

Peabody College

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37203



The Alliance Project

Headquarters

Peabody College, Box 160
Hill Student Center, Rm. 101
(615) 343-5610
1-800-831-6134
Fax (615) 343-5611
alliance@vanderbilt.edu

Washington, DC Metropolitan Office

10860 Hampton Road
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
(703) 239-1557
Fax (703) 503-8627
Email: judysd@gte.net

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We Will Get What We Expect! _____ An Instrument for Screening New Practices for Adoption

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, email announcements, and so on.

If we eventually follow up on some of this merchandise, 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 even the smallest items for ourselves.

Many interests across the country (commercial, professional, nonprofit, private, federally funded, and otherwise) are purveying new practices and products for education -- instructional models and materials, professional development programs, coursework packages, workshops, books, software, audiovisuals, distance learning programs, and other technological innovations. Let us call these people *sellers*. Their merchandise represents new practices and products for educating children, preparing personnel, improving instruction, or otherwise raising the quality and efficiency of educational services. Curiously, 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. And what we have here is a *sellers' market*.

At the same time, many others are endeavoring to improve the preparation and development of personnel and/or 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, as follows:

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 may very well 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. In this aspect of the educational enterprise, as in most others, *we will get what we expect*.

The attached 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 (and variations of the article) have appeared in several publications and remain 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 central adoption issues that make successful implementation possible.

Screening New Practices for Adoption: The Instrument

YOU ARE THE BUYER. You are the selector or user of promising practices for the preparation of personnel, or for classroom use by pupils and teachers, or for making changes in service delivery systems. 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 in 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: _____						

Effectiveness	What evidence proves this practice is successful in achieving what it claims?	How stringently should effectiveness be demonstrated by practices in this domain? Is the evidence convincing?	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: _____						

Ask the Seller

Ask Yourself

Rate the Match

**History
Of Use**

In what administrative, geographical, and educational settings has the practice been successful?

What are the definitive characteristics of our administrative, geographical, and educational setting?

1 2 3 4 5
No Good
Match 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 a practice?

1 2 3 4 5
No Good
Match Match

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?

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 and sequencing necessary for implementing this practice?

What level of complexity can we accommodate in implementing a new practice?

1 2 3 4 5
No Good
Match Match

How much discomfort and reorganization are likely to occur in implementation?

What level of discomfort and reorganization can be tolerated?

Notes: _____

Ask the Seller

Ask Yourself

Rate the Match

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 initiating 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, etc?

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: _____

Ask the Seller

Ask Yourself

Rate the Match

**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 and problem solving assistance are given?

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 _____ practice was screened on _____ (date) by:

It was judged ___ worthy ___ unworthy of: (a) ___ further consideration, (b) ___ demonstration, (c) ___ trial use, (d) ___ adoption because:

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Alliance Project of Peabody College/Vanderbilt University

Screening Practices
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