

Can I Be Replaced by a Package?

Glenys G. Unruh

THE uneasy thought that some of us (teachers, supervisors, and professors) could possibly be replaced by packages is not without some foundation in fact. Several instances have been reported recently of school systems that have contracted with outside firms to teach reading, arithmetic, or other skills by means of instructional technology under a money-back guarantee to produce results.

Could not an aide operate such a prepackaged program as well as a highly-paid teacher? Curriculum workers and supervisors are well aware that several agencies now provide in-service training films which can teach new skills to teachers much better than the local supervisor can. It is also well-known that several commercial agencies provide packaged in-service programs complete with materials and service personnel and needing no assistance from the local curriculum worker.

Some college professors may be vulnerable to replacement by packages. We have all heard the well-worn story about the professor who, during his frequent absences from campus, supplied tape recordings of his lectures, which were in turn received by tape recorders of absent students. Educational television constantly broadcasts college courses which package a series of lectures on video tape and require only a technician to transmit to unlimited numbers of students.

Whether we are schoolteachers, curriculum workers, or college professors, we might ask ourselves as we read this issue of *Educational Leadership*, "Am I presently performing my role in such a way that a package administered by an aide or technician would actually be an improvement?" If so, perhaps we had better look critically at ourselves and at the package.

What Is a Package?

Any discussion of packages in reference to teaching and learning soon reveals semantical difficulties attached to the word "package." It is a term used at times to refer to a boxed assortment of materials and at other times to refer to a complicated learning system made up of subsystems and encompassing a complex educational program.

Tracing the pedagogical meaning of "package" is not a simple matter. The major unabridged dictionaries do not define the term in an educational context. *Education Index* has not yet elevated the word to the status of an individual listing as it has other examples of pedage, but has relegated "package" to a place among "teaching aids and devices." Therefore, the essence of the concept of "package" must be extracted from descriptive writings and curricular products of educational researchers and developers.

It is probably safe to predict that learning packages or instructional packages will become more educationally sophisticated and widely used as expertness develops; thus, as educators, we would be well advised to examine the package concept critically and objectively and continue to learn more about it. In the current sense, issuing from research and development centers, teaching-learning packages involve a systems concept and are clearly distinguishable from more traditional and superficial applications of packaging.

Negative connotations accompany the earlier and obsolete forms of packaged education. A conventional package once included a basic text and teachers' manual which seemed to assume that all children of a given age throughout the school, the district, the state, or across the nation were homogeneous in terms of social or economic status, with little diversity in ethnic and experiential background. If a child did not succeed when offered a uniform presentation, he failed and was expected to repeat the same package.

Varying degrees of advancement in the preparation of textbook-based packages produced by publishing corporations are presently in evidence. Some include basic curriculum outlines, texts, diverse materials, and applications of media for use with varying types of machines and electronic equipment and accompanied by in-service information and activities. Other packages seem to be textbooks cut up into worksheets and accompanied by film material assembled in brightly-colored boxes. Others are more aptly designated as "kits" with a fascinating variety of items which may remind us of a bundle of remnants purchased from a mail-order house, containing a bargain-priced collection but seldom including materials we really need.

Another example of a superficial interpretation of an instructional package is the type of assignment that utilizes a "guidesheet" or "unit" which is distributed to all students in a class and contains several pages of things to do and questions to answer, designed to keep students busy scurrying around the library and digging through textbooks to find the answers. This type of assignment could just as well be done as a correspondence course administered at a geographical distance to any student who can read or listen to instructions on tape.

If the emerging concept of teaching-learning packages rejects traditional textbook-centered courses, variety kits, and correspondence-type courses, what are the distinguishing characteristics of the concept?

Well-designed teaching-learning packages are built as instructional systems and are characterized by several distinguishing features. In the characterization that follows, the term "student" may be applied to an elementary or secondary student, to a student teacher in college, or to an in-service teacher who is involved as a "student" in on-the-job continuing education. In this context the teacher-instructor may be a classroom teacher working with his pupils, a professor responsible for preservice

education of teachers, or a curriculum supervisor working with other staff members.

1. *The emphasis is on individualization in the emerging concept of teaching-learning packages.* Pretests or means of assessment may be used to determine what the student already knows and placement can be arranged for him into personally tailored instructional processes and content. Options are offered to accommodate for differences in learning rates, past achievement, interests, motivation, and other diversities. All students are not expected to complete all of the procedures as in older programs.

2. *Instructional systems packages are based on broad concepts organized into manageable coordinated modules.* The total package is comprehensive and frequently encompasses basic substance and a wide range of materials of a defined area of study as opposed to the type of package intended as supplementary materials to accompany a textbook or previously entrenched course of study.

3. *Clearly stated instructional objectives convey to the student the quality of performance expected of him.*

4. *Multimedia learning materials of varying types are included to provide a choice of vehicles for learning for various steps in the process.* The package recognizes that people learn in different ways and that a variety of media may provide more effective learning.

5. *The package not only provides diversified materials, but also provides for diversified learning activities, particularly student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction.* The range of activities may include large group and small group instruction, field trips, model building, role playing, simulation, laboratory experimentation, independent study, and others. The package has built-in self-evaluation processes designed to provide continuing feedback to assist the student in determining his progress toward achievement of the instructional objectives.

6. *The role of the teacher-instructor is significantly changed.* His function as a dispenser of information is considerably reduced as the student moves into a more active role in the learning process. Teachers become diagnosticians of learning and find themselves developing professional competence in helping each individual learner find success. Teachers have more time for effective instructional planning to solve learning problems and to provide enrichment for individual students.

The package should provide flexible provisions for teacher input in local adaptations. The teacher, working closely with the community, can bring his professional expertise to bear on applications appropriate for each student in each particular situation. The instructional systems package should make it possible for educators to devote much more energy to humanism in education directed toward the development of whole human beings by supporting individual students' efforts and by devising the most positive learning conditions for each one.

An illustration can be cited of teachers who were surveyed after utilizing Individually Prescribed Instruction (IPI) for three years and said that they were working harder in IPI than they would have in other programs, but were obtaining greater satisfaction since they felt they were meeting

the challenge of individual differences for each pupil. The survey also seemed to indicate that teachers are willing to make significant changes in teaching if they are offered a program with specific help.

A critical examination of any given package must of course include a look into its source of origin, its research base, and its educational rationale. Grants from private foundations and from the federal government have provided much of the impetus for the development of the package concept. Some of the more comprehensive packages are being developed by regional educational laboratories and research and development centers. Examples are the Aesthetic Education Curriculum Program of the Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory, Inc., and IPI, being developed by Research for Better Schools, Inc. Preceding large-scale use of the more comprehensive packages, field-testing is used to provide feedback information leading to revisions and changes as part of the development of the instructional system. Continuing adaptability and revision are made possible as a part of the design of the packages.

A handful of innovative school systems are developing creative instructional packages especially tailored to their particular populations. In some cases, schools have joined in a consortium which develops and exchanges packages among the schools of the network. An example is Project PLAN (Program for Learning in Accordance with Needs), which was initiated in 1967 by the American Institute for Research, Palo Alto, California, the Westinghouse Learning Corporation, and schools in various parts of the United States.

In a "Package World" . . .

Aside from these frontier efforts, probably the majority of schools in the United States are continuing to obtain curricular packages from commercial publishers of educational materials. Assuming that, with the aid of the big publishing corporations, we are moving toward a "package world" and that most schools will select and integrate various packages rather than designing curriculum on the site, it becomes extremely important for us as teachers, curriculum workers, and professors to be aware of the distinguishing characteristics of well-designed packages and to become more discriminating as we make our curriculum decisions.

Finally, as we examine the package, we might keep in mind further questions such as these: Will it motivate individual learning? Is the student an active participant in the process, doing much more than just listening and reading? Does the package provide for self-direction, self-teaching on the part of the student? Does it stimulate investigation, search, and quest; does it lead him into new frontiers? Does it lead him out of the package into real life? Does it help to release the human spirit; help find what man must *be* as well as what he must *do*?

If we as educators can draw skillfully upon packages to reach toward the ideals expressed here, if we can see our changing roles in a new light, then we cannot be replaced by a package and an aide and we will deserve the professional status accorded to teachers, curriculum workers, and professors.

—GLENYS G. UNRUH, *Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, School District of University City, Missouri.*

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