

# TEACHERS' PLANNING MODELS

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*How do teachers actually go about planning lessons, class periods, units, or courses?*

*This researcher reports on his study of classroom planning models.*

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**T**HE topic of planning for teaching has mainly been dealt with on the prescriptive level. Various individuals have suggested how teachers ought to plan lessons, class periods, units, or courses. The prescription that has received the most attention is the one developed by Tyler (7) over 25 years ago and since modified by Popham (5), Taba (6), and others. This planning model in skeleton form consists of (a) objectives, (b) learning activities, (c) organization of learning activities, and (d) evaluation. It is a rational, logical model in which ends or objectives take precedence over and are separated from means or activities. Given the longtime availability of this model, the number of curriculum experts who support it, and its powerful appeal to rationality, it is reasonable to believe that the model is in widespread use at all levels of teaching.

Macdonald (3), Eisner (1), and others suggest, however, that in reality teachers do not begin their planning by first making a decision about objectives and then proceed

to make decisions about activities, evaluation, and other matters. They suggest that a teacher's first decision focuses on the type of learning activity he or she will provide for the students, and that objectives can only be known after students have engaged in the activity. Further, Macdonald (4) proposes that teachers ought not try to identify specific learner objectives prior to teaching, but rather should begin their planning by deciding on the types of activities they will provide, activities from which students choose their own learning experiences and pursue their own objectives. In this type of model, ends are integrated with means. Objectives arise from and only exist within activity. Although Macdonald's prescription is less well known than Tyler's and possibly has fewer supporters, his model may well be descriptive of what teachers actually do.

The topic of planning models that teachers use has not been extensively studied in the past. Studies such as Goodlad's (2) have dealt with teachers' use of objectives, but few studies have looked at the total planning process. The study undertaken here was an attempt to extend our knowledge of what teachers actually do as they prepare to teach.

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## Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine what kinds of plans teachers make prior to the time they enter the classroom and begin to teach a group of students. The general problem and subproblems investigated were the following:

What types of planning models do teachers currently use?

1. What planning decisions do teachers make?

2. What planning decisions are made first the most frequently?

3. For teachers who include objectives in their plans, what types of objectives are used most frequently?

4. For teachers who include activities in their plans, what types of activities are used most frequently?

5. To what extent are planning decisions made in the areas of instruction and organization?

6. Do planning decisions vary in relation to level of teaching, type of content being taught, and experience of the teacher?

## Methods and Data Sources

Data concerning how teachers plan were collected by having teachers indicate the decisions they make as they plan to teach one or more class sessions or periods. The data collection instrument consisted of two parts. Part I simply requested teachers to list in writing the decisions they make prior to teaching in the order that they usually make them. The teachers were urged to list the decisions that they actually make, rather than decisions that, for one reason or another, they feel they should make. Part II, which was given after the first part had been collected, requested those teachers who had indicated that they did make decisions about objectives and activities to give an example of an objective and of an activity that they had used recently.

Direct analysis of actual plans that teachers had constructed was not used as a data source for several reasons. Some teachers, first of all, do not make written plans.

They think through various aspects of their teaching, but they do not write down their decisions. Second, teachers who do make written plans often are compelled to use a planning model that they do not support. Consequently, the plan they submit to the principal is more of a formality than a record of their real planning decisions. These pseudo plans are either ignored and new ones formulated or they are heavily amended. In either case the teacher's real plan and the plan submitted to the principal are not the same. In an attempt to study the real written or mental plans of the teacher, the procedure of asking teachers to list their decisions was employed.

The sample in this investigation consisted of 194 teachers who agreed to participate in the study. All of the teachers were from a large, metropolitan city and several of its surrounding suburbs. Eighty-six of the teachers taught in the city school system and 108 teachers taught in suburban systems.

A variety of grade levels, subject areas, and years of teaching experience were represented in the sample. In terms of grade level, 25 teachers taught in grades K-3, 38 in grades 4-6, 63 in grades 7-9, 42 in grades 10-12, 17 in adult education programs, and 9 in programs that span grades K-12. Nearly all of the elementary teachers taught all subject areas with the exception of art, music, and physical education. Of the junior high and high school teachers, 46 taught in the humanities areas of English, social studies, and art; 51 taught in the science or technical areas of science, mathematics, foreign language, and vocational studies; and 8 taught in other areas. The subject areas taught by the adult teachers were primarily nursing and vocational-technical subjects. The years of teaching experience represented in the sample ranged from 1 to 20. More specifically, 50 teachers had 1-2 years of experience, 72 had 3-5 years, 40 had 6-9 years, 22 had 10-12 years, and 10 had 13 or more years.

The lists of decisions from Part I of the instrument were analyzed according to the types of decisions made and the order of the decisions. Eight categories were used to classify the decisions:

1. Objectives—Decisions about goals, aims, outcomes, or purposes

2. Content—Decisions about the nature of the subject matter to be taught, such as identification of facts, events, or other aspects

3. Activities—Decisions about the type of learning activity or experience to be used

4. Materials—Decisions about resources to be used such as books, films, field trip sites, and guest speakers

5. Diagnosis—Decisions about students' readiness for the particular lesson or session. This would include students' previous learnings as well as their ability and interests

6. Evaluation—Decisions about how to determine the effectiveness of the lesson or session

7. Instruction—Decisions about teacher verbal and nonverbal behaviors and teaching strategies to be used

8. Organization—Decisions about how to arrange the teaching-learning environment such as grouping of students, use of space, and use of time.

The examples of objectives and activities from Part II of the instrument were classified as being either specific or general. A specific objective was seen as one which had a narrow focus, a behavioral form, and was accomplishable in a short time period. A general objective was seen as one which had a broad focus, a topical form, and could only be accomplished after a considerable period of time. A specific activity refers to one designed to achieve a predetermined objective. A general activity refers to an activity that has been designed to have students seek and pursue their own purposes.

Frequencies and percentages of decisions made, decisions made first, and types of objectives and activities were determined for the total group of teachers. Frequencies and percentages of decisions made and decisions made first were also determined in relation to the variables of teaching level, content area, and years of teaching experience. The teaching levels compared were elementary

(grades K-6), secondary (grades 7-12), and adult programs. The content areas were humanities, sciences, and miscellaneous. Humanities consists of the less technical subjects of English, social studies, and art. Sciences consists of the more technical subjects of science, mathematics, foreign language, and vocational subjects. Miscellaneous content refers to library teaching and remedial teaching. The years of teaching experience compared were 5 or fewer years and 6 or more.

Although in general it was not difficult to categorize the decisions the teachers listed, in some cases because of the nature of the terms used or the brevity of the response, a certain amount of subjectivity in the categorization process could not be avoided. Usually, however, an unclear individual decision could be categorized after examining the total model and determining its tone and thrust.

## Results

The results of the study in terms of the types of decisions that were made by the total group of teachers are reported in Tables 1 and 2. From Table 1 it can be seen that no type of decision was made by all teachers. The decision that came closest to being used by all teachers was activities. This decision was made in 81 percent of the plans. Other decisions that at least one-quarter of the teachers used were content, objectives, materials, evaluation, and diagnosis. Seventy percent of the teachers listed content, 56 percent listed objectives, 56 percent listed materials, 35 percent listed evaluation, and 25 percent listed diagnosis. It can be seen in Table 2 that the type of decision made first the most frequently by the total group of teachers was content. Fifty-one percent of the teachers listed content first. Of the other decisions that were made first, objectives were listed by 28 percent of the teachers, diagnosis by 14 percent of the teachers, activities by 3 percent of the teachers, and materials by 3 percent of the teachers.

When types of decisions made and decisions made first are examined in relation to

the variables of teaching level, content area, and teaching experience, some differences were found. In general, however, the results for each subgroup were the same as the results for the total group. These results are reported in Tables 3 through 8.

From Tables 3 and 4 it can be seen that in relation to teaching level, adult teachers used the decision of objectives more often and used it first more often than the other teachers. Also, secondary teachers used the decision of materials more often than the other teachers, and elementary teachers used the decision of diagnosis first more frequently than the other teachers. In relation to content area, an examination of Tables 5 and 6 reveals that humanities teachers used the decisions of activities and objectives more often than the other teachers, and they used the decision of content first more often than the other teachers. Sciences teachers used the decision of content first less often, but used the decisions of objectives and activities first more often than the other teachers. Tables 7 and 8 reveal that teachers who had taught for over five years used the decision of content first less often and the decision of objectives first more often than teachers with less experience, but content was still their first decision the most often.

The results of the study concerning types of objectives and activities that were identified are reported in Table 9. They show that most of the objectives and the activities were specific rather than general. For those teachers who used objectives and provided an example, 88 percent were specific. Approximately the same quantity of activities were specific.

On the basis of these results, several conclusions can be stated for this particular group of teachers concerning planning decisions:

1. Objectives are not a particularly important planning decision in terms of quantity of use. Other decisions are made more frequently and made first more frequently than objectives. The objectives that are used, however, are almost always specific.

2. Activities are an important planning

decision in terms of quantity of use, but they are almost never the first decision made. If activities are joined with the closely related area of materials, this combined decision still is only made first about 6 percent of the time. Also, the activities that are used are almost always specific activities.

3. Content is one of the most important planning decisions in terms of quantity of use. Almost three-fourths of the teachers make this decision, and it is made first more often than any other decision.

4. Although the planning decision of materials is made by over half of the teachers, the decisions of evaluation, diagnosis, organization, and instruction are only made by a third or fewer of the teachers. Organization and instruction are particularly unimportant decisions in terms of quantity of use.

5. Few differences in planning exist in relation to the variables of teaching level, content area, and teaching experience. In general, the basic pattern found for the total group existed in each of the subgroups.

The size, diversity, and apparent representativeness of this sample of teachers suggest that the findings might be descriptive of teachers in general in the urban area from which the sample was drawn. Because of the technique used to collect data and the use of volunteer subjects, however, to generalize to a larger population of teachers involves considerable risk.

## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that neither the separate ends-means planning model as prescribed by Tyler (7) or by Popham (5) is being used by this group of teachers to any great extent, nor is the integrated ends-means model as prescribed by Macdonald (3). Since only about one-fourth of the teachers begin their planning with objectives, the separate ends-means model may be more of a theoretical formulation than a functioning reality. Those who advocate a separate ends-means model can be encouraged, however, by the fact that the type of objective that the teachers used is the

type that is consistent with the model. Since almost no one begins to plan by identifying learning activities (although almost everyone decides about activities later on in the planning process), the integrated ends-means model also does not appear to be a functioning reality. Furthermore, because the activities of the integrated ends-means model would have to be general activities that permit students latitude in what they will experience and learn, few teachers appear to be moving in the direction of the integrated ends-means model even if they begin their planning with a decision about content or about diagnosis, or if they begin with general objectives.

The question that most of the teachers in this study ask themselves frequently and ask themselves first the most frequently, then, is not what specific objectives are students to achieve or what are the activities in which students will become involved. Rather, the question asked is what is the range and particulars of the subject matter of the lesson or unit to be taught. This practice of beginning the planning process with a consideration of content and emphasizing content as a planning decision would be rejected by many, if not most, curriculum theorists. The practice is unacceptable because it tends to make content an end in itself rather than one of the means to achieve an end. Selecting a general content topic preparatory to stating an objective or choosing an activity does not make content an end, but identifying specific subject matter topics, ideas, and facts as a first consideration probably does. Both curriculum theorists who support a separate ends-means model and those who support an integrated ends-means model believe that content should be one of the means to achieve objectives. In the case of the separate ends-means model, the objectives are predetermined and content is clearly more of a secondary consideration. In the case of the integrated ends-means model, the objectives are the students' objectives that emerge within an activity. From this perspective content is a decision that is not only secondary, but can only be decided in a general and tentative way prior to actual teaching.

The results of this study suggest that the breadth and depth of the content for a teaching-learning session is of primary concern to teachers. If proposed planning models are to become helpful tools for teachers, perhaps the place of content in the planning models ought to be more clearly delineated.

Decision	F	%
Activities	158	81
Content	136	70
Objectives	108	56
Materials	108	56
Evaluation	68	35
Diagnosis	48	25
Organization	40	21
Instruction	31	16

Table 1. Types of Planning Decisions Made for Total Group of Teachers (N = 194)

Decision	F	%
Content	98	51
Objectives	54	28
Diagnosis	27	14
Activities	6	3
Materials	5	3

Table 2. Types of Planning Decisions Made First for Total Group of Teachers (N = 194)

Decision	Elementary (N = 63)		Secondary (N = 105)		Adult (N = 17)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Activities	51	81	87	83	13	76
Content	43	68	78	74	12	71
Objectives	35	56	53	50	13	76
Materials	32	51	66	63	6	35
Evaluation	27	43	32	30	6	35
Diagnosis	20	32	20	19	4	24
Organization	16	25	20	19	4	24
Instruction	11	17	15	14	4	24

Table 3. Types of Planning Decisions Made by Teaching Level

Decision	Elementary (N = 63)		Secondary (N = 105)		Adult (N = 17)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Content	29	46	59	56	9	53
Objectives	16	25	26	25	7	41
Diagnosis	12	19	11	10	1	6
Activities	2	3	4	4	0	0
Materials	1	2	4	4	0	0

Table 4. Types of Planning Decisions Made First by Teaching Level

**“This practice of beginning the planning process with a consideration of content and emphasizing content as a planning decision would be rejected by many, if not most, curriculum theorists.”**

Decision	Humanities (N = 46) <sup>1</sup>		Sciences (N = 51) <sup>2</sup>		Miscellaneous (N = 8)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Activities	43	93	41	80	5	63
Content	36	78	37	73	6	75
Objectives	29	63	23	45	2	25
Materials	27	59	36	71	7	88
Evaluation	13	28	15	29	2	25
Diagnosis	7	15	12	24	2	25
Organization	9	20	8	16	1	13
Instruction	8	17	6	12	1	13

<sup>1</sup> The Humanities teachers consist of 29 English teachers, 14 social studies teachers, and 3 art teachers.

<sup>2</sup> The Sciences teachers consist of 20 mathematics teachers, 14 science teachers, 11 vocational teachers, and 6 foreign language teachers.

Table 5. Types of Planning Decisions Made by Secondary Teachers by Content Area

Decision	Humanities (N = 46) <sup>1</sup>		Sciences (N = 51) <sup>2</sup>		Miscellaneous (N = 8)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Content	31	67	24	47	6	75
Objectives	9	20	15	29	1	13
Diagnosis	3	7	7	14	1	13
Activities	0	0	4	8	0	0
Materials	3	7	1	2	0	0

<sup>1</sup> The Humanities teachers consist of 29 English teachers, 14 social studies teachers, and 3 art teachers.

<sup>2</sup> The Sciences teachers consist of 20 mathematics teachers, 14 science teachers, 11 vocational teachers, and 6 foreign language teachers.

Table 6. Types of Planning Decisions Made First by Secondary Teachers by Content Area

## References

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2. John I. Goodlad, M. Frances Klein, and associates. *Behind the Classroom Door*. Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company, 1970.
3. James B. Macdonald. "Myths About Instruction." *Educational Leadership* 22 (8): 571-76; 609-17; May 1965.
4. James B. Macdonald, Bernice J. Wolfson,

Decision	1-5 years (N = 122)		6-20 years (N = 72)	
	F	%	F	%
Activities	99	81	59	82
Content	89	73	47	65
Objectives	65	53	43	60
Materials	72	59	36	50
Evaluation	41	34	27	38
Diagnosis	29	24	19	26
Organization	27	22	13	18
Instruction	19	18	12	17

Table 7. Types of Planning Decisions Made by Years of Teaching Experience

Decision	1-5 years (N = 122)		6-20 years (N = 72)	
	F	%	F	%
Content	67	55	31	43
Objectives	29	24	25	35
Diagnosis	14	11	13	18
Activities	3	2	3	4
Materials	5	4	0	0
Organization	4	2	0	0

Table 8. Types of Planning Decisions Made First by Years of Teaching Experience

Type of Decision	F	%
Objectives (N = 92) *		
Specific	81	88
General	11	12
Activities (N = 117) *		
Specific	104	89
General	13	11

\* These totals do not correspond with the total frequencies for objectives and activities in Table 1 because not all teachers completed Part II of the instrument.

Table 9. Types of Objectives and Activities for Total Group of Teachers

- and Esther Zaret. *Reschooling Society: A Conceptual Model*. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1973.
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