



The Materials Center at the School District Level

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THE HISTORY OF DISTRICT MATERIALS CENTERS is inextricably intertwined with that of resource centers (libraries) in individual schools and, to a considerable extent, with the development of public library service. In the nineteenth century there was a strong movement toward the development of public libraries as agencies of school districts.¹⁻³ Such libraries were proposed in New York as early as 1827, and several were established there shortly after the passing of enabling legislation in 1835. These library systems had branches in the schools and offered services to teachers as well as to students and the general public. Thus, the total resources of the public library system were under the control of the school authorities and served to support the school branches; and perhaps served the general public only as a secondary consideration. Most, but not all, of the school district libraries have been phased out in the interest of developing a strong, independent public library system, but the tradition of the public library serving as a supplementary resource for the schools has persisted. It was a prominent item on the agenda of the 1963 American Library Association "Conference Within a Conference" on student use of libraries.⁴

In her study of school library services in rural areas, Lathrop⁵ devoted considerable space to the services rendered to the schools by municipal and county libraries in the early 1930's. The ALA standards issued immediately after World War II in *School Libraries for Today and Tomorrow* strongly recommended the establishment of

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"a headquarters central library for the city, county or region"⁶ to serve as a central collection of materials and as a service, purchasing and processing unit for the schools. In addition, provision was made for small schools to "make contracts for supplementary service from the public library."⁷ As late as 1947, Fargo's classic text on school libraries continued to cite the advantages of a "central teacher's library" in the local public library as an alternative to the district's establishing a separate unit for this purpose.⁸

By 1960, however, the *ALA Standards for School Library Programs*⁹ gave considerable attention to the need for separate district materials centers, declaring that:

Although the district materials center is a relatively recent development and not many have been established, its usefulness has been demonstrated in many ways and gives promise of a rapid increase in the number of centers in the immediate future. Indeed, a district materials center is essential if a full program of instructional materials and services is to be provided for students, librarians, and teachers in the schools.¹⁰

These standards no longer provided the option of contracting with the public library for such services.

A second factor contributing to the development of the modern district materials center has been the audio-visual movement. Saettler¹¹ attributes the origin of school district audio-visual services to the school museum movement beginning in St. Louis in 1904. Another early contributor to the rise of audio-visual units was that of the "Chicago Projection Club" which gave the collection of slides it had accumulated since 1895 to the Chicago Board of Education to support its new Bureau of Visual Instruction in 1917. By 1923 only sixteen school systems had departments of visual education, but their number has multiplied very rapidly since then.

Although advocated earlier, the consolidation of audio-visual services with those dealing with printed materials, not only in the schools but also in district offices, is a post-World War II trend that is continuing apace, regardless of whether the designation "Library," "Instructional Materials Center," or "Educational Media Center" is on the door.

A third contributor to the modern district resource center is the curriculum laboratory movement. Associated with curriculum improvement efforts in the schools during the 1920's and 1930's, curriculum materials centers housing and servicing collections of sample

textbooks, courses of study, resource and teaching units, etc., are now found rather generally in school district offices, in state departments of education, and in universities and colleges which engage in teacher preparation. The history of such centers and their status in 1945 has been well-documented by Drag.¹² Subsequent history of these units has been given, with special reference to the California situation, by Browne¹³ in 1961. The extent of the trend to incorporate curriculum collections into more comprehensive materials collections is discussed below in connection with the questionnaire survey.

A fourth component of a "model" district materials center would certainly be what is sometimes referred to as a "Teachers' Library." Curriculum materials centers have frequently been expanded to include professional materials for the in-service education of teachers beyond those required for curriculum development. In addition to the informal arrangements from public libraries for such service, colleges and universities have been called upon to provide professional materials for public school teachers in the immediate area. Since World War II, however, there have been strong advocates of more extensive and specific collections and services designed to further the development of the teacher's knowledge and skills—in local schools, in district centers and in state departments of education. In 1962, the Michigan Association of School Librarians issued a list of recommended materials for professional libraries in schools.¹⁴

In 1966, the American Association of School Librarians and the National Commission for Teacher Education and Professional Standards of the National Education Association, with the assistance of a distinguished roster of academic specialists, schoolmen and librarians, produced another, more advanced, list which is even more useful to those working at the district level.¹⁵ It includes helpful information on how to organize a professional materials collection, five case studies of outstanding examples, and an annotated list of recommended materials in all media. Already this volume has been so well received and influential that a new edition is being prepared. The strength of the support being given to professional materials collections and services in district centers, as well as in the schools, is reflected in the responses to the questionnaire used in connection with this study.

A final influence, or set of influences, on the development of district centers has not been well-documented in the literature. This aspect relates to the tendency of district offices to collect materials

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"willy-nilly." Textbook selection processes, library processing centers, staff research and writing, and other normal district activities have resulted in the accumulation of sample textbooks, reference books, preview films, courses of study and many other types of materials. These soon overflow office shelves and require separate housing, organization and servicing. In this respect the origin of district materials centers is similar to that of any other special library. Add to this the need for supporting services to school libraries or, temporarily one hopes, substitutes for such libraries, and it becomes obvious that the further development of such centers is assured.

Current thinking about the present function and future prospects of district resource centers has been well-expressed by Lohrer¹⁶ and by Simmons.¹⁷ The most potent recent stimulus to their development has been the availability of Federal government financing. Current literature is replete with the "glad tidings" from individual districts concerning plans and progress under the Federal acts. For example, a recent brochure from New York State describing state and Federally aided materials center projects lists several for establishing or developing centers in a number of districts in that state. The coordination of school materials centers into networks capped by sophisticated services in state departments of education should certainly be furthered by the provisions of the 1966 Library Services and Construction Act relating to the promotion of library cooperation.

The trend, already mentioned, toward coordinating and consolidating district materials service has been summarized up to 1956 by Bristow and Simon.¹⁸ Since then, reports from individual districts indicate further advances in this direction. A useful bibliography of these reports was compiled by Davis¹⁹ in 1967. It lists reports of IMC development at all levels including an impressive number from school districts.

The wave of the future may, or may not, be represented by the work of Leonard H. Freiser²⁰ in Toronto, Canada. Freiser's well-publicized Education Centre Library is essentially an attempt to expand the materials center concept into that of an information analysis and dissemination operation serving both teachers and students. In 1965 Freiser described the Centre as follows:

Started from scratch in mid-1960, ECL now has an operating budget of \$750,000 and a professional staff of nineteen, and is one of the largest education information centers in the world. People get information from ECL in two ways: They approach ECL be-

cause they need something, or ECL approaches them because the library has discovered something they may need.²¹

Despite charges of spoon-feeding and information-flooding, and the price tag on such an operation which places it out of reach for most districts, the idea of expanding materials services into full-scale information storage and retrieval systems is being studied in some of the larger and more opulent districts in the United States. This concept may owe its inspiration partly to the information analysis centers and networks already established in the physical sciences. Whether the public schools will ever be well enough financed to emulate the information systems of the defense and space programs remains to be seen.

To secure an estimate of the present status and future plans of central materials units, a questionnaire was sent by the authors in April 1967 to a sample of district materials supervisors. This sample consisted of 183 districts; they were stratified to the extent that at least one district in each of the states was included, but otherwise selection was random. By the tabulation deadline, ninety-one districts (50 percent of those queried) had submitted usable information. Of these, twelve (13 percent) reported that they did not have a district materials center. Of the remaining seventy-nine districts, one was excluded from the tabulations because of incomplete information. Thus, the analysis is based on the responses of seventy-eight materials supervisors.

Most of the tabulations are broken down into two sizes of districts: "smaller" districts are defined as those employing nine hundred or fewer teachers; "larger" ones as those with more than nine hundred teachers in 1967. Of the seventy-eight districts involved in most of the summaries, forty-six are in the "smaller" category, thirty-two in the "larger."

In reply to the question regarding the center as a single unit, fewer than half (47 percent) of the districts reported that their central materials services were organized as single, consolidated units handling all media. Large districts especially (74 percent) reported more than one unit—for example, a district library and an audio-visual center. Districts operating single multi-media centers usually call them "Instructional Materials (or Resource) Centers." This term, however, is also used in sixteen districts which in addition operate other units entitled "Curriculum Laboratory," "Professional Library," and so on.

Questions were asked concerning the approximate size of the total

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materials collections, and the types of materials included. Books and audio-visual materials were found to be the most widely held categories with the "newer media" having a slight edge in gross number of items. More than half (55 percent) of the smaller districts hold a thousand or more books and 61 percent have audio-visual collections of this size. Over 80 percent of the larger districts hold one thousand or more of each type of material. Virtually all districts reported subscriptions to twenty-five or more periodicals but the smaller districts tend to have fewer than one hundred whereas most of the larger ones have that many or more.

Pamphlets are held in rather small numbers. It may be that respondents underestimated the capacity of a filing cabinet of pamphlets. At any rate, fewer than half of the centers reported having five hundred or more of them. Only fifteen centers reported holding a thousand or more, and, of these, twelve were in the larger districts.

Curriculum materials seem to be held in somewhat smaller numbers than one might expect considering the attention given to curriculum development during the last fifty years. Nevertheless, a respectable 40 percent of the districts do report having a thousand or more courses of study and other materials of this type. The small difference between the figures for the smaller and larger districts suggests that there may be an optimum size for a current working district curriculum collection and that the larger districts may be keeping their files weeded of obsolete curriculum materials.

Perhaps the most striking information relates to the relatively small proportion of centers holding student-level materials. While 64 percent of the centers reported having some library books on this level, only about one-fifth of the collections were described as of "considerable" extent. Historically, one of the reasons for the establishment of libraries in school district headquarters was to stock library books to supplement the rather meager collections in school libraries and classrooms. Now the tendency seems to be to assist individual school libraries in becoming relatively self-sufficient in printed materials rather than to provide resources-at-a-distance in district headquarters.

Student-level audio-visual materials, on the other hand, tend to be stocked in the district center to a greater extent than do printed materials on that level. This is particularly true of films, which are often too expensive to be held in the materials centers of individual schools. Indeed, small districts apparently depend upon borrow-

ing or renting of films from outside sources, since only 44 percent of them reported holding a "considerable" number.

Most centers, particularly in the larger districts, have sizable collections of library books and a respectable number of periodical subscriptions intended for the professional use of teachers. These data would seem to reflect the encouragement given to the development of professional teachers' libraries by state departments of education, professional organizations, scholarly associations and, lately, by grants from the Federal government.

The somewhat surprising paucity of centers reporting holdings of sample psychological and other types of tests suggests that these materials may be held in district counseling and guidance centers rather than in instructional materials centers. Programmed materials, as such, are not very widely held in the centers. However, it may well be that some of these are counted with the medium in which they appear, i.e., as books, films, tapes, etc., rather than as a separate category.

Sample textbooks are fairly widely held—again for the use of teachers, curriculum supervisors and selection committees. Apparently district materials centers are not so frequently charged with warehousing required textbooks for students as they used to be. Although 67 percent have collections of required texts, only 42 percent have collections of a size that would suggest warehousing operations. Most centers (75 percent) have copies of supplemental textbooks but less than one-third report "considerable" collections of them. Several centers reported the stocking of supplementary, as opposed to required, texts as a major responsibility, but this is apparently not generally the case.

In addition to the many categories of materials suggested in the questionnaire form, respondents mentioned a variety of other materials such as art prints, pictures, slides, transparencies, charts and college catalogs. Picture and map files were mentioned most frequently in the "other" category.

Respondents were asked to check services provided by the center. The wide variety of services checked can be only briefly summarized here. Virtually all centers reported giving service to everyone in the system. Only four reported restrictions and these appear to apply to the purposes of the center rather than access to it. Fifteen centers indicated that they offered service to the general public as well as to school personnel. Still others declared that they served such selected

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portions of the public as "specialists," "business people," "university students," "parents groups," and "clubs." At least nine centers give direct service to students as well as to teachers and other adults.

Provision of reference service was reported by 82 percent of the centers. Since only one quarter of the smaller districts have reference collections of any size, much of the service must be given from the general collections rather than from specific reference sources. Virtually all of the centers give reference service in person or by telephone. Except for ten of the smaller districts, all centers reported offering reference service by mail.

Sixty-nine centers indicated that lending was one of their services. Of the types of printed materials loaned, the most frequently mentioned were sample student-level materials to teachers (84 percent) and professional materials to teachers (87 percent). These figures further exemplify the extent of the "teachers' library" function of the centers. Also reflecting a factor previously mentioned is the fact that only 38 percent of the centers provide rotating collections to materials centers in individual schools, most of these being in the smaller districts. There seems to be a definite tendency to emphasize self-sufficiency for individual school centers insofar as student-level printed materials are concerned.

On the other hand, despite the opinion of school library leaders²² that such practices discourage the development of adequate collections in the schools, twenty-one of the centers (31 percent) provide rotating collections directly to classrooms. As indicated previously, direct service of audio-visual materials to teachers (thus bypassing the school IMC) is even more prevalent. All but two of the centers responding to the question indicated that they issued audio-visual materials directly to teachers.

Operation of processing centers seems to have become the rule, rather than the exception, in school districts. In sixty out of sixty-eight cases, the district center is prepared to perform this function. In thirty-eight cases, some or all of the selection of the materials is also done there. Centralized selection of materials is particularly characteristic of smaller districts.

Almost three-fourths of the centers are prepared to produce teaching or learning materials if suitable items are not available from other sources. To accomplish this, they frequently reported that they operated photographic laboratories, employed graphic artists and provided facilities in which teachers might work on the design of cur-

riculum or audio-visual materials. Facilities for preparing transparencies were the most frequently mentioned, but a wide range of equipment and supporting services for production of materials was mentioned: laminating, mimeographing, tape recording, filming, and so on.

Consultation services to personnel in individual schools regarding collection development, planning and personnel selection were reported almost universally. In-service training programs for teachers, librarians, audio-visual coordinators and others in the selection, handling and use of materials were also mentioned frequently. The least frequently reported service is that of research (beyond that required to answer reference questions) but even here, almost half of the centers do at least some original investigation of problems.

If the resources and services described above are to be used by teachers to the extent intended, then they must be publicized. The survey revealed that a number of centers employed each of several means of informing teachers and other potential users of the materials and services available. The most frequently mentioned methods are (1) the issuing of catalogs and lists, and (2) talks to teachers by staff members of the centers.

The extent of reliance on oral communication is further reflected in the remarks made under the category "other," where meetings, workshops and, especially, individual personal contacts were often mentioned. Issuing of formal brochures is not common among the smaller districts, but larger ones have prepared many very attractive publications. These brochures tend to emphasize the materials and services designed to aid teachers in extending their professional competence. The use of newer media, such as closed-circuit television to inform teachers of the services available, as well as to transmit information from the collections to them, is apparently still in the future. It would seem that the large number of centers (44 percent) which do not take advantage of general district bulletins for teachers may be missing a good medium.

The card catalog continues to be the universal method of bibliographic control of collections. All centers responding to this item on the questionnaire reported that they maintained card catalogs. Nearly all of them include author, title, subject and shelf-list entries in the catalogs. (Four centers do, however, dispense with author entries, two with title, one with subject and three with shelf-list.) Catalogs and lists are produced by machine in twelve centers. Of the centers

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producing book catalogs or other cards or lists by machine, five are in smaller and seven in larger districts.

Fewer than half (45 percent) of the districts record all of their holdings in a single, consolidated, multi-media list. Even those which maintain consolidated lists, usually maintain also listings by media, such as "books" or "audio-visual materials," or by purpose, such as "curriculum materials" or "professional books and magazines." Most district centers publish catalogs in one form or another for use in the schools or in offices of the district. A few districts publish catalogs in card form but most (forty-six out of sixty centers) issue them in book form. A few apparently do both.

In arranging books on the shelves, the Dewey classification system is used in some way by all of the centers reporting. Some fifteen centers also use subject headings to arrange portions of their collections. The Sears list is the most commonly used authority but subject words derived from the curriculum vocabulary are also reported extensively. As one would expect, subject-heading systems are used more frequently for non-book printed materials than for either books or audio-visual collections. However, even in the case of curriculum materials and "vertical files," ten centers report arrangement by Dewey. Accession number order was the most frequently reported arrangement for non-print materials. Approximately half of the centers file audio-visual items this way. Of the remainder, fifteen use Dewey for audio-visual, thirteen file by subject, and nine use some other numerical or alphabetical system for the "newer media." One has the impression that as audio-visual collections become larger there may be a tendency to move from a simple receipt-order system to a classified or subject arrangement within each medium (film, tape, disk recording, etc.).

Staffing arrangements are summarized for only forty-seven of the seventy-eight centers. Many seem not to have very precise information concerning their staff in full-time equivalent terms. On available data, one can tentatively conclude that the "typical" materials center in a smaller school district in 1967 employed approximately the equivalent of three full-time professional staff members and approximately five FTE sub-professional and clerical workers, for a total FTE just short of eight. In a larger district, the average center employed the equivalent of approximately four professionals and twelve other people, for a total staff of sixteen. In the case of the smaller districts, the ratio of professional to other employees is on the order

of 1 to 1.5. The ratio in larger districts runs 1 to 2.9. Thus, the larger the center, the more use is made of non-professional personnel and hence, presumably, the better the division of labor and the greater the economy of operation. The ratio of librarians to other media specialists is higher in the smaller than in the larger districts. In both size categories, the number of certified teachers serving in materials centers without special library or media training is relatively small.

Many of the staff members reported in the "other" category might well have fitted into one of the more general categories but the data are recorded as given. However, the mention of "artists" and "illustrators" under "other" does serve to emphasize the function of producing as well as housing, circulating and servicing teaching and learning materials. The specific mention of processing personnel, such as "menders," as well as textbook warehousing people, reflects the concern of some centers with the processing of library and classroom materials for the schools.

Even though district materials services are frequently organized in more than one administrative unit, most of the units are in the same building. Only twelve districts reported physical dispersal of central district materials service units. The location of materials centers was given usually as the district administrative offices or an annex to them. However, several districts are planning separate buildings for these units.

The number of square feet of floor space occupied was reported by forty-nine of the centers. The figures range from 200 to 85,000 square feet. The average (mean) space occupied by centers serving smaller districts is approximately 2,000 square feet. For the larger districts the figure runs to nearly 8,500. Part of the large difference in floor space occupied by different centers is perhaps attributable to the greater tendency of the large districts to include processing and materials production as part of the center's responsibility.

Most of the space in a typical center seems to be devoted to storage of materials and quarters for staff. Reader seats are few in most of the centers. Indeed, a number of centers reported none at all. Excluding those who reported the seating capacity of space arranged in auditorium fashion for meetings, the largest number of reader seats reported was one hundred and fifty, but the mode seems to lie between twenty and twenty-five. Apparently most of the materials are used off the center premises, either by checking them out, by

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having them delivered to schools, or through mail or telephone reference service. There also appears to be some tendency for materials to be used in common district meeting rooms where committee sessions and workshops are held. Some district centers, such as San Diego's, provide such meeting rooms as part of the center's quarters, but this appears not to be the rule. Provision of preview rooms for audio-visual materials must exist more often than the responses indicated.

Unfortunately, the budget information submitted is sparse and much of it very difficult to interpret. One reason for this is the fact that the budgetary procedures in many centers are not satisfactory. Of the seventy-eight centers studied, twenty-one reported that there was not a separate line in the district budget for the central materials services. Furthermore, examination of the figures submitted by those centers which did claim to have a separate budget line revealed that the item referred to in many cases was for the entire materials service of the district, including the funds for collections and services in individual schools as well as in the district center. Since it was virtually impossible to reduce the figures submitted to a standard base, it was decided not to report them.

Many respondents did submit usable information regarding the sources of budgetary support for central materials services. As expected, the largest single source is the local school budget itself. Exclusive of two districts operated by the Federal government on military reservations and one other that appears to be 100 percent Federally financed, local support ranges from 10 percent of a center's funds to 100 percent. Interestingly enough, only twenty-two of the sixty-eight centers reported receiving all of their support from local district sources. Of those receiving support from other sources, nineteen centers received partial funding from state government. Five of these received more than half of their funds from state sources. The Federal government contributed half or more of the financial support to nine centers. Private sources of support were negligible. Three centers reported minor receipts from PTA book fairs and other donations.

Financing of many centers seems to be improving, thanks to Federal grants in most cases. Comparing expected expenditures for 1966-67 with actual ones for 1965-66, twenty-one centers reported increases ranging from 5 percent to 100 percent. Only three expected to spend less, 5 percent less in each case. A majority (thirty-four) of

those reporting expenditure trends expected them to remain at about the same level as in the previous year.

The impact of Federal government money is evident in the data submitted concerning grants. Respondents reported having made applications for forty-four grants to improve materials collections or services. Of these, nineteen had been approved at the time of submitting the data. Of the approved grants all but three were from Federal sources.

Respondents were asked to make statements concerning their plans for the future. Of the seventy-eight districts studied, fifty-two (67 percent) reported having plans for future development of one or more aspects of their collections or services. Centers in larger districts tended to report fewer plans than those in the smaller ones. It would appear that many large districts already have their basic plans in operation and expect to continue upon courses already established, whereas smaller districts are more frequently still in the planning stage. Thus, the larger districts which do have plans tend to emphasize expansion or improvement of facilities. Although interested in improved quarters, the smaller districts are particularly anxious to expand their holdings of materials. Curiously, plans regarding personnel were mentioned exclusively by smaller districts, and by only five of them.

Equal numbers (five each) of centers made statements concerning either "consolidation" or "decentralization." Smaller districts seem to favor the latter, probably referring to the establishment of materials centers in individual schools to reduce heavy dependence upon central district services and collections, particularly in the case of audio-visual materials. In the larger districts, "consolidation" usually refers to the bringing together of the various central units into a single multi-media center instead of operating them as separate, uncoordinated agencies giving services in limited areas of concern or particular media.^{23, 24}

In conclusion, it would appear that the district materials center advocated in the 1960 *Standards*²⁵ is useful, necessary and growing. Both the quality of teaching and the learning of boys and girls stand to feel the impact of these ever-expanding collections of resources and services, and to benefit from them.

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