ONE has but to open his mail including the latest issues of professional journals or open his door to the publishers' representatives to be confronted by what Komoski describes as the "second industrial-instructional revolution."

Wherever teachers, supervisors, and other school personnel convene and instructional materials are displayed, projects, packages, and programs compete for attention. Each claims amazing potential for stemming the tide of criticism leveled at the existing curriculum, for curing present ills, and for fulfilling the district's goals for all its pupils.

The availability of many comprehensive programs in the various subject areas increases the necessity for careful analysis of district goals and needs, of the range of alternative programs, and of the distinct characteristics of the most promising ones. As a curriculum director or other individual charged with clarifying district goals, improving instruction, and making decisions in the area of instructional materials, what are some of the considerations I must have in mind before I begin to examine the contents of the curriculum package?


District Needs—A Prime Consideration

The district's needs are of prime consideration. Hopefully, the day of "bandwagon" change has ended. Before looking inside the proposed new package, evaluation of the existing program to determine areas of deficiency or weakness is a vital process.

Evaluation of educational programs, as Stake points out, is complex:

Educational programs are characterized by their purposes, their content, their environments, their methods, and the changes they bring about. Usually there are messages to be conveyed, relationships to be demonstrated, concepts to be symbolized, understandings and skills to be acquired. . . . each of the many characteristics requires separate attention.

Questions such as the following must be answered: In what respect is the content of the present program inadequate? What about methodology? Which thought processes are


* Edith E. Grimsley. Assistant Professor of Education, University of Georgia, Athens

EDITH E. GRIMSLEY *
encouraged and which are ignored? Are materials of instruction appropriate in terms of desired learning outcomes? In other words, what are the shortcomings of the existing program and what are the projected needs of the district? Until one is able to answer these questions, he is ill-prepared to select a replacement with improvement capability.

Claims of the Proposed Program

After careful assessment of the peculiar needs of the district, the question logically follows: “Does the proposed program hold promise for improving the educational processes in terms of district goals?” What is the basic philosophy undergirding the proposed program? Is it consistent with the philosophy of the school district? What evidences are there that the program is based on sound learning theory? Do the methods include the best in pedagogical know-how such as discovery and inquiry?

Promotional materials for some programs and packages make bold claims. On what are the claims of effectiveness based? Where and under what conditions has the program been tested? What has been the feedback from consumers? What modifications have been made as a result of consumer feedback?

Despite the claims of many programs and packages about their adaptiveness to any conditions, including the “learning styles” of individuals, the program or package under consideration is likely to be built on assumptions about how learners “really do” learn—and about how teachers “really ought” to teach. While such assumptions are sometimes stated quite explicitly, one may have to look within the materials for evidences of them.1

What evidence is there that provisions are made for a range of abilities and individual differences? Does the program enhance learning for disadvantaged children? Is it designed for only the academically talented? If intended for a specific “audience,” is this clearly communicated? The results of McQueen’s1 study emphasize the necessity of raising questions of appropriateness in terms of student abilities and of clarification as to intended consumers.

Questions of content selection and organization will best be answered when I look inside. However, in preparation for that assessment, I need to consider the desired cognitive and affective outcomes.

As the results of this instructional program, what do I want children to know, to value, to become? How do I want them to behave toward other human beings? At a time when attention is focused on nurturing humanness, I need to recognize “that many of the new practices and new technologies are more limiting, less individualizing, and less humane than the old ways.”2

Cognizant of the claims made and mindful of the questions raised, one is prepared to look inside for clues which will help him answer the question he must ultimately ask: “Is the program appropriate and desirable for the students of this district?”

Consequences for the District

Another cluster of questions focuses attention on consequences for the district: What will the decision to adopt a particular package or program mean in terms of utilization of personnel, time, and space? What personnel competencies are required? Is staff training necessary? If so, are the resources available for such training? Does the package include both hardware and software? What additional materials of instruction will be necessary to ensure effective utilization of the program?

Recognizing teacher training as vital to the success of the program, a number of pro-


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gram producers have made provision for teacher training as a part of the package. The Syracuse University Madison Project, a "supplementary program in modern mathematics," and Science — A Process Approach, an elementary science program which emphasizes the laboratory method of instruction, are two examples of programs which have emphasized the need for teacher training and made provision for this component on a contract basis.

However, purchasing teacher training and consultant service raises additional questions regarding the relationship of the consultants to the supervisors and other district personnel charged with staff development. How will local curriculum workers be involved? What provision will be made for transition from leadership by the "outside" consultants to leadership by local curriculum workers when the contract for services expires? Where attention was not given to involving the district's curriculum workers in the teacher training and introduction of the new program, Grimsley found the continuance of the program threatened by the withdrawal of contracted consultant services.

With "new" curriculum packages stressing (a) the involvement of students in the method of the discipline, discovery, inquiry, process, and (b) multimedia, consideration must be given to utilization of time and space. Will 50- or 55-minute periods provide adequate time for a simulation activity in social science, or an anthropological investigation, or a laboratory activity in mathematics? Will present space accommodate the proposed program? What new facilities or renovations will be required? For optimum effectiveness, what demands for time, space, and personnel are made by the proposed program?

The terms "program" and "package" imply more than a textbook component. Other components often included are: activity units, filmstrips, artifacts, films, filmloops, tapes, and equipment kits. Are the necessary supplies and equipment available as a part of the package being considered? Are materials published or available commercially? Do some need to be developed locally?

In districts where instructional funds may not be spent for materials unless they appear on an "approved list," the purchase of experimental, unpublished materials may be difficult. Inability to provide the essential materials for a program places serious limitations on effectiveness and successful implementation.

Before I look inside, I need to be aware that the proposed program will have consequences for the school system and that these consequences need to be identified and considered in the initial decision-making process.

In summary, before I look inside the curriculum package, instructional system, or comprehensive program, I need to analyze data regarding the existing program so that I can identify district needs. I need to know the characteristics of the program, the claims made for it, and the undergirding philosophy so that I can, upon looking inside, ascertain its appropriateness in terms of district goals. Finally, as I prepare to look inside, I need to be alert to consequences of the program for the district.

With the stated considerations in mind, I am in a much better position to "see" inside the program and then to make decisions regarding it.

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