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ABSTRACT

This paper considers issues related to determining which students should attend summer school to bring their achievement up to standard. One of the first problems in selecting students who must attend summer school is determining the level of achievement students must meet. Determining the types of assessment that should be used, and possibly taking multiple intelligences theory into account, can be quite complicated. Other issues to be considered are how best to help students who do not benefit much from summer school, how intensive programs to help them should be, and how to allow for students' individual learning styles. Policymakers tend to see summer school as punitive, but it might be better to see it as opportunity. Perhaps summer schools should be open to all who want to attend to offer a broad and balanced curriculum that might include aspects of vocational education. Any stigma attached to summer school would be removed. The one-size-fits-all approach to standardized testing should be replaced with assessments that provide for individual differences in determining who should go to summer school. (SLD)

Assessment: Who Goes to Summer School

Marlow Ediger

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ASSESSMENT: WHO GOES TO SUMMER SCHOOL?

There is much written and speeches given on selected public school students going to summer school. Why? With high stakes testing for students to graduate from high school or be promoted from one grade level to the next, the need to boost test scores is certainly there. Many school systems spend hours and hours of school time on teaching test taking skills and teaching particulate facts which might appear on these state mandated tests. With pay for performance based on how well students do on tests, there is pressure and urgency to "teach well" to up test scores of students. The standards may indeed be high to achieve with the bar having been raised extremely high. In an article entitled, "A Quiet Crisis: Unprepared for High stakes," (Education Week, April 28, 2001), the following quote appeared:

Despite the intensive push, bringing all Putnam, Massachusetts students up to the state standards remains a formidable task. Among tenth graders who took the exam last year, 94% failed the English test, 95% failed in mathematics, and 91% fell short in the science portion.

Similar scenarios are playing out around the country, as the drive to hold secondary students to more rigorous academic standards and tests reveal a quiet crisis. A large proportion of students who are already in high school are not doing high school level work.

The above quote refers to students taking the state mandated test entitled The Massachusetts Assessment of Comprehensive Skills (MACS). These students are caught in the transition when moving from the traditional standards for high school graduation to the new state mandated standards and accompanying tests. How can students then be brought up to reaching state mandated standards such as in The Massachusetts Assessment of Comprehensive Skills?

Remedial Work and Summer School

Those students who do not measure up to required state mandated standards may well be required to attend summer school. There are a plethora of questions which need to be answered pertaining to who should be required to attend. Among others, these include the following:

*** which level of achievement must be met by students to avoid attending summer school? For example, students being able to read on grade level keeps coming up in the educational literature. Thus, if a student is in the third grade, he/she should read on grade level. If not, attending summer school may take care of the difficulties and avoid the sin of social promotion, according to advocates. Thus, if 94% to 91% of test takers failed the English, mathematics, and science tests on The MACS, there will indeed be many attending summer school. Should**

there be multiple measures of student achievement considered before selected students are required to attend summer school?

*** will summer school attendees be labeled as failures due to being drafted into attending?**

*** are there other qualities, than doing well on the academics in achievement testing, which would satisfy the role of being a good student, such as in the following intelligences?**

a) visual/space including art products to reveal achievement.

b) logical/mathematical involving powers of reasoning to indicate progress in learning.

c) musical/rhythmic which might involve learning songs, composing lyrics and melody, as well as engaging in folk dances to show achievement.

d) intrapersonal in that the learner desires to work by the self to show progress and growth.

e) interpersonal in that these learners show achievement more optimally in collaborative rather than individual endeavors.

f) bodily/kinesthetic intelligence involves those students who indicate physical prowess as well as neuro- muscular skills to reveal what has been learned.

g) scientific stresses intelligences possessed by those who do well in objective thinking and in science, as compared to subjective ideas (See Gardner, 1993).

*** what if students still do not read up to grade level or do not meet standards in state mandated test results? There are advocates who believe after school tutoring should then be added to attending summer school attendance requirements. The student then might experience burnout from too much emphasis placed upon learning pertaining to the basics.**

*** what if selected students still fail to meet requirements after being tutored after or before school begins? Negative self concepts may certainly enter in. The self concept of the learner is of vital importance. Success, not failure, should be experienced by each student in the learning process (See Maslow, 1954).**

*** what penalties will there be for no show students required to attend summer school and/or school tutoring? The get tough approach on social promotion policies may need to have tools to enforce their point of view. Positive reinforcement for doing well can face rational thinking standards more so than punishment procedures for failing to achieve at a designated level. Punishment does emphasize the negative rather than the positive in educational thought.**

*** how many students will then need to repeat one or more school years to meet state mandated standards? Repeaters will not be attending a grade level with their peers. Research has long supported the view that**

repeating a grade does not help the total child in his/her development. Feelings of failure are devastating. The emotions are important in learning and positive feelings need to be there. The role of emotional intelligence has rather recently received considerable importance in educational literature (See Goleman, 1995).

* will additional teachers need to be hired to teach the many repeaters, assuming this to be the case. Passing a test may be a different situation as compared to actually reading subject matter in context to show achievement. The author has noticed automobile mechanics read from a difficult manual which was necessary to do in order to repair a car at the work place. Many reading specialists have written about finding library book content which interests a particular learner. Not all, of course, will be interested in reading the same subject matter on a test. Interest is a powerful factor in learning (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter Sixteen).

* do all students have the ability to read on grade level? There are several subparts to this question. A student just may not have the ability to read on grade level even with attending summer school sessions and after being tutored much before/after school. Second, the content on a test may not possess the "cup of tea" of the learner.

* how does learning styles theory harmonize with test taking skills and abilities of students? Students differ on learning styles possessed. Learning styles theorists stress the following salient factors in teaching and learning situations (See Searson and Dunn, 2001):

a) environmental factors such as light intensity, acceptable noise levels, appropriate temperature readings, as well as formal versus informal settings.

b) amount of student motivation, persistence, responsibility, and structure versus choices in what to learn.

c) learning by the self as compared to peers working collectively, as well as a flexible versus an authoritarian teacher.

d) auditory, visual, tactual and/or kinesthetic ways of learning, as well as snacking (eating) and movement during studying.

e) progressing in a step by step, logical approach in learning versus an holistic view of perceiving concepts and generalizations to be learned. The former moves from the specific to the general whereas the latter from the general to the specific.

From the above statements on learning styles theory and relating these statements to testing situations, there are numerous problems involved such as

1. does a student like a quiet environment for testing or should there be accompanying music or other forms of positive noise while the testing situation progresses? Should the testing environment emphasize a formal setting, which is very true of standardized testing situations, as

compared to a friendly, encouraging surrounding?

2. Is motivation to do well inherent in testing or should there be ways of motivating students to do well before/during testing time? Testing does stress conformity behavior while responding to multiple choice test items whereas are there students who desire essay items in which novelty and uniqueness of responding could be emphasized.

3. should students be tested while working alone or should those who prefer working with others be permitted to do so? Should the testing situation emphasize a friendly, informal administrator or should there be a one way street of communication between the test administrator and those taking the test?

4. should test taking always involve the verbal such as reading/responding to multiple choice test items or should student preferences be involved in using a hands on approach in manipulating items and objects as in performing science experiments and demonstrations? Those who prefer to snack while being tested, should they be permitted to do so? Many do snack while studying.

5. should those who learn in a step by step approach respond to test items emphasizing this procedure whereas those preferring holistic procedures of learning be permitted to answer test questions stressing a more global approach?

There are then a plethora of variables involved when emphasizing learning styles theory applied to the measurement movement. Measurement and testing specialists need to take all of these variables into consideration when developing state mandated and/or standardized tests. Complexities are involved when students are assessed to ascertain achievement and progress.

Additional Questions on Summer Schools

State legislators, governors, congress, and the President perceive summer schools to be used as punishment. Perhaps, there is a much better way of looking at the summer school concept. First, summer school should be open to all who desire to attend. Thus, the talented, the gifted, average achievers, as well s those who did not meet state mandated standards of achievement may attend. The curriculum should consist of an integrated subject matter philosophy. Using the interests of attendees should prevail, along with teacher direction. Memorization and drill for test taking should not be stressed, nor should it be during the regular school year. Rather , a variety of developmental learning opportunities should be selected to achieve worthwhile objectives of instruction. Reading, writing, and arithmetic should receive its fair share of emphasis along with science, social studies, art, music, and health/physical education. Each of these curriculum areas is very important for students.

For example, a good health/physical education curriculum is necessary for all when observing the many recorded obese children in society. Rich experiences then in healthful living with proper nutrition and exercise should be an end result. Health/physical may be incorporated into all curriculum areas. What is considered to be academic knowledge, by itself, is not the core to life and living. How many will become academicians or be involved in academic work after high school graduation and beyond?

Second, the summer school curriculum should stress the importance of vocational education integrated with the other curriculum areas to be emphasized in teaching and learning situations. The future means of earning a living will depend upon choosing a quality career, even after high school graduation. These students, no doubt, prefer a hands on approach to learning with concrete objects and items. Now is a good time for students to experience careers in a meaningful curriculum.

Third, the one size fits all in standardized testing needs to be replaced with a philosophy of providing for individual differences. Students are different from each other in many ways such as in abilities, interests, personalities, and purposes. A single test to measure and report student achievement has too many downfalls and is not educationally sound. A single standardized test has problems with validity and reliability. Validity emphasizes that a test measures that which a student has had opportunities to learn. Too frequently, these tests do not cover what students have had chances to achieve. Thus, achievement tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the Stanford Achievement Test measure differently and the results for the same student taking these two tests will differ because the first measures skills while the second test measures academic knowledge. Then too, it would be difficult to make the case that either the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or the Stanford Achievement Test are valid from the point of view that they cover what has been or should be taught in the local classroom. This does not minimize standardized achievement testing; rather it points out differences among these tests and each has their role, along with other evaluative approaches to ascertain learner achievement. Standardized tests, too may assist in determining what a student has not learned and what is left to learn. What has been missed by the student on a standardized test then may become objectives of instruction and goals for student attainment.

Thus, numerous evaluation techniques should assist in determining who should attend summer school. Perhaps, all should have this opportunity who so desire to attend summer school. No stigmas are to be attached to students who do attend. Rather, it should be looked upon as a privilege, not a punishment. Sometimes, the educational literature reads as if teachers, too, are to be punished if students do not do well on standardized tests, especially for low income students who have not

had the opportunities in the local community to learn which higher income level homes can provide for their children. The following are then advocated to use in punishing teachers whose students do not “hurdle the bar” with satisfactory test scores:

1. bankruptcy laws in education and schooling with a possible state takeover where deficiencies in test scores are in evidence.
2. charter schools which separate from the public schools but still take their share of moneys from the public school budget.
3. vouchers whereby a student may attend a private school and take along the allotted tuition moneys from the public schools to attend the chosen private school.
4. pay for performance in which a teacher is paid based on student performance on state mandated tests. The author would then want to teach in a suburban school.
5. eliminate tenure and a single salary schedule which means a teacher could lose his/her teaching position regardless of what had transpired in teaching and learning situations. The author began teaching in the early 1950s when there was no salary school and salaries had to be bargained for in the schools in which he taught. Tenure too was unknown of and a teacher could be dismissed at will. Being deficient in teaching, according to a single test score, may then determine who teaches in summer school (See Ediger, 2001, 12).

Conclusion

Summer school attendance by public school students needs to be made more attractive than having a punishment emphasis such as a student who does not meet state standards on testing will be drafted into summer school attendance. All should have opportunities to attend. The opportunities in summer school attendance may be indicated with the following enticements:

1. quality objectives which enrich the life of the learner and make the school curriculum one of desired achievement, rather than forcing individuals to attend in being punished for “sins committed,” the sin being a single low state mandated test score.
2. learning opportunities which inspire subject matter, citizenship, emotional, and attitudinal achievement.
3. variety in assessment procedures which truly assist students to achieve more optimally and in a sequential manner (See Ediger, 2001, 13-16).

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