

# Toward an Operationally Defined Curriculum

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**P**RESUMABLY every decision made in the educational process—including the selection of instructional activities and materials, the use of time, and the choice of evaluative procedures—has a guiding rationale. This rationale, in turn, ideally springs from an educational philosophy typically formulated in terms of one or more long-range goals.

Simply put, *educational philosophy* might be defined as the answer to the question, "What are we educating students for?" Our society and the educational agencies within it, ranging from lone scholars to school boards and national commissions, have quite properly devoted a great deal of thought to answering this question, and to distilling from their deliberations an educational philosophy on which daily classroom activities can be based.

Most often, however, this philosophy is left implicit rather than explicit, with the result that the teacher has to guess at the intentions implied by a set of long-range goals, rather than being equipped with the ability to translate those goals into specific classroom behaviors. In a recent study of kindergarten classrooms, one of the authors compared the stated goals of teachers with their instructional practices as revealed by classroom observation. The study indicated

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*Only as teacher education institutions undertake to design curricula that progress from long-range goals to operationally defined behaviors to preservice tasks, can their graduates be expected to breathe classroom life into an educational philosophy.*

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that even well-informed teachers were not doing what they claimed to be doing.

For example, one objective mentioned by virtually every teacher interviewed was that instruction should "help a youngster become independent." Yet observation indicated that nearly 80 percent of class time was devoted to teacher-directed activities. Teachers told the children when to sing, when to play with blocks, when to listen to a story, when to go to the bathroom, and when to get a drink. Another goal held by all the teachers was that the child "learns to communicate with persons around him"; however, actual classroom practice required the children to sit still, be quiet, and listen to the teacher for virtually the entire school day.

Clearly some degree—perhaps even a

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high degree—of teacher control is necessary for the proper functioning of a classroom at any level. But teacher control should have a purpose, too, and in the classrooms observed, the teachers did not use their control to select instructional activities that would promote either independence or peer-group communications, even though both these goals supposedly ranked high on the teachers' agenda.

The authors are convinced that this disparity between stated goals and actual practice is not an isolated phenomenon, unique to this single study. They are further convinced that this disparity is not the fault of teachers, but of the abstract terms in which educational philosophies and long-term goals are usually expressed, and the failure of teacher education institutions to help their graduates trace the practical, pedagogical implications of proclaimed objectives.

Certainly, no school board should dictate, hour by hour, day by day, how a teacher should translate a community's instructional aims into practice; such interpretation is and should be the prerogative of the professional. Equally as certain, however, teacher education institutions should provide their graduates practice in translating philosophy into specific objectives; otherwise, statements of philosophy will remain empty credos, obediently echoed by teachers but ignored by them in practice as pious hopes which have little relation to the realities of classroom practice.

The crucial question is whether broad educational goals *can* be translated into specific instructional activities, and whether training in this process can be provided. Must an individual's ability to select classroom activities that carry out a stated philosophy depend entirely on unusual ability or fortunate intuition, or can it be developed and strengthened by activities built into the teacher education curriculum? Must such an ability, in sum, remain the gift of a talented few, or can it become the province of the competent many?

The authors believe the latter is the case, and offer in the following pages illustrations of a process by which long-term goals can be translated into a series of operationally defined preservice tasks.

## What Are the Goals?

As a hypothesis for these illustrations, let us assume that the faculty members of a teacher education institution reached broad consensus on a number of value statements which, in their view, constituted a description of "good education." Once identified, these statements would compose the nucleus of a teacher education program. As the nucleus, they would provide a starting point or guide for program development. At the same time, the list of commonly agreed-upon goals would preserve the autonomy of the individual professor because it neither exhausts all possible objectives nor dictates the means for their achievement.

Let us assume, further, that the planners and evaluators of a teacher education program agreed upon the following goals as desirable characteristics in their graduates:

1. They accept and encourage creative or divergent behavior.
2. They communicate positively with their pupils, in ways that strengthen the pupils' belief in their own capacity to learn and their interest in doing so.
3. They can identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual students, and they utilize this knowledge in their teaching.
4. They understand and respect a child's cultural heritage, and recognize it as an important element in motivating students.
5. They stimulate pupils to take an active part in shaping the learning environment.

Few educators, the authors suspect, would reject any of these goals as desirable. But the general nature of these goals as stated allows unlimited interpretation, and provides no assurance that any given skill, understanding, or attitude will be represented in the program. Reaching agreement on long-range goals is only a first step in developing a teacher education program; before the curriculum can reliably reflect the intended philosophy of these goals, the education faculty must—to the greatest extent possible—define these general goals operationally, in terms of desired teacher behavior.

One would expect different faculties to

formulate their long-range goals and supporting tasks in different ways; however, any formulation should be regarded as preliminary, open to continuous revision and, thus, to continuous instructional innovation.

The following examples are illustrative only, and are intended to explain a strategy for curriculum development, not to prescribe one. They are by no means all-inclusive but are intended to show how a process for translating long-range goals for teacher behavior into preservice tasks can be achieved.

**Long-Range Goal 1. Teachers who accept and encourage creative or divergent behavior in children.**

<i>Teacher Behavior</i>	<i>Preservice Task</i>
The teacher is able to state his personal conception of the creative process.	After reading from a selected bibliography related to the nature of creative teaching, the teacher candidate will view the film, "Why Man Creates," and summarize in writing a personal conception of the nature of the creative process.
The teacher is able to distinguish between student behaviors which are convergent and those which are creative or divergent.	After participating in guided discussion concerning the identification of convergent and divergent student responses, the teacher candidate will, when given several descriptions of student behavior, identify those student responses which are convergent and those which are divergent in nature.
The teacher is able to identify teaching behaviors which are likely to foster openness to new experiences and which encourage inquiry, exploration, and involvement.	After completing an instructional module called "Teaching for Creativity" and after participating in a series of guided analyses of videotaped teaching sequences, the teacher candidate will view a videotaped teaching sequence and identify those teaching strategies which appear to stimulate creative and divergent behavior.
The teacher creates a teaching environment in which creative and divergent behavior is fostered.	Using input from the foregoing tasks, the teacher candidate will, in a twice-repeated videotaped microteaching session: (a) plan and demonstrate the ability to establish a creative teaching atmosphere; (b) from self-analyzed video playbacks of the microteaching session, describe in writing how creative behavior was stimulated by variables within the teaching act.

**Long-Range Goal 2. Teachers who communicate positively with pupils.**

<i>Teacher Behavior</i>	<i>Preservice Task</i>
The teacher is able to describe reinforcement as it relates to the modification of student behavior.	The teacher candidate will satisfactorily complete an individual instructional module on "behavior modification."
The teacher is able to present a rationale for emphasizing positive communication with students.	The teacher candidate will read one or more of the following books or articles and will be able to present (orally or in written form) a rationale for emphasizing positive communication in the classroom. Dollar, <i>Classroom Discipline</i> (1971); Hunter, <i>Reinforcement</i> (1967); Becker, Englemann, and Thomas, <i>Teaching</i> (1971).
The teacher is able to identify teacher behaviors which are likely to serve as reinforcers for a specific student.	After being provided with behavioral descriptions of several children and participating in guided group analysis of teacher behaviors which are designed to serve as reinforcers for each of the described children, the teacher candidate will write an analysis and evaluation of the teacher reinforcement behaviors portrayed in a taped teaching sequence.
The teacher provides pupils with prompt, specific, and constructive feedback.	Given a series of videotaped teacher-pupil response sequences and an analysis guide, the teacher candidate will: (a) orally analyze each sequence in terms of the oral response patterns of the teacher; (b) formulate appropriate written feedback for each of six varied specimens of student work which are accompanied by descriptions of the students.

**Long-Range Goal 3. Teachers who identify the strengths and weaknesses of the individual student and utilize this knowledge in their teaching.**

<i>Teacher Behavior</i>	<i>Preservice Task</i>
The teacher is able to use a variety of formal and informal measures including teacher observations, teacher-made instruments, and standardized tests to assess a child's present level of functioning in relation to specific instructional objectives.	After a presentation on criterion-referenced evaluation, the teacher candidate will select or construct an evaluation instrument which will assess a child's present level of functioning in relation to a specified curricular objective.

**Goal 3 (continued)**

<i>Teacher Behavior</i>	<i>Preservice Task</i>
The teacher is able to observe and assess a child's behavior in relation to his response patterns and learning style.	After viewing a self-selected number of instructional video tapes on the observing and recording of student response patterns, the teacher candidate will observe an individual tutorial sequence, analyze the student's response to specific instructional stimuli, and prescribe follow-up instruction for the child viewed.
The teacher is able to formulate instructional objectives which are appropriate for an individual student.	After completing an instructional module on identifying en route or component skills, the teacher candidate will, when given an objective, determine at least two component skills which the student must be able to perform prior to reaching the desired objective.
The teacher is able to select instructional procedures and materials which are appropriate for individual students within a class.	After hearing an audio tape on learning modalities and after examining philosophies of varied reading materials, the teacher candidate will, when given a single instructional objective in reading and an educational data sheet on five pupils with diverse characteristics, generate for each pupil a list of appropriate instructional procedures and materials.

**Long-Range Goal 4. Teachers who understand and respect a child's cultural heritage.**

<i>Teacher Behavior</i>	<i>Preservice Task</i>
The teacher is able to specify the basic components of culture and to describe the relationship of these cultural features to the learning process.	After hearing a series of speakers and participating in group discussions regarding a particular cultural minority, the teacher candidate will: (a) list educational manifestations of cultural variables which are shared by the minority culture and the dominant culture; (b) list educational manifestations of cultural variables which contrast the cultures; (c) explain how cultural differences affect the learning variables of motivation and cognitive styles as well as the selection of activities for instruction.
The teacher is able to identify the effects of social, economic, and ethnic status on a child's total development.	After reading from a selected bibliography on the "disadvantaged" child, the teacher candidate will: (a) cite major findings of research within the past ten years which relate to the physical, mental, attitudinal, and social-emotional development of the child; and/or (b) write a position paper related

*Photo by John L. P. Maynard*

A desirable goal for teachers is the ability to communicate positively with their pupils.

**Goal 4 (continued)***Teacher Behavior**Preservice Task*

to the impact of the public school—past, present, and future—on the total development of the “disadvantaged” child.

The teacher is able to identify expectancies of the dominant culture which shape a child's learning experiences.

After a series of class sessions involving lecture, discussion, and guided analysis of student behavior sequences on cultural pressures and coping styles of children, the teacher candidate can, when given a videotaped instructional sequence involving a child of a particular subculture, list adaptive behaviors reflective of pressures and expectancies of the dominant culture.

The teacher is able to design an instructional environment in which activities and materials related to the native culture of children have been incorporated.

After the completion of an individually selected and conducted concentrated study of a cultural group, the teacher candidate will produce a resource unit containing specific materials and activities usable throughout an academic year for the purpose of developing pupils' understanding of and respect for the chosen minority culture.

**Long-Range Goal 5. Teachers who stimulate pupils to take an active part in shaping the learning environment.**

*Teacher Behavior**Preservice Task*

The teacher is able to define “discovery” or “inquiry-directed” learning and provide a rationale for its incorporation into the education process.

After locating and reading selected articles on the discovery method, the teacher candidate will write: (a) a definition for this concept; (b) a rationale for incorporating this concept into his teaching.

The teacher is able to provide foci in the school environment which cause the pupil to question and explore.

After participating in guided discussion and analysis of several instructional activities the teacher candidate will: (a) select from a list of possible classroom activities those which are likely to cause the pupil to question or explore; (b) provide a justification for each.

The teacher is able to respond to student ideas in an accepting manner.

After role playing a representative teacher-student interaction, the teacher candidates and the professor will analyze it, discuss its implications,

**Goal 5 (continued)***Teacher Behavior**Preservice Task*

generate possible alternative responses, and replay the interaction to exemplify a more open teacher-student interaction.

The teacher is able to ask questions of students which demand a variety of mental operations.

After finishing an instructional module based on the cognitive and affective taxonomies of educational objectives, the teacher candidate will, when given a series of possible student responses: (a) identify those which represent the lowest levels and those which indicate higher levels of mental functioning; (b) construct teacher questions likely to elevate each response level.

The assumption upon which this strategy rests is that training in a process for translating the abstractions of long-range educational goals into precise forms of classroom behavior will increase the future teacher's ability to implement a stated educational philosophy. In addition, such precision in specifying the instructional activities implied by a set of long-range goals places educational evaluation on a more objective basis than our present, imprecise concepts of educational “quality” permit.

Such precision is due teachers as professionals whose competence is to be judged and who, therefore, have a right to understand the types of performance expected of them. Moreover, the strategy outlined here would help educators meet the continuing demand for “accountability” by eliminating much of the vagueness that now characterizes lay-professional discourse about the ends and means of education.

Statements of long-term goals are essential to the effective functioning of our schools—but they are not enough. Only as teacher education institutions themselves undertake the demanding intellectual labor of designing curricula that progress from long-range goals to operationally defined behaviors to preservice tasks, can their graduates be expected to breathe classroom life into an educational philosophy. □

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