



Jack Stenner: *The Lexile King*

Linda J. Webster, Ph.D.

A. Jackson Stenner's accomplishments span academia and industry. Stenner is co-founder and CEO of MetaMetrics, Inc., a private corporation dedicated to educational research. His interest in measuring educational achievement began in a classroom in St. Louis at The Center of Our Lady of Grace.

"I taught emotionally disturbed children for three years. The Center took children who were too aggressive for public schools and who had various emotional problems. The kids were part of an in-patient six-to-ten week program where I taught during the day. I went to school at night. While there, I finished my undergraduate work and began the Master's degree."

With an undergraduate degree in psychology and education from the University of Missouri at St. Louis and a Master's underway, Stenner was awarded a Ford Foundation Fellowship that ran from 1970 through 1972. He moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked with the Council of the Great City Schools.

"This was my first look at measurement and policy. The Council represents the largest school districts in the U.S. by doing lobbying, policy analysis, and large-scale evaluation."

In 1972, Stenner left the fellowship program to start an agency that focused on social action research. "During the 1970's, we grew to over 250 people and worked with Head Start, the Department of Agriculture, and the National Career Evaluation Program. Head Start is a good example of what we were doing."

"When Congress mandated that the Head Start program be evaluated for its 'true effects', we spent several million dollars designing a study which would have been the most definitive study ever done. But, in the end, Congress chose not to fund the study."

Between 1973 and 1981 Stenner served as President and Director of NTS Research Corporation in Durham, North Carolina where, until the corporation was sold in 1981, Stenner was the Principal Investigator on educational research projects for the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Administration for Children, Youth and Families for the Office of Human Development, the Washington, D.C. Public Schools, and the Office of Career Education.

During this period of NTS growth, Stenner was working on his Ph.D. at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. By 1976, he had completed the course work, but, be-

cause of his busy research schedule, hadn't time enough to complete his dissertation until 1984.

Stenner's major achievements during these years was recognition of the fundamental importance in educational research of explicit construct specification, the empirical discovery that observable readability could be entirely predicted from word familiarity and sentence length and the application of this "Lexile Framework®" simultaneously to books and readers. "I worked on the Lexile Framework® primarily through grants from the NIH which funded twelve years of research on developing a better measurement system for reading and writing."

From 1984 through 1996, Stenner served as Principal Investigator on five grants from the National Institute of Health, all of which dealt with the measurement of literacy. And until 1996, he was also Chair and co-founder of the National Technology Group (NTG), a 700 person firm specializing in computer networking and systems integration.

Then in 1997, Stenner formed MetaMetrics, a company designed to make the Lexile Framework® easily available to schools and teachers, children and parents everywhere. "Our goal is to make the framework a global standard for language measurement. States are adopting the framework for their schools, tests and libraries: Hawaii, Utah, California, Alabama, North Carolina, and some parts of New York and Florida are in full swing."

"The Lexile Framework® is an open standard that anyone can link to. Forty publishers use Lexiles as their means for building targeted products designed to bring readers and

their books together in the most beneficial way. And more are coming on board every day."

In order to spread the availability and use of the framework, Stenner is on the road constantly, meeting and teaching with school boards, teacher organizations, politicians and business men as he works to help every school district in the nation to take advantage of the Lexile system for measuring books and readers on a common scale.

Of course there are critics. Some say it is all too complicated. Others insist it cannot be this simple. Each old guard must defend their turf. But the increasing number of publishers and school districts successfully basing the targeting of their products and teaching on the Lexiles system is gradually disarming most critics.

Stenner's research has appeared in many scholarly journals including *Popular Measurement*, *Rasch Measurement Transactions*, *Journal of Educational Measurement*, *Phi Delta Kappan*. Among the scholars collaborating with MetaMetrics are Dr. Donald Burdick of Duke University, Dr. Benjamin Wright of the University of Chicago and Dr. Ellu Page.

A. Jackson Stenner currently holds administrative or board positions with several professional organizations including: president of The Institute for Objective Measurement; board member for the North Carolina Electronics and Information Technologies Association (NCEITA), The National Institute for Statistical Sciences (NISS), and Duke Children's Hospital. He is also a member of the American Educational Research Association, the National Council on Measurement in Education, and Phi Kappa Delta.

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For more information on the Lexile Framework for Reading, or to 'Search' our database of over 24,000 Lexile Measured books, please visit

www.lexile.com.

This web site will soon offer even more ways to leverage the Lexile Framework.

For comments, questions or desired uses of the Lexile Framework, please contact Mr. Shawn Berry, VP Marketing, at sberry@lexile.com or at 888-Lexiles, ext. 3406.

