# MICROCOMPUTERS AND MEDIA SPECIALISTS:
## THE CHANGING ROLE

K. M. Fullerton, Media Specialist
Harford County Public Schools
Bel Air, Maryland

With the introduction of microcomputers in the classroom, the role of the school library media specialist takes on another dimension. Today's school media specialist is a teacher in the broadest sense of the term--in training, in certification, in attitude, in function and in commitment. He or she has a responsibility to other teachers to effectively introduce the microcomputer as a learning tool, and to assist and advise educators in the many uses of computers and computer materials.

Training teachers to use the microcomputer can be as simple as showing an individual teacher the correct way to load a disk into the disk drive, or as complex as a formal program presented to an entire faculty. The Harford County Public Schools in Harford County, Maryland, put their secondary school librarians through a series of in-service meetings designed to make them proficient on the computer, thereby becoming the resident resource people, or "experts" in each school. The school media specialists who is trained in media production and is used to handling A-V equipment and instructional materials becomes the natural choice to handle the school's microcomputers, as well.

As a resource person, the first thing you will have to deal with will be the pervading attitudes of the teachers on your staff. Despite technological advances, the most common attitude toward using computers in the classroom is fear. "I don't know a thing about them. . .I'm scared to touch them" is frequently heard. Your ability to display a calm proficiency, and your atti-

tude in treating microcomputers as simply another form of instructional media will alleviate this somewhat.

Presentation of lesson ideas that utilize microcomputers during department meetings, for example, is one way to capture interest in the computers and reduce fears at the same time. Media specialists should be prepared to spend time taking one or two teachers through the ropes to familiarize them with the basics of operating the computer. Direct hands-on experience, given with guidance, is the best method to dispel fear. A reading specialist, for example, after receiving this "hands-on" introduction to the Apple II with his librarian, went on to use the Apple II Tutorials, a series of eight lessons designed to teach the fundamentals of computer language and operations. He is now successfully using Apple II software to enhance his remedial reading program.

In addition to hesitation and fear, you might also have to convince skeptical educators of the merits of the microcomputer as a teaching/learning vehicle. Some teachers may view computer-based education as simply an extension of the video-game craze, or worse, as bringing a "penny arcade" atmosphere into their classroom.

The Minnesota Educational Consortium on Computers (MECC) recommends six basic instructional uses of the computer which can be applied to any subject area:

1. Drill and practice: useful in reviewing previously learned material; can tailor instruction to an individual student and provide a detailed education of student progress.

2. Tutorial: can introduce a new concept and allow students to progress through new material at their own rate.

3.  Simulation: can approximate real or imaginary events; allows students to have a simulated "hands-on" experience.

4.  Materials Generation: helpful expecially for teachers to produce worksheets, dittos, answer keys, puzzles, and other materials.

5.  Educational games: can present facts in new ways; can review material in imaginative methods.

6.  Problem solving: can provide rapid and accurate calculations.

The school media specialist needs to become familiar with these six ways to utilize computers in the classroom. More importantly, though, you need to be able to relate specific software packages that demonstrate these methods of instruction. For example, Three Mile Island is a computer program that simulates the activities of a nuclear reactor and is used in upper level science classes. Vocabular Builder I and II are two software packages designed for drill and practice for the verbal section of the SAT.

For many media personnel, learning about computers may require additional education. But every media specialist can now begin to survey the literature to become familiar with computer programs. Booklist, for example, has recently added a column reviewing such programs. Knowing what is available--and how to use it--are the primary steps to assisting teachers to utilize this valuable learning tool.

A third attitude a media specialist might encounter is a somewhat surprising one: just because it is a computer program, it's better than any other form of media. Many educators in their eager search for computer software fail to carefully evaluate what is available on the market. Media specialists, trained in good selection principles can provide valuable leadership and support in this area. Selection policies cover all forms of media,

including computer programs. Evaluate each program carefully in terms of format, content, price, and level of difficulty. Ask yourself these questions: Does the program package contain clear, concise documentation? Does the program make good use of the computer's graphics? Is the program an appropriate instructional use of the computer? Could the information be presented better in another form of media?

Many media specialists make the initial mistake of duplicating information found in filmstrips and media kits already housed in their collection. Remember, the content of computer software should reflect and enhance the school's curriculum; format is a secondary consideration.

In addition to attitudes, the school media specialist will be expected to deal with the computer hardware itself. Many times the librarian is the only person in your building with education and experience in the organization and operation of audio-visual equipment. Therefore, teachers will expect--and need--your guidance and assistance in setting up computers in their classrooms. This may involve in some situations moving the computers, setting-up the terminals, adjusting the monitor and loading the actual program into the computer's memory. In other situations, you may have to organize a computer "center"--often within the media center itself--where the computers stay permanently. The media specialist in this instance may have to monitor the groups that utilize the center, the materials housed in it, and it's maintenance and care.

Whether one microcomputer or several arrive in a school building, the role of the school library media specialists will certainly change in many ways. The library media specialist can expect to become an instrumental force in introducing the microcomputer--its capabilities, operations, and programs to

fellow teachers and students. Educating teachers on the merits and methods of computer-based education, as well as organizing and handling the hardware will simply become another portion of the librarian's role as a resource person. Selection of library materials will include computer programs in addition to other forms of media. Becoming an integral part of this computer-based education is not easy, but soon will be an additional facet to the most important responsibility any school media specialist already has, and that is to work directly with other teachers to facilitate and expedite their teaching and to work with students to effectuate and enhance their learning.