Crucial Issues for School Media Coordinators

Compiled by Bill Pendergraft

School media coordinators are not cloistered. They are highly visible, and they serve many clients including students, teachers, parents, school-level administrators, system-level administrators, and a host of others who see them as potential clients for products and processes. They often do not decide how they will serve their clients, for often they may not recognize the diversity of their clientele, or the services which they market. They are (depending upon who one asks) merely responsible for being the heart of the school program. The metaphor does give one a rather heady responsibility. The school media coordinator must not only serve the clients mentioned, but also act as a technological oracle and repairperson, an expert on every new curricular "innovation" introduced, and a financial whiz. There is a resulting identification problem.

School media coordinators collectively do not know what to call themselves, and therefore choose roles depending upon training or inclination. As the school media coordinator does not work in cloister, the problem of identity will not be resolved in this journal or in institutions which propose to train them. The identity and function of the school media coordinator will be resolved in the school—in the marketplace where the crucial issues affecting our planet and the educational community will mix and separate.

It is the purpose of this collection of statements on the crucial issues affecting school media coordinators to offer perspectives about four major issues in the field. They are

- THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MEDIA COORDINATOR
- TRAINING: MEDIA COORDINATORS, TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS
- BUDGET AND PERSONNEL
- TECHNOLOGY

Many suggestions were submitted which included the broader issues of energy, major budget cuts at the federal level, comprehensive testing and so forth. The topics selected for consideration here reflect consensus among those submitting materials. Perhaps the statements which follow can serve as the beginning for a dialogue among school media professionals about these crucial issues.

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL MEDIA COORDINATOR

As has so often been said, the most important component in any media program is not the quantity of materials or the size of the facility, but the ability of the media coordinator to lead the development of the program and to infuse

its value into every mind in the school. Having collected our "things"—our materials, our machines, our rooms—there is great danger in thinking we have arrived. There is danger in the apathetic lull that seems to be setting in.

It goes without saying that the role of the media coordinator is subject to change in response to shifts in curriculum, technology, and communities. Sages of the school media profession have written reams on *The Role*, but the bottom line is what the individual school media professional perceives his/her role to be. Critical to the survival of the profession is its self-concept—the vision that school media coordinators should be, can be, and are agents of change. More critical is for each coordinator to believe that he/she is personally capable of being a leader. Leadership need not be confused with flamboyant assertiveness; quiet determination will suffice.

Given the fluctuating nature of education, the media program must have flexibility. The doomsday view is that media coordinators cannot adapt to changes and do not continuously evaluate their effectiveness. While it is inconceivable to media professionals that any change in school curriculum or organization or whatever could take place without their involvement, the bitter reality is that such involvement all-too-often comes as an afterthought—if at all. Media coordinators who are not on the leading edge of change, who do not see themselves as belonging in that role, may indeed find themselves dispensable at some point in time.

Frustrating as it can be, school media coordinators will have to push the same pushes and raise the same questions repeatedly until *The Role* as we see it becomes *The Role* as "they" see it. But first, we must be sure we are each clear on what our role should be. We can hardly communicate our role to others until we are quite certain about it ourselves.

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TRAINING: MEDIA COORDINATORS, TEACHERS, AND ADMINISTRATORS

"The very nature of educational technology as a profession requires that its practitioners be able effectively to design and execute adoption and diffusion plans that will promote and facilitate the acceptance and utilization of instructional media of all types—print, non-print, traditional, and electronic—in order to affect the learning in our educational system."[1]

To match this concept of the school media professional from OHIO MEDIA SPECTRUM, 1980 with the training currently available is difficult. What is required of this position does not exist in one single well-defined compartment of academia. The training of school media personnel requires a combination of the traditional library science and education curricula with a sprinkling from other established schools such as business administration.

Moreover, although the above definition effectively summarizes the competency based certification requirements for the school media coordinator in North Carolina, the eleven media programs accredited by the State, in

general, maintain the traditional divisions of library science and audiovisual education. This dichotomy of training further generates an identity problem by not providing the professional leadership (because they are also divided) to support and define this role for the pre-service media coordinator or for his or her peers in the Schools of Education. A 1980 informal survey of NCAE division membership by SDPI/DEM of in-service school media personnel illustrates this continuing dichotomy. School Media personnel are almost equally divided between Individualized Pupil Services (IPS) and Association of Classroom Teachers (ACT).

In addition, the school media coordinator is expected to function in a school without benefit of administrators or colleagues who understand the role of media facilitator. Sam Yarger pointed out that teacher education programs generally do not require training in the use of the tools of their trade. He identified these tools as instructional resources such as print, non-print, electronic/ mechanical, management, intact (time, money, space) or human.[2] Until this is changed, the school media coordinator is put in the untenable position of training peers without benefit of administrative status.

In summary, the disjointed media training program for media coordinators and the lack of training for teachers and school administrators in the use of resource personnel and instructional technology may combine to create major gaps in the educational program at the K-12 level.

1. Rebecca Gilger and Amos C. Patterson, "Planning for Change: An Annotated Bibliography," *Ohio Media Spectrum,* 32 (Winter 1980): 16.
2. Sam J. Yarger, "The Status of Resources in Teacher Education," Syracuse University ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources, 1979.

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BUDGET AND PERSONNEL

Of all of the issues currently facing education, one of the most crucial involves the decline in both budgets and personnel for public schools. This decline is the result of decreasing school enrollments, ravaging inflation, and dwindling government and local funding. Nowhere is this decline felt more severely than in the school media program. Staffing for school media programs and the purchase of media for instruction are affected.

Declining school enrollments coupled with tight school budgets, 70% of which often is related to personnel costs, suggests that professional media positions at the local school level and at the system level that are now vacant will not be filled in the future. Many school media centers are staffed by part-time professionals or, in some cases, nonprofessional aides or volunteers. This trend will continue as classroom teachers facing reduction in force fight to save their teaching positions. If one can read the handwriting on the wall, it

states emphatically that media professionals must continue to establish and communicate their undeniable importance in the instructional process if their positions are to remain. Media professionals must continue to build viable media programs that are integral to the total instructional program. Teachers and students must realize that quality learning cannot exist in the void created by a poor or nonexistant school media program.

Inflation and reduced federal and local funding has led to a sharp tightening of school budgets for purchasing instructional materials. Competition is keen from all school programs for a "piece" of the funds. Many times, local school administrators dole out funds to those who present the most appealing cases. It is absolutely necessary that media professionals establish the process of a school media committee establishing school-wide media needs and priorities for selecting the best instructional materials to support the instructional program. This makes possible the accountability that is necessary today in light of reduced budgets. Media professionals will find it essential to be able to show the instructional value of the purchase of media in order to secure the necessary funds to build the school media collection.

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TECHNOLOGY

Technology is one of the underlying reasons for libraries, especially in schools. Among the first technologies was the printing press making information more available to more people. As this technology improved, needs to have exchange of information grew. As new information and technologies became available, the logical place to center circulation was the library. There is now a proliferation of informational technologies that have built in capacities for interaction with the users. It is these types of technologies that have made it necessary for school librarians to become media specialists involved in instructional planning and learning utilization. MEDIA PROGRAMS: DISTRICT AND SCHOOL[1] places strong emphasis on an array of media formats and the equipment necessary to present information to users. These developments have changed the role from a reactive responder to request for information to a proactive innovator that moves out of the physical confines of the media center to all learning areas of the school, working both with teachers and individual learners. Many changes are in the offing.

Although it would be extremely difficult to predict the specific nature of equipment that will be used in schools in the future, there are certain tendencies that we should consider.

First, industry is providing technological change with ever-increasing frequency. This gives us not only new models of existing equipment, but new kinds of equipment as well. Whatever we buy and use today will be outdated in very little time.

It is equally true that American society is adopting new technology in much less time than ever before. Telephones and television took a relatively

long become common household items, but computer-related devices have become commonplace in far less time.

The mechanical, optical, and electrical technologies that brought us projectors and recorders will continue to be important to us for many years to come. However, there are several newer technologies that will be increasingly important to much of the equipment we will use. Among these are the microprocessor, the laser, and fiber optics.

The microprocessor is the heart of the microcomputer. While its capabilities seem phenomenal now, it is already being designed to store more information and to process it more quickly. This same technology is being incorporated in more traditional audiovisual equipment to control operation, provide access to materials, and to store information about students.

The laser provides a high-intensity light source which is already used in comparatively simple pointing devices and in rather complex videodisc players. Other kinds of uses of this technology will undoubtedly be made.

Fiber optics can carry impressive amounts of information over long distances at low cost. They will grow in their importance to our communications equipment.

Will our audiovisual equipment be any different, even if it incorporates these and other technologies? Basic functions will probably remain unchanged: we will still need devices which store and play back both audio and visual information. New equipment will have to do this, even if by some yet-undreamed-of means.

There are two trends which are appearing now which will probably be very important to the equipment and to the ways in which we use it.

The first involves students in learning. Rather than being passive viewers of instructional programs, students become actively involved in responding to the presentations and in determining their pace and structure.

The second trend involves media formats. The newer equipment, in addition to providing hardware, software, and procedures that are different from systems we have dealt with in the past, also has the capability of interconnecting with older equipment. This will allow a microcomputer, for example, to connect with a projector or with a videotape recorder to provide instructional experiences which are more comprehensive than either unit would provide alone. So, instead of dealing with even more formats which are different from the others, we may finally see equipment which allows everything to be used together.

No matter what changes technology may bring us, our role as media coordinators will remain the same. In order effectively to use any medium for instruction, we will need carefully to determine our objectives and needs, then evaluate existing equipment and its ability to meet those needs, examine materials which could be used on any of the formats, and train staff and students in their use.

1. Prepared by AASL/ALA and AECT, jointly published by ALA (Chicago) and AECT (Washington) 1975.

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