Staffing Patterns and Education for Media Center Personnel: Relevant or Regressive?

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The media center as it is envisioned today and projected into the future is a relatively new idea in the profession of librarianship. Not much more than a decade ago the librarian who broached the subject of cybernetics at a professional meeting was looked upon as either an erudite individual who was far ahead of his time or a confused person who had stumbled into the wrong meeting. Today the vocabulary of librarianship must include not only cybernetics, but also remote access, information retrieval, computerization, video, networks and myriad other terms. The growing acceptance that all media, in their many formats, play a role in the education of the individual has brought educational technology to the forefront in librarianship.

The book medium has always been the forte of librarianship. It is the new media, as instruments of communication for learning, which cause consternation. As far back as the 1940s, however, while the majority of librarians were denying any responsibilities for audiovisual resources, there were isolated instances of far-thinking, creative librarians who provided multi-media services. It would probably be safe to say that they functioned this way in spite of their librarianship training!

Library education has an obligation to prepare its graduates to function in a variety of positions within the rapidly moving technological environments they will inhabit. The stature of the profession will stand or fall on the success library education has in developing programs which will result in librarians with a better understanding of the interrelationships between man, media and machines and of the role they must assume to bring these interrelationships to fruition.

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This article is directed to the concept of the library functioning as a media center in educational institutions. The words “library” and “media center,” and “librarian” and “media specialist,” are used synonymously, and while the observations have application for the total field of librarianship, the focus is on school, college and university situations.

Whether the idea of a library as a media center is rejected or supported, the reality is that the overwhelming advances in media and technology and the changing philosophy in education have caused a rapid evolvement of the concept. Standards for School Media Programs states that “the availability of many materials in a variety of formats gives students and teachers the opportunity to select from among many resources the media best suited to answer their specific needs” and that “the focus of the media program is on facilitating and improving the learning process in its new directions.” 1 Kevin Ryan conjectures about the school of 1993 when he says, “To foster deep involvement, much of the school will be devoted to learning environments toward which the resource centers of our most advanced schools are just beginning to move.” 2 Despite the statement of standards and predictions for the near future and contrary to the impressions gained from a multiplicity of talk and writing, the number of libraries staffed and functioning as media centers represents a small percentage of the nation's libraries in educational institutions.

How is the lag between the concept and the implementation explained? A random sampling of replies to this query would result in a high percentage of answers related to some aspect of the budget. The problem of lack of funds is not denied, but it is too frequently used as an excuse for complacency. If funds were available in abundance, a great portion of the lag would still exist. The technological advances have moved too far, too fast! Change has outrun us and caught us, as a profession, still looking in McLuhan's “rear-view” mirror. While there are negative reactions to the overexposure of the word “change,” it cannot be removed from the vocabulary. It is the core hypothesis from which future direction must come. It is only the misinterpretation of the word which will make it invalid. If change is equated with a product, it has little value. Only when viewed as a process involving people does it have validity and meaning for librarianship. If we in the library profession permit change to happen without being informed and active participants in it, we are derelict in our professionalism. We must become involved in the moving process of change; we
must cope with the impinging forces inherent in change so that we can understand and direct them; and we must explore and identify the most effective ways to proceed.

The changes taking place, both technical and societal, impel a close look at the library function and the kinds of personnel competencies contiguous with that function. This means more than a quiet renaming of library education course titles and a haphazard reshuffling of personnel. It will require a three R’s approach involving processes of revolution, reformation and reordering. We must not ignore the need to abolish some long held truisms; to alternate, substitute, adapt and add others; and to put order into what is accepted as essential. All this must be done within a flexible framework which will not only permit, but encourage, modification and evaluation.

To achieve new meanings for the profession will not be a simple exercise in definition, primarily because totally new variables have appeared. Predetermined by the plethora of media, the invention of the machines to accompany them, the computer to organize and retrieve them, and their potential as conveyers of knowledge, the new variables require a reevaluation of traditional library education objectives. They make present occupational definitions and staffing patterns obsolete and they demand curriculum reform. All of these are intertwined and must be approached as integral parts of the total library education program.

Any method of attacking the problems must begin with a redefinition of library function—only then can there be sound direction to the immediate and long-range aspects of staffing and education. Technology has placed a greater demand upon how and where to provide access to broader realms of knowledge and to secure the diversity of talents required to accomplish the task. The library function, newly defined, must incorporate composite thinking beyond the traditional patterns of librarianship. When it is considered that the two most closely allied resource professions—the “book” and “audiovisual” specialists—have exhibited some reluctance to reach a point of agreement, this may be a difficult task. The inability to meet on a common ground would seem unnecessary, for the goals of each profession should be essentially the same—to provide resources “with emphasis on the learner, on ideas and concepts rather than on isolated facts, and on inquiry rather than on rote memorization ... and to make the school media center a primary instructional center that supports, complements, and expands the work of the classroom.”

David Berlo hits at
the heart of the dilemma when he says, "I would urge us to look for similarities among media, not differences; to look for coordination, not preservation of separate treatment and equal rights. Obviously, there are differences among the media in terms of mission, costs, adaptability to various intents, and effects; nevertheless, our primary need is to understand the relationship of our media to effect and intent." 4

A redefinition of function will move the library profession to the question, "What types of staff members are needed to accomplish these goals?" Any new design for library manpower utilization must perceive the deficiencies of pursuing a "closed corporation" attitude. The library of today, in addition to its multi-faceted librarianship expertise, needs assistance from the behavioral sciences, management, research and electronics. There must be cognizance that increased productivity will require the delegation of certain tasks to people from a different profession and also to people with different degrees of training and competency. This staff design must also provide an opportunity for entrance and mobility within a flexible career lattice.

The determination of the kind of staffing required for the media center, with its full complex of media and technology, must be based upon an orderly plan for identifying the tasks. The task analysis procedure serves as a measuring device to ascertain the variety of things which are being done or need to be done to accomplish a particular function. It also helps to answer the questions: who is doing what, who should be doing what, and finally, should it be done at all? The School Library Personnel Task Analysis Survey revealed that 59.4 percent of the heads of elementary library media centers were clipping items from newspapers and magazines and 42.9 percent of the elementary audiovisual specialists were delivering and collecting materials and equipment. 5 Is it not true that the first task was unnecessary and the second task was incorrectly assigned?

Based upon task analysis, occupational definitions must be developed to define the nature of the services and the responsibilities of a particular position, accompanied by the knowledge and abilities required to perform effectively in that position. At this point the occupational definition answers questions about what must be done, how it will be done, and the competencies required to do it. It is this kind of objective scrutiny that can lead to the development of effective staffing patterns. "Attempting to restructure all jobs in a field on the basis of the analysis done is not possible, since the goals, functions and processes vary among organizations." 6 While it is true that each local unit
must make the final determination on the best deployment of staff to meet its goals and functions, some general pattern of the essential career positions should be available as models.

Studies now in process are beginning to provide the findings to support new occupational definitions. In addition to the JIMS study, the Media Guidelines Project and Maryland’s Manpower Project are doing active research in the area. The School Library Manpower Project, through the task analysis process, has developed model occupational definitions for positions in the school library media field. Proceedings of two regional workshops of the Council on Library Technology are devoted almost in their entirety to the development of job descriptions for library technical assistants. Hopefully, the definitions which evolve from these studies will identify those aspects which are routine and mechanical as opposed to those requiring a high degree of professional education.

The occupational definition must also indicate the place of the position within a library personnel structure. Instances of inefficiency and waste in the placement of library personnel are not too difficult to isolate. Professionals are found performing routine clerical tasks. Staff members are placed in the untenable position of having responsibilities for which they have no preparation. Some librarians still insist that theirs is a “solo” operation. The question is—why? In all likelihood, it is a result of inadequate or nonexistent education in the design of library personnel structures based upon a human management resources technique. The accomplishment of a working personnel structure, no matter how well supported by clear and precise occupational definitions, will falter if administered by poor managers who fail to view the contributions of all staff members as important to the total staff operation.

The final ingredient of the occupational definition is the position title—and here there is relatively little agreement in the field. A proliferation of titles is found—librarian, audiovisual specialist, media librarian, media specialist, media generalist, information scientist, computer specialist, para-professional, library technician, media technician, library aide, media aide, library clerk, media clerk—all equally confusing and all carrying different connotations for different people. The transition from one title to another and the querulous attitudes which accompany it may well become the greatest roadblock in the development of occupational definitions acceptable to the profession.
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Perhaps we too should be called "media." It would at least imply a degree of communication.

Any attempt to develop a plan for a multiplicity of positions within an effective staff pattern has a built-in danger—that of librarianship itself. Unless the staff of the media center can be satisfactorily deployed so that talents may be brought to bear where they are most useful, the staff design will collapse before it has a chance to prove its worth. Librarianship is not exempt from the problems faced by education and medicine, where there is failure to recognize that the solution to personnel needs cannot be found in a greater quantity of "more of the same." Is this caused by an inability to function in a team effort, the reluctance to let go of certain kinds of responsibilities, or simply a desire to cling to the comfortable feeling which often disappears within a reordering process? To be fair to the practitioners in the field, it should be noted that one strong possibility for the reluctance to this reordering may be traced to the attitudes acquired during their library education.

This matter of attitudes brings us right to the doorstep of library education: what we allow to happen in attitudinal development and change will be the very cornerstone upon which librarianship will grow professionally. The students drawn to librarianship today are looking for many of the same satisfactions as previous recruits. They have an interest in people, education and ideas and are seeking an opportunity to bring all these together through providing the accessibility to recorded forms of knowledge. They want more, however. They want an opportunity during their education to discuss, embrace and pursue ideas. They want to be able to use their own inventiveness and creativity; they seek practicability with theory. In this age of technology, librarianship must be certain that it does not become so enamoured of the machine that it will be trapped in a similar pattern of the past, moving the librarian's image from that of a cloistered cataloger to a machine tinkerer. So that library education does not produce librarians who fit a cybernetic mold, the education program must temper its emphasis on the cognitive domain and seriously move to incorporate the affective domain.

How can a viable curriculum be attained and maintained? The well implanted patterns of the past frequently deter the kind of progress that needs to be accomplished. The task of moving this mountain becomes horrendous. In many instances we therefore have settled for small scalings which have resulted in nothing more than a facade.
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to cover an inability to reach the mountaintop. Course titles have been renamed with very little change in content or methodology. New courses have emerged and old courses have remained—frequently with no noticeable effort to evaluate their contribution to the total program. Objectives are written in nebulous terms having little relationship to the behavioral goals which should be primate. One way for library education to avoid this sporadic pattern is to apply the systems approach to curriculum development. "Modern organization theory and its derivative, general systems theory, have much to offer in relating inter-dependent components in complex organizations to the whole in the accomplishment of objectives. The systems approach can accomplish outstanding feats." 7

Within the boundaries established by library education, the systems approach will involve the statement of behavioral objectives and the functions and methodology for achieving these objectives. This incorporates the man-machine-materials aspect and the most effective combination of these. It also includes study of the back-up support in terms of staff, resources, facilities and budget. And finally, it guarantees an evaluation-feedback which permits change and modification. Stated simply, the systems approach is "a means of focusing on the problems of teaching all of the insights about learning and all of the techniques of displaying information that have been developed during the twentieth century." 8

If the graduates from library education are to achieve the competencies and attitudes required for designing, selecting, acquiring, organizing and evaluating media; for serving as responsible mediators with potential users; and for planning and managing a total media program, then the traditional curriculum must be radically revised. Persons entering the profession today must have competencies in media, meaning the printed and audiovisual forms of communication and their accompanying technologies. To be effective performers in the field they also need competencies in the areas of human behavior, learning and learning environment, management, and the processes of planning, evaluation and research.

Germane to any plan for revision of curriculum and instruction is the need for staff development. There is a human tendency, which is exhibited among library education faculties, to become complacent and comfortable in a familiar routine. This kind of inertia results in a less than dynamic program, with the utilization of new media and innovative strategies in learning being noticeable by their absence. The
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staff development component must be both immediate and long-range, and must recognize the contribution of the total staff to the success of the program by the inclusion of the variety of back-up support personnel. The importance of staff development cannot be too highly emphasized. No plan for curriculum and instruction, no matter how brilliantly conceived, can succeed if the staff input is mediocre or if there is a lack of understanding about the objectives and how they are to be achieved.

The new media and technology have had a significant impact in the field of education. This impact seems to be felt more at the public school level than in higher education. The junior colleges, probably because of their relative newness, are quickly following the path established by the public schools. The colleges and universities, unfortunately, are generally far behind in the availability and utilization of the newer media. "Approximately 23% of the instructors teaching courses in education do not use educational media in their own teaching." 9 Harold Goldstein reports a similar observation in library education. “The newer media are not used either extensively or well to assist teaching any aspect of librarianship in either formal or informal instructional programs, and there is no evidence available to suggest that there will be any changes in the near future.” 10

It is inconceivable that the kinds of media specialists required to man the media centers of today are being educated in the regressive patterns of yesterday. To meet the demands of the education program in librarianship, the curriculum must be supported by materials, facilities and equipment to accommodate the innovations and flexibility of the program. If a full complex is not available within the library school, the possibilities for sharing within the institution and the local area must be explored. There must be an exemplary media collection for student use with a complete range of audiovisual equipment, large and small group and individual instructional areas with media and electronic capabilities, an evaluation center, graphics and television production equipment and supplies, and access to on-line computers.

The acquisition of all of the above will serve only as an awesome display, however, unless its potential to the learner is an integrated part of the curriculum design. "Most educational technology has been thought of as an additive, the machine being used to contribute to results which were planned independently of the machines. The educator continues to use procedures and concepts for planning which were used prior to the new technical innovations; hence, machine re-
sources added after planning is completed are seldom used as beneficially as they might be."

Any program of education must submit itself to evaluation. Evaluation will need to consist of a variety of data upon which reasoning decisions can be made. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the program, clearly defined objectives are essential. Based on these objectives, it will then be possible through an ongoing program of evaluation and measurement to achieve and process the necessary feedback from students, faculty and employers which will permit continuous modification and revision of the program when necessary. Evaluation in the past was frequently haphazard or nonexistent. Presently, although all evaluative data are not compatible with the computer, computerization has made this task a far simpler one and has unconditionally placed "cybernetics" in the vocabulary of librarianship. Now there is an opportunity to clearly perceive and assess, to profit from the errors and to test the alternatives. Library education models, with concomitant evaluation components, are sorely needed so that we may discover what really works.

Questions about where and how this educational reform will happen place us right in the center of the existing quandary within library education. The problem of the quality of education within the various subdivisions of librarianship is further compounded by the addition of library technician programs. Relationship and articulation between the various levels of education and training must be of primary concern, and a way must be found to properly match this education with the functions to be performed.

The graduate library school, in the traditional pattern, is hard pressed to explain how it can prepare the generalist and the many specialists in one program—each one capable of performing effectively and adapting the concepts of librarianship to a particular experience. The possibility of the contribution of the undergraduate school can no longer be ignored, for here resides the long neglected opportunity to commit people to librarianship prior to the graduate level. A sacrosanct demand for liberal arts graduates is still maintained, while the liberal arts curriculum does not have unanimity in its own ranks. Library education should clearly define its own needs in cogent fields and cease to rely on any one other core of knowledge in its entirety. It should accept the challenge to assess the scope and quality of the undergraduate program and to provide the proper perspective for this first level of professional training. In the great expansion of the library
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function, the undergraduate program should not be considered as a terminal point, but rather as an earlier beginning in the complex educational pattern for performance relevant to the media center function. This would also provide an opportunity for the master’s degree programs to move to more highly sophisticated learnings. The problems of articulation, now compounded by the junior college and the sixth-year programs, have never been resolved. They must be resolved if the flexible, mobile library staff structure essential to media center programs is to succeed. It will require full undergraduate and graduate curricula more sharply focused on content than credits to produce the multi-levels of personnel competencies.

The sixth-year program needs to find its place within the educational pattern. It should be geared to higher areas of specialization and not developed as a re-tooling vehicle for practitioners. Inservice and renewal types of pursuits can be handled better by short-term institutes or seminars.

Doctoral programs have long given lip service to research and the training of library educators, but an examination of the field reveals a dearth of library research and a paucity of exciting, innovative teaching. The status quo remains in library education, with few teachers knowledgeable in the newer media and even fewer bringing any practical applications to the process, while the Ph.D. continues as a prestigious symbol for promotion within the hierarchy. The concept of the rigid core curriculum for all librarianship must be examined in light of the areas of specialization, the contribution of an elective interdisciplinary approach, and the relevancy to learner competence. The value of the general language requirement must be weighed against the merits of linguistics, language systems and the language of urban communities in terms of flexibility and program goals. The contribution and place of the paid internship program must be explored and tested.

Changes within the educational pattern for librarianship have been miniscule since its birth, and the changes that have been made show little revolutionary movement to meet the rapidly moving conditions. The danger is apparent: unless the schools of library education and the profession itself take the leadership to meet these conditions, they will no longer be able to maintain their place within the educational structure. It is surely true that the profession can be no more creative or purposeful than the individuals who commit themselves to it. Innovative ideas being implemented successfully need to be shared, and
communication between all levels of library education must be broadened to provide an opportunity for dialogue among the agents of change in the field.

Educational technology has provided an outside impetus for librarianship to take an inside look at itself. The library profession must now address itself to objectives based on function performance, the learning it takes to accomplish these objectives, and the methodology to best achieve them. New theories will continue to emerge with impact for library leadership roles in technologically supported media centers. It is up to those in the library profession to determine whether technology will make us more mechanical and task oriented or will truly assist us to facilitate, personalize, and humanize the library function.

References


ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

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