

## VI

## THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

## MEASUREMENT OF CLASSROOM PRODUCTS

Perhaps the chief value of Mr. Courtis's report lies not in the inferences he draws regarding the work of the Gary Public Schools so much as in the critical discussions of the various measuring devices employed in making the survey of Gary's schools. Mr. Courtis's outstanding position among the exponents of scientific measurements insures for his opinions a widespread interest.

Realizing that the accumulation of a body of experiences and principles sufficiently accurate to be veracious is a slow process, he has been steadily engaged in measurement work and has seen the old derision of scientific measurements replaced by confidence—and sometimes, unfortunately, by gullibility. "The testing movement," he says, "has now reached a stage in which a critical study of the validity of the results secured may be both interesting and beneficial"; and it is this study which distinguishes the present volume from the seven other parts in which the general Education Board has published its recent survey of the Gary schools.

The subjects covered by tests were reading, writing, arithmetic, English composition, and spelling.

The tests have been summarized as follows:

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Writing</i>	<i>Arithmetic</i>
Oral	Cleveland	Series B
Gray	Free-choice	Four Operations
Silent	Dictation	
Kansas		Cleveland
Courtis	Composition	Multiplication
Trabue		Fractions
<i>English Composition</i>		<i>Spelling</i>
Original story		Cleveland List Tests
Reproduction of story		Dictation Tests
		Composition Test

It should be observed that the Ayres Handwriting Scale was used in scoring each of the three handwriting tests, which are really only samples of handwriting obtained under different circumstances. For instance, the compositions written in the Composition

Tests were also scored for handwriting, and thus serve as a check on the results of the free-choice and dictation scores. In like manner the Ayres Spelling Scale served as the basis for scoring spelling results as obtained under three different sets of conditions.

No attempt was made to measure oral composition, and the testing was limited to the simplest form of written composition, narration. The quality of these compositions was then measured by means of the Hillegas Scale. The method of marking the papers has been explained in detail, since, as Courtis says, this scale cannot be used effectively without training. It is pointed out that Hillegas scores mean just one thing, the degree of merit possessed by the composition as a composition, and entirely apart from any consideration of the age or grade of the pupil. Courtis explains how his scorers were trained in the use of the Hillegas Scale before any of the Gary compositions were measured. He includes in this chapter an analysis of the Hillegas scale which has much merit and grows out of the thesis that development of ability in English composition passes through three phases: (1) mastery of the mechanics of writing, (2) development of organization of subject matter, and (3) development of literary merit. The lack of literary merit makes a composition uninteresting to read, the lack of organization makes it tiresome to read, the lack of mechanical proficiency makes it difficult to read. It is suggested that these three phases represent loosely in the Hillegas Scale the following qualities: mechanics, 0 to 29; organization, 30 to 69; literary merit, 70 to 99.

Courtis has chosen from the Gary compositions a set of samples which themselves constitute a composition scale, similar in general plan to the Nassau County scale worked out by Trabue in connection with the Nassau County (N. Y.) Survey.

The chapter on Reading contains a valuable analysis of the various abilities which are included in the indefinite word *reading*. Tests have been devised for at least seven of these abilities, and Courtis mentions four more ways in which "ability to read" may be interpreted. Courtis considers Thorndike's Scale Alpha 2 the best silent reading test, but for reasons not stated the Kansas Silent Reading Test was used. This is said to measure the ability to "read and understand, and to think or reason about what is read." Thorndike's

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Alpha 2 measures the ability "to read again and again (study) until one has mastered the contents of a passage so that one can answer questions about it or use the information in solving problems."

Gray's Oral Reading Scale measures skill in oral reading, only so far as that skill is defined as "ability to pronounce words correctly and in proper sequence." Although it measures neither expression nor understanding, in Courtis's opinion, "Gray's Scale is one of the most satisfactory of the various measuring scales, and is probably as perfect as it can be made on the basis of present knowledge." That children must be measured individually is a drawback because of time requirements, but this necessity is inherent in any test of oral reading.

The Trabue Language Scales are classed with reading tests because reading ability is one factor in determining a child's score, but the author points out that neither the Trabue Scales nor the Kansas Silent Reading Test measures directly any single product of classroom teaching.

The necessity in both tests for the exercise of much initiative, judgment, and reasoning ability in addition to the ability to read and understand the material of the tests probably accounts for the high correlation with results from the Binet-Simon and other tests of general intelligence.

It is interesting to note that of the five special activities in which measurements were made only arithmetic is not in the province of the teacher of English. Composition, reading, and spelling are fundamental parts of English teaching, and writing bears intimately on the work aimed at by the teacher of English. The Gary studies show that, contrary to the general belief that English in its various phases is an indefinite and highly theoretical subject not lending itself to any practical measurement, the English teacher in fact more than the teacher of any other subject has the advantage of definite and practical measuring devices.

This fact bears out the statement advanced in the report of the committee on Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools (U. S. Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1917, No. 2) that "the relation of language to the expanding life is so close and intimate that to drop the systematic practice of speaking, writing, and reading at any point in the

school program would be like ceasing to exercise or to take food. English is unique in its relation to mental development and to the constant enlivening and reorganization of the pupil's whole life experience on ever-higher planes, with ever-widening horizon."

A list of words misspelled in eighth grade compositions at Gary is included in the reports as Chapter IV, Appendix A. This list is of practical value to graded school teachers, as is also the study analyzing the vocabularies of eighth grade compositions, in Chapter VII. Chapter IX contains a detailed explanation of the method followed in scoring the attempts of children to reproduce a story which they have read silently. This is a new measuring device, used for the first time in the Gary survey. The author's convictions regarding the effects of maturity and training on the scores of children form an interesting chapter, and Appendix A is concluded with a clear treatment of "statistical terms and methods."

Appendix B answers a widespread need by offering detailed directions for giving the various tests, and by showing illustrations of actual papers written by children, of answers and score cards, and of tabulation sheets.

No doubt many teachers now looking forward to the supplementary report on measurements of classroom products made as a part of the Virginia School Survey and soon to be published, will wish to examine the Gary report by Mr. Courtis. A careful study now of the Gary report will prepare Virginia teachers for a surer comprehension of the statistics presented and the conclusions reached in the measurement of accomplishments in Virginia's schoolrooms.

CONRAD T. LOGAN

#### BE OF GOOD CHEER

The redbird sings: "Good cheer! good cheer!  
Take courage for the coming year,  
For faithful spring is very near.

"It will not always rain and blow;  
It will not always snow and snow;  
'God's in his Heaven'—this I know."

MADGE BRYAN