

10

Extensions

What's Next?

INTRODUCTION TO A CONCLUSION

In the classic television drama, *The West Wing*, President Jed Bartlett often prods his advisors to move forward on new governmental initiatives by asking them, “What’s next?” In a similar vein, *The ABCs* was written with the hope that at least some of those who read it would employ whatever they were learning to improve education. Accordingly, the final chapter of the book poses an overriding “What’s next?” query to readers. That is, Chapter 10 entices readers to *do something* with their newly acquired insights regarding educational measurement.

Unlike the book’s first nine chapters, each of which focuses on promoting the reader’s mastery of a specific assessment-related understanding, Chapter 10 is organized into more of a “wrap-up” structure containing four separate “Chapter Chunks.” These Chapter Chunks deal with (1) the complete set of nine per-chapter understandings, (2) a reprise of the self-administered confidence inventory first presented in the book’s initial chapter, (3) potential understanding-triggered

actions on the part of readers, and (4) a small set of assessment-related issues that your affable author believes warrant special attention from readers.

Rather than trying to squeeze Chapter 10's decisively different content into the pattern used for the previous nine chapters where, for instance, there was always a section dealing with "Better Understanding an Understanding," the final Extensions for the book are organized quite differently. In the following pages you will find commentaries (all mine) on each of Chapter 10's chief segments. These comments, sometimes quite brief, are intended to help you reach a more defensible stance regarding what, if anything, you intend to do with the stuff you've been learning from *The ABCs*. The structure of this chapter's Extensions, therefore, will coincide completely with Chapter 10's four Chapter Chunks. Let's get into those four chunks.

CHAPTER CHUNK 1: THE PER-CHAPTER UNDERSTANDINGS

What's first offered up in this chapter's Extensions is a complete set of the nine chapter understandings around which *The ABCs* is organized. Presented in the same order as they appeared in the book's nine chapters, and accompanied by a brief descriptive label for each, these nine assessment-related understandings clearly constitute the book's most important content. The nine understandings listed in this initial Chapter Chunk should, therefore, represent a reader's most important overall takeaway from *The ABCs*.

Let's be candid. As the writer of *The ABCs*, I decided to exercise an author's prerogative by laying out what I regard as the nine most important things about educational assessment that should be comprehended—and, hopefully, internalized—by members of the five target audiences for whom *The ABCs* was written. I believe that if a person actually comprehends these nine assessment-related understandings, then

such an individual would be—in my judgment—truly *assessment literate*.

If another member of the educational measurement community had set out to write a similar book about educational testing, would that author’s list of assessment-related understanding coincide perfectly with my “gnarly nine” understandings? I doubt it. Nonetheless, I think there would be substantial overlap among most educational assessment specialists regarding what’s truly important about educational testing for teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents of in-school kids, and regular citizens. So, although you should not regard the nine assessment-related understandings presented in Chapter Chunk 1 as representing holy writ, you can reasonably conclude that they deal with most of the important aspects associated with educational assessment.

Do you need to memorize the nine understandings in order to have truly comprehended them? I don’t think so, there are better things to memorize. Instead of committing them to memory, grasp the essence of each assessment-related understanding, then cognitively internalize that understanding—in *your own words*. You really don’t have to mimic the precise verbiage of the nine understandings as presented in *The ABCs*. Instead, you need to comprehend what’s present in all nine understandings so that, if a meaningful educational issue meanders your way, you will be in a position to provide a dash of illumination to the resolution of that issue.

CHAPTER CHUNK 2: A REPRISE OF THE CONFIDENCE INVENTORY

Because I had promised in Chapter 1 of *The ABCs* that the self-report confidence inventory presented in that first chapter would be made available in the book’s final chapter, and because publishers become visibly annoyed when authors brazenly double-cross their readers, that same confidence inventory is presented in Chapter 10. (I am not implying that

publishers countenance non-brazen, sufficiently sly double-crossing of readers.)

If you completed and scored the inventory when reading Chapter 1, I think you'll find it interesting to re-take the confidence inventory again to see if there's been any serious shift in your score. I am hoping, as you might suspect, that you will see a major increase in your assessment-related confidence. Remember, the items in the inventory typically call for you to register your confidence in being able to "explain" or "describe" (or some similar expository action) an educational testing concept or procedure. Consequently, it should follow that people who have comfortably grasped the meaning of *The ABCs'* nine assessment-related understandings would display greater confidence than would people who haven't.

Some readers, even those who have truly mastered the book's nine understandings, may not display an increased level of confidence between their completions of the inventory. Certain people are inherently not confident sorts of blokes. And this is why, as explained in Chapter 9's treatment of affective assessment, it was regarded as unwise to arrive at affective-focused inferences about *individuals* based on self-report inventories. However, if you happen to be dealing with *The ABCs* in a group, for instance, as a member of a school PTA association studying the book, administration of the confidence inventory on a pre- and post-basis ought to result in some serious increase in confidence scores. The resultant inferences about the *group's* affect would be far more valid than inferences based on the responses of individuals.

CHAPTER CHUNK 3: UNDERSTANDING-TRIGGERED ACTION?

As confessed on several occasions in *The ABCs*, I wrote the book because I am convinced that appropriately created and properly employed educational tests represent the most cost-effective way of improving the education we provide to our

children. Yet, even though the book does a solid job of informing readers about a collection of assessment truths, what if *none* of those readers ever took any action regarding what they had read? Such a situation would be analogous to the oft-cited forest puzzle with its fabled falling tree that, if unheard, does or doesn't make any noise. Clearly, what I hope you'll do is take action, a little or a lot, to stimulate the better use of educational assessment to benefit more students.

I realize that it may seem laughable to expect many readers of *The ABCs* to wrap up their reading of the book, then sit down instantly to consider what steps they should undertake in an effort to better educate children. What seems more likely is for someone who has internalized *The ABCs'* nine understandings to be routinely "on the lookout" for assessment-related shortcomings that can be remedied. Then, when there's a tangible situation in which a better understanding of educational assessment's basics might improve what's going on—a reader is positioned to *get into it with gusto!* In other words, you can scan the scene to see if you believe what's going on should be applauded, changed, or stopped completely. The right question, voiced at the right time, can force participants to think more carefully about their current uses of educational tests.

In most situations, because they are now more knowledgeable about the contributions and limitations of educational assessments, many readers will prefer to be "at the ready" rather than "aggressively active." Clearly, the choice is yours.

What's particularly important in this context is for you *not* to assume that assessment-related flaws will be fixed by others—others who possess more assessment sophistication than you. Sadly, assessment literacy is not widespread in our nation. Indeed, few of today's teachers and administrators are familiar with the kinds of issues associated with *The ABCs'* nine assessment-related understandings. It's currently unlikely that many assessment-knowledgeable persons will be available to "fight the good assessment fight."

The collection of “potential action options” presented in Chapter 10 of *The ABCs*—options that might be taken by a person who wants to use assessment for improved education are, hopefully, illustrative. They most assuredly are not exhaustive. Thus, think hard and inventively about how you could employ your newly acquired insights regarding educational testing as a springboard for stimulating constructive change. You might embark on a change-promotion with abundant energy, or you might simply raise one penetrating question at an appropriate moment. Even a gadfly can sometimes cause serious thinking by others.

CHAPTER CHUNK 4: QUICK TAKES ON EDUCATIONAL TESTING

Other than the Glossary and Index, *The ABCs* wraps up its story in Chapter 10, and thus presents the final opportunity for the book’s author to blabber about important aspects of educational testing. I chose to address three assessment-related issues and, while getting ready to write this particular Chapter Chunk, I went back and re-read what I had previously written about those three issues in Chapter 10.

For this final Extension, I have no intention of re-stating what I already said about my three chosen issues. Accordingly, after I completed my re-reading of the fourth and final Chapter Chunk in Chapter 10, I decided to crank out one paragraph only as a re-think regarding the issue being treated. My hope is that you’ll look over those three paragraphs, then decide whether you regard my three solo paragraphs as sensible.

Assessment literacy. I’ve devoted considerable thought to the ways we currently use and misuse educational tests. I could have said “I’d spent many sleepless nights worrying about these issues,” but I suspect you prefer honesty to feigned emotionality. Anyway, I have concluded that the *single best thing* we can do to improve education is to increase the assessment literacy of key constituencies such as educators, policymakers,

and parents of school-age children. This *single best thing* has the potential to pay off in counteracting much of the assessment dumbness in which we currently engage. I regard the acquisition of more widespread assessment literacy as *an absolutely necessary precursor* to greater educational improvement. Think about it—without accurate evidence regarding instructional impact, how can we ever know what works well? Finally, as suggested in Chapter 10, I believe we need to nurture the creation of a cadre of assessment consultants who can review the quality of various technical reports regarding educational testing, and then present truly comprehensible translations of those reports to assessment-literate audiences.

Evaluations with instructionally insensitive tests. When the AERA-APA-NCME joint *Standards* hit the streets in 2014, they established a far more clear demand for *purpose-supportive evidence* when evaluating an educational test's quality. This was a wonderful move by the architects of the joint *Standards*, for it made vivid the need to evaluate programs or educators on the basis of students' test results—but *only* when the test being used is accompanied by solid evidence indicating that the test is suitable for its designated evaluative mission. The regrettable truth is that most of today's educational tests are being used to evaluate schools and teachers without even a wisp of evidence supporting this evaluative use. *Instructional sensitivity* refers to the degree to which a test is capable of distinguishing between well-taught and poorly-taught students. Sadly, a great many serious educational mistakes are made because they use the results of tests to compare test-takers' performance, not differentiate among the instructional quality provided by teachers or schools. The sooner the world realizes the seriousness of this ubiquitous error, the sooner such mistakes can be corrected through the use of instructionally sensitive tests.

Formative assessment's underuse. Formative assessment works well, so well, indeed, that its underuse is quite heartrending. It needs to be employed much more widely for, as some

researchers have recently concluded, appropriate implementation of the formative-assessment process can literally *double* the speed of students' learning. Not to use such a powerful assessment-illuminated instructional process constitutes an educational sin against children. To secure the considerable learning gains available from the use of this potent classroom strategy, it is important for us to understand what formative assessment is—and what it is not. Then, the use of formative assessment must match different teachers' comfort in employing this process. Some teachers will be comfortable using formative assessment only occasionally; some teachers will prefer to use it constantly. Because we need to see more formative assessment in our nation's classroom, we should make certain that teachers do not become overwhelmed by formative assessment's required actions. If possible, in a formatively oriented classroom setting, students themselves should play a significant role in becoming self-directed and self-reinforcing learners. The formative-assessment process should, then, be vigorously promoted at every reasonable opportunity.

In *The ABCs* you'll find a Glossary and an Index. Please have fun with both. And thanks for your patience.