

Introduction

Not too many months ago, I sent off to Corwin, educational publisher nonpareil, the final touches of a book I had just written: *The ABCs of Educational Testing: Demystifying the Tools That Shape Our Schools*. The book is aimed at five target audiences, namely, teachers, school administrators, educational policymakers, parents of school-age children, and citizens in general. The purpose of my book is to help members of as many of those five audiences as possible become reasonably knowledgeable about a modest number of significant understandings regarding educational testing.

Chances are that you have already read all or part of what I'll hereafter refer to as *The ABCs*. However, if you haven't previously read all or some of that book, try to do so without delay. Reading *The ABCs* will position you to arrive at more defensible conclusions regarding how we currently use tests in our schools—and how we *should* use those tests. In *The ABCs*, I often explain (some might say *rant* about) the significance of educational testing's role in improving the way we educate our children. Indeed, as I frequently suggest in that book, when we consider the many alternative ways to enhance the quality of schooling, educational testing is, hands down, our most cost-effective way of doing so. That's right—improved decisions made on the basis of more appropriate uses of educational tests can emphatically boost the quality of instruction provided in our schools. And those improvements can be accomplished much more cost-effectively than other options.

But a nontrivial impediment to our getting the most mileage out of educational tests is that too few people really understand the fundamentals of what make such tests tick—or tock. Assessment-knowledgeable individuals—other factors being equal—will make better education-enhancing decisions than will individuals who are unfamiliar with the basics of educational assessment. Unfortunately, as matters stand, many of the individuals who now have a say in how our schools are run, including most educators, most policymakers, and most lawmakers, don't know enough about what today's education assessments can and can't do.

Accordingly, to encourage more folks to comprehend the assessment understandings treated in *The ABCs*, Corwin encouraged me to create this *Online Supplement* to that book. The *Online Supplement* was written in an unabashed effort to entice more people to read the original book and, thereafter, to better comprehend the assessment-related understandings presented in that book. The *Online Supplement*, although it can be used by an individual reader, should be of particular benefit to a group of readers such as a school's teachers, a school's parent organization members, or a district school board's members.

ORGANIZATION OF THE *ONLINE SUPPLEMENT*

The ABCs contains ten chapters and, in the first nine of those chapters, presents nine significant assessment-related understandings. This *Online Supplement* is structured in a similar fashion. You'll encounter nine separate Chapter Extensions, each of which focuses on one of the understandings presented in the first nine chapters. A final Chapter Extension deals with the content presented in *The ABCs* book's last chapter.

Given that there are only nine understandings the organizational obstacles for group-study programs are not formidable. If, for instance, most of the language arts teachers in a large urban high school decide to study *The ABCs* during a school year, they might split up the nine understandings so

that, spaced over an academic year, 90-minute meetings every two or three months could focus on two or three chapters at a time. Ideally, of course, participants in such a group-study effort will have already read the group-assigned chapters before any book-focused sessions and will be in a position to deepen their understandings of a familiar topic during the interactive exchanges among a group's members.

Each of this *Online Supplement's* ten sections can be reached by clicking on the digital links provided herein.

STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTER EXTENSIONS

The structure of each Chapter Extension will always be organized around the following four sections:

- **Better Understanding an Understanding.** After presenting a chapter's understanding, you will take a somewhat different look at the nature of this understanding than was given in *The ABCs*. Think of this initial section as an amplification or underscoring of a particular chapter's assessment-related understanding. Solo readers can enhance their grasp of a chapter's assessment-related understanding by mentally—or orally—trying to explain the meaning of a given chapter's understanding to another person—real or imaginary. In a group-based activity, such increased comprehension of a chapter's understanding typically takes place while comparing different people's interpretations of what a particular understanding actually means. The mission of this section of a Chapter Extensions is captured in its name, that is, to help readers in *understanding an understanding better*.
- **Collegial Conjecturing.** In this second section of each Chapter Extension, a fictitious colleague's e-mail regarding one or more features of the understanding is featured. In certain instances, the position taken by this e-mail writer will make slabs of sense. In other cases,

the fictitious writer will have authored a flock of foolishness. Your charge, either by yourself or in a group, will be to think through how you would respond to the make-believe e-mailer. If you carry out this “think-through” response in a group, of course, different members’ responses can be shared with others. If you are conjuring up an e-mail response totally on your own, you can think through how you’d reply. Then, after a mental or oral presentation of your response (just to hear how it sounds), you may wish to applaud vigorously as a tribute to the wisdom and lucidity of your reply.

- **Thought-Provocation Queries.** More often than not, a thought-provoking question is preferable to a thought-suppressing question. And this is why many textbooks, particularly those written for reasonably mature students, often conclude their chapters with a collection of queries designated as “Discussion Questions” or some similar label. In the third section of each Chapter Extension, therefore, you’ll find a small batch of queries intended to stir up, as Hercule Poirot would say, your brain’s “little gray cells.” In other words, to provoke cognitive consideration of the issues linked to that chapter’s assessment-linked understanding. If you are using this *Online Supplement* by yourself, you could profitably try to frame, in your mind, how you might respond to each of the questions. If you are using the *Online Supplement* as part of a group, however, then different group members can be asked to respond aloud to the questions. Agreements or disagreements in the responses of group members can be discussed. The mission in such question-answering activities, of course, is to provoke more than a thimbleful of thought from you.
- **A Real-World Application.** Each Chapter Extension will be closed out by a description of an activity in which a group of participants will be asked to undertake an

endeavor as *if they had already comprehended the meaning of a particular chapter's assessment-related understanding*. The essence of this final group-structured exercise is to model the impact that such an understanding, if actually grasped and internalized, would have on one's real-world behavior. Although best undertaken when multiple participants are involved, a solo reader of *The ABCs* might profitably attempt to speculate about what differences, if any, would be seen between individuals *who had* or *who hadn't* grasped the full meaning of the particular assessment-related understanding being considered. Recognizing significant distinctions among people who have differing ideas about the implications of a given understanding can help people better comprehend an assessment understanding's essence as well as its likely impact.

To review, presented from here on in you will find in this *Online Supplement* a set of 10 Chapter Extensions, each of which contain the following sections: (1) *Better Understanding an Understanding*, (2) *Collegial Conjecturing*, (3) *Thought-Provocation Queries*, and (4) *A Real-World Application*. A reader who is employing the *Online Supplement* can choose to use none, some, or all of these four sections from any of the Chapter Extensions. Let's turn, then, to the first of our Chapter Extensions for, unsurprisingly, Chapter 1. Each Chapter's Extensions will begin with a boxed presentation of that chapter's assessment-related understanding.