

**TO: THE READER OF A SUPPOSEDLY ENTHRALLING
BOOK ABOUT EDUCATIONAL TESTING FROM: YOUR
LONG-TIME PAL SUBJECT: IDEA VETTING**

Hello again:

I bet you didn't expect to hear from me again after last week's e-mail exchange, but something came up yesterday that you can make better sense of than I. I say so because of what you were telling me about the new book you were reading about educational testing. And, after all, what are friends for?

There's a guy I work with who is pursuing a master's degree at Tipton University, and he's been taking at least two courses regarding educational assessment. Yesterday, as we were having lunch in the departmental lounge, this guy started talking about the reliability of educational tests, especially for individual students. What he said really shook me up, and I wanted your take on his main point. Does it sound reasonable to you—based on what you've been reading?

His main point was that in many instances, if not most, we are *inappropriately* calculating the reliability of tests we employ to make instructional decisions about individual learners. Apparently, teachers (or sometimes counselors if a school has one) calculate what's called a "standard error of measurement" that's symbolized by the letters SEM. This SEM lets teachers know how consistent a student's score is apt to be on a given test. However, because there are actually *three* different ways of calculating reliability for a test, the wrong kind of reliability estimate is often used in an SEM's computation.

My friend indicates that, in most instances, an SEM is based on how similar a test's items are, but teachers are often more interested in how consistently a test measures students' ability over an extended period of time. As a result of often using the wrong input for an SEM's calculation, teachers are likely to make mistakes in their instructional decisions.

Does this make sense to you, or is the guy misunderstanding something? If you think he is on-target, I'd like to hear some more of his views. If you think he is off, I can find other lunchtime friends.

See you next month at Frank's, and thanks for taking a crack at this topic.

Jamal

