The Test Collection Database at Educational Testing Service

by Marilyn Halpern

The effort involved in accessing information ranges from quick and easy to elusive and time consuming. The latter description probably reflects librarians' experiences when looking for tests or other assessment instruments. Since 1967, the Test Collection at Educational Testing Service has been locating, acquiring, and indexing both standardized, commercially available tests and research instruments. Our users have been limited to those who are aware of our reference service, bibliographies, newsletter, and/or Tests in Microfiche. Clients who live nearby may visit the Test Collection. Others telephone or write to us for information.

There are, certainly, other sources of information about tests, but that information is scattered among various reference sources, journals, test publisher catalogs, and newsletters. The Test Collection has assembled a comprehensive collection of tests and assessment instruments to spare users the frustrations of engaging in a random, hit-or-miss approach to finding the information they need.

As the number and variety of online databases have grown over the years, we became aware of an opportunity to make the test collection publicly available and to fill a void in the education and social sciences computer-retrievable literature. In September, 1983, the Test Collection database became a public file with BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services).

With development funds, the Test Collection began to convert from a manual to a computerized system. The work of building the file began over two years ago. Certain initial decisions about the content of the database were made. Only those tests and instruments which were still available and were obtainable would be included. ERIC descriptors and identifiers would be used as indexing terms because ERIC is so familiar a database and because our test file complements the information in ERIC (especially the materials contributed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement and Evaluation).

Since ERIC was to be the model for our database, the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility was approached for help in designing the cataloging record and in producing the magnetic tapes to be mounted on the BRS computers. The cataloging form went through several revisions, as experience taught that some of the things we wanted to do were too time-consuming or impractical. The final indexing record includes the following paragraphs: accession number, test title, author (personal or institutions), publisher (availability source), publication date, age or grade level, number of items, time required to take the test, subtest names, indexing terms, identifiers, and abstract.

Once the format of the indexing record was established, the task of reindexing all the tests previously cataloged with various classification systems began. The tests were grouped into broad categories and the groups rank-ordered: achievement, aptitude and intelligence; vocational-occupational, special populations, attitudes and interests, personality, sensory-motor, and miscellaneous. Part-time indexers and clerical assistants were hired and trained. Since only those tests currently available were to be included, a system of checking both published and research instruments for availability was set up. This system evolved through trial and error as we attempted to make the process as efficient as possible. For the research instruments, it was necessary to depend on the authors' willingness to respond to our inquiries. Responses have not been as satisfactory as one would wish, and there is still some follow-up work to do. Many titles in our card catalog were no longer available (especially the research instruments distributed by individuals), many had been revised, and a certain number of organizations, institutions, and individuals could no longer be located. If an availability source for an instrument could not be located after three attempts, the instrument was automatically excluded from the database and considered out-of-print.

BRS expressed an interest in the Test Collection database since it has made an effort to pull together a family of education-related files. With help from BRS, a design to convert the file from the format used by the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility to the final BRS product was implemented. Initially, plans were made to include the Test Collection database in BRS's SPIF database so the format selected was compatible with SPIF. Although the Test Collection database later changed to a separate file, the SPIF format and paragraph labels were kept.

The Educational Testing Service Test Collection database has been searchable since the end of September, 1983. The label for accessing the database is ETSF. The initial file contains approximately 5,000 bibliographic records. Updates will be done on a quarterly basis. Plans call for a file of approximately 7,500 records by June, 1984. After that, about 500 records per year will be added. Periodically records for tests which go out of print will be deleted.

In addition to the usual kinds of bibliographic information, some data are included which should provide additional valuable information. Within the indexing record, there is a paragraph called "subtests." Subtests are components within the overall test which assess specific skills or factors and for which there are often separate scores, as well as an overall score for the entire test. For example, in an overall achievement battery, there may be subtests for spelling,

following incorrect response; (5) use with nonreaders. Includes checklist for user-friendly software.

Sanders, Roger L., Sanders, Mary Ellen. Evaluating micro-computer software. *Computers, Reading and Language Arts*, Summer 1983, 1(1), 21-25.

> Suggests what to look for when evaluating software and its support literature; includes a software evaluation checklist.

The software line-up: What reviewers look for when eval-uating software. *Electronic Learning*, October 1982, 2(2), 45-48.

> Contains a check list to aid teachers in evaluating software used in computer-assisted instruction on microcomputers. Evaluation form contains three sec-tions: program description, program evaluation, and overall evaluation.

It may seem that these guidelines are simple, and therefore too easy. However, they have worked for others, and they should work for you. If you have any particular questions, you might wish to write or call either of these individuals, both of whom willngly shared their expertise and ideas with me and indicated that they would be glad to share them with our readers:

> Virginia Day, Librarian
> Massachusetts Vocational Resource Center
> 758 Merritt Road
> Lexington, MA 02173
> 617-863-1863

> Zhita Rea, Consultant
> Microcomputer Review Law
> Los Angeles County Education Center
> 9300 East Imperial Highway
> Downey, CA 90242
> 213-922-6111

Susan Baughman is Associate Librarian Gutman Library, Harvard Univesity

reading comprehension, and vocabulary. These items would yield subscores for the specific skills assessed by the battery. An overall score, based on the complete battery, would also be available. By entering the names of the subtests, additional key words are available on which a search may be conducted.

Also, in the age level and grade level paragraphs, the user may search on individual ages from 0 to 18 or grades K through 12 even though the printed record may display such terms as "children," "elementary education," or ranges, such as K-6. That is, the computer program has exploded these terms so that each age or grade level encompassed in a range may be searched.

Within the near future, BRS will make available the search aid page and documentation for ETSF. We hope that education and social science librarians will find the database useful and that it will help them locate information on tests and assessment instruments which they may previously have had difficulty finding. We hope, also, that searchers will provide us with feedback about the database. For those interested in obtaining a BRS password or learning how to search ETSF, the contact person at BRS is Michael Kremin. For those interested in finding out more about the content of the database, Marilyn Halpern, Test Collection librarian, is the contact person.

Marilyn Halpern is Head, Test Collection, Educational Testing Service