

Opinion

32303 Grand River / Farmington, MI 48024 Bob Sklar editor / 477-5450

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Public access Judges must go by new rules

THE LEGAL SYSTEM, including our courts, is perhaps the most obscure, remote and removed from the public eye institution that the average citizen will ever encounter.

The average person rarely has any contact with the courts, other than Judge Warner and occasional jury duty.

The courtroom itself is intimidating — the judge sits on a raised dais, the jury is off to one side. In some courts, protective glass separates legal personnel from the audience.

So it was a welcome relief when the Michigan State Supreme Court approved in January 1989 a recommendation from its Cameras in the Courtroom Committee that cameras and tape recorders be allowed in all state courts.

THE CHANGE was a long time in coming. It began in 1987 when the Citizens' Commission to Improve Michigan Courts urged that a pilot program be conducted. The State Bar Representative Assembly recommended a one-year trial period.

The experiment began in February 1988, but at that time, either party in a case could file an objection with the judge and get the cameras removed. In June 1988, Oakland was among five counties in which the experiment was changed, giving only the judge permission to ban cameras and tape recorders in the courtroom.

Now the permanent order granting permission for tape recorders and cameras is nearly a year old. It's time for a review.

Access to the courtroom by the news media has provided many benefits, leading to an informed and well educated public. It also has led to courtrooms losing their mystery.

EXPOSURE to the public is also good for judges. A judge who is firm, but fair, demonstrates his/her effectiveness to the public for all to see. And let's face it, that can only help come election time.

Unfortunately, not all of the judges this newspaper encounters are aware of the newest court ruling giving them sole discretion over whether coverage is permitted. And problems still have to be worked out with pool coverage and giving advance notice of wanting to cover a judicial proceeding. Meanwhile, a committee of the U.S. Judicial Conference recently recommended continuing the ban on cameras in federal courtrooms.

Having said all this, it's important to remember that the judge still is in control of the courtroom. Decorum is still called for. Only two still photographers, videotapes and television cameras are allowed in the courtroom.

But the important thing is that access is assured. We do live under the promise of "liberty and justice for all."

Why state reading scores 'leave a lot to be desired'

The new Michigan Education Assessment Test (MEAP) in reading resulted in some lower scores than school districts expected. I understand that it's a different type of reading test. However, when only 47 percent of our seventh grade children pass the reading test, it leaves a lot to be desired. What is the problem and what impact do these low MEAP reading scores have on high school teachers who are trying to do their job?

A: Using the social studies areas as an example, some teachers have been taking a bad rap for many years because we have not focused strongly enough on reading for understanding — the teaching skill necessary for success in the social studies areas.

Not only social studies but all subject areas that require a textbook with information to be mastered has been impacted over the years. We now know reading for understanding and comprehension according to the new MEAP test results are a deficiency in our present system. We appear to have allowed reading for pleasure, i.e. fiction, to dominate our approach in the development of competent readers.

We need to start early in a child's education teaching the children to manipulate the language for better understanding. We need to bring together reading, writing, spelling, listening and speaking into what is called the whole language approach as opposed to teaching each area in an isolated manner.

It is also known that reading literacy has to emerge from within the child rather than being imposed by the mastering of minor sub-skills found in the present day elementary reading books called Basal Readers. In the new approach, children will be encouraged to modify, to reject,

the main characters are, what the major events are.

A third step is called "semantic mapping," that is, brainstorming relationships between ideas in a particular reading section so the student can compare and contrast and think and internalize what they are reading.

The last step, "reciprocal reading," is when the teacher reads out loud and asks him/herself questions to teach the children how to ask themselves questions as they read.

These reading strategies make much more sense than just exposing students to a constant menu of isolated sub-skills, such as identifying prefixes and suffixes hoping that by osmosis it will turn the student into a reader who comprehends.

Keep in mind that many school districts have been using this model for several years, but this has not been the case for far too many school districts in Michigan.

What is unfortunate or fortunate is that it takes the state department of education — oftentimes heavily criticized by local school districts for mandating curriculum — to put together a MEAP reading test which hits us in the head and tells us we must change our thinking and our strategies in the teaching of reading.

We must have students who can read for understanding so that they will be more successful in science, social studies, math, language arts, foreign language, industrial arts/vocational education and other major content areas.

Dr. James Doyle is the former assistant superintendent in the Troy School district. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.



Doc Doyle

We need to start early in a child's education teaching the children to manipulate the language for better understanding. We need to bring together reading, writing, spelling, listening and speaking into what is called the whole language approach as opposed to teaching each area in an isolated manner.

contrast as they master the higher level thinking skills necessary for comprehension of textbook material.

This approach includes teaching young children comprehension strategies that start with "prior knowledge," that is, eliciting from students all the information they know about a topic before they begin to read. Through this process teachers will know exactly where the children are at opposed to blindly starting an assignment.

The second step is "story mapping." This concept separates the story into the most important areas a child needs to understand, such as the plot, the setting of the story, who

from our readers

Barriers are a bad move

To the editor:
As a regular contributor to the Farmington-Farmington Hills Community Center, I feel the decision of

the Farmington Hills Planning Commission on Nov. 16 concerning operations at the center requires more consideration.

I definitely wish the cultural programs continue without the imposed barriers.
Beatrice Smith,
Farmington Hills

Weight loss program introduced to area women

DETROIT—Area women are invited to try a new program to help them lose weight through a new method using videotapes at home.

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