

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Report of the Consultative Committee

on

Psychological Tests of Educable Capacity and their possible use in the public system of education



LONDON:

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PREFACE.

It will be remembered that when the Consultative Committee was reconstituted in July, 1920, the Board gave them two references. The first of these, upon the differentiation in curriculum between boys and girls in Secondary Schools, was discharged late in 1922, and the Report of the Committee has been for some time before the public. The second reference was in the following terms:—

“What use can be made in the public system of education of psychological tests of educable capacity?”

The Committee have now presented their Report upon this subject to the Board and the Board are arranging for its immediate publication.

In so doing they must not, of course, be understood as committing themselves to endorsement of the conclusions of the Committee or of the views stated by their officers in evidence before the Committee. They believe, however, that the full and thorough treatment accorded to the subject in this Report will afford valuable guidance to all those students of education—and there are many—who are anxious to pursue a topic, comparatively speaking so new, so intricate and so full of possibilities of error, yet so important; and they desire, in the name of the general body of teachers and administrators, to thank the Committee for the time and labour expended upon the work, including of course those distinguished men who, though not members of the Committee, agreed to serve on Dr. Adami's Sub-Committee, and who in that capacity rendered indispensable assistance in the preparation of the Report.

L. A. SELBY BIGGE.

June, 1924.

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Note.

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NAMES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CONSULTATIVE
COMMITTEE.

SIR W. H. HADOW, C.B.E. (*Chairman*).

MR. P. W. H. ABBOTT.

DR. J. G. ADAMI, C.B.E.

MR. S. O. ANDREW.

DR. ERNEST BARKER.

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REV. DR. D. H. S. CRANAGE.

THE RT. HON. LORD GORELL, C.B.E., M.C.

MR. IVOR H. GWYNNE.

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MR. P. R. JACKSON.

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DR. R. H. PICKARD.

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DR. R. P. SCOTT.

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MR. R. H. TAWNEY.

MR. W. W. VAUGHAN, M.V.O.

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MR. R. F. YOUNG (*Secretary*).

TERMS OF REFERENCE.

What use can be made in the public system of education of
psychological tests of educable capacity?

ANALYSIS OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

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INTRODUCTION.

On 29th July, 1920, the Board sent two References to the Consultative Committee, one on the differentiation of curricula, the other on the use of psychological tests in the general system of education throughout the country. For reasons which will be readily appreciated, the Committee took first the Reference on differentiation of curricula, spent about two years in its investigation, and reported in September, 1922. Meanwhile, realising that its second Reference was highly technical and would need much expert assistance and advice, it appointed a Sub-Committee of six of its members, with Dr. Adami as Chairman, and with power, subject to the approval of the President, to co-opt members from outside.¹ In this way it was fortunate enough to secure the services of Dr. P. B. Ballard, Dr. C. S. Myers, and Professor C. E. Spearman, who placed at its disposal their wide knowledge and sound judgment and to whose ungrudging help and co-operation it is very deeply indebted. Not less does it owe its cordial gratitude to Dr. Cyril Burt, who supplied it with evidence, who wrote for it some invaluable memoranda for Appendices IV, V, and VII, and whose work has influenced almost every page of our first chapter.

The Sub-Committee sat 13 times between October, 1920, and May, 1922, examined 19 witnesses, and received in addition many valuable pieces of written evidence from psychologists at home and abroad. On 25th May, 1922, it presented to the full Committee a report in which the evidence before it was digested and interpreted. This report the full Committee took as the basis of its work.

Since May, 1922, the full Committee has sat on 22 days, and has heard evidence from 18 witnesses, including the three experts who had served on the Sub-Committee and who very kindly came to explain and develop certain of the points raised in its Report. A number of additional memoranda, scientific, educational and statistical, have also been received and have been much utilised especially for the Appendices. Many members of the Committee have visited schools and institutions where the tests were in use in order to investigate at first hand the methods by which these are applied, marked and interpreted. They also visited the laboratories of Dr. Myers and Professor Spearman, and submitted themselves to experiment.

¹ See Clause 5 (ii) of the Order in Council, 22nd July, 1920.

From the outset the Committee decided to interpret the term "test of educable capacity," in its widest denotation (*see* Report, § 50); and after consideration of the evidence from all sides, came to the conclusion that only three types of tests, the so-called intelligence tests, standardised scholastic tests, and in a less degree, vocational tests were suitable for use in schools and other educational institutions as distinct from psychological laboratories. Even within these limits it appeared that the theory of mental testing has not advanced as yet beyond the stage of what may be called temporary stability. It would therefore be dangerous and misleading to lay down any dogmatic rules as to the uses and limitations of the various types, especially as, up to the present time, comparatively few systematic experiments in their use have been made through England and Wales, and there is consequently no large body of experience suitable to national conditions such as is available in the United States and in Germany. A *resumé* of the work that is being done in countries outside Great Britain is given in Appendix III.

We take this opportunity of thanking our witnesses for their evidence, much of which is very technical and must have taken great time and trouble to prepare. We regret that it is impossible to print the evidence in full, but we reproduce in Appendix IX the views of psychologists on the difficult question of testing for general and special abilities. Especially we would record our gratitude not only to the four distinguished psychologists whose names we have already cited, but to Mr. A. E. Twentyman, Librarian of the Board of Education, who prepared for us the valuable note on Grades in American Schools printed in Appendix VI, and to our Secretary, Mr. R. F. Young, whose unstinted labour has greatly helped us to thread the mazes of an abstruse and complicated problem.