

# What is an Instructional Program?

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The term, instructional program, refers to a replicable instructional activity that is designed and implemented to achieve an instructional goal, namely, some clearly defined change or changes in a selected group of learners. The primary criteria for determining the success or the effectiveness of an instructional program are these measures of changes in the selected group of learners. These changes can be affective, academic, social, or physical.

Every instructional program combines a curriculum component (what we teach), and a teaching procedure (how we teach). An instructional program can be as small as a social skills lesson to teach a child to say thank you at appropriate times and in appropriate contexts. An instructional program can be as large as a two-semester algebra sequence, or the complete K-6 elementary reading program.

Whether small or large, an instructional program will have a curriculum component that defines the goal or goals we have for the learner and a set of teaching procedures (the pedagogy) which we plan to use to achieve the curriculum goal.

In each instructional program the essence of instructional accountability; e.g., program effectiveness, resides in the relationship between the curriculum component and the teaching component. If curriculum goals have been carefully and appropriately set for each learner, then teaching procedures must be progressively adjusted and revised based on the extent to which the curriculum goals have been achieved. The determination of goal achievement is based on measures of changes in the learner.

If, after exhausting the possible teaching procedure alternatives, we fail to achieve the curriculum goals, then we must revisit the assumptions that led us to believe the curriculum goal was appropriate for the learner. In many cases we will find that the reason a curriculum goal was inappropriate was our failure to ensure that the learner had the prerequisite knowledge, skills, or attitudes needed for success in the selected instructional program.

# Instructional Programs That Work: Generational Progress

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Slavin (19889) noted the tendency for education practices to swing from one fad to another. He stated:

If education is ever to made serious generational progress, educators must somehow stop the pendulum by focusing their efforts to improve education on programs that are effective, rather than on those are merely new or sound good (p. 758).

Central to Slavin's concerns is the notion of generational progress. To have generational progress we must have a system in place that ensures that the next generation of instructional efforts represents an improvement over the previous generation. Generational progress can occur in a number of instructional contexts. A school district can examine the test data form year to year, and use that information to make adjustments that ensure that the most effective practices are retained and that the less effective practices are replaced with more effective practices. A teacher can examine the instructional program implemented with one group of learners and use the information on learner changes to ensure that a more effective version of that program is used with the next group of learners.

Generational progress is difficult to achieve if we are not clear about what we are teaching and why we are teaching it. Additionally, we must be clear about the instructionally relevant characteristics of our learners, particularly the prerequisites needed for success in each instructional program. If our instructional programs are not clear and replicable, then generational progress is not possible, except by accident. We need to know how and why one generation of instructional effort differs from the previous generation.

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Generational progress is difficult if our reference points are not learner-centered. The most important information for making generational adjustments are the data we have on learner changes.

Decisions on effectiveness are not one-shot decisions. First, we use the best information available to select an instructional program. Second, we monitor the implementation of a program to verify that program goals, particularly the projected impact on all learners, are indeed being achieved.

In an ideal world teachers would be able to select from a range of effective programs. These programs would be valid. To be classified as valid, the program would do what it claims to do. The most important claims would identify the academic, social, attitudinal changes in learners. Other claims could include the costs, the amount of teacher support and training, the time needed to achieve the projected learner change and the extent to which other curriculum goals are supported.

The more diverse the learner population, the more limited the school district resources and the more restricted the instructional time available, the less likely the teacher will have access to effective instructional programs that have been validated for the learners they are teaching. While a teacher may not always have access to effective programs, it is important that a teacher be able to judge the potential effectiveness of instructional programs. If a teacher starts with a program that is less than ideal, then knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the program becomes very important. In such cases the teacher will have to address specific weaknesses in the curriculum component or the teaching procedure component (the program pedagogy) when the program is implemented. Additionally, the teacher monitoring of the program implementation will become extremely important, because immediate adjustments must prevent failure experiences.

Instructional effectiveness must be measured by examining the impact of specific instructional programs on students. Related terms of similar intent are program validity and learner verification. Instructional materials serve as vehicles to support the implementation of instructional programs. The term, learner verification, is often used in association with instructional materials. Bateman (1992), noted that, "Learner verification is simply documentation to indicate whether or not programs are effective." In order to verify or validate instructional materials, e.g., a textbook, we must know how the materials will be used in the classroom. The research has consistently noted the wide variability among teachers with similar students and using the same textbooks and related materials (Berliner, 1984; Brophy, 1986; Buchmann, 1981). While instructional materials can certainly limit or enhance a teacher's efforts, the associated teaching procedures (e.g., the effective use of teaching functions, time management, feedback procedures, etc.), will be very important.

# Criteria for Judging Instructional Program Effectiveness

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## *Question 1. Is the Instructional Program Clearly Defined?*

- Are there clear, practical descriptions of what instructors and learners will do?
- Are there tools that allow instructors to assess how well their activities are consistent with the requirements of the instructional program? Teacher checklists would be an example.
- Are there tools that allow teachers, learners, and parents to determine the impact of the instructional program on each student? Curriculum-embedded assessment instruments that would provide weekly measures of progress would be ideal.

## *Question 2. What Evidence Exists That the Program Is Effective?*

- Does the evidence involve measures of student impact, or is it limited to expert opinion?
- Are student gains in learning modest in regard to costs in time, training, and materials?
- Does the evidence include comparisons with other practical, but less costly, alternatives?
- Is the evidence tied to an individual or has the program worked well with different teachers?
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## *Question 3. Is An Accountability Process Built Into the Program?*

- Will learner and teacher measures provide useful program implementation information?
- Are resources available for teachers who wish to refine the implementation of the program?
- Will learner monitoring procedures ensure timely instructional adjustments to prevent learner failures?
- Will monitoring tools allow for determinations of alignment with district curricula and associated measures of student outcomes?

## *Question 4. Is the Program Sustainable?*

- Will the needed staff development be available to ensure uniformly high teacher success?
- Will teachers receive consistent long-term administrative support and recognition.
- Are resources committed for needed release time for planning and staff development?
- Will teachers be pressured with competing alternatives that dilute program resources?

## *Question 5. Is the Program Equitable?*

- Will the program impede the progress of any group of students?
- Has evidence on program effectiveness been analyzed for adverse effects on different learner groups?
- Equity does not mean the same approach for all. Does the program have the flexibility to successfully address needs of diverse learners?

# Suggestions for Using the Summary Rating

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The five evaluation questions were selected to summarize the available information on a program. To use the rating form:

First, make sure the minimum requirements to qualify as an instruction program are met, e.g., the available information must address both what is taught (the curriculum) and how the program is taught (the pedagogy). If these minimum requirements are not met, circle 1 for Question 1, and place note to identify the missing requirement in the Notes column.

Rate each question using the following four-point scale. Circle one number beside each evaluation question.

4 = Criterion met

3 = Minor Problems – Minor problem is one that can be addressed at modest cost by those responsible for implementing the program.

2 = Major problems – A major problem is one that substantively affects the possibility of consistent and effective implementations for all students. Typically, those implementing the program will have difficulty correcting a major problem, and such corrections will need to be done by program developers.

1 = Insufficient information – This rating is used to denote a lack of required important information, particularly information that addresses the considerations listed under each question.

Use the Notes column to summarize the type of problem and/or the missing information. The Notes column should be used if the rating is not A4.@

## Summary Rating: Instructional Program Effectiveness

Rating Scale: 4=Criterion Met 3=Minor Problems 2=Major Problems 1=Insufficient Information

*Program Title:*

Program Evaluation Questions	Rating	Notes
<p><b>1. Is the instructional program clearly defined?</b></p> <p>Considerations Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there clear, practical descriptions of what instructors and learners will do?</li> <li>• Are there tools that allow teachers, learners, and parents to determine the impact of the instructional program on each student?</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>	
<p><b>2. What evidence exists that the program is effective?</b></p> <p>Considerations Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the evidence involve measures of student impact or is it limited to “expert opinion”?</li> <li>• Are student gains in learning comparatively modest in regard to costs in time, training and materials?</li> <li>• Has the program worked well with a range of teachers?</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>	
<p><b>3. Is an accountability process built into the program?</b></p> <p>Considerations Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will learner and teacher measures provide useful program implementation information?</li> <li>• Will learner monitoring procedures ensure timely instructional adjustments to prevent learner failures?</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>	
<p><b>4. Is the program sustainable?</b></p> <p>Considerations Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will the needed staff development and implementation resources be available to ensure uniformly high teacher success?</li> <li>• Will teachers be pressured with competing alternatives that dilute program resources?</li> </ul>	<p>4</p> <p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p>	

## Summary Rating: Instructional Program Effectiveness

Rating Scale: 4=Criterion Met 3=Minor Problems 2=Major Problems 1=Insufficient Information

*Program Title:*

Program Evaluation Questions	Rating	Notes
<b>5. Is the program equitable?</b> Considerations Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="207 533 883 638">• Has evidence on program effectiveness been analyzed for adverse effects on different learner groups?</li><li data-bbox="207 646 867 751">• Equity does not mean the same approach for all. Have the needs of the children of poverty and learners with disabilities been considered?</li></ul>	4 3 2 1	

# References: Instructional Programs

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