

Educator Wages War on 'Biased' Tests

HARTFORD, Conn. (UPI)—John Weiss wants to save children from standardized tests. He thinks it might make them bigots, sexists and conformists.

He's so worried he's started a national movement called Project DE-TEST (Demystify the Established Standardized Tests)—a movement that tries to point out the evils of some intelligence and aptitude tests.

What bothers Weiss and a number of others is the questions on some of the tests frequently given to elementary, junior high and high school students.

Here's an example:

Fill in the following blank.

"The—roses flush up in the cheeks."

Your choices are: (A) Pretty, (B) Small, (C) Yellow, (D) Red.

The company that made up the test said the correct is (D) or Red.

"The answer is red," Weiss said, "but only if the cheek in question is white."

What about a black child?

"We're not against testing," said the 23-year-old Middletown resident who is director of the Center for the Study of Education and Politics. The nonprofit group is located at, but not

associated with, Wesleyan University.

"It's just that in some cases the test areas are blatantly culturally biased," Weiss said. To illustrate his point, he read another test question: "What do you do when you cut your finger?"

The company that wrote the test gave children two points for saying: "Put on a Band-Aid," one point for saying "Go to a hospital" and no points for saying "Do nothing."

"Poor kids get this test question wrong because they think the test must mean a big cut and they answer, 'Go to a hospital,'" Weiss said, "Or they say, 'Do nothing' because they don't have enough money to buy

Band-Aids."

Weiss is touring Connecticut and Massachusetts lecturing colleges and civic groups on the pitfalls of standardized tests. He says they "encourage and perpetuate race, sex and class distinctions."

Those aren't the only reasons Weiss objects to the tests.

He said that in many cases, standardized IQ tests have taught teachers more than students. Weiss said a few years back Minnesota promised to reward educators whose students improved their test scores during the year.

Teachers, he said, quickly learned

to give the first-of-the-year test on a Friday afternoon when the children were thinking about the coming weekend. The teachers would give the year-end test on a Tuesday morning when the children were more alert.

"The year-end scores were really high. They (the teachers) were having phenomenal success," Weiss said. "They had learned to play the game."

"Students should write down their own answers, instead of choosing answers," he said. "Standardized tests breed a multiple-choice mentality. The test questions are designed to fool you."