

NEW APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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THE kind of assessment most common is that of testing the learner's ability to give back the facts which it is assumed he has been given. If we get into that form of assessment, the effects could be quite devastating. I have heard that those who support this kind of testing do not intend for comparisons to be made. I doubt, however, that it is possible to do this type of testing without having the results known, and if they are known, comparisons will be made.

It may be possible to keep individual scores confidential to the tester, but it hardly seems to me that it will be possible to keep community ratings unknown. And if it were possible to have the tester the only one privy to the results, what good would it do?

These comparisons, which pit community against community, school district against school district, if not student against student, are the real evils of this form of testing. They put people "on the spot" and are isolating in their effect. When a community is judged to be lower in score than its neighbor, the administrators and teachers really have no choice but to raise the pressure not only on themselves but directly on the children. I no longer believe that the highly pressurized atmosphere is conducive to learning. I feel sure that it inhibits learning.

Parents will be up in arms, angry with the teachers, hostile to their own young. Their pride will be damaged. If the child next door has done better than their own, they will feel sure that somebody will think the deficiency is hereditary. This will intensify the conflict between age and youth, which I consider to be one of the saddest aspects of our society.

Rebellion on the part of our young will be intensified. It is hard enough now to grow up in our urban society. Putting our young on the spot for not doing what we adults think they should will add to youth rebellion rather than reduce it.

Minority groups will be further inflamed. In January 1966 I happened to be in the San Francisco area. *The Chronicle*, while I was there, came out with its main headline proclaiming as a fact that the San Francisco schools were below "average" according to the results of a test which had been given to many if not all

California school districts. The score which the testers had settled on as satisfactory was 200. San Francisco had scored only 199.3. According to *The Chronicle*, the San Francisco superintendent had said that it must be remembered that San Francisco had a good many Negroes, Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. This brought down the wrath of the organizations of these minority groups. They called for the resignation of the superintendent.

This illustrates what I mean. The superintendent was attacked, the minority groups were angry, and it is altogether likely that the pressure on principals, teachers, and learners was stepped up. All of this over seven-tenths of a point on somebody's scale! We see here a great commotion over something that does not really matter. Unrelated items of subject matter are soon forgotten, and serve only the purpose of passing a test.

The Life Good To Live

It is still true that how a person feels is more important than what he knows. How a person feels controls behavior. What he knows is important too, because this is what he uses to behave with. But what he knows has to be relevant, meaningful to him. Otherwise it will for the most part be soon forgotten, and cannot function in behavior.

The proper subject matter for each individual is that which is closest to him or regarding which he has most concern. Learning leads to more learning, and thus horizons are continually expanded. This process goes on at all times unless the learner has had his curiosity killed. I know I have said this before, but I expect that there are whole multitudes who have not heard or read it.

What makes meaningful assessment of educational programs so difficult is that the value of an education really depends upon the life lived by the learner. It is beyond our resources to assess the lives lived by our students. Even if we could do this, it would give information on what the programs were some time back.

The good citizen who participates in the affairs of his community and of the world, who cares for his own, who cares for his neighbors must be considered to have had a good education. Whether he remembers what the Missouri Compromise was, for example, is not harmful, but irrelevant.

Some Things We Can Do

There are some items we can be alerted to, although so far as I know we lack instruments for measuring many of them; at least such instruments as we have would not be considered trustworthy by the statisticians. I believe this is why remembered "facts" are so often depended upon. We can ask a child who Israel Putnam was, and he either knows, or does not know. From this, of course, we can make a table, though this table will not tell us much about the child's development.

1. We can make such use as is possible of the instruments we have. These will not be approved by the statisticians, but they do have some value.

2. We can observe the child's attitude toward others. This will tell us much as to whether he has a hostile outlook or an outgoing, positive one.

3. We can judge which of our learners are starving for someone's love. The ones who are avidly seeking the love of their peers and their teachers can be detected. Not every child in most classes needs special attention in this area. I should think that it would be possible in a school building for the teachers to make a list of those who have been starved in this regard, and divide them up for special attention. It has been said that no child who had an adult who really cared about him and in whom he had confidence ever became delinquent.

4. We can assess, on an individual basis, whether the child is outgoing, love giving, or is withdrawn and hostile. We can start to try to do something about this, especially if we are able to identify these children and divide them up for such attention.

5. We have some instruments designed to measure the child's concept of self. These are not as effective as they need to be, but they can without doubt be improved upon. Any test which can tell us about the items cited here will be useful. I believe that the IQ test, now in disrepute in some quarters, can have value if it is properly given and if its outcomes are used for what they measure rather than being misused to stamp scores on people. In fact it is the misuse of tests and of subject matter that so often occurs which disturbs me.

6. We need some way of judging the child's ability at problem solving and his use of freedom. It seems to me that there is only one thing we can be sure of in the future of our learners, and that is that they will have to meet situations in this changing world which we cannot now even imagine.

There may be those who think that I am opposed to all forms of assessment. This would hardly make sense. We ask ourselves how we are doing all of the time outside of school. In school, learners are not called upon to do this as a rule, because the teacher is going to ask them. Learners come to ask themselves whether they got by, whether they were lucky on the teacher's questions.

Self-evaluation is the kind that really matters because judgments are built into experience and become a part of the functioning organism as long as he lives. Teachers need to use self-evaluation, asking themselves how they are doing, in what way they could have done better. They would then be seeking constantly to improve their teaching. They would then have to abandon the humdrum routines so often found now.

If we can learn to assess our young on the items cited above, the results would be positive for both teacher and learner. We need to work on the construction of instruments in the degree that we are able to. But since each learner is unique, much of the assessment will have to be done individually and subjectively. We can then work with reduced pressure although I doubt that all pressure can or should be eliminated. Whatever we do, it should result in our young becoming more loving, less hostile; more courageous, less fearful; more free, less enslaved.

This form of assessment will bring about better, more adequate human beings. This, as I see it, is the task of the school, and the hope of humanity. ☺

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