

O. L. DAVIS, JR.

**Q:** Jack, ACCS (pronounced "access") started when you were president of ASCD, didn't it?

**Frymier:** That's right. During the early 70s, I was working with a group of people on our staff at Ohio State and several public school people from around the country, trying to conceptualize what we came to call "A School for Tomorrow." The staff and principal at the Annehurst school in Westerville, Ohio, heard about it, got copies of our draft papers, and asked if we would

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be willing to work with them. The Annehurst Curriculum Classification System is an outgrowth of those original ideas.

**Q:** To what extent can a school staff begin using ACCS on their own?

**Frymier:** It can be done, but it requires a long-term commitment. It works best with a relatively small group. At the high school level, for example, it might be the people in the math department.

It would probably be much easier for the group if they had help from someone who understands the system, and such people are available. About 100 of us have worked together for several years, validating and verifying the assumptions, definitions, and procedures.

**Q:** So researchers were involved as well as practitioners?

**Frymier:** Yes. We worked back and forth between the practitioners and the scholars to identify the basic dimensions of human existence related to learning. We were determined that the system would be practical and useful but theoretically and empirically valid.

**Q:** In what way has it been validated?

**Frymier:** There are at least two kinds of validation studies. One is the acid test: Does the Annehurst system make a difference in learning? We hope to do more studies of that kind but we haven't done them yet.

What we have done is validate the theoretical constructs. For example, we've done factor analytic studies to see whether we have accurately identified the human dimensions

## **A Conversation with Jack Frymier**

**Much of the inspiration and support for development of the Annehurst Curriculum Classification System came from Jack Frymier. In this interview, Frymier explains how schools are using the system and what researchers have discovered about the quality of instructional materials.**



affecting learning. That research leads me to believe our original formulations were sound. The system works; people can be trained to classify materials with a lot of reliability. And the descriptive studies of curriculum materials are absolutely mind-blowing.

**Q:** Why?

**Frymier:** We've classified thousands of pieces of curriculum materials intended for teaching reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and so on. The overriding generalization to come out of those studies is that the materials are intellectually impoverished. They are very low in motivational quality; they tend to stifle creativity; they don't foster sociability; they don't encourage healthy personality development. They leave a tremendous amount to be desired—but those are the materials being used in our schools.

**Q:** You're not saying the content isn't accurate.

**Frymier:** I'm talking about the quality of content—the intellectual level. So many materials have no substantive content at all—especially the materials used to teach reading; there is no intellectual substance there. There's not an idea, not a fact, not a concept. We have leaned so far in the direction of skills that the materials are intellectually hollow.

**Q:** Can anything be done about that?

**Frymier:** If our society values creativity, we need curriculum materials that are imaginative rather than repetitive and that encourage divergent rather than convergent thinking. The mere explication of those characteristics encourages people to think of them as criteria for judging materials. Over time I'm hoping that publishers will become more sensitive to those criteria. Right now they tend to be more concerned with not offending anybody and with the materials being technically correct. Their concern is with acceptability rather than with validity. Publishers will tell you it doesn't make any difference how good the materials are if they won't sell. Now, if as a

profession we become aware of things like the intellectual quality of materials, we can encourage publishers to produce better materials. One problem is the press to make reading levels lower, which inevitably results in lower intellectual quality. We're caught in a cycle that means the average keeps going down.

**Q:** How is that?

**Frymier:** Well, educators tell publishers they want materials students can read. As performance goes down, publishers pitch their materials at a lower level—and achievement goes still lower. It wouldn't be such a problem if we'd accept the idea of a range of levels. Over time, I hope the use of the Annehurst system will sensitize people to the need for a diversity of materials and there will be less wholesale adoption of one book for all students.

**Q:** How is ACCS related to research on learning styles?

**Frymier:** I'm uncomfortable with some of the activity that goes on under the name of learning styles. It presumes that if you ask a youngster, "Do you learn best when you listen to the radio, watch TV, and eat popcorn?" the answer will be valid. We know enough about self-report data to question that. Some students may think they learn best when the radio is on, but in fact that may not be true. Even so, there's a lot of overlap in what we're doing. For example, work on learning modalities corresponds with the four dimensions of ACCS we call verbal expression, auditory perception, visual perception, and motor perception.

**Q:** What about other research?

**Frymier:** We've done shadow studies of children at different levels. The people who participate in those studies walk into a school at 8:00 in the morning, randomly identify one child, and follow that youngster all day long, noting every time the child uses a piece of curriculum material. At the end of the day they classify the materials used. The people who have done those studies were invariably distressed and dis-

turbed. They talked about how dull and boring school was; about how they themselves could hardly stand to get through one day. They were concerned about the low level of intellectual stimulative materials. They said, "How do children stand that 180 days of the year when I can hardly get through one single day?" They recognized that children are different from adults, but it was obvious that children were turned off by it too. If it weren't for the social stimulation, the fact is most kids could not tolerate school. It's a very dull and boring place, as reported by dozens of observers.

**Q:** Let's talk a little more about how ACCS can be used.

**Frymier:** One way is to analyze the existing collection of materials. If a staff classifies all the materials they've got, they'll find their collection is terribly unbalanced. They'll have hundreds of items on some subjects and nothing on others. The moment they see that, it puts them in a position to make intelligent decisions about what to buy next. A staff can also analyze their materials in terms of learner characteristics. As I said earlier, the moment they do that, they'll probably find there simply isn't much material that's intellectually stimulating. That helps them ask a different set of questions about textbook selection, for example.

**Q:** One thing that would help would be for publishers to classify their own materials.

**Frymier:** That may happen in time, but my guess is it won't. It would work if the classifications were purely descriptive, but many of the classifications have value connotations. If publishers were to classify their own materials, you couldn't depend on the accuracy of their classifications. I wish some group or agency would do it, but I don't expect it to happen soon.

**Q:** Does a school need a lot of money to use ACCS?

**Frymier:** It may take some money to

buy people's time, but there's nothing to buy as such. ACCS uses the curriculum materials schools already have. It takes commitment, it takes a while to learn, and it takes a considerable period of time to classify the materials.

**Q:** Once the materials are classified, how do teachers keep up with what's there? How do they go about choosing just the right material for the right student?

**Frymier:** When they get their materials classified, they'll find they have thousands and thousands of items. They'll need some kind of management system, which may be a card file, a notched card system, or something like that. Many schools are using a mini-computer and

that's a very practical way of doing it.

**Q:** But even buying a computer and getting the materials classified doesn't mean the school has a functioning system.

**Frymier:** No, ACCS is a way of thinking. It's a way to help teachers understand individual differences according to criteria that are more or less objective. It places great confidence and trust in teachers' ability to understand the nuances, the variations, the differences among students in their classes.

**Q:** Let me ask the kind of question teachers have asked me. Once we have materials classified and we know what's available, does it mean I have to diagnose every pupil and find materials for every one of them every day?

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**Frymier:** No, the people who use the Annehurst system use it in a very piecemeal way. Let's say you have a sixth-grade child who hates mathematics and you want to help that youngster learn long division. Or you may have a sixteen year old who is intelligent and creative who wants to look into some aspect of the early history of America. You search for materials that would be especially appropriate for those situations. Teachers almost never use the whole system all the way; they put bits and pieces together in relation to what they know about particular students at a particular time.

**Q:** Materials are classified by subject as well as by characteristics of students, right?

**Frymier:** Yes, the subject index is a variation of the Dewey decimal system. Some schools prefer to use the Dewey system and that would be all right, but we think ours is more practical and helpful.

**Q:** The subject directory is being revised, isn't it?

**Frymier:** Hundreds of people from around the country are working on that. As parts are completed, they'll be published by Kappa Delta Pi.<sup>1</sup>

**Q:** Jack, I've heard you say the Annehurst system is a success story. In what way?

**Frymier:** It's the best example I've seen of a principal and staff working together over a period of time to help the children in their school learn better. I'm proud to have been a part of it, but it was their project. Our work was done without a lot of extra help and without outside funding. Less than a dozen people came together and stayed together—and they did it. ■

<sup>1</sup> The first expanded ACCS directory, compiled by Steven C. Hawley and Gwendolyn Spencer, is *ACCS Mathematics Directory of Topics* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Kappa Delta Pi Press, 1980). Other directories, including one for language arts, are in various stages of preparation and will be published as soon as they are completed.

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