



Development of New Instructional Materials in the IMC Network¹

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Although the Instructional Materials Center (IMC) Network is a large and significant undertaking, the need for services and resources in special education seems to be even larger. There was hope that the IMC Network would somehow solve all the problems. For example, disappointment was registered when it became clear that Centers would be unable to mass produce the more promising of their newly developed materials. At present, however, regulatory guidelines and practical plans are being developed to allow the participation of established publishers and manufacturers in order to put the best of new Center-developed materials into production. Until then, the supplies of prototype materials will, in most cases, be adequate only for the field evaluations carried on by the originating Centers.

What the Centers are Developing

In order to inform the professional field concerning the development of new instructional materials within the IMC Network, a survey was undertaken during the summer of 1968. Although not every Center was far enough into its developmental work to have new materials to report, each director was asked to indicate what new materials had been developed. Only 4 of the 14 Centers reported “no new materials yet.” More than 30 separate items were specifically described in response to the survey.

Assessment of Need

Most Centers indicated that their plans for development of materials were based on assessment of gaps in the available instructional materials’ repertoire. Some Centers had surveyed teachers in the field to learn first-hand what the needs were. For example, the IMC at Michigan State University (MSU) conducted a thorough study of the use, habits, preferences, needs, and complaints of teachers regarding materials in the area of the visually handicapped. Reports of such studies and the resulting position papers have been used in many Centers to determine focal points for materials development.

Teacher Emphasis

High value is placed on teacher improvement. Priorities within the IMCs have, in general, led to as much concern for the development of materials for teachers as for materials for pupils. The tentative conclusion drawn from one major survey was that the supply and adequate quality of materials are lesser problems than the failure to use, or use correctly, those materials which are available.

Teachers’ Manuals

There is a sizable chore ahead in developing teachers’ manuals for existing materials and devices. It was discovered that some of the large-scale producers of materials for the handicapped provided no How-To-Use guides. Further, certain common devices such as the ordinary tape recorder have

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enormous potential for use with handicapped children, yet very little effort has been made to provide special education teachers with ideas and suggestions about their use. A recent seminar at MSU identified more than 40 instructional uses of the tape recorder and cartridge tape player for teaching the handicapped. From this sort of work in collaboration with academic units and state-wide study groups, the IMCs are able to produce booklets, manuals, and demonstration kits showing How-To-Use materials.

Examples of New Materials

Center-developed materials fall into various categories. Materials can be classified according to use—either teacher use or student use. They can be classified by the source of the original idea—from a teacher in the field or from a staff member of an IMC. Some materials are adaptations of existing materials, while others are essentially new in concept and design. Since no one can be sure which of these species will prove to be the most important in the long run, the present wide range of types, sources, and intended uses of materials seems fortuitous. Some idea of the variety of Center-developed materials can be gained from the following review of a few of the items reported in the recent survey:

1. Feeder Device for Audiocard Players

Recognizing that one of the leading audiocard players presents visually or motorically handicapped children a rather awkward loading problem, a technician at the Illinois IMC in Springfield designed a simple aluminum funnel to be attached to the audiocard player, making the machine easier for children to use. The design and drawings disseminated by the IMC are sufficiently simple to enable any teacher or parent to construct.

2. Domestic Task Teaching Films for the Retarded

The IMC at the University of Southern California has produced and field-tested a series of single-concept cartridge films (color motion picture) dealing with common domestic and custodial tasks, such as washing windows, wet mopping, dust mopping, and lifting heavy objects. The reports from the field tests of these materials have been encouraging. Single-concept cartridge motion pictures may become an important basic tool in teaching the mentally handicapped. The advantages of perceptual focus, repetition, and flexibility for use with the individuals seem to be fulfilling the earlier claims and expectations.

3. Verb Form Aids for Teaching the Deaf

Working from leads discovered in a regional survey of teachers of the deaf, the IMC at Colorado State College developed a variety of visual materials which bring the relationship of verb form and the relative time of the action it describes into substantial conceptual form appropriate for teaching the deaf.

4. Recorded Aid for Braille Music

Responding to a need reported by music teachers of the visually handicapped, the IMC at MSU developed and field-tested a kit of materials which provides supportive audio cues for the young musician who must learn musical scores from Braille or large print formats. These kits, in variants for different instruments, are now produced by the Library of Congress and are included in its catalog of services for the blind. This kit is the first IMC-developed instructional material to be nationally disseminated.

5. Guide for Making Materials

One of the important ways the IMC Network is helping to increase the availability of teaching materials is by encouraging and guiding homemade teaching aids. An extensive collection of How-To-Make-It ideas and patterns has been produced by the IMC at the University of Kentucky. In only 12 pages of text and 16 pages of drawings, this manual entitled "Materials to Make for Teaching the Special Child", passes along more than 24 ideas that could be useful in a variety of special education classrooms.

6. Thermometer for the Blind

The American Printing House for the Blind is now field-testing five devices under the terms of their IMC contract. One of these, a thermometer, is a mounted zipper which can be adjusted to indicate various temperature readings; the markings appear in both Braille and large type.

7. Sound Film for Speech Therapists

In response to the needs identified by a summer institute on articulatory disorders, a training film for therapists has been produced, designed to supplement the materials of Robert Milisen of Indiana University. The IMC at the University of South Florida has carried on this project.

8. "Modern Mathematics" for the Mentally Retarded

The IMC at the University of Wisconsin has collaborated with one of the University's doctoral students to develop audiovisual material and a testing kit to accompany a new and experimental mathematics instruction method. This material is representative of the particularly promising sort of curricular innovation created specifically for the handicapped, which is less common than materials adapted for the handicapped.

Differences within the Network

Certain Centers have placed particular emphasis on the development of new instructional materials and have employed personnel particularly suited to this task. These Centers are the American Printing House for the Blind, Colorado State College, University of Kansas, University of Kentucky, Michigan State University, University of Southern California, and University of Wisconsin.

Since teacher ideas and handmade materials are thought to be a particularly untapped source of models for instructional materials, several IMCs are experimenting with various approaches to stimulating and collecting such ideas. One of the most promising techniques consists of a simple form which asks the teacher questions about his or her idea. In effect, it teaches a teacher how to write an abstract of instructional material or idea for communication to other teachers in the field. An extension of this sort of sharing is the procedure used in several Centers for drawing simple diagrams of devices which can be produced in sheltered workshops in the community.

Centers in the IMC Network differ in the amount of emphasis they place on materials development and the method by which they encourage this development. However, all Centers do feel that the creation and production of new instructional materials are essential to improving education for handicapped children.