

# THE VIRGINIA TEACHER

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## I

### TEACHING READING, ARITHMETIC, SPELLING AND HANDWRITING IN VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

One hears our public schools alternately praised and condemned nowadays, depending upon whether the speaker is of "the powers that be" or of the powers that "would be". Strange to say these authorities seem seldom to get at the crux of the matter. They discuss school taxation, supervision school politics, overhead expense, the participation of the community in school administration, and a host of other more or less pertinent and interesting problems. A just estimate of our schools is to be found, however, mainly in some accurate and scientific measurement of the results of our educational efforts especially as they are manifested in the achievements of the children being educated in our schools. After all, it is largely a question of to how many children we teach in the right manner the right things. This at least is a safe point of departure for a dissertation on our schools.

How well do we teach the common school branches? How well are reading, spelling, handwriting and arithmetic taught? These questions are answered for us accurately and scientifically, as far as present-day means for such measurements will permit, in the report of the Survey Staff of the Virginia Education Commission, issued by the World Book Company as Volume VIII, Educational Survey Series<sup>1</sup>.

Quoting the Survey Staff, we find as regards reading:

The children in the best Virginia city schools read as well as average

<sup>1</sup>*Virginia Public Schools, Part II: Educational Tests*, by M. E. Haggerty and others. Yonkers, N. Y.: World Book Company. 1921. 235 pages. (\$2.40).

children of the same age in Northern and Western cities.

The rural children are . . . . . from one year to a year and a half behind where they should be for their ages as compared with the pupils outside of Virginia.

The colored city pupils are one and a half years behind the city white pupils in reading achievement.

The reading achievement of colored children in rural schools, age and grade considered, is very low. The pupils are greatly overage and read poorly.

In regard to arithmetic we find:

Virginia city children at the end of elementary school are less efficient in the fundamentals of arithmetic than the Woody standards require and less efficient than the children in most of the good schools throughout the country where the Woody tests have been given.

The rural schools make a poorer showing than do the city schools in the fundamentals of arithmetic.

The city and rural colored schools make lower scores than corresponding types of white schools, and the greater age of the pupils indicates a greatly inferior product.

Spelling is no better taught than are reading and arithmetic, for we note:

Certain city white schools meet the standard attainment of typical American city systems, but as a group the Virginia city schools average two years behind the standard attainment of pupils in typical eight-grade city systems and white pupils.

The poorest Virginia rural colored schools average almost four years behind the standard attainment of pupils in typical eighth-grade city systems and almost two years behind the city white schools in Virginia.

We find little consolation in the handwriting situation, for the Survey Staff reports:

In handwriting the Virginia city white children average one year short of

the Starch standards at the end of the elementary school.

The rural four-teacher white schools are about three years below the Starch standards at the end of the elementary school.

The one-teacher white schools fall short of the four-teacher schools by about one year of progress.

The colored pupils in rural schools achieve results inferior to the scores of white pupils.

Colored pupils in city schools average a year's progress above that of white pupils in corresponding schools. In general they are about one year older.

Without burdening the reader with further details of the findings of the Survey Staff, it appears safe to draw certain conclusions from the report, provided one keeps in mind several pertinent facts, viz: First, that the work of the seven years in the elementary schools of Virginia is compared with the achievement in eight grade elementary schools in cities of the North and West; Second, that the achievement in our rural schools is compared with these same standards derived from the work of pupils in city eight-grade elementary schools, affording no comparison of the product of our rural schools with the product of rural schools in other states; Third, the achievement of our own negro pupils is compared with that of white pupils making it difficult to determine how much importance should be attached to racial differences in native intelligence and how much to differences in the quality of instruction; Fourth, it is questionable whether the primary reading tests were properly standardized.

Certain significant conclusions, however, are inescapable. First, the achievement of the pupils in our city schools is decidedly superior to that of our rural pupils, offering convincing evidence that we cannot yet claim the realization of the democratic ideal of equal educational opportunity for all the children of Virginia.

Second, the product of our elementary schools as far as achievement in reading, arithmetic, spelling and handwriting is concerned, is superior, in our consolidated rural schools of four rooms or more, to that of the one, two or three room schools, although the differences in the products of our one, two and three room schools are not significant.

Third, the four common school branches mentioned above, whatever the causes may scientifically, as far as present-day means for

be, are taught more effectively in the Northern and Western cities than they are in the elementary schools of Virginia.

Fourth, we are forced to question seriously whether we are pursuing a wise policy in maintaining an elementary school of seven years instead of one of eight years as found in the North and West. This problem, of course, is complicated by other questions of the relative values of certain subject matter and school activities but the achievements of the white pupils in the two Virginia eight-grade city systems of Norfolk and Harrisonburg are so strikingly superior to those of the seven-grade Virginia city systems that we are forced into the foregoing consideration. In reading, as shown by the Thorndike Scale Alpha 2, eighth grade pupils in Norfolk are not only superior to seventh grade pupils in other Virginia cities but also exhibit "higher scores for grade eight than any city outside of Virginia except those of Indiana". The report says "Norfolk with her eight-grade system has a uniformly excellent record with the exception of that for the upper fifth grade." "In Norfolk the grade scores for the entire city show that pupils in grade six read with an understanding exceeding the expectation for grade eight, . . ." "Norfolk makes the best record of the eight cities, on the basis of the fact that she has the highest score oftener than any other city, and that her second-half-year classes equal or exceed the standard scores in five out of six grades". "An additional fact of interest is that the pupils in Norfolk who make the highest scores are grade for grade a year younger than the pupils in the other seven cities."

The pupils of the eight-grade elementary schools of Harrisonburg were measured only in achievement in arithmetic, but it is significant that the Survey Staff reports that "The median scores made by Harrisonburg pupils in almost every grade and in each process tested reach the standards set by Woody and in several cases exceed the standards. There is no other Virginia city here considered which makes the same consistently high record, and only in a few cases in cities other than Harrisonburg have the Woody standards been reached or exceeded."

The report, in addition to giving the facts in regard to our work in the above mentioned fundamental school subjects, also gives a series of recommendations for changes to correct the

situation revealed by the tests as follows: "(a) the passage of an effective compulsory education law; (b) the lengthening of the school term to a one-hundred-eighty-day minimum; (c) improvement in the qualifications of teachers; (d) the increase of supervision, particularly of the rural schools; (e) a reduction of the one-room schools wherever possible in favor of consolidation; (f) the restriction of one-room schools to five grades; (g) improvement in the classification of children; (h) the organization of special classes for backward and superior children; (i) the employment of standard educational tests in measuring the progress of children and the efficiency of instruction; (k) the creation in the State Department of a bureau of educational investigation; (l) the creation of similar bureaus in all city and non-city divisions where conditions permit."

The first three of these recommendations, if carried into effect, will leave little to be done elsewhere, as the right kind of teacher with the pupil for a sufficient length of time will usually produce the desired results.

(In a succeeding issue of THE VIRGINIA TEACHER the writer will endeavor to go into a more detailed study of the findings of the Survey Staff.)

S. P. DUKE

## II

### EDUCATIONAL TESTS

#### IN THE SUMMER TRAINING SCHOOL

In connection with a class in educational tests and measurements given in the summer session of the Harrisonburg State Normal School, and enrolling about a score of students, tests were given widely throughout the Training School. The study covered reading, arithmetic, and intelligence. These are undoubtedly the more significant features of a testing program and a great deal of interest has been shown throughout the country in the test known as the Illinois Examination, published by the Bureau of Educational Research, Urbana, Illinois, which combines tests in these three matters in one folder.

The judgment of the class following the testing was that great good in diagnosis can be derived from the Woody Arithmetic Tests and that the Monroe Silent Reading Tests, the Haggerty Intelligence Tests for the pri-

mary grades, and the National Intelligence Tests for grammar grades, are satisfactory, usable and practical tests. The class judgment as to the Haggerty Primary Reading Examination was equally decisive but negative. This test proved too difficult for second graders, requiring long periods of concentration and explanation that were too complex to be held in mind by such young pupils. The result was that about half of the pupils tested made zero scores, altho these tests were given with more than usual care and preparation, and although these same pupils made fair scores in the Haggerty Intelligence Examination.

One additional result of this work is the fact that two members of the class, Misses Bertie Nicholson and Elizabeth Grubb, have been appointed a committee to undertake intelligence testing in the second grade in the Norfolk schools under the direction of the primary supervisor, Miss Saunders.

#### NEW TESTS

Among the newer tests are the Courtis Standard Practice Tests in Handwriting<sup>1</sup> and the Otis Primary Intelligence Scale<sup>2</sup>. The Courtis practice tests in arithmetic have been one of the teacher's finest assets in that subject in obtaining rapid progress and a high grade of habit attainment in the fundamental processes. It is to be hoped that a similar service will be rendered by these tests in handwriting, inasmuch as this subject has been one in which achievement has seemed to bear little relation to the time and effort given to it. Besides the tests, the materials include a Teacher's Manual, a Student's Lesson Book, giving explanations and information valuable to the pupil, a Student's Daily Record Card with a Graph Blank to encourage him in making progress and measuring it, and a Class Record Sheet.

The Advanced Intelligence Examination by Otis has given such general satisfaction that the Primary Intelligence Examination is assured a place among the high grade elementary tests. In fact the Teacher's Manual gives preliminary standards developed thru a large amount of testing already done.

<sup>1</sup>Courtis Standard Practice Tests in Handwriting by S. A. Courtis and Lena Shaw. Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co. 1921.

<sup>2</sup>Primary Examination: Otis Intelligence Scale, by Arthur S. Otis. Yonkers-on-Hudson: World Book Co. 1920.