WITH change fast becoming the most prevalent feature of modern school life, the child might sometimes be forgotten in the rush to upgrade the school program and overhaul the curriculum. One step toward remedying such a tendency would be the creation of a new, high level supervisory or administrative position, namely Director of Pupil Assessment.

The Pupil Development Specialist who would fill this position would be responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of information about children's development, learning and behavior. He would not only be responsive to requests from other school personnel, including the superintendent, for specific kinds of data; he would also provide leadership in selecting areas for assessment and demonstrating their utility. Perhaps it is appropriate at this point to identify some promising assessment areas.

Illustrative of developmental data that might well be gathered in such a program are height, weight and other body measurements. When these are obtained regularly and plotted on some of the more recently standardized growth grids, maturation rate, body build, growth deficiency, and developmental level take on rather precise meanings. Significant relationships during the primary years have been established between reading ability and various indices of body maturity. Teachers with developmental information are in a much better position than those without it to help parents establish appropriate expectations for their children.

Energy, motor coordination, visual and auditory deficiencies, diet, and rest (sleeping patterns) are other physical factors that underlie learning and school behavior and can be assessed readily within the school setting with proper procedures and equipment. Various estimates and surveys suggest that up to 30 percent of the children in most classrooms have at least some degree of hearing

or vision impairment. Most schools have minimal programs at best for identifying such handicaps.

**What Are the Possibilities?**

Outside the area of physical development the opportunities are even greater for useful in-school studies. Sarason points out that perhaps 20 percent of today's elementary school children exhibit enough anxiety over the testing situation to mar their test performances substantially and to indicate to teachers less knowledge and skill than they really possess. Should not teachers be alerted to those children who are overly anxious so that this pupil characteristic may be taken into account in daily lesson planning? Ways of measuring test anxiety are available, yet few schools have the trained personnel or time to do it.

Similar possibilities exist for self-concept assessment. A youngster's thoughts about himself, especially as a learner, may be the keystone of his whole motivational structure. Much talked about by school people but seldom measured, values and attitudes are also capable of assessment in the school setting with reasonable validity.

The weaknesses of many standardized intelligence tests have long been recognized. In developmental psychology today many other facets of the intellect are being studied than those typically measured by such tests. The tools of this research could be adapted to the typical school setting with minimal modification. Various tests for measuring creative thinking, concept formation, and cognitive style are now available. Up to now very little has been known about how and what children think, because research on this subject has been conducted primarily in the laboratory. Why should not many of the same laboratory procedures be used in school for the amassing of larger amounts of such information?

Other promising areas for data-gathering are classroom interaction and teaching style. A rather precise, objective and accurate picture is possible today of what teachers and pupils actually do minute by minute. Like football coaches studying films of the previous Saturday's games, teachers could have the opportunity to view again what happened in given hours of instruction. Through the utilization of various observer checklists, coding symbols, and behavior classification devices evolving within interaction technology, they could study this "frozen behavior" in relation to their particular teaching objectives. They could analyze, for example, the kinds of responses pupils make to different kinds of teacher questions in order to determine how creative thinking is nurtured or stifled.

In all of the above samples of promising small scale developmental studies, the major purpose should be to amass extensive descriptive details about boys' and girls' functioning which are being overlooked in most schools today and to treat these details so that they would constantly be used in the planning of school programes.

Depending on the size of a school system and the perceived importance of such a program, the major factors needed to carry it out are at least one well-trained Pupil Development Specialist with supporting secretarial and clerical assistance, a limited amount of materials and equipment, a modest budget, administrative backing, and teacher cooperation. Studies would not have to embrace any more classes and grade levels than seem expedient at the time. Although scientific procedures should be utilized as much as possible within the framework of other school obligations, for the most part, developmental studies should be seen as application rather than replication of more basic research. Precedence should be given to obtaining reliable and valid developmental information rather than to sampling pupil population representatively or tightly controlling various other factors as must be done in research projects. This difference is not so much one of rigor as of intent.

**Why a New Position?**

One question remains for this discussion to answer. Why is a new position necessary? Are there not behavioral specialists already in most school systems who could assume the roles outlined above? The answer is no, not unless a major reshuffling is done of other duties. The present counseling and guidance personnel are forced by their limited numbers to concentrate their attention on the behavioral extremes of troubled and troublesome youngsters and on a minimum of vocational and college counseling for the rest. Although his role is expanding somewhat, the school psychologist is still too closely identified with testing and, along with the guidance counselor and special education teacher, with handling deviant behavior. Typically, the psychologist has such a backlog of recommended pupils for “WISC, Binets, Benders” and other individual tests that he is several weeks behind the requests. The research man too often has his time usurped by budget, inventory, pupil accounting, school lunch, and other such statistical matters to leave very much room for pupil behavior assessment.

Furthermore, the techniques for developmental and behavioral appraisal are becoming both sophisticated and extensive, compared with those of 1950, and by themselves demand a high level of specialized training. Although the Pupil Development Specialist should be well acquainted with the most commonly used standardized tests of intelligence, achievement, adjustment, and personality, a public reaction against too much testing is gaining momentum; this could well stifle the rather limited testing programs currently in existence. He should also be armed with a variety of procedures, therefore, for assessing behavioral patterns systematically and for analyzing ordinary school work for indices of development. In addition to tests, his tools would include growth grids, behavior checklists, and scoring systems. Supplementing a solid academic background in behavioral science, moreover, should be sufficient internship experience in this new role to achieve a high degree of empathy for both teachers and children. He must learn to insert developmental appraisal into the school program without increasing the teacher's task or invading the pupil's sense of privacy.
The position of Director of Pupil Assessment would probably be closest to that of Curriculum Director. He could operate either at the building level, in which case he might be called Pupil Development Specialist, or he could have responsibility for many schools in a system. His focus would be on pupil behavior and development, whereas the Curriculum Director concentrates on teaching methods and materials. Nevertheless both positions would demand attention to the whole school program and the entire student body.

Both persons would work closely with teachers in a variety of ways and both would give attention to groups, classes and grades of children rather than to individual pupils. Both would be in contact with community agencies and would have to demonstrate public relations skill. Just as the Curriculum Director must restrict his in-service expectations for teachers to a reasonable amount at any given time, the Pupil Development Specialist should not overdo testing activities for any given teacher or pupil group and would have to utilize other assessment procedures as well. His job should ease rather than increase the teacher’s burden.

Any corporation president knows how important it is to be able to assess, analyze, and report on the various facets of his corporation’s functioning so that the next year’s product development and sales campaigns can be planned realistically. He could not maintain his position beyond the quarterly report period if he were not armed with facts about how his product is doing. Are public schools so different that they can afford to go without key manufacturing data—the hoped-for end product in this case being a mature, responsible, intelligent, creative and contributing citizenry in the years ahead?

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