

education is so clearly of benefit to all aspects of subsequent decision making that the lack of existence of such a system can only be attributed to a shared intuitive feeling that it would be "irksome", or worse. The term 'Information Processing Tribunal' (IPT) is offered here as a tentative code name for discussing a proposal to formulate such a system despite the lack of apparent enthusiasm to do so.

Discussed below are some of the possible features and a rationale for evolving an IPT system. A straw vote of the members of the American Reading Forum will aid the Board in its final vote to sanction or disallow the following proposal:

It is proposed that a committee be appointed to select, and develop the particulars of, and IPT system, and to undertake one or more complete runs on it, and at the end of not more than two years, to recommend either non-adoption or adoption of an appropriate version of it by the American Reading Forum as part of its annual meeting.

### **Tentative IPT System**

The particular system developed below is designed to be the most expeditious possible given the nature of the organization and the time and space which separate its members.

#### *Features:*

1. A 'Critical Issues' committee of five ARF members, three of whom should be Board members or designates, first would select the issue to be adjudicated at the following year's conference. The issue to be adjudicated would not require further Board approval unless opposed by a majority of the Board members of the committee. If Board action was required to select an issue, those Board members serving on the committee would be expected to abstain from voting on the issue.

2. Next, the Critical Issues Committee would select, from members expressing a willingness to serve, or so failing, empowered by collegial arm twisting, a tribunal of three persons to serve both as judge and jury in a "Critical Issue" hearing.

Those so appointed would be required to hold these minimum standards: a rank of associate professor, or some non-academic equivalent, and a record of publication in refereed journals. The person appointed by the committee to preside over the hearing would be required additionally to hold an academic rank of full professor, or some such equivalent.

For the sake of continuity and other such expediencies, the tribunal probably should include at least one, though not more than two members of the Critical Issues Committee.

3. Next the Critical Issues Committee would tentatively select and/or solicit persons to represent opposing views.

Final notification of the particular wording of the issue, of the views represented, and of the persons appointed to represent those views would require the approval of the majority of the judges agreeing to conduct the hearing.

4. The actual hearing would be held at the annual conference of the American Reading Forum.

The number and duration of the hearing session would be determined by the judges.

Judges would be expected to announce a tentative conclusion before the close of the conference. Within 45 days of the hearing(s), the judges would submit a written majority, and if necessary minority, opinion.

5. Opinions would be published in the conference proceedings, exempted from veto by consulting editors, though subject to their examination and recommendations.

6. The final paper would be published as the opinion of the judges. Endorsements of an opinion by the ARF would require a separate motion, probably at the next formal business meeting, or by a mail ballot conducted by an impartial member appointed to do so.

7. Briefs, which ideally would be filed prior to the actual hearing, could be submitted separately as conference papers and would be subject to the usual course of review.

## **AN INFORMATION PROCESSING TRIBUNAL (IPT) FOR ADJUDICATING COMPLEX ISSUES IN EDUCATION . . . AND PUBLIC POLICY**

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"That Irsome, Boring, Vital, Rewarding Experience" is the way *Time* magazine (September 28, 1981) introduced a feature story called "We, the Jury."

A system for hearing and adjudicating the complex issues of

8. Two persons would be assigned to record and monitor, as nearly as is tenable, the 'actual' proceedings.

9. Immediately following the concluding remarks of the advocates, the judges should allow a minimum of 30 minutes for members attending the hearings to raise questions, make comments, and announce or actually file separate briefs with the tribunal.

### Rationals for an IPT System

It now is widely recognized that most issues are more complex than the information at hand for dealing with these. Accordingly, "knowledge industries" now account for over 40% of the Gross National Product. Even where the raw information is available, there is a recognized need for assistance in processing that information, preferably in the form of the considered opinions of authoritative, though unbiased, sources. The popularity of financial newsletters and news analysis magazines attests to this growing fact.

The judiciary system is the least politicized and most respected method for accumulating and processing information on complex issues in civilized societies. In many cases, the evolutionary stage of a nation can be inferred from the size of its knowledge industries and the fairness of the system which it employs to arbitrate differences.

Information Processing Tribunals (IPT's) would be a new addition to the knowledge industry. The IPT would be built upon the judiciary system and designed also to provide a forum for rational change. Without some appropriate place to express alternate views, movements for change tend to become frustrated and grind to a halt, or fall into the hands of persons with radical personal needs. Such circumstances tend to lead either to apathy and/or to a counterpurge mentality.

From other situations we can infer that the need for someone, or something, to guide decision making is so great a felt need that super-authorities are created. These persons usually are avuncular individuals who, without challenge, come to have an influence upon a field far out of proportion to any knowledge base which anyone could hold.

The judiciary system of the United States seems to offer more than one useful model from which academics might evolve a forum from which to educate, arbitrate and/or sanction change. Without pretense of knowing the judicial system intimately, it appears that there are at least these functions within it which can be selected or modified to meet varied demands and issues. There are "discovery" proceedings, for example, which could be held merely to hear facts and clarify issue(s). There are "equity" or "advocacy" proceedings designed to hear arguments on behalf of a position which some may believe to deserve more attention than it might be receiving. And, of course, there are "adversary" hearings where a position stands "accused", and a case is offered against it.

It could take some time to evolve an analog to this legal system which suits the needs and character of the academic community. The effort to do so, however, seems worthwhile since the core of the judiciary system contains features which our current amorphous research and writing schemes do not provide.

There is no place, for example, in the U.S. to bring new curriculum ideas. It is naive to think that these can be promoted on a cell-by-cell basis in the schools or through journals. The latter typically have long periods to elapse between writing and publication, limited and confining space and form requirements, and low circulation.

An Information Processing Tribunal could provide the last, though not the final, word on the issues brought before it. This could be an exercise with far-reaching implications. Written opinions, for example, begin to correct for a great weakness in institutional, or bureaucratic organization: the absence of a memory, and therefore of wisdom.

Even in the most enlightened bureau, or decision making body, records only are kept of the decisions made and rules enacted, but no bureau keeps careful records of the reasons and conditions which entered into its decisions. Thus, while the circumstances surrounding a decision or policy may change, the policy often remains the same, creating massive disharmonies between purpose and practice. A record of each decision along with notation of the opinions and rationale for that policy would ameliorate many such inconsistencies.

In short, an Information Processing Tribunal could be of considerable assistance in providing an unbiased summary of facts with an accompanying authoritative, though non-authoritarian, opinion on such matters. These could serve as benchmarks for decision makers at all levels and in varied circumstances.

The potential benefits of such benchmarks take on international proportions when consideration is given to the world of nations, many of whom may need such information though they have not the resources nor the technology to acquire and/or process it.

### Development of an IPT System in Reading Education: Responsibility and Benefits

As Americans we abhor dictators and central planning, though we have come to recognize too that there are certain problems with unbridled free enterprise. The displacements, disconcertion, and dismay which both central planning and free enterprise can create must be at a high pitch nationwide judging from the increasing number of persons seeking equity in the courts.

IPT is a bit of the hair of the dog that's biting us. It offers the possibility of stemming the tide of litigants seeking redress in overcrowded courts, courts which probably would prefer to defer many such cases to a collegial system of review, or at the least, to have a set of guidelines from such a system for assessing and redressing possible inequities.

Ironically, the need for such a system is *not* so great in our field, which might be the reason that we are able to seriously consider a proposal to be more efficient and effective. Reading Education, undoubtedly, is the most highly sophisticated field in all social science. We have the technology to teach anyone to read. Nonetheless, we sometimes can be quite insecure, permitting confounding influences to send us on seemingly avoidable and costly excursions away from the further honing and refining of this superior technology.

In this regard, I always think of the disproportionately large (or at least so it seemed to me) part which Ernie Rothkopf's theory of "mathemagenics" played for over ten years in studies of reading comprehension and text processing. Reading behavior, in his own words, was merely the vehicle he employed to study something else. The research questions which he raised would have been quite different had the orientation of those studies been school learning and teaching.

There probably is a "natural" selection process which eventually causes the most appropriate ideas and findings to survive. But the process is fortuitous and can take generations. In this vein, consider as another example the issue of model building in reading. With very few exceptions, this aspect of the field has been dominated by non-reading people. Current models fill several volumes and are treated in many courses though it appears that they contribute absolutely nothing to our mission and purpose. The reason for this, I suspect, is that model building has become identified with the "reading process" and with discourse, or language, analysis. These are interesting, though tangential areas of study. These areas address primarily to questions of an epistemological or linguistic nature. The field of reading is not so much in need of models of the "reading process" per se, but of the "teaching-learning process." The teaching-learning process addresses to students and to

instructional outcomes and must contain attention to the role of the teacher (or teaching device), the temperament and abilities of the student, and to related factors such as social-emotional development and cultural opportunity. These elements are hardly to be found in most current "process" models.

It appears that if current models could be taken to a "court of equity" that, at the least, the intimidating effect which these have had upon reading-learning specialists might be broken. In due course we probably could expect to see reading specialists, again, building and employing appropriate models in their work.

A "court of equity", while always at risk of being politicized, or dampening of spirit, on balance, could be invigorating to the extent of providing high level inservice education for professors. The hearings could provide a platform for ideas which any one of us might not have been educated in or otherwise are unable to accommodate in terms of understanding its purported significance.

By way of a small personal example of this, I have not been able to grasp the significance of those things called "psycholinguistics" and the related points attributed to its proponents. Thus I cannot teach these effectively, nor formulate an intelligent position on them. Reading the literature available does not seem to help either; it does not seem to answer the comments and questions which I would like to pose. Thus, while not able to speak intelligently for or against such, and being a bit too ego-defensive to be a judge of this school of thought, I probably could benefit considerably from attending or reading the proceedings in which the opinions of my colleagues would be available to enrich my meager understanding.

### **Benefits to ARF**

There are several possible benefits to the American Reading Forum in founding an Information Processing Tribunal system. Briefly, the most noteworthy are the following: 1. the crisp debate of critical issues in reading would be harmonious with ARF's name and purpose; 2. the organization, its conference and proceedings would enjoy a feature distinguishing it from other similar organizations; 3. the complete conference proceedings would enjoy the benefits of much wider dissemination if the published accounts of the "tribunal" prove useful to educators and other public policy decision makers; and 4. such popularity could result in greater income and set up the possibility of attracting support from foundations and individuals who may wish to endorse and perpetuate such actions among "learned" societies.

It appears, in conclusion, that an Information Processing Tribunal system could be of considerable value to decision makers, to researchers, to professors, to teachers, to our field, and to our organization. This prospect rests, however, upon whether we can live with the irksome, awesome role aptly summed up in the expression "We, the Jury"(?).