



3. Analyzing Early Childhood Education Programs: A. *The Nature of Educational Objectives*

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EDUCATORS and other professionals are confronted with a renewed concern for the development of early childhood education programs. A preliminary process leading to local program development is the examination of existing types of early childhood education programs. This process is facilitated and objectified to some extent through analysis of the various types of goals related to these programs. The scheme for analysis of objectives characteristic of individual programs may be represented by a triadic hierarchy (Figure 1).

Program Goals

The objectives of a particular program may be described at any one of these levels: program, intermediate, or instructional. Some statements, in fact, contain a mixture of unrelated objectives at several levels.

Program Objectives

Program objectives are extremely broad in nature, serving to describe the major intent of a program. Program sponsors may communicate their intent as *custodial*, though this is unlikely, given current emphasis on educational child care; or they may publicize their major intent as *educational*.

Publicized objectives are not always true indicators of actual practice, and the operational program should be examined before making final judgments about program objectives. If the program is truly *custodial*, concerned only with keeping children confined while parents work, no further analysis of educational objectives is needed. Such a program is indefensible from a child development-education point of view. Given an early childhood *education* program emphasis or objective, the evaluator may examine the reports and/or operational procedures of the program to determine *precise* objectives.

Intermediate Objectives

Intermediate objectives are selected on the basis of existing knowledge about human development—how humans develop intelligent behavior or the incremental evolution of the individual's abilities to control the environment. For educational purposes, the major dimensions of development are typically categorized as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Such categorization is highly

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artificial, particularly the cognitive-affective dichotomy, for increase in control over one's environment is affected when emotional or psychological damage or benefit is effected.

Similarly, typical curriculum process-content-product dichotomies are highly artificial for these are, in the strictest sense, inseparable. Nonetheless, it seems essential for communication that certain of the intermediate-type objectives be identified and described in relation to common classificatory patterns (Figure 2).

The identification of intermediate objectives and their categorization into a systematic framework help to assure that important dimensions—for example, socialization, language—are not under- or over-emphasized, though a strong case may be made for switching, adding, or deleting elements of the particular categorization system.

Instructional Objectives

Broad goals are appropriate as directives for programs or units of study. Systematic analysis of program and intermediate objectives leads to specific instructional objectives, for program goals are logical outcomes of instructional goals. Specific instructional goals actually define program goals. A prevalent pattern in curriculum development is to base instruction and evaluation on broad program goals. Educators with a behavioral-environmental orientation see this practice as evidence of a vast leap of faith and logic, while those with a cognitive-transactional view may consider specific statements of instructional objectives far too narrow and restricting.

Support that instructional objectives are linked to psychological evidence is most clearly seen in reply to the question, "Should instructional objectives be stated in behavioral terms?" A number of books have been published on this issue in recent months (McAshan, 1970; Popham and Baker, 1970; Armstrong *et al.*, 1970; Kibler *et al.*, 1970), and arguments for and against behavioral objectives are accumulating (see Popham, 1970; Macdonald and Wolfson, 1970).

Educators deal with the child's behavior

by necessity because they have no direct control over genetics and neurophysiology, at least for the present. Such important global dimensions as knowing, understanding, and valuing cannot be directly observed, so the educator acts and reacts (teaches) on the basis of what he or she can observe, that is, the direct behavior of the student (what he does, says, or writes). From such observations the teacher can only *infer* knowing, understanding, and valuing.

The range of present early childhood programs is extremely broad in nature, including, at one end of the continuum, the day care-custodial-socially oriented-therapeutic types, and, at the other extreme, academically oriented-concentrated instruction types, with many possible varieties in between. Each type may conceivably have the same ultimate goal: the development, in general terms, of a "fully functioning" individual. The perpetrators of each program may simply have a different point of view regarding the proper procedure for assisting in the development of such a person.

Objectives do not inherently fix methodologies. The personnel of the socially oriented schemes may feel that logical procedure is to provide a variety of materials and socializing opportunities and to guide the child to explore and discover relevant social and intellectual behaviors for himself. In such situations, instructional objectives usually are either unspecified or are stated in very general terms. This places a great burden of interpretation upon the observer, who attempts to conceptualize operational bases and procedures, and it severely limits communication to others who would attempt replication.

Some operational instructionally-oriented programs use precise behavioral goals, usually ordered in a hierarchical manner; evaluation is sometimes constructed to match these goals. Precise objectives allow for precise definition of a program, assuming, of course, that methodology and other major curricular dimensions are defined. The fact that socially oriented programs are not typically defined by precise objectives does not necessarily mean that they could not be or

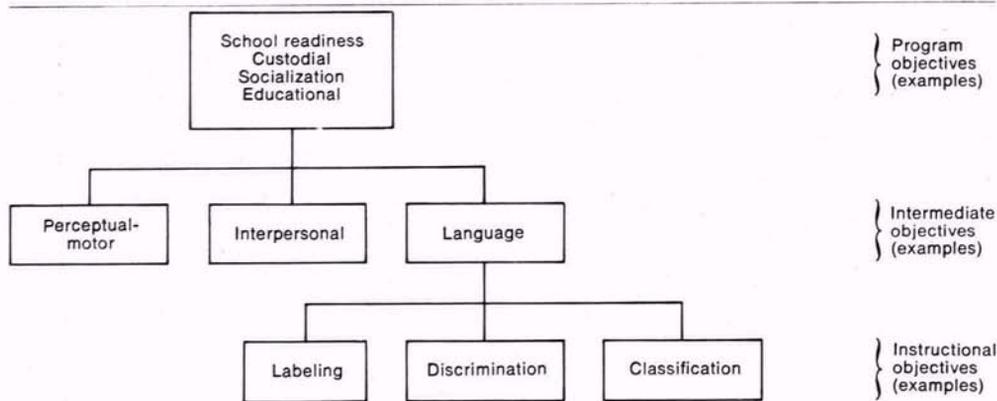


Figure 1. Analysis of Objectives of Individual Programs

should not be, but rather that social ends are not as amenable to precise definition as are cognitive ones.

Characteristics of Objectives

In addition to a determination of the levels at which objectives are described, analysis can be continued by examining: (a) the range and priority of objectives; (b) the degree of relatedness seen among them; and (c) their process-content-product focus.

Range and Priority

The range of objectives may vary from almost total emphasis upon one objective (for example, language) to a broadly-based program encompassing most or all of the types of objectives shown in Figure 2. Three interrelated factors are influential here: (a) how the sponsors of the program view the nature and needs of the children for whom the program is intended; (b) what relationships are assumed to exist among various categories of behavior; and (c) the underlying view (implicit or explicit) of human development and learning.

Many current preschool programs are intended for "disadvantaged" children. Therefore, selection of objectives for such programs is based on analyses of the ways

in which children from such families differ from those that are more "advantaged." (The use of this basis for selection cuts across all views of development and learning.) Some educators see the "disadvantaged" as lacking certain behavior patterns such as impulse control, ability to follow the rules of classroom conduct, specific language skills or vocabulary, or auditory and visual discrimination skills, and believe that each of these patterns can be taught separately.

Others focus on broader characteristics such as attention span, delay of gratification, self-concept, and achievement motivation or on more inclusive objectives such as competence. Each program gives priority to the objectives considered most crucial to the child it serves, while assuming that other objectives: (a) are achieved in other ways (for example, through home or family); or (b) will be fulfilled as secondary or concomitant learnings.

Careful examination of representative programs shows that objectives may be unspecified yet inherent in ongoing methodology and in the outcome measure used. If a relatively consistent methodology is employed, these inherent objectives may be derived through systematic analysis. For example, motivation and persistence, though not specified as objectives, may result from the careful sequencing of tasks, the social

reinforcement (verbal) from the teacher, and the consistent success of pupils in performing increasingly complex tasks.

Degree of Relatedness

Another influence on the range of behavior dimensions identified in objectives and the levels (program, intermediate, instructional) at which they are described is the sponsor's view of the degree of interdependence among these dimensions. If individual behaviors are seen as responses to be associated with other behaviors through the proper programming of cues and reinforcement contingencies, then the objectives, at the instructional level, tend to be quite specific and focused on those behaviors considered relevant to the attainment of broader goals.

Objectives tend to be more general (intermediate level) if specific behaviors or learnings are viewed as closely related to one another within broad mental structures, and thus dependent upon the development of these structures.

The *products* of educational intervention, for example, abilities to perform given tasks, result from *processes*, and processes require *content*—an inseparable relationship. Given a desired product, the ability to dis-

criminate between four shapes, one teacher may choose language drill as a teaching medium, requiring the child to repeat over and over, "A square has four equal sides," or "A triangle has three sides." In isolation this would represent an extreme version of the "teaching English as a foreign language" technique, and the alert teacher would learn that parroting words for which insufficient conceptual referents or prerequisite abilities had been established is wasteful.

A second teacher might provide a set of wooden shapes and allow the children to explore them, in either a leisurely or a structured fashion. Yet the language referents may not be developed, teacher questioning may be limited, and pupil talk may not be systematically encouraged. Such a situation may be found in some Montessori programs enrolling "disadvantaged" children.

A third teacher may provide for both systematic language interaction and object exploration but choose to allow children to abuse one another verbally and physically, and she may produce certain other undesirable behaviors through punitive or coercive actions. Certain objectives may be emphasized and others deemphasized in the early childhood program, but not to the extent that fundamental interrelationships between pro-

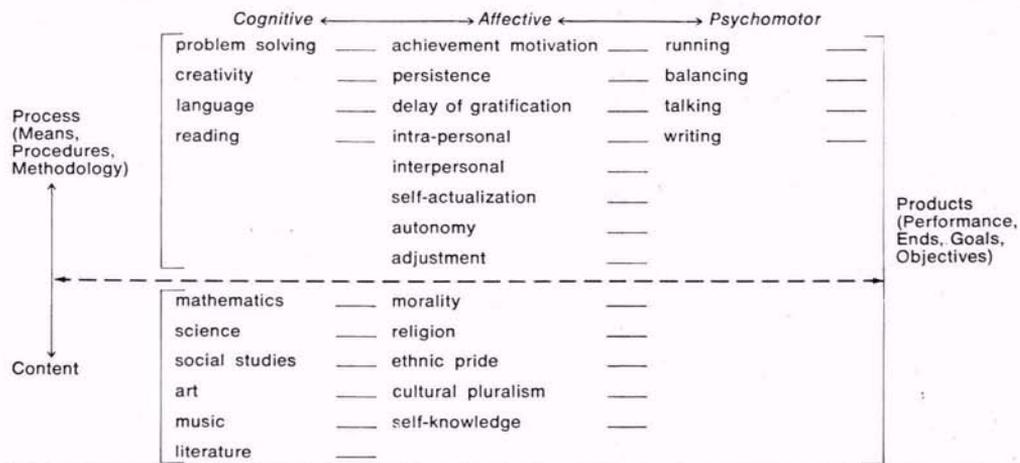
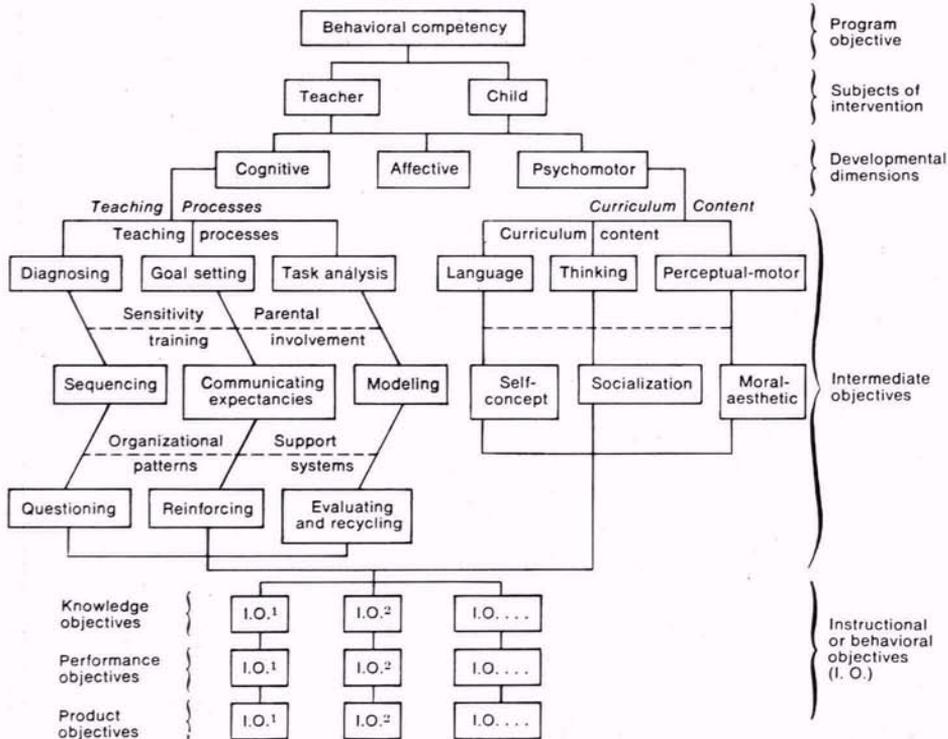


Figure 2. Intermediate Objectives (Representative)



Note that the two major dimensions of the model are (a) *teaching processes* and (b) *curriculum content* (which may be considered processes). In teacher education, curriculum content is mastered primarily through the use of *knowledge objectives*; teaching processes are mastered primarily through the use of *performance objectives*; and the ultimate worth of the teacher education program is measured by means of criterion-referenced *product objectives* or the performance of pupils.

Figure 3. A Dyadic Model for Teacher Education—Early Childhood Curriculum

cess, content, techniques, and objectives are jeopardized.

Process-Content-Product Focus

The writer rejects the notion of *un-equivocal* differentiation of "process," "content," and "product." However, he presents here an operational scheme for program analysis, since programs tend to emphasize one or more of the three factors in their statements of objectives. For purposes of program analysis, "process" may be defined as: (a) the systematic series of actions (teaching methodology and learning activi-

ties) directed toward some end (objective), for example, the set of teacher-child behaviors characteristic of "discovery" learning; and (b) a series of progressive and interdependent steps by which an end is attained, for example, the cumulative acquisition of abilities or competencies in the evolution of language or, in a broader sense, intelligent behavior. In the most elementary terms, process refers to "how" an objective is to be achieved.

"Content" is defined as the substance or matter of the educative process, for example, mathematics, science, music. Referring to Figure 2, it is seen that certain elements, for

example, "religion," "ethnic pride," readily fit in the categories of "process" and "content," for they obviously include more than mere subject matter to be learned.

"Product" refers to that which is produced by, or results from, an action or operation (process). "Product" may be defined as the achievement of a given objective evidenced by measured performance of particular tasks or skills, or in simplest terms, "what" is to be achieved.

The process-oriented program emphasizes procedures or means, "how" things are done, for example, how to identify objects, how to construct with blocks, how to discriminate and classify, how to get along with one's peers. Also involved is learning what to look for in certain situations and subject areas when certain kinds of operations, for example, classification or seriation, are applicable, and how to check one's answers.

Some process-oriented programs lack specific instructional objectives. The early Head Start programs, for example, relied upon a series of 12 broad program goals. Consequently, guidelines were subject to almost infinite interpretation. Similarly, a number of experimental program developers seem to confuse objectives (ends) with procedures (means). Examples of stated "instructional objectives" gleaned from the Follow Through models are: "to involve children" and "to encourage participation." These are merely broad statements of desired teaching procedures and should not be construed as objectives or ends.

Figure 3 illustrates how teaching procedures are integrated with curriculum variables. This model shows the inseparable relationships among various types of objectives, teaching processes, curriculum content, developmental processes, and support systems. None of these elements alone represents a complete program for young children. Process-oriented programs are more consistent with the cognitive-transactional view of development than with the behavioral-environmental view.

The content-oriented program emphasizes what is to be learned, for example, the numerals to ten, selections of verses or songs,

names of body parts, role of community helpers, or the letters of the alphabet. Kindergartens geared to developing "readiness for school" usually emphasize content to be learned. The maturational-normative view is typically held by those who produce programs with a content emphasis.

The product-oriented program emphasizes observable outcomes. In contemporary programs, outcomes are defined in terms of behavioral change. Behaviorally stated objectives are specified in advance of teaching. The act of teaching is viewed as hypothesis testing (X teaching should produce Y behavior), and the success of the selected methodology (hypothesis) is judged by the child's performance on a given task. Emphasis upon product (getting to the desired end as soon as possible) is more consistent with the behavioral-environmental view of learning and development than with the other views described.

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