

“Intelligence” - To Test or Not to Test

Definitions of intelligence have been propounded and proposed by numerous psychologists. The 20s, 30s, and 40s were replete with mellifluous statements of how intelligence can or cannot be improved. Intelligence tests went through the periods of great adulation, then through decline and now “*critical caution.*”

In the main, the arguments presented revolved around Heredity and Environment in aspects of Intelligence. Proponents of heredity would frequently speak in terms of the immutability of test results. Proponents of the environment would negate Intelligence test results. Few individuals would attempt to differentiate Intelligence into Hebb's Intelligence “A” and Intelligence “B” and yet the greatest weight appeared to be given to heredity. The cliché “Heredity deals the cards and environment plays them” still appeared to be the most apt.

Unfortunately for many, the self-fulfilling prophecy came into vogue in the late 60s and *psychologists* argued in favour of different treatments to alleviate lower test scores. Vernon's excellent paper in this journal indicates some degree of fallacy in the design of the experiments which trumpeted the “self-fulfilling” edict.

Perhaps as far as the schools are concerned, the hard, cold, realistic facts of Intelligence scores are still the best indicators of achievement, although, in many instances, narrow. IQ-based distinctions for identifying talented and gifted students are no longer the sole method used by the schools — however, we still rely to a large extent on testing to provide a systematic way of finding gifted students. A recent report by the Educational Research Service¹ (ERS) evaluates three types of testing for the gifted. The gifted can also be spotted by teachers, parents, peers, and experts in special areas, but the testing, made critically and cautiously, still leads the field in the identification process.

What the schools must ask with respect to the bright, the gifted and talented is whether to test or not to test. The evidence is highly in favour of the former.

But the schools have a second function — not only to educate for the present but to assist in training for later life. Intelligence tests are invaluable in assisting in the former, but what about the latter? It appears to many that in a relatively rigidly-structured society, even though changes are constantly being mooted, creative and intelligent people are beset by a myriad of problems. The school of “hard knocks” is a frustrating experience to many of the intelligent and creative people who emerge to face society.

¹ERS, 1815 Fort Nyer Dr., Arlington Va. 22209; 61 p.

The percentage of those people who actually do apply creativity or intelligence to everyday life is limited in number. A typical example is that of the creative artist who follows the commercial beat in order to sustain an existence.

This brings to the fore Guilford's description of the "divergent" vs. the "convergent" thinker. The divergent thinker possesses an essence of creativity in his or her ability to produce new forms, to conjoin elements that are customarily thought of as dissimilar or independent, as well as the aptitude for achieving new meanings that have social value. The convergent thinker usually thinks in terms of a reality that is closely embraced by society. He, in essence, converges to a solution that is highly acceptable in our modern schools and in today's life. It is chiefly the latter type of performance that is appraised by conventional measures of intelligence.

In the Cooperative Research study published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, on the Gifted Child in 1962, many dissimilarities were discovered between the "creative" and "intelligent" child. In some instances children were both, but very infrequently. The central purpose of the research was to discover significant variables which differentiated the "creative" from the intelligent person. There were many differences in the relatively unstructured test and interview methods adopted.

But, returning to our original query — "to test or not to test" — the answer is definitely to place greater weight on the former — if only for the sake of clues and indicators, and if only for the sake of predicting school achievement.

We repeat — school achievement whether based on "Intelligence A" or "Intelligence B" can best be measured by some standardized intelligence tests replete with all their fallacies.

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