

poorer readers are significantly less aware of what they do as they read and less able to do anything to "fix up" their comprehension when they run into problems. The variety of things younger and poorer readers are apparently unaware of and unable to do anything about is too broad to be reviewed here, but a few examples will serve to demonstrate that these are not erudite skills. Children below seventh grade seem to be unable to determine the important ideas in a text from the unimportant ones. How then do they know what to focus on as they attend to and study text? Of elementary children, only sixth grade good readers were able to adjust their reading when given such diverse purposes as: *read as quickly as possible for only one piece of information or read to study*. Looking back in the text to answer a question about which you are unsure is a "fix up" strategy. Below sixth grade good readers, children did not look back. When instructed to look back, they looked back equally for information which had been presented in the text and for information which clearly had to come from their own experience and knowledge.

While the research is still at a beginning stage, it is shocking to discover that so much of what we thought children "naturally" did as they read, it appears they don't do until much later than we assumed and that poor readers may never learn to do. Metacognition research is forcing us to look not just at what we teach children to do under the direction of the teacher, but what they internalize and become able to do independently as they read and study. The research so far suggests that we need to teach for independence and to not con-

sider something taught until we see children independently applying it. The look at children's metacognitive abilities may enable us to teach children so that they can take charge of their own learning.

### The Great Readability Debate

The ideas that materials in all subject areas should be at the appropriate readability level for the grade level is one of the most commonly accepted notions in education today. Why then would a national meeting of reading researchers sponsor a session titled: *A Debate—Resolved that readability formulae have outlived their usefulness for grading the difficulty of school materials?* What would there be to debate? To an SRO crowd at the National Reading Conference meeting in Austin, Richard C. Anderson of the Center for the Study of Reading argued against the use of readability formulae. Edward Fry of Rutgers University (and Fry Readability Graph fame) argued for the formulae. No winner was declared, but the arguments set forth opposing readability should be considered seriously by all people involved in textbook adoption decisions.

All readability formulae are based on the notion that long words and long sentences make material harder to read. On the face of it, this argument appears unassailable. But consider some of the points made by Anderson. For "naturally occurring text"—that is, text not specifically written to readability, the word and sentence length variables are good indicators of difficulty. *But, because publishers are required to meet established readability levels, they must write and rewrite materials to readability.* This sentence (italicized) has a higher

readability than this rewritten version: *Publishers must meet established readability levels. They write materials to readability. Sometimes, they rewrite to it.* As you can see, the two versions have essentially the same meaning. The second version, because the sentences are short and because some concept words (readability) are replaced with short pronouns (it), has a lower readability. Anderson argued that in order to achieve a lower readability score, causal links are removed (*because, since, although*) when one long sentence is chopped into several smaller ones. Long words are often replaced with words requiring the reader to remember the referent and thus materials written to readability are peppered with words such as *this, it, them, and these*. Anderson suggests that materials written to readability may have lower readability scores but in actuality be harder to comprehend. Anderson called for us to substitute the concept of "comprehensibility" for the concept of "readability."

Fry rebutted that readability formulae were never intended to be used to rewrite materials, that Anderson had no objective way to measure comprehensibility, that until something better came along, readability formulae had worked for years and were the best measure we had. Anderson responded that "if the best medicine available killed the patient, it would be better to use no medicine." The debate heated up and was continued over dinner and in dark corners throughout the conference in Austin. The answers are not yet in, but all of us who want materials children can understand must consider if readability formulae are helping us—or hindering us—from reaching that goal. □

## Education Case Law

### PAT LINES

**Case note—student initiated religious activity upheld where school made facilities available to students for virtually any purpose.**

The United States Supreme Court decided last year that students on a univer-

sity campus had the right, under the first amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion, to meet on campus for religious purposes. The Court did not indicate that this ruling—under its so-called open forum doctrine—would apply to secondary schools. However, it seems

the basic principles do apply. If a secondary school has opened up a public forum, then it may not close it selectively based on the content of the expression expected by those utilizing the forum.

A district court in Pennsylvania has now ruled that the Williamsport Area

School District had opened school premises to student organizations for meetings of all sorts, and could not deny access to this forum simply because a meeting would include student-initiated religious activity.

The district had established a policy permitting student organizations to hold meetings during a regularly scheduled activity period. Requests were routinely granted until one group of students sought to use the time for purposes of prayer and Bible reading. Although the request was initially granted, and 45 students met, with a teacher acting as a monitor, permission was subsequently withdrawn. The court observed that over 25 student organizations were utilizing the activity period; none besides the plaintiffs were refused. School officials had indicated that they would grant the benefit to any student organization

"deemed to be a 'legal and proper one.'"

The court concluded that the period constituted an open forum, limited to students but unlimited as to type of discussion that could take place. District officials offered no reason for denying access to these students, other than their opinion that it violated the establishment clause. The court found that, first, the purpose underlying the activity period was to promote intellectual, physical, and social development of students; second, the primary effect given the larger number of students participating in a broad range of activities was to achieve this purpose, and the advancement of religion remained incidental; and, third, permission for these events would not lead to excessive church-state entanglement. On the second point (effect) the court also noted that the organization did not seek the full range of

benefits available to other student organizations—such as provision of supplies or mention in the school yearbook.

On the entanglement issue, the court found very little interaction between students and officials, except for the teacher who would be a monitor, and responsible for order in the room. This was not entangling. Having rejected the district's position under the establishment clause, and finding no other basis available for denying these students an opportunity to meet during the activity period, the court ordered that they be given access to this forum.

The case is *Bender v. Williamsport Area School District*, Civil No. 82-0692, N.D. Pa., May 12, 1983. □

*Pat Lines is Director, Law and Education Center, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado.*

## Selected Abstracts

### CHERYL G. SULLIVAN

#### Successful Supervisor Communication

Supervisors and supervisees operate from different perspectives. Actually, says Walter D. St. John, they operate in two different worlds. St. John cites avoidance, abusive actions, withdrawal, and tension as common sources of conflict.

He notes it is important that supervisees be given information about expectations, reporting and organizational relationships, constraints, resources, information updates, performance reviews, training, and what their future opportunities might be.

St. John stresses that the supervisor must develop a high degree of credibility with his or her peers and supervisees—credibility built through candor, consistency, keeping promises, accessibility, accepting responsibility, personal style, and interest in others. Supervisors need to stay informed of progress and problems, rules and regulations, and employee feedback.

#### Assessing Management Styles

Surveying 370 employees and supervisors, Norman Harbaugh, John Sulli-

van, and Joseph Walker report that supervisors often interfere with work to be done because of their irritating work habits. The irritating behavior that respondents mentioned most often was "rarely or never compliments me on a job I think I've done well." They felt that supervisors took their work for granted.

The next four irritating habits listed in order of frequency were: "acts as if she/he knows it all," "procrastinates on problems," "makes impractical suggestions," and "passes the buck." The authors conclude that it is important to compliment or in some way recognize a job well done. Demonstrated evidence of trust might go a long way toward promoting subordinates' self-confidence. □

#### References

Harbaugh, N.R.; Sullivan, J.F.; and Walker, J.F., "How Does Your Management Style Measure Up?" *Business*, (March 1983): 51-54.

St. John, W.D., "Successful Communications between Supervisors and Employees." *Personal Journal* (January 1983): 71-77.

#### Design Factors Affecting Responses to Jobs

In a literature review of research findings on job design and careers, Kenneth R. Brousseau notes that a complex array of factors shape job-person relationships. The scope of the job appears to be but one factor in an individual's inclination to respond positively or negatively to a particular job.

Other factors include: organizational context surrounding the job; the amount of time the person has spent on the job; the influence of previous job experiences or the individual's personal characteristics (such as work values, needs); the type of career that the person wishes to pursue; and the degree to which the job falls into a developmental career sequence consistent with his or her type of career.

Time is an important factor. The "goodness of fit" is likely to change as

Copyright © 1984 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.