The Age of the Package is one way to know these times. Its signs are abundant. Notice, for example, vacation plans, financial proposals and arrangements, teacher negotiations, book clubs, and the six-variety pack of cat food. Note also the accumulating litter of packages. For, in truth, the package is that contained and its container. The package also is the way it is used.

The package is a concept already materialized in education. Once considered alien, some packages are recognized as having a solid, even respectable place in school programs. Packaging, indeed, is so common in the general culture that it is expected by many to contribute dramatically to educational improvement. Without doubt, the package seems likely to be a feature of educational life and for some time to come.

Packaging concepts did not enter the educational scene abruptly. Incomplete concepts have been standard for many years. The textbook is one such package. The textbook package contains an instructional message, segmented into “lessons” or “units,” accompanied by visuals, exercises, activities, bibliography, and even answers to questions. These components are encased by a binding sturdy enough to withstand a variety of abuses. Merchandising for these packages has insisted upon their validity, usefulness, and potency. Frequently, such packages have been parts of a larger system, a textbook series.

The textbook package, however, represents an incomplete packaging concept, incomplete at least by contemporary standards. It is only one, however major, of many materials that are or may be appropriate for instructional purposes. Likely, it was developed independent of other materials, even if additional media (for example, films, apparatus, ditto masters) accompany it. The textbook probably was developed first and, characteristically, was designed for principal use, with other media cast clearly in supporting roles.

Major Characteristics of Packages

More complete packages being merchandised in schools these days seem recognizable by three prominent characteristics. Common as they seem, they exist in differing degrees.

First, packages are conceived as pro-

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gram, not materials. The purpose is the creation of a new curriculum and its necessary, not interesting, accessories. Perhaps the concern is physics or reading or geography or oral language. The genesis of the package is curriculum. Many of the popular packages have been financed by massive federal government funding, some from private foundation sources. The past decade saw a spate of such curriculum developments, each with its cryptic alphabetic name. While the rate of establishment of large-scale projects may decrease in this decade, smaller, less grandiose projects probably will be started. Curriculum concerns likely will remain central to educational package development.

A system of instructional media and materials is the second feature. The first major projects, conventionally ambitious, set out to put the newly fashioned curricula into a traditional textbook package. Yet, as work proceeded, the developers seemed to recognize that convenient carton as unsuitable for the product on which they labored. Indeed, the "product" began to be conceptualized as a system of closely related materials, each serving a particular purpose. Thus, while a textbook was developed, so were films, exercises, laboratory notebooks, paperback booklets, inexpensive equipment, and recordings. The textbook may have been a principal component of the system, but the other materials were not seen as supplementary; like the textbook, they were essential.

Each component is integral to the system; omitting one would be to deny the validity and frustrate the impact of the whole. A key to the entire system of materials seems to be the plan for their use. The restrictiveness of some plans has caused their systems to be tagged "teacher-proof." This derision has prompted most subsequent plans to be less detailed and to provide guidance for flexible use. Even so, the system is real and holds together. It is another type of product, basically unlike a collection of related materials grouped together for sales purposes or because they "could be used together." The package is itself a viable system.

The third characteristic element of packages appears to be their pattern of developmental tryout and distribution. Packages usually receive rather extensive field testing under project supervision. Teachers selected to use the package in its early form receive special preparation to understand both its substantive content and pedagogic rationale. At times, this in-service education has been coupled with materials design and development over a summer; on other occasions, in-service preparation has continued regularly over an entire year.

Important to understanding the package is the fact that teacher education is a component critical to its success. Limited availability of the materials during field testing is also a feature. When news breaks of a new package being developed, requests for specimen sets of materials pour into the project. But the package, being highly commercial, is not distributed to all those interested. Descriptions and general project plans may be circulated, but not the materials. When the package has been field tested and is about ready for marketing, it may be purchased but, even then, usually with some restrictions on use.

These features are drawn from available packages. Most have been financed by public (government) funds, and public accountability, however minimal, is necessary. As private, commercial enterprise produces increased numbers of packages, from conception through distribution, these three features may be altered and others added.

Small Packages: A Concern About Inflexibility

One vexing issue currently is the degree to which the package should be used flexibly in the school situation. This concern, a recurrence of the "teacher-proof" charge, now involves the matter of "pupil-proof," as well. Packages which are seen as quite self-contained primarily are more limited in scope than the large curriculum systems. These small packages have an integrated design and usually are implemented by a coordinated set of audio-visual media. Employing these packages in a school program, teachers need make
few or no instructional decisions. Pupils are bound to the package also. For the package's purposes, popularly derived and published as statements of expected pupil behaviors, the system is complete: the substantive material is treated more adequately than in other and available forms; other materials and modes of discourse are not only unnecessary, they are seen as liabilities by system designers.

Too little evidence is available for adequate judgment and generalization about this type of instructional packages. Nevertheless, a few preliminary reflections may be helpful in considering the potential impact and usefulness of such tightly conceptualized and instrumented products. The specter of arrogant, omnipotent, and omniscient designer-producers, frightening enough, seems unlikely in any real sense. Competitive marketing of packages, on the other hand, seems a special necessity. With different ideas implemented and on sale by different firms, options for choice and consumer direction remain potent.

Teacher militancy and negotiations relating to instruction may be seen as inhibiting schools from buying into instructional packages which restrict teachers' professional expertise. Yet, teachers should be expected to demand packages which enable them to perform more professionally. Generally increasing education costs seem another reason that large, controlled systems of small, self-contained packages may be more fanciful visions than realistic possibilities. Too, packages must account for the enthusiasm of eager pupils to seek additional sources of information beyond those available.

Concern for reversing observed school procedures which tend to dehumanize the educational process may blunt efforts that act on people rather than make possible people's acting on things. Noting these observations, however, is not to deny the possible widespread usefulness of many small, self-contained packages. Also, using them probably will not subvert the schools. And those pupils, needing limited, special programs based on restricted and specific objectives, likely will profit from this type of package.

Some General Problems and Prospects

Availability and use of instructional packages probably will increase. Packaging processes, employing systems design and product engineering techniques, may be expected to yield more complete packages. Large-scale packages should continue to be developed, but the small package field may soon burst with activity. Such projections are easily framed. Other prospects and some attendant problems, not so superficially apparent, merit consideration.

Attention to instructional packages in teacher education programs is an obvious necessity. After a decade of major curriculum developments, systematic consideration of their materials seems rare in most undergraduate programs. Candidates seeking teaching posts, consequently, may have heard about the AAAS elementary science program, but do not know the system and its materials and have not worked with children using this package. Or, knowing the AAAS program, candidates do not know another science program. As projects have multiplied, the problem has grown more serious. Undergraduate preparation programs probably should not be captured by one of several competing programs, but should afford candidates opportunities for intensive familiarization.

In-service programming seems an appropriate strategy for deliberately attending to a specific program in a school system. Too long dependent on training grants, themselves never sufficient for the need, teachers must receive their needed preparation to teach particular instructional systems in programs financed and directed by local schools. To adopt a package without making provisions for the required teacher education seems wasteful, at best. So, local schools must budget sufficient funds for in-service education, not an inexpensive enterprise, and, perhaps, mandate participation as a condition of employment.

Major barriers in teacher education domains must be dismantled before even the best-conceptualized and instrumented in-
structional systems will have substantial payoffs. These tasks will not be concluded with ease, but they must be begun and soon.

Adoption procedures for instructional materials warrant review and, in some cases, revision. Too frequently, in all probability, adoption of packages is inhibited by regulations established for choice and purchase of textbooks. These rules usually permit only the textbook from a larger system to be considered, thereby reducing the entire package to shambles. Some elements may be considered later and by other groups and apart from the textbook. In such events, the materials developed as a system seldom can be regrouped meaningfully. An entire package should be considered on its own merits. If this were done, even more systems would be produced and more appropriate materials would be available for pupils.

But adoption rules are not all the problem. The pervasive mythology enveloping a single material must be destroyed. Most teachers probably expect to use only a textbook as the principal instructional source. When thinking about and examining new materials, they probably pay closest attention to the textbook and see other materials, even those in a system, as useful but not integrally necessary, perhaps only decorative. Teacher education has a role to play in the demythologizing process. So, too, do local supervisory and administrative practices. And merchandising must play a role as well.

Marketing of instructional packages currently follows traditional forms. Textbook publishers produce and sell textbooks as other traditional producers and distributors make and market films, transparencies, and equipment. Since rules and myth restrict usual choice to textbooks, materials more appropriate to other media are issued in bound book form. And other materials in the instructional systems are left to founder by themselves. Needed, it would appear, is a new kind of commercial enterprise. Perhaps the new educational conglomerates may serve in this capacity. The distributor of the package would subcontract the production of all materials in the system but would market the package only as a complete system. Negotiation with local schools could yield different contract specifications for purchase of system components. Purchase of textbooks or films (or a film) alone simply would not be possible. If the package is viable as a whole, it deserves marketing which emphasizes and capitalizes on that feature. This new educational marketing agency very well might include in or with the instructional package a teacher education component. Thus, schools buying the package would also purchase time, materials, and consultants for the adequate preparation of their staff to use the package well.

The "match" between various packages in a total instructional design seems quite troublesome. In the past decade, complaints were commonplace about the lack of "match" between different modern mathematics programs. The elementary mathematics program may have lacked a close match with the junior high program and the senior high program may have been built on bases other than those programs coming earlier. Not the least difficulty, of course, was that pupils in the system became confused. Problems of selection and placement of topics, sequence, and articulation were highlighted. The match between "Man: A Course of Study" and the "other" years of social study, for example, may become a nettlesome complication and frustration. Surely, the notion of match between the new package and other program elements cannot be ignored.

Additional models of package development should be sought. The patterns of the national curriculum project (for example, BSCS, HSGP) and small-scale packages probably do not exhaust viable possibilities. Available and apparently successful, they are most easily copied. As other models appear, attention should be directed to several important features. One is provision for flexibility. Another might relate to the extent of specification of learner behaviors in instructional objectives. Local production of particularly relevant materials (for example, a film loop showing neighborhood street signs, a tape recording of local speech patterns) should be encouraged by special suggestions, plans, and directions. Master tapes, prints, and tran-
scripts that may be reproduced locally should also be components in new package development plans. Alternative models, seriously considered, will represent considerable and useful variety.

Cost undoubtedly will persist as a major problem. Budget restrictions and rising expenses make necessary more frugal operations. And a tempting portion of every budget are the already meager lines for instructional resources. Purchases of materials may be cut further than already anticipated. Since packages usually have a high initial cost, they may face drastically decreased sales. Yet, because of their conception and development, and with greater attention to marketing, packages could benefit from current budget restrictions. The argument could be, simply, that the package is a better instructional system and the more economical choice would be a decision based on demonstrated quality. Such an argument, however cleverly merchandised, must still be accompanied by products at reasonable costs. Extravagance has never been a hallmark of school business management, in spite of a few excesses and some inflammatory publicity. Costs must be reduced for widespread adoption and use.

Greatly needed are data useful to the possible adopter about the package. Advertising and artful merchandising, in this respect, are obscurant. Empirical data about initial and replacement costs and equipment up- and down-times, as well as about pupil learnings, will be helpful. Records kept by teachers about instructional problems, pitfalls, and successes with specified and described pupil groups probably are more valuable to the adopter than a list of towns in which tryouts were held. Critiques of the package by several experts will provide perspective and highlight attention to important concerns for substantive and pedagogic validity. Accounts of patterns of use in different schools will demonstrate the flexibility possible or rigidity required. Indeed, attention to these matters of evaluation permit the practical expansion of evaluation activities and theory and provide relevant, usable information for those who are interested in the package.

This Age of the Package is not a new era. Rather, it seems to be the present state of maturation of a posture about instructional media and materials. The new way of life is here, to be sure, but it is not here for all, in every school. Continuing to emerge as only dimly seen here, this age presents possibilities only dreamed about in days past. But dreams, like metaphors and labels, are not the reality of bustling pupils working on important matters. Seizing the possibilities of instructional packages is a current opportunity for living in these days.