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Building the Instructional Materials Center in the Small School

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Abstract

First, we must define what is meant by the term, Instructional Materials Center. It has been called a library, a resource center or an audiovisual center. Bruce R. Purrington's explanation seems appropriate. He likens the Instructional Materials Center to a university. A university is a collection of various schools or colleges, and the Instructional Materials Center is a collection of several libraries or resource units containing libraries of printed materials, projected materials, transmitted materials and recorded materials.

To explain the Instructional Materials Center's purpose we have to briefly look at the educational developments and demands of today. In the last several years we have viewed curriculum more broadly than ever before as the growing needs of all kinds of education become apparent and educational achievement levels rise. We no longer consider learning as only for children; it is a lifelong process, and the school must prepare the student. The student must be taught an effective mode of inquiry which will be useful to him throughout life. The school program, developed to meet current needs, must also anticipate change to come. Such a program of education calls for a high quality and diversity of materials and methods of instruction appropriate to the age and ability of the learner, as well as to the changing objectives of education.

BUILDING THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
CENTER IN THE SMALL SCHOOL

Presented to the faculty of the Library
Science Department, in partial fulfill-
ment for a Master of Arts in Library
Science

William G. Strabala

July 10, 1972

BUILDING THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS CENTER IN THE SMALL SCHOOL

What is it, and why is it necessary?

First, we must define what is meant by the term, Instructional Materials Center. It has been called a library, a resource center or an audiovisual center. Bruce R. Purrington's explanation seems appropriate. He likens the Instructional Materials Center to a university. A university is a collection of various schools or colleges, and the Instructional Materials Center is a collection of several libraries or resource units containing libraries of printed materials, projected materials, transmitted materials and recorded materials.¹

To explain the Instructional Materials Center's purpose we have to briefly look at the educational developments and demands of today. In the last several years we have viewed curriculum more broadly than ever before as the growing needs of all kinds of education become apparent and educational achievement levels rise. We no longer consider learning as only for children; it is a lifelong process, and the school must prepare the student. The student must be taught an effective mode of inquiry which will be useful to him throughout life. The school program, developed to meet current needs, must also anticipate change to come. Such a program of education calls for a high quality and diversity of materials and methods of instruction appropriate to the

¹Jean Key Gates, Introduction to Librarianship (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968).

to the age and ability of the learner, as well as to the changing objectives of education.

Individual growth and development are major concerns of education. Growth and development are greatly conditioned by experience that can be organized as a basis for behavior. The school must provide the materials, resources and facilities which will make possible these learning activities and situations.²

Schools have introduced many curriculum and instructional changes; innovations seem to be one of the characteristics of today's education. These innovations demand a broad curriculum offering attention to individual differences and independent study and inquiry. These in turn must be supported by a wide variety of resources. The school's emphasis on diversified learning materials, printed and non-print, for all subjects and levels of ability is giving increased importance to the concept of the library as an Instructional Materials Center.³

Unfortunately, the small school does not have the resources for meeting this need as fully as does the larger school. Personnel are not available; curriculum development many times is lacking; physical facilities limit what can be done; and funds do not seem to be adequate. How can the small school overcome these obstacles and begin developing the Instructional Materials Center? Where should it begin, and what steps should be taken?⁴

²Joint Committee of the American Association of School Librarians and the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association, Standards for School Media Programs (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969).

³Ibid.

⁴Kenneth Taylor and Robert Hull, "Facelifting for Old Schools," Library Journal, Vol. 64 (November 15, 1969), 4218-4224.

Planning

We must first decide what the educational goals of the school district or school are. These objectives and the curricula must be well established if the Instructional Materials Center is going to function efficiently. Without these well established goals the center will lose much of its value.

Next there must be total involvement in planning by students, faculty, administrators, librarians and specialists that may be on the staff. These people, of course, must be familiar with the curriculum and educational goals the school or school district has established. The old adage that two heads are better than one will be especially useful in this situation. It cannot be stressed too strongly, especially since the small school has limited human resources, that all concerned should be involved in the planning of the center. This participation is important for efficient usage later.⁵

Mr. Richard Lavin in his article, "Simulation, Standards and the Seventies," discusses a unique idea for total involvement. He refers to it as the Media Game, which he believes promotes creative group thinking and can help avoid costly mistakes. An actual model of the proposed Instructional Materials Center is developed by the participants, together with the instructional spaces available in the school. Dr. Lavin believes that by observing the physical model, those involved can understand implications more quickly and relate the variables present in such areas as scheduling, kinds of media usage, proposed staffing patterns and student usage. The game helps to establish communication

⁵Kenneth Taylor and Robert Hull, "Facelifting for Old Schools," Library Journal, Vol. 64 (November 15, 1969), 4218-4224.

among the groups participating in the planning. This system worked especially well when students were involved.⁶

All the components of the proposed Instructional Materials Center are represented and adhere to the board magnetically. Teams of player-planners arrange playing pieces to accommodate a stated situation. Trade-off rules force a choice between staff and equipment. Other rules make it necessary for the team to relate educational program objectives to the space. The physical representation of the system provided by the model allows media personnel, teachers and students the opportunity to keep each of the needs in front of them, while still getting an over-all view of the operation. The game also provides vicarious experience with quick knowledge of results. It also facilitates looking at alternatives. If undesirable results become evident, the planners can adjust to them, plan new alternatives; and, perhaps, new approaches will emerge. The simple fact that a planner can try innovations without the usual cost should remove all stops and lead to real creativity.⁷

Remodeling

If a new school building is being built, the Instructional Materials Center can easily be planned for and incorporated into the new structure. But what of the small school with an existing structure and physical facilities which they must take into consideration? What guidelines can be used that could generally be applied but lead to specific solutions for remodeling to create an IMC?

There are two concepts about the Instructional Materials Center

⁶Richard Lavin, "Simulation, Standards and the Seventies," Library Journal, Vol. 64 (November 15, 1969), 4216-4217.

⁷Ibid.

that must be considered before we try to remodel to accommodate it. First, it needs more space, both in the IMC and around the school itself, for shared teaching, large group instruction, peer group discussion, media projects, independent study and reflection. Secondly, there must be more sophisticated media in the IMC, the classroom and in special laboratories.

The Instructional Materials Center should be functional in design and inviting in appearance. It should have good lighting, acoustical treatment and temperature and humidity control necessary for the comfort of its users and for preservation of materials. The floor covering should be made of noise reducing materials, and carpeting is recommended.

It should be located away from noise areas and placed so that it is easily accessible to students and teachers. The location should permit use before and after school, evenings, Saturdays and vacation periods.

The Instructional Materials Center must have a sufficient number of electrical outlets, the necessary electrical power for peak loads and at least one telephone outlet and intercommunication outlets. Light switches, electrical outlets, power grids, thermostats, telephones and fire extinguishers should be conveniently located without using space needed for shelving.

Program change and teacher readiness for change must be considered in the IMC development. Kenneth Taylor and Robert Hull stress the importance of staff involvement and study before remodeling begins in their article, "Facelifting for Old Schools." They suggest the following ten principles be considered in IMC remodeling:

Identify the educational needs that may be served by an advanced materials program. Unless teachers agree on common school purpose and the use of materials, dissension among the staff as to the best teaching will persist. Naturally, the degree to which the teachers encourage students to use audiovisual materials and provide the opportunity will determine the size of the IMC.

View the principal as the motivating or supportive force for change. The principal is the dominant force to start change. The teacher, librarian or any faculty member can suggest change, but they must have the principal's support for it to succeed.

Define the basic IMC function. The future function of the IMC which will be responsive to desired learning activities and which will underlie design should be explained by the IMC staff and the principal. Learning activities that involve media draw upon reading, listening, viewing and production behavior. Facilities must be available for the activities in the IMC and around the building for large group instruction, group projects, independent study and production labs. It should be indicated that the IMC can support traditional or innovative programs with equal ease.

Use quantitative standards with care. Use quantitative standards for the IMC with school administrators with care. They many times ignore the curriculum, teaching goals and procedures, availability of community resources or socio-economic characteristics of the individual community.

Involve many persons in redesign. In addition to the staff, people responsible for building and grounds development and maintenance can explain what structural changes are possible in older buildings.

Accept remodeling as a continuing process. We find remodeling is becoming a part of building life. Continuing remodeling adapts facilities as teachers become increasingly ready for experimentation.

Stress flexibility. Avoid small permanent rooms intended for special purposes. Furnish the IMC with movable equipment. Today's open spaces can be divided according to function with furniture and equipment in creative ways.

Relate IMC facilities to similar facilities around the building. Where the possibility for expansion is limited, facilities for related functions can be developed elsewhere. For instance, large group instruction facilities need not be located next to the IMC; they can be elsewhere in the building.

On district basis, develop a long-range plan. What are the trends or indications for school population? If population is expected to drop, room for expansion of the IMC might be considered. If population will increase, building additions may be necessary.

Capture beauty inherent in old building. Special features, such as attractive ceilings, tile, brick and arches, may be preserved by the imaginative architect.⁸

The Collection

What materials should we include in our collection so that it will be a balanced collection and meet the needs of the school it serves? Naturally, our selection in the following areas must meet the needs and interests of our constituency. Our IMC should have representation in the following areas to fulfill the demands of a true Media Center. Books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, educational games, pictures, slides, music scores, maps, disc and tape recordings, the various microfilm forms and archival materials which relate to the local community should be included.⁹ Also, such machines as opaque projectors, filmstrip/slide viewers and projectors, micro-projectors and readers, record players, eight and sixteen millimeter movie projectors, sound filmstrip projectors, television, listening stations, radio receivers, video tape recorders and projection carts should be included.¹⁰

Naturally, this collection cannot be built overnight. In certain areas our resources may not be as great as other areas. Curricular demand and needs will set priorities for us to fill first. It is a continuous process of building and not one of buying all in one day.

⁸Kenneth Taylor and Robert Hull, "Facelifting for Old Schools," Library Journal, Vol. 64 (November 15, 1969), 4218-4224.

⁹Joint Committee of the American Association of School Librarians and the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association, Standards for School Media Programs (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969).

¹⁰State of Iowa, Department of Instruction, Plans for Progress.... in the Media Center, 7-12 (Department of Public Instruction, 1970).

After all, it took six days to create the world! The possibilities for microfilm are terrific for the small library with limited space and facilities.

Making it Run Smoothly

After the building has been remodeled and the physical facilities are ready, our real job has just begun. Our program must be sold to the administration, faculty, students and community if it is to grow and become a real part of the educational program of the school.

How do we sell our program? Through public relations, that's how! The director must use every device at his disposal to gain favorable reaction and prove that the program is a necessary and worthwhile part of the educational process.

Frederic R. Hartz and Herman Elstein, in their article, "Public Relations and Secondary School Media Center: the Director's Role," suggest some potentials for publicity from routine operation. One is the physical appearance of the center and its arrangement of materials. The second is the manner in which staff members serve the school population.¹¹

Many times the media center is the natural showplace of the school and may be the physical focus of the building. According to Henry Lash, the media center should be "centrally located, light, airy and spacious; it lends itself ideally for exhibits of many sorts; as a meeting place for certain civic organizations such as PTA, and the visits

¹¹Frederic R. Hartz, "Public Relations and Secondary School Media Center: the Director's Role," Audio-Visual Instruction, 15:61-63, January, 1970.

by the public in general. If, then, the library is a natural showplace, why not show it off?"¹²

Attractive communications from the library is another useful publicity tool that we often times overlook. If communications coming from the media center, such as reports, letters, directives, and overdue notices show little concern for appearance; so we will be judged! A thorough check of all outgoing communications for a short period might prove to be a revelation.

One of the most important, if not the most important field of publicity, is human relations. It is the responsibility of the media director and his staff to work with every student and teacher in the school. We must overcome the old stereotype librarians, and now, media personnel's impression of being aloof, snobbish, unworldly and standing guard over books and materials with little concern for the individual, whether he is a student or a member of the faculty.

Relationships with administrators, teachers, students and the general public depend not so much on formal training, but rather on humility, common sense and good humor.

For the administration to be sympathetic to the media program, they must have knowledge of the center and its resources, services and the potential that the media center can have for a really fine instructional program. The administration must be made to realize that the media center and its functions link it with the total school public relations program and that its products speak not only to the school, but to the community as well.

¹²Henry Lash, "School Public Relations through the Library," Wilson Library Bulletin, 33:485+, March, 1959.

Naturally, it is not verbal praise we seek from the administration, but support for additional staff, funds and facilities for furthering the educational program.

Then it is essential that we get the administration involved so they can understand the problems and services of the media center. Administrators should attend special institutes or workshops and meetings for media specialists and librarians to gain a better insight into these problems. Notices of these meetings and workshops listed in library/media periodicals should be brought to their attention by the director. With knowledge of standards, new techniques and sound practices, the school administration will be better prepared to support and evaluate media programs.

If we expect to have a successful media program, we must know and be able to state clearly our objectives. The media director must not only know what objectives he hopes to achieve, but how he will accomplish these objectives. Only after these facets of his program are clear in his mind should he approach the administration and begin to sell his program.

It is also advisable to provide regular reports which describe the progress of the media program. These could include statistical reports on circulation, acquisitions, attendance of classes, reference questions or a written summary of services rendered by the staff, displays, book reviews, bibliographies and inservice instruction. Such factual records can be very useful when the administration is approached for additional funds for the media center.

The preparation of the school budget is the ultimate responsibility of the administration, but this should not exclude the media director's participation. Not only will the media director be familiar

with professional standards, such as the requirements of accrediting agencies and the state department of education, but the current status of the media center, the resources needed and the curriculum demands. The director and his staff can project costs of materials and services and can compute the change of cost since the last fiscal year.

It is imperative that the media center director be willing to work on the curriculum development committee. With these contacts he will understand the direction and needs of the developing curriculum and will be able to formulate immediate and long range acquisition programs.

If the media center is to be a success, it must have the full support of the classroom teachers. A great deal of effort is needed to familiarize teachers with the contents of books, films, filmstrips, microfilms and phonograph records if these materials are to really be a part of the instructional program.

Frequently, the media staff receives little cooperation from the teaching staff and do all too little to find out why this situation exists. This is surely an indication that we are not selling our program to the staff. Reasons are varied for this lack of response. Priscilla McKim states:

Some teachers who have been in the racket for a long time (and usually the longer they have been in it, the more this is true), just hate to admit they don't know what you are talking about. Therefore, they keep out of your way for fear they'll get trapped into admitting what they don't want to admit to themselves. It's a way to avoid losing face.¹³

Many teachers hesitate to make recommendations and would rather that the media director make the selection. The NEA inquiry, The Secondary School Teacher and Library Service, reported that only "twenty-five percent of

¹³Priscilla McKim, "How to Convince Teachers that you are a Hydra-Headed Angel," Wilson Library Bulletin, 36:553-554, March, 1962.

the secondary school teachers have had actual instruction in the role and function of the school library as a part of their professional preparation."¹⁴ It is apparent that teachers' library background is seriously lacking and that inservice training in this field is necessary if a successful media program is to be realized.

Since these programs are seldom forthcoming, the director must sell media services to the faculty by various means. The following is a list of factors, adapted from Jacobs and Darling. These factors contribute toward good will.

1. All teachers should have easy access to instructional materials.
2. The contribution of the media center to the instructional program should be kept constantly before the faculty. Regularly distribute news of services and materials; solicit recommendations and comments.
3. New teachers should be invited to visit the center in September; consider offering an orientation session.
4. Teachers should be advised of new materials (books, periodicals, films, filmstrips, etc.) by routing lists.
5. Rush requests should be efficiently handled.
6. Responsibility should be shared with teachers and department heads for selection and discarding of instructional materials and equipment.
7. Bibliographies should be prepared; arrange for a constant flow of curriculum collections to and from the classroom; help the

¹⁴ National Education Association of the United States, Research Division, The Secondary School Teacher and Library Service. (National Education Association, 1958).

teachers use them.

8. Awareness of instructional materials and equipment by corridor and homeroom displays, posters, etc., should be created.

9. Teachers should be provided with a quiet place to study; offer material for the professional.

10. An arrangement should be made with teachers to ascertain specific needs, interests and abilities of youth.

11. Always be skillful and diplomatic in requests for returning overdue materials.

12. Remember that teachers may be overworked too! Act accordingly. Through effective human relationships the classroom teacher and the media specialist gain understanding of their roles in curriculum planning and learn to understand and guide students.¹⁵

Our prime concern is the student body, as the media center exists for their benefit. A major effort must be directed toward the student body. Satisfied youngsters are the best publicity for the school media program.

There are a number of effective methods the director can use to attract the potential user to materials and services. Among them are:

1. Displays, including permanent displays in halls, classrooms and the media center.
2. Bibliographies of book and non-book materials.
3. Assembly, radio and television programs.
4. Book talks, reviews, discussion groups.
5. Student participation in the selection, display and

¹⁵Frederic R. Hartz, "Public Relations and Secondary School Media Center: the Director's Role, " Audio-Visual Instruction, 15:61-63, January, 1970.

discarding of materials.

6. Contests for the best essays and graphic displays about the center.¹⁶

These and other techniques should be designed to train the student to relay books and non-print materials as sources of pleasure and information. Most important is the experience the student receives in borrowing materials, using equipment and securing the assistance he seeks.¹⁷

The value of student assistants and media club members should not be overlooked. With proper guidance they can assume displays, exhibits and prepare material for the school newspaper, or on radio and television.¹⁸

Another area vitally important to public relations is the rules laid down for the operation of the media center. These must be thoroughly tailored to your program and formulated through the cooperative effort of the administration, faculty, students and media center staff. Flexibility must be our key concern, a willingness to take a critical and unbiased look at new ideas to see if they have merit. Our world is changing very rapidly, and we must be willing to try innovations that will better serve the patrons of our media center. What is applicable today may not fit tomorrow's needs.

Public relations with the public libraries in our area is very important to our public relations program over-all. We must know the resources available in our area. Students do depend on the public library to varying degrees. Most public libraries consider students an

¹⁶Frederic R. Hartz, "Public Relations and Secondary School Media Center: the Director's Role," Audio-Visual Instruction, 15:61-63, January, 1970.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

important part of their clientele and plan programs to meet their needs. However, the school staff must recognize the limitations of the public library. Coordination must be sought and can be achieved. Acquisition programs can be developed rationally when each group is aware of the other's needs, resources and goals.

The media director can be the necessary link between teachers and the public library staff. The following paragraph adequately summarizes how the director can help to promote understanding between the public and school library:

The director of the materials center can promote mutual assistance and understanding by meeting with library staff and trustees. He can inform teachers of available services and resources as well as the limitations. He should encourage teachers to notify the public library before mass assignments drive students into their building. An interlibrary loan policy can be developed; so can a program of talks to students by public librarians.¹⁹

Competition for taxes cannot be avoided, but duplication of effort can be. Interchange of ideas, materials and personnel can do much for both institutions.

Before we can make demands on the public library, we must first evaluate our own media program. Perhaps the following questions could help us develop a valid checklist for evaluations:

1. Does the media director acknowledge the value of good public relations?
2. Does he know the interests and needs of the various publics which he serves? Of the area population?
3. Does he interpret the media program to his administration by involving them in the planning of the program and with scheduled reports?
4. Does he interpret the media program to the faculty? Does he

¹⁹Ibid.

offer efficient services to them?

5. Does he involve students in formulating policy? Is reference service always available?

6. Does the media director consciously consider the community (parent groups) in interpreting the media program?

7. Does the center have a sense of direction, a plan for development known to the public? Are the center's policies known to all; regularly reviewed and discussed? Are problems such as cost known to all?

8. Is the staff service-oriented?

9. Are there conflicts with public library policy? Is there contact between the two institutions?²⁰

Student orientation is equally important. Each student should understand what is available generally at the beginning of the year. Naturally, it would be impossible for the students to be familiar with all the materials, but a thoroughly integrated library program of curriculum and media services will soon acquaint them with the media materials available. The initial orientation could be done from class during the first few days of school. Small groups would be preferable, as this would allow the students to see and experience the media available. The orientation might take several days for each group. Students at this time must also be told the operating procedures, as well as given a written statement of policies and rules. They must also be told what basic materials, machines and equipment will be circulated and the rules of the media center operation. This will avoid misunderstanding later. A good basic background in what is available in the media center will be

²⁰Ibid.

well worth the time spent.

Public orientation is another item of high priority. After all, tax dollars are being spent, and the public should have the opportunity to see what is being done with their money. Open house with a special program might be one way to get the public involved. Library notes, a book list and the like in the school paper and the local paper might be another way to inform the public.

Briefly, let us summarize our plan of action. We must first determine our educational goals and curriculum in the school so the media center can serve these objectives. Total involvement is our next step. We must sell the IMC idea to get the support of the administration, faculty, students and the public to be successful. All should have a hand in planning the IMC center. After plans have been established, remodeling begins, following our ten general principles cited earlier, and taking into consideration the special space requirements of the IMC. Next, we must build our collection to support our educational and curricular goals, hopefully including all types of media. Finally, orientation and instruction in the use of the IMC is necessary for faculty, students and public.

The success and thoroughness of this final step play a major role in utilizing to the fullest possible degree any IMC center. All preceding plans and building of the center are of little value when an IMC center is not correctly or adequately used.

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