

REVIEWS

Criterion Referenced Measurement. W. James Popham. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978. 260 pp.

Test Scores and What They Mean. Howard B. Lyman. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978. 190 pp.—Reviewed by William D. Corbett, Principal, James Russell Lowell School, Watertown, Massachusetts.

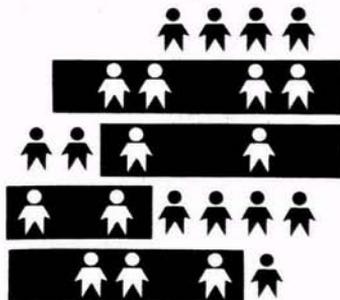
Popham and Lyman, both authorities on measurement, have different points of view. Popham describes norm-referenced standardized tests as ineffective measures of the achievement of school children: "We have an enormous reeducation job to do in order to convince a now skeptical public that norm-referenced standardized testing is not the answer to everyone's prayer." Lyman is an unabashed apologist for current standardized tests: "There is nothing wrong with most tests that educating the consumer cannot cure."

Popham describes the early history of standardized tests during World War I. Because the army needed to select officer material, the "spread 'em out and spot the best" philosophy in testing prevailed. In ensuing years that philosophy proved particularly useful when college openings were at a premium and when industries needed tests to select employees.

For measurement of the achievement of children, Popham recommends criterion-referenced tests, tests "used to ascertain an individual's status with respect to a well-defined behavioral domain." He devotes several chapters to the development and preparation of criterion-referenced measures, their reliability and validity, methods of selection, and their practical application in instruction.

He warns that the development of criterion-referenced tests is in its infancy and says the testing industry must devote consider-

Test Scores and What They Mean



able energy to the development of high quality tests.

Lyman's third edition of *Test Scores and What They Mean* was written to help professionals know more about tests and to increase their ability to interpret results to parents and students. The need for this skill has increased because of the Buckley Amendment, which requires all educational agencies to make test results available to students and/or their parents. (In Massachusetts, parents and students must be given an opportunity to see corrected tests.

Lyman does a nice job of explaining the various types of tests in present usage and the statistical procedures employed in development of norm-referenced tests.

Those offering preservice or inservice courses in psychometrics could well use both of these con-

cise, well-written books as required reading. Their diverse viewpoints would certainly provoke some interesting discussion.

Curriculum Development Library Index. 6 volumes. Belmont, California: Fearon-Pitman Publishers, Inc., 1978.—Reviewed by Gerald Bryant, Assistant Superintendent, Grand Island Public Schools, Grand Island, Nebraska.

The *Curriculum Development Library Index* is a major information resource for people planning or studying K-12 curriculum. Curriculum guides submitted by school districts and state departments of education (including those displayed at the ASCD annual conference) are subjected to a screening process, and those selected are duplicated on microfiche and indexed in a six-volume set. The index is organized by subject area and also by topics such as consumer education, basic skills, and diagnostic teaching. Both the topic entries and abstract descriptions of each guide are keyed to the microfiche.

The ERIC system and other information networks have for several years provided a way to obtain research and project reports, but there was not a single source for school-developed curriculum. Now there is, and it should be very useful to districts in the process of developing or revising their own programs.

The complete library may be too expensive for some small school districts (\$1,495 for the first 900 guides), but the microfiche collection could be maintained at a regional center, if necessary. The six-volume index, which gives complete information about contents of each guide, costs \$72.50.

Editor's note: The 1979 library is now being prepared. Guides may be submitted for review to Fearon-Pitman Publishers, Inc., 6 Davis Drive, Belmont, California 94002.

Minimum Competency. *Research Report 1978-3.* Washington, D.C.: National School Boards Association, 1978; **The Competency Challenge: What Schools Are Doing.** *Special Report.* Arlington, Virginia: National School Public Relations Association, 1978.—Reviewed by William M. Kendrick, Superintendent, Salem Public Schools, Salem, Oregon.

Perhaps no movement in education in recent years has created as much controversy as has the movement toward minimum competencies. Two recent publications, from the National School Public Relations Association and the National School Boards Association, provide insight into the competency question from different perspectives.

Minimum Competency, a publication of the National School Boards Association, looks at the competency movement from a national research and policy-oriented perspective. It sets forth the "state of the art" among leading education policymakers regarding basic skills, testing and achievement, local versus national control, and other issues implicit in the competency movement.

Incorporated in the report are three subreports concerning: (a) a national conference chaired by HEW Secretary Joseph Califano on "Achievement Testing and the

Basic Skills"; (b) from a committee chaired by Assistant Secretary for Education Mary Berry, "Improving Educational Achievement"; and (c) from an NSBA-conducted survey among school board presidents.

All three reports agree that the federal government should not be in the business of either establishing or testing for competencies. In fact, school board presidents surveyed by NSBA put federal and national agencies at the bottom of their list of "people to be trusted" with decisions regarding competencies. Based upon these reports, HEW seems to be de-emphasizing the national competency testing program considered earlier and to be concentrating, instead, on serving as an information clearinghouse and a source of technical assistance. That role is an appropriate one. Competencies are a matter for local district and state control.

The policy implications of the competency movement, from testing to teacher training, raised in this publication are serious ones. No one who intends to remain active in education during the next decade can afford not to give them serious considerations—and can afford not to read this thought-provoking report.

The Competency Challenge: What Schools Are Doing takes a good look at the competency movement from an operational perspective. Tracing the movement from its Oregon beginnings through the rest of the nation, *The Competency Challenge* focuses—and rightly so—on local district efforts to define, measure, and communicate competencies.

As one who has been a "competency advocate" for years, I feel strongly that local districts and state departments of education must exercise leadership in implementing competency programs. *The Competency Challenge* provides a concise update of each state's competency status, as well as providing several "case studies" of local districts' competency efforts.

The future of the competency

movement, as this publication points out, is uncertain. Will we see a set of nationwide competencies, with a national standardized test? I hope not. Will we see an effort to focus on competencies in the lower grades, instead of just at the high school level? I hope so.

For anyone interested in learning about the problems, challenges and promises of the competency movement from the local district perspective, *The Competency Challenge* is "must" reading.

Reviewers



William D. Corbett



Gerald Bryant



William M. Kendrick

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