

Mental Testing of Children

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MENTAL Testing has assumed in all realms of human behavior, such a position of importance in recent years, that no one, interested in human affairs, can afford to ignore it. Everyone who seeks to influence, i. e. to control for good or ill, human destinies, evolves some working method or technique of procedure. This must have a period of history of its own, before it can be standardized and made susceptible of general application. It is of interest to all to get a cross-section of normal and variant human action, but a matter of primary importance to teachers, since indeed they are for so large a portion of children's lives, the appointed guardians (I was about to say gardeners) to form habits that are economical of time, energy, and self-direction; to awaken and cultivate worthy interests that are satisfying in themselves and to inculcate aspirations that tease, entice and withal ennoble the possessor.

Then if this can be regarded in a sketchy way, as the end desired in education, it is easy to see that the evolution of the process of teaching, and an examination of the powers and capacities of children is a much more complex undertaking than it is usually regarded.

While it is true, then, that adequate and complete mental testing is a process of great complexity, and extreme difficulty — nevertheless our present day schemes of testing, like any other device, tool, or examination, serves a purpose which is worth while.

Rightly handled, testing of this sort proves enlightening to the teachers, to the school, administration, and to parents.

I should like to bring to the attention of teachers some of the salient features of the new movement in education under some such captions as the following: 1. What is measured; 2. The divisions of the field of testing or kinds of schemes suggested or employed; 3. Mental testing in relation to the teacher's everyday tasks; 4. The intimate connection of mental testing and the newer methods of teaching, such as project-plan of lessons, problem-teaching and the organic factors in education; 5. The value of mental testing to the principal, the supervisor and the school administrator.

Because of the limitations of sphere, some of this must of necessity, be left untouched, some must be merely suggested or implied in what is said and withal

much may appear to be condensed; nevertheless, I shall be grateful if what I write may provoke further interest and study, and best of all, if as many of my readers as possible, will undertake some practical application of mental testing with individuals, groups, or entire school systems.

First of all instead of "starting at the beginning" as children demand in their stories, I wish to review for you a bit of preliminary psychology. Those of you who have read standard text books on psychology, remember the highly technical terms, so forbidding or terrorizing if not wholly baffling that are used to divide us up and mark us off into compartments. Perhaps you recall that such texts begin with "Knowledge, then discuss Feeling, and end up with that will-o'-the-wisp in expository writings—the Will. We, nowadays, give all this three divisional way of looking at our minds a new turn. Everything is in a setting. We call it a situation. Forms, Fixtures, do not exist, it seems, in our present day thinkings. Change, only is the real. Animal forms have changed, are changing and will change. They are symptoms of a changing order. You recall your readings and your reflections on this. Even so, in mental things. There is no such thing as static thinking. Thinking, knowing—or whatever you term it, does not go on in vacuo; there is always some feeling mixed up with it and likewise in all normal life, there is always some action which comes before thinking, accompanies it and succeeds it. So to speak, one part of the mind must not be thought of as existing alone, supreme, and undisturbed by other parts. All this new attitude is what we call the relativity of every aspect of mind to every other part and to all, and furthermore, the relation of any bit of our life to the particular situation in which that life symptom is called out.

To sum-up in every situation of one's life, something is before one, it affects one somehow, and as a consequence one does something. This is, you see, our old three divisions of mind, but in relation to each other always, and in relation to some circumstance in which we have a problem or we are learning something new. For these reasons, Psychology of the school room must take its cue, not from the mind sleeping or day-dreaming, nor from taking in, nor from working things over contemplatively, nor from mere doing, in the sense of try and try again, without