

**Questions
for
Evaluation
&
Selection
of
Instructional
Materials**



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The flood of instructional materials on today's educational market is overwhelming. If pertinent questions which assist in selecting instructional materials for classroom use aren't well thought out before the purchase, many new materials may end up stored in classroom closets.

The problem of evaluation and selection of appropriate materials has been magnified by the large number of instructional materials available and their increasing sophistication. Publisher's exhibits provide educators with opportunities for first-hand inspection of new instructional materials prior to purchase. However, a purchase based on first-hand inspection may be of no more value than a purchase based solely on the publisher's advertisement.

The key to wise buying is learning how to ask appropriate questions.

Today, many teachers are being asked for their feelings and opinions *before* materials are purchased. The following general questions cover several areas which should be considered before the purchase of any new instructional material. They are the types of questions to ask when a company is trying to convince you of the value of their product. These examples should also suggest related questions.

Can teaching objectives be met just as effectively with the material currently used in the present instructional program?

Frequently, teachers equate the potential effectiveness of any recent learning aid solely on the basis of its newness. The prevailing belief is in the inherent quality of a product simply because of its recent development rather than evaluating it on its usefulness as a teaching aid. It should come as no surprise that often those materials currently being used may be equal, if not superior, to those being considered for purchase.

Are there reliable research findings which support the use of the new material?

A primary consideration in the evaluation of all new instructional materials should be the review of any supporting evidence of its effectiveness in a classroom setting. Regrettably, there are many educational materials which are sold with little, if any, competent research basis for their use. Teachers should expect there be adequate data to support this decision before a product is purchased. It is unfortunate to note the reluctance of some publishers to provide this information. The rationale most often given for this lack of support data is the belief that classroom teachers are neither interested nor are they qualified to review research about an instructional material. In reality, this argument is often a cover to mask the lack of available studies which support the use of a particular product.

Does the increase in cost of the new materials justify the change?

An important part of any material selection process is the relative cost. The importance of the educational return in relation to the purchase expense should be considered. All too often the deciding question on cost is simply the purchase price with little thought given to factors such as the eventual number of students who will use the product, length of service before replacement, and expense of supplementary materials. Purchase price is important but only when these additional considerations are taken into account.

Is the teaching format of the new product (length of instructional time required, organization of the materials, etc.) designed so effective use can be accomplished in a classroom?

One of the most important factors in the selection of new material is the degree of efficiency with which the teacher may use it. Little value is obtained from teaching materials which require inappropriate teacher preparation and detailed classroom supervision procedures, or are limited in the number of children who may participate. It is unfortunate to note the amount of money spent on products which were so inefficient they were never used by classroom teachers.

Will the material be attractive, motivating, and appealing to the students?

If one universal characteristic of new materials were identified, it would be their appealing format. Fresh approaches to the use of art work, pictures, and page construction are typical of these changes. While these innovations may be appealing at first sight, a note of caution is needed. Many of these changes are only superficial, with little, if any attempt to actually enhance the purposes for which the materials were designed. The eventual selection of what is to be used for instruction in the classroom should be decided not on how the products look, but on their basic usefulness as teaching aids with children.

Does the publishing company have a preview policy which allows inspection of the material prior to purchase?

Perhaps the most effective approach in determining the value of an educational material is simply to try it in the class. No amount of prior discussion with various salesmen or reading of company advertising can adequately substitute for the knowledge gained through actually using the product in a teaching situation. Not only are you better able to make a reasonable decision about a potential purchase, but the reactions of the students in class can be considered.

Will the publishing company provide instruction and service both before teachers introduce the new materials in their classes and also during the actual use in the classroom?

Traditionally, publishing companies have included the development and sales of new educational products as a primary responsibility. While inservice education has been a part of many companies policies, it often is much more evident before a purchase is made. Careful consideration must be given to the willingness a company expresses concerning support both before and after the purchase. Accurate information can often be obtained from other school districts on these matters.

What do other teachers say about the instructional effectiveness of the potential purchase?

Other classroom teachers are often overlooked sources of information on the effectiveness of educational materials. Because they face essentially the same teaching problems, their comments and suggestions related to proposed purchases are frequently the most relevant. Many mistakes in the development of an effective curriculum can be avoided when other school systems are consulted about use of materials.

If teachers are to select appropriate usable materials which meet instructional needs, they must learn to ask the right questions.

The questions in this publication are suggested for consideration. Hopefully, they will provide a starting point from which individual questions, appropriate for special needs, can be formulated ●

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