

## Time for a new attitude on assessing aptitude

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level of language competencies from non-English grounds."

It has documented the non-English speaking living in Australia each year. Little is known who seek to enter the those who wish to pursue trade courses begun in country. No statistics are available on the participation by age of adult "on-arrival" and English courses. How many have arrived in Australia are and took part in the government's school-to-work program is also unknown and no examined the education needs of recently arrived migrants, compared with those in Australia for leaving by ethnic background. It appears not to have been education authorities,



grant miner keeps unlikely to receive in English.

research on immigrants has overlooked the immigrants, particularly young ones in transition and work, and provide a base for program implementation,

is a dearth of statistics on many aspects of what data has been put up the disadvantage. In school, for have shown that children language other than English are less likely to be socially, tend to fall more likely to be isolate themselves as able to cooperate significantly assessed by their remedial help with their work.

Overseas born migrants, disproportionately employed, account-

for, training, skills or experience. The unemployment rate among new arrivals to Australia is currently running at about three times the figure for the Australian-born, and the rate for migrant women is much higher again.

Lack of English also makes it even harder for new migrants to find their way through Canberra's bureaucratic maze of financial allowances, benefits and assistance available to those wanting to learn the language. Four Commonwealth departments administer up to 10 different assistance schemes, from double orphan pensions to junior secondary bursaries from living allowances for students in full-time courses, to the unemployment benefit.

But inconsistencies in the administration of the schemes abound. Unemployment benefits, for example, are withdrawn if a migrant undertakes full-time intensive training in a language centre in a school system. Although a living allowance equivalent to the dole is paid to students participating in the adult migrant education programme no similar assistance is available to younger students at language centres.

Between 1978 and 1981, more than 38,000 young Vietnamese from 10 to 19 years settled in Australia. Many were supposed to be under the guardianship of a relative or friend but this relationship often proved tenuous and broke down shortly after arrival, leaving hundreds of adolescents to fend for themselves.

Another 9,000 Vietnamese aged 20 to 24 years arrived during the same period and many were single people with tertiary entry or partly completed tertiary studies. They were prepared to attend school or other secondary courses in order to qualify for tertiary entrance in Australia. Income support was essential but, according to the report, many were not eligible for any study assistance or the dole.

The federal report makes clear that immigrants – young ones especially – have had and will continue to have a valuable impact on Australian society, not least as an important component in population management for changing the age profile. Immigration of young people and children has effectively retarded the aging of the Australian population, the report states. Immigration contributed 60 per cent of Australia's postwar population growth and tended to do so in younger age groupings.

The contribution young migrants can make to the Australian economy is likely to be greater if they can complete secondary education, develop their skills and realize their educational and career potential, the writers of the report argue. Any investment in them in terms of their participation in adequate education and English language programmes should be offset against savings made on the cost to the Australian government of their education prior to immigration.

The report calls for: the collection of much more information; the coordination of English language programmes; more support for migrants whose English is poor and more financial help to 15 to 24-year-olds who wish to complete secondary schooling.

Increased opportunities for intensive, English tuition for all non-English speaking immigrants and refugee youth; greater use of bilingual programmes in schools, transition courses, technical and further education courses; greater recruitment of multilingual staff as teachers and teacher-aides to work with newly arrived immigrant and refugee young people.

Education authorities to encourage teachers to pursue second and other language studies through course work and travel by providing study leave and leave without pay and giving credits to teachers who do so.

Like the 1978 Galbally report which reviewed post-arrival programmes and services for migrants, this latest report is full of good ideas and strong arguments. Publication of the Galbally report persuaded the federal government to pump \$10m extra into migrant education programmes between 1979 and 1981. The latest Canberra report does not put a figure on how much more is now needed. But it does give an indication of just how much remains to be done.

Recently, on a visit to Japan, I became more aware of the "Cram Schools" that have grown up to prepare secondary school graduates for university entrance examination. This is serious business not only for the people who run the companies but equally so for students. In Japan, perhaps even more than in other industrialized nations, gaining access to a ranking public university is a ticket to a secure and prestigious future while failing to do so means restricted options.

In the United States, too, there is a flourishing test preparation industry. It is built around helping secondary students get ready for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) – our most widely used school-college transition examination. How much good the preparation actually does is open to question. Even so, many of our more affluent students are eager to gain competitive advantage.

Several weeks ago education secretary Terrel H. Bell released the average SAT scores for the various states, suggesting that this was a measure of the overall quality of the schools within the states. What was overlooked was the dramatic difference in the number of students taking the tests from one state to another. In New York, for example, 61 per cent of students take the SAT, while in Iowa it is 3 per cent. And even the best testing experts differ on the meaning of scores to measure something as slippery as aptitude of large groups of students from differing social and economic circumstances.

But all of this raises a far more important issue: how should we evaluate the students and how can we better help all students as they move from school to work and further education?

During our own study of secondary education in America, we found that the SAT was the most important and traumatic experience of many students. They seemed to feel (not as intensely as students in Japan perhaps) that their future depended on that single test, which often is not the case. Today, the majority of American higher learning institutions are not highly selective, and there are few that use the SAT as the primary criterion for choosing students.

The irony is that the SAT was not created to measure the quality of the schools. Rather, when the Scholastic Aptitude Test was constructed about 60 years ago, the aim was to measure students' underlying aptitude for higher education, not what students had learned during high school in specific subject matter areas. Today, while it is generally acknowledged that the SAT scores relate in some fashion to what is taught in schools, as well as to the student's background, the precise connection remains unclear.

The SAT was developed at a time when many believed an instrument could be prepared to measure aptitude – a relatively constant set of intellectual characteristics and abilities not seriously affected by previous education. But the evidence suggests that this early faith was misplaced. It is generally acknowledged now that the SAT does not measure the basic ability of students, nor is it directly linked to the curriculum in the schools. Still, the nation has mistakenly come to view the SAT as a reliable report card on its schools. Now, regrettably, the federal government seems to have thrown its weight behind a flawed notion.

The SAT was shaped at a time when the quality of high schools was extremely uneven, and ethnic and racial intolerance was a fact of life in admission procedures. The SAT sought to make the process of student selection more accurate and equitable, and scores on the exam were given considerable weight. But it is limited in its

ability to predict how well a student will do in college. When used alone, the scholastic aptitude test is better than random selection in predicting academic success. When the SAT score and high school grades are combined, the accuracy of predicting success in college moderately increases.

The highlighting of SAT results as an important indicator of school quality does offer a new opportunity to focus the public's attention on the issue of examinations and on how the student transition process can be improved. There is an urgent need in the United States, currently unmet by the SAT, for a more effective assessment and guidance programme that will give colleges and universities a more realistic portrait of what students have learned during the high school years – not screen them out but to help students find colleges that fit them best.

A more valuable measurement of education quality in United States schools is another test given in early grades as well as to 17-year-olds – the national assessment of education progress. The national assessment has the virtue of periodically testing students in the subject areas in which they have been taught, such as mathematics, science, social science studies and reading. Then, too, there are state-based tests, such as those carried out in Iowa, California and Michigan, which focus on specific subjects – on what students actually have been taught.

Yet the larger problem remains: how can we through evaluation best serve the needs of all students? It is ironic that under the current system those who need the most help get the least. Frequently non college students get only snippets of information about job possibilities from family or friends or other students or counsellors at school. It is unacceptable to focus our elaborate testing and assessment system only on those moving on to higher education while ignoring half the young people who even more urgently need guidance.

That is why the Carnegie Foundation, in its recent report called *High School*, recommended that a new student and advice test be developed to serve the needs of all students as they complete secondary education. The goal of the new assessment programme would be to evaluate the achievement of the student – linking it to the core curriculum that the student studies. The goals also would be to provide advice, to help students make decisions more intelligently about their futures – again, not to screen out options, but so that they may move on with confidence to further education and to jobs.

The College Board, which administers the SAT, now offers achievement tests in specific subject areas. With some modification, these could form the basis for at least the achievement part of the new evaluation programme. Further, the College Board recently released its own thoughtful report on what a college-bound high school student should know. This provides at least a beginning for the linking of education and evaluation. When such a link has been created, then it will be possible to have a report card on the nation's schools that is rooted in reality.

The current debate about the quality of education in the United States reminds us once again that what is taught is what is learned, and that educators must be far more thoughtful and creative about evaluating the achievement of their students.

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