Newer Adult Education Methods and Techniques

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The bench-mark survey of library adult education activities in 1953 by Helen L. Smith gave for the first time, on a sampling basis, the quantity of newer media methods and techniques employed in public libraries in the United States. Four years later as part of a regional study of library needs and resources in the Pacific-Northwest, Mary R. Pamment found that the audio-visual resources in libraries in that region of the United States were four times greater in 1957, notably in the area of 16 mm. film and 16 mm. film equipment. There was also a clear indication that the number and type of adult education services was in direct relationship to the size of the library, its available resources, and the amount of staff time available for such services. Thus it was found that the libraries which served the largest population groups were able to do the most effective job with adult education activities.

Based on interviews, questionnaires, and materials collected through correspondence, Mrs. Pamment devotes a considerable portion of her study to a description of the educational services of the public library. While sufficient attention was directed at the library’s relationship to community organizations and adult education agencies, the major concern was the study of the libraries’ own programs and activities. The study revealed that there were differences in opinion among the librarians concerning the function of the library on the community. Whether to emphasize the book collection and the resources of the library, to promote its use, or to extend the services of the library as an educational agency, depended a great deal on the philosophy of the librarians, on their temperaments and their training. Illustrations of these differences of opinion were found in the programs investi-
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gated, yet there was unanimity in recognition of the educational and cultural function of the public library and its resources.

An effort was made to obtain information concerning the types of programs presented by the sample group of libraries of the Pacific Northwest, the purposes of the activities, how they were organized and directed, and what materials and means were used in presenting the programs and activities. In general, the emphasis was on discussion group programs, audio-visual programs, books, and activities which publicized and promoted the library. This detailed catalog of seventy-nine programs is arranged in fifteen categories:

Great Books discussion groups and varied audio-visual programs were the two most frequently mentioned types of programs; these each represented 15 per cent of the activities. Eleven per cent of the activities, such as open house, radio and television programs, featured the library and its resources and services; ten per cent of the programs were centered on special interest groups, and another ten per cent featured public and world affairs. Varied book programs, which included book reviews and book discussions represented almost nine per cent of the activities, while practical arts, crafts, and skills accounted for seven per cent. Five per cent and less of the library sponsored activities involved American Heritage discussion groups, fine arts, and orientation and training in group leadership and participation. Programs dealing with family relations, program planning services, literature, general education, and vocational or technical education were also listed in small percentages.

Since fifteen per cent of such activities were varied audio-visual programs this provided a descriptive index of practical ideas which involved films, radio, television, recordings, and live music. It was self-evident from this variety that librarians were surmounting the prejudices and misconceptions pointed out by R. C. Swank; namely: (a) that the predisposition to compare the best in books with the worst in audio-visual materials is common practice; (b) that blame for the poor quality of many audio-visual materials is put on the nature of the media; (c) that books are richer in spiritual and intellectual values than audio-visual materials; (d) that audio-visual materials are not intimate and individual, that they are essentially mass media; (e) that audio-visual materials are embattled against books and “a struggle to the death” is in the making; (f) that a kind of unity is ascribed to audio-visual materials—whereas they are actually everything but print.
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Additional clarification of the role of audio-visual materials is the concern of Lester Asheim in *The Future of the Book*. In examining the implications of the newer developments in communication it is suggested that while the content of the book is sacred, its form is not, and yet, there is no question about the importance of the book's function or the continuing need for it. Instead of emphasizing the separateness of book and non-book materials, the concern should be with the content and educational purposes of all materials of communication in order to achieve the best learning situation. In other words, the end and not the means must be the determining factor.

In all probability the single national stimulant for the greater utilization of audio-visual materials and techniques in libraries has been the series of grants to the American Library Association by the Fund for Adult Education. C. H. Hewitt has prepared *Grant Evaluation Study* which lists the six projects as follows: American Heritage, 1951–1955; Survey of Adult Education in Public Libraries, 1952–1953; Adult Education Subgrants, 1953–1955; Allerton Park Conference on Training Needs for Librarians Doing Adult Education Work, 1954; Library–Community Project, 1955–1959; and for the operation of the Office for Adult Education, 1953–1961. One of the purposes of the evaluation study was to determine in what ways the quality of adult education programs in libraries has improved, and skills have increased, and to predict what future progress may result from the grant activities.

Participation by libraries in the American Heritage Project has increased the stature of the library in the community so that no longer is the library considered merely a book service agency and the librarian only a desk assistant. It was the adult education Subgrant Project that stimulated libraries to experiment in a number of program areas little known or not widely used among American libraries. A comparison with the results of the Smith survey shows that six of the techniques used by the subgrant projects (discussion groups, exhibits and displays, book talks, reading lists, lectures and discussions, and listening and viewing groups) were reported by the survey to be used by from 10 per cent to not more than 38 per cent of libraries in their own programs. Seventeen of the techniques used in the subgrant projects were reported in the survey to be used by less than 10 per cent of the libraries. In the area of material used in the projects, five (musical and non-musical recordings, filmstrips, radio, television) were used by less than 10 per cent of the libraries,
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and three (pamphlets, magazines and newspapers) were reported by less than 30 per cent.

Hewitt reported that evaluations from the field clearly indicated that specific progress could be reported as a result of adult education grant activities in the participating states. As an example, state library agencies, state library associations, and local libraries all responded favorably on the increase in the collections of audio-visual materials and acquired or increased skills and knowledge regarding audio-visual methods and techniques.

If one type of audio-visual materials is to be isolated because of its development and greater utilization by American public libraries during the last twenty years, that material would be 16 mm. motion picture film. At the national and state level library associations have made notable efforts to create better understanding of the use of 16 mm. film. At the national level the American Library Association has had consultant and specialized services available to the libraries of the country. The statistical reports that have been issued over the past decade show huge growth both in library collections and in viewing audiences. Probably the very best analysis and survey of this medium occurred in the Public Library Inquiry by Gloria Waldron.6 This study, published in 1949, indicated that in the period of less than forty years the 16 mm. film field had become a force for education. In her examination of the entire field of the adult educational film, Miss Waldron discusses the present chaotic state of distribution and suggests possible solutions to this problem including library use of films and the public library as a film circulating agency. The survey considers the literature of the field, incorporates the results of personal interviews and answers to questionnaires, and concludes with detailed case studies of eight public libraries that provide film services.

It is significant that some seven years earlier, in 1942, G. D. MacDonald7 was commissioned by the American Library Association to make his study of educational motion pictures and libraries. At that time, this landmark study prepared the firm foundation for the use of 16 mm. film through informal educational services such as the public library. Much that was first forecast in the MacDonald study on the development of this field, and later discussed and demonstrated by example in the Waldron report, has come to pass. More libraries, either through their individual taxing jurisdictions and areas of service or having joined together with other libraries in film circuits, are providing 16 mm. film materials for their patrons. This matter of
participating in a cooperative agency is described in detail in a report made by Patricia B. Cory and Violet F. Myer. They describe actual arrangements as found in their survey of film administrative agencies and circuit-member libraries in the United States. This report also includes sample budgets and contracts. The way is clearly marked for the how-to-do it of providing film service even for libraries with limited budgets.

As film utilization has increased considerable effort has been expended in achieving the best in selection aids for library adult education purposes. Not too long ago only descriptions published by the producers and distributors of 16 mm. film or brief annotations in the trade journals or bibliographies were available. In 1955, the American Library Association published its selective list, Films for Public Libraries. This is a balanced list of critically annotated films in all fields with no attempt to specialization. This was followed by a supplement in 1957 and, since that time, on a monthly basis, there have been specific reviews of recommended films in the monthly issues of The Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin. This type of selection aid, where preview facilities are unavailable, has improved the situation for effective utilization of 16 mm. film. While some attention has been given to the use of such materials with children and young people, the major emphasis throughout this program during the past twenty years has been to seek films that could be used with adults in informal adult education as well as program material for autonomous groups.

The development of the 16 mm. film program in the public library may be described in three stages. First, it may be simply an information service for library patrons in connection with programs for the use of an individual or an organization. Second, as the library’s own program, films may be obtained with or without rental to be used for evening programs based on subjects requested by citizens, community need, or general cultural or intellectual interest. Third, the establishment of a loan or reference collection for use by the community. At this point an opportunity exists for the greatest understanding and potentiality of these materials. Since this stage requires the largest outlay of funds, the recommendation expressed earlier for cooperative audio-visual services needs to be examined.

The newest of the audio-visual media is television. For more than a decade libraries have been examining the potential and use of commercial and noncommercial television, and each succeeding year
has indicated more effectiveness. This development was climaxd in 1958 with a two-day institute just prior to the San Francisco conference of the American Library Association on the use of television in library adult education. The premise on which the institute was based was, “that the intelligent use of television by the librarian has larger goals than the immediate benefits of publicizing and promoting the library in that community; that it can, additionally, add still another dimension to many areas of library adult education programming; and thus can enrich the library’s total adult educational effort in the community.”

The role of the library with television is threefold: 1) the library may provide resource materials to assist television producers, writers, and other individuals working in the field of television; 2) the library may occasionally initiate a program of its own as a single performance or as a weekly series; 3) the library may become the repository of kinescopes (recorded television programs), magnetic tapes, etc. of television productions for historical and archival purposes.

In addition to program participation in communities where non-commercial channels have been allocated, libraries have taken an active role in assisting the organization and establishment of such channels. Notable examples may be found in Detroit, Cincinnati, Denver, Seattle, and San Francisco. In fact, in one or two communities the library agency was the chief proponent for the noncommercial channel when it was first announced. Libraries have recognized the complementary role of noncommercial to commercial television as being somewhat akin to the value theory as contrasted with the demand theory of book selection. It has been emphatically stated that culture in a democracy is a two-way street. If it is bad for the majority not to recognize minority tastes, it is just as bad for the minority not to recognize majority preferences. For this reason it is necessary to have the programs planned by commercial television for the large audience but at the same time to provide the telecourses and special information programs to meet local community needs and desires on the noncommercial channels.

With requests for assistance from libraries everywhere the Public Libraries Division of the American Library Association prepared a report titled: TV: How Public Libraries Use It. Here is tabulated and organized information covering the experience with educational programs for television as evidenced in surveys conducted by committees of that association. One of the more valuable sections of this
publication is the comprehensive listing of television program ideas. Considerably more than children’s story hours and book-based or book-oriented discussions are suggested and described briefly. Perhaps this is the starting point for most library television activities, although today, through the Extended Service plan of the Education Television and Radio Center at Ann Arbor, it is possible to secure kinescopes which may be used throughout the country over non-commercial channels, or over commercial channels under the sponsorship of an educational agency, such as the public library, if a non-commercial channel does not exist. Furthermore, these programs can also be used as 16 mm. film material if television is not available.

In order to insure a wider and more constructive use of television, it is recommended that cooperative relationships be organized at the state level. A good example of such cooperative activity has been evidenced in Illinois where the University of Illinois Library School, Illinois Library Association and the Illinois State Library have joined together to finance, produce, and distribute television shows that may be used throughout the state for educational purposes. This has also provided opportunities for training and practical experience with the medium. Because of the need for know-how, production facilities, and financial support, this kind of effort should be duplicated elsewhere in the United States.

To climax the new media approach to library adult education, Title VII of the National Defense Education Act of 1958 has been welcomed with considerable anticipation. This Title concerns “Research and experimentation in more effective utilization of television, radio, motion pictures, and related media for educational purposes.” Surely the results of this legislation should provide a basis for action for years to come. The Act itself has a four-year life and while the initial appropriation is less than the amount recommended in the Act, there is every indication that Congress will give full support to the development of this program. The Title is divided into two sections; namely, Part A which concerns grants-in-aid for specific research and experimentation, and Part B which is concerned with the dissemination of information on the new educational media.

At this writing Part B looms more significantly for libraries as indicated by the broad-based pilot projects for which contracts are now being negotiated. These are:

1. A study to determine the feasibility of establishing an Educa-
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tional Media Research Information Service. Columbia University, New York, N.Y.

2. A limited number of filmed case reports, to be planned and produced, showing uses of new media in sound teaching practices, in such subjects as science, mathematics, and modern languages. Educational Television and Radio Center, Ann Arbor, Mich.

3. A pilot project to discover ways and means of disseminating information on tested techniques, as developed at regional conferences and workshop demonstrations. National Education Association, Washington, D.C.

4. A study to test the feasibility of gathering and disseminating bibliographic information about essential teaching materials, including films, filmstrips, recordings, radio, and television programs. University of Indiana, Bloomington, Ind.

5. To publish reports based on reviews of basic problems, opportunities, and accomplishments in current planning for network systems by states, regions, and subregions. National Association of Educational Broadcasters, Urbana, Ill.

In addition, the first fifteen grants-in-aid under Part A have been announced. These are spread among the school districts, the institutions of higher learning, and quasi-public organizations with the following subject areas represented: an investigation of the relationship between specific television production techniques and content organization and maximum learning experiences; an experiment in basic teacher training courses, in which selected audio-visual media are substituted for actual classroom observation; a study of the effectiveness of closed-circuit television in a program of teacher education; an experiment with the use of a video tape recorder in a program designed to improve college level teaching techniques; study patterns for improving teacher education in the uses of audio-visual materials; and a study to identify and evaluate economical and practical methods of televised instruction to stimulate gifted pupils in small secondary schools. These are but a few of the projects underway. Many more have been submitted for approval by the U.S. Commissioner of Education.

Librarians will want to watch with a great deal of interest the studies which result from Title VII. There can be no doubt that many of the projects will be focused on educational problems of major importance. There can also be no doubt that new knowledge directly
applicable to education or new applications of existing knowledge to the problems of communication will result. Although the primary consideration in the earliest projects appears to be in the area of formal classroom education, adaptations should be applicable to informal adult education and librarianship. More important is the overall potential of the Act for research and experimentation by everyone in the newer adult education methods and techniques.

References