

## THE CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON TESTING<sup>1</sup>

Melvin H. Tennis, Jr.  
Dade County Public School System  
Miami, Florida

As FERA has grown during the past 10 years, so have attacks on educational and psychological testing. Perhaps a latent anti-testing sentiment became conscious and active in 1956 with the publication of William F. Whyte's The Organization Man, Merloo's The Rape of the Mind, and Hunter and Goff's Brainwashing. The books probably hit an eager market for in 1962 the publishers loosed a salvo of, The Brain Watchers by M. L. Gross, Hoffman's The Tyranny of Testing, and Black's They Shall Not Pass. In 1964 Vance Packard's The Naked Society was published. Many articles criticising testing have also appeared in magazines and newspapers since 1956. Perhaps research would show examples of published criticism of testing going back fifty years, but this speculation should be followed up with facts.

At FERA meetings in recent years members have taken a look at the social impact of testing. Particularly noteworthy was Dr. Vynce Hines' address on this subject to the eighth annual FERA meeting in Tallahassee. At the same meeting Dr. G. R. Foster presented a paper that raised questions about the effect of the testing controversy upon the production of new tests. At the meeting in Brevard County the previous year, Dr. B. Frank Brown made verbal mince-meat of a pamphlet attacking testing that had been published by an organization of school administrators. At the same meeting, as I recall, Dr. Henry Chauncey refuted criticism of the validity and reliability of some measures of ability and achievement. That same year he and Dr. John Dobbin published an explanation of testing for the public entitled, Testing: Its Place in Education Today. In 1962 Dr. Walter Durost with co-author George Prescott published Essentials of Measurement for Teachers, a volume which, in my opinion, provides practical help in analysing test data. Compared with the barrage of literature criticising testing, the efforts to keep the public informed of the vital and essential function that educational and psychological testing plays in our society today have been meager. Between January 1960 and November 1965 over 50 items dealing with testing appeared in the American Psychologist, the monthly journal published by the American Psychological Association, Inc. This indicates that the professional group primarily concerned with testing is carrying on a lively dialogue between themselves. Whether they are able to communicate with the public is another question.

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In any event, in June of 1965 they got the chance of a lifetime. The full glare of Washington's publicity spotlight fell on the psychologists and their various critics as they testified before subcommittees of the House and Senate. Michael Amrine, public information consultant for the APA, edited a special, 148-page issue of the November '65 American Psychologist, reviewing and condensing thousands of pages of testimony and presenting statements pro and con from key figures in the controversy. (Anyone having more than a casual interest in testing should have a copy as a basic reference. I don't know if the reports of the two subcommittees have been published yet. They, too, should find a place beside your copy of Buros.)

Appearing before the committees were government officials, college professors, psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers, the author of The Brain Watchers, and the president of The Psychological Corporation. Though the learned witnesses took excursions into the history and philosophy of testing, the validity and reliability of tests, and the usefulness of tests in the selection procedures of the various government departments, time and time again the controversy returned to and swirled around the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Of special interest to the Committees were test items relating to sex, religion, family relationships, and other aspects regarded as personal. As expounded by the lawyers the issue was whether the Federal government could compel individuals to provide information on their attitudes toward sex, religion, family relationship, etc, as a prerequisite for employment, promotion or job assignment.

Sen. Sam J. Ervin, Jr. (D-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Subcommittee, maintained that such questions "constitute an unjustified invasion of privacy." His counterpart in the House, Rep. C. E. Gallagher (D-N.J.) wrote in the APA's special issue: "The objective has been a laudable one -- to protect the Federal service from misfits -- but the means, in my view, violates the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution and perhaps the First, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments as well, depending upon the facts in each case."

It seems that eventually it will be up to the courts to decide on the substance of the alleged infringement of basic constitutional rights such as freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, freedom of religion, protection from self-incrimination, right to due process of law, and the full rights of citizenship without regard to condition of previous servitude. It is to be hoped that those in testing can steer clear of litigious entanglements for the rights of the individual are as precious to us as to the Congress. The

rights of the scientist to study human behavior and the rights of the manager to select well qualified personnel are also of vital importance. Though those in testing can regulate their own activities -- and should -- the Congress may take it upon itself to define in legislation for the Executive Branch the procedures to be observed in protecting the rights of individuals who take psychological tests. Such laws should certainly include measures to guard the confidentiality of records. This was a concern that permeated much of the testimony.

With one or two exceptions, it appeared from my reading of the special issue that the press dealt fairly with the proceedings, though at times with tongue-in-cheek. A number of self-styled humorists, amateur and professional, poked fun at the distinctly humorless personality inventories by concocting their own little gems probing the most secret confines of the psyche, such as:

"I am not unwilling to work for a jackass.  
I think beavers work too hard.  
It is hard for me to say the right thing  
when I find myself in a room full of mice.  
It is important to wash your hands before  
washing your hands."

(I think this latter item has real diagnostic significance -- but just what, I'm not sure.)

What gave the hearings a bizarre touch of unreality -- at least from my biased corner -- was the fact of the brilliant success of the selection program developed by the Peace Corps psychologists. According to Amrine, "The staff and the young men and women sent overseas have built up such a tremendous record that the Peace Corps is almost on a par with the FBI in Washington as being above criticism." Yet, in contrast to the massive attacks on the validity of psychological tests, the Peace Corps remained as a shining example of the success of the procedures that were so sternly criticised.

"From the beginning, Peace Corps selection and training have been dominated by psychological findings as has no other government agency, not even the Air Force," Amrine commented. Though it may be argued that the Peace Corps and other governmental activities are not comparable, it is hard to ignore the conclusion that the way in which psychological assessment was carried out was a major factor in the success of the Peace Corp program. Certainly the selection procedures are designed in terms of some theory of human behavior. The success of the program may be validation of the theory. If it hasn't been contracted yet, a book

should be written about the assessment program of the Peace Corps.

All this is very interesting you may say, but where does that leave us who must do the testing in the public schools? Well, naturally, right in the middle -- where else? You'd better improve your public relations and get oriented to what other groups are doing.

A good start is obtaining a copy of the February 1965 American Psychologist, in which four papers were published that consider current problems and practices in the testing area. Orville G. Drim, Jr. analyzed American attitudes toward intelligence tests; John Stalnaker examined psychological tests and public responsibility; Samuel Messick discussed personality measurement and the ethics of assessment, and Ralph F. Berdie described the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on Social Impact of Psychological Assessment. Berdie's article contains a kind of "box score" of the testing controversy and some excellent suggestions for those working in the public schools -- giving tests, that is. Perhaps a statewide organization in applied psychology -- which is the way that I perceive FERA -- could help implement some of the ideas of the Ad Hoc Committee. Perhaps other Florida organizations such as the APGA through the Florida division and the various chapters or the Florida Association of School Psychologists would be more appropriate agencies.

At the risk of sounding as if I had been brainwashed by an ardent APA member -- and maybe I have -- I should like to repeat an eloquent plea for affirmative action made by Quinn McNemar as part of his presidential address to APA:

At a time when there is shouting about the tyranny of the testers and the brass of the brain watchers, at a time when school people are showing resentment at the disruption caused by too many national testing programs, at a time when Federal and state legislators are all too willing to write legislation that places restrictions on the use of tests, and at a time when both majorities and minorities are being denied the benefits of test-based guidance because certain well-intentioned persons fail to realize that scores for the underprivileged minorities are useful indices of immediate, or present, functioning -- at a time when all these and other forces are operating to throw out the tests, it is high time for the profession to establish a bureau of standards to test the tests instead of coasting down a road that is tinged with some of the trap-pings of Madison Avenue. Better to have informed internal control than ignorant, hostile, external control.