

Educator Evaluates the Meaning And Nature of Effective Testing

By Rena Kunis

In the recent furor over the testing of schoolchildren, some have deplored the effect it has on teaching, directing teachers' efforts to examination techniques rather than learning. Others have defended such examinations as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests in determining the readiness of the students tested to enter college. But little has been said about the psychological effect of the pressure of constant testing on the children of elementary school age.

Accordingly, language arts specialist Nancy Meryl Cohen has developed an approach to minimize the ill effects of demands for top grades, effects which include stomach aches, nail biting, and sleepless nights, and even go so far as obsessive compulsive syndrome. "What the children need to learn is how to absorb and apply information and method. Of course there should be testing, but a way must be applied to minimize the tension, especially for elementary school students."

Ms. Cohen emphasizes the importance of self confidence. "In a fifth-grade class I recently visited, the children indicated that testing would help them if it were used only at the end of a unit of learning, and then at the end of the term, to evaluate progress. Some of the students said that they often stay up far into the night studying for tests after doing their homework, in fear of failing."

"Not all children can excel in every area of learning, said Ms. Cohen. A child with musical talent, for instance, should be encouraged to develop his



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musical ability, rather than struggling with advanced mathematics. Of course all children need to know the basics of mathematics, reading and writing," she said.

To further evaluate the frequency and nature of testing, Ms. Cohen would like to hear from parents, teachers and students. "When I help a student to learn, I must take into account his or her needs," she said. She may be contacted by accessing clevertutor@aol.com.