Responsibilities of the School Media Specialist

George W. Huang*

In the field of librarianship it is recognized that the school media specialist is something special. Originally called a teacher-librarian by Mary P. Douglas,¹ the title was changed to a media specialist in action adopted by the American Library Association and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology.²

Paralleling the name-change, the school media specialist has shifted her/his roles of clerical-aide, curriculum developer and mechanical worker to roles of administrator, technical processor and teacher. Because of her/his direct involvement in learning and teaching processes, the media specialist has changed from passive spectator to active participant in the total educational process. These changes in school librarianship fully reflect new trends in learning and instructional processes in the schools of which the school media center is an integral part.

Ruth Ann Davies explains: "Just as societal change is reflected in education, so educational change is reflected in the function and role of the library. Direct involvement in the instructional process has demanded that the library become a partner in educational change—a source and a force for educational excellence."³ Among major trends which bear direct impact on school media programs are inquiry, modular scheduling, individualization of program, and independent study (known

* Dr. Huang is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Library Services Credential Program at California State University, Chico, California.
as the Trump Plan). Under these trends new emphasis of the school media program, as conceived in *Standard for School Media Program*, is "placed on accommodating the needs of this 'public' in a modern educational setting where individualization, inquiry, and independent study are the goals." This concept is further expanded in the newly adopted national standard - *Media Programs: District and School*. To stress humanistic education in democratic societies, a school media program needs to reflect applications of educational technology, communication theory, and library and information science; they must also offer essential processes, functions, and resources to accomplish the purposes of the school.

However, public schools in recent years have frequently discontinued or decreased support for school media programs for reasons of financial difficulty and/or inadequate budget. The problem of insufficient funds is not denied, but it is too frequently used as an excuse. Media has frequently been considered among programs of low priority in funding because very few educators really understand it. Bette Anderson remarks:

"Presently, school librarians hold an ambiguous position. They are expected to be teachers, librarians, technical experts, and curriculum specialists—all at the same time—while enjoying the full professional rights and status of none of the above. Very few educators (including other staff members and administrators) really understand what librarians do, but many of them suspect that whatever it is, it's an easier job than theirs!"

**What is a school media program?**

The question as to "What do you do in the school media center?" can be answered by the questions, "What is a school media program?" or "What do students do in school media centers?" The answer is that these programs provide a high degree of interaction between the media specialist, teachers and students as they work together to improve learning and teaching. Traditional aims of the school library were defined in 1945 by
the library standard *School Libraries Today and Tomorrow*
published by American Library Association as follows:

1. To acquire books and other materials in line with the
demands of the curriculum and the needs of boys and
girls and to organize these materials for effective use.
2. To guide pupils in their choice of books and other
materials of learning desired both for personal and
curricular purposes.
3. To develop in pupils skill and resourcefulness in their
use of books and libraries and to encourage the habit
of personal investigation.
4. To help pupils establish a wide range of significant
interests.
5. To provide aesthetic experience and develop apprecia-
tion of the arts.
6. To encourage lifelong education through the use of
library resources.
7. To encourage social attitudes and provide experience in
social and democratic living.
8. To work cooperatively and constructively with instruc-
tional and administrative staffs of the school.⁷

The decade of the 1960’s is considered one of the greatest
periods of school library growth. Many things happened simulta-
neously in many areas. In addition, there were changes in
educational trends and curricular developments, theories of com-
munication, and technological developments. The emphasis on
use of a wide variety of educational media in teaching and learn-
ing under the influence of Marshall McLuhan introduced a new
name for the school library: Instructional Materials Center,⁸
Instructional Resource Center, Learning Resource Center and
the like.

Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of
1965 has provided approximately $850 million in federal aids
for library materials. The school media center thereby became
the hub of the educational complex and a center of total learn-
ing environment. The function of an instructional materials
center, as adopted by the American Association of School Lib-
rarians, is "to locate, gather, provide, and coordinate a school's materials for learning and the equipment required for use of these materials."²

Within three decades, from 1940's to 1960's the place of School Media Centers changed from the "maintenance subsystem" to semi-production or "production subsystem"¹¹ of school organization because the instructional structure under the Trump Plan is available in three different formats: large group instruction, small-group instruction, and independent study. A School Media Center is the ideal and will be the most important place to facilitate independent study as well as large and small group instruction.

Kenneth Taylor states that School Media Centers are places for creative inquiry as well as for production of instructional materials for teachers and pupils. His model shows as follows:¹²

School and IMC Facilities for Creative Inquiry

- Large Group Instruction (Including Classrooms)
- Conference and Committee Areas
- Individual Stations
- Production Facilities for Teacher and Pupil
Taylor’s statement is in accord with Ruth Ann Davies’ view of the role of the School Media Center. Her observation indicates that the impact of changes in learning and teaching processes brought about changes in the scope and dimension of a school media program. Table I indicates her observation.

**TABLE I**

**SCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAM IN TRANSITION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FROM TRADITIONAL PRACTICES</th>
<th>TO INNOVATIVE PRACTICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From the library as an auxiliary service</td>
<td>To the library as an integral component of the total educational program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the library as a study hall</td>
<td>To the library as an educational force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the library as a materials distribution center</td>
<td>To the library as a learning laboratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the library limited to a printed collection</td>
<td>To a library providing all kinds of instructional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the incidental use of library facilities, staff, and collection</td>
<td>To the planned, purposeful and educationally-significant use of library facilities, staff, and collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the librarian serving as study hall monitor</td>
<td>To the librarian serving as an educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the librarian as a curator of books</td>
<td>To the librarian programming for the most effective and educationally rewarding use of all types and kinds of instructional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the librarian as an impersonal dispenser of material</td>
<td>To the librarian as a learning expediter personalizing the services of the library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the librarian working in isolation</td>
<td>To the librarian serving as a cooperating and/or team teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From the librarian working incommunicado</td>
<td>To the librarian directly involved in curriculum planning, revision, and development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Emanuel T. and Joyce S. Prostano bear a similar view. They assume that management and technical services are the support elements while primary elements include planning and implementing curriculum, instruction and in-service, design and production, and guidance and consultant services. They say: “The primary elements are visible. They make a difference in the way teachers teach and the way in which students
learn."\textsuperscript{14}

The new edition of \textit{Media Program: District and School} lists sixteen responsibilities of the school media program. Seven of the sixteen can be grouped as a production subsystem since they play an active role in the instruction of students. These responsibilities are:

1. Planning media program activities and integrating them with other programs of the school
2. Participating in instructional design, course development, and the creation of alternative modes of learning
3. Conducting orientation and in-service education in media for the school media staff and teachers
4. Providing production facilities and expertise in production suitable at the school level
5. Developing flexible operations that encourage and support users in problem-solving, interest fulfillment, and creative expression
6. Initiating and providing program activities that respond to curriculum goals on a day-by-day basis
7. Providing opportunities for discovery and exploration independent of or beyond the stated curriculum\textsuperscript{15}

Responsibilities of the head of the school media center.

Whoever is in charge of the media program must be fully responsible for operation of the media center and implementation of the media program. As media specialists begin playing more active roles in the teaching and learning process, they are earning many titles for themselves—librarians, teachers, technical experts, materials specialists, curriculum specialists, media coordinator and the like. The occupational definition developed by the ALA's School Library Manpower Project specified that the only administrative position within the building level is the head of the School Media Center. A reality prevails that the head of the School Media Center is the sole professional on the staff. Her/his responsibilities are defined by the Project as planning, developing, and implementing a successful school media program.
Robert N. Case and Anna Mary Lowrey, based on the Phase II of the ALA’s School Library Manpower Project, identified approximately 700 tasks under 75 different functions in seven major areas of competencies to be performed by the school media specialist. These competency-based job functions and task statements represent the requirements for school media specialists. Each specialist should be prepared for the seven major areas of competencies, which are: 1) Human behavior, 2) learning and learning environment, 3) planning and evaluation, 4) media, 5) management, 6) research, 7) professionalism.

Media Program: School and District, as usual, lists typical responsibilities of the school media specialist as the development, administration and implementation of a full media program. To stress the creation of strong educational programs for individual users, the new standard underlines the media program as “a pattern of interfacing among program components such as users, materials, machines, facilities, and environments. It then becomes the media professional’s duty to establish and improve the interfacing between and among users and the universe of information.” Since the users are to be referred to teachers, students, administrators and community people, the media specialist will also be responsible for the interpretation of the school media program to district media personnel and people of the community.

Beyond the sixteen major responsibilities listed in the national standard, there are other specific tasks to be performed. For instance, because of commitment to values of media in the total learning environment, the media specialist is involved in reading programs by providing for an adequate, reliable, and relevant collection of all types of media which can be easily integrated into the objectives of the school’s reading program. Therefore, the media specialist becomes “an extension of the reading specialist.”

When budget is limited and the media center staff is inadequate to implement all the desired media programs, or to meet the needs of the users, it is imperative to decide on the priority
which media programs will be implemented. This process always involves the user and is frequently called value clarification. The outcome of the process will reflect the users' perception of the role of the media center and its staff as well as the total educational program of the school.

Lowell Ellis Olson found that although teachers, principals and librarians differed significantly in their ranking of five of the ten school librarian objectives, the three groups agreed on the order of their perceived importance for the five student-related objectives as well as the five teacher- and community-related objectives:

I. Student-related objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Provide individual students with appropriate library materials and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assist in teaching students basic library and study skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Stimulate and guide students in many phases of their reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Guide students in correlating listening and viewing experiences with their reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Help students to develop desirable social behavior and attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Teacher- and community-related objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Plan library services to promote the achievement of the school's general objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Help teachers to use library resources in their teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Contribute to the professional and cultural growth of the staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Encourage students to use public libraries to continue their education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Help to develop a community-wide library program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In analyzing the school librarian’s role in instruction, Olson stated that although the majority of teachers (61%) compared the position of the school librarian to that of a classroom teacher, they do not consider school librarians exercising the usual faculty responsibilities at school functions.\(^2\)

Such perception of the role of the school media specialist in instruction was corroborated by Shirley L. Aaron’s study, in which she tried to find an answer to the question “How do educators in innovative staffing projects visualize the role of the school media center staff in educating students?” The finding indicated that a majority of educators believed the value of multimedia instruction in individualizing learning opportunities for students. But they failed to reinforce and build on skills that media specialists already possess.

Instead they attempted to train other members of instructional staff to assume this role. They also tended to regard media specialists as “ancillary personnel supporting instruction instead of as materials specialists skilled in the performance of certain unique instructional services necessary to meet the individual learning needs of students.”\(^3\)

A new approach of viewing responsibilities of the school media specialists as perceived by the principals, teachers, and librarians was conducted by Evelyn H. Daniel in Maryland.\(^4\) The significance of this study is the analysis of the twenty-two critical tasks performed by the media specialist according to perceived importance in actual as well as ideal situations. One hundred thirty-eight principals, 1004 teachers, and 138 librarians in the 138 schools of the State of Maryland participated in this study. It reveals that ranks of tasks change little in their relative position between ideal and actual case and the ideal case increases in every case except two. The analysis of each task is shown in Table II.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designation</th>
<th>Actual Rank</th>
<th>Case Av. %</th>
<th>Ideal Rank</th>
<th>Case Av. %</th>
<th>Net Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Library Skills</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>−1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting Library Books</td>
<td>2d</td>
<td>58.5</td>
<td>3d</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>−7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Library Schedule</td>
<td>3d</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>2d</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocating Library Funds</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>+12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing Professional Collections</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>+0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Audiovisual Material</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting Audiovisual Equipment</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>+5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Service Training in Media Use</td>
<td>8th</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>+9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising and Supervising Independent Study</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>+4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Social Development of Students</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>+3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Library Physical Facilities Changes</td>
<td>11th</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>+21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selecting Supplementary Textbooks</td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>13th</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>+4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Library Budget</td>
<td>13th</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>+21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with Community Groups</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>+4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Instructional Units</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>+4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interacting with Parents</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>17th</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>+3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Potential Field Trip Places</td>
<td>17th</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>18th</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>+4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring Audiovisual Technician</td>
<td>18th</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>+7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Discipline</td>
<td>19th</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>+1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Curriculum</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>19th</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>+1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allocating Physical Space in School</td>
<td>21st</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>21st</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>+2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining Pupil Promotional Policies</td>
<td>22d</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>22d</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The service concept influences the role of the school media specialist. To be a media specialist or to function as a clerical-
aide depends on the users' perception of the role of the school media program and media specialist in the total instructional program of the school. As Carolyn Joyce Anderson remarked, librarians and principals are in higher agreement regarding the media specialist roles as administrator, technical processor, and teacher. But teachers are in lower agreement regarding these roles. The change in the learning and teaching process has demanded that the media center become a source and force for educational excellence. Without the media specialist, the media program will never be implemented; its significant role in the instructional program will never be fulfilled. The role of the media specialist will continue to change as educational programs change. The future role of the school media center and media specialist is predicted by Louis Shores. He says:

"By the year 2,000 the library will replace the classroom as the center of learning. Students of all ages, from kindergarten through graduate school, will be independently studying, at an individual pace, increasingly varied and exciting instructional materials. Guidance will come from a new breed of teacher, a cross between those who today teach in classrooms and those who teach in libraries. The curriculum will follow the library rather than vice versa, as is currently accepted. Sacred specialties of today will give way to increasingly interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge. The school facility will be essentially a library."  

References

4. Prostano, Emanuel T. and Joyce S. Prostano, *The School Library


8. The concept of instructional materials center was adopted unanimously at the business meeting of the American Association of School Librarians during the American Library Association Conference, Miami Beach, June 21, 1956, but the real influence on the establishment of instructional materials center came from the "Statement of Guiding Principles" in the *Evaluative Criteria 1960 Edition* published by the National Study of Secondary School Evaluation.


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