

AVAILABILITY FOSTERS USABILITY

ALICE S. VAN DEUSEN

*Principal, Mercer School
Shaker Heights, Ohio*

FLORENCE S. WITTEN

*Staff Assistant, Mercer School
Shaker Heights, Ohio*

DOES availability foster usability? An alliance between business and education is seeking to determine the answer to this question. Encyclopaedia Britannica Films Inc., the Shaker Heights City School District and the Bell and Howell Company are joint allies in an experiment seeking such an answer. This endeavor, called Project Discovery, is attempting to find what happens to the learning process when an elementary school has maximum availability of film media.

Mercer Elementary School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, had its 28 classrooms and library equipped with automatic film and filmstrip projectors by the Bell and Howell Company EBF made available a library of more than 600 16mm films and over 1000 filmstrips. A new centrally located film center is directly connected to the printed media library and under the guidance of the Mercer librarian. Film media, like all library printed materials, are loaned to children, staff and parents. It is not unusual for children to load their arms with books, pamphlets and filmstrips for home study when pursuing an assignment.

The Shaker Heights Board of Education and administration lent their support to the project by placing it in Mercer Elementary School. A committee representing central staff and Mercer formulated policies for handling media and equipment. Each classroom and the library were equipped with permanent screens furnished by the Shaker Board. EBF furnished teachers with study guides for each 16mm film. An in-service workshop was held under the leadership of EBF, Bell and Howell, and Shaker's coordinator of Teaching Media.

The Mercer staff members were knowledgeable. They knew that learning could not be rigidly structured. They knew that students' needs are never alike and that children bring to each new endeavor a composite of past experiences, a diversity of personality, and a range of abilities. They are aware that a child is a human being unique in outlook and intake and that any means used for instruction must be selected with care and concern.

Teachers' reactions to Project Discovery were varied. Some viewed the project with keen interest, a few had doubts, some could scarcely wait to start. Questions posed were:

1. What learning benefits would come from this project?
2. How would it affect attitudes and behaviors?
3. How can I adjust my teaching to include these media?
4. When will I get time to preview?

Since the staff members recognized the necessity of being prepared for hurdles which could act as obstacles to this innovation, they assumed the task of fitting the program into their overall schedules. Usability became a reality when teachers were assured by representatives of Bell and Howell and EBF that the equipment was to be used at the discretion of the teacher to aid teaching and enhance the curriculum.

Teachers set their own time for previewing. They participated in creating and establishing policies for circulation that would better meet their needs. The staff was assured they could work in an atmosphere of freedom. Children were excited and enthusiasm spilled over into the home.

Out of the Closet

Before Project Discovery, Mercer's film center was merely a storeroom housing all types of supplies. With a great amount of vision and a small amount of remodeling, this storeroom-closet soon became a vital center for learning. Paramount in all planning was the objective, complete access to materials. Experience had taught that materials which were "out of sight had a tendency to be out of mind" and seldom used.

A film center assistant was added to the library staff to guide teachers and students in selectivity and use.

No spot in the building is too small for viewing. Students view films and filmstrips before and after school, individually with earphones or in groups in classrooms, and at listening posts in the film center. Not only is viewing a school activity, it is carried over into the home.

When students become proficient in using a filmstrip projector, they are permitted to borrow a projector and three filmstrips—two for study purposes and one pertaining to the student's own particular interest—for home use. These "interest filmstrips" add flavor to students' learning. As a result of filmstrips and their projectors going home a new idea was born, emerged and innovated. Using this same pattern, we are beginning to circulate 16 mm film and lending the 16 mm projector for home study.

Students discover that maximum availability of films and filmstrips provides a front seat to learning, attracts attention to the wonders of the past and present, supplies a wealth of information. Students say: "People come alive." "It's like taking a trip. You see things you've never seen before."

Films and filmstrips stimulate visionary thoughts of the future, make it possible

to see those things which cannot be seen because they are too small, too large, move too fast or too slow. They motivate learning—a fifth grade girl claims, "You don't have time to sit back. You're too interested." They broaden reading interests, improve self-image, encourage involvement (all students strive to be projectionists at all grade levels).

They develop self-understanding—while viewing a film a student can relate to a film personality, enabling himself to gain insight into his own behavioral problems. This is particularly helpful to the emotional child. Film and filmstrip humanize learning—students say, "I understand people better."

Teachers find that with film and filmstrips at their fingertips, they are teaching more creatively, doing less telling, meeting a wider range of abilities, using the same film for many purposes, adding dimensions, especially the dimension of feeling, to students' learning, showing fewer films in their entirety, stopping film frequently for discussion (producers are somewhat aghast at this practice but teachers are proving this technique is an effective teaching device).

Teachers are using film media as sources of reference and as stimulants to further study, search and investigation. They consider films and filmstrips to be effective in developing readiness at the primary level, for developing common experiences and enriching the curriculum. They are finding, too, it is necessary to tailor their instructional program to fit each child's learning pattern as they discover that color and sound are especially appealing to the visually and audi-

SMSG: The Making of a Curriculum

by William Wooton

The revolution in the teaching of mathematics is probably the most exciting pedagogic development in recent times. Mr. Wooton chronicles the progress of the insurgent theoreticians and teachers—the School Mathematics Study Group—from their first plans to devise an entirely new curriculum, through the writing sessions and the construction of the textbooks, to the impact of the texts on schools and the reactions of parents to the "new math." SMSG: THE MAKING OF A CURRICULUM will be of particular interest to educators as a pilot study of the mechanics of the new approach to teaching.

\$4.00

Subject to SMSG discount schedule; for information and orders write to School Mathematics Study Group, Yale University Press, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, Connecticut 06520.

Yale University Press



New Haven and London

torially-minded child and movement attractive to the child who learns best by doing.

Using Project Discovery's materials, teachers are individualizing their instruction and are taking the ceiling off learning. As Dr. John Lawson, Shaker Heights Superintendent of Schools, cautions, "Don't box children in."

Availability

Making materials available has been Project Discovery's great contribution. We find teaching to be more effective when answers can be found at the moment the question arises. Availability of materials is encouraging Mercer students to pursue knowledge—each in his own unique way. It provides opportunities for teachers to develop new techniques and to instruct in a more creative and individualistic style. Having projectors, films and filmstrips available for home study seems to be promoting even closer educational relationships between the school and the home.

Lengthening Our Focus

After one year of experimentation with Project Discovery's materials we, at Mercer, are beginning to think:

1. Cooperative business and educational ventures can be beneficial to education. (Three other school districts—Daly City, California, Washington, D. C. and Terrell, Texas—have been added to this educational venture.)
2. Business should be encouraged to find ways of financing similar projects and continue allowing educators to make the educational decisions.
3. School boards should consider using federal funds for the establishment of printed media and film libraries.
4. In-service preparation should be provided for all participants in any innovation.
5. Film libraries can make contributions to an instructional program. They could be particularly effective in the educational centers being planned for the culturally deprived and the very young child.
6. Taking films and filmstrips into urban centers and homes would provide opportunities to teach illiterates to read and would acquaint foreign born with the principles of our democracy.
7. Educators, involved in innovations, should hold themselves responsible for disseminating information. (An Ohio State University research student is now observing the functioning of this project.)
8. This article is our attempt to disseminate knowledge concerning Project Discovery. With its valued availability of materials, it tends to humanize the instructional program. Through the use of these materials, students are apparently developing a greater appreciation of and understanding for the peoples of their world. ←§

Copyright © 1966 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.