

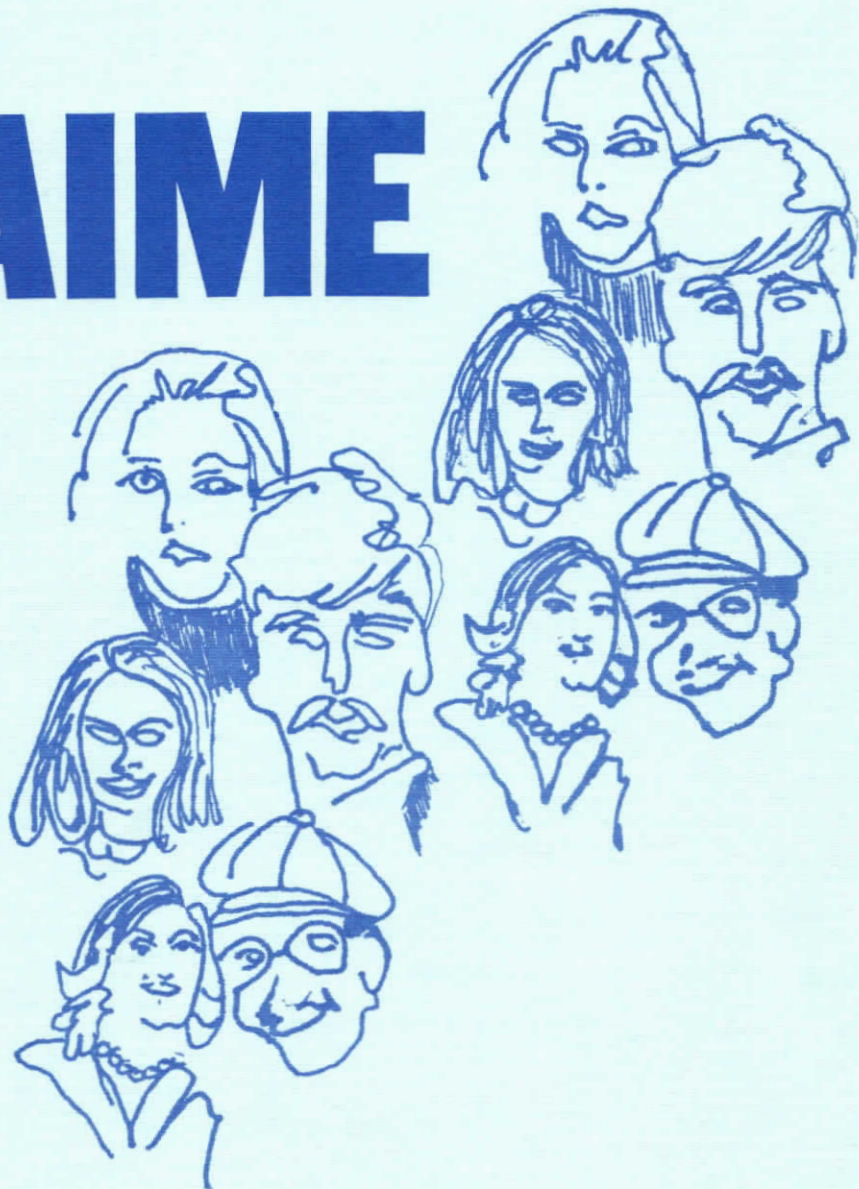
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Half a loaf . . . BETTER THAN NONE?

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The history of school library and audio-visual programs over the past twenty years can be likened to the progress of mountain climbers picking their way up the Matterhorn. At times, the progress has been agonizingly slow, and it seems we take two steps back for every one forward. Had media specialists demonstrated their worth in the educational program in terms of profit and loss charts, the rate of progress might have been different.

In seeking to be wanted, valued, and of worth in schools, sometimes media specialists find they have painted themselves into a corner. Two examples will demonstrate this point:

THE PLUG-IN SYNDROME

In school A the library media program had been developing for a ten-year period and was considered by the parents in this, the affluent part of town, to be a showplace. This elementary school had a spacious library media center, was staffed by a four-fifths-time professional, a half-time clerical and a cadre of 30 volunteer mothers.

The library media specialist, who had been at this school for eight years, happened to be the wife of the superintendent. She was both imaginative and influential in the school and community. Teachers were very nice to her and volunteer mothers flocked to her assistance. As an adjunct to the reading program, this library media specialist purchased with PTA funds eight System 80 machines and the accompanying software. Located in the library media center and staffed with volunteer mothers who helped individual children through their programs, the activity was a great success. Several years later the Hoffman Reading Program was added. Six children could be handled at a specially constructed table.

Next a Reader's Digest program was added at another listening station. Finally, another reading package was made available. As a result, at any one time fifty children could utilize various programmed reading packages. At this point the media specialist who developed the program left

the school and a new library media specialist, fresh out of school and raring to go, was employed.

The "new" media specialist installed an intricate schedule in which children came from various classrooms all day long to use one of the reading packages. Because some of the volunteer mothers could not be there, the media specialist and the clerk were usually very pressed to get everyone seated and plugged in for their 20-minute program. There was a great deal of activity. A few cords needed to be plugged in. A needle had to be changed. The tape for station three needed to be changed. Two students were having a fight over a headset. A call was received from a volunteer who wouldn't be able to make it. A salesman wanted to describe a great new reading package. A student was crying because she had been sitting here for 15 minutes and no one helped her. Looking at all this activity the principal observes, "Great place! So much activity. Never seen a library used like this one!"

The media specialist responded to questions about the program and its effect on her as follows: Sane? "Used to be." Zoo? "Definitely." Time for anything but the plug-in game? "Rarely." Reading guidance? "Only discussed in library school." Work with science and social studies? "Never." Storytelling? "Who has time?" Shouldn't some changes be made? "Yes, but we have so much money invested. Anyway, teachers love it. I take a third of their students, art, music or physical education has another third and the teachers get to work with small groups." Are you convinced that the programs are teaching the children anything? "That's a moot point," says the library media specialist; "the teacher doesn't really care."

THE VIDEO VALKYRIE

In school B the media specialist, after taking a course on TV in education, became very enthusiastic about the potential of using video in the media program. At his school he found a VTR in a dusty closet, got it out and made it work. Following a few conversations with teachers and the

coach and a few successful tapings, the library media center video program was off and running. Two years and thousands of dollars worth of equipment later finds the library media specialist spending 60% of his time on camera, and little time left to accomplish any other program activity. "Do students help in taping?" he was asked. "Well, no, would you let a seventh grader wrap your brand new Cadillac around a tree?" "Do you realize the rest of your program is suffering?" "Yes," he replies, "I wonder if I've birthed an elephant."

CAUGHT IN A TRAP

Sometimes people, politics, school schedules and a myriad of other events combine to trap media specialists into an imbalance in library media center program activity that can threaten the program as a whole. Many library media specialists feel trapped by various school policies over which they have little control. Some of these problems, however, have been of their own making over a period of time.

Although there are numerous personal pickles media specialists can get themselves into, there has been a more subtle and long-range problem that has been developing in the field. It is the frustration, discouragement and identity crisis of the part-time library media specialist, the person who serves more than one school. A problem which the budget crunch is making worse.

Several years ago a study of the services of 200 Indiana elementary library media centers looked for differences in the services offered by full-time professionals, part-time professionals and full-time clericals. The questions to be answered included: Which group gives the largest variety of services? Which group communicates the most effectively with their users? It was assumed that the order from lowest to highest would be:

1. full-time clerical
2. part-time professional
3. full-time professional.

The real order turned out to be:

1. part-time professional
2. full-time clerical
3. full-time professional.

The evidence for this order came from users, teachers and students. The findings, though unexpected, were really a matter of common sense. A full-time person is able to communicate a service program more effectively than a part-time person. In other words, time is a great factor in raising user awareness of what is done.

The second finding was astonishing. The part-time professionals claimed to give

more services than the full-time clerical! An explanation for this discrepancy was suggested in interviews with part-time professionals.

Library schools and schools of instructional technology teach the concept that the library media center has an active and exciting impact by working with teachers, groups and individual students, on instruction. This "service" function has increased in scope over the past fifteen years to include participation in instructional design and development.



Library media center educational programs teach the administrative function of the library media center and skim over the clerical function. The classification is often belittled, or attempts are made to show how to streamline it. Emphasis is placed on the service function.

Part-time professionals, imbued with this service orientation, however, find their precious minutes in a school taken up with administrative and clerical necessities. The harder part-time professionals try (and try they do) to develop a meaningful service program, the more frustrated they become.

Many of the part-time professionals feel obligated to see every class in the school every week for some type of library orientation lessons. They leave only a few hurried minutes in the schedule, or after school hours, to order new materials, to work on the card catalog, etc.

In searching for solutions to the part-time media specialist's dilemma, this author has never forgotten an interview he had a

number of years ago with a principal of an elementary school in Indiana. The principal was very enthusiastic about the role of the library media center in his school. Over a period of five years and with the help of a sympathetic superintendent, a discretionary budget, and cooperative teachers, he had furnished and stocked a nice library media center. For two years the media center had had the services of a very fine library media specialist. She was activity-oriented. The library media center had become the center for many instructional units. The principal, however, made a fatal

error by bragging about his library media specialist once too often at the principal's meetings. Two other principals pointed out that it wasn't fair; for one school to have a media specialist while the others didn't. The administration replied, "But we can afford only one person." It was suggested that her time be divided between the three schools. And so it was done. If you remember the story of the goose that laid the golden eggs, you know the results. A library media program split three ways is not a library media program.

AN UNPOPULAR SOLUTION

The best solution to this problem usually meets with negative reaction. When there is only one library media specialist and three schools, serve one school and forget the others. This is a harsh solution, and is usually billed politically impractical. A variant of this recommendation would be: if a district can afford three specialists (one an art teacher, another a music teacher, and a third a library media specialist) could each one of them be used for a year or two in one school and then rotated?

A SECOND SOLUTION?

If a media specialist has only a half day in a school, what is it that she/he can do to make a difference in education in that half day? If the answer is to teach twenty-minute blocks of library lessons, forget it. My own children go to a school where that type of program takes place, and as a parent concerned with quality education, I'm considering suing for malpractice!

There is now enough research evidence available to show that if a full-scale administrative, clerical, and service pro-



gram are attempted, with a part-time professional, the result is less than acceptable in program terms and psychologically unsettling.

gram are attempted, with a part-time professional, the result is less than acceptable in program terms and psychologically unsettling.

What is it that the media specialist can do in a half day to make a difference in education? This question deserves lengthy consideration and for the remainder of this article, a number of ideas will be discussed.

THE CENTRALIZED LIBRARY

What is it about a centralized library media center that is better than classroom collections? A review of the experience of twenty years of centralizing library media centers shows:

1. Centralized collections had fewer duplicates, therefore, more titles. Classroom collections are small and duplicate one another.
2. In centralized collections, media specialists tend to purchase from reviews, are more discriminating and the quality of the collection improves. Because

3. The centralized collection pooled resources which gave teachers and students an amazing number of materials from which to choose. Levels of difficulty, interests, variety, and quantity suddenly became a part of library media center service. In classroom collections, teachers usually did not share materials and these small collections

could not hope to serve the needs of all their students for an entire school year.

4. The centralized library media center can afford to purchase a variety of reference materials for use by the entire school. Reference tools in a classroom collection could not hope to compete with those available in a library media center.
5. Without some form of central control and distribution audio-visual equipment cannot be shared effectively.
6. A centralized library media center provides students with a new and exciting environment. It is an extension of the classroom which can stimulate individual interests.

Centralized collections provide two other benefits:

7. The library media specialist works with the teacher in planning lessons. She/he helps generate instructional ideas, gives suggestions about types of media

to use for learning, cuts to a minimum the time spent searching for just the right materials and knows where to get all types of materials and resources outside the school building.

8. The library media specialist, as a teacher, assists students to satisfy their curiosities and makes learning fascinating by recommending wonderful books, films, records, and tapes.

There have been some drawbacks in centralization. The worst being in classroom collections, teachers had all their materials at hand and could use them at any given moment. With centralized collections, the materials were out of sight, and easy to put out of mind. The materials had to be scheduled and might not be available when needed. Library media specialists could very easily design activities in the library media center unrelated to classroom concerns.

PRIORITIES

When there is only a part-time professional, it is necessary to look at each of the functions of the centralized library media center and make some basic decisions. These decisions may or may not be related to program components of the past. The Indiana research showed that the past is prologue to failure. Some of the functions of the centralized library media center may need to be shifted back to the classroom.

When library media center functions are evaluated, with the help of teachers and administrators, decisions on what to retain and what to drop from the program can be made. Hopefully the following activities can be left out of the considerations:

1. Do not consider scheduling every child into the library media center on a regular basis when the library media specialist is in the building.
2. Do not attempt a library skills program as a separate course of study with the library media specialist responsible for the teaching.
3. Do not expect the library media specialist to serve only a clerical role. Professional salaries require professional roles.

The following should be taken into account:

1. The type of curriculum and teaching styles in the school.
2. Facilities.
3. The role of the centralized library media center in:

- a. avoiding duplication (requires a card catalog);
 - b. selecting the best materials (requires tools, input from teachers, and coordination);
 - c. availability of materials (requires a warehouse concept and a circulation system);
 - d. research possibilities (requires reference collection and accessibility);
 - e. an additional learning environment (requires a facility in addition to a classroom);
 - f. the library media specialist as a teacher partner (requires a qualified professional); and
 - g. the library media specialist as a teacher of children (requires a qualified professional).
4. Time constraint placed upon the library media specialist.

A RADICAL PROPOSAL

Let us suppose (for discussion) that in prioritizing the roles under number three above that the library media specialist as a teacher partner is the first priority. How would the day-to-day job requirements be structured in order to spend the majority of the "half day" working in this partnership:

- 1. Determine which teachers wish the media specialist to work with them on an instructional unit. For these units the media specialist would assist in the planning, collect materials from every source available, produce media, work with the teacher as various media experiences take place, help interest students in the various materials which have been collected and participate in testing the students learning.
- 2. Only work on a few units at a time. Be sure those units are exemplary in terms of student learning.
- 3. Train the school clerk to handle all orders for the library media center including preprocessed cataloging. The media specialists would only have supervisory responsibility for the card catalog.
- 4. Set up a selection center (probably in the teacher's lounge) where sets of material selection tools would be available. Be sure that the materials needed for any instructional units are available when needed. Be responsible for helping choose materials from the best sources.

- 5. Do not have the library "open" in the traditional sense. Have students and teachers come to the warehouse to select new materials for room collections. All home circulation would be handled from the room collections. At any one time a room collection might have 500-600 titles with duplicates.
- 6. Set up a research center in a location where it can be supervised throughout the whole school day. It might be in the hall near the administrative offices or any other convenient place. Encyclopedias, dictionaries and other reference materials would be located in the reserve center and could be taken to the classrooms for short periods or checked out for home use at night.
- 7. Do not take responsibility for shuttling equipment, however, be responsible for setting up the system for its distribution and make sure that it works. Participate with the teachers in ordering new equipment and be concerned with standardization, repair problems, etc.
- 8. Do not create a learning environment in addition to that of the classroom. That is, storytelling, puppet plays, and research activities would all take place in classrooms when the media specialist was participating in instructional

units rather than in the library media center.

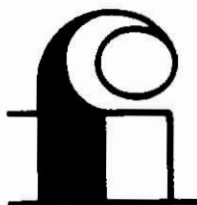
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The part-time library media specialist is faced with a real dilemma — struggling to provide a full-service program within an extreme time constraint. The resulting frustration requires a re-thinking of the entire structure of a centralized library media center program. The re-orientation should be based principally on program elements which have promise in terms of educational impact not on preserving a separate administrative entity within the school.

The role of the library media specialist, as materials expert, as media facilitator, as production specialist and as individualized learning and enjoyment consultant to children, remains undimmed in the face of technological change. If part-time library media specialists continue in their frustrating ruts, a half of a loaf may not be better than none.

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