

## THE IDEA FILE

Phyllis Ryan  
Instructor  
Instituto Mexicano Norteamericano  
de Relaciones Culturales, A.C.

SITUATION

Much of what we use in a classroom, is filed away in our memories and we expect to use it again at the appropriate time. We know from past experience what techniques or visual-aids to use, where to find them (this is especially important), and with what grammatical structures to use them. From experience we have developed a style full of our own ideas. The audio-visuals, songs, dialogues, skits, posters, flipcards, stick-figure drawings, and wall charts are all a part of our experience.

When a new teacher asks for help in planning a lesson, finding a good visual, or getting an idea, the experienced teacher is more than willing to offer suggestions if time permits. However, the word-of-mouth transference of ideas does not always work. The experienced teacher must be there when the new teacher is looking for an answer and must have time to discuss the new teacher's lesson. If these two variables are not present, then the new teacher is on his/her own. He or she doesn't know where to find materials, but has spent time searching, (usually a lot of time) and as a result loses time that could be used to plan the lesson.

PROPOSAL

An Idea File can eliminate uncertainty. The new teacher can go to it and find the answers he/she is looking for and quickly. What then is an Idea File? It is a place any teacher can go for an idea, a new approach, or just an answer to "Where is it?".

At IMNRC the Idea File is a file card system. We've found it very successful in meeting the needs of our new teachers and our experienced teachers as well and would like to present it to you for consideration.

STEPS IN MAKING THE IDEA FILE

1. Decide upon a manageable size for the file cards. Start with around 100 cards (14 x 20 cm. cards work well because they allow enough space for each entry).

At IMNRC we had file cards printed in our printshop. They could also be hand-printed, using a felt tip pen.

2. Keep the amount of information to a minimum. Make it direct and straightforward.

Our objective was to set down on the card the structure, lesson, and course level in the upper right-hand corner (making the course level our index) and leave the remainder of the card for the stated objective, materials and procedure. The procedure includes only space for five steps; more steps could be included on the back of the card if necessary. Below is a copy of the file card:

	COURSE LEVEL:
	STRUCTURE:
	UNIT:
	LESSON:
MATERIALS:	(1) _____
	(2) _____
OBJECTIVE:	_____
	_____
	_____
PROCEDURE:	1. _____
	2. _____
	3. _____
	4. _____
	5. _____
Teacher:	_____ (signature)

3. Make the objective stand out by framing it.

Our purpose in framing the objective is so that when a teacher is looking through the Idea File and has noticed in the right-hand corner the course level, structure, unit and lesson in the textbooks being used, his attention is directed to the objective in the center of the card to pin-

point how the structure was approached. Then, if the information on the card is valuable at the time and if it fits his needs for the lesson he is planning, he can examine it more carefully and copy down the list of materials and steps of procedure. On the card beneath the procedure is the teacher's signature. He can talk to the teacher personally for further information.

4. Prepare a file box for the cards.

We found it to our advantage to index by course level first and structure second; namely, because our basic courses are structured around our nine textbook series. For instance, if one visual--a poster--could be used as the material for an objective in Course One (structure-present of custom), and it could just as well be used in Course Eight with if clauses, then it would be found under Course One and Course Eight as well. Our system of indexing allows for this.

The indexing could also be done with a subject heading for each audio-visual material; for example, a section for songs, posters, or available equipment. A wall chart of a scene for instance--a family at home on the weekend; members of the family in each room of the house and outside--would be very flexible and could function very well at any level from the beginning student learning the present progressive tense to the more advanced practicing time clauses.

5. Code the A-V equipment by title or number to correspond to that on the Idea card.

We identified our equipment by title or subject, for example, a wall chart as family at home or stick figure drawings as mass nouns. Another possibility is to arrange the material by a number code or color code to match the equipment with the file card. Filing by title has been best for us, however, because most of the teachers are familiar with the materials we already have and identify them in conversation by title. This is where this filing system is flexible and can be adapted to meet the needs of the institution.

6. Place the Idea File in a readily available place and have nearby a work area.

The work area is invaluable for it gives somewhere to write down information from the card or to write a new card for the file.

7. Encourage everyone to contribute.

Each teacher can contribute a card or a group of three or four

teachers can interview the staff for their ideas. The advantage of using the interviewers is that within a few weeks they can reach each teacher and get at least one idea for the idea file. Although using the latter system is more work at first for a few teachers, after this initial start the additions can be made by the individual teachers and the file constantly up-dated.

8. Optional: Teacher trainees add at least one card based on a classroom observation.

Another method we found successful is using the teacher trainees to add creative ideas because it was felt that students are good observers, critical, and full of good ideas.

### ADVANTAGES

The Idea File works for us at IMNRC much as any cataloguing system for books and materials in a library does. The reasons for not having it associated with a library are the advantages of:

1. having it near our A-V materials,
2. having it available at all teaching hours in the teachers' room,
3. having a system to organize what had always been in the teachers' room, but was not being utilized to its full potential by all teachers.

Now, we have a system for retaining over the years, techniques as well as a place for keeping creative ideas and not letting them be used only once, or just by one teacher and then forgotten. The effort of making the file is paying off.

The potential for an Idea File is great for any institution. It can be the foundation for sharing ideas and generating new ones, and a source of material for a newsletter. We have found it has helped acclimatize our new teachers to the A-V materials, to methodology, and to creative ideas at our institution. When a new teacher arrives, he/she can no longer say, "Where are the A-V materials?", "What can I do today? No one has told me where anything is". The answers are to be found in the Idea File.