

Educational Packages—Panacea?

HULDA GROBMAN *

PACKAGES are not new. Materials accompanying basic texts have been used for a long time. End-of-chapter questions, supplemental readings, workbooks, teacher guides—including supplemental exercises, tests, and lists of films and other resources—have been the norm rather than the exception. The difference is that today packages are more frequent, more comprehensive, more often prepared with care, involve more techniques and media, and are generally easier to obtain since more often they may be ordered from a single source and may come as a single packet.

More basic, in the traditional package, non-text materials *supplemented* the text. Today, many packages consist of *complementary* parts of a unified whole, and the parts cannot always be separated. For example, traditional science texts might have a supplementary laboratory manual; the teacher could use any or none of the laboratory exercises while using the text. In today's science curricula, the laboratory and text are often complementary, so that one cannot be used without the other. Social science materials may have games, films, field trips, organized discussions, and projects built in as part of the basic continuity of the course materials. Thus, at least some parts of the package may be inseparable from other parts, and to choose the curriculum may be to choose all or a large part of the package.

Does this provide any room for teacher

creativity? To what extent can such packages stimulate student creativity? The criteria for selecting packages that enhance opportunities for creative teaching and learning are essentially the same as for selecting nonpackage materials, and they involve questions of structure and presentation.

Degree of Structure

Perhaps the major threat of packaging is the degree of structure built into the package. Before considering the amount of teacher and student elbowroom provided by the package, it is well to ask how much structure is desirable and how flexible the package should be.

Complete freedom of choice among parts to be used and the sequence in which these are used might seem desirable. However, in practice, unless the package includes considerable structure, optimal learning may be precluded. Unless there is some predetermined sequencing, no part of the materials can assume prior student skills, techniques, and ideas included in any of the other materials, and no part can pyramid learning on previously developed skills.

Followed to its extreme, each unit or part of the package would be entirely independent of all other units and would assume

* *Hulda Grobman, Professor of Education, New York University, New York*

no knowledge of learning from other units. Each science laboratory exercise would have to include all basic skills, since none could be assumed. Each social science unit would have to present all skills and background information needed in the unit. Each English literature unit would have to establish a setting and skills required in the unit regardless of how often these had been included in other units which may already have been taught. This obviously would not enhance productive or creative classroom learning. Clearly the teaching and learning potentials are increased when some structure is built into the package.

Different teachers need differing amounts of structure, and the same teacher may require different amounts and kinds of structure at different times. A teacher starting a new venture in curriculum quite properly may want and need considerable guidance and rather forthright parameters for the first year or two. Unless the curriculum provides for this teacher, while still giving freedom to others, the result may be unsatisfactory. A teacher who is floundering is neither creative nor effective. Creative teaching and stimulation of pupil creativity require considerable confidence in the situation and in the subject area. Unless the materials provide some structure for many teachers, such confidence may be missing and effective learning may be precluded.

Thus, it would seem that some structure is essential. But how much?

Materials should have some broad structure while offering alternatives in media, in approach, and even in subject matter coverage so that all parts of the materials are illustrative of some general theories or skills of concern to the curriculum but all need not focus on specific knowledge of a given series of facts. Within the framework of the course and school objectives, the package should offer a variety of pathways for achieving the objectives.

Within these alternative pathways, there must be sufficient overlapping of coverage so that any one of the pathways will communicate the basic themes or skills desired. Within each, there should be alternatives involving a

variety of media, suited to the ecology of many different kinds of classrooms. Thus, a package in which all materials are part of a single track with few alternatives would seem inappropriate, both in terms of general educational effectiveness and as a medium for creative teaching and learning.

For Creative Teaching

Another consideration in evaluating packages is the extent to which the package helps the teacher teach creatively. The teacher who can order supplies with a single order form, who has an annotated list of supplementary materials—including clearly specified choices of medium and subject area—who can easily obtain needed alternative materials suitable for a given teaching problem or learning difficulty, can be free to think about teaching creatively, and is more likely to have the energy to do so. He can try out a variety of media without time-consuming screening of large quantities of materials. He is more likely to be successful in locating materials that are directly appropriate rather than those that are only peripherally germane. However, unless the package includes relatively extensive teacher materials of several kinds—explanations of the philosophy of the materials, suggested approaches, possible difficulties, and a carefully annotated reference bibliography in specific areas of the discipline—regardless of availability of alternatives in the package, their potential probably will not be realized.

Wanting to stimulate creativity and being able to do so are not synonymous. Some packages include activities that require a creative student approach while they provide sufficient structure for the teacher to direct these activities effectively. Schwab's "Invitations to Enquiry"¹ pioneered in this ap-

¹ The format for "Invitations to Enquiry" was developed in: Joseph J. Schwab, *The Teaching of Science as Enquiry*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1962; and is used in a curriculum package in: Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, *Biology Teachers' Handbook*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1963; and in: Norman Abraham et al. *Interaction of Matter and Energy*. Teacher's edition. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1969.

proach. It is also exemplified in some academic games, branched programmed materials, and inquiry-type films which involve student reactions and discussions of questions built into the film.² In a sense, such materials program the teacher into stimulating creative thinking on the part of the student. At the same time that the teacher is assisted in developing a new role as he masters the techniques of encouraging divergent thinking, the materials provide a framework in which he can implement the role.

What Are the Goals?

Because curricular materials are presented in a package does not mean they are really new or are good or bad. Many packages are merely expensive variations of old practices and we the consumers often aid and abet this. We tend to assume that films must be more effective than slides or filmstrips, that slides and filmstrips are more effective than photographs in books. We assume that colored illustrations or films

² See: Teacher Guides for Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, *Single Topic Inquiry Films*, distributed through Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., Houghton Mifflin Company, and Rand McNally & Company.

must be more educational than black-and-white illustrations, when they may merely be more expensive. Multimedia materials are not necessarily preferable to single-media materials. Increased cost, gloss, and machinery do not necessarily provide enhanced education. Neither does high powered sales promotion.

The educational package as well as the nonpackage curriculum materials should be evaluated on the basis of what it is the school wants to do and what resources it wishes to commit to this task.³ The extent to which the materials permit and enhance opportunities for teacher and student creativity is one factor. But creativity alone is not a sufficient criterion in curriculum selection, just as no consideration of curriculum can afford to ignore the question of creativity. Packages can permit and enhance creativity—they can also stifle it. The only way to determine which is the case is systematically to examine the curriculum in terms of structure and process. □

³ For evaluative questions relevant to creativity and other areas of curriculum outcomes, see: Margaret Ammons and Robert S. Gilchrist, *Assessing and Using Curriculum Content*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1965.

*Papers from a conference sponsored by the
ASCD Elementary Education Council and the
American Association of Elementary-Kindergarten-Nursery Educators (E|K|N|E)*

The Unstudied Curriculum: Its Impact on Children

Edited by Norman V. Overly

- "The Consequences of Schooling," Philip W. Jackson
- "Curriculum as Educational Process: The Middle Class Against Itself," Edgar Z. Friedenberg
- "The Impact of School Philosophy and Practice on Child Development," Barbara Biber, Patricia Minuchin
- "Teacher Expectation and Pupil Learning," Robert Rosenthal
- "Schooling and Authority: Comments on the Unstudied Curriculum," Robert Dreeben
- "The Moral Atmosphere of the School," Lawrence Kohlberg

142 pp.

NEA Stock Number: 611-17820

\$2.75

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Copyright © 1970 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.