

An Introductory Text on Rasch Measurement

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Applying the Rasch Model: Fundamental Measurement in the Human Sciences
by Trevor G. Bond and Christine M. Fox

Birth of a New Book

I guess I just grew sick and tired of the same old request after almost every presentation I made at conferences involving developmental psychologists: “Trevor, could you just give me a simple ten minute explanation of what Rasch analysis is all about?” After a dozen or so inquiries of this nature, I thought there must be a shortcut. A couple of us Piagetians gathered and developed a little web site for developmentalists interested in Rasch analysis. When we tried to suggest introductory readings for our colleagues – many of whom had very little explicit training in statistics or quantitative research methodology – we realized that we could not produce the goods.

That’s not to deny in any way the importance of the classic Rasch texts – Wright and Stone, Andrich, Wright and Masters, and that of Georg Rasch himself. It highlighted, however, the absence of an introductory text – a text that would take an interested beginner to the point of being able to participate in the wider Rasch collegial community.

So really, I had the plan for the book in my mind for more than a couple of years. And the book would still be just that – plan in my mind – if I hadn’t had the good fortune to meet Christine Fox at a Midwest Objective Measurement Seminar (MOMS) meeting in Chicago. Consequently, I was able to read the “Uses of Rasch Modeling Counseling Psychology of Research” (Fox & Jones, 1998). I was impressed enough to suggest to Christine that we could collaborate in writing this book. I then sent her a copy of the book plan and the single chapter that I had already written in the hope of convincing publisher Erlbaum to undertake the publishing task.

Thanks to the marvels of e-mail communication, and a more than occasional phone call, we started the collaboration that has produced this volume. Long time Piagetian colleague Bill Gray organized an opportunity for me to visit the University of Toledo as a Distinguished Visiting Professor. James Cook University granted me a half year sabbatical in 2000 which resulted in the first draft of the complete text being sent to the publisher the day before I flew back to Australia!

One of the best aspects of visiting the University of Toledo was the opportunity to participate in teaching Christine’s course on Rasch measurement to graduate students in education and other related disciplines. We had decided to use key chapters from the draft of our book as the core material for the students, and took turns presenting those ideas to a lively bunch of committed and critical future researchers. This reinforced an idea that I had long cherished: that teaching students had always been the most important stimulus to my own learning.

While the book had started off as a sort of ‘how-to’ text for developmental psychologists, the editor and a number of our colleagues encouraged us to broaden the scope of our writing. More importantly, the emphasis on the fundamental scientific measurement role that Rasch analysis

could play – as repeatedly argued on the Rasch list – gradually influenced the style of the book. It's true: for many researchers, the Rasch model provides a very practical solution to data analysis in the social sciences. This volume contends that Rasch measurement is the model of choice because it is the closest to realizing the Holy Grail of human science research: the objective fundamental measurement so long revered in the physical sciences.

Above all, this book should be seen as a tribute to the supportive collegial nature of the Rasch measurement community. A number of our colleagues actively contributed to the ideas the book now contains. William Fisher took on the unenviable, time-consuming, and rather thankless task of being our critical friend. It is rewarding to think that our text will be adopted for a number of introductory courses in measurement. Conversely, those who wish to work through the text independently can have access to the data files that we refer to in the text, and will find those files and further support at: www.jcu.edu.au/~edtgb.

Our aim has been to provide the means by which others could become fully participating members of our international community of the Rasch scholars. Joel Michell's continuing work on the inadequacy of current approaches to psychological measurement (1999) suggests that the time is ripe for Rasch models to have an unprecedented impact. We hope that this volume might help to capitalize on that impetus.

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References

- Bond, T. G., & Fox, C. M. (2001). *Applying the Rasch model: Fundamental measurement in the human sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Fox, C. M., & Jones, J. A. (1998). Uses of Rasch modeling in counseling psychology research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 45(1), 30-45.

Michell, J. (1999). *Measurement in psychology: Critical history of a methodological concept*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Notes

1. Further information at: www.erlbaum.com.
2. *Applying the Rasch Model*, by Trevor Bond and Christine Fox, is now available for \$29.95 through the IOM website, www.rasch.org/books.htm. IOM members will receive a 10% discount.