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Accountability

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Editorial Comment

ACCOUNTABILITY

Parents and taxpayers are beginning to apply the word accountability in their appraisal of achievement in the classrooms of the nation. In some school systems reading tests are employed to determine whether or not a fee will be paid to a contractor providing instructional services. If an increment occurs between initial and final test scores, the company receives its remuneration. If there is no gain, there is no pay. Accountability for growth is the essence of the agreement.

Reading is an integration of skills carried on to accomplish a purpose and is not an accumulation of subject matter such as literature and mathematics. Tests of reading measure specific skills which are only a part of the whole reading process. Ability to read for pleasure and for the appreciation of the various image modalities is not considered by test makers. Many individuals identify themselves with personalities in the story, and their behavior is modified by this relationship. Reading is an aspect of the individual's way of life and is not easily evaluated. In fact, some individuals *can* read but they *do not* read. What consideration is given by testers to this fact? Many students score high on a test of reading and yet are unable to make effective use of textbooks, for example, in science and the social studies. Furthermore, an increment manifest by test scores is not always statistically significant. Again, spurious gains are apparent if the teachers have "taught to the test." Contracting companies are creating the illusion that reading can be effectively measured by a single test which is free from placebo and Hawthorne effects. Such a narrow concept of reading and its measurement is quite insufficient.

Accountability has been lacking in education. As many teachers have stressed socialization and have "lived with their children," or have taught children about reading, little emphasis has been upon the child, his reading needs and his remediation. Promotion is not always based upon achievement nor is graduation at any level solely dependent upon the acquisition of specific basic skills. In many instances progress from grade to grade has been due to consideration of "seniority" and social adjustment of the student rather than to specific academic attainments. American parents and taxpayers want their

money to be spent wisely. They want results certified as to quantity and quality. In their purchase of consumer goods such as food and drugs, parents are protected by standards and requirements which are vigorously maintained. They are now expecting the schools to set forth similar standards at all levels and to be accountable to a greater degree for the reading growth of their children.

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Editor