

# Locally Identified Promising Programs: Quality Control Through Professional Judgment

Olga Moir

*"The identification and sharing of local promising programs, whether at the local or intermediate school district level, offers a new dimension of curricular options." Some successful programs are examined here.*

Today the American education system is being compelled to examine the processes used to improve education. Population declines and shifts, taxpayers' rebellions, and the decline of federal and foundation grants for program development are forcing educators to initiate new ways to effect educational change. Many schools no longer have the time, money, or staff needed to design and implement new programs on their own. The identification of programs of value to other school districts becomes critical as a possible curricular resource.

There are many approaches to use in determining the effectiveness and transportability of educational programs. The bank of Educational Programs that Work, offered by the National Diffusion Network (NDN) of the U.S. Office of Education, utilizes a highly quantitative screening and validation process. State level activities, which also offer a bank of validated promising programs, usually employ similar quantitative approaches. The use of student performance data, number of students involved, socioeconomic indicators,

start-up and operational costs, staffing requirements, and evaluation results are determining factors in judgments about program quality for many of the banks that deal with a broad and diverse political and geographic area.

Drawing from national and state validated program banks helps many schools meet their needs. Programs from these sources have proven track records and can be tailored to meet local needs after they are adapted. However, these banks are often of limited usefulness. Because of the nature of the initial program funding (Title I, Follow Through, and so on) the scope of the national and state program offerings is often limited to specific areas, such as elementary reading and mathematics. Also, many of the programs have been funded during the planning, developmental, and experimental stages, and in the time since their inception, educational priorities have often changed. What may have been a top priority program five or six years ago may no longer be so. The distance of many of these programs from the interested school site can also be a limiting factor, as it is difficult to examine a program that is across the country to see if it indeed meets local needs.

Because of these and other limitations, there is a substantial need for the development of programs unique to the local district. Such programs are usually generated in terms of locally felt needs and do not always rely on predetermined categorical funding from some outside source. They offer ease of access for others in the locality and can usually be implemented at reasonable cost, as most are operating on a shoestring or cost effective basis having not been favored by significant external funding. These programs are usually perceived as being credible, because they are not from some distant source, but from close at home. Additionally, local programs can be identified and validated by much less formal means and in less time than they can be by state and national banks. They can, therefore, enter a local program bank in a much shorter time and be ready for sharing with other districts that might find them useful.

An effort to systematically develop a bank of local programs is being made by Project VALUE (Validated Activities for Learners Use in Education), a Regional Supplementary Center established within the Michigan Adoption Program of the Michigan State Department of Education.



Laurajeon Milligan assists students at Region Four Open School, Farmington Hills, Michigan. Photo: John Collier.

Through the Wayne County Intermediate School District, Project VALUE serves Wayne County, the third largest county in the country, which includes the city of Detroit. Utilizing field staff, Project VALUE disseminates, through the key curriculum decision makers in the districts, national and state programs, as well as a local bank of promising programs that might meet local school needs.

To develop a local bank of promising programs required the hard work of a committee of Wayne County School District staff and curriculum representatives from local school districts. This group developed the criteria for the definition, nomination, and selection of promising programs for the Wayne County bank. The main ingredient for program selection was the professional judgment, and the expertise and interest of educators and interested lay people in the county.

Because the criteria specified that these programs must meet the high priority needs of Wayne County, a needs assessment technique was developed with the assistance of Project VALUE and Wayne County ISD staff and the curricular representatives of the local school districts. The

intent of this needs assessment was to determine areas of high local need where there was a lack of validated programs. The resultant list of identified needs for which programs were solicited follows:

- Alternative education
- The gifted and the talented
- Career education
- Classroom management systems
- Affective education
- Guidance programs
- Language development
- Positive parenting
- Consumer education
- Value clarification
- Early childhood education
- Bilingual/bicultural education
- Mathematics

Seventy-one programs were nominated by local school districts. The ones that met nomination criteria were moved to the selection stage. The core of the selection process for programs to be included in the local program bank is the Site Visitation Team. All programs were to be visited by a team, and this is where professional judgment comes into play. Team members are selected on the basis of proven professional expertise in a particular curricular area and on their interest in serving on the team. Each team includes personnel from local school districts other than the program home site, an intermediate school district consultant, a Project VALUE staff member, and parents, community persons, and students where appropriate. All descriptive and quantitative information available is considered by the Site Visitation Team in its deliberations following the onsite visit. The critical factor in the decision to include or not include the program in the bank is a consensus of the professional judgments of the team members.

Examples of programs selected for the bank are:

- *Region Four Open School*—A Detroit Public Schools alternative school that has as its goals the establishment of a child-centered approach dealing with the developmental needs of students including awareness and respect of themselves and others, mutual trust building between teach-

ers and children, and stressing the integral involvement of parents.

- *Elementary Guidance Program*—A South Redford School District program that has elementary counselors working with children, professional staff, parents, and the community. Counselors provide direct services to students and assist the staff in providing a mental health atmosphere that fosters a good self-concept in children and results in a reasonably happy and productive school experience. They also provide leadership in the career education program.

- *ALPHA*—A Livonia School District Alternative Learning Program for the High School Age Student that is designed to meet the needs of a wide variety of students. Working cooperatively with teachers, students create individual study programs that are based on their long-term educational and career goals, and reflect their interests and needs.

- *IGNITE* (Inspiring the Gifted and Nurturing Individuals Through Enrichment)—Dearborn School system program for students in the elementary, middle, and high school who are academically gifted or highly creative or talented. Enrichment within the classroom is strongly emphasized with the use of all available resources. In-depth studies, exploratory activities, creative pursuits, and challenging experiences are basic instructional elements of the students' program.

These and many other programs will be included in a catalog to be distributed within Wayne County. Resources will be provided to the selected programs to help prepare materials such as brochures to be distributed as needed to implement the program and to make it accessible to other school districts. This coming year, programs will be solicited from a broad range of curricular areas with an emphasis on secondary programs.

A complementary effort among the three Intermediate School Districts (Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne) that serve the Metropolitan Detroit area is the Tri-County Promising Programs Bank. The purpose of this bank is to surface and share exemplary programs that have been developed and operated at an intermediate school district level, and its development follows the same general procedures utilized by the Project VALUE local promising program bank. A particularly sig-



River Oaks' fifth-grade students watch as *IGNITE* Program Resource Teacher Alan McDonald reviews the process of broommaking. Photo: J. Sherman.

nificant component of the tri-county bank is the internal screening that takes place within each intermediate school district prior to submission of the program for potential inclusion in a tri-county bank. Each nominated program is then visited by a professional team from the other two counties. A consensus of professional judgment places the programs in the final bank. Examples of the 21 programs that were included in this bank are:

- *Computer-Assisted Career Guidance Program*—The Oakland Schools have a program to make relevant career guidance information more readily accessible to high school students via the use of computers. Group guidance activities, individual counseling, use of assessment data, job values clarification, and the use of career resources centers are other components of the program.

- *In-Service Needs Survey*—Wayne County Intermediate School District surveys and identifies the in-service needs of all of the professional administrators and staff of Wayne County. Each school district is provided with a computer print-out of the results pertaining to its staff as well as a summary of the countywide results. The data are



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## Project Value's Local Promising Program Nomination and Selection Criteria

The definition of a promising program is: A "promising program" is a systematic, identifiably different instructional process or organizational approach that is designed to meet locally defined educational needs and improve the instruction of students.

The criteria have three phases:

### Phase I—Nomination

The program will:

- Be located in Wayne County
- Be currently operational
- Have been operational for at least two years
- Be in an area of identified high priority educational need in

Wayne County

● Be available for examination by a visitation team (The team shall be representative and fluid in its composition according to the nature of the program being evaluated)

- Have specified goals
- Have specified objectives
- Indicate method(s) of instruction used
- Be suggested by a local school or school district
- Be available for visitation

### Phase II—Selection Information

The staff of the program will cooperate with Project Value and a visitation team to provide the following information:

- Evaluation results
- Facility requirement(s)
- Costs (start-up)
- Cost per pupil (operational)
- Local school district supportive services for project
- Staffing requirements
- In-service requirements
- Equipment needs for project
- Target population
- Materials produced by project
- Grade levels
- A brief description of how the program was conceived, planned, and developed

### Phase III—Operational Conditions (once in bank)

- Conditions of visitation
- Contact person
- Abstract available

Because the criteria specified that these programs meet the high priority educational needs of Wayne County, a needs assessment was developed and conducted with the assistance of the Linkers and the Intermediate School District staff. The needs assessment is currently being compiled and the process of identifying and screening Wayne County programs is now underway.

useful for planning local school district, multi-district, and countywide staff development.

● *Being a Parent Is*—Macomb Intermediate School District offers to local school districts a series of meetings for parents to examine child training activities based on a practical theory of human behavior and to develop effective communication skills in understanding and communicating with their children.

Both the local and tri-county banks have proved to be an excellent in-service activity for the staff members involved in visitations, and have greatly facilitated communication among the various school districts.

The identification and sharing of local promising programs, whether at the local or intermediate school district level, offer a new dimension of curricular options. These programs are from and of the real world. They meet real needs, and can easily be evaluated and shared. They are particularly valuable in filling gaps in more formally selected program banks. In addition to all of these advantages, the breadth of view gained by the process of developing such a bank is a very re-

warding endeavor in its own right. The participants gain professional knowledge, while at the same time contributing their expertise to the total effort. [E]



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