

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON MEASUREMENT IN EDUCATION: Its History, Purposes and Activities

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THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON MEASUREMENT IN EDUCATION  
Its History, Purposes and Activities

Anna Dragositz  
Educational Testing Service

The 1920's were a boom period in test development. In 1928, Walter S. Monroe estimated there were some 1300 different standardized tests available and that some 30,000,000 test scores were obtained in a single year. By 1944, a corresponding estimate was that there were about 5000 tests available, and that something like 60,000,000 tests were administered.

Increased use of tests in schools was accompanied by growing criticisms and concerns. Students and parents expressed fears that tests were not measuring the important personal intangibles. Educators questioned whether they were measuring important abilities and significant educational objectives. Measurement specialists were concerned that tests were being used indiscriminately and their results used too casually or too literally.

Teachers of tests and measurements were getting together informally at the annual meeting of the Department of Superintendents of the NEA to discuss common concerns about the problems arising from the rapid growth in the use of various types of aptitude and achievement measures. On February 24, 1937 a group of college professors who were teaching courses in educational measurement assembled in a room at the Hotel Statler in New Orleans. The purpose of their meeting was to consider the desirability of organizing an association of people who were directly concerned with the practical use of various types of measurements used in education.

While no formal organization was set up at this meeting, there was unanimous agreement that there was need for one. Hence R. K. Bent and Frank S. White were appointed as a committee to prepare a constitution to be presented for consideration at a meeting called for the following February. Invitations were sent to teachers of courses in educational measurements in colleges and universities.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, February 22, 1938, about twenty-five men and women met in Committee Room A of the Atlantic City Auditorium to discuss the proposed association and its constitution. The result was the establishment of the National Association of Teachers of Educational Measurements. In 1942, the name of the association was changed to National Council on Measurements Used in Education. Its name was changed again in 1961 to National Council on Measurement in Education.

The first ten years of the organization, with Frank White as the moving figure, were hampered by the fact that the nation was at war and everything, of necessity, took second place to this effort. The membership was small, and the chief activity was a breakfast meeting held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Association of School Administrators. This was usually attended by 10 to 20 persons. A short program was held also, usually lasting through an afternoon, at which about a half-dozen papers were read. The attendance at this program was equally small.

Then with the end of the war, the organization grew rapidly and today there are over 700 members. The membership is comprised of measurement specialists and educators in a variety of positions who are interested and active in the development and use of tests.

The purposes of the association when it was established were essentially what they are today:

To disseminate among educators an increased knowledge of the techniques and instruments available for the measurement of human abilities, personality characteristics, and educational achievement, and of the procedures appropriate for the interpretation and use of such measurements.

To promote the improvement of the measurement techniques and instruments in these areas and of the procedures used in their administration, scoring, and interpretation.

One way in which NCME has implemented these objectives has been by holding annual meetings. The prepared papers and symposia have provided the membership with an opportunity to exchange experiences, new ideas, and current information on developments in test construction, research, and the application of measurement techniques to educational problems. The Council has also participated in Joint Sessions with the American Educational Research Association and the American Association of School Administrators.

The papers presented at the NCME meetings have been made available through an annual Yearbook, the first of which appeared in 1941 and reported on the first three meetings. The Yearbook has also served as a record of significant developments in Council affairs and provides a list of the names and addresses of current members.

A further aid to communication among the membership was inaugurated in December 1957 when the first NCME Newsletter was issued. The purpose of the Newsletter has been to provide a means for brief and informal exchanges of experiences in the teaching of measurement and in the use of tests. Its second purpose has been to inform the membership on Council activities.

Over the years, the Council has worked with other organizations interested in the improvement of tests and their use. It joined in sponsoring the preparation, publication, and revision of Technical Recommendations for Psychological Tests and Diagnostic Techniques and Technical Recommendations for Achievement Tests. Both publications present standards of professional practice which have influenced authors and publishers in the development of tests and in the preparation of interpretative and accessory materials. They have provided test users with guidelines useful in the selection of tests.

The Council is also a member of the Council for Research in Education. The purpose of this organization is "to provide the means, not now available, whereby the wide interdisciplinary interests and capabilities in the scientific approach to educational research may coordinate their strengths in seeking solutions to major educational problems."

The work of special committees has also contributed to the achievement of the Council's objectives:

The Committee on Pre-Service Education of Teachers of Measurement has been studying the advisability and feasibility of requiring instruction in measurement in connection with teacher certification.

The Committee on In-Service Education of Teachers of Measurement has conducted workshops for superintendents, principals, guidance counselors and other educators.

The Committee on Development of a Test of the Measurement Competencies of Classroom Teachers has compiled a booklet of multiple-choice questions for use in testing teacher competence in educational measurement.

The Committee on Test Utilization has developed, for consideration by the NCME Board of Governors, a list of activities which NCME might undertake to further promote greater understanding and improved use of measurement techniques.

The administrative arm of the Council consists of a Board of Governors which includes the past and the present Presidents, the Vice President, the Secretary, the Treasurer, three Directors, and the Editors of the NCME Yearbook and the NCME Newsletter. Their work is facilitated by a Nominating Committee and a Membership Committee.

There are three classes of members:

Active Member: Any person actively engaged in educational work who is desirous of promoting the purposes of the association.

Associate Member: Any person not actively engaged in educational work who is interested in promoting the objectives of the association.

Emeritus Member: Any active member who has reached the age of 65, and has paid dues for the ten years immediately preceding, may request emeritus membership.