

Should Agricultural Editors Assist Classroom Teachers?

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THE AGRICULTURAL EDITOR'S office is in a good position to move into the classroom, particularly with audio-visual skills. In a few states this is now being done, generally where there is no university-wide teaching resources center.

Across the country there is a growing awareness that university-level teaching can and should be improved. Evidence of this statement is illustrated by

- student complaints of teaching quality
- efforts to select and reward outstanding teachers
- concern with teacher evaluation processes
- committees designed to encourage more effective teaching
- addition of personnel to assist classroom teachers.

During the past decade a flood of new teaching hardware has reached the market. It is not unusual to find in the classroom, from primary grades through the university, a screen and overhead projector at the front of the room and a slide or film projector at the back. Studies are being carried out to evaluate many of these new tools. The evidence thus far indicates that these new devices can be used effectively.

Also, old tools are being made more useful. The film, for example. Advent of 8 mm. and super 8 has put the cost of filming within reach of most instruction budgets, whereas previously the cost of 16 mm. made the use of original film prohibitive for most classroom purposes.

Majority of States Offer Limited Help

Agricultural editors in 35 states replied to a questionnaire last February asking for a summary of their activities in assist-

ing classroom teachers. Of these 35 states, 28 (80 per cent) indicated little activity aimed at improving classroom teaching. Few reported that no help at all is given, but assistance is typically the random or incidental type, and often "as time permits."

Several editors pointed out that the resident teaching section of the agricultural college puts little money into the editorial office. Most editorial appointments are funded by extension, or jointly between extension and research. (The February 1970 issue of *Agricultural Information Staffs in State Land Grant Universities*, published by the Federal Extension Service, indicates that in 17 states some instructional funds go for editorial salaries, but in most cases these funds provide only a part of the salary of the head editor. In only nine of the above 28 states is salary support from instruction indicated.)

Services provided include preparation of visuals, advice on buying and using equipment, participation in seminars and training sessions for classroom teachers, and some consultation on classroom construction to accommodate audio-visual presentations.

As one editor put it, "Theoretically, we have an 'open door' policy toward the classroom teachers, and we help them in any way that we can when we are asked and when the assistance sought falls within our range of responsibility. But there are limiting factors on the assistance that they seek and which we offer. One factor is that with our present resources we are but barely able to handle our primary responsibilities to Extension and the Station."

Another factor mentioned is that there are other units on the campus, mostly university-wide, set up to provide instructional resources. The respondents in 10 states indicated such units are already in operation, one state indicated one is being planned, and in two other states recommendations have been made that such units be established.

These units have a variety of names, such as Teaching Resources Center, Instructional Resources Center, Media Resources Center, Instructional Media Center, and Educational Media Center. One state summarized the activities of these units as "assisting faculty members in improving instruction through consultations on the formulation of course objectives, selection of alternative teaching strategy, the production or construction of materials, and the implementation of evaluation procedures."

Of the 28 states mentioned above, where the agricultural editorial office provides limited support to classroom teachers, five indicated that requests have been made for the creation of a position, located in the agricultural editorial office, to work exclusively with classroom teachers. (One of these states now has an extensive university-wide resources center.)

Therefore, of these 28 states, only 10 contain campuses where there are not resources provided to help the classroom teacher or where some activity in this area is not being planned or proposed.

Extensive Activity Underway

In the remaining seven states replying to the survey, varying degrees of assistance to classroom teachers are provided.

Kansas reports an artist in the Information Office who provides visual services for teachers in the School of Agriculture. E. D. Warner reports that this artist is busy with the preparation of all forms of artwork for teacher use.

Bill Ward's New York group has long been involved in the college's teaching program. Bill says his teachers rely on telelectures, closed circuit TV, teaching carrels, and other teaching methods which they demonstrate to other faculty members. A new ETV Center, in the department, is involved extensively with the College of Human Ecology (formerly Home Economics). A major proposal for a College Instructional Development Program has been developed and presented to the state legislature. The chairman of the Department of Communication Arts would be a member of the advisory board. It is not yet funded, but in the meantime plans are being drawn for another new building on the College of Agriculture campus and a "learning center" is to become a part of it. Members of the agricultural information unit have prepared the plans for this part of the building.

The Department of Agricultural Journalism at the University of Wisconsin owns a kinescope recorder used by various departments in the college and has been involved in developing minimum criteria for classroom remodeling and construction along audio-visual lines and in a new audio-visual center in the agricultural library and a media laboratory in Agricultural Hall. When he reported in February, John Ross said he was currently interviewing a cinematographer whose main responsibility would be production of single concept films for science courses, and

they are also beefing up artistic talent for audio-visual classroom materials.

Colorado has developed an extensive office of Educational Media within the agricultural editorial area that serves the entire university. However, Director Preston Davis says the unit is scheduled to be moved administratively into the office of the University's Academic Vice-President. This unit, with 30 full-time people and about the same number of students on part-time assignments, has a strong orientation toward the classroom teacher, with an estimated 90 per cent of their effort directed toward this group.

Another operation with university-wide dimensions is in North Dakota, where the Office of Communications has been set up under the direction of Bob Jarnagin, with a Department of Educational Media Services. It is envisioned that this new service, set up last fall, will provide all faculty members of the university the same services as have been provided to the agricultural extension staff over the years.

In 1968 the University of Missouri set up a teaching resources unit under the direction of Editor Dick Lee. The unit now contains two full-time people with the titles of coordinator of teaching effectiveness and educational media specialist. It is anticipated that a third person will be added to the group this year. The objective of the new unit, according to Dick, is to work with the teaching faculty in teacher evaluation, testing, establishing educational objectives, developing new courses and curricula, and developing new methods of teaching.

Although the University of Illinois had a university-wide Office of Instructional Resources, the College of Agriculture established its own unit in 1965. The unit now contains the coordinator of the unit, an artist, a half-time photographer, and a graduate assistant. Jack Everly, who fills the coordinator position, says he calls on other units on the campus to help them meet specific needs of the teaching-learning situation.

Personnel Needed and Location

Editors responding to the survey see help with audio-visual aids as the Number 1 problem of the classroom teacher in the technology area. Nine respondents listed the preparation of visuals as an area of concern. Seven indicated assistance in how to use them most effectively. Other high-ranking needs were

information on sources of various materials, how to use teaching hardware, introduction and implementation of new technology, and how to make more effective presentations in general. Other items mentioned included help in course construction, establishing objectives, and testing.

As to the type of individuals needed in such an operation, seven editors suggested specialists in the audio-visual field; four named production people (artists-photographers); and three suggested communication consultants who would be familiar with the total communication field. Several suggested the educational psychologist type, and some would look for individuals combining experiences and training in both education and communications.

As to location of teaching resources personnel, the editors strongly feel that such people could and should be located in the agricultural editorial office. However, editors in states with other arrangements thought the arrangement they have is satisfactory. And a couple of editors indicated that this decision is an arbitrary one, and the location really doesn't make much difference, as long as the operation receives necessary support from administration and teachers.

The following philosophical statement attempts to reflect some of the sentiment voiced by the respondents in the survey.

Philosophy of Approaches

Assistance for the classroom teacher by a teaching resource person might be likened to the assistance the statistician provides the researcher. One level is for the researcher to call on the statistician for help in analyzing the data after the experiment has been run (Type A), whereas the ideal arrangement appears to be for the statistician to be involved throughout the project, particularly when the project is designed (Type B).

The parallel in the classroom is a media specialist helping the teacher prepare materials to be used in his presentation (Type A) compared to the educational psychologist who is involved in establishing course objectives, assisting in the preparation of materials, and to varying degrees involved in course evaluation (Type B).

The primary distinction in both examples on the level of involvement is that in the Type A situation the researcher or

teacher is in complete control of the activity; in the other (Type B) the control is shared.

Some institutions are moving directly into the Type B approach, with one or more educational psychologists supported by one or more media specialists. Although this level of support is considered the ideal over the long run, it presents several problems:

1. Since it involves the relinquishing of some control over the course by the instructor, the number of instructors interested in Type B services may be small.

2. In view of 1 above, a considerable portion of the educational psychologist's time must go toward selling his services and gaining confidence, with only limited results evident for several years.

3. The educational psychologist, with training equivalent to that of the instructor, may not be content to play what will amount to a secondary role, with the instructor maintaining the primary role.

4. The educational psychologist may not have training in the media area, making the supervision of media specialists difficult for him.

On the other hand, if the approach is through the employment of one or more media specialists, there are such problems as status and training differences, an over-infatuation toward the hardware employed instead of designing materials and selecting equipment designed to meet certain course objectives, and little knowledge of the teaching-learning processes.

Selling the services of the media specialist will be an important part of the activity in the beginning, but most teachers are receptive to the idea of improved instruction and their only fear of it is the challenge of doing something new, or they see it as a threat to their role as "the teacher." There is some evidence that increased assistance with audio-visuals might be a good starting place since this need is more clearly recognized by classroom teachers and where they might be most receptive to suggestions and to offers of assistance.

In either type of service, an existing organization may not provide a suitable home for such a unit. Where there is a strong school or college orientation within the university, schools are often reluctant to make maximum use of the services and

to provide a proper share of finances needed for personnel and operation if a university-wide operation is established.

If such a unit is placed at the school level, the administration is often reluctant to have the operation placed directly under its wing to avoid the stigma of administrative pressure for its use. Existing editorial offices and visual aids operations are often geared toward service functions with little interest in classroom teaching activities.

If the teaching resource unit is set up as a separate and independent operation, it has the problem of any new operation in getting started, such as gaining confidence of faculty, learning of resources available to it, and developing its own operating procedures.

There is no single arrangement that will work best for all institutions.

Summary

The current national interest in teacher improvement is more than a fad. Once the needed services are provided, they will remain a part of the institutional structure for a long time—until something better comes along.

The hardware is available. Needed are ideas and materials, tailored to the needs and desires of the individual teacher. It will take special funding and commitment by the administration and the unit that provides the services.

It would appear that on every campus there is need for two kinds of individuals—the professional who can meet the professor at his level and the technicians or production people who can provide the materials needed to make the ideas become realities.

Whatever the organizational pattern, the expertise developed in the office of the agricultural editor over the years is needed. In some way, on every campus, this office should to some extent be involved.