

John Michael Linacre

The Man Behind the Code

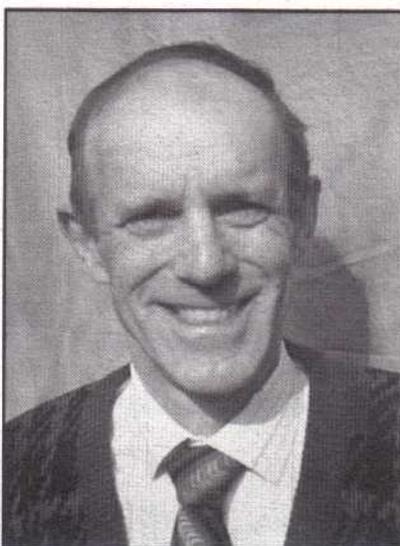
Ellen Sullivan Woods

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's words of advice for the apt educator ring eminently true for Michael Linacre, "Only by errors that irk us do we advance." Also, equally befitting Mike is Goethe's definition of the educator's task ... "not to preserve from error but to guide the errant, indeed to let them savor their errors to the dregs—such is the teachers's wisdom. "Whoever barely tastes his error will long nurse it, will revel in it as though in a rare treat; but whoever drains it to the bottom must come to know it." Indeed, the heart of Goethe's quote resonates for any student of Mike's. The lingering effect of his wonderful crisp presentations and effulgent ideas produces a curiosity that is sadly rare for many students of statistics.

Measurement classes at the University of Chicago are largely comprised of individuals that have used statistical measurement techniques throughout their careers but have never quite known the richness of the typical findings that come out of this class. Dr. Linacre delineates new ways to look at the problem of research that both enhance scientific progress as well as the researchers use of a variety of theoretical underpinnings. All students' work bears the same weight in the eyes of Dr. Linacre. "It is our duty to tell others but what they are able to receive. Man grasps but what is his measure," reminds Goethe.

Indeed, there is but one Michael Linacre but with many facets. (This is no coincidence since Facets is the name of the new phase he launched in 1989 of the Rasch software program that he designed in cooperation with the American Society of Clinical Pathologists.) This innovative program, while implementing Rasch analysis, provides a unique focus intended to construct measures from observations based on the expert rating of examinee performance.

Dr. Linacre needs little introduction to members of the field of measurement. Mention must be made of the year 1989, however, since it was important for both Dr. Linacre, Maureen, his wife, and certainly for Chicago. In that year he



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obtained a Ph.D. in Psychological Measurement from the University of Chicago and took up research and teaching there as well. One of Mike's many notable talents is his ability to transfer proven methods to his classroom audience. Anyone within his reach feels that he can tap into Mike's genius for skillfully linking measurement ideas with the larger scheme of things. His answers invite questions. When a classroom is exposed to Dr. Linacre's spirited ideas, his easy laugh and engaging smile inspire enthusiasm for one of the most understood and oft-maligned disciplines—measurement. He is a master teacher consistently confuting the monody of the "expert assumption" that postulates that "effectiveness can't be taught."

Mike was born in England. In 1967, he graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in Oriental Studies and Mathematics. In 1971 he was awarded an MA by Cambridge University. Also, in 1971 he obtained a second BA degree from Ambassa-

dor College (Bricket Wood England). In subsequent years, he obtained further degrees and certifications in Psychological measurement together with a second MA from the University of Chicago. In 1989, he decided to take up research and teaching at the University.

Fascinated by computers as a young adult, Mike became involved with various programming projects throughout college even while attending Cambridge as an undergraduate. He engaged in computer-related technical programming and management activities in England, Japan, Australia, and the USA, and by 1981 he was Computer Sciences Manager on a project to develop test instruments to evaluate local HEAD START programs for the Administration for Children, Youth and Family (ACFY) of the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). It was at this time that a very important friendship developed with Dr. Benjamin D. Wright. By 1986, due to the inducement of Dr. Wright, Mike and his wife, Maureen, moved to Chicago and to the University of Chicago. After receiving a Spencer Dissertation Year Fellowship, he ob-

tained a Ph.D. in psychometrics and educational measurement under the aegis of Dr. Wright, a pioneer in the practical application of Rasch measurement from many different types of social science data. (If greatness comes to those who team up to make cooperation, vision, and personal understanding a reality, then the alliance he and Dr. Wright have forged over the past 10 years is a testimonial to teamwork of the highest degree.) By 1989, MESA's previous computer programs for multiple choice tests, attitude surveys, and partial credit response formats (BICAL, CREDIT, MSCALE and MSTEPS), were superseded by BIGSCALE, introduced in 1991, and WINSTEPS in 1998, gave Dr. Linacre extensive knowledge in the 'anatomy of assessment.' As the Associate Director of the Measurement, Evaluation, and Statistical Analysis (MESA) Psychometric Laboratory at the University of Chicago, Mike is very active in the application and dissemination of Rasch analysis techniques. He is the editor of the Transactions of the Rasch Measurement Special Interest Group (SIG) of the American Educational Research Association and also SIG operations manager. While he lectures and publishes widely, Mike also devotes time to his responsibilities as pastor of the Active Bible Church of God since it foundry in 1996 in Hyde Park, a neighborhood of Chicago. Mike also is a pastor of the Biblical Church of God in Danville, Illinois and the head coordinator of the Student Christian University Bible Association, a campus outreach at the University of Chicago. Mike is a consultant to major public and private testing agencies. He admits that the primary challenge now and in the future facing practitioners of the Rasch methodology is improvement of the communication of findings to the decision-makers and, more importantly, to society at large.

In the light of his own stated challenge to explain testing results more effectively, it is a great consolation to his colleagues that much of Mike's success to date rests on his consummate ability to translate technical visions into a marriage of strategy for both the market and the academic place. He blends creativity and technical acumen in an alchemy that distinguishes Mike in the classroom, in his research, and the marketplace.

Ungar, Frederick. 1989. *Goethe's World View: Presented In His Reflections And Maxims*, Frederick Ungar Publishing Company. New York, New York. Linacre, John Michael. 1998, Spring. Ben Wright: *the Measure of the Man*, Popular Measurement: Journal for The Institute for Objective Measurement.

Ellen Sullivan Woods

Ellen Sullivan Woods is a recent graduate of the Masters In The Science of Communications program at Northwestern University. She is a wife and mother of 5 grown children ages 15 to 30. She serves as: Commission member of Animal and Care Control for the city of Chicago; Lector, St. John Fisher Parish; Leadership Committee, Alivio Medical Center; Education Committee, Executive Club of Chicago; Advisory Board Member, Black*Star Project. She loves to teach watercolors and gardening. In her leisure time, she enjoys travel. Ellen looks forward to further research and involvement in the use of psychometrics in its application to speech and communication training.



“Our analysis which has hitherto been qualitative, must become quantitative; we must cease to be empirical, and become scientific: in criticism as in other matters, the test that decides between science and empiricism is this: `Can you say, not only of what kind, but how much?’ If you cannot weigh, measure, number your results, however you may be convinced yourself, you must not hope to convince others, or claim the position of an investigator; you are merely a guesser, a propounder of hypotheses.”

Frederick Gard Fleay (1831-1909), British Shakespearian scholar in
On metrical tests as applied to dramatic poetry (1874).