
From the Outside to the Inside

Viewpoint

by

Mary Arden Harris

Because of conditions resulting from innovations in technology, developments in education, and changes in society in general, a changing role has emerged for school librarians and school libraries. These conditions demanded concept modification and additional skills development for the library media professional. The role expanded rapidly in the decade of the seventies from a "passive" manager of materials in a library to include the functions of instructional leader and team member, as well as manager of multimedia materials and equipment in a media center. The new, full grown, more active role in the eighties demands expertise and flexibility. Expanded requirements include professional training, skills, and expertise as a librarian, a teacher, a curriculum specialist and materials designer, an instructional leader, an audiovisual specialist, an administrative manager, and a public relations expert. In becoming more than a library, the media center moved from the perimeter of instruction to the center, from the outside to the inside. This move placed the library media specialist in a position to develop a program that could have a positive impact on the total instructional program within a school.

With brief comments on these three major conditions bringing change to the school library, this article will examine the force each has had and is having in requiring the media specialist's role to focus on instruction. The article also will look at some of the emerging needs for practicing media specialists in meeting role changes. To shorten and clarify terminology, the professional school library media specialist is called media specialist in this article and the school library media center is the media center. Technology refers to the wide range of audiovisual media and equipment used as educational resources.

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Innovations in technology

The first condition bringing change to the library was the explosion of knowledge and innovations in technology. The revolutionary innovations, of course, resulted in utilizing technology for the storage and communication of knowledge. Then the fusion into one resource center of all formats used to store and convey information brought the change from separate library and audiovisual departments to a unified resource center. Many technological innovations have the potential for vitalizing all instructional programs and for augmenting individualization. By the time students enter school, the technological world has already had an impact through the phonograph, television, radio, motion picture, telephone, computer, and other forms of electronic magic. Every student is already ready for audiovisual learning.

Technology is being harnessed for the education process. It is an essential resource for inclusion in instructional programs to extend understanding, interpreting, and communicating. Audiovisuals bring concreteness to the abstraction of print. The cliché "a picture is worth a thousand words" expresses this concept. Visual and audio literacy is a fundamental part of education for the remainder of the twentieth century and beyond.

To be able to organize information and make it accessible to students and to be able to instruct in the use of technology, a media specialist must have expertise in the following aspects of educational technology:

- to operate audiovisual equipment
- to communicate through a variety of audiovisual formats
- to design and produce instructional materials in a variety of formats
- to teach students and teachers to operate audiovisual equipment
- to teach students and teachers to communicate via a variety of media

- to assist students and teachers in utilizing different media and in applying these to educational and personal needs
- to match appropriate formats with instructional needs

Personalized Instruction

A second condition bringing change was the development in educational focus on helping *every* student to learn and to develop individually. By understanding that learning and developing are an individual process, teachers and media specialists must plan together and cooperate in personalizing learning and teaching. It is essential to use a variety of techniques and formats of print and nonprint resources to facilitate learning experiences and talent development opportunities unique for each learner.

To be able to personalize instruction and plan for responding to individual differences in students, a media specialist needs competencies such as the following:

- the knowledge to understand child growth and adolescent development
- the knowledge to understand the uniqueness of students with diverse backgrounds, levels of maturity, abilities, and talents
- the ability to help students build a positive self-image and to become self-motivated
- the ability to create an inviting environment conducive to learning for students with abilities varying from the gifted to learning disabled
- the ability to organize resources for accessibility and utilization by the handicapped as well as by other users of resources
- the expertise to select and use appropriate techniques and procedures that respond to needs of students having different abilities, interests, and learning styles
- the expertise to teach media center patrons how to locate, use, evaluate, and generate information

As individualized patterns within the instructional program increase, the media specialist must be a partner in curriculum planning and instructional design. Crucial to effectiveness in curriculum development and design is a team effort involving media specialists, teachers, principals, curriculum specialists, and other staff members. To plan and design instructional programs, a media special-

ist needs broad educational competencies that provide expertise to do the following:

- to set instructional objectives
- to function as a curriculum team member
- to integrate the use of many formats of resources with subject content
- to evaluate and select materials and methods
- to relate appropriate media formats to curriculum patterns
- to maintain a working knowledge of courses of study
- to cull instructional content from textbooks and curriculum guides
- to design and produce instructional materials
- to teach others to locate information, design instructional units, and produce curriculum materials

Social changes

Entwined with the technological innovations and the child-centered individualization patterns that affect media programs and the role of media specialists are social changes in general. First of all, society in general has accepted the concept that learning is a lifelong process, obviously demonstrated in the many opportunities for continuing education for those older than the traditional school or college age. Another social factor influencing school programs is the variety of recreational media available in homes. Through electronic devices, students and their families have access to a veritable bonanza of formats for information and recreation. Because of this almost unlimited access to technology outside of school, the need for similar technology in school is obvious in order to avoid the potential for student boredom and complacency.

Media specialists, therefore, need refined skills to challenge individual students to become responsible users of nonprint and print media for lifelong learning and recreation. Instructing and guiding in this kind of development require expertise:

- to select and purchase materials that will respond to educational needs and appeal to recreational pursuits and personal interests of students
- to provide individual guidance for students in selection and production of media to meet varying needs
- to guide students to develop expertise in utilizing audiovisual materials and

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- operating audiovisual equipment
- to plan and conduct a literary appreciation program which includes guidance in reading, viewing, and listening experiences with the classics and other outstanding literary selections
- to assist students in determining valid criteria for evaluating print and nonprint media for personal growth, vocational pursuits, and recreational activities
- to foster appreciation for good literature, art, television programs, and movies

Attesting to the fact that expanded roles have emerged for media specialists and media programs is the inclusion of a sequential media skills course of study in *Standard Course of Study for Elementary and Secondary Schools K-12* (1977) and in *Competency Goals and Performance Indicators K-12* (1979), both published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The inclusion was a significant statement for school media programs as they became an integral part of the instructional program in preparing students for the realities of living and making a living in today's world and in the future. One has only to review the skills for student development included in these two documents to recognize that the competencies listed in this article for media specialists are indeed essential, varied, and extensive.

Two Crucial Concerns

Emerging during the sometimes dramatic and other times traumatic move from the rim to the center of instruction have been two crucial concerns for media specialists: the need for role interpretation and the need for continuing education. To maximize the effectiveness of the expanded role, these two crucial concerns must be met.

It is imperative that the role and its potential become clear not only to media specialists themselves but also to others in education. Indicative of the changes that the move from the outside to the inside has brought to the professional role and to the media program is the reality that the role will continue to change. To stay in step with the changing needs of students, the ever developing technology, and the evolving curriculum, the professional and the instructional media program must place high value on remaining flexible and being change agents.

The second crucial concern, the need for continuing education, can be dealt with in a

number of ways. If a model plan were developed, it would need to include options in time, location, format, and content to meet individual needs of professionals in the field. When courses have been available, some media specialists already have enrolled in university courses or entered advanced programs field based from universities. Some have taken advantage of inservice and staff development workshops offered by local districts. Whatever the plan, continuing education is desirable.

In summary, the crucial role modifications for the media specialist have resulted primarily from changes created in the library media program by innovations in technology, developments in education, and changes in society in general. Significantly, as the changes occurred, the school media specialist and media program moved from the outside to the inside to become an integral component of the instructional program within a school.

