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AUTHOR Page, Reba Neukom
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ABSTRACT

The symbolic function of curricular debate, as it is manifested in the minimum competency testing movement (MCT), is investigated. Curricular debate necessarily reflects the demands of the society in which it arises. The topics that are addressed spring from this milieu and the language in which issues are couched must be appropriate to it. Examination of the MCT literature shows that educators do not recognize the symbolic power of curricular debate. Typically, educators writing about MCT defend the past or the status quo and reject MCT out of hand or they flow with the times and accept it without question. The writing of those who have climbed on the MCT "bandwagon" provides an example of the confusion that results when curricular issues are not treated reflectively. The first section of this paper asks what proponents of MCT want, in order to demonstrate that a straightforward answer is hard to pinpoint. In the second section of the paper, responses to MCT which are more analytical are examined. Neither simply rejecting nor accepting MCT, the writers reviewed in this section recognize and call attention to philosophical and political issues raised by the movement, but fail to recognize the power of their own educational discourse. All attempt to reconstruct the MCT movement and divert its popularity to other educational purposes, but new problems arise from their unselfconscious use of language. (LC)

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Wisconsin Center for Education Research
 University of Wisconsin-Madison · School of Education
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Minimum Competency Testing: A Curricular Debate

Reba Neukom Page

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By July 1, 1984, with the active involvement of school district administrators, teachers, and parents, every school board shall adopt objective-referenced pupil minimum competency tests which reflect the school district's curriculum and the school district's minimum standards of proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics (Wisconsin 118.30, Pupil Minimum Competency Tests).

Thus surfaced in the Wisconsin legislature in July, 1981,¹ an educational phenomenon that has received attention in at least 38 other states in the nation since the early '70's: the Minimum Competency Testing movement.

What shall we make of this educational movement?

— John Dewey, assessing one of the educational "currents" of the twenties, made observations that are relevant to educational movements in general.

Dewey pointed out that educators react to the "compelling" economic and political forces of the modern world in two ways: they retreat into eulogies of a culture of the past or they unreflectively embrace the utilitarian ethic of the present. In contrast, Dewey urged that educators become myth-makers: with an "inspired imagination," they may

transmute a society built on an industry which is not yet humanized into a society which wields its knowledge and its industrial power in behalf of a democratic culture... our public education is the potential means for effecting the transfiguration of the mechanics of modern life into sentiment and imagination (Dewey, 1929, p. 291 and 293).

Dewey saw the need for educators to adopt a critical stance toward the social forces of the day and for them to express that stance in language that was self-conscious. Thus, he called attention to the symbolic function of curricular debate. It is this function,

as it is manifested in the minimum competency testing movement, that I wish to investigate.

The general framework underlying this investigation relies on Dewey's essay. It assumes that curricular debate necessarily reflects the demands of the society in which it arises. The topics that are addressed spring from this milieu and the language in which issues are couched must be appropriate to it. Given current economic and social forces it is not surprising that today the debate concerns minimums, competency and testing.

On the other hand, curricular discourse has a force of its own. It acts back on and gives definition to the milieu in which it grows. Demographic changes, to which some attribute the impetus for MCT, are important, to be sure, but of equal importance is the meaning ascribed to those changes. My question is, do educators recognize the symbolic power of curricular debate?

Examination of the MCT literature shows, by and large, that they do not. Typically, educators writing about MCT respond exactly as Dewey says: they defend the past or the status quo and reject MCT out of hand or they flow with the times and accept it without question.² The writing of those who have climbed on the MCT "bandwagon" provides an example of the confusion that results when curricular issues are not treated reflectively.³ The first section of this paper asks what proponents of MCT want in order to demonstrate that a straightforward answer is hard to pinpoint. Moreover, because proponents of MCT assume that the answer is self-evident, they uncritically accept certain educational values, instead of giving them serious scrutiny.

In the second section of the paper, responses to MCT which are more analytical are examined. Neither simply rejecting nor accepting MCT, the writers recognize and call attention to philosophical and political issues raised by the movement. Nonetheless, they also fail to recognize the power of their own educational discourse. All attempt to reconstruct the MCT movement and divert its popularity to other educational purposes, but new problems arise from their unselfconscious use of language.

A major problem with the MCT movement is understanding exactly what the majority of those who support the movement want (e.g., Seeley, 1979; Neill, 1978; Parnell, 1978; Tyler, 1976). This problem results from three factors: 1) there is a lack of clarity about the substantive issues involved in MCT; 2) there are inherent contradictions in the social policy MCT reflects and creates; and 3) there is a confusion of descriptive, prescriptive and polemical language in MCT literature. Moreover, while these factors make the movement hard to clarify, they are also a source of MCT's symbolic and political strength. Vague educational policies with a ring of accountability and egalitarianism make for a very effective "bandwagon" (Spady, 1977).

On a rudimentary level, there is some agreement concerning facts about MCT. For example, most authors date its beginning from 1972, when the State Board of Education of Oregon established a new criterion for high school graduation: students would have to meet locally-determined competency standards, rather than simply pass a required number of courses. Most articles announce the "score" of how many states in the country are establishing MCT, either as legislation or as educational policy. The

variability of programs is noted, but most authors agree that these characteristics are common to all: standards are defined, in academic subjects, and means of verifying the achievement of the standards are specified.

However, the problem of understanding what proponents of MCT want begins precisely in these agreed-upon characteristics of the movement. Every advocate has his own definition of the standards that will be set for competencies and the means by which their achievement will be tested. In Oregon, for example, one school district has identified over 300 competencies while another has decided upon nine.

In what may be an effort to simplify this problem, some proponents make the minimum competencies synonymous with basic skills. Thus, in the proposed Wisconsin legislation cited at the beginning of this paper, the competencies are reading, writing and arithmetic. However, this seemingly commonsensical definition of competencies is called into question by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which insists upon distinguishing lower- and higher-order basic skills. NAEP argues that children must be taught reading comprehension as well as decoding skills, problem-solving as well as computational skills. In fact, it is concerned that the lower-order basic skills are being over-taught and higher-order skills, neglected:

There is a critical need for attention to higher-order cognitive skills. Reasoning, analyzing, estimating, selecting appropriate information and inferring--these are basic skills that are essential to the effective application of mathematics (Hill, 1979).

While most state laws specify at least the Three R's, some MCT advocates expand the competencies to include additional academic disciplines. For example, at a recent symposium on microcomputers, Dr. William Moursund deemed "criminally negligent" any educational system that does not provide

for computer literacy because in 10-20 years hand-held computers will be as common as calculators. Other proponents of MCT broaden the competencies to include the non-academic. Life skills, survival skills, or interpersonal skills are asserted to be more basic than cognitive skills. Thus, Oregon graduates learn "enabling" (cognitive) skills for six "life-roles" but they must also learn to be able and willing to apply them (Spady, 1977).

The lack of agreement as to what competencies will be tested makes the MCT movement difficult to define. The confusion is only compounded by the tasks of specifying standards and tests to go with the selected competencies. Some of this confusion is inherent: educational goals are rarely clear or unanimously held; methods are imprecise, and students, infinitely variable. Moreover, the ambiguity of the debate serves a positive political purpose. Vague but charming slogans about getting back to the basics make possible the breadth of support the movement needs and, in fact, commands. However, the bulk of the MCT literature, by focusing so much on the various operational questions, functions to deflect attention from an important prior question: what education, after all, is imparted by and what culture may issue from the cultivation of minimum competencies (Dewey, 1929). The "busy" character of most of the debate about MCT is such that this question about educational values simply never arises.

Equally confusing educational statements accrue from the correspondence between MCT and the general social and political milieu in which the movement has appeared. This is the second factor that makes determining what MCT comprises difficult. Advocates of MCT, by accepting that the parameters of educational debate must be those of current social policy, gain political

credibility but ignore important disjunctions between societal and educational priorities. This tension is heightened by the ambiguity of the social policy itself.

For example, the worst of the problems of the '70's and '80's may be "stagflation," an economic condition that is, paradoxically, inflationary and stagnant. A specter of this condition infused the comments of Wisconsin policy-makers in recent interviews about the problem of marginal students in high schools. One law-maker remarked:

Schools are geared to handle the kids that fit the programs they offer. We don't have individualized education plans for special needs kids the way they do in the handicapped programs. We need more early basic skills testing. We need early counseling for kids that are having problems, family problems. Schools need to identify kids earlier--dropouts don't just happen overnight. The schools just don't adapt...And it's not necessarily a question of costing more money. Maybe schools need to learn to use their existing resources in a more creative fashion (Interview with a Wisconsin legislator, 1981).

This legislator, like others interviewed, expressed, first, higher expectations for the schools: their programs must appeal to all children and they must provide individualized services. At the same time, the policy-maker denied the need for any substantial increase in monies to accomplish these inflated demands. Thus, educational policies, like the economic milieu in which they arise, are themselves stagflated.

MCT is a politically potent, but ambiguous, educational policy, because it also demands increased outputs with little emphasis on financial inputs:

Little attention has been paid to the increased costs resulting from legislation that mandates testing of minimum competencies and remediation of students who cannot pass competency requirements. More accurately, little attention has been paid by the public and by the media. School personnel are well aware that additional requirements and regulation always cost more money (Neill, 1978, p. 82).

Today, there is less willingness to provide expansive monetary support for education, in general, and MCT, in particular. In part, this results from the discrediting of the educational policy of the '60's, human capital theory. If, as academic studies and press reports pronounce, investment in education does not result in greater benefit to the individual, in the form of a higher-paying, higher-status job, or to society, in the form of a more-productive, more-harmonious community, then further investment is not warranted. Simultaneously, however, and contradictorily, the acquisition of educational certificates is acknowledged as necessary for gaining a competitive edge in the race for jobs and income. Students who once would have chosen college now see it as too expensive or unsure an investment to make. Others expect the high school diploma to be a terminal degree. For both groups, it's increasingly important that the high school diploma be meaningful. Thus, the differentiation of diplomas under MCT is attractive because it will certify some--probably those who are already successful in school--for the increasingly scarce supply of non-professional jobs.

The correspondence between MCT and social policy extends beyond the present decade with its problem of stagflation to the dominant social policy in the U.S. in the twentieth century: minimalism (Cohen and Haney, 1980). Under this policy, the government defines its role as setting a minimum level of social welfare below which no one is allowed to fall. Similarly, MCT guarantees an adequate, but not excellent, education for all. The paradox of this policy is that by establishing a minimum, a stigma or negative label is also set. If some high school diplomas certify attainment of all requirements but others certify mastery of only basic competencies, few will view the latter as status-conferring. MCT protagonists argue that

the second certificate designates achievement of at least an adequate education. However, it certifies some degree of failure, as well.

The confounding of the intent of MCT--to guarantee a floor for what a diploma means--and its manifestation in a negative labelling process is fueled by the rhetoric of egalitarianism. This is the third factor that makes understanding the MCT movement difficult. Yet by embracing this rhetoric, MCT captures greater support. It is essential to advocate "education for all," however much such a slogan clouds a concomitant focus on differentiation.

This quotation is typical of the literature:

The New York Board of Regents has made clear that the object of its minimum competency test is not to screen out those who fail, but to insure that all become competent...Children can no longer be promoted regardless of whether they learn; on the other hand, sixteen-year-olds cannot be kept in first grade. There is only one solution: make sure that everyone learns so that they can move forward (Seeley, 1979, p. 1).

The appealing, simple "solution" set forth in the last line of the quotation obscures three important educational issues: distributing education, responsibility for educational outcomes, and curricular choices. Advocates of MCT ignore an historical perspective in which "minimalism appears to have been a relatively conflict-free way of improving life for those at the bottom of the American heap, because economic growth allowed those above the bottom to improve as well" (Cohen and Haney, 1980, p. 7). Shifts of the entire population are acceptable but shifts in the distribution of status within the population are not. Because these are not times of economic expansion, increased educational attainment by all is precluded. Therefore, it is plausible to expect that MCT will have the effect of confirming those from less powerful groups to lower-status education, rather

than "insuring that all become competent." Egalitarian slogans conceal MCT's potential for legitimating the status quo.

A second issue that is obscured by the egalitarian rhetoric of MCT is that of responsibility for educational outcomes. Although a state or school district mandates achievement, individual students are often held responsible for it. Seeley, for example, insists that "all children can and must become competent in reading, writing and arithmetic" (Seeley, 1979, p. 1). However, most MCT programs do not specify the means for this development by mandating remediation programs for students who are found to be "incompetents."⁴ By juggling the question of just who is responsible for educational competency, advocates of MCT play on society's ambivalence about whether it is the individual student's or the school system's fault when people fail. This ambivalence also contributes to the maintenance of the status quo (Edelman, 1977, p. 8).

Finally, the rhetoric of egalitarianism begs the question of mass education. Advocates of MCT borrow from mastery learning theory and assert that everyone can learn anything, given time and appropriate techniques. Nevertheless, this does not answer the fundamental curricular question of what to teach to whom. If one student learns algebra in a year and proceeds to other math courses, but another takes four to master algebra, the two will not be "equal" in mathematics at graduation. The MCT answer often made to this objection is that schools value only one kind of learning and there are many other kinds that they should credit. Interpersonal and technical skills should be taught along with academic skills (Cross, 1976). This answer is also incomplete, however. The academic curriculum is high-status because society deems it so. Groups that receive courses in checkbook

balancing, no matter how essential that skill, will not command the status of groups learning calculus. Moreover, the inclusion of checkbook balancing in one's schedule limits the opportunity to take higher-status classes, of necessity. Therefore, in the curricular debate about MCT, the rhetoric of egalitarianism functions to confuse the extent to which the movement is a response to an industrial society's need for sorting and selecting mechanisms that are accepted as legitimate.

The first question about MCT, then,--exactly what do the majority of supporters want--is not easy to clarify. Operational definitions are necessary but complex; the social policies that are reflected are ambiguous; rhetoric that is timely also obscures. Curricular proposals, such as many of those from MCT advocates, that simply mirror the society in which they develop carry all the contradictions of that society. Nevertheless, most of the educators writing about MCT accept this politically astute form of argument, because it assures them of public support. However, they also accept a negligible role for educational discourse in transfiguring societal norms.

In addition, they fail to examine an important prior question: what definition of education is imparted through an emphasis on minimums, competencies, and testing? This question remains unexamined because advocates of MCT do not understand that the words of their proposals contain evaluative as well as referential meanings. Articles about MCT are not merely programmatic and technical, but also set parameters within which education is defined. The implicit definition influences teachers and students as well as the society at large.

For instance the way in which general curricular debate may percolate down into the classroom is revealed in the following example from The Case for Competency-Based Education:

Below [is an example of a] competenc[y] and performance indicato[r] that [is] essential for leading a profitable, responsible, adult life.

GOAL--Each student should develop the ability to make application for employment.

COMPETENCY--Either obtain a job or research the job characteristics that would directly affect an employee.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR--Either obtain a job and work for a specified period of time or explain to the certifier details about the job such as salary, hours, fringe benefits, dress regulations, and job duties.

On the one hand, this straight-forward account looks descriptive: the goal, the competency, and the performance indicator appear to be clear. Obviously, people must know how to apply for jobs. However, the statement's value judgments are neither explicitly nor clearly presented. For example, the introductory statement implies that students should be prepared to lead a "profitable, responsible" life. While few would quarrel with being responsible, however that word may be defined, some might quarrel with the equation of the good life and "profit." Or, note the emphasis in the "Performance Indicator" on the mechanical aspects of the process of applying for a job. Is an understanding of sexual or racial discrimination not also a part of competent job application, for example?

In the final analysis, educators must develop a symbolically powerful curricular debate. This requires a response to the modern world that is critical, not blind. Furthermore, the response must be couched in language that is self-conscious. It must be inspired yet the values it endorses must

be explicit; it cannot be mere shibboleths or catchwords, no matter how popular. Otherwise, we will remain "caught in the meshes of a mechanical industrialism" or trapped in "a culture whose method is reminiscence" (Dewey, 1929, p. 292).

The second question then becomes, what are the problems in developing such a debate? Can educators "assist the vital focus [of modern society] into new forms of thought and sensation?" (Dewey, 1929, p. 291). The question can be examined by attending to the writing of a small number of educators whose stance toward MCT is neither defensive nor uncritical. Their articles reflect the contradictions and limitations that face educators who attempt to become the myth-makers or interpreters of present-day forces. Among them are some who accept MCT as a political necessity but cynically assert that it won't affect schools for good or ill anyway. They deny the efficacy of educators to do more than roll with society's punches. Others accept MCT but try to "soften" or humanize it by extending the domain of the competencies. These educators fail to understand that, in important ways, the language of minimums, competencies, and testing shapes the education that results. Finally, there are some writers who reject MCT, usually by stressing the need for a liberal education. These educators, none of whom seems to have captured much popular attention, are usually criticized as elitist or naive.

The cynical realists (e.g., Baratz) are distinguished from the majority of writers about MCT because they do not blindly embrace the economic and political forces that impinge on schools. Instead they eloquently call attention to these forces. With a neutral stance, neither advocating MCT nor opposing it, they suggest that educators shrewdly accept the political

necessity of endorsing MCT because MCT will not significantly change schools anyway.

These writers characterize the formal structure of institutions in post-industrial society as reflecting the "myth of rationality."⁵

Bureaucratic educational organizations exist to produce in a rational manner the classifications and credentials industrial society demands. Thus, the formal structure of schools must satisfy the societal injunction that schools seem to educate, e.g., schools must administer objective tests or pass out diplomas. This formal structure, however, is not strongly linked to the activities that are actually educative. In fact, serious examination of what kind of education is taking place in classrooms might prove counter-productive. It is much more important for a school system to say that it is teaching the minimum competencies than it is to prove it. That is why the wise school will administer minimum competency tests even though it already collects similar information through other tests. As with these earlier tests, MCT will not change what goes on in classrooms.

While these realists thus emphasize the political importance of curricular debate in maintaining public support, they do not allow much scope for its production. For example, debate must be couched in terms of the rational ethos of the times or it will be dismissed as foolishly idealistic. Carried to an extreme, this logic is self-perpetuating: even if educators think that emphasis on competencies does not produce a good education, they nonetheless will act as though it does because they know that everyone else in the society makes this assumption (Meyer, 1977). While such an attitude may be realistic it is also essentially pessimistic. It denies the possibility that the terms of a curricular debate can be altered.

Furthermore, these educators do not consider that the debate about MCT will have much impact on life in classrooms. This is because the status quo, though carefully described, is nonetheless accepted as the way things must be. This complacency is reflected in the way the issue of MCT's impact on minorities is addressed. Supposedly blacks will not lose any of the gains made in the '60's because those gains are embedded in law. If there is undue hardship, legal and political challenges to MCT will be mounted (Baratz, 1980). Such a sanguine view is hardly tenable. First, it denies the sanctioning power of differentiated diplomas. These may justify racial discrimination in hiring practices much more than the unofficial dropout procedure now does. Furthermore, the safeguards to prevent undue hardship--legal and political challenges--seem tenuous at best in these times of political reaction.

Therefore the cynical realists carefully describe the parameters of curricular debate set by societal forces and the way the debate can function simultaneously to protect the autonomy of the classroom. However, the cost at which such autonomy is bought is very high. According to these writers, educators must be Janus-like, satisfying educative as well as societal priorities. However, such a balancing act may be untenable over time without crisis in both arenas. Educators may win popular support by mouthing platitudes about competencies but they may lose the ability to produce meaningful discourse about educational values.

A second group of writers whose stance toward MCT is neither defensive nor uncritical argues that education is different in some way from the social and political forces to which it responds (e.g., Spady, Cross). These writers try to "soften" or humanize these forces as they are expressed in

the MCT movement, usually by broadening the domain of competencies to include life skills. Thus, Spady asserts that a "full-blown CBE program [will have an] adequacy and mission [that] extend beyond the prevalent and narrow demands for minimum student basic skill proficiencies (Spady, 1977, p. 10). Praising Oregon's plan, he expansively proposes that education teach the competencies needed by all children for six "life-roles": learner, individual, citizen, family member, consumer, and worker.

There are obvious objections to such a proposal. Some would say that teaching a student how to be a family member is still rather a mystery, others, that schools are not the institutions to try to teach it anyway. Furthermore, Spady himself acknowledges that an expansion of the school's role along the lines he proposes is financially unfeasible at this time.

A more serious objection can be raised, however. These educators are unable to transfigure the requirements set by the industrial forces of the day for education because they use the very language of industrialism in their own remedies. Their unselfconscious use of the language involves unwitting acceptance of the values carried in the language. Thus, the praiseworthy intent to "view students as active agents in the educational process, not as passive recipients of society's concern with accountability..."

(Spady, 1977, p. 10) is undercut by a language of skills, outcomes, and measurements.

For example, compare these two statements:

- (1) The central theory is simple. Human life, however varied, consists in the performance of certain activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities. However numerous and diverse the human activities may be for any social class, they can be discovered; This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which these affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations and forms of knowledge that men need.

Competency-based education [is] a data-based, adaptive, performance-oriented set of integrated processes that facilitate, measure, record and certify within the context of flexible time parameters the demonstration of known, explicitly stated, and agreed upon learning outcomes that reflect successful functioning in life roles.

The first is from Bobbitt's classic of 1918, The Curriculum; the second is from Spady's article written in 1977. Both use the language of social efficiency. This results in both advocating an education that is instrumental, rather than intrinsically valuable, learning that is task-analyzed, rather than holistic, and a curriculum that is individualized in an idiosyncratic use of that term, rather than common. Moreover, both suggest that the question of what the schools should teach is commonsensical and non-problematic.

Thus, this group of writers, though intending to suggest a humane education for all, actually seems to be overwhelmed by the same question Bobbitt was: what in the world is to be done with all these masses of people who are thronging to the schools? The answer of MCT is in the tradition of social efficiency. Individualized, practical programs in a mastery learning framework are suggested as the means of accommodating the significant intellectual and social differences between learners that is the basic assumption of Bobbitt, Spady, and other social engineers.

A third group of writers who try to take seriously Dewey's injunction to be myth-makers and interpreters of modern day forces argue against MCT by arguing for a liberal education (e.g., Greene, Griffiths). These educators assert that in the modern world, as more people work at meaningless jobs, the liberal arts are more important than ever. It is not that a liberal education will "adjust" one to industrialization, but that it will prevent

one from becoming a "mere technician, too engrossed to reflect upon [oneself]" (Greene, 1979, p. 635). Moreover, these writers meet the issue of egalitarianism head on by asserting that "it is fundamentally wrong to act as if access to the humanities were beyond the capabilities of the 'disadvantaged' students...[the humanities are] part of a basic education" (Newsweek, quoting from the Rockefeller Foundation's report, The Humanities in American Life).

The main criticism of these educators' contribution to the debate regarding MCT is not with what they say, but with how they say it. Even though they assert that a liberal education is not beyond the capabilities of "the masses," their articles employ allusions and arguments that are beyond the capabilities of almost anyone. Thus, Maxine Greene's article, which explicitly denies that high culture is for the few, nonetheless uses so many literary allusions that it is comprehensible only to the few in the population who are English majors. Hence, her arguments can be dismissed as sounding elitist, even though that is not their substance.

Furthermore, there are problems with the substance of the argument for a liberal education as well. Liberal educators are no less dependent upon uncritically accepted slogans than many MCT advocates. They suggest that what is needed is a common, not an individualized, curriculum, but they do not explain how such a program is to be selected. In fact, the curriculum implied looks very like the traditional academic curriculum that has served the middle class so well. Thus, the question of how one creates a common culture for all which nonetheless recognizes political and social diversity is raised but never really answered.⁶

The examination of the three groups of educators who stand apart from mainstream advocates of MCT highlights the difficulties of creating serious discourse in the curriculum field. Unlike many of the proponents of MCT, none of these writers responds uncritically to the demands of modern society for an education that is differentiated and structurally utilitarian. Yet all seem unable to provide viable alternatives to the mainstream.

Curiously, their failure seems attributable in part to the nature of their criticisms as "opposite extremes" to the mainstream argument. For example, those who would broaden competencies in an attempt to soften the mechanistic impact of MCT, fall prey to the language of social efficiency itself. Those who most clearly see the importance of the symbolic function of curricular debate nonetheless deny that the terms of the debate can be anything other than reflective. Those who argue against the adequacy of an education of simplistic competencies use a rhetoric that is too complex, thus limiting the audience to whom their statements will make sense. While these three groups of writers perceive the need for educators to respond critically to the demands of modern society they fail to frame their criticisms in language that is self-reflective yet politically powerful.

If we are to establish a genuine curricular debate--one in which we do not bow to the times or fly to the past--we must speak in a language that is clear, but not simpleminded, about issues that are complex, without adding to their complexity. Such discourse cannot be a simple reaction against the mainstream:

Not chiding but the sympathy and direction of understanding is what the harsh utilitarian and prosaic tendencies of present education require...To bring to the consciousness of the coming generation something of the potential significance of the life of day-to-day, to transmute it from outward fact into intelligent perception, is the first step in the creation of a culture (Dewey, 1929, p. 294).

NOTES

¹The legislature eventually passed a modified MCT bill which a) provides resources to the Department of Public Instruction to develop competency tests for use by districts but b) makes use of the tests a voluntary district decision, not a mandatory requirement.

²The past defended can be real or imagined.

³"Bandwagon" is Spady's word.

⁴Use of the word, "incompetents," reminiscent of G. Stanley Hall's "incapables," is attributed to Henry Brickell, Director of Policy Studies in Education, the Academy for Educational Development, by Neill, 1978, p. 71.

⁵The cynical realists build on the theories of Meyer and Rowan.

⁶Adler's Paideia Proposal fits into this category, although his treatise depends on uncritically accepted slogans, rather than obscure allusions.

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Personal Interviews with eight Wisconsin policy-makers regarding social policy and the marginal student. Those interviewed were State Assemblyman R. Flintrop and Assemblywoman L. Plous; Marshall Smith, Director of the Research and Development Center of the UW-Madison; Betty Fey, Director of Dane County Youth Commission; Kathleen Nichols, Madison Urban League; Lt. Smith, Madison Police Department, Youth Aids Division; Peggy Chapman, Madison Public Schools, Instructional Support Services; Bruce Larson, Intake Division, Dane County Social Services. Interviews were conducted in April and May, 1981.