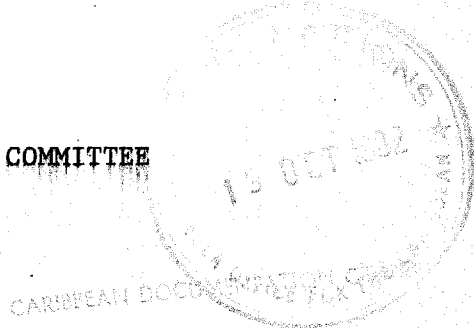


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THE USE OF THE MEDIA
IN USER EDUCATION

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The Use of the Media in User Education

In considering the problem: the Use of the Media in User Education, some assumptions had to have been made.

Not myself, being a librarian, a certain type of background was missing. However, I had gained some experience having at some time made intensive use of a Special Library. I began to think of some things I needed to do at that time as a user of the library.

So there are some things then that the user must be able to do. Here are some questions I asked:

1. Can he go into the library and find his way from one special area to the other?
2. Can he use the card index?
3. Can he research his topic adequately, and how much assistance can the librarian give in this area? (in my case, not much).
4. Is he an independent user of the library, and is this what is expected of him?
5. Does he know that what he needs is in the particular library or is he wasting time?

These may constitute the type of desirable user behaviour aimed at and must be stated as user competencies to be achieved. They must be stated as things the "user must be able to do".

But these were my own ideas. There was still an area of the "unknown". I had not up till then consulted with the planners of this workshop - the people with wider experience with users. This was a gap that had to be filled.

After consultation the following emerged as desirable User Behaviour Objectives:

The user must:

- be able to overcome the difficulties of access to information. This is what the user is to do and what we will help him to be able to do,

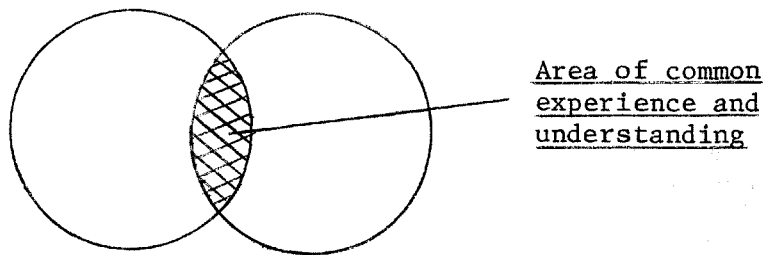
- be aware of the value of information in specialized fields and in everyday life,
- develop positive attitudes towards the need to seek information,
- be motivated to make use of information sources or to develop information sources,
- be aware of the range of information sources and services available within and outside the library,
- gain the skills for discovering relevant information sources, searching these sources and organizing the information for use,
- be able to identify his needs and to articulate them to the information system,
- have an idea of how the information system works in order to formulate his need most effectively,
- be educated on the system, developments in information techniques, the information services being provided by the libraries and other sources,
- know what specialized information the library has to offer - i.e. what is in the library and where it is located,
- learn to use card catalogues, bibliographies and reference books which are keys to the library and develop the skill and habit of browsing through current magazines and newspapers or the section for new accessions.

We are not here concerned with the user education that goes on in training institutions such as schools and universities, these apparently take care of themselves. It is with the citizen at large that we are concerned - the practitioners, decision-makers, extension service officers, health personnel in the solution of life problems and questions of occupational interest. With these we include the task of "reaching the hard to reach", and these objectives apply to them as well.

It is for the achievement of these objectives that the librarian seeks media as an aid to getting the users to learn these competencies, hence the title: "The Use of Media in User Education".

Now, education is a teaching/learning effort, and this involves communication. The librarian engaged in user education is therefore concerned with the communications process, how it works, aids and hindrances to the process and a sensitivity that causes him to recognize when the process is complete. This is so only when understanding can be satisfactorily demonstrated.

Now, what is understanding? What is meant when I say "I understand"? Some folks say this when they do not all understand. Understanding comes about when there is a one-ness or commonness in experience and in the meaning attached to an idea as in a man talking to himself. When, for example, A talks to B and they begin to see eye to eye - to see things in common, then they have communicated one with the other.



If A or B finds that what he says, i.e. the message, is not getting to the other in a way that makes for clear understanding then he must bridge the process. He uses aids to establish the commonness, to impart, to transmit, to make known, to give information.

The aid is used in order to cause B to experience exactly that which A is experiencing. This then is what using aids and seeking aids is all about. Aids are external assistance which can provide the kind of experiences that create the one-ness or commonness necessary for communication to be effective or complete.

Why the Media? What can it do?

The media is a powerful attention-getting tool. Some make extensive use of others in their own production, chief of these being television, which by its very nature will, from time to time, arrange in its production to benefit by exploiting the virtues of all the others:

- Chalkboards
- Flannel boards
- Flat pictures
- Maps and charts
- Models or 3-dimensional materials
- Tape recorders
- Tape/slide projectors
- Overhead projectors
- Opaque projectors
- Films
- Filmstrips
- Film projectors (35mm., 16mm.)

These aids are used to achieve certain objectives of communication:

1. Things which exist in understandable but inaccessible form can be photographed from life by means of direct photography.
2. Things too small to be seen can be made visible by micrography.
3. Things which happen too rapidly for normal observation can be slowed down to comprehensible speed and the same applies in reverse.
4. Things too abstract, too large, too hidden, to theoretical for effective comprehension by the average learner can be visualized by animation and portrayed on film.

The Librarian's Competencies

As the librarian sets about the achievement of the User Objectives cited earlier, he too must display certain competencies as a "User Educator" as a user of media.

The librarian should understand the user and his needs - "Know your audience" - You need to have a clear understanding of the people you want to help with your display, tape recording, slide set, radio programme, television programme, bulletin board or whatever.

After identifying needs then decide "what do I have to offer that might help to meet these needs?"

What aid do I use to get my message across and why?

This is the point of selection of the appropriate aid to the communications process - getting the learner to understand the procedure and to demonstrate this understanding.

The librarian should:

- develop skill in the selection of suitable and applicable material from available print, audio-visual, film etc.,
- stimulate their use through appropriate displays and exhibits, and arrange for the availability of appropriate resource persons, filmstrips, special area kits, flat pictures, transparencies, slides, and slide sets and should know how to prepare them in order to serve his/her purpose,
- do a promotion job of what is and what is coming. This is tantamount to a "selling" effort towards the usefulness of the library - the "librarian as a salesman" might be a good idea to encourage.

The development of what are termed "media skills" becomes necessary:

- Skill in the learning process and how it works in message design for various types of users.
- Skill in the production of aids and materials he needs in the achievement of his objectives.
- Skill in the operation of media equipment - small media mainly - can be useful in selection and application to the communications process.

The librarian should be capable of assembling a related set or group of aids i.e. a multi-media approach to problem solving of user education needs.

A knowledge of what the various types of media can do best, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using each becomes necessary. There are some things better done by print than by Television or Radio; and vice-versa.

It is imperative that the most appropriate types of media for attaining the stated behavioural objectives should be identified, and the user educator should set about doing this once the objectives have been identified and stated. It does not necessarily mean that the same aid will be useful in helping towards the achievement of every objective. Some objectives might need the use of a wider choice of aids than others i.e. the assembling of larger communication systems.

Every effort should be made and a directory developed as a guide to the location and evaluation of existing types of media, and their availability for use by the librarian. Media needed but not readily available should be produced. Commercial media centres and private sector organizations can often be quite helpful regarding equipment.

The User Educator should be a motivator. Showing through the use of media and demonstrations how others in specialized areas use media to achieve their own objectives and serve as a motivating force to step up its use by other users in specialized fields. It seems worthwhile therefore to team up with every source of information and media equipment available.

Don't be afraid of the equipment. This is a charge generally levelled against women. I suspect it is aimed at keeping them out of media use.

Develop equipment operational skills - handle the equipment. The challenge is great. First-hand experience with the media is a need for all librarians as User Educators in the face of the promise held out to them by the Systems Approach to Learning.

The Mass Communications Centre is right here. It is hoped they will avail themselves of the training it offers.

Attitude

The User Educator's attitude to what he wishes to communicate is important:

- Is it one of indifference? Does he believe in it? Is his own attitude so positive that he can influence or persuade the learner/user to want to go along with him in the achievement of his objectives?
- What is his attitude to himself in this business of using media or of user education? Does he believe that the user really wants to make use of what he has to offer? Does he care? Is he confident he can handle the media in this whole affair? Is there self confidence or is there doubt that he can lead the user to demonstrate the achievement of his objectives? For always the achievement of his stated objectives in behavioural terms for the user is his yardstick of success.
- What is his attitude to the user or the potential user? Is it negative? - So he thinks: "Oh! They won't use the library anyhow so why bother too much?"

Let the user feel your genuine interest in his need and develop a desire for the achievement of the identified object. Soon he will become a worthy partner to your communication effort.

The attitude of you the communicator/user educator to yourself, to your objectives, to your user needs and to your users affects the success of the communications process.

We must remember too that there are user attitudes to contend with. Some are good - we capitalize on these. Others we might need to change or influence in some way, maybe by persuasion or by demonstration that "it works" to acquire the skill.

Is the user too busy? Then maybe short-cuts to the information must be found - a Digest perhaps or re-scheduling of time.

Is there resistance to the atmosphere of the library? This must be remedied as it constitutes "noise" in your communication system.

Blocks in the System

The socio-cultural system - involving both the source of the message, the receiver, the channel and its level of sophistication, the source - impinges on the communications process and is important to it. Who says what to whom, how, when, where and why must at all times be taken into account. The things

we may do, may not do or say, must do or must not do, can do or cannot do are important to the communications process and to our use of media to aid the process. Our choice of language and general approach varies with the socio-cultural groups. A blunder here might do irreparable harm to the communication system and contribute to our permanent loss of specialized users.

Lack of initiative or indiscretion in the application of controls, unspoken policies and mistaken ideas regarding confidentiality of classified information could be a "block" in the process. Lack of preparing yourself for using the media can be a block. Our manner of dress when we give an illustrated speech to a special area group at a dinner or convention, club or other gathering - speech mannerisms, inaudible speech or speech defects, physical discomfort, faulty seating, glare, draft. All of them can interfere as "blocks" to effective communication.

In short, anything that interferes with the flow of communication and prevents its completion is "noise" and can occur in any of the ingredients of the process to reduce effectiveness.

A word must be said for "reaching the hard to reach": In this category we include: parliamentarians, diplomats, extension field staff, decision-makers, senior civil servants, the judiciary. These are always on the go and pose a challenge. Despite this they need to be kept up-to-date on what is available in their field, and may even seek information in a hurry.

It might not be farfetched to expect that media-lending facilities could be made available to them, so should digests, annotations in their special areas etc. Materials for them must be light weight, easily handled, clear and easily read and understood. Often there is not time to sit out a half-hour television programme, video-tape or film. The documented jist might be enough.

Skillful timing and the opportunity for convenience and arresting the attention must be thought up for such users.

It seems to me a new era in the field of Library Science is about to unfold. Again, it appears the power of the media is at work and the library might just be the unifying force for its utilization. As communicators, we say "Welcome to the area of Media Users" as with other educators you take up the challenge of the more effective use of your libraries.