

The Communications Center

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There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our venture.

William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

EDUCATORS HAVE BEEN ACCUSED of being slaves to innovation. There is some evidence that they try to "take the current when it serves" and may occasionally misjudge when the tide is "at the flood." Libraries were once an auxiliary service of the school; later they became the core of the school; then the instructional materials center appeared, to be followed by the learning resources center; and most recently the media center enlarged the concept of the learning resource center. Audiovisual services and electronic equipment, often financed by federal funds, added another dimension to the library.

Such a progression from a library to a department of media services is illustrated by the developments at Evanston Township High School (ETHS). First, the traditional library added audiovisual services and became an instructional materials center. Four supplementary resource centers were added when new wings were built to accommodate four schools in one building. A Title III grant to produce audio- and video-mediated materials in a media center for distribution to the resource centers via a dial access information retrieval system brought together the interests, concerns, and objectives of the library,

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the resource center, and the media center. As a result the areas were united in a department of media services to coordinate the facilities and services, as illustrated in figure 1.

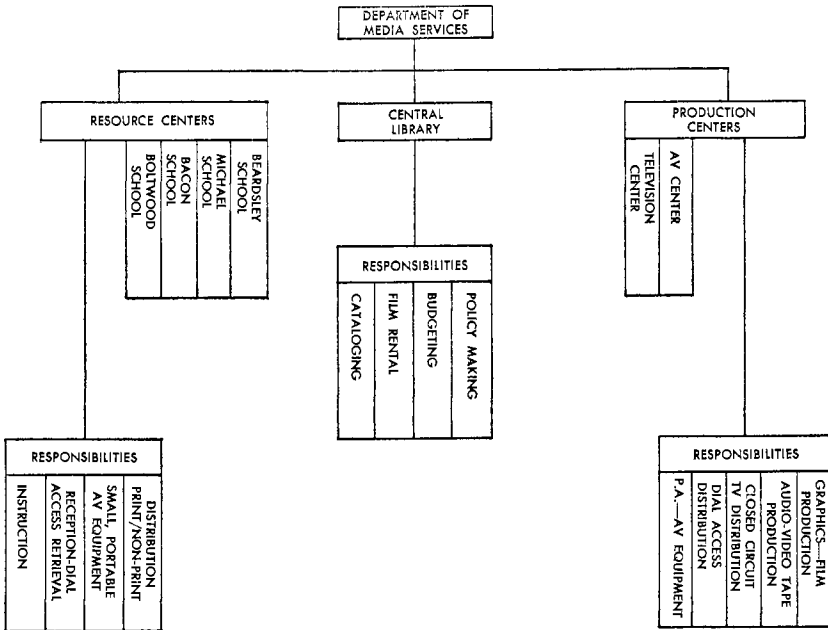


Figure 1. Department of Media Services

To understand the function of the communications center and its relation to the central library and resource centers, it is necessary to understand the functions of the other divisions of the Department of Media Services. Responsibilities for policy making, budgeting, film rental, and cataloging are assigned to the central library which serves students with reference materials, books, and periodicals. There are facilities for listening to records and for viewing microfilm. Books and periodicals for teachers are also housed there in a professional reading room.

The four resource centers house materials directly related to the curriculum. Books, periodicals, filmstrips, records, tapes, cassettes, small portable audiovisual equipment, and conventional and electronic carrels with both audio and video dial access information retrieval are among the resources in these centers. Teachers' offices are located

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in quadrants throughout the center in keeping with the principle that teachers are resources, not taskmasters.

The communications center includes an audiovisual center, so named to distinguish it from the television center. Large overhead projectors, 16 mm. projectors, stereo tape recorders, and other large pieces of audiovisual equipment are distributed from this center. Here teachers preview film, make overhead transparencies, edit film, and confer with the art consultant who prepares overhead transparencies and delivers class lectures on art history.

The center for the production and electronic distribution of mediated instructional material is the current facility which evolved from a television studio through the era of a communications center, instructional media center, and media center to its present title: television center. The name does not adequately describe its functions but is used to distinguish it from the production center for visuals and graphics.

The television center houses the television studios, two studio control rooms and master control, the dial access video and audio tape decks, the language laboratory tape decks, a shop and offices, and a television production classroom. These facilities provide three types of services: 1) production of video tape, audio tape, and film; 2) distribution by closed circuit cable, dial access information retrieval, and portable record, playback, and filming equipment; and 3) instruction of students in courses with academic credit and inservice training of teachers through workshops and mini-clinics.

The first of these services—the production of teacher-constructed mediated materials—received its initial impetus from an Elementary and Secondary Education Act Title III grant to prepare materials to be distributed via dial access information retrieval. The faculty, already oriented to the use of multi-media, took advantage of summer workshops, curriculum projects, and released time to prepare 183 video tapes, 531 audio tapes, and 184 films during the three-year project.

The music department and the foreign language department prepared cassettes for student home study in addition to the reel-to-reel tapes used on dial access in the music resource center and in the language laboratories.

Science and business education developed super 8 mm. film with a sound track in cartridges to be used on small projectors near the science laboratory tables or near the office practice machines. The

software and the hardware were geared to independent study and individual progress.

The social studies department developed a series of 35 mm. slide presentations with a synchronized sound tape. The carousel projectors were used in class with supplementary audio tapes on dial access for review or reinforcement.

Students in English classes became sufficiently interested in super 8 filming to justify the purchase of cameras and projectors by that department, which in turn used the facilities of the television center for editing and adding sound.

Not the least of the services performed in the center is the dubbing requested by teachers who wish a sound track of some kind transferred to another format, i.e., from reel to cassette, from disc to tape, etc. The college consultant requested the video taping of interviews with college representatives who visit the school. Some of these are cataloged and used as video tapes, but more often after one use the sound is transferred to audio tape for later use.

What is the content of the materials produced in the television center? A random sampling of titles and descriptions will indicate the variety of approaches.

Video tape titles include:

The Protest Movement—ETHS students discuss this current issue with an alderman, a representative of Young Americans for Freedom, and a professor of sociology.

Materials of Music: Composer's Workshop—ETHS students and a teacher discuss the work of guest composer-artist Gilbert Tryhall.

Alternate Behavioral Responses for Child Development—made by ETHS home economics students.

It's the Law—four driver education students ask an assistant state's attorney questions about law and the courts.

The Process of Inquiry—class discussion techniques.

Student Interviews with Dean of Admissions at Reed College.

Audio tape titles include a series of on-the-job interviews for vocational guidance and titles such as *Outside Reading Suggestions for Slow or Busy Readers* and *How to Apply to College*. Other uses include: French phonetic drills, grammar units for Spanish I, fifty-five lessons in Algebra I for performance criteria, drill tapes for music sight reading, explanation of 1040-A tax form, and literary term papers.

Films include super 8 color/sound cartridges for fifty-five experiments in freshman science and eighteen cartridges for operation of

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business machines, slides with synchronized sound track for freshman orientation, and *The Three B's of Hearing Aid Care*.

Although the Title III project was limited to locally prepared materials, it is not the policy of the school to so limit the materials available for instruction. Since 1955 when closed circuit television was installed in the school, the money and time necessary to prepare quality material for this medium have limited its usefulness. The experience of the school substantiates the theory that the cost of high quality local production is prohibitive except in those special areas in which units need to be related to the peculiar characteristics of a class. Therefore, materials have also been purchased and/or rented in addition to infrequent exchanges of video and audio tapes with other high schools.

The second service of the communications center is the distribution of materials in three ways: 1) dial access video and audio information retrieval, 2) closed circuit television, and 3) portable equipment.

The dial access system has three video channels which can be accessed by student demand at a touch-tone panel in a resource center carrel. Additional video channels are available on scheduled access, for which the video tape machines are manually operated. There are ninety-two audio program channels available which can be accessed by student demand at a carrel. There are forty-eight wet carrels in the four resource centers and eight classrooms with dial access audio panels. The foreign language classes have their own dial access language laboratories, but they use the video carrels in the resource centers to access films and video tapes.

The second method of distribution is the closed circuit television installation available in fifty-five rooms, each seating from 25 to 250. The three network stations and the Chicago educational station are available at all times. Four additional channels are available for video tape playbacks on a prearranged schedule. The eight video channels available through closed circuit television complement the small number available on dial access.

The third type of distribution which originates in the communications center is portable equipment such as a classroom video tape recorder, a super 8 cartridge film projector, and certain types of 16 mm. cameras and super 8 cameras.

In addition to its function as a distribution center, the communications center is an instructional center. High school students may elect

Television Production I, II, and III as regular full-credit courses. Students serve as crews for the taping and filming produced locally.

The teachers share in this instructional program by participating in miniclinics, the nature of which is illustrated by a few of the titles: *How to Structure Content for More Effective Learning*, *How to Prepare a Television Script*, *How to Decide Which Medium to Use*, *Microphones*, *Cassette Recorders*, *Filming with a Super 8 mm. Camera*, and *Effective Television Visuals*.

The communications center then produces mediated instructional materials and electronically distributes films and tapes (or live television) to the resource centers and classrooms. It functions to make available to each student the kind of material best suited to his mode of learning at the time he needs it, regardless of who his teacher is or what she is doing at the time he needs help. In cooperation with the central library and resource centers, the communications center aims to preserve the human element in the instructional process by providing for independent study, individualized instruction, a variety of patterns of learning, and the removal of some of the barriers of time and place.

Technology is not the solution to all educational problems, but a media services department which offers resources of many kinds, readily accessible, can affect the learning climate of the entire school. Such a concept of service poses no threat to the autonomy of the classroom teacher. On the contrary, it provides her with alternatives in approach, in content, in method, and in emphasis.

With these resources available the teacher can explain a theorem in geometry and then say, "If you did not understand that, take this cassette home and replay the explanation while you do your homework," or "Go to the resource center and dial video tape 1273 with Mr. Sharp's discussion of this same problem." The girl in home economics who is ready to put the zipper in her skirt before the class is ready can see the teacher's videotaped explanation rather than wait for the entire class to reach that point in clothing construction. The slow learner can replay an explanation as many times as necessary without "losing face." The teacher who is inept at threading a projector can have the film on dial access and save class time for student contact and discussion.

A tape on dial access can serve the needs of a boy who studies best at eight o'clock in the morning and the girl who does not wake up until eleven. The video tape on closed circuit television can simul-

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taneously provide a tape to three classes, each of which is viewing it with a different motivation, such as oral interpretation, social studies, or English classes studying "Vinie Burrows and the American Negro Poets." Two students question panelists on "The Feminist Movement" or "The Draft" or "Student Protest Movement" in a studio videotaping with information as current as the daily newspaper. A guest speaker from England videotapes his theater lectures as a valuable resource for next year's students. The instructional contributions of the communications center are significant in the learning environment of the school.

The communications center—the technological arm of the library—operates successfully when it assists in matching the most appropriate resource with individual student need for more effective learning.