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## **“More than Measurable Human Products”: Catholic Educators’ Responses to the Educational Measurement Movement in the First Half of the 20th Century**

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*During the first half of the 20th century, Catholic educators in the United States used theological arguments both to resist and embrace the progressive educational reform effort of educational measurement. The significant expansion of Catholic schooling and the increased number of students attending them, along with increased state oversight, led to a gradual, yet uneven, acceptance of educational measurement by Catholic educators. This partial and more critical acceptance can be attributed to the diversity of Catholic schooling and the incongruity between the assumptions of educational measurement and Catholic educational beliefs. This historical case offers support for continued critique of reform movements and at the same time cautions against wholesale rejection of them. Each reform requires scrutiny with the goal of determining which will assist schools in helping students reach their fullest potential.*

Every major innovation in educational methods and procedures has encountered open, hostile opposition. For the past two decades, perhaps no other one of the modern trends in school practice has stirred more heated and prolonged hostility than has measurement in education, a movement often designated by the phrase, tests and testing. (Hunsicker, 1938, p. 166)

**A**lthough some 70 years later, this statement could very well describe current debates over the use of tests and testing in schools. The question of whether a single test can assess a student’s academic achievement or predict academic success runs counter to sound pedagogical practices, yet such tests are often used or misused to do just that. This is not a new debate. It began in the early 20th century during a seemingly unlikely time, an era associated with the progressive movement and a paradigm shift in teaching and learning inspired by the writings of John Dewey. Characterized

as pedagogical progressives by historians, educators who admired Dewey's work promoted child-centered learning (Tyack, 1974). However, a parallel movement, focused on testing, developed at this same time by those who advocated educational measurement. These educators, described as administrative progressives, were equally interested in the needs of the individual child, but largely in order to establish a more orderly and efficient society (Tyack, 1974). This strain of progressivism promoted the administration of standardized achievement tests and IQ tests to elementary and secondary school students as sorting mechanisms for placing students in the "proper" academic track and guiding them toward work that "best" suited them.

The development of these approaches to education affected more than just public school educators and their students. Catholic educators in the United States weighed in on the debate over progressive education and its related educational reforms in the first half of the 20th century. During this same era, Catholic school enrollments steadily increased, reaching nearly 3.1 million by 1950, just fewer than 12% of the total school population (Snyder, 1993). This growth supported the Catholic hierarchy's goal of having every Catholic child in a Catholic school (Veverka, 1988), but it also made Catholic schools a more significant member of the American educational community and more subject to state oversight. Public supervision of Catholic schools accelerated with efforts to organize the nation's public schools in the early 20th century and the United States Supreme Court's decisions in *Meyer v. Nebraska* in 1923 and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* in 1925. The latter two decisions protected private education, but allowed for state oversight. The resulting relationships with public educational agencies generated debates among Catholic educators over the value of progressive education and the public school reforms it inspired.

Catholic educators did not characterize themselves as progressive educators in the early 20th century, but some forcefully argued for incorporating progressive reforms in Catholic schools with both Catholic and progressive rationales. Examinations of Catholic responses to progressive education have focused primarily on the child-centered pedagogical theories promoted by prominent figures like Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick (Walch, 1996/2003; Woods, 2004). Less attention has been given to Catholic responses to administrative progressivism, including standardization and accreditation, educational measurement, and vocational education and guidance, among others. Some historians have explored Catholic responses to accreditation (Gleason, 1995; O'Dowd, 1935; Ryan, 2006; Veverka, 1988), but given the impact of administrative progressive reforms, these topics warrant more in-depth examinations (Justice, 2005).

This study focuses on the responses of Catholic educators in the first half of the 20th century to one particular progressive reform, the educational measurement movement. This movement promoted the use of testing to assess students' abilities, aptitudes, interests, and achievement, including IQ or mental testing. Research focused specifically on Catholic schooling and educational measurement is scant. Fass (1989) gave a significant treatment of the subject in her analysis of the acceptance of IQ testing by Catholic educators during the 1940s and 1950s. During those decades, IQ testing had become more widely accepted by educators, especially as a device to advance the education of children in lower socioeconomic classes (Ackerman, 1995). However, the acceptance of educational measurement by Catholic educators has a rich history before the 1940s, demonstrating that the institutionalization of such testing was not a foregone conclusion for Catholic educators as it was in many public schools (Ryan & Stoskopf, 2008). Although there has been considerable attention given to public educators' responses to educational measurement in this earlier period (Ackerman, 1995), this article addresses the limited research on Catholic educators during that era and through to the 1940s.

This article examines the variety of positions Catholic educators held on this school reform effort, ranging from qualified rejection to full endorsement, leading up to the uneven acceptance of educational measurement by Catholic schools. Catholic educators discussed, critiqued, debated, and advocated educational measurement in a wide range of national Catholic publications, records, and research reports. These texts are examined for the resistance to and acceptance of educational measurement by Catholic educators. I argue that increased oversight of Catholic schools by state agencies, along with increased enrollments and diversity of students in academic skills and aspirations, led Catholic educators to consider seriously progressive educational reform efforts and educational measurement in particular. In the debates over educational measurement, Catholic educators employed Catholic beliefs both to support and interrogate it. Those who supported it often incorporated progressive educational ideology into their educational philosophy and practices. Although there was a gradual movement toward incorporating educational measurement, the early debates over this reform effort, its incongruity with fundamental Catholic beliefs, and the diversity of Catholic schooling led to an uneven and more critical acceptance of it.

## Progressive Education and Catholic Responses

Historians have argued for more complex applications of the terms progressive and progressive education that acknowledge their advocacy of both social justice and social control (Kliebard, 1995; McCormick, 2000; Reese, 2001). Davies (2002) described progressive education as paradoxical owing to the conflicting ideologies and movements it encompassed. However, at their core, progressive education movements of the early 20th century promoted the use of science to meet the educational needs of individual children to improve wider social conditions (Davies, 2002; Kliebard, 1995; Reese, 2001). For some, progressive education meant applying research on child development to make learning experiences more child centered or using a project method of instruction based on formal scientific inquiry. These pedagogically progressive approaches had some impact on schools; however, administrative progressivism proved more influential (Tyack, 1974). Associated with the efficiency movement of the period (Callahan, 1962), this form of progressive education championed the need for schools to become centralized bureaucracies managed by professional educators rather than fickle or corrupt local school boards (Justice, 2005; Slawson, 2005; Tyack, 1974). Administrative progressives such as E. L. Thorndike and Lewis Terman proposed scientific solutions to educational problems and focused on making schools more standardized and less subject to local politics (Kliebard, 1995; Tyack, 1974).

Catholic deliberations about progressive education in the United States took place within a transnational debate among Catholic leaders over the incompatibility of medieval Catholic teachings with modernism and its promotion of rational scientific understandings and secular institutions. The Vatican responded to these ideological tensions in the early 20th century by reaffirming its belief in scholasticism—an ideology rooted in Aristotelian philosophy, which held to the existence of universal and absolute truths invulnerable to time and context. This rearticulation of scholasticism, known as neo-scholasticism, challenged the Catholic hierarchy in the United States faced with leading American Catholics who were anxious to become more socially and economically mobile through education (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993).

The Catholic hierarchy in the United States was wary of Progressivism in general because of its modern position promoting a centralized democratic state favoring citizenship and state obligations over religious commitments (Woods, 2004). This key difference prevented many Catholics from fully accepting Progressivism and its educational programs, but it did not prevent others from entertaining progressive ideas and using progressive methods. Walch (1996/2003) argued that some Catholic educators used aspects of

progressive education they found useful, but not in conflict with their fundamental Catholic beliefs. Woods (2004) supported this conclusion, but emphasized that the pragmatic use of secular teaching strategies did not make them progressive educators. Woods contended that Catholic educators selected “morally neutral elements of the Progressive program” (p. 86), suggesting that they could not accept the fundamental premise of progressive education aimed at educating citizens, because Catholic education aimed at cultivating souls. Yet, Catholic educators engaged in more than the mere cherry-picking of progressive methods as their network of schools expanded in the 1920s.

The reality of a growing and diverse school population induced many Catholic educators to consider seriously the public school reforms crafted by administrative progressives to address similar challenges (Fass, 1989). Between 1900 and 1950, the United States received over 20 million immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003b). Significant numbers of those immigrants were Catholics, coming from countries like Ireland and Germany, which had long histories of migration to the United States. However, they also came in large numbers from other regions with strong Catholic ties like Italy and Mexico (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003a). During this same period the Catholic population in the United States almost tripled, growing from just over 10 million and representing 13% of the nation’s population in 1900 to more than 27 million and representing 18% of the population in 1950 (Catholic Directory, 1900; Official Catholic Directory, 1950; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003c). This increasing Catholic population fed school enrollments. In 1900 over 850,000 students attended Catholic schools in the United States, equaling 5% of all children attending public or private elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Catholic Directory, 1900; Snyder, 1993). By 1950 over 3 million children attended Catholic schools, representing almost 12% of the school population (Snyder, 1993). Rising enrollments led Catholic educators to take more interest in progressive education and public school reform efforts designed to address overcrowded classrooms and students with a range of abilities.

### **Reluctant Compliance: Standardization and Accreditation of Catholic Schools**

The movement to standardize American high schools in the early 20th century through accreditation embodied the major tenets of administrative progressivism. Accreditation sought to improve college preparation and establish a clear articulation between emerging secondary schools and universities (Krug, 1964). The voluntary practice of accreditation originated in the

mid-19th century and was used by individual universities to ensure adequate preparation of students by accrediting the secondary schools they attended. In the early 20th century with the rise of social efficiency and bureaucratization, many universities transferred this work to regional accrediting associations. Eventually these systems of accreditation were replicated, and used for state recognition of schools, often transforming a voluntary process into a mandatory one.

At the turn of the 20th century and into the 1910s, as states pressed for oversight of private schools, Catholic institutions engaged in institutional organization and cooperation, hallmarks of the social efficiency movement. At the same time, Catholic educators fiercely debated the merits of standardization by outside entities at the annual meetings of the Catholic Educational Association (CEA), established in 1904 and later renamed the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) in 1927. They argued for resisting state intervention in their schools, but legislative mandates eventually led many to comply with it. By 1934, 68% of the 2,125 Catholic high schools in the United States had secured state or regional accreditation (O'Dowd, 1935). Catholic educators pragmatically concluded that to provide Catholic secondary education, they would need to succumb to some state supervision (Gleason, 1995; Ryan, 2006; Veverka, 1988).

Reverend James O'Dowd (1935) claimed that as a result of this standardization process, Catholic secondary schools followed the educational changes in public schools. This system of public involvement in Catholic schools increased Catholic educators' exposure to public reform movements, like educational measurement. Accrediting bodies required teachers to complete a minimum number of college courses in education, often including educational psychology. Catholic educators encountered new and often progressive ideas about education in these courses and had to decide whether to embrace, modify, or reject them.

### **Catholic Educators' Debates Over Educational Measurement in the 1920s**

Catholic debates over public educational reforms gave little attention to educational measurement in the 1910s. Catholic educators became more interested in this reform effort as their enrollments increased. Theses, dissertations, journal articles, and conference papers authored by Catholic educators in the 1920s reflected the growing awareness of and concern over the increasing use of educational measurement in schools. The strongest of advocates generally took great pains to emphasize the limits of testing as they encouraged

its introduction to Catholic schools. In her 1922 master's thesis, Sister Mary Rose O'Donnell endorsed the use of testing in Catholic schools. She lamented how the mental test movement was misunderstood by its critics, and asserted that advocates of the tests did not see them as flawless or the only measure of a child. O'Donnell acknowledged that few parochial schools or diocesan systems had introduced any intelligence testing while she encouraged more to consider it. She supported the promotion of testing through journals targeted at Catholic educators and mental measurement courses in teacher training programs for religious sisters at Catholic colleges and normal schools. But for all its benefits, O'Donnell closed her thesis with a caution to others not to misuse testing results or see it as a cure-all. She warned that "the advocates state that the argument for the use of the tests is not the infallibility of the results, but the extreme fallibility of the results they replace" (p. 29). She endorsed testing and argued that despite their limitations, they were an improvement over the subjective evaluations of children by teachers.

Catholic educators engaged in lively discussions over educational measurement at the CEA's annual meetings. Representatives from across the country offered their evaluation of testing and its uses in Catholic schools. Reverend John O'Brien (1921) described the value of standardized testing, claiming that it offered an objective measure to offset the subjectivities of teacher evaluations, an assessment of the teacher's instruction and guide for improvement, an accurate evaluation of students to facilitate grouping by ability, and an indication of the "progress of a class and the efficiency of the teacher" (p. 255). This endorsement of standardized testing and educational measurement explicitly reflected the language of administrative progressives with its emphasis on efficiency. However, it was not the mainstream opinion on the matter in the early 1920s; others found the measurement movement to have real benefits, but questioned its underlying assumptions.

The active questioning of educational measurement by Catholic educators was critical in shaping how Catholic schools used these tests. At the 1922 CEA meeting, Brother John Waldron argued that some in the testing community ignored the spiritual qualities of children and made decisions based on a single test. Like Sister Mary Rose O'Donnell, Waldron (1922) took issue with using a single measure, but thought that in time tests would improve and serve as another valuable tool in meeting the educational needs of students. Reverend Joseph Dunney concurred to some degree in his response to Waldron's paper, but offered more caution than acceptance of the testing movement. Dunney (1922) reminded his colleagues at the meeting that Catholic educators were "dealing with more than measurable human products," they were "dealing with immortal souls" (p. 229). As Woods (2004)



suggested, the primary goal of Catholic education, cultivating souls, was not easily reconciled with the one-dimensional approach of those promoting educational measurement.

In addition to their theological critiques, Catholic educators took issue with the scientific validity of the tests themselves. In 1923 at the CEA annual meeting, Reverend Francis P. Donnelly offered one of the strongest critiques of mental tests in his analysis of the army test results from World War I. Donnelly (1923) prefaced his discussion with a definition of what the tests claimed to measure: “Intelligence in this case means the performance of certain operations for forty-five minutes. These operations have been arranged for persons of a certain time, place, age, and condition and are full of error when applied elsewhere” (p. 175). Donnelly examined the underpinnings of the testing movement and raised questions about the contextual nature of the tests and those being tested. Although he maintained a critical stance on IQ testing, he thought that mental tests had some instructional value, because they emphasized intellectual over vocational tasks.

Catholic educators, who believed that testing held some merit, articulated their support for it cautiously. The response to Donnelly’s paper at the 1923 CEA meeting praised his conservatism toward testing and lamented the misuse and abuse of testing, but also urged Catholic educators to consider their potential (Ursuline Sister, 1923). The respondent, an Ursuline sister, suggested that intelligence tests might assist Catholic educators in identifying students’ capacities.

Intelligence tests... seem to tend to the old mediaeval Catholic idea that the *ideal of effective service* [emphasis added] is to be found in any work well done and that the greatest defect is the failure to measure up to one’s own possibilities. The only sense in which one man’s work is “higher” than another’s is that, considering his talents, the *one is contributing more effectively than the other to the common welfare* [emphasis added]. (p. 181)

She employed a Catholic belief, but reflected the contemporary and progressive idea that IQ testing would make education more democratic by assisting each student in finding their proper place in society (Kliebard, 1995; Tyack, 1974). This sentiment echoed a central tenet of the National Education Association’s (NEA) *Cardinal Principles* published in 1918, the embodiment of progressive education:

The purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his personality primarily through activities designed for the well-being

of his fellow members and of society as a whole....*The ideal demands...that the individual choose that vocation and those forms of social service in which his personality may develop and become most effective* [emphasis added].  
(Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, 1918, p. 9)

The similarities between the Ursuline sister's response and the *Cardinal Principles* offer a rich example of the complexity surrounding Catholic educators' reactions to progressive education. The Ursuline sister articulated caution about the abuses of testing and questioned some of its assumptions, but also offered a Catholic rationale for using them. Although the rationale may have supported an aspect of Catholic teaching, it mirrored a clearly progressive position. This entailed more than selectively adopting progressive practices; it involved the strategic selection of Catholic beliefs to coincide with this element of progressive ideology.

Although the acceptance of testing was on the rise, some Catholic educators continued to question the underlying assumptions of the tests and cautioned against an over reliance on them. During the 1920s, *America*, the weekly publication of the Society of Jesus, published several articles on the use of IQ testing in Catholic schools. Donnelly, who presented his critique of testing at the CEA, authored five articles on the subject between 1920 and 1923. He challenged the inferences drawn from the results of mental tests. He argued that the worst of these were claims that human beings possessed fixed mental capacities, and that some racial and ethnic groups were inferior in intelligence to others (Donnelly, 1922). On the first point he argued that free will refuted the idea of fixed intelligence. He believed people developed over time, and tests given at age 13 only indicated what students knew at that age, rather than predicting their adult fate. Donnelly countered claims regarding group inferiority by asserting that the tests were bound by context, and those unfamiliar with American culture and schooling were not inferior, but simply at a disadvantage. Donnelly grounded his critiques of educational measurement in both Catholic beliefs and the circumstances of Catholics in American society. He convincingly argued for preserving free will, and therefore, God's will, while advancing the argument that tracking immigrant Catholics could prohibit them from gaining social mobility.

Testing in these early years had its share of critics who saw it as a strategy for limiting opportunities, but the movement also garnered significant support from Catholic educators. Reverend Austin Schmidt served as one of the more prolific advocates of testing among Catholic educators in the 1920s. Schmidt's arguments reflected a keen understanding of his audience and the need to address specific Catholic beliefs to persuade his colleagues effectively to accept

testing on their own terms. Schmidt (1922) took issue with tests that compared students to national rather than local norms and argued that it could lead to discrimination and exclude too many students. Rather than reject testing as a result of its limitations, Schmidt challenged Catholic educators “to develop and perfect [tests], and to gain greater control over the precautions and checks that are necessary in their application and interpretation” (p. 9). Schmidt advocated developing tests that were congruent with Catholic beliefs that would allow them to “look upon man as something more than a mere physiological reaction, and to avoid a materialistic and fatalistic interpretation of life” (p. 10). This particular line of reasoning was directly aimed at countering the Catholic critique of modernism; maintaining that modern industrialism, capitalism, and science left individuals spiritually bankrupt. Schmidt appealed to his colleagues to take what he saw as a useful product of scientific thinking and reshape it to reflect a Catholic worldview.

Schmidt, like Donnelly, authored a series of articles in 1923 for *America*, where he outlined the benefits and limitations of testing in general and in relationship to Catholic education. In six separate articles, Schmidt weighed the benefits and drawbacks of testing. Schmidt (1923a) explained that Catholic educators resisted the theories supporting educational measurement because they could not deny

the possibility of a mental renaissance on the part of backward children. This feeling is based on mercy, faith, and love; and may the day never come when the cold mathematics of a thirty-minute test expels it from this world of ours! (p. 142)

Schmidt then posed the following:

But what would you say, fellow teachers, if I were to offer you proof that a mental scale, instead of making you think a pupil is more hopelessly stupid than you considered him in the past, is apt to make you realize that the pupil you looked upon as stupid is not really so. (p. 142)

Schmidt (1923b) argued that intelligence tests had distinct advantages over conventional forms of assessment. He believed that IQ tests removed the subjective evaluation of student work by teachers and assisted educators in being of better service to their students. Although he promoted the use of such tests, always cognizant of his audience, Schmidt acknowledged: “We are without doubt measuring but one aspect of intelligence. Nor do we know much about the causal connection between this mental power and success in the world”

(p. 241). Schmidt expressed skepticism, but like others he found elements of testing appealing enough to support their use in Catholic schools.

Whereas discussions over educational measurement at the CEA and in *America* reflected a lively debate, articles in *Catholic School Interests*, a publication focused on practitioners, generally supported testing as a useful tool. In 1922, Sister Katherine posed questions in an article that illustrated enthusiasm for testing:

Does it not seem well that we give to each child that body of knowledge suited to his native capacity? Does it seem well or even just that we permit children of fifteen or even sixteen to sit in the back seats year after year in the middle grades because they have not sufficient native capacity to understand the abstract body of truths presented in arithmetic and formal grammar? (Sister Katherine, 1922a, p. 37)

She suggested that students with limited capacities should be given industrial or vocational training to meet their needs. Overall, she argued that testing offered a solution for meeting the needs of both students considered “sub-normal” and those deemed “gifted.” In a follow-up article Sister Katherine (1922b) added that tests could assist in helping educators clarify and meet the needs of students to find their place in society. Sister Katherine’s stance offered a full endorsement of testing and an indication of Catholic educators’ interest in the progressive ideas so prevalent in public education at the time.

Articles in *Catholic School Interests* clearly leaned toward acceptance of IQ testing, indicating their appeal to classroom teachers, but some pieces still raised critical questions about it. Reverend W. F. Cunningham (1928a) cautioned against the use of intelligence testing in isolation of other diagnostic elements, but saw these tests as a tool for promoting democracy: “Democracy means equality of opportunity. This means equal opportunity to every individual to develop himself to his maximum capacity. Democracy does *not* mean equality of endowment” (p. 595). He revealed Catholic educators’ growing acceptance of the rhetoric used to rationalize the use of IQ testing in public schools (Tyack, 1974). Yet, in a follow-up essay, “Democracy and the Duller Intellectuals,” Cunningham (1928b) argued against ability grouping:

In the elementary and secondary school and in the first cycle of secondary education where the dull as well as the average and the superior are to receive elements of a liberal education, on the principle stated above sectioning on the basis of ability should have no place whatsoever. Yet here is where it is in most common. Alas, the new “science” of education! (p. 73)

Cunningham demonstrated how Catholic educators began to accept and make use of IQ testing, but also resisted using it as the sole arbiter of a child's educational experience.

The commitment to a liberal education for all Catholic children sprang from both traditional Catholic beliefs about education and a defense from modern movements interested in tracking specific groups into particular socioeconomic spheres. Although less marginalized in this era, Catholics were still vulnerable to nativists' anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant rhetoric and tactics (Higham, 1955/1988). They developed schools and other social institutions to assist in their social mobility and protect their religious culture. McGreevy (2003) has noted that Catholics responded to the challenges faced by impoverished Catholic immigrants by developing Catholic social institutions—schools, hospitals, and orphanages. These institutions aimed at improving the conditions of those in poverty with schools serving as vehicles for social mobility. Catholics were vulnerable to public educational policies interested in tracking specific groups, particularly impoverished and working-class immigrants, into vocational education programs. This was one of the reasons Catholics developed schools emphasizing academic and faith development open to all students. The discussions over educational measurement in the 1920s revealed that maintaining this commitment became increasingly difficult for Catholic schools as the number of students choosing to attend them increased.

### **Toward Gradual Acceptance: Implementing Educational Measurement in Catholic Schools**

As with the debate in the 1920s, the call for a reasoned use of educational measurement continued into the 1930s. Writing in *The Catholic School Journal*, Reverend Thomas Bowdern (1930) argued against extremists on the nature versus nurture debate. He found claims that heredity or environment solely determined human development of little use, calling for a more balanced approach. Like some other Catholic clergy during this era, Bowdern was particularly disturbed by eugenicists, who attributed all human characteristics and behavior to genetics, rather than considering the impact of environment and social circumstances (Leon, 2004; Rosen, 2004). Eugenicists saw IQ testing and similar measures as ways to exclude individuals and groups from social institutions like schools. Bowdern (1930) described such practices as sinful and employed a call for social justice in determining who had access to education.

Did this resistance to eugenics carry over into Catholic schools? Despite continued skepticism of educational measurement, a national survey of Catholic high schools in 1934 found that 34% of the schools acknowledged that they used intelligence tests for guidance purposes, while 26% noted the use of achievement tests, and 22% used student interviews with teachers and school officers to inform their guidance of students (Murray, 1938). Even though IQ testing exceeded the other techniques, it still only represented a little more than a third of the participating schools. Additionally, Murray noted that the majority of schools expressed dissatisfaction with the tests “as objective evidence for guidance purposes” (p. 124). This suggested some resistance or at least ambivalence on the part of Catholic educators toward the educational measurement movement and its promise for guiding students on to the “right” vocational path.

Although Catholic educators questioned how useful standardized tests were, several surveys conducted in the 1930s and 1940s substantiated an increasing trend in the use of educational measurement by Catholic schools, especially for vocational guidance. These surveys were conducted or supported by the Catholic University of America (CUA) or the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference. Similar to accreditation, the CUA maintained a voluntary program of affiliation with Catholic secondary schools. In its 1940 bulletin to affiliated schools, the CUA’s Committee on Affiliation and Extension reported on the history of testing in United States secondary schools. In its bulletin, the committee asserted, “In spite [*sic*] of their widespread use, [tests] are not without their enemies. These may be really friends in disguise, since they point out the danger and educational abuses which may arise from the misuse of tests” (Committee on Affiliation and Extension, 1940a, p. 3). The article named the limit on academic freedom and factual versus conceptual teaching as the greatest disadvantage of state and national testing programs. It also identified the strengths of testing programs and reasoned that the influx of students with a wide range of abilities, largely due to compulsory schooling laws and the lack of jobs for youth during the Great Depression, made testing valuable. It asserted that testing offered a way to check the subjective judgment of teachers, to compare the performance of similar schools, and to generate data for guidance purposes. The article acknowledged the limits of testing, but made a case for testing using progressive arguments.

In a subsequent bulletin, the Committee on Affiliation and Extension (1940b) reported results from a survey conducted in December of 1939, regarding the use of individual inventories in guidance programs in Catholic secondary schools. These inventories included intelligence tests, aptitude

tests, personality and interest inventories, and achievement tests. The survey results offer evidence that such instruments were used in both Catholic elementary and secondary schools to some extent. Secondary schools were asked what type of information they received about their students from the elementary schools their students attended. Of the 79 respondents, 23% said they received intelligence test scores, 22% received personality or interest ratings, 20% received achievement test scores, and 16% received special aptitudes. Although there was no indication on how the testing information received by the high schools had been used by the elementary schools, there was discussion as to the high schools' use of it. According to survey results, there was no significant difference between the schools affiliated with CUA and nonaffiliated schools. Sixty percent of the secondary schools reported that they used individual inventories for guidance purposes. This was a significant jump compared with 34% of respondents affirming the use of testing for guidance in Sister Murray's findings from 1934. The Committee on Affiliation and Extension concluded that large nonaffiliated day schools made more use of psychological tests, including intelligence tests, to compensate for the lack of information received from grade schools. Affiliated schools administered more educational or achievement tests than psychological tests (Committee on Affiliation and Extension, 1940b). The report concluded that because these schools tended to be smaller in size and often included elementary programs, they knew their students better and had no need for large-scale intelligence testing to assess students' abilities. When asked how testing was used, affiliated schools responded with soundly administrative progressive reasoning: assessing instructional needs, improving the efficiency of instruction, and classifying students. The nonaffiliated schools placed classification as the first use followed by assessment of individual abilities for guidance and then identification of areas to emphasize in instruction. The nonaffiliated schools, often with larger enrollments, used testing in ways more similar to urban public schools, likely stemming from their size and the diversity of their students (Tyack, 1974).

### **The Challenge of Educating *All* Catholic Children in the Post-World War II Era**

Several Catholic educational researchers in the post-World War II era examined the growth of Catholic secondary schools and its impact on the mission of Catholic schools to educate *all* Catholic children. These researchers did not challenge testing per se, but certainly questioned how testing results were used by schools. Brother Louis Faerber (1948) used results from a set of

questions included on the National Survey of Catholic Secondary Education disseminated in January 1947 and sponsored by the Department of Education of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, for a study on how Catholic high schools provided for students with “low-abilities,” described as those with an IQ score of 70 to 90. The survey was sent to 2,111 Catholic high schools, and Faerber based his study on the 1,327 (63%) replies received by March of 1947. The schools surveyed included parish-based or parochial high schools, central high schools serving students from several parishes from the same diocese, and private high schools administered by a religious order or congregation and independent of a diocese. Of all the schools, 38% admitted high- and low-ability students on an equal basis; 33% did not admit students of different abilities on an equal basis, and 9% admitted low-ability students if they passed entrance exams. Factoring out those who did not respond, Faerber determined that 52% of the schools responding did not admit students on an equal basis.

Faerber (1948) examined the data from the survey to determine common characteristics of schools not admitting or admitting students with “low abilities.” Faerber found that schools excluding low-ability students tended to have enrollments exceeding 500, to be private Catholic high schools, or to be located in the northeastern region of the United States, an area with considerable private school competition. Faerber claimed that these private schools seemed out of step with the others and were “furthest away from the pastoral responsibility of providing for all Catholic youth of its area” (pp. 64-65). In contrast, those schools with students of low ability had enrollments of less than 500, were parochial or central high schools, or were located in the midwestern region—an area with large Catholic populations concentrated in urban centers. Faerber concluded that these smaller locally bound schools with strong diocesan ties better fulfilled their pastoral responsibilities of educating every Catholic child in a Catholic school. Faerber did not interrogate the administration of tests, but bemoaned the fact that schools used tests to exclude students from attending Catholic schools. In his analysis, Faerber built on the significant body of work questioning the way tests were used in schools. Similar to those debating the issue in the 1920s, Faerber revived that debate in the 1940s.

Others soon followed with further investigation of the use of testing in Catholic schools. Using the complete results (75%) from the same survey, Sister Mary Janet (1949) analyzed the results with an interest in assessing the accessibility of Catholic secondary education for Catholic children. Sister Mary Janet found that some schools refused admission to students with “low scholastic standing in the elementary school, or of low mental ability



as determined by intelligence tests administered either in the high school or in the elementary school” (p. 53). Fifty-one percent of the schools indicated that they accepted students with low IQ scores “(between 70 and 90) on par with those of average or superior IQ” (p. 54) and 33% excluded students with low IQs. This finding differed from Faerber’s. Although it seemed to indicate more schools were willing to accept students with lower IQs, the results still disappointed Sister Mary Janet. After lamenting the limited access for low-ability students to Catholic high schools, Sister Mary Janet outlined the challenge she and her colleagues faced:

If we accept this principle of Catholic high school education for all Catholic youth, as the majority of Catholic educators do today, there will have to be more significant changes in curriculum. Increased student bodies multiply individual differences. They call for more careful guidance. They demand more valid methods of evaluation of achievement in terms of individual endowment and effort. They demand programs of study suited to the diversified abilities, interests, and aptitudes. They call for scientific research to find answers to difficult problems. (p. 131)

Sister Mary Janet argued for using progressive educational methods to fulfill their pledge to educate *all* Catholic children in Catholic schools. Rather than taking issue with testing, she offered ways to use science to serve the educational needs of all Catholic children. This reflected the movement within Catholic educational circles to accept educational measurement and use it in a way to fit the mission of their schools.

The research of Faerber (1948) and Sister Mary Janet (1949) raised deep concerns over the growing divide between the goal of educating all Catholic children in Catholic schools and the reality of a limited number of available seats in Catholic schools. These studies also called into question the capability of Catholic schools in meeting the needs of all Catholic children. In a separate survey, Sister Mary Pauline Degan (1950) asked principals of Catholic high schools about their admission and placement practices. Her sample consisted of diocesan and non-diocesan high schools. “In the large majority of the diocesan high schools—87.1 per cent of them—no set I.Q. is required of a student for admission” (p. 9). Degan’s results indicated that more Catholic high schools were using educational measurements, but that diocesan schools were not necessarily using them as an entrance requirement. Instead, they were used to place students once they were in the school. Two-thirds of large diocesan high schools administered an IQ test to incoming freshmen, 12% administered it after admission, and 22% gave no IQ test. In the case of large

non-diocesan schools, 34% did not give intelligence tests to incoming freshmen and 19% administered them only after enrollment. Among small diocesan schools, 45.5% did not give IQ tests for admission and only 17% administered them after enrollment (Degan, 1950).

As with earlier studies, the size of the school seemed to be an important factor in how tests were used. In addition to her finding that a good number of small diocesan schools did not give IQ tests, Degan (1950) found similar results among small non-diocesan schools: “No I.Q. tests are given in 51.2 per cent of these schools. In 14.1 per cent of the schools I.Q. tests are given after school starts” (p. 82). Degan’s findings supported Faerber’s and Sister Mary Janet’s: “Freshmen are given I.Q. tests in 61.8 per cent of the schools, with the smaller schools employing these tests to a lesser degree than the larger ones” (p. 98). This may have been because smaller diocesan schools generally had fewer resources, and the cost of testing could have impeded the adoption of a full program. It may also have been, as Sr. Mary Janet (1949) and the Committee on Affiliation and Extension (1940b) argued, that these smaller schools knew their students better and found no need for testing.

Collectively the studies conducted in the 1940s lend credence to the importance of context in Catholic schooling. Each study addressed the diversity of schools surveyed with some more attentive than others to differences in size, location, and organization. All of the studies examined secondary schools, and the CUA’s study by the Committee on Affiliation and Extension gave a glimpse into the seemingly limited use of testing in elementary schools. The data demonstrated that Catholic secondary schools increased their use of educational measurement in the World War II era and post war years, but more for placement and guidance than admission.

### **Conclusions**

Is it only wishful thinking to hope for the time when Catholic youth may apply for admittance to Catholic high schools without fear of being refused because they do not have an I.Q. of 95; because they have not had a scholastic average of B; because God created them with black skin instead of white; because in God’s Providence they do not have the economic background to pay high tuition or fees? (Degan, 1950, p. 1)

In 1950, Sister Mary Pauline Degan captured the many changes in the mission and practices of Catholic high schools in the first half of the 20th century in the United States. Her commentary reflected the assimilation of Catholic schools into the race-based, class conscious, and meritocratic orientation of

American education. Degan's lament arose from a gradual, but not inevitable, shift in many Catholic high schools toward becoming more exclusive institutions by the 1950s. This change was aided by an increase in the demand for Catholic schooling in the post-World War II era and the inability to keep pace with it (Franklin, Gordon, Seller, & Fass, 1991). Despite the more exclusive character of Catholic secondary schools at mid century, Degan's comment also highlighted the continued desire of some Catholic educators to serve the educational and spiritual needs of all Catholic children.

At the turn of the 20th century, many in the Catholic hierarchy could not resolve merging Catholic and modern American ideas and values. Over the next several decades with increased oversight by public authorities and jarred by two world wars and severe economic depression, American Catholics gradually moved toward a policy of accommodating the modern world. This process was well illustrated by Catholic educators' developing ideas about schools and schooling. The commitment to cultivating souls and educating all Catholic children in the liberal arts tradition prompted Catholic educators to question progressive educational methods such as educational measurement. These commitments also required those who embraced modern educational notions to articulate how those ideas supported Catholic beliefs, which resulted in a more strategic use of educational measurement and also demonstrated how some Catholic educators endorsed progressive educational ideas and methods.

By the 1940s more Catholic schools and specifically secondary schools adopted testing programs. Advocates of testing argued that despite their limitations, testing provided an improvement over the subjective evaluations of teachers. In their defense of educational measurement, some believed, as did many public educators, that it was an efficient way to identify children's needs and address them (Rousmaniere, 1997). Some saw testing as a way to help students determine how best to serve in a democratic society, and they employed both progressive ideas and Catholic theology in this argument. Those who supported educational measurement promoted the use of science to meet the educational needs of individual children and improve wider social conditions. However, few, if any, embraced the secular orientation of progressive education, holding fast to the centrality of religion in education. Although, in their support of educational measurement, these educators adopted not only practices but ideas as well. They were not pedagogical or administrative progressives in the fullest sense, but they certainly made concerted efforts to reconcile their Catholic beliefs with progressive ideology, moving them well beyond simply selecting progressive methods to suit their own needs.

“Despite Catholic belief in the equality of all souls, a socially stratified system of private, diocesan, and parish schools, inability to accommodate all eligible children, and the desire to train Catholic leaders produced a selective admissions (and expulsion) policy” (Franklin, Gordon, Seller, & Fass, 1991, p. 55). This assessment is accurate in part, but of equal import is the continued resistance to or ambivalence toward educational measurement by some Catholic schools. Catholic schools varied in size, organization, and administration. The influence of the local context, including the geographical area, the diocesan leadership, and the particular religious order or congregation administering a school, played a significant role in shaping school practices. The very diversity of Catholic schools and Catholic educators, although socially stratified, contributed significantly to their more critical and uneven acceptance of educational measurement in the first half of the 20th century.

This historical case offers evidence for continued critique of reform movements and at the same time cautions against wholesale rejection of them. Catholic educators in the first half of the 20th century engaged in rich debates over educational measurement and some displayed a keen sense for sorting out the pernicious elements of this movement and for finding value in some of its practices. This challenges educators today to make a similar commitment as they encounter or engage in educational reforms. Practices focused on authentic learning with the goal of students reaching their fullest potential and those that provide teachers with curricular frameworks and instructional strategies to support this work are worthy of consideration. Taking on the accountability movement in totality may not be wise, since we often cannot know our own blind spots, but evaluating those aspects that improve student learning has proven to be critical and important work.

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