

## Textbook Selection

CONNIE MUTHER

### How to Determine Which Textbooks Are Easiest to Read and Remember

**R**eadability formulas are not recommended for use in California. Perhaps you shouldn't use them, either. Why? If texts are written to a readability formula, the formula is invalid. And too many of today's textbooks are rewritten to formula.

Textbooks must still be purchased. Is there another simple and easily administered method to determine which textbooks are the most interesting, understandable, and memorable for students? Here are three ideas.

1. At the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, Bonnie Armbruster has determined that comprehensible and memorable textbooks are "considerate" to readers. Considerate texts are structured with a "logical, easily identifiable organization," with clear headings, sub-headings, introductions, and summaries. Obvious main ideas, usually in the first sentence, are supported with details presented in a predictable order. Graphics are directly related to the written text. These are only some of Armbruster's "Characteristics of a Considerate Textbook." She explains her ideas more "considerately" in her many articles, which may be obtained from the Center.<sup>1</sup>

2. Although Roger Farr's idea relates to evaluating basal reader stories, his idea of "kid interest" should be used in all subject areas. Farr asks students to read and react to stories. When they cannot read, or if there is only one book, he reads to them to determine their level of interest.

You can use this idea with content books by selecting textbooks from three different publishers that have several topics in common at each grade level. Evaluating more than three publishers is too confusing for students and takes too long to justify the results. Next, find a teacher willing to try out these texts with students. Divide each classroom into small groups (three to six students), and challenge each group to determine which of the three publishers presents the same topic in the most interesting, understandable, and memorable way. Before they begin, discuss what these three words mean and what qualities make something understandable or easy to remember. This will give students a clearer view of what to focus on. When they present their conclusions, have each group provide supporting evidence. Again, this requires that students be able to recognize clues that made them think, remember, or learn.

It's surprising how students at all grade levels enjoy studying textbooks, completing worksheets, and taking tests for this purpose. If their conclusions are not accurate or helpful to you (this task is very difficult for most students), what students reveal about how they think and study is well worth the two to four class periods the project may take to complete.

3. To determine the writing quality of content textbooks, the following idea might be useful. Harriet Tyson-Bernstein, Director of the Council of

Chief State School Officers/National Association of State Boards of Education Project on Quality of Textbooks and Instructional Materials, spends many evenings reading high school textbooks. Because she found her mind constantly wandering while reading certain passages, she decided to monitor her own reading by placing a checkmark in the margin every time she was forced to reread. Examination of those passages identified garbled, confusing, or inaccurate writing. Since most people blame themselves for being inattentive when their minds wander, Tyson-Bernstein believes that all evaluators should monitor their own rereading to identify poor writing in textbooks.

Hopefully these three ideas—selected for their simplicity—will help you to evaluate new texts or understand the textbooks you currently use.

Please send questions, ideas, responses, or suggestions for this column to Connie Muther, 25 B Esquire Drive, Manchester, Connecticut 06040, or call (203) 649-9517. □

<sup>1</sup>Armbruster's articles are available for \$2.00 each. For more information, write to the Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, Illinois 61820.

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## Reading

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### Does Research Support Whole-Class Reading Instruction?

In a growing number of classrooms throughout the country, reading in-

struction is being carried out in a manner not seen in many decades. Whole classrooms of children can be seen looking at the same page of the same basal reader or workbook as the

teacher guides their reading of a selection or teaches them reading skills. When teachers are asked about this "new" way to teach reading, they often appear puzzled but assure the ques-

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