

A TEACHER REFLECTS



We had some interesting class discussions in connection with Lesson 2, Who's the Best. I had seven students line up according to how long they usually played sports so that students could see that the median was the middle. Anticipating my next point, two of my students, Mike and Cal, asked what would happen to the median if there were an even number of students. As usual, Cal already had his theory, which was that there would be no median and we could go on to mean and range. I put the question to the rest of the class, and was pleased when Carmen, who did not have a lot of confidence in her math ability, suggested that the median would be between the two middle numbers. Cal immediately said no, you couldn't have a median that was not a whole number. I asked if anyone else had any ideas. Few other ideas were generated, but some students did volunteer support for either Cal or Carmen, saying that the median couldn't be a number that wasn't part of the data set or that since two numbers were in the middle, the number between them would obviously be the median. The question was resolved when John, who could always be depended upon for logic, suggested looking up the exact definition of median. Students volunteered to look it up in the dictionary as well as read it from their own books, and even found it in other math books that I had for reference in the room. This persuaded all of the students except Cal, who insisted that he was right. I was pleased that the whole discussion had gone on among the

students and that the resolution was found without my interference.

Later in the same lesson, students were asked to rate various basketball players as to who was the best player. They found the data for each player easily, but were hesitant when it came to deciding who was the best player. It was interesting to hear the discussions in the group, especially with regard to mode and range. Students first ranked the player with the highest range best. However, as they began trying to decide who was the overall best player, Holly and a few other students said that someone who had a large range sometimes scored very low as well as scoring higher at other times. Holly said the player with the lowest range should be the best. Aris said the range didn't matter and we should look at the mean. Others, however, realized that in order to make the best decision both measures needed to be taken into account. Students finally (and rather hesitantly) decided Neisa was the best. Many didn't vote at the end, saying they thought Sheryl and Neisa were equal since Sheryl had the highest median and Neisa the highest score. It was hard for students to take so many factors into account. They spent a long time arguing because there were so many different factors. Tito, a friend of John's, suggested that we weight all the factors we had to consider and thus come up with a numerical answer. Although some members of the class initially didn't understand this idea, everyone seemed happy to come up with a numerical answer rather than having to make a judgment.