The extent of these major changes should be made known and debated. Some will support the changes as a temporary recession measure to be reversed when inflation is brought under control and economic growth resumed. Some will argue that there is now an adequate supply of graduates and no longer any need to use financial grants to inflate the demand for higher education.

These arguments should be openly discussed and analysed. So should the counter arguments that on grounds of equity and the development of the scarce talents of the community, the decline in financial support for needy students should be reversed.

The debate should also be placed in the right context. The ingenuity of man in making processes of production more efficient and in creating new products has both required extensions of education and encouraged more education by increasing real incomes.

The percentage of our lives spent in the workforce has fallen. Man's ingenuity in production has not reached its limit and there will be further changes in technology and further reductions in life hours of work. Sensible adjustment to this will include a further extension of higher education.

As I see it, that extension of higher education will carry with it an increase in the variety of educational programmes and a greater emphasis on recurring education.

The greater emphasis on research in modern society has hitherto been a mixed blessing for universities. It has made them more exciting places for staff and specialist post-graduate students. But because of the way research encourages specialisation, it has in many ways made universities less exciting for undergraduates.

When we make our list of the qualities of a well-educated person — I hope that we still think in those terms — I think that we must admit that in some important respects contemporary graduates are not as well educated as in earlier generations. It now takes longer to become well educated; it now takes much more effort to keep up with the growth of knowledge.

Perhaps life was not meant to be easy — at least not since Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil — but all university graduates should find excitement in the continuing adventure of ideas. That is one of the great virtues of higher education and it will become a still greater virtue as new technologies reduce still further annual working hours and the age of retirement.

SETTING PRIORITIES IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH: NATIONAL TESTING IS A COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE CONTRIBUTION IN THE EDUCATIONAL TASK

Peter J. Fensham
Faculty of Education,
Monash University

In 1979 a high level committee of educationists' concluded that a national testing programme of student performance was not in the best interest of Australia's schools or school age children. About the same time, I understand that a group of Directors-General of Education from the states and territories also held a position of opposition to such a programme. A number of parent and teacher bodies have over the past few years, affirmed views that would suggest that such testing was not a helpful priority on which to expend resources. The Director of the Curriculum Development Centre affirmed this opinion in that national body's 1979 report.

On the other hand, some employer groups have expressed concern at the absence of such explicit checks on the performance levels of children in the nation's schools — a feeling echoed by the Australian Council for Educational Standards and several less organised community voices.

The practical experience with such testing is similarly divided. Some quite detailed, nationwide testing in mathematics and science was carried out in the late 1960s and early 1970s by ACER as part of the multi-national studies of International Educational Achievement*. These findings were given very little publicity outside scholarly writings and there is, I believe, no evidence that there was any marked response from state authorities or schools to either the strengths or the weaknesses that these "voluntary" testings revealed. In 1975 ACER carried out a survey, usually called the Literacy/Numeracy Survey[2] at the suggestion of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties. Its findings have received considerable publicity and, though limited to specific areas, they have had some effect on schooling though no attempts to evaluate this effect have yet been reported.

Despite what seems to me to be, on balance, a professional judgment against national testing and the past poor record of educational response to such findings, Australia does now have a major development in this field. The Australian Education Council (State and Commonwealth Ministers of Education advised by their Directors-General, etc.) decided to establish, late in 1979, the National Study of Basic Skills (Australian Studies of Student Performance). It looks as if we now may be in for at least four years of testing of samples of 10 and 14 year olds in each state together with a considerable programme developing a range of other tests — a consequential activity which, as I indicate below, seems to be a common and sad by-product of national testing programmes.

Both the National Study and the other test development programmes require the willing participation of educational researchers and teachers with high levels of particular skills. Without their willing participation there would be no national study despite the ministerial decision in the AEC. Accordingly, nationwide testing raised a number of interesting issues quite apart from the consequences for schools, teachers and pupils to which I refer below. Some educators with the appropriate skills would feel morally unable to participate in such a programme because of their assessment of the research evidence. Others clearly have come to a different conclusion. In order to appreciate the perplexity of this field of moral choice for skilled researchers and teachers it is important multifaceted perspectives of nationwide testing become available. Too often it is promoted or rejected on over-simplistic arguments. Without such a broad perspective we may find ourselves involved in, or responding to it without an adequate basis or defence. This paper attempts to raise a number of issues. Most of these issues can, I believe, be well supported from earlier practices here and from the experience of such testing studies in the U.S.A. and Britain.

Political Aspects

As soon as one learns of the strong political influence in the establishment of the National Study, it is not hard to realise that, as in the other two countries, a national programme of testing is an important mechanism of defence for those politicians (like Ministers of Education) whose reputations can be easily sullied by criticisms (of whatever foundation) of the school systems under their care. In Australia's federal scene, such national monitoring sounds as if the operation of schooling is being carefully controlled and checked. Its findings are likely to be both too general for much blame to be located in particular

* These testings, although nationwide, can be sharply distinguished from those now proposed since they were initiated from outside Australia, and in no sense represented authority structures that had influence in Australia.

states and on such a time scale that they will not impose early survival threats. Even if they were to be taken as serious and valid measures of something educationally important, overall they can only either deteriorate, improve or remain static. If the first, the study itself can be used to say, "we have the matter in hand" (reformist government); if the second, "we deserve credit" (political renewal); and if static, "look at our record" (stable government).

If the testing programme could be contained to these trivial political defence mechanisms, then we could deplore its costs in funds and expert educational resources, but basically get on, or let others get on, with the real tasks that, goodness knows, do beset our schools if they are really going to optimise for each child the learning opportunities compulsory schooling present.

Alas, there are many seemingly inevitable consequences of national testing programmes that do affect schools and society and, I believe, more adverse ones than positive ones. To give some scope to a debate, I wish to mention briefly seven rather different effects. These are: I. Obscures Real Social Problems, II. Locates a Problem on the Weakest Participants, III. Distorts Education, IV. Confuses Symptoms with Remedies, V. Poses a Threat to Schools, VI. Misuses Testing and Hinders its Proper Use, VII. Removes Initiative from Teachers.

A Real Problem for Concern

However, before turning to these aspects, let me state very clearly my own concern about the learning of essential skills in schools. The education systems of Australia, and we who labour within them, miss so many opportunities and fail so many children that there is nothing to be complacent about. When we think about the complexities of the world in the years ahead, with their energy crises, their multi-cultural realities, and their confusing technological and human imperatives, the improvement of schooling's performance is a problem of immense urgency.

Concern about essential skills can be simply stated. The great majority of children enter school with little or no ability to read, to calculate, to appreciate historical information, to use the knowledge and methods of science, or to do and be aware of many other things. We may recognise that schools are only one of the educative sources for developing these abilities in a society like Australia. Nevertheless, the investment in schools of time, money and human and material resources is so substantial that most people do expect them to make a major contribution to many of these sorts of learning. Unfortunately, it is clear that a number of Australia's young persons leave school after 9–12 years of its experiences, having made little progress with these and many other aspects of learning.

Most parents and many members of the general public know about the existence of these "failures of learning". Teachers and their students in the schools know only too well the details of their success and failure in assisting pupils to acquire these skills. What we know much less about — lay and professionals alike — is how to act so that there will be less about which to be concerned. At its best, a statewide testing programme will provide us with grand scale information about the occurrence of success and failure for a **small** number of these essential skills — a quantifying of some of what we already know, not a contribution to what we don't know.

Let us now turn to my list of less desirable aspects.

I. Obscures a Real Social Problem

Wide scale testing programmes seem to be born at times when there are crises in the structure of society. In Australia the feature of society that now seems to have heightened our concern about the failures of schooling is the novel (after nearly 50 years) experience of both rising unemployment and of misemployment after schooling. While the former is particularly associated with age groups who include the recent or less "successful" of our school leavers, the dissatisfactions of the latter apply to both "successful" and "unsuccessful" persons of much wider age groupings.

Five or ten years ago, the least "successful" products from our schools were able to find employment and the great bulk of them are still employed today. It is not this lack of educational success that has created the problem of unemployment. Its origin lies far more deeply embedded in the economic and social priorities that we have espoused as a nation. Greater educational success among these students would heighten the competition for too few jobs and increase the number of "successful" students experiencing dissatisfaction. It would not create jobs on the scale we now lack. A national testing programme has a tendency to identify schools and schooling as scapegoats for a problem that is not theirs, and hence to obscure us from seeing it for what it is and seeking the right sorts of more basic political and social solutions.

II. Locates a Problem on the Weakest Participants

The real concern about the learning of basic skills by pupils is that, at the end of intended learning experiences, so many pupils have not learnt. What we need to know is why our efforts — as teachers, or as educational planners, or as parents in support of schools — have failed. The answers to these failures will be revealed when we know more about teachers and their teaching, about planners and their planning, and about how parents (and society) help or hinder,

the efforts of schools. But the national testing programme is not going to focus on any of these essential determinants of what pupils learn. Teachers (particularly teacher unions), educational planners and parents are all "powerful" in some political sense or other. Pupils are not a "power" group, so the testing programmes focus on them and inevitably a degree of "blame" will begin to be associated.* That Australia, in the International Year of the Child, should have focused a testing programme on the "victims" of education and not on their "oppressors" is irony indeed. Furthermore, it is, as seems to be the case of the current Assessment of Performance in Britain, a well-intentioned exercise on the part of most if not all of the educators who are now involved.

III. Distortion of Education

It turns out that only a few of the "essential skills" that we might hope for in schooling are easily measurable (or measurable at all) by tests of the statewide type. Certainly we would hope that all students will emerge from school able to add simple numbers or to read the sorts of messages that confront them in later life. These are amenable to this type of testing although not as easily as they may seem. However, many people hope schooling will assist people with skills that enable them to confront their social and material environments with confidence, to appreciate historical origins, to be able to use simple scientific knowledge and procedures, etc., etc. Most of these other skills turn out to be very difficult (or impossible) to assess with accuracy by the statewide testing methods that are available or are easily administered. So they are omitted from such procedures. This leaves a testing programme which, by its very existence, confers a status of importance on a few skills, and by its neglect of the others, inevitably tends to downgrade their role and the efforts of teaching and learning in these latter areas.

IV. Confuses Symptoms with Remedies

Recently an Australian, Neil Bowman, carried out a fascinating study of the use of testing programmes in the U.S.A. where the practice has been much longer part of the scene. He chose an American school district near Chicago which had over a period of time had a more widespread and systematic testing programme than many others in the State of Illinois. Despite this very intensive programme that compiled ever larger dossiers on the students in these Chicago suburban schools, he could find little sign of the planning and teaching being affected. It turns out that "outcome" test data are not easy information to use. It is relatively easy to collect in various forms, but it does not tell us why the "failures" and "successes" of learning occur. It goes even less far in the matter of assisting schools and teachers as to what changes they should introduce to enhance success and reduce failure. As indicated above it is the interactions between teachers and pupils and the wider backgrounds of the latter that are the key elements. But testing programmes never, or rarely, seem to explore these. The new Australian Study, like the APU in Britain, has recognised that its broad survey data will not get at the "why" and "how" of improvement. However, unlike the unsuccessful attempt by the British group to survey teachers and parents, our study does not seem to even contemplate such supplementary data and rather, is encouraging the development of other less mandatory diagnostic and school progress tests still focused on the learners. Tests beget other tests, but how can we use only pupil symptoms to prescribe the cure?

V. Poses a Threat to Schools

In any education system, some schools have within them more pupils who achieve essential skills than do others. A substantial number will have achievements that are below any statewide average revealed by statewide testing. However, as we all know, some schools have more pupils from educationally advantaged homes, some have advantages of resources — teachers and facilities — and their higher than "average" level of achievers may, in fact, not reflect any better contribution by the school or its teachers to actual learning achievement.

The APU in England has tried to avoid the threat of "league tables" of schools by using "light sampling" in which neither whole school populations nor whole tests by single pupils are involved. However, there are already signs that regional educational authorities are embarking on their own test development and "heavy sampling" to "defend" themselves against the implication that will arise for them from the statewide results. When data exist, it will be hard to resist the pressures to produce the invidious and unreasonable "league tables" that have been mentioned with favour by a present British Minister of Education. Will Australia be able to control its test data and still make them usefully available?

VI. Misuses Testing and Hinders its Proper Use

The bureaucratic urge to which I have just referred has several other effects. It will consume, outside the schools, the energies and expertise of people who could, in my opinion, be of much greater service to the schools in working in and with them in other ways. There has also been a curious tendency in England during these early days of the APU for people like some inspectors of schools to seek to identify with such a centralised activity in education. This will inevitably alienate them still further from the schools — a serious enough problem already for some of their counterparts in this country.

* I understand the original name proposed for the survey was Australian Studies of School Performance. The change to Student Performance is significant with respect to this point.

It tends also to isolate the test development teams from other professionals (such as Curriculum Development Centre, subject associations, etc.) and from the bulk of teachers just at a time when a widely co-operative "development" exercise may indeed have merit.

Knowledge of achievement is an important part of learning. Thinking up such checks is an important part of teaching. Appropriate forms of testing are important tools that ought to be part of the equipment of teaching, and they should be increasingly available to teachers as they carry out their roles. To focus the testing expertise in Australia on statewide programmes administered from outside and at discontinuous intervals, will misuse "tests" as part of learning and teaching and make less likely their very proper use in these tasks that continuously confront teachers and their pupils.

VII. Removes Initiative from Teachers

Schools are established in Australia (as in most countries) and teachers employed in them with public (or private) funds and certain expectations that programmes of teaching will occur and that the pupils in them will learn and acquire essential skills among many other things. It is very reasonable to expect that there will be an account as to how, and how well these expectations are fulfilled. It is the teachers and administrators in individual schools who take the initiatives for teaching and learning, and it is they who should be expected and encouraged to take the initiative and responsibility to reflect and explain their efforts and achievements to their immediate and wider clienteles. In doing so they will also no doubt seek to harness constructive comment and support for renewed efforts on their part to achieve as broad a spectrum of learning as possible.

Statewide testing programmes are, by definition, constructed and administered by authorities and persons beyond the schools themselves. They result in these external authorities telling teachers (and/or a wider public) what has been achieved, by pupils in schools, groups of schools or regions of the state, with respect to a few tips of the very complex iceberg of learning in which schools are involved. This is quite the reverse to requiring schools and teachers to tell their members and the wider public what they are doing about the essential skills of learning, and how well they are achieving them in their students.

An Alternative Way Forward

I have tried in this paper to indicate some dangers and unfortunate consequences of associating essential skills and nation or statewide testing. However, I began with an affirmation that education, and schooling in particular, is seriously concerned with **essential skills.** What then might be the characteristics of a positive and helpful accountability about them for schools, and how can teachers behave with respect to their learners and to the wider society? It seems reasonable to me that schools and teachers should be required to provide an account of what they are achieving and how they are going about it. To some extent they are already doing this through such traditional ways as student reports, parents nights, annual reports of principals, etc., and some newer ones like boards of review. Examination of these, however, shows an unevenness and many gaps that make them difficult to use as component parts of a programme that is really trying to improve its performance. If we want positive accountability then it won't be enough merely to require and expect an account from the only people who can really provide it — the "insiders" themselves. External resources, instead of usurping the task, should be organised to assist the insiders to provide an account and in so doing to find ways to improve it. Assisting the insiders to identify such skills, advising on procedure, offering a range of tools for aspects of an account, developing particular abilities in the insiders, working with them on first attempts at preparing the account, finding out what information various audiences need and in what forms they can assimilate it, are just some of the ways outsiders can positively contribute to something we all want — the improved learning of essential skills.

REFERENCES

1. *National Assessment of Education Progress*, E.R.D.C. Report No. 26, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1980.
2. Bourke, S. F. and Keeves, J. P., *Australian Studies in School Performance, Vol. III., The Mastery of Literacy and Numeracy: Final Report*, E.R.D.C. Report No. 13, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1977.

REVIEWS

Selective Admissions in Higher Education

A Report of the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1977. Copy supplied by ANZ Book Co.

Entry Scores to Universities and Colleges of Advanced Education
C. A. Gibb

Canberra, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1980.

Fairness and efficiency, justice and merit, understanding and objectivity, and many other highly valued qualities of administration enter into discussion of admissions policies and selection procedures. As the Carnegie Council commented with reference to the American scene in the short first part of this volume the admirable ideals involved in setting admissions policies are not fully compatible with each other. The balanced overview they present clarifies some issues, and suggests priorities and means of combining if not reconciling competing emphases. They recommend a moderate degree of affirmative action for the increased participation by disadvantaged minority groups, but favour the use of grades and tests (or examinations) to establish the minimum level above which other criteria might be employed.

Much information is summarised and usefully applied to the analysis of current issues in the Parts 2 and 3 by three authors from Educational Testing Service (ETS). These reports together with a hundred pages of tables and notes in the Appendices comprise the major portion of the book. The first report by Winton H. Manning, "The Pursuit of Fairness in Admissions to Higher Education", is much influenced by concern with the educational issues raised by the *Bakke* case which was pending in the US Supreme Court at that time. If anything, Manning's analysis gains rather than loses by the eventual outcome of that case which upheld the California court's decision to rule out the special admissions programme of the University of California at Davis, but nevertheless favoured a less mechanistic policy of taking racial or minority group characteristics into account. Perhaps Manning's most useful contribution is his treatment of 'a two-stage model of the admissions process' in which he sets out the different types of evidence and the different procedures which are appropriate to the determination of admissibility and selection as distinct decisions.

In their report in Part 3 of the Carnegie volume, "The Status of Selective Admissions", Warren W. Willingham and Hunter M. Breland also address the issues surrounding the *Bakke* case, but not in such a way as to limit the generality of the treatment of policy and technical problems which are common to many countries. The great diversity of American secondary and tertiary education however, the virtual absence of joint admissions procedures, and the graduate level entry into professional schools, make the discussion of some specific processes less directly applicable to Australian conditions. There are separate chapters on selective undergraduate admissions (noting that about half of the admissions to undergraduate programmes are non-selective), and admissions to graduate schools of arts or sciences, law schools, medical schools and management schools. The extent to which American procedures employ subjective judgments of qualities assumed but not demonstrated to affect performance would trouble Australian admissions officers; similarly, one suspects that the often exclusive reliance upon academic performance measures for undergraduate admissions in Australian universities would raise serious questions for Americans. Nevertheless, we are now seeing, especially in Australian colleges (CAEs), much more flexible use of a range of evidence of an applicant's potential. The research work and arguments presented by the ETS team can provide a useful corrective to the tendency to depart too quickly from traditional procedures or to take up slogans with no factual basis. Their chapter on the 'use and limitations of selection measures' is probably the best available summary of the state of the art.

Professor Gibb's report to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) on entry scores for admission to Australian universities and CAEs is not concerned with the problem of how best to select students under conditions of competition, but with the means by which variations in entry scores as now most commonly used may be compared to discern changes in demand for places. The so-called "cut-off" score is recommended as the best index by which the competitiveness of entry to courses may be compared. Professor Gibb is careful to point out that this lower bound of the range of scores of "normal" entry students is not to be confused with a measure of average quality of intake, although it is correlated with it and often used for that purpose in discussion of relative standards. We are not able, from evidence presented in the report, to judge for ourselves the relative value of alternative indices of competition, because the summary statistics collected from state joint-admissions centres and from institutions, together with the tables of correlations to which the author refers, have been excluded from the published report. Both the general public and interested scholars have a genuine interest in the facts of the matter and it is a pity that we must take the findings on trust in this respect.

The Gibb report contains some evidence of reduced competition for entry to Australian institutions generally over the last two or three years. Perhaps it