

# SERVICE IS THE CENTER

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INSTRUCTIONAL materials centers gain their strength from the service they offer to their patrons. Yet, it is not difficult to dehumanize the operation. Elaborate rules and regulations and a supermarket, impersonal atmosphere, added to sheer bigness, can make the service center an anomaly. Some centers are like that.

## **A Service, Not a Place**

The concept presented here is that of an instructional materials center as a service, not a place. It does not have to be located in one central spot. Centralization does not assure effective use. In fact, utilization is facilitated if the particular service needed is most readily accessible at the point of use.

An integrated program for the acquisition, production, storage and distribution of instructional resource materials is a splendid idea. Examples can be drawn from many public school systems, universities and colleges. The notion stems from the concern for providing the teacher with all types of materials in a convenient location. I am arguing for the same thing but I contend that one location is not necessarily either the most convenient or the one that can render the best service.

In some cases, there may be a central materials building or room; in others, several locations each central to the service rendered. Some kind of coordination, to be sure, is needed. Central cataloging of all materials available and their location is also desirable in addition to local catalogs.

The various specialists in their respective centers constitute the members of a team whose primary function is effective instruction. It is the degree to which each team member sees his contribution as a service to instructional improvement that will make this concept a truly effective one.

Although I shall use examples from my own College, the principles are the same for a public school. We have recently moved into a new College of Edu-

cation building, which houses all of the areas of instruction except industrial education, business education, music education, art education and speech education. Industrial education has a building of its own with a materials resource center. The latter four programs are housed in the new Business and Public Administration and Fine Arts buildings with special resources pertinent to those phases of instruction.

In the Education Building are found a Curriculum Laboratory, a Science Teaching Center, a Reading Center, a book collection for human development, a Statistics Laboratory, a Personnel Services Laboratory, a center for UMMaP—the University of Maryland Mathematics Project, a Bureau of Educational Research and Field Services, and a future Educational Technology Center, each with collections of printed materials, tests, instructional equipment or media.

In addition, there are laboratory-type classrooms with unique equipment and materials for special education, language arts, science, mathematics, home economics, social studies, and a nursery-kindergarten school. Each of these is an instructional center in its own right. Would our faculty and students (teachers and future teachers) best be served if all printed materials were in the Curriculum Laboratory? Where would students find the best service for utilization of tests, for example: in the Curriculum Laboratory or in the Personnel Services Laboratory and the Reading Center?

Service is closely related to people. In any instructional materials center should be found the kinds of specialists who can best help teachers with their materials problems: specialists in curriculum materials, in audio-visual media, in production, in research; artists, technicians, clerical personnel.

In our different centers and laboratories are housed the curriculum materials specialist, the science specialist, the reading specialist, the statistics and research specialist, the personnel services specialist, the educational technology specialist, and so on. Teachers can call upon these specialists as they use the particular center. As method is related to content, so are materials. Any curriculum materials specialist knows that only as he can call upon specialists in different areas can he run an effective operation.

## **Idea Production**

An instructional materials center should serve as a place to generate ideas for curriculum improvement. These may be ideas for developing and testing a new approach to the social studies curriculum, for analyzing teaching, for evaluating a course in science, for utilizing multi-media in creative ways, for planning a TV lesson, for production of transparencies and overlays, or for a new concept of organizing a college course.

Ideas refuse to be confined to a particular time and place. The ideas are more likely to be generated if a teacher can examine materials or experiment with them, read about experimentation by others, learn some of the techniques for production, or discuss his hunches with those specialists who do a great deal of thinking about the specifics of the problem in which he is interested.

## **Aid to the Innovators**

Innovations in electronic learning devices of all kinds, programmed learning, curriculum content, cybernetics, and the transmission and storage of information are occurring so rapidly that materials and equipment in an instructional materials center may quickly become obsolete. In order to be of service, such a center must keep up with the most recent developments.

Moreover, the changing role of the teacher and the advent of unfamiliar curriculum designs all greatly affect a service center, just as does any type of curriculum change. These changes do not, however, mean that a center only buys new materials. Persons who understand the developments, not only the techniques but the educational implications, become even more essential because it is in the local development, refinement and use of newer media that the humanizing or the dehumanizing of education occurs.

One need only look at the profusion of types of resources to realize that no one person can be of service as an expert in the intelligent use of all of these: closed circuit TV, audio and video tapes, language laboratories, disc recordings, overhead transparencies, film, filmstrips, slides, three-dimensional displays, mock-ups, dioramas, charts, diagrams, graphs, photographs, maps, specimens, models, programmed texts, computer programs, multi-media communication systems, tests, textbooks, tradebooks, pamphlets, forms, references, and the various projection, listening, reproduction, and response devices.

In the College, we have tried to plan an Educational Technology Center which will help faculty and students to develop their competencies in the use of the newer media. In no sense is it intended to be merely a distribution and warehousing operation. Instead, the facility will serve as a center for research and experimentation with teaching and communication systems; for production of closed-circuit TV programs and video tape recordings, audio tapes, motion pictures, filmstrips, slides, overhead transparencies, photographs, mock-ups, and a host of graphics teaching tools; for demonstrating and learning to use devices intelligently; for facilitation of independent study; for services to the faculty, students, and public school community. The multi-media systems classroom and the independent learning, audio production, listening, research, graphics, photographic, and construction laboratories will be aimed at faculty and students learning individually how to produce and utilize media.

Programmed devices and systems involving 8mm motion picture projectors and other listening and viewing devices will make possible experimentation in teacher education independent study techniques. The possibilities for teacher education are limitless when one considers the potential of video taping for recording the wide range of public school educational activities. Classrooms, listening laboratories, and dormitories equipped for individual learning can all be resource centers for learning. Dial arrangements tied to random-access computer systems can give the student access to various types of media through which he can observe a classroom, study a child, or peruse the latest research on instruction.

## One of the Disseminators

One of the recent developments in federal programs, the National (Regional) Educational Laboratory, is still in the drawing-board stage. Along with the research objective, it stresses the dissemination of the results of research and experimentation. The service center can play a vital role in this function. If the regional laboratories make the maximum use of existing facilities, as they ought, the service center can become a most important link in communicating results of research in laboratories, in schools, and in communities.

Collections of research studies, materials needed for action research in the schools, actual research in the center and in schools on the use of media, models for curriculum design and research, evaluation materials, dissemination through use of the newer concepts and findings in preservice and in-service education can all be visualized as within the scope of a center's services. Even assistance in writing and communicating results in other ways is a potential service.

It is difficult to envision what an instructional materials center will be like ten years from now. The developments of the future may make the conventional materials center outmoded. All directional signs point toward some rather striking changes. If we have the imagination to come up with the ideas for their utilization, the courage to put them into practice, and the wisdom to evaluate them for their potential, any information carriers can be made to serve human ends and to release teachers for the significant personal contacts with individuals. Service to people will never become an obsolete commodity.

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