

The Controversy Over IQ Tests

Wed., Sept. 4, 1974

San Francisco Chronicle 23

By Judith Anderson

If the IQ test were banned from further use in public schools, would anyone complain?

Certainly the companies that make them up and sell them would. And so would the teachers, psychologists and school administrators who believe an Intelligence Quotient score is necessary to confirm a child's need for special education.

But many blacks, Mexican-Americans and members of other minority groups undoubtedly would see the ban as a positive step. Strong evidence supports their claims that the tests are culturally biased and therefore discriminate against them.

Language and cultural differences, critics say, can make a big difference in test scores. What does a child who has never left the inner city, for instance, know about finding his way out of a forest? Or many children in Hawaii of questions about railroad tracks? Yet similar problems confront those children on IQ tests.

Those who find fault with the tests, which were initiated early in this century in France to predict how well youngsters would do in public schools, believe the tests either should be revised to reflect cultural, educational and economic differences, or be eliminated altogether.

One of the latest to add her voice to the mounting criticism is Margot Wiesinger Smith, a doctoral candidate in public health at UC-Berkeley.

Ms. Smith found in a research project that tests, in the U.S. were modeled to fit the experiences of white middleclass children and that attempts to translate and adapt IQ tests to cultural differences did not improve scores; in fact, the lower scores persisted, leading her to the conclusion that the revisions themselves affected the scores.

She drew her conclusions from a comparison of the responses of children who were used as test subjects

the tests is that they are genetically inferior.

Ms. Smith and others who have researched the subject believe the tests are at fault.

Ms. Smith has come to the conclusion that an IQ test may reveal nothing more than a particular child's response to a particular set of questions on a particular day.

"We're assigning a number to a child's capacity for intelligence, and it may not necessarily mean that." In fact, other research has shown that the IQ score for a child can change dramatically, depending on his education and exposure to white middle-class experiences.

Ms. Smith is now convinced "the IQ test serves no useful purpose" and should be replaced.

Her findings come as no surprise to those who have been engaged in the IQ test-bias battle for years.

Dr. Harold Dent, director of consultation and education at Westside Community Mental Health Center, said that "psychologists have been saying for years that if



LAURA JAMIESON AND TESTER MINERVA MENDOZA-FRIEDMAN
They are doing the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children



IQ manuals: Are they appropriate to today's world?

Both Dent and Hilliard are members of the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists, a group that filed suit three years ago against San Francisco and state boards of education. That suit demanded that schools stop giving individual standardized IQ tests to black students and that the number of blacks assigned to classes for the mentally retarded

(mentally retarded) classes at two to three times the rate of children from English-speaking, Caucasian homes.

In June 1972 U.S. District Judge Robert Peckham issued a preliminary injunction against the San Francisco Unified School District, ordering that IQ tests no longer be used as the prima-

ham's original injunction. Now the Black Psychologists are awaiting a further ruling that they hope will extend the injunction to the entire state and set the racial quotas for blacks, as well.

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1973, the state board of education agreed with CRLA attorneys to establish and enforce quotas for Chicano

MR. classes two years to correct the situation.

Armando Menocal, attorney for the Black Psychologists, said recently there are 129 school districts where the imbalance affects Chicanos and 97 where it affects blacks (out of about 1000 school districts in the state).

Dave Jamieson, supervisor of psychological services for San Francisco schools, agreed that the label of an IQ score, whether it's low or high, can have a profound effect on a child's performance.

If it's low, less may be expected of him; if it's high, he may be pressured to perform beyond his real abilities.

Critics also complain that test scores are used to "track" students into vocational or college preparatory courses, and may have a lifelong effect.

Some, like Jamieson, are not willing to eliminate IQ tests altogether, however.

He admitted that the numerical score tells little about a child's weaknesses and strengths. But he said the test is a valuable tool.

"It's a rough indicator that tells something about a child's possible function, about his potential," said Russell Forney, a consultant in program evaluation for the state board of education. "Taken in concert with other information, it helps schools determine how money will be spent to improve educational programs."

The trouble is, said Dr. Hilliard, test scores have not been used to improve education. "We can show that IQ tests have negative conse-



Margot Smith: She has her doubts

quences," such as directing a student to a class for the mentally retarded when he doesn't belong there.

"But we haven't been able to show to the same extent how giving these tests benefits education. And you have to go a long way to find someone who interprets and uses them properly."

Hilliard believes that new ways of measuring intelligence, creativity, aptitudes and experiences are needed.

That could mean a greater variety of tests designed to evaluate the myriad cultures in our society. It could mean more highly skilled "psychometrists" who take a prescribed list of skills to be tested and frame specific questions in the cultural context of each individual student.

Researchers might come up with types of tests no one has ever thought of before. But whatever they come up with, he predicted that unbiased tests will be more complicated than they are now and will require much greater skill and sensitivity on the part of the testers.

Harold Dent is another who feels that "a lot of local tests" are going to have to be developed. But he has seen no effort by testing services to develop such tests, and he believes it will be "many, many years" before the problems are solved.

If IQ test scores consistently reflected cultural biases against Anglo students, as they have against minority youngsters, he ventured, "it's clear things would be very different."

SWEET IDEA

Baked Ham With Orange-Pineapple Yams

Yams in Orange-Pineapple Sauce make an ideal sauce for basting ham.

Heat oven to 325°. Place ham in baking pan on a rack. Bake 25 min. to the lb. for a whole ham or 30 min. to the lb. for a half ham. 15 minutes before ham is done, brush with sauce.

middleclass children and that attempts to translate and adapt IQ tests to cultural differences did not improve scores; in fact, the lower scores persisted, leading her to the conclusion that the revisions themselves affected the scores.

She drew her conclusions from a comparison of the responses of children who were used as test subjects for 12 revisions of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test for nine countries between 1908 and 1960.

UC professor of educational psychology Arthur R. Jensen and Stanford physicist William Shockley have incurred the wrath of minority groups by insisting that the reason blacks score lower on

vinced "the IQ test serves no useful purpose" and should be replaced.

Her findings come as no surprise to those who have been engaged in the IQ test-bias battle for years.

Dr. Harold Dent, director of consultation and education at Westside Community Mental Health Center, said that "psychologists have been saying for years that if a child is judged against norms of experiences he has never had (for instance, a black child from the inner city against white middle-class experiences), the test is culturally biased."

Dr. Asa Hilliard, dean of the school of education at San Francisco State, agrees.

Both Dent and Hilliard are members of the Bay Area Association of Black Psychologists, a group that filed suit three years ago against San Francisco and state boards of education. That suit demanded that schools stop giving individual standardized IQ tests to black students and that the number of blacks assigned to classes for the **mentally retarded** not exceed their proportion in the school district's population.

This, and a similar suit filed on behalf of Chicano school children by California Rural Legal Assistance, followed the discovery that black and Chicano children were being placed in MR

(mentally retarded) classes at two to three times the rate of children from English-speaking, Caucasian homes.

In June 1972 U.S. District Judge Robert Peckham issued a preliminary injunction against the San Francisco Unified School District, ordering that IQ tests no longer be used as the primary criteria for placing blacks in MR classes. He did not outlaw their use totally, however, and San Francisco schools continue to use them for MR cases because the state requires it.

San Francisco appealed that decision, but just this month the Ninth Circuit Court upheld Judge Peck-

ham's original injunction. Now the Black Psychologists are awaiting a further ruling that they hope will extend the injunction to the entire state and set the racial quotas for blacks, as well.

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1973, the state board of education agreed with CRLA attorneys to establish and enforce quotas for Chicano students assigned to MR classes. Blacks asked to have the quotas extended to them, and the state refused.

Last May, after no enforcement had occurred, Judge Peckham ordered compliance with the quota order and gave school districts in which there is a disproportion of Chicanos in