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We Will Get What We Expect: An Instrument for Screening Programs and Practices for Adoption

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Introduction

(The instrument is shown on pages 3-7)

Dissemination in both its disciplined and undisciplined forms has brought us what we have always wanted -- information in abundance. Much of it comes to us whether we seek it or not. We are impinged upon by brochures, flyers, articles, promotional faxes, catalogs, dog and pony shows, advertisements, web sites, listservs, and so on.

If we eventually follow up on some of this merchandise for our personal use, we have certain criteria in mind. Does it fit? Is it durable? Does it match other things we already have? Is it better than what we already have? How does it work? What conditions apply to its use? How is it maintained? Is it really what the advertising claims? These are the sorts of things we ponder when we shop for ourselves.

Many interests across the country (commercial, professional, nonprofit, federally funded, and otherwise) are purveying new practices and products for education. Let us call these people *sellers*. Their merchandise represents practices and products for improving instruction or otherwise raising the quality and efficiency of educational services. But we often examine -- and use -- this merchandise without asking the right questions, and the goods are often presented without features that would make some of the answers self-evident.

At the same time, many others are endeavoring to improve schools and classroom instruction through the adoption and implementation of new practices and products. These people may be called *buyers*. In sorting out the array of innovations that are available, buyers should seek to be systematic, objective, and responsible. A number of questions and criteria can and should be applied to the selection process, and these can be classified as three major consumer standards that form the bottom line of responsibility.

1. DOES IT WORK?

What objective evidence can the seller furnish to show that a practice or product is demonstrably effective in achieving what it claims?

2. WHAT ARE THE MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR REPLICATION?

Can the seller describe the attributes, procedures, and details that represent the integrity of the practice and that comprise its programmatic and management specifications? Has the innovation been prepared specifically for use by others?

3. DOES IT FIT?

Can the buyer define local conditions and contexts and use this information to determine which practices and products will best fit local characteristics? And can the seller provide information that will clarify the contexts in which the innovation is most likely to succeed?

When sellers are unable to respond to the first two questions, this means in fact that their practices are not yet ready to be adopted or adapted by others. When sellers can respond, then buyers have something to work with and can set about deriving other information for determining the match between the innovation and the potential user site.

If those who identify and adopt new practices and products can apply consumer standards, the commerce in educational dissemination/diffusion can become what it rightfully should be -- a buyers' market.

If we do not ask for evidence of effectiveness, minimum standards for replication, and information about the necessary conditions for successful implementation, we probably will not get them. *Instead, we are very likely to get innovation without change.*

If we all do ask for and require these criteria, we will get them from some sellers immediately and from many more in the future.

We will get what we expect.

Screening Programs and Practices for Adoption: The Instrument

YOU ARE THE BUYER. You are the selector or user of promising models and practices for education. THE SELLER is the developer or purveyor of a practice. The seller is responsible for presenting the innovation in terms that will make it possible for you to determine whether or not it will work and whether it fits your situation.

When you use this screening instrument, you are shopping to fill an identified programmatic need. (For example, you already know the curricular area and target population to be served by the practice you are seeking.) This screening instrument lists structural and contextual questions that you should ask about a practice and about your situation, and it suggests a scale for rating the relative match between the practice and your situation.

	<u>Ask the Seller</u>	<u>Ask Yourself</u>	<u>Rate the Match</u>				
Claims	What goals and objectives is the practice designed to achieve?	What goals and objectives are we seeking to fulfill?	1 No Match	2	3	4 Good Match	5
	Notes: _____						

Evidence	What evidence proves that this practice is successful in achieving what it claims?	Is evidence convincing? How stringently should effectiveness be demonstrated in this domain?	1 No Match	2	3	4 Good Match	5
	Notes: _____						

Relative Advantage	Does the new practice offer something that makes it better than what is already in operation here?	What evidence is there that shows that adopting this practice would advance our program or activity?	1 No Match	2	3	4 Good Match	5
	Notes: _____						

History of Use	In what administrative, geographical, and educational settings has the practice been successful?	What are the defining characteristics of our administrative, geographical, and educational setting?	1	2	3	4	5
			No Match			Good Match	

Notes: _____

Minimum Standards for Replication	Exactly what must the adopter do to achieve success?	How much are we willing and able to do in order to replicate the practice?	1	2	3	4	5
	Is the practice completely proscribed --or does it permit adjustments and tailoring by the adopter?	Are we seeking a flexible or proscribed program to meet this need?	No Match			Good Match	
	Does anything have to be added at the adopter site?	What are we willing and able to add to the practice we adopt?					
	Can the practice be tried out on a small scale first?	Is a trial effort desirable as part of the decision-making process?					

Notes: _____

Complexity and Convenience	How complicated are the procedures/sequencing that are necessary for implementing this practice?	What level of complexity can we accommodate to implement a new practice?	1	2	3	4	5
	How much discomfort and reorganization are likely to occur in implementation?	What level of discomfort and reorganization can be tolerated at our site?	No Match			Good Match	

Notes: _____

Compatibility	How much change will this practice create in the program, in the system, and in parallel activities?	How much overall change do we seek? How much system change can be accommodated?	1	2	3	4	5
			No			Good	
			Match			Match	
	What background or level of sophistication does the practice demand of users and/or participants?	What is the background and level of sophistication of our intended users and/or participants?					
	For child-centered, practices, what are the age levels and learning, behavioral, and other characteristics of children for whom the practice is designed?	What are the characteristics of the children who are intended to benefit from the adoption of a new practice?					
	Notes: _____						

Costs	What is the purchase price of adoption?	What budget has been estimated for adopting a new practice?	1	2	3	4	5
			No			Good	
			Match			Match	
	What is the cost of implementing and of maintaining the practice?	What budget has been estimated to implement and maintain a new practice?					
	What additional resources does the practice require in personnel, facilities, equipment, and supplies.	What additional resources are available for initiating and implementing a new practice?					
	What learning materials or implementation materials are required? What is their source and cost? Are they reusable or reproducible?	What budget has been estimated for purchasing supplementing, and reproducing materials?					
	Notes: _____						

**Assistance
With
Implementation**

How is the practice conveyed to new users?

What kinds of training or assistance would we need for implementation?

1 2 3 4 5
No Good
Match Match

What followup services and other assistance for problem-solving are provided?

Will we need external followup and problem-solving from the developer?

Notes: _____

Payoff

How rapidly does the practice achieve its goals?

What is our timeline for producing change?

1 2 3 4 5
No Good
Match Match

How many individuals can participate simultaneously?

What is the total number of people intended to participate in this practice?

Does the package include evaluation procedures for measuring success?

What are our criteria for judging the success of the replication of this practice?

Notes: _____

The program/practice called _____

was screened on _____ (date) by the following individuals:

This practice was judged ___ worthy ___ unworthy of:

- (a) ___ further consideration;
- (b) ___ demonstration;
- (c) ___ trial use;
- (d) ___ adoption;
- (e) ___ adaptation

Reasons:

This instrument was developed by Judy Smith-Davis for the OSEP-funded Dissemin/Action Project during the 1980s. It is derived from the classic R&D literature on the dissemination, diffusion, adoption, and implementation of innovations in education and related disciplines. The instrument (with variations of an accompanying article) have been published over the years by the California School Boards Journal, the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, the Alliance Project at Vanderbilt University, and others. The instrument remains valid as (a) a set of criteria that potential adopters should examine when considering a new model, practice, or product and as (b) a guide for developers in providing information on essential adoption issues that make successful implementation possible.

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