



3. Analyzing Early Childhood Education Programs: *C. Administrative Considerations*

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THE power of any institutional program depends, to a large extent, upon certain key factors. These factors relate to the effectiveness with which the administration provides leadership, support, and a system designed to anticipate and solve administrative questions in a timely fashion. This section lists and comments upon four sets of basic variables that relate to the initiation and conduct of an early childhood program. These variables and the accompanying explanation may be used to analyze existing programs being considered for possible adoption (or modification). They may also be used as guides to the creation of new programs for young children.

The variables have been grouped in four categories: (a) prerequisites for adoption/initiation of a program; (b) staff development; (c) staff involvement; and (d) community involvement. The variables discussed in this section must be considered irrespective of the nature of the program's objectives or the strategies chosen to reach those objectives with children.

Prerequisite Considerations

1. Can you determine the nature of the population to be served? Is the program under consideration relevant to the needs of the target population in your locale?

Model early childhood education programs now in existence have been designed, in many instances, for specific target populations, and the evidence for their effective-

ness has been determined by reference to that group of children. For example, the program developed at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas, was designed for three-, four-, and five-year-old Mexican American children and may not be effective with inner city black children or with six-year-old mildly retarded children. The criterion of relevance must include the age and experiential background of the children served, the objectives of the program, and the degree to which the objectives are related to the needs of the target children. Another criterion is the degree to which the program is designed to serve a heterogeneous group of children with respect to age, background, and needs.

2. What minimal qualifications must the staff have to implement the program under consideration? Some programs are designed as total "packaged" programs to be put into operation by persons who are trained only in the implementation of that particular program. Others are designed to provide a program framework with objectives, strategies, and general format already determined, but with specific lessons, curriculum, and schedule left to the creative efforts of the local staff. Other programs require a differentiated staff with lead teachers, supervisors, teaching assistants, volunteers, home visitors, or some combination of these persons. The

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administrator must also determine the minimum qualifications required by local or state regulations. These regulations may be inconsistent with the staff qualifications demanded by a particular program. Thus, one should ask:

a. What types of personnel, and with what educational background, are required by the program?

b. What types of personnel, and with what educational background, are required by local or state regulations?

c. What incongruities are there between local/state regulations for staff and requirements of the program being considered?

3. What is the ratio of staff to children served? Most programs specify the number of children who can be served effectively by each staff member in the implementation of the program. An administrator must determine these ratios for each of the staff involved to assess the probability of local implementation based on personnel available in the area and staffing patterns in other units of his organization.

In most programs the teacher is the basic unit upon which all other staff ratios are based, for example, one teacher per 15 children with 2 aides/assistants; one supervising teacher for each group of 4 teachers.

4. What are the space requirements for the implementation of the program? Space requirements are determined by local and state regulations as well as by the demands of a program. The demands of a program differ greatly with the objectives, the length of the program day, the types of activities required, and the number of children served in each unit. If at all possible, the analysis of a program should include the determination of a space unit requirement per child in order to arrive at reasonable estimates of space demands for each program.

5. What are the time requirements of the program? Time requirements are dependent upon the nature of the program being considered as well as upon local constraints. Some programs are complete and provide for a full school day including all

aspects of development and education. Other programs are focused on a narrower range of objectives and provide programming for only portions of a complete school day.

Local constraints vary among communities. In some rural areas where transportation is a problem, children must be involved in full-day programs so that routine transportation facilities may be used. In other areas the demands require care for young children in a full-day program so that parents may work. Some programs may be designed for only a portion of the day, or to reach a limited set of objectives. Such arrangements should not be excluded from consideration since local plans can be designed around less comprehensive programs that are otherwise appropriate for the community. The main kinds of time periods are the following:

Day-care model (early morning-early evening)

Full school day

One-half day within school hours

One-half day not exclusively within school hours

Others.

6. What are the transportation requirements of the program? Most programs under consideration will have no specific requirement for transportation except as each program requires children to be at a particular locale at a particular time. Each administrator, however, must consider the expense factor and arrange for appropriate transportation schedules. Some programs do have significant transportation components within them. Each program should be analyzed with regard to the need for staff travel and the transportation of children for field trips which are integral program activities.

7. What are the initial start-up costs of each program? Start-up costs will vary significantly from program to program depending upon staff-child ratios, level of staff training at entry, equipment, material, time, staff-development, evaluation, and dissemination requirements. An analysis of each program should include the initial costs of each of these components to arrive at an estimate of start-up costs.

Staff Development

The analysis of prototypic early childhood programs must include factors relating to staff development. A critique must be made of the capabilities of the originators or proponents of such a program to conduct staff development activities for an organization which wishes to install that particular program. An administrator should ask the following questions:

Does the program require special training?

What is the minimum amount of training required to initiate the program?

How much time will be required for the initial preservice training?

What is the cost of initial training per staff member trained?

Does the program require additional in-service training?

What is the proposed spacing of in-service training?

What type of in-service training is required?

What resources are needed for in-service training?

What is the cost of in-service training?

Who receives initial training? Supervisors only? Teachers? Aides/Assistants? Volunteers? Community representatives? Additional teachers who receive children from the program into their classes?

What incentives for engaging in training are provided the recipients? College credit? Additional pay? Released time? Promotion?

Staff Involvement

In order to install a program for young children, it is essential that the staff be involved in several levels of the installation process to ensure that the program is properly implemented. Program development hinges on the effectiveness with which the staff has an opportunity to participate in the decision-making processes. The administrator will need to analyze new programs with respect to the degree to which the staff is involved in these decision-making levels:

- a. Selecting the particular program
- b. Planning the installation process
- c. Developing policy positions for the program
- d. Developing supplementary materials and adapting the program to the needs of local children
- e. Developing and implementing evaluation procedures
- f. Developing dissemination procedures within the local organization and its community
- g. Continuing involvement in the problem-solving process.

The degree to which a program to be adopted lends itself to the implementation of the processes of staff involvement should be determined for each program under consideration. For example, a program which predetermines objectives, strategies, policy, materials, and evaluation procedures may be less useful in the long run than a program which depends upon local initiative in the determination of policy, materials, adoptions, and so on.

Community Involvement

The longevity of a program depends in a certain real sense on the degree of community involvement in the process of program development. Programs differ in the degree to which they provide for the involvement of the community in the implementation process. The administrator must examine programs under consideration with regard to the following potential points of community involvement:

- a. Selection of the particular program
- b. Sources of volunteer support
- c. Parent education accompanying the program
- d. Information provided communities with respect to the nature of program objectives and methods
- e. Degree to which the community is involved in policy decisions
- f. Degree to which community people, including parents, are included in the training process. □

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