Preparing Personnel for School Media and Library Service Positions: Some Observations

by Marvin E. Duncan

A trend has emerged during the past decade or so toward the closer articulation of educational media services and library services and the curriuculums associated with them. This trend has revealed itself in several ways: (1) college and university media services are being housed in the existing library building or a new structure with a designation such as the learning resources building; this practice is also being followed in secondary schools and community colleges where there are oftimes separate library buildings; (2) media hardware at the elementary, secondary, and community college levels is stored in the library or in an adjacent room in institutions where library services occupy a room rather than a building; (3) media services, as are library services, are performed by library personnel; merged preparation programs in library service and educational media have been established in institutions of higher education which seek the development of competencies in both areas; and (4) new nomenclature has been developed to describe the separate programs both in the media area and in library services, as well as in the merged programs.

It cannot be gainsaid that some benefits have resulted in some institutions from the establishment of the merged program. Colleges and universities with small enrollments, limited faculty and facilities in the two separate programs can benefit; elementary and secondary schools which have funding for the position of librarian but not for a professional employee in media service can likewise benefit. An employee with training in both fields has potentially greater usefulness in such situations. The graduate of the merged program has the potential of higher achievement on a certification examination such as the NTE since the examination will likely include content from both

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fields. It should be realized, however, that the establishment of a merged program does not solve all of the major problems involved in the closer articulation of these fields and that problems remain both for merged programs and the separate programs. This paper will examine several of the problems.

A serious problem connected with the merged program is credit/curriculum requirements. In institutions offering the graduate merged program, the typical credit requirement for a Master's degree of 30-36 semester hours should not be increased if the program is to remain quantatatively competitive with other Master's level programs. More specifically stated, this problem simply grows out of the elementary arithmetic that two programs, each requiring 30-36 semester hours (a typical requirement of graduate-level media and library science programs) cannot be merged into a single 30-36 semester hour program without the substantial elimination of courses or credit requirements form one or both of the previously separate programs. If the curriucla of the separate programs prior to a merger were well-designed and were based on sound principles of curriculum design, one may legitimately ask, "What happens to the course content and the related student competencies which have been eliminated in the process of merging?"

A second problem which principally affects the separate programs but which has some impact on the merged program is the inexact and confused use of the "new" terminology which is designed to replace such traditional titles as AV director, media personnel and librarian. As Richard Wynn observes, titles are changing to keep pace with societal changes. Media and library personnel suffer form an ever-increasing list of job titles: "This trend from banal to more esoteric job titles has been all about us, even in schools. School librarians have become instructional materials center coordinators . . ."[1]

[1] Richard Wynn, "The Wynn Principle," Phi Delta Kappan, LIV, No. 6 (February, 1973).

Wynn generalizes that a societal basis exists and that "the esotericism of job titles must be escalated with the rising influence of society."[2] Among the proliferating terminology for program and job titles, two titles are in current use which seek to describe programs and personnel in media and in library science: (1) *media specialist* is conceptualized to denote the professional worker trained in an education technology or media program; the same terminology is used to identify the program which provides the training; (2) *media coordinator* is the term used to identify the professional worker trained in a library science program; this terminology is also used to designate the program which provides the library science training.[3] Possibly as a result of a lack of strong program identity (in terms of the competencies developed in the merged program) and the jargonese character of the words specialist and coordinator, fuzziness results in oral and written use of the terms. A review of pertinent literature reveals that at times one title is used when context suggests that the other title should have been used for correct meaning. Some writers and speakers use the terms interchangeably — further confusing meaning. As a result of the inexact, and incorrect use of the terms, school administrators, personnel officers, and managers in business and industry and some administrators of professional schools and programs have become confused about the nature of the programs and the differing competencies developed in each program. It is the position of the writer of this paper that libraries, librarians, and library service programs are **primarily** concerned with the printed word in the form of books, journals, pamphlets, tapes, newsprint and the like; hence, library science programs should focus on these materials and develop student competencies in their educational uses. Media training programs are **primarily** concerned with the various technological aspects of communication and learning (films, recordings, still and motion photography, audio and video tapes) and with instructional development; hence, the curricula of media programs seek to develop learner competencies in the theory and practice related to the effective use of media hardware and software in the educational pro-

[2] Ibid.
[3] North Carolina and several other states use this terminology in listing certification guidelines.

cess. Obviously, goals, curricula and outcomes of the programs differ. Graduates of a library program offer the prospective employer rather different competencies from those offered by a graduate of a media program. The media specialist will function at a substantial disadvantage when expected to perform tasks associated with library services while the media coordinator will conversely experience difficulty in directing and providing media services. There are critical differences in the training programs, and, hence, substantial differences in competencies are developed in the separate programs.

Undoubtedly, there is more overlap at the present time in the tasks performed by media specialists and media coordinators than in previous years. Yet, differences still exist. The changing role of the school librarian is noted by Johanna S. Woods who writes: "school librarians in their roles as media specialists must possess competencies in media design, development, and evaluation."[3] There is no question as to whether librarians whose training has included **substantial** work in media can function effectively in this new role; there is question, however, whether the person trained in either a merged program or a traditional library science program which, at most, will include 2 or 3 courses in media, can adequately develop the competencies in media proposed by Wood. (The confused usage of the term media specialist when media coordinator is more appropriate should als be noted.)

A study in the mid-seventies provides some information about media education programs pertinent to the consideration of media training in the merged program and both separate programs. In 1975, a questionnaire administered to 495 school media specialists sought to ascertain their judgments as to the nature of graduate media course offerings (or other learning activities) needed in preparing individuals for managing and operating school media centers. Among the recommendations were that:

> Graduate media programs should offer additional courses in media design and production. Courses that would seem to hold some interest for school media specialists might include (1) advanced media

[4] Johanna S. Wood, "The Role of Media Specialists in the Curriculum Process," School Library Journal, XXIII, No. 1 (September, 1976), 20.

production skills, (2) graphic design, (3) still and motion picture photography.[5]

While courses of the sort recommended are offered in many media programs or can be developed without undue difficulty, it is unlikely that either in the merged program or the media coordinator program these additional courses can be provided without major curriculum revisions and additions in staff and facilities. In a similar vein, the incorporation of courses or credit experiences in library science (such as story telling, basic reference materials and cataloging) would present difficulties in staff facilities to the planner of the curriculum of a media specialist program.

Inherent in joining certification of media personnel and librarians are the problems discussed above. In addition, in state joint certification programs which require a "passing score" on the National Teacher Examination, the graduate of the media specialist program is at a great disadvantage. In 1975, as a member of a validation team reacting to the issue of "fairness" of NTE content in the various subject areas, I observed that most of the questions on the media examination grew out of library science content; hence, students who graduate from educational media or educational technology programs are at a severe disadvantage; the curriuclum preparing the media specialist usually does not include substantial work in library studies, as previously noted. Although the merged program may appear to provide an easy solution to this problem, it is the position of the writer of this paper that a merger should be undertaken slowly with greater care. A merger should take place when more similarities than differences exist between programs, when programs have similar goals and objectives, when faculty and facilities are available for diverse course offerings and when the programs prepare individuals for similar jobs.

As noted above, although a trend toward the merged program concept has developed, many separate programs are available to students. It has been noted earlier that the practice of joint certification presents a distinct problem for the graduate of the separate media program when confronted with a certification examination that is substantially more

[5] Howard G. Ball, "School Media Specialists' Perceptions of Media Education Programs," The Southeastern Librarian, XXVI, No. 4 (Winter, 1976), 226-29.

library science than media. The suggestions which follow will eliminate the basic unfairness inherent in this situation:

Students majoring in each field (media or library science) should be strongly urged, if not required, to minor in the second field, i.e., media students should minor in library science and **vice versa;**

An examination should be developed for those students who have completed a media major, library science minor; the content of the examination should be predominantly media; conversely, library science students should take an examination predominantly in library science but which includes some media content. Students in each field who do not minor in the second field should take an examination in the single field in which they concentrated.

The initial suggestions above, if implemented in both programs, will strengthen the preparation of students graduating from either of the separate programs in the second field. This strengthening will have the potential of improving students' scores on certification examinations which test on content from both fields. The recommendation above suggesting a single field examination is appropriate for students whose interest and programs are limited to a single field.

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