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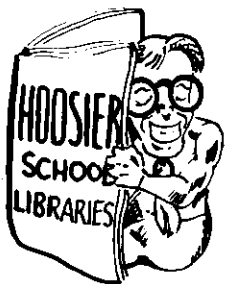


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On Joining the Unhooked Generation; or, How and Why to Junk the Rigid Scheduling Habit

by *David V. Loertscher*

One of the most common complaints of librarians at all levels is that there is very little time to accomplish some of the most important of professional tasks; i.e., instructional development, evaluation, and personalized attention for media center users. Elementary media specialists are particularly hard-pressed to give individualized service because of the dearth of clerical assistance.

For a number of years now, the professional literature has been promoting one way of gaining more time in the elementary media specialist's day - the abandonment of a rigid scheduling of class groups into the media center and the implementation of a more flexible flow of individuals, small groups, and large groups.

Recent research in the elementary schools of Indiana by the author indicates that few elementary media specialists in this state have adopted a more flexible policy. The reasons for this are no doubt legion, but the major reason is probably that media specialists are not certain just how a totally flexible center would operate, and lacking experience, are reluctant to approach teachers and administrators with the idea.

Rigid scheduling has many of the attributes of smoking. It is a habit with a long tradition and may be very difficult to break. Prospective media specialists are hard to convince that rigid scheduling is bad for the health and vigor of the media center because they either experienced the habit in their childhood or have indulged themselves while undergoing student teaching or practicums. Everyone seems to know media specialists who have had many successful years in the profession and still advocate rigid scheduling as a sound policy. With that kind of experience, how could one be wrong? Easy. Tradition is often our worst enemy.

Let us suppose you have approached this article with an open mind and are the type that will give any proposal for increased efficiency the "college try" before declaring blatantly and unequivocally that it won't work. If you are that person, then a four-step plan is proposed:

1. Immerse yourself in the idea of flexible scheduling, dreaming of what it would be like, how it would work, and the advantages it would hold for the learning climate of your school (that is the major consideration, remember).

2. Plan very carefully with teachers, administrators, students, and parents just how a flexible schedule would work in your school.

3. Simplify your plan so that it has a high probability of succeeding on the first try.

4. Implement your new scheduling long enough to reach sound conclusions concerning its impact on the learning environment of the school.

Let's go step by step through the four steps with concrete suggestions.

Step One: Dreaming

Perhaps the first thing to do is to search the professional literature for good articles on flexible scheduling. There are *Library Literature*, ERIC, and annual indexes to various library periodicals which will help.

Secondly, visit a media center where flexible scheduling is successful. Find out how it works and why it is successful. Area meetings and ISLA are excellent places to find out who is doing what and where.

Preview once again the films "Libraries are Kid Stuff", "At the Center", and "And Something More" - perhaps even "Learning with Today's Media". These films are available from several university film depositories in the state and free of charge from the Indiana State Department of Public Instruction, Department of Instructional Media.

Make a list of the advantages of flexible scheduling and add to it daily for two weeks. Here are some starters:

- a. The media center can become an activity-learning center every hour of the day.
- b. Children can come to the center anytime they need to come.
- c. Teachers do not have to wait for their assigned period to involve the class in media center resources and activities.
- d. Spur-of-the-moment needs for research can be satisfied.
- e. Voracious readers, viewers, and listeners can satisfy their cravings whenever the urge becomes overpowering.
- f. Readers, viewers, and listeners who didn't get their material "consumed" in the traditional week (what is magic about 7 days?) need not feel the pressure of returning an item which they fully intend to finish.
- g. Readers, viewers, and listeners who become disenchanted with materials that looked promising in the media center, but do not "fill-the-bill" after returning to the room, can return immediately for an exchange.
- h. Teachers who have precious little time to plan feel free to come into the center at any time without having to interrupt a class.
- i. The media specialist plans to get out of the center and into the classroom to assist in the flow of materials and learning experiences from media center to class areas.
- j. Most of the media specialist's day is not spent herding class groups in and out of the center.

Step Two: Planning

Joint planning with teachers, administrators, students, and parents is an essential ingredient in any radical policy change in the media center



..... "Can anything which children enjoy so much be all bad?"

program. But don't just call a meeting. Prepare for the planning session by "seeding" the group, i.e., convince a few important people of the soundness of your proposal (or maybe it really is their proposal) beforehand, and then get the group together.

A good way to start such a meeting is to view "Libraries are Kid's Stuff" together. This 15-minute film will show an activity-oriented center and will provide the basis for discussion: What were the children doing in the center? What contribution was the center making to the learning activities of the classroom? What made the center such an exciting place for the children to visit - and made them want to come? What are some ideas for doing things in a better way than those presented in the film?

Be prepared for negative comments with numerous positive ideas on how the flexibly scheduled center will meet the needs of the teachers and students to a greater extent than before.

Decide how best to implement a flexible schedule:

a. Could some teachers retain their rigid scheduling and others a more flexible one?

b. Could rigid scheduling be phased out in a two-or three-step process? (Classes might be scheduled every two weeks for a while, then every month, and finally, only on demand).

c. How can school policies be changed to allow children the freedom to come and go from the center whenever they need to?

d. What ideas do the teachers have for allowing individuals and small groups of students ample time in the school day to visit the center as needs and desires dictate?

e. How can parent volunteers assist in providing activities and learning experiences for the children in the media center?

f. How can older students assist younger students in the media center in learning how to use audiovisual equipment, be successful in learning projects, and give individual tutoring when needed?

Step Three: Simplification

Plans can be so ambitious or implemented without adequate planning that they are doomed to failure. "Look before you leap" is a great philosophy. If you are going to quit smoking, simplify your plan by seeing that the time you launch forth is not a time when stress is likely to condemn you to failure. Likewise, new media programs must naturally and simply fall into place. Start small - but make results *immediately apparent and visible* to users. Then, tackle more difficult procedures.

Step Four: Implementation

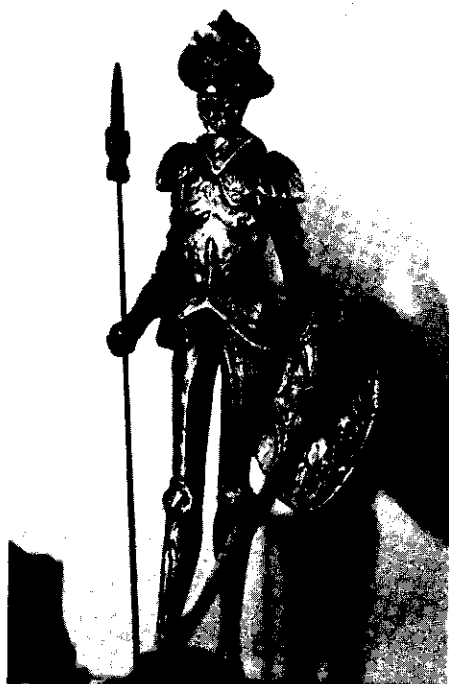
Do everything in your power to see that your plans succeed. This may require a few more hours of work every day for a little while until things are running smoothly, but pay the price - after all, that's what professionalism is all about. Building children's enthusiasm for the new program is essential. Maintain their enthusiasm by providing variety, excitement, and profitable activities. Entice parental support by including adults in the fun things going on in the center - not just the clerical tasks. (Grandmother brings her rocking chair and knits all day-answering children's questions about what she is doing; a father who works swing shift comes to the center with a few tools to make some jigsaw puzzles or help in the construction of a new puppet theater; mothers read stories to small groups whenever they can find a few children to listen, etc., etc. . . .)

Change and adapt your program as you go along; be as flexible in your new program as you dreamed about -- don't trade one rigid plan for another. For example, circulation systems will probably need to be revised three or four times before you find a simple way that works best in a flexible program.

Finally, one year is probably not enough to give a flexible schedule a fair chance -- there will be too many ideas to try out effectively in one year, particularly if you have adopted the "taper off plan" rather than the "cold turkey" approach to quitting the habit.

One of the best ways to join the unhooked generation is to make up your mind and stick with it come . . . or high water. Then share your success with others who want to quit. Let's see, if the author were to bring badges saying "I joined the unhooked generation" to ISLA next spring, I wonder how many could wear them? It's worth a try!

... "I would have missed the sly humor of Don Quixote."



... "If we want to stimulate creative change . . . we must begin with the persons who make up the institution . . ."

