

Should these pressures continue to increase, due to national testing programs for scholarships and satisfactory college placement, then by default almost, a *sub rosa* national curriculum will have been established by test publishers. Abnormal emphases on a single test score can produce such unwanted and unsought results within individual classrooms of our nation's schools.

In the school of the future, these minor enticements to unethical test manipulation, and to the abnormal emphasis on scores, will abate and testing will be recognized and used for what it is—a *tool* of evaluation in curriculum, and neither a determiner of nor a deterrent to good instruction.

A final danger noted in present-day testing procedure is the tendency of mass test results to reduce the individual student to an ignominious set of numerals which can be "treated" in statistical fashion. In large school systems, this tendency is an ever-present threat in almost all curricular procedures and activities. As a companion service to closed systems of instruction and automated tutoring devices, testing and electronic analysis and computation could administer the final *coup de grace* to individual integrity of students.

An inglorious conclusion to our noble experiment in providing the best of in-

struction for each *individual* child is not necessarily the result of increasing the complexity of testing, scoring and reporting. As in all inventions of man, the device itself is neutral; man's goals and applications determine whether any particular procedure or instrument is dangerous or detrimental to the human personality.

The touts of technology do not seem to realize that *uncritical* mass acceptance of new devices, media, and instructional procedures can result in just such a negation of individual worth. On the other hand, the high priests of group process and individual transactionalism seem to try to avoid all understanding of the technological age, at the risk of a sort of educational embalming. For supervisors to say, "A plague on both your houses," may indicate a critical shortage in moral fortitude on their part, and almost guarantees that curriculum workers and supervisors will have responsibility in an increasingly smaller domain.

The separate positions of curriculum supervisor, testing director, and audio-visual coordinator in 1985 will be as obsolete as the village blacksmith is in 1960. Curriculum in the school of the future will depend upon all three areas to such a great extent that the person who supervises the curriculum must be regarded as a specialist in all three components. "The state of the art" in tutoring devices, mass media, and testing procedures, to say nothing of the greatly expanded wealth in curriculum content and process, is such that the supervisor responsible *must be conversant with and competent in* all these areas.

There is great promise for testing in this new role of the curriculum supervisor. Evaluation, of a dedicated competent sort, is the Achilles heel in most

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ognition of homophones which measures the ability to recognize different spellings of the same sound. Apparently successful practice in word analysis gives the child power in the "multi-phonics" of written English.

The success of the fourth grade word classification cards led to the production of similar cards for grades three and five. Both are being evaluated experimentally. The fifth grade exercises are being compared with similar exercises in which the same words are studied through structural phonics approaches which are common to basal reading systems. This will permit a more detailed

comparison of growth through inductive phonics as compared to deductive or "structural" phonics. Techniques of word usage in spelling which stress mental imagery and enriched meanings are also being tried, in the expectation that both spelling and transfer of spelling to written composition will be improved. The improvement of children's abilities with words is still a rich field for educational pioneering.

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mass media innovations. There are many sacred cows pasturing in our own curriculum procedure and content preserves, too, whose carcasses are in need of some thorough test of viability. Many of our "best" procedures are based upon fragmentary philosophy and restricted research evidence. A deep critical self-evaluation in teaching is long overdue; the longer this examination is delayed, the more difficult will become needed modifications. Should we delay too long in this critical inspection, then the inspection and decisions of viability may well be made outside our profession, and to our detriment and that of children.

The child in the learning process, then, is and should be the focal point of all concern. Here, too, testing in the new school can play a vital and positive role. More complex information, electronic calculator procedures, and automated systems of instruction and evaluation need not submerge the learner's importance and reduce him to a series of rectangular holes in a calculator card. Properly utilized, all these procedures can be

brought to bear for the enormously enriched benefit of the individual student—for his own enlightenment and self-appraisal, for guidance and counseling purposes in the instructional experience by his teacher, and for careful scholarly analysis and adaptation of the system-wide curriculum by school officials.

Many massive forces are at work in the world today, and a large number of these have extensive implications for the teaching-learning experience. Will the tidal wave of technology in testing and new communication-teaching media inundate the present teaching and supervisory personnel, or will the wave carry the teaching profession to new crests? The answer depends upon the stature and posture of teachers and supervisors today, and upon their willingness to learn and acquire new and expanded techniques.

Children have very practical and functional definitions. Such an approach might serve us well in our present context: To teach is to learn, to learn is to know, to know is to control. We say we have been teaching—let's hope we have been learning—in time.

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