Basic Considerations in the Development of Academic Curriculum Materials Centers

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Fundamental to planning a curriculum materials center is the development of a philosophy of service. If such a program is viewed as anything other than the cultural and academic center of the education department, it is bound to be thought by those faculty, students, and administrators who come in contact with the resource as something less than it ought to be. In the beginning stages of planning a curriculum resources center, several questions must be answered:

(1) What is a curriculum materials center?
(2) Is there a need for such a center?
(3) What services should be provided through the center?
(4) Who will act as the control authority for the center?

As important as it is to consider these questions, a bevy of additional queries may be born through the process. Nonetheless, a curriculum materials center must be defined before a meaningful dialogue is possible.

The A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms (1971) comes near to a definition when it defines a curriculum materials center as "A group of books in a teacher-preparing institution, a library school, or other

similar institution, organized for purposes of demonstration, practice, and project work." For purposes of this paper, however, this definition is much too limited. A curriculum materials center includes the acquisition, organization, preservation, and dissemination of all information (regardless of format) that contributes to the training of teachers. In some laboratory settings, production of teaching aids is often included, but this aspect will not be considered as the construction of materials is not within the scope of this definition of a curriculum materials center.

Since books are not the only items to include in the center, a decision must be made as to what *is* included. It is important to decide this in the early stages of the program, or face the dilemma of having a white elephant with no "feed" to keep it happy! Faculty members and administrators are more than happy to give advice on what should be housed in the center. Books, textbooks, kits, ditto masters, junior fiction and non-fiction, reference materials, filmstrips, cassettes, records, computer software, and more, will be suggested but the wise librarian will limit the collection. This is not to imply that faculty and administrators do not have a valid place in the development of the collection. In fact, joint efforts on the parts of faculty and bibliographer are essential to the growth of a quality curriculum materials center. Librarians know the whole of the collection and are quite capable of maintaining balance in the collection while faculty members have the specialized knowledge to select materials which support their programs.

Many centers do not include methods books, media software, and/or other materials which cannot be used specifically in the elementary or secondary classroom. Some centers allow an exception to this by providing a "professional" collection in the center. This allows for a small number of select titles, chosen by the instructors, to be placed in the center, creating a small reserve section. A few institutions place the materials center adjacent to the main education collection or integrate the collections. All of these arrangements are valid, but choices should be made early in the development process. All of these decisions help define the program and will curtail unnecessary future disagreements and deliberations.

Next, the question of need must be addressed. Now that the curriculum materials center has been defined, is the center beneficial for a particular college or university? At first, this seems to be an easy question to answer. If an institution has an education department, the need for a curriculum materials center seems obvious. Perhaps the answer is yes, but there are considerations that must be given before plunging headlong into such a program. For the administration, a primary concern will be the financing of the center. A special center budget, separate from the book allocations, may be

desirable. Extra shelving may be needed to house the collection, as all collections have a way of rapidly expanding. It must be a law: When space is made available for even less than worthwhile projects, said space will be consumed posthaste. There will be the minimal costs of processing materials, boxes, labels, cards and pockets. A decision will be needed concerning staffing. Is the present staff able to efficiently handle the overseeing of the center, or will additional staffing be needed? Will it be necessary to hire professionals, para-professionals, or might student workers be able to handle much of the load? Probably, in the beginning, with a small collection, these questions are easily answered. But as the program grows and more demands are made for additional services, these questions must be given serious consideration. Also, if there is a large collection of materials on hand or a substantial materials budget initiated at the start of such a project, housing arrangements, processing, and personnel costs must be considered immediately.

Besides administrative factors in determining the need for a center, other items of importance must be considered. Education department faculty members must be in favor of the project. If they are not supportive of such a center and if they do not see the need, there is little reason to begin the project. Much has been written in library literature to support the view that the key to the circulation of materials is the faculty. In the curriculum materials center, this is no exception. Faculty members who drag their feet in promoting the center will do much to undermine the possibilities of such a program. It is necessary, therefore, to survey the education faculty before the project is undertaken. This could be done informally over coffee and rolls, but it *should* be done. Discussions should be held, not only with department heads, but also with each member of the education staff, including part-time faculty if possible. Each person is a key element in the success of the center and must be convinced of the need for such a center. Besides, the teaching staff will have many valuable contributions to make, especially in the organization of the materials. They will feel more a part of a team effort and, therefore, be more willing to support the center's usage when the center is developed. There is a noteworthy spinoff benefit to these interchanges. Such dialogue goes a long way toward promoting academic rapport with colleagues outside the confines of the library.

Now that the need has been established, what services will the center provide? If money is no problem, a number of worthwhile services might be suggested. Everything from audiovisual production to manning a television studio and model classroom could be accomplished. Of course, this question is directly tied to the earlier question of need. It seems unreasonable to provide services that cannot be afforded or will not be used. Related to the services provided are the materials to be included. Basic to any curriculum center

are the textbooks to be used by public school teachers. Teacher's editions, workbooks, and student texts are all important to the education major. Junior fiction materials are essential to the children's literature courses. These areas, including a few well-selected reference sources, nonfiction works, and learning kits, should be enough to give a foundation to the center. But beyond this, consideration must be given to media software and hardware, teaching machines, calculators, production supplies, and graphic arts materials. With the latest technology comes the invincible computer, with all its paraphernalia.

Services represented by this huge variety of educational trappings range from dissemination of materials to the operation of audiovisual hardware. Will the library staff provide on-demand operators for all audiovisual equipment? Is hardware delivered or is it picked up by individual professors? May students use audiovisual equipment? Will the materials center have permanently located equipment and, if so, which pieces? Will on-campus repair be possible? Will the library assume responsibility for repair of equipment from departments outside the curriculum materials center?

Related to the hardware questions are those concerned with the circulation of the materials. Will filmstrips and other software items be checked out of the center? If there is heavy demand on a professional collection, will there be time limitations set for its circulation (e.g., 2-hour, 1-day reserves)? Circulation procedures need to be established for more ephemeral materials such as transparencies or ditto masters. Since these items are easily lost, questions of circulation periods should be established (e.g., overnight).

Besides audiovisual delivery/repair and circulation, organization of the collection is a major service. It will be found that the curriculum materials center is a very complex educational unit. Teachers' guides, workbooks, ditto masters, tests, kits, records, and other media can be very frustrating to catalog. Some centers simply group items together by browsing areas; some use Dewey or LC; some use modified approaches to Dewey or LC; and some prefer to create original classification schemes. Those who choose the last option, tailor the classification to fit specific needs. For example, the education department may wish to have all materials by the same publisher together, or to have all grade levels from one publisher, together. To meet the needs of individual campuses, other questions concerning classification and cataloging will need to be answered as they surface.

Another important area of service would be that of bibliographic instruction. Depending on the size of the education classes involved, orientation may be made through media presentations or lecture/discussions. In both situations, however, nothing will substitute for the student's hands-on experience when working with the center.

Equally important is how much individualized instruction will be given. The reference interview provides an excellent opportunity to teach students how to use the center, but if staffing is not available, another route may be chosen.

The last consideration is one of control and authority. If the materials center is, or becomes, as central as it should be, possessive attitudes may develop. A sense of ownership of the program is good if it does not cause undue strife and if it promotes a cooperative venture in quality education. There will be much input from administrators and education faculty members and this is needed. When it comes to authority, however, the librarian is in the best position to govern the center. First, the librarian has the expertise in organizing, preparing the materials for the shelves, and circulation procedures. Secondly, the librarian has general bibliographic knowledge of educational materials and has access to selective bibliographies and reviews to keep the collection well balanced and up-to-date. As in any organization, to be effectively run, there is a line of authority which facilitates decision-making. Each faculty member will have opinions as to how the center should be managed. All of these ideas should constantly be reevaluated as to their merit, but obviously, too many cooks will spoil the souffle.

It may be desirable to consider the question of control near the beginning of the discussions before it has a chance to become an issue. More than likely, however, the librarian will be perceived as the authority. If this occurs, the concern would be to get a free-flowing discussion of issues on the move. Avoiding the temptation to dominate meetings should always be in the forethought of the librarian's mind. That way, good ideas about the development of the educational materials center would have a better chance of surfacing, and the faculty members would be more willing to cooperate with the library staff in the center's ongoing program.

During the initial stages of developing an education curriculum materials center, philosophical questions, definitions, needs, services, and elements of control should be clarified. By starting the process of building the center with these concerns, and working with concerned educators, many roadblocks to developing a quality program will be removed.