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Round Robin

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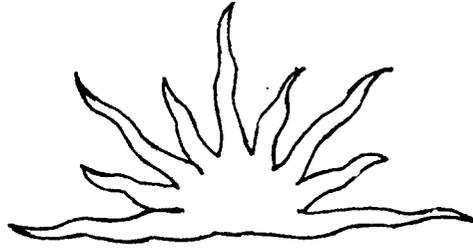
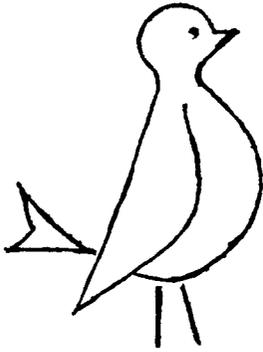


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ROUND ROBIN

Dorothy E. Smith, Editor

Dear Readers,

Your editor is departing from the usual contents of Round Robin in order to share with you an article which appeared in the Chicago Tribune on January 29, 1970. The title was, "Chicago Pupils Lag Far Behind National Norms in Tests," by Peter Negronida, and the lead-in to the article was as follows:

Here are the highlights of 1968-69 test scores for the Chicago public schools, presented to the board of education yesterday:

1. On a city-wide basis, the city's school children fell further behind national test norms than they had been before.
2. On a school-by-school basis, white schools had markedly higher test scores than black schools.
3. School officials cited lack of money, inexperienced teachers, and socio-economic factors as reasons for the discouraging results.
4. Supt. James F. Redmond indicated that school principals might be judged on how well their pupils learn.

Tests focused mainly on reading and other verbal skills, and on arithmetic, and were administered to students in the first, third, sixth, eighth, ninth and eleventh grades. In all but one grade level they fell below the national median of 50 in reading scores, and their percentile ranks ranged from the 45th percentile to the 28th. During the year '66-'67 the children were below the national average, but they slipped even farther behind last year.

Interestingly enough, there was one group which surpassed the national average, and this was the first grade children. They measured up to the 56th percentile. How they lose their impetus and begin to decline while attending successive grades, merits some study.

In general, predominantly white schools had higher scores than predominantly black schools, although there were four elementary schools with 90% or higher black enrollment who topped the national average, and thereby topped significantly the city wide average.

All of the above facts deserve intensive study by educators, and another fact which emerged has what might be even greater potential interest: The one brightest spot was in the performance of four federally funded child-parent education centers specializing in intensive education for pre-school through second grade children. They all had first grade reading readiness scores above the city-wide average, and two of the four topped the national average. The people involved were predominantly black, and in the low socio-economic group.

Aside from all of this important information, there is an ethical or professional question arising from the testing program, and the publishing of the results. The fourth point listed at the beginning of this article states that school principals might be judged on how well their pupils learn. Do you agree that this would be a reasonable criterion? Should each school system, or each teacher for that matter be judged by standardized tests that are "plugged into" the national percentile ranking for those same tests? Would you, as a teacher feel this was fair? Would you, then, happily accept a job in a school system which had many disadvantaged children? If you did, might you be tempted to "teach to the tests"?

Pertinent to testing considerations is the Editorial at the beginning of this magazine. The editors would be most interested in hearing your views on this subject. We will be glad to share your thoughts with our readers in the next issue of *Reading Horizons*.