Plant Planning Affects Use of Instructional Materials

Closely related are plant planning and availability of instructional materials.

MATERIALS of instruction are usually regarded as second in importance only to teachers in the teaching-learning process. Improving facilities for the use of instructional materials becomes, then, a significant part of school planning and construction. Here, careful analysis of the problem and insightful planning in advance of construction can contribute as much toward the effective use of instructional materials as can a substantial increase in funds for capital outlay. In some instances, an actual saving of money may be effected, while the facilities are greatly improved. Basic to the success of this procedure is a cooperative and creative approach to the study of the ways instructional materials are used in classrooms and the ways in which they might be used to improve both teaching and learning. This essential planning is shared fully by teachers and administrators working closely with the architect's staff.

Within the individual classroom, an inventory of student and teacher use of various media will indicate some fundamental considerations in the planning of classrooms. Teachers and administrators should then participate in open discussion of ways in which they envision the use of instructional materials, regardless of any difficulties in present or past situations. Their ideas will give a basic list of suggestions for consideration for every classroom. A survey of developments in the field of communications may also indicate useful adaptations for the classroom. New inventions today may become commonplace during the life of the school plant. Later changes in a building are often so costly as to become prohibitive. Each suggestion, therefore, should be weighed carefully and discussed thoroughly.

A meeting involving students, teachers, administrators and parents that encourages "dreaming out loud" about classroom facilities can be rewarding. What is most wanted for the classroom laboratory by teachers may be something that has escaped administrative consideration, or seemed insignificant from that viewpoint, although the provision might be made easily, even economically. In such a meeting, one

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student pointed out how convenient it would be if lightweight carts, like those used in grocery stores, were available to move sets of encyclopedias from room to room. The actual implementation of this suggestion came in a form that facilitated the movement of many types of materials within the school, even though the final choice was slightly different from the original idea.

A Check List for the Classroom

Any school's list of desirable classroom facilities to promote better use of instructional materials should provide for the following:

1. Adequate shelving for books that are kept in the classroom on both a temporary and a permanent basis. If the shelving is deep, 12 inches in most instances, it can serve many purposes. The clearance between shelves should be a minimum of 10 inches for greatest usefulness. Wherever practicable, the overall height of classroom shelving should be 42 inches. This provides adequate space for three adjustable shelves and a counter at a useful height. Shelving should be equipped with metal stripping and clips to make convenient the adjusting of space between shelves.

An inviting seating arrangement in a corner of the classroom makes reading for information, for relaxation or for the pure joy of escape a natural part of every student's day. Even crowded classrooms can usually find a place for two or three chairs chosen with the physical maturity of the students in mind. One Florida school succeeded in having a "reading corner" in every room throughout the year, despite a doubling of the student population during the tourist season. Sometimes the furniture was new, more often it was renewed by a cooperative P.T.A. committee, but always it was attractive and comfortable. One corner included two hassocks and a wicker rocker, another a small love seat, while a third even added decorative reading lamps to enhance the setting. A few current periodicals selected with care, some pamphlets related to a class project and placed on a low table can make this area an attention-getter for a roving eye and an added lure for the reluctant reader. Time for browsing here is important, too, but the facilities are of prime importance.

2. Listening equipment that can be used without disturbing other students. Time for listening-to-learn can usually be found by busy students as well as their teachers, if a record player or a tape recorder is a part of classroom equipment. This can be kept conveniently ready for use when a broad shelf with an electrical outlet is properly placed. Storage facilities for earphones close to the record player or tape recorder minimize the disturbance to other students when the listeners set up their equipment.

Similarly, radio facilities are installed so that the whole school may enjoy occasional programs, but a single classroom may tune in to a particular program if desirable. Whether radio is centrally controlled or whether individual receivers are supplied to classrooms, it is important that tuning in or out be managed within each classroom.

In this connection, thought should be given to the desirability of a schoolwide intercommunication system that is supplemented by individual instruments in each area to provide privacy for teacher communication within the building. Such instruments encourage direct (Continued on page 436)
calls to the centers involved when materials from several sources are needed for a class. The quick verification of a statement through a call to the school's information center or library, can often set a class discussion on a firmer footing so that an issue can more readily be discussed while interest is high.

3. Facilities for individual and group viewing. Just as filmstrips have long ago proved their value in classroom teaching, so they also have a role in the individual's plan for learning. Here again the generous provision and careful placing of electrical outlets can make the use of individual filmstrip viewers a natural, uncomplicated part of study and research. Such filmstrip viewers do not require a screen, can be operated very easily, and are inexpensive enough to make the provision of one or two for each class group practical.

The increasingly important role of television as a record of history in the making and as an important added dimension to classroom teaching underscores the importance of planning for the use of this medium in the classrooms being constructed today. Few screens are presently suitable for viewing by 25 or 30 persons. Therefore more thought should be given to the placement of two or more screens at a proper height and with adequate diffusion of light for comfortable viewing. Once the size of the group and the probable amount of use of television facilities are determined, both television and lighting engineers should be consulted for expert help in the selection, location, and manner of use of such equipment. Television facilities may be planned for only a certain percentage of the classrooms in a given building, but a decision as to this should result through well-informed discussions and with the advice of qualified consultants, not on the basis of individual enthusiasms or dislikes.

The use of television and of filmstrip viewing in successful and enriching learning situations has underscored the unique role of the educational film. Therefore, recent developments in research indicating potential revolutionary changes in the educational film industry may well affect classrooms within the next few years. One suggestion is that the projector may become a permanent installation, no longer prohibitively expensive for individual classroom location. The picture and the sound may conceivably be supplied on separate cartridges and slipped into their respective places without the problems attendant on threading, rewinding, etc. The time to consider provision of a suitable projection surface in each classroom is during the initial planning so that the developments of the future will be useful in the classroom built today. Should the inexpensive projector become a reality, there will then be fewer barriers to its extensive use.

4. Adequate display areas and devices are important in utilizing instructional materials effectively. It almost goes without saying that chalkboards and tackboards will be provided in every room in a school used for instructional purposes. Nevertheless, the all-important bulletin board is too often omitted, or its composition and placement are not carefully considered. Location should be a matter worked out in consultation with teachers; and composition should be an important contribution by the architect since new materials are being developed constantly. Pegboard has recently proved its value and adaptability for display of many types of exhibit materials. With a varied stock of accessories, the pegboard
can provide a hook or a useful shelf in a wide range of sizes. A panel or more of both pegboard and tackboard is essential in every classroom.

To facilitate the study of maps and large charts and the display of pictures, a functional metal strip at two or more predetermined heights is highly desirable for each classroom. The eye-level for viewing when seated and when standing suggests the proper height. Adjustable hooks and clamps to insert easily in such a "moulding" should be provided in ample variety and supply.

Whether or not the basic equipment here described is provided initially, it is of paramount importance to consider its probable use so that necessary wiring and wall-construction will not hinder the addition of any of this essential equipment at a later date.

Most of this discussion deals with the individual classroom. The suggestions, however, apply equally to all classrooms from kindergarten through high school. Little has been said about the storage of equipment or instructional materials in the classroom, because the ideal situation is, of course, a central location from which both the materials and the less frequently used pieces of equipment are readily available. Opaque projectors, powerful microscopes, extra individual filmstrip viewers, and replacements for temporarily disabled equipment should be centrally controlled and administered.

Instructional materials available to all students and teachers and circulated throughout the building are usually best handled through one area where the school's total resources are shown in a central index. To be functional, this is usually an alphabetically arranged card catalog. Here, in a generous sized laboratory-type center, recordings, books, periodicals, newspapers, slides, filmstrips, charts, maps and pictures are properly housed and readily available. Here faculty and students can come for immediate browsing, examination and comparison of resources before selecting those to be borrowed for further study and use. Loans can be made for both class and home use, to individuals and to groups, as the need dictates.

On the basis of the function it is to fill, this central resource begins to describe itself. It should be centrally located within the building, particularly in relation to the classroom area. It should be acoustically treated to an even greater degree than classrooms because of the increased amount of use it receives and the kinds of activities conducted in it. It needs shelving for books, allowing at least 10 volumes per student in the school's enrollment, with adequate consideration for the problems of oversize as well as conventional volumes. Shelving divided every 4 inches, 13 and 17 inches in height cares for recordings, while suitable cases accommodate filmstrips and slides. Legal size files in ample number provide for an active, up-to-date source of current information in clippings, pamphlets and pictures. Periodicals, both current and for a reasonable period of prior time are invitingly displayed, while easily accessible storage is available for significant periodicals over a five or ten year period as the curriculum of the school may suggest or need. Within the same central area, there are also appropriate storage facilities for maps, charts, posters and similar items.

To make provision for use of all the resources available in the school, the principles that applied to consideration of facilities for classroom use of instructional materials may need to be reviewed.

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Here many comfortable chairs placed near bookshelves to invite reading and browsing are essential. Larger work surfaces where a variety of materials may be consulted, compared and studied at once, are provided by tables with matching chairs. The conventional table and chair arrangement characteristic of school libraries for 40 years has not proved its unique value. Observe carefully the relaxed positions assumed by absorbed readers in any situation.

Soundproof conference rooms should be provided to accommodate from six to eight persons for listening, for discussion. Control from a central point is made easy by the installation of glass partitions from a height of 42 inches to the ceiling. Adjacent should be a viewing room where film pre-views and discussion may take place with faculty or student groups.

A somewhat secluded area for a professional library, apart from the usual traffic pattern, will encourage faculty members to take advantage of a limited, but uninterrupted opportunity to scan current professional material. Lounge-type furniture here is especially desirable, while the whole materials center can be enhanced through the use of dividers. Planters and shelving can screen off the area designated for faculty collections.

Since, in an area of this size and function, wall space is of paramount importance, whenever possible window areas should be concentrated in blocks and the lower sash placed as high as feasible, preferably no lower than 42 inches to provide functional shelving beneath.

The suggestions given here only skim the surface of important considerations in planning for the improved use of instructional materials as a new building is being planned. The urgent need for involving teachers and others in the basic planning and in reviewing present practices before making final decisions cannot be too strongly emphasized. Out of such “thinking together” sessions will come the understandings that make for successful new schools. In each area of instruction, it goes almost without saying, the advice and counsel of experts should be sought. Formerly, few school administrators built even one new school in a professional lifetime. Now, too many administrators are plagued and harassed by building problems so numerous that scant attention can be paid to any detail. Nevertheless, the generations to come will have their education improved or handicapped by the urgent decisions being made under terrific pressure today. It is imperative to plan and construct with vision and insight.

Fascinating way to learn: “read” signs. make change in this block store . . . pay fares, ask train times at the block station. Children build instant, BIG settings for experiences in learning with hollow Mor-Pla Jumbo-Blox. Interlocking—don’t tumble down! Durable as only America’s finest lumber can make them. Unit #4 above, $30 freight collect. Get full details for your teachers: Dept. L-460, R. H. Stone Products, Box 414, Detroit 31, Mich.
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