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Jerome Axelrod  
*Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

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# READING AND EXTRANEOUS-FREE TESTS

*Jerome Axelrod*

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

An extraneous-loaded test is one which tests something other than or more than what the exam purports to test. A pupil's score on an extraneous-loaded test is unduly inflated or deflated because it allows him to bring to the testing situation data (i.e., experiences and previous learnings) which are unrelated to the test but which "help him out" (so the pupil thinks) with the answers. For example, if a student figures out the correct answer to a question in an objective reading comprehension test by using the process of elimination, then that question does not test reading comprehension. Instead, it reveals the pupil's use of logic, which is beside the point. An extraneous-free test is a culture-free test and more. It excludes everything which the child brings to the testing situation that can vitiate the test score via his use of external knowledge. For example, if a pupil is being tested in his knowledge of subject A and he can exploit only his knowledge of subject A to get the answers correct, he is taking an extraneous-free test. But if he applies his knowledge of subject B, the exam becomes extraneous-loaded. While it is true that not all extraneous-free tests are good, it is also true that all extraneous-loaded tests are bad. Any test is bad if it does not test *only* what it is supposed to.

Following are some examples of extraneous loaded elements that have crept into various published phonics and reading comprehension materials and into teacher-made tests. Any phonics inventory that uses meaningful words instead of nonsense syllables in testing vowels and consonants is extraneous-loaded because the child may have previously learned these words in a spelling lesson, from a television show, and elsewhere. In the Botel Phonics Mastery Test (1966) words like "budge," "fad," "tab," "dude," "hub," and "leash" are used, all words most children are familiar with verbally if not graphically. Thus, even before the test begins, it is invalid. One remedy to this situation is in using sounds the student has never heard or seen before in his life, like "bext," "froob," and "tump." In this case, the pupil has only his phonics knowledge to rely on in the test.

One type of extraneous-loaded test is the culture-loaded exam which often appears in reading comprehension books. One culture-

loaded story from an SRA kit (1963) goes something like this: "Every night we hear 'Silent Night,' 'Jingle Bells,' and other familiar songs on radio and television programs. This reminds us that it is almost A—Easter, B—Halloween, C—Christmas, D—Thanksgiving." This story is not culture-free because only good readers from *selected* cultures would get the answer right. A good culture-free test is one that is pancultural and transcultural in that good readers from *every* culture in the world could get the answer correct. A good pancultural question would be: "After listening to her son Jerry sing in the choir, the woman realized that he had a wonderful A—mind, B—voice, C—sister, D—idea." This question truly tests only comprehension in that a good reader need not belong to a particular culture or subculture to arrive at the correct response.

Another form of extraneous-loaded test is the knowledge-loaded one. This is a test in which the reader can figure out the answer only by knowing certain facts which he must bring into the testing situation from the outside because these facts are never mentioned or implied in the story. For example, in one unit from McCall-Crabbs Standard Test Lessons in Reading (1950) (which is too lengthy to reprint here) the question is asked: "The attacking ship in this story belonged to which country? A—England, B—France, C—Germany, D—Italy." The answer, Germany, was never even mentioned in the story by name. The only way the reader could have gotten the answer correct was to know beforehand that the word "Bismarck" is associated with Germany. If he did not know this fact beforehand, he would have had to make a lucky, wild guess in order to get the answer right.

The visual and mental-loaded test is one which depends on the pupil's interpretation of the teacher's facial expression to yield answers. Teachers, in their eagerness to elicit from their students correct responses to questions based on their previous teachings, often give away answers by frowning, smiling, changing voice pitch or doing anything but appearing neutral in these verbal examinations.

A final type of extraneous-loaded reading comprehension test is one in which the teacher, ignorant of the consequences, advises the pupils to rely on non-reading skills to arrive at correct answers. In this situation, the teacher does not really want to measure reading achievement, but wants, instead, to see high scores. Advice given by the teacher to his pupils might include instructions like these: "Remember, if you do not know the answer to one of these multiple choice questions, look at the other choices. If they seem wrong to you, select the answer that is left." Or worse: "Keep in mind that

if you leave an answer blank, it is automatically wrong. If you do not have any idea of the answer, put anything down. In this way you have some chance of getting the answer right." In the first case, reading comprehension is not being tested. The pupils' use of logic is. In the second case, nothing is being tested. The best advice a teacher can give a pupil before taking a reading test is: "If you are not sure of an answer, do not put any answer down. If you are fairly sure of an answer, weigh in your mind if it is worth guessing at and decide from that point. You are penalized for wrong answers."

In conclusion, the teacher should decide from the outset of a lesson what it is she will want to test afterwards. If she chooses to test reading skills, she must make sure she tests that, nothing more and nothing instead.

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