

BIENNIAL SCHOOL MEDIA WORK CONFERENCE OCTOBER 8-10, 1970

by *Frances Kennon Johnson*

"FOCUS ON LEARNING through Unified Media Programs" was the theme of the 1970 Biennial School Media Work Conference sponsored by the North Carolina Association of School Librarians (NCASL) and the Division of Educational Media, State Department of Public Instruction. Held in Durham October 8-10, the conference attracted 626 registered participants, including members of the Department of Audiovisual Instruction, North Carolina Association of Educators.

Dr. Henry M. Brickell, who is director of studies for the Institute for Educational Development in New York City, opened the conference on Thursday night with a challenge. On reading the 1969 *Standards for School Media Programs*, he said, "I got the impression that you people are seriously intending to change the school . . . You intend some new kind of relationship between the students and the media center, between the media specialist and the faculty . . . The media program you describe has no end to its reach. It touches the behavior of every teacher and every child, every administrator . . . You would change the teacher's role as a presenter of information, for example. This is not like small-scale changes that teachers can accommodate to with skills they already have in their possession."

"You have to know," Dr. Brickell continued, "that the school is a very complex system in which you are trying to intervene." He discussed characteristics of the school as a stable institution, one which tends to resist change, and reviewed principles and approaches in effecting change in education.

In the Friday morning general session Dr. Brickell continued his presentation, focusing on what is involved in implementing the kind of media program envisioned in the 1969 *Standards*. Emphasizing that the primary goal of the media program is to improve teaching and learning, he offered a definition of learning (applicable to students, teachers, and media specialists): "To do something you've never done before, and to remember it so that you can do it again." He presented a resume of principles of learning, in the form of a set of twenty-five points that characterize conditions under which learning occurs. One point, for example, had to do with individual differences in rate of learning (and forgetting)—and the implications of these differences for the grouping of students. "In short," Dr. Brickell added, "no teaching can be so poor as to result in the same learning for all."

Dr. Brickell reminded us that, if we are to achieve communication with teachers and administrators, we must talk the language of teaching and learning, not the language of media; i.e., we must approach and work with teachers in terms of their primary concerns, relating the media center and its program to those concerns. He suggested that the role of the school media specialist is that of prime advocate or personal champion for the improvement of teaching

Before the media program envisioned in the 1969 Standards can be adopted by schools, he continued, it must be fully "invented;" that is, the conditions and qualities which characterize the program must be fully recognized and understood. Unless we know what we are trying to do (or, as Mager puts it, where we're going) we are likely to end up "someplace else." Once the desired program is clearly defined, it must be adopted. Dr. Brickell described conditions needed in the school to support the adoption of a new program, among which are the following conditions: (1) The program to be adopted must be identifiable, describable: "you'll know when you have it, or when you don't." (2) The program must be accepted: "the faculty must believe that it's worth having." (3) The program must have administrative support: "Commitment by the administration that we're going to make the change." (4) Staff training is imperative: "guided practice, over time, reinforced by satisfaction on the part of the staff in what they are doing."

In short, Dr. Brickell concluded, "We can't just put new media on the center's shelves." To achieve what is implied in the 1969 *Standards for School Media Programs* we must translate these recommendations into a usable—and used—body of practice.

Following the Friday morning general sessions, conference participants attended group meetings by levels (elementary, secondary, or system-level media specialists), participated in small group discussions, and visited the extensive exhibits of instructional media.

For the elementary media specialists' program on "Teaching, Learning, and Media," Betsy Detty (Librarian, Overton Elementary School) and Marcus Smith (Director of Instruction) traced emphases of the instructional program in the Salisbury City Schools and showed the broad base of media support provided for teachers and students in this school system—from books to closed-circuit television to an early 19th century school house to circulating animals, with resources and their use coordinated by media specialists who are as much at home in classrooms or supplementary education centers as in the library media center.

For the secondary media specialists' program, "Emerging Media Centers," Robert Lee, Superintendent, Moore County Schools, traced developments in his county which has merged three school systems into one and consolidated fifteen high schools into three, within the past six years. In developing an effective media program, Mr. Lee stated, the following factors are essential: (1) advanced planning, (2) appointment of a competent system-level media director, (3) employment of school media specialists who are capable of instructional leadership, (4) provision of system-level media support services, (5) development of a strong elementary school media program, without which secondary school programs cannot succeed, and (6) continuous evaluation.

For the meeting of system-level media specialists, Dr. Kenneth Newbold, Superintendent, Laurinburg-Scotland County Schools, discussed the role of the media director in instructional improvement. The first imperative, he emphasized, is effective communication with other groups: not other librarians or media specialists but superintendents, other supervisors, principals, and

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teachers. Major needs and contributions of the media specialist today, in his view, are relating to the curriculum and to curriculum development; participating actively in improving instruction, working in such areas as the diagnosis of learning needs, field testing of materials, and planning for individualization of instruction; evaluating the instructional program and working for its improvement, in keeping with the mandate for accountability; and building public support.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Craig Phillips attended the elementary group meeting on Friday morning and brought greetings to NCASL. He stated his viewpoint, shared by Dr. Brickell, of the media specialist as a change agent in the school, and called for the support of media specialists in solving the problems we face today in our schools—problems of human relationships, of relevance in programs, and of upgrading our competencies for the work of today, through preservice and inservice education.

Time was built into the elementary and secondary group meetings for small group discussion, in which conference participants demonstrated prime qualities of the media specialist: flexibility (hundreds of people formed into small groups rapidly and efficiently) and involvement (genuine dialogue began quickly and ended reluctantly after time was called). Major points made in group discussions included these recommendations for improving teaching and learning through more effective use of media: (1) The media specialist must be informed, committed, positive, and enthusiastic in projecting the role of the media program in instruction. (2) The media specialist must have—or build—the support of his/her principal. (3) Awareness, confidence, and competence in the use of media, on the part of teachers, must be developed. Suggestions included acceptance of a leadership role by the media specialist; using a personalized approach to keep teachers informed of resources; seeking released time for teachers for inservice education; “selling” teachers through students; improving the preservice education of teachers and media specialists. (4) Flexibility and freedom must be provided in media center operations: in scheduling, in open access to all resources (the “hands-on” approach), in liberal circulation policies. (5) Both system-level support services and drastic streamlining of work procedures at the school level are required to enable the media specialist to be available to students and teachers. (6) As media specialists we must commit ourselves to full involvement in curriculum planning and support.



Left to Right: Bynum Shaw, Pauline Myrick, and Barbara Hylton, President of North Carolina High School Library Association

At the Friday evening banquet Bynum Shaw of Wake Forest University, winner of the 1969 Sir Walter Raleigh Award, explored the belief that "there's a novel in most of us," and traced the process by which he has brought an idea (a setting or a character) to finished book: "a discipline," he said, "that is utterly demanding." A highlight of the banquet was the presentation of the Mary Peacock Douglas Award to Cora Paul Bomar, for her outstanding and sustaining contributions to the development of school media services in North Carolina. (Tribute to Cora Paul Bomar by Margaret Kalp appears in this issue)

A business meeting of NCASL opened the Saturday morning final session of the conference, followed by "Directions 1970," in which Cora Paul Bomar (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) high-lighted concerns and trends at the national level and James W. Carruth (Director, Division of Educational Media) reviewed priorities and directions in North Carolina.

Many people worked long and hard to plan and conduct the 1970 work conference. Special thanks are due to Pauline Myrick, NCASL chairman, who performed with unshakable poise and contagious enthusiasm; B. M. Sheffield, the resourceful vice-chairman; Mary Alice Wicker, capable secretary-treasurer; the directors of NCASL; the chairmen responsible for hostess, registration, exhibits, publicity, and membership arrangements; the staff of the Division of Educational Media; the group coordinators and discussion group leaders; and many more. With leaders such as these, North Carolina school media specialists can face with confidence the challenge of the seventies.