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**The Tragic Illusion:  
Educational Testing**

**John Raven**

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... deserves the widest circulation amongst those engaged in the current debate on testing in schools and colleges. *John Stephenson, Director, Education for Capability.*

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In the first two chapters, Dr. Raven demonstrates that current educational assessment procedures have seriously damaging effects on pupils and society. They limit our ideas of what education is and what it could be. They result in seriously misleading conclusions being drawn from evaluation and research studies - and they therefore result in misguided policy reforms. Because of their defects, we promote many incompetent people (who often destroy their organisations and society) into influential positions.

But this is not a negative, anti-assessment, book: Dr. Raven shows that neither schools nor organisations can function effectively without assessment: pupils and students need means of monitoring their progress; teachers need to be able to identify pupils' motives and incipient talents and tools which will help them to harness those motives to develop those talents, monitor progress, and engage in diagnostic activities. Students need means of gaining recognition for the talents they have developed so as to be able to capitalise on them. Managers need means of identifying the talents of their subordinates so as to be able to place them in positions in which they will develop and use those talents. Policy researchers and evaluators need means of demonstrating that teachers and schools - and particular types of educational program - have nurtured high-level competencies which will benefit the individuals concerned and the societies in which they live.

In the second part of the book Dr. Raven first argues that the dilemmas posed by these observations are to be resolved by

developing a new model of talent and its assessment. As a basis on which to build such a model he summarises his work on the assessment of such competencies as initiative, leadership, and the ability to communicate. He argues that it will be necessary to move toward a *descriptive* model in which we identify people's motives and the competencies they display whilst carrying out activities they care about. Such a framework has more in common with the model behind atomic theory in Chemistry than with that behind Newtonian physics. The information required to make these statements can be obtained using *Behavioral Event Interviews* or by employing Questionnaires based on value-expectancy theory. The environmental constraints on people's behaviour - and the extent to which the environment taps their motives or values and thus leads them to display high-level competencies - can be indexed using organisational, classroom, and community climate measures.

While underlining the need for further development work, the book concludes by summarising some studies showing the utility and validity of the approach: it has made it possible to show that different teachers have dramatically different effects on their students' motives and patterns of competence, to identify the reasons why educational programs have had counter-intuitive, undesired, effects, and to document wide differences between the priorities and patterns of competence of people who live in different societies - dramatic differences which have clear consequences for the type of society that develops.

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