
Time Management in the Elementary School Media Center

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In recent years the role of the elementary school media coordinator has expanded to include many new areas of expertise. In addition to the long-time function of student instruction and management of the media collection, the elementary media coordinator is now facing the new technologies of computers and video in education. The elementary school media coordinator is often working in a situation with no clerical assistance (or, at the most, half-time assistance), and often these schools have no assistant principal. As a result the media coordinator is often asked to help in a wide variety of school administrative needs. To fulfill this expanded role, the elementary media coordinator is faced with finding some means to handle the ever-increasing work load given the same number of hours in a day—not an easy task!

The only way to cope with this situation is to make the most of the time that is available. Much has been written in the past few years about the importance of time management in general, but very little has been directed at school libraries. Some of the techniques suggested would be quite difficult for the elementary school media coordinator to implement, but there are many suggestions that would help make the most of the available time. This article reviews some of the general suggestions for good time management and gives specific suggestions for each of the six major functions of the media coordinator, as described in the Job Description of Media Coordinator adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Education in July, 1987.

The general premise of time management is to allocate the time available in the most efficient manner. Listed below are some of the suggestions that appear in general time management articles and books:

- establish a quiet hour for planning and project work;
- develop the ability to concentrate and focus on a project;

- develop a good work area (clean desk, place for everything, supplies at hand, project files);
- avoid procrastination—take action;
- assign priority to tasks (long- and short-run);
- start day productively (plan a day ahead to get right to work);
- delegate effectively (using assistants and volunteers, both student and adult);
- avoid wasting time;
- establish effective "to do" lists;
- conduct and attend effective meetings;
- develop better communication skills;
- batch activities where appropriate;
- learn to say "no" when necessary;
- know yourself (are you a morning or night person?);
- keep accurate calendars (desk and pocket);
- avoid perfectionism;
- establish and keep to deadlines for work;

Several of these time management techniques would help maximize the available time to accomplish the six major functions of the Job Description of the Media Coordinator. The first major function is **Manages Instruction**. *Adhering to the Teacher Performance Appraisal Instrument criteria, the media coordinator instructs students and faculty in using and/or producing media to integrate into the curriculum and facilitate the teaching/learning process.*

The type of daily schedule you develop can have a big impact on your use of time. A flexible schedule combining some regularly scheduled class times along with open scheduling for classes, small groups, center activities or individual work gives the media coordinator greater efficiency. The times when no classes are scheduled can be used for some of the collection maintenance and circulation activities. These activities need to be structured so that all of the materials are available and ten minute blocks of time can be immediately put to use. For example, having overdue form letters ready to fill in, or having the cards for the card catalog presorted (perhaps by a volun-

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teer) and at the card catalog to be filed, will complete a job using several ten- or fifteen-minute blocks. In looking at regular class schedules, I have found that scheduling thirty-minute classes consecutively allows the completion of five classes between 8:30 and 10:30, leaving a one-hour block of time before lunch when I either work with small groups or tackle one of the ongoing project files. By grouping the same grade level consecutively when scheduling classes, there is no time lost in putting materials away for one lesson, setting up another, and then having to go back to the first set of materials.

Planning is another very important part of the instructional role, but finding the necessary time to do so is difficult. The necessity of finding a "quiet hour" when you can work uninterrupted, usually at the beginning of the day, is a wonderful idea, but the elementary media coordinator will have to be very creative to find this time (and certainly not in the morning). Because the media coordinator's main purpose is service to students and faculty, there is no way to close the door for a "quiet hour" each morning. It is essential, however, to establish a quiet time, and each media coordinator will need to experiment to find the most effective time. (I have given up trying to find time during the school day and do most of this type of work at home. I have found, though, that Friday afternoon has worked for me since very few meetings are scheduled that day, and there are fewer faculty requests for assistance. Any time that is found during the school week is considered a "bonus"!)

Try to simplify everything possible.

One other aid in managing time to facilitate instruction is to develop long-lasting teaching materials for formal classes, small groups, or centers. Media coordinators can laminate these materials and develop a filing system arranged by skill. They can gradually add to this collection each year and have lessons and materials ready to use.

The second major function is **Manages Public Relations**. *The media coordinator initiates interaction with students, staff, administration, and the general public for purposes of integrating, promoting, and expanding the media program.*

The computer has been a timesaver in this area. Using the computer for quick preparation of materials such as letters to parents, signs,

summer reading lists, publicity items and then saving these letters for future modification has been helpful. Using the computer printer to create stencils for the mimeograph machine has also saved hours of work for one who makes many typing mistakes! Another way to save time in this function is to create a "media corner" in an existing PTA newsletter. It is also important to be visible—take the time early in the year to develop a rapport with key PTA officers: president, treasurer, media liaison. As the year progresses, you can quickly build on these relationships. Be visible with all parents—again, early in the year, attend or offer to work at PTA meetings, open houses, carnivals. Cultivate parent volunteers; they can be real time savers! While volunteers no longer seem to arrive in neat bundles of two hours work, I have found it helps to encourage them to work twenty minutes or half an hour—for example, when bringing their children to school in the morning, at lunchtime, before picking up students in the afternoon; or to pair their work with another volunteer job they are doing in the classroom. In this way you can create a wider parent base of volunteers and end up with more productive total hours. Finally, it never hurts to provide a pot of coffee for the volunteers—they deserve it!

The third major function is **Plan for the Media Program**. *The media coordinator designs and implements short- and long-range plans which allow a balance among integrated skills instruction, literature appreciation, planning with teachers, and collection management and development.*

As mentioned above, it is critical to find quiet planning time. Be aware of what kind of a person you are—when you do your most creative work, morning or afternoon—and then plan accordingly. As mentioned previously, the morning person is going to have to be very creative. If you are working with a flexible schedule, you may be able to carve out a block of time during the day (your regular class is on a field trip, no class is signed up for a time-slot, etc.). Be sure to take advantage of "bonus" blocks of time and use them to the fullest. Save less time-consuming activities (filing cards, filing catalogs, handling routine circulation matters) for those ten-minute blocks of time during the day. In using these larger blocks of time, one also needs to develop the ability to concentrate. It is very easy to become distracted and jump up and tackle some other activity. Force yourself to concentrate on the task at hand and stick with it—the more you do it the easier it becomes.

Another tip is to take advantage of "a roll." If you are having a very productive streak, keep

going until you drop! Get started working quickly, develop long- and short-range "to do" lists, and complete them. Divide a big project into several smaller steps and focus on completing each step. Avoid perfectionism; spending an inordinate amount of time on unimportant details wastes valuable time. Establish deadlines for things that need to be completed, write them down on a visible calendar, and get to work.

Use the media advisory committee effectively and efficiently to help with planning for the media center. Run the meetings effectively: distribute the agenda ahead of time; let members know in advance what input they will be asked to provide at the meeting; start and end on time; focus on agenda items; stay on target; set time and purpose for next meeting, and write minutes immediately.

Communicating and planning with teachers is another area where it is possible to use your time more effectively. It is simply not possible to set aside formal planning time with every teacher on a regular basis. There are, however, several ways to maintain the lines of communication and planning without formal sessions. Plan to eat lunch in the faculty lounge every day with different groups to develop informal relationships with your faculty. Find out what they are doing in their classrooms, and suggest ways the media coordinator can be of assistance either with classes or materials. Often more can be accomplished over a sandwich than in a formal planning session after school.

Plan to attend as many meetings as possible (e.g., grade level, subject, special planning) to keep abreast of upcoming events. If you are unable to attend a meeting, be sure that you receive the minutes of the meeting. Try to be a member of the school leadership team. Know which meetings will be productive and which will not. Make use of a time line scheduling calendar for teachers to fill out. Develop schoolwide planning forms (perhaps on a quarterly basis) for teachers to complete, outlining their upcoming plans for instruction. Put a pad of paper on the media desk for teachers to note their needs or questions if you are teaching a class. Establish a suggestion box by the card catalog for teachers to jot down needed materials. Develop a regular sign-up calendar that teachers can use without having to "see you to plan," or develop a form for them to use to request small group instruction. There are many ways to communicate informally with teachers that will save time for both teachers and media coordinator.

The fourth major function is **Manages Re-**

sources. *The media coordinator establishes and carries out procedures for effective and efficient selection, acquisition, cataloging, processing, accessing, and maintaining materials and equipment.*

There are many parts of this function that need to be examined for time-saving potential. Acquisition is one of the most important. Keep up-to-date by examining new journals as they arrive (or make regular frequent trips to the library if you do not have a personal subscription). Do not procrastinate until an order is imminent. Keeping current at all times will produce a stack of orders that can be processed at a moment's notice. Try to find one or two parents who will do your typing either at home or in the media center. Have all of their materials together with a sample form of an order. For example, the media coordinator can mark personal copies of journals and have volunteers type from them. Identify and label clearly a location for them to work and to place the completed orders, journals, or preliminary order slips. It is important to have several routine jobs for volunteers besides shelving books. Set up a shelf in the office clearly labeled for books that need repair, books that need cards typed, books that are potential discards. Train one or two volunteers to handle such things as typing duplicate cards—again have all the necessary supplies available right at the typewriter.

The computer can be a big help in saving time here as well. Both the word processor and data base programs are invaluable in preparing bibliographies, teacher and student overdues, school equipment inventory, and lists of materials purchased through the PTA.

The fifth major function is **Manages the Facility.** *The media coordinator organizes the facility and resources in such a way that they reflect the philosophy and goals of the school and its media program.* There are several time management suggestions that will help in accomplishing this function. One is the necessity of developing a good work area that includes a clean desk, a place for everything, and necessary supplies at hand. Start by taking some time to totally "clean house;" start with a clean desk. Develop a specific place for everything. Keep all the supplies (stapler, paper clips, pads, pens, etc.) where you will use them. Keep your desk free of clutter and piles of papers and journals. Buy some inexpensive plastic in-boxes and place them off your desk. Label them for such things as: magazines, catalogs, materials order information, material to laminate/copy, routine work, and high priority

work. Develop the habit of not piling things on your desk; immediately assign all paperwork to one of these boxes. Develop a series of project files to keep all material regarding ongoing work such as: Media Advisory Committee, Leadership Team, PTA Purchases, and Materials Orders. Keep these files together either in your desk in hanging files or in plastic file holders near (but not on) your desk. Only place on your desk the material that you are working on at that moment. It takes some time to set up this type of work area, but it is worth coming in one Saturday or staying late one day to totally "clean house." This might be the first task to think about if you really want to make effective time management techniques work for you. Tackle both your immediate desk and work area, and then proceed to look critically at the circulation area.

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Try to simplify everything possible. Develop a circulation system that allows the students to assume much of the clerical work. Have them card their own books so that they are ready for reshelving. Train selected student helpers to do some of the book check-in and reshelving. It may help to assign a special shelf for each child to reshelv; however, competent help in this area is essential to save time. Try not to have too many "special" places to shelve books—this will cut down on shelving mistakes and questions. Interfiling all audiovisual materials will save time when pulling material for a unit of study.

The sixth major function is **Carries Out Professional Responsibilities**. *The media coordinator provides opportunities for personal and professional growth for him/herself as well as for the school's staff and students. S/he also carries out assigned non-instructional duties; adheres to established laws, policies, rules and regulations; and submits accurate reports promptly.*

In order to submit accurate reports as

required, one must remember not to procrastinate. Keep information as you get it, and keep it up to date. Do not wait until the end of the year to compile information for the final report. Consider setting up a system for continuous inventory to facilitate gathering this information. Keep a special file for all new material and be sure it is filed as soon as it arrives. Duplicate material should be noted on the shelflist card immediately; do not wait until the end of the year. Develop a workable filing system for keeping records and keep it up to date.

Read professional material promptly; do not let it pile up. Keep a professional collection and place material there as you read it. Attend professional conferences and meetings. They take time, but will provide you with a full day of suggestions and updates that you cannot afford to miss.

The elementary media coordinator's schedule often seems overwhelming and impossible. There are only so many hours in a day, and there are other things in life besides your media center. Therefore it makes sense to look at some of the ways we do business and try to streamline them. Not all of the general time management techniques will work in the elementary media center; not all will work for you. But there are many things that can be done to save some precious moments and help us use our time more efficiently. I'm going to start by cleaning off my desk!

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School Library Media Day

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