

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

*Correspondents: Barak Rosenshine  
James D. Raths*

### **Teaching for Specific Objectives in Specific Ways**

Urbana, Illinois

Dear Editor:

Although many teachers and teacher educators would be quite comfortable with the suggestions espoused by James D. Raths<sup>1</sup> in his article "Teaching Without Specific Objectives," there remains a minority who might like more structure and direction. This article is an attempt to provide such structure. It contains six specific educational goals, and six specific processes or procedures to be followed in obtaining these goals.

The educational goals are:

1. Students will learn to make informed choices and reflect on the consequences of these choices.
3. Students will learn to inquire into ideas, and apply intellectual processes to current problems.
6. Students will learn to examine ideas, applications, and current problems in a new setting.
7. Students will habitually examine topics or issues that citizens do not normally examine.
8. Students will learn and practice en-

gagement in intellectual risk taking in which ideas can succeed or fail.

10. Students will learn the mastery and application of meaningful rules, standards, or disciplines.

Readers may not agree with all these goals (and may be puzzled by the numbering), but they are free to select and adapt. As yet, we have inadequate means of measuring the attainment of these goals, yet this is a technical problem which can probably be solved in the testing offices in Palo Alto and Iowa City.

In order to obtain these goals, we would expect that students would engage in these activities and, through practice and successive approximation, reach the criteria. That is, just as they learn reading comprehension by appropriate practice and instruction in relevant activities, we would expect them to achieve a goal such as intellectual risk taking by taking risks—first on a simple level, and later on a more complex level, such as submitting articles for publication.

I suggest six procedural guidelines which a teacher might use to facilitate student learning of the goals. The first three guidelines appear important for the instructional process; the last three appear useful,

<sup>1</sup> James D. Raths. "Teaching Without Specific Objectives." *Educational Leadership* 28 (7): 714-20; April 1971.

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for encouraging or motivating students to practice.

2. Students should have an active rather than a passive role in the instructional process.
4. The activities should involve children with realia.
9. The activities should require that students rewrite, rehearse, and polish initial efforts.
5. Completion of task should be allowed at several levels of ability.
12. The activities should be relevant to the expressed interests of students.
11. Students should share in planning and carrying out the plan.

The reader can now take Raths' article (or a reasonable facsimile) and compare his list of criteria for teaching without specific objectives with my six goals and six processes.

My list is Raths' list; the above enumeration is identical to his; the wording of my "goals" has been changed from his wording of the "criteria" for evaluating teaching without specific objectives.

The point is that Raths' list of twelve criteria for teaching without objectives can be divided into a list of six fairly specific goals, and six fairly specific instructional procedures. The six goals are quite different from the traditional "grill and drill," but it is illusionary to infer from Raths' article that none of his criteria for evaluating classroom transactions implies fairly specific objectives.

If one endorses Raths' six educational ends, as I do, then a number of developmental, research, and measurement tasks remain, and all of these are quite difficult. First, many teachers will need to be provided with curriculum materials packages which contain both materials and methodological suggestions for attaining these ends. More important, we will need to develop measures to assess attainment of these excellent ends. The fact that teachers will be working toward these ends does not ensure that the goals will be attained any more than the fact that reading is part of the curriculum ensures that all students are becoming literate.

In the process of developing measures for the attainment of these ends, the people involved in the development of the instruments or assessment situations should not be surprised if they find themselves talking about very specific behavioral objectives by which attainment will be measured. The objectives will not be criterion-referenced in the sense that all students will be expected to demonstrate identical behaviors, but the objectives will certainly be domain-referenced<sup>2</sup> in the sense that there will be a list of com-

<sup>2</sup> Wells Hively II, Harry L. Patterson, and Sara H. Page, "A 'Universe-Defined' System of Arithmetic Achievement Tests," *Journal of Educational Measurement* 5 (4): 275-90; Winter 1968.

petencies for the observer and/or test writer to use to determine the degree to which, for example, a student has learned to inquire into ideas and apply intellectual processes.

One such test might be to present a student with Raths' and my papers and ask him to identify the flaws and merits of our discussion of a current issue. The development of this suggestion came easily; the development of a useful coding scheme will be extremely difficult, but it will involve specific objectives.

BARAK ROSENSHINE

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## A Response

College Park, Maryland

Dear Editor:

Professor Rosenshine's comments are welcome and appreciated. His point might have been better made if he had offered specific Mager-like objectives for us to inspect. His paper suggests that such goals and associated measuring instruments can be defined and are in the offing. The article he cited in the *Journal of Educational Measurement* seems to be a bit more pessimistic on that score even in the rather constrained area of arithmetic, not to mention the broad goal areas he chose to identify.

Given the current concern with accountability in our field, I am reluctant to advocate the specification of goals. With reputations at stake and more, it seems natural for teachers to teach for specific behaviors rather than for generalized domains. A good example of this phenomenon is found in our graduate

schools. Students are tested to evaluate their generalized competence in a foreign language. As a result of many pressures, students tend to study for the ETS language examination with little pretense that a passing score represents anything more than getting a certain number of correct answers on the examination.

Let's reject the "production line" view of education, excepting perhaps some of the basic skills associated with communication, and instead see education in a broader context—an involvement of children in worthwhile activities—activities that promise to interest them, that promise to challenge them—and let us accept the responses of students to these activities—whatever they may be.

JAMES D. RATHS

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