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Behavioral objectives movement and its contribution to the use of language in art material development

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum and syllabuses are all affected by different schools of thoughts. Those related to art are not an exception either. The purpose of this study is to introduce the idea of behavioral objectives and show how they can be of great effect on art curriculum, syllabuses and material development. Behavioral objectives provide a framework which has led to some progress in the design of educational systems including art material development. Although there are a couple of reservations against behavioral objectives, attempts must be made to repair the defects to arrive at a new and potentially more fruitful conceptualization of behavioral objectives.

Key words: Behavioral Objectives Movement, use of language, Art Material Development

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years three different approaches to instructional design have been deployed and all of them were developed within a behavioral (but not behaviorist) paradigm. These approaches include the objectives movement, competency-based education, and the standards movement. "The desire to develop a standardized science of education made behavioral objectives (movement) a necessary step in programmed instruction" [6].

The Objectives Movement

The first behavioral approach to instructional design was the objectives movement. Objective means the pedagogic intentions of a particular course of study to be achieved within the period of that course and in principle measurable by some assessment device at the end of the course. "An objective is a description of a performance you want learners to be able to exhibit before you consider them competent. An objective describes an intended *result* of instruction, rather than the *process* of instruction itself" [10]. Valette and Disick suggest that "objectives should stress output rather than input and that such output should be specified in terms of performance" [12]. It was the objectives movement that introduced a behavioral approach to education. This movement has been very influential and highly disputatious both in general and language education. In the scope of general education the works of Mager (1962, 1984) were quite influential. "Robert Mager is considered by many to be the father of modern-day behavioral objectives" [6]. His 1962 book, *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, has had a major influence on the development of learning and training programs. Mager argued for the use of specific, measurable behavioral and performance objectives that both guide designers during courseware development and aid students in learning process [1]. To Mager, the behavioral objectives should have three major components: *behavior*, *condition*, and *standards*. "1) [Behavioral objectives] must unambiguously describe the behavior to be performed, optimally in

terms of an action word or verb of observable behavior, 2) they must describe the conditions under which the performance will be expected to occur, and 3) they must state a standard of acceptable performance (the criterion)" [15]. To sum it up, the behavior should be specific and observable in conditions under which the behavior is completed and the standard is the level of desirable performance, including an acceptable range of correct answers. The following statement illustrates three-part objectives:

- In an authentic interaction (condition), the student will request prices of shopping items (task). Utterances will be comprehensible to a sympathetic native speaker (standard).

The introduction of behavioral objectives raised a storm of controversy in early 60s. Mager (1984) states that this controversy was due to "an unfortunate choice of terms":

"During the early sixties we talked about behavior rather than about performance. This turned out to be an unfortunate choice of terms. A number of people were put off by the word thinking that objectives necessarily had to do with behaviorists. Not so. Objectives describe performance, or behavior, because an objective is specific rather than broad or general and because performance or behavior is what we can be specific about" [10]. Therefore, it can be concluded that performance objectives define what learners show, do, or feel at the end of a planned instructional experience.

Why should performance objectives be used?

Tumposky (1984) argues that there are "four most common justifications for the use of behavioral objectives in education:

1. **Goal clarification.** It is said that behavioral objectives help teachers clarify their purposes and become aware of their own goals and expectations.
2. **Facilitation of instruction.** It is claimed that behavioral objectives facilitate lesson design and help teachers to select materials and organize content by establishing hierarchies of importance of skills and sub-skills.
3. **Facilitation of evaluation.** Behavioral objectives furnish data which can be used for cost analysis or as the raw material for interesting research problems, and
4. **Creation of a public record.** This justification is used by those who are concerned with accountability in education. Students, as well as the public, have the right to know what is expected of them and should not be forced to play guessing games about objectives.

In his book *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, Mager suggests three reasons for writing learning objectives [10].

First, when objectives are defined in terms of learning outcomes, teachers have a better chance of selecting the most appropriate content and teaching tactics. When the teacher has stated quite specifically what he or she wants students to learn, the teacher can ask: 'Now that I know what I want my pupils to learn, what is the best way of helping them achieve it.'

Second, when objectives are described in precise and unambiguous terms, it is easier to find out if our teaching has been effective or not, since we can test our pupils' performance. Depending on the result of our assessment, we either augment our objectives or try using different materials and teaching tactics.

Third, when pupils know exactly what is expected of them, they can organize their own efforts in order to attain the stated objectives. A further benefit is that slow learners, armed with a set of learning objectives, can seek specific help from their peers, parents, and others in the community [13]. According to Lee (1972), "the empirical literature has showed that in most cases the use of objectives improves instructional efficiency". He holds that "Behavioral objectives change the teacher's role behavior which is difficult and often frustrating" [7]. Findly and Nathan (1980) feel that the use of behavioral objectives has a liberating effect on the student and the teacher by permitting students to choose alternative ways of mastering skills. Lunenburg (2011) asserts that such objectives can be transformed into a taxonomy which in turn can be employed as a means of curriculum development. "The taxonomy is a scheme for classifying educational objectives into categories descriptive of the kinds of behavior that educators seek from students in schools. It is based on the assumption that the educational program can be conceived of as an attempt to change the behavior of students with respect to some subject matter. When we describe the behavior and the subject matter, we construct an educational objective". "The taxonomy is divided into three domains: cognitive, affective,

and psychomotor. The cognitive includes those objectives having to do with thinking, knowing, and problem solving. The affective includes those objectives dealing with attitudes, values, interests, and appreciations. The psychomotor covers objectives having to do with manual and motor skills [14]. The classification scheme in each of the three domains is hierarchical in nature; that is, each category is assumed to involve behavior that is more complex and abstract than the previous category. Thus, the categories are arranged from simple to more complex behaviors and from concrete to more abstract behaviors [11]. According to Bloom, there are at least four values of using the taxonomy for curriculum making. First, the taxonomy provides a basis for working with objectives with specificity and a precision that is not generally typical of such statements. Second, this specificity and precision in the description of a student behavior make it easier to select the kinds of learning experiences that are appropriate to developing the desired behavior [8]. Third, the hierarchical nature of the taxonomy facilitates scope and sequence in curriculum planning. And, finally, the taxonomy may be useful in evaluating teaching. Specifically, the content of norm-reference and criterion-referenced tests, in addition to educational experiences and innovations in teaching, can be analyzed using the taxonomy as a framework, which may reveal and over- or under-emphasis on particular objectives.

Criticisms and limitations against behavioral objectives

In spite of the appeal of behavioral objectives, there have been a number of objections against them. According to Tumposky (1984) critics of behavioral objectives charge that many educators and educational administrators have accepted the above-mentioned justifications without a thorough examination of their own motives for doing so or of the empirical data in the literature, and without considering the possible limitations of such a narrow definition. Research on the effects of behavioral objectives on learning has been inconclusive, and there is little empirical data, in fact, to support the hypothesis that objectives facilitate learning or teaching. Duchastel and Merrill, for example, examined the possible facilitative effects of communication behavioral objectives to students and found that the presence of objectives facilitated learning only in certain instances. Another common objection is that "behavioral objectives have become a bandwagon which many are jumping on, hoping that it is the panacea for all our educational ills, even though an adequate theoretical base is lacking" [15]. Another related objection is the problem of origins: Where do objectives come from? What criteria have been used to select them? Objectives should be derived from goals, and needs, and not from the accuracy or availability of measures used to evaluate them. If the primary goal of education is to change behavior in predetermined ways, then behavioral objectives would seem to be the logical means for carrying out this process of human engineering. Predictable change in behavior, however, is not usually seen as the primary objective of education in non-totalitarian societies, although it is an agreed-upon objective for training. Another criticism which is the basis of much of the intense resistance to behavioral objectives among teachers of English centers around the difficulty inherent in pre-specifying all objectives and the effects such pre-specification can have on teaching. Realistic teaching situation involves learning outcomes which could not have been anticipated when the objectives were originally formulated. Pre-specification, therefore, ignores the multiplicity and inter-relatedness of goals as well as the validity of goals which emerge during instruction [4].

Another criticism leveled against behavioral objectives is that they are incompatible with different styles of learning and teaching. Critics of behavioral objectives hold that behavioral objectives have constraining effects on methodology and the roles of both teachers and learners. They believe that behavioral objectives stifle creativity and innovation by imposing a rigid style of teaching. Advocates of behavioral objectives (Van Ek) see no connection between the use of behavioral objectives and any particular type of teaching methodology. Lee (1972), as an advocator of behavioral objectives, holds that behavioral objectives change the teachers' role behavior. However, there is disagreement about whether a change in teacher behavior is necessary. Another criticism leveled against behavioral objectives by teachers is that they consider many of the goals of education to be difficult, if not possible, to specify in behavioral terms. White (1988) cites some objections to behavioral objectives:

- Stenhouse (1975) takes the view that education as induction into knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes the behavioral outcomes of the students unpredictable [16].
- Socket (1975), is philosophically opposed to the prescriptive character of the objectives model and he is suspicious of the dogmatism to which the rigid adherence to an objectives model can give rise [16].
- Davies (1976) points out that while rehearsing the arguments against behavioral objectives, suggests that the strongest argument for them lies in the power of methodology as a means of exposing underlying assumption [16]. Once objectives for a learning experience have been isolated and defined, it is possible to go beyond them to the very value structure that they apparently reflect. Objectives are the consequences of values, and it is these values – rather than the objectives themselves – that need to be revealed when previously they may have been concealed.

White (1988) concludes that the implausibility of predicting detailed performances and the inherent freedom of the learner in an educative process are not reasons for supposing that we cannot or must not try to specify performance objectives. We can agree that student performances (a) cannot or should not be pre-specified in detail and (b) are a part but not the whole of what we mean by education.

MacDonald-Ross (1973) has summarized the objections raised to behavioral objectives:

1. No consistent view exists as to the origin of objectives.
2. In the educational domain no well-defined prescriptions are available for deriving objectives.
3. Defining objectives before the event conflicts with voyages of exploration.
4. Advocates do not show how teachers can use objectives to guide unpredicted classroom events.
5. There are an extremely large number of paths through any body of knowledge, thus reducing the effectiveness of objectives in design.
6. In some disciplines criteria can only be applied after the event.
7. Objectives do not prescribe the validity of test items.
8. Objectives are inherently ambiguous.
9. The level of specificity problem has never been solved.
10. Objectives do not communicate intent unambiguously, especially to students.
11. Trivial objectives are the easiest to operationalize, and this is a problem.
12. The relevance of goal referenced models of education can be questioned.
13. Weak prescriptions lead to cycling. This can be costly.
14. Lists of behaviors do not adequately represent the structure of knowledge.
15. The use of behavioral objectives implies a poverty-stricken model of student-teacher interaction.
16. The Behavioral objective scheme suffers from many of the weaknesses of any operationalist dogma.

Despite these criticisms, "objectives, used appropriately, did bring tangible gains to the learning process. The use of objectives, when conveyed to learners in ways that makes sense to them, plays an important part in sensitizing learners to what it is to be a language learner: (a) In particular, learners came to have a more realistic idea of what could be achieved in a given course; (b) learning came to be seen as the gradual accretion of achievable goals; (c) learners developed greater sensitivity to their roles as language learners, and their vague notions of what it is to be a learner became much sharper; (d) self-evaluation became more feasible; (e) classroom activities could be seen to relate to real-life needs; and (f) development of skills was seen as a gradual rather than all-or-nothing process" [12]. One point that we must bear in mind is that "behavioral objectives cannot exist in isolation, but are necessarily part of a system. This is easily demonstrated, since the whole effectiveness of behavioral objectives depends upon the precision of their elements; it follows, therefore, that precise means must have been used to arrive at these figures and that the task of transforming 'general statements of aims' into 'unambiguous statements of objectives' is a vital one. In other words, advocating behavioral objectives is in fact advocating the systems approach (an outcome of the work of Mager, Gagne and Briggs in instructional design). Just as you do not normally buy only the engine or transmission of a car but rather the whole car itself, so with behavioral objectives you must also buy the systems approach. Language teachers have traditionally been very cautious of doing that" [2]. The relationship between behavioral objectives and the teaching of subject matter has been examined by various teachers and professional educators, most notably by teachers of English to native speakers. "Most teachers from different fields of study concede that the use of behavioral objectives beyond the elementary-grade level should be undertaken with great caution" [15]. This criticism mostly comes from teachers in the domain of the humanities.

Behavioral Objectives and Teaching Art

There has been a mixed, but largely negative, reaction to behavioral objectives from teachers of art. Many of their criticisms echo those of the educational community at large. The following are some of the simplistic or faulty assumptions made about behavioral objectives which appear to be most relevant to the teaching art:

Assumption 1. Behavioral objectives are something new.

Assumption 2. Successful art teaching can be accomplished by mastering pre-specified, hierarchically arranged, discrete items.

Assumption 3. It is possible to "master" a linguistic skill.

Assumption 4. Knowledge can be translated into observable behavior.

Assumption 5. Everything taught must be capable of post-instructional assessment.

Assumption 6. Poor performance on the student's part is the result of poor or inefficient management on the teacher's part [15].

CONCLUSION

All in all, it can be said that behavioral objectives as a school of thought paves the way for better manifestation of meeting objectives in syllabuses. Art instruction is mostly a visible phenomenon in which the behavioral objectives can be of great help. In fact, behavioral objectives provide a framework which has led to some progress in the design of educational systems. There are four most common justifications for the use of behavioral objectives in education: Goal clarification, Facilitation of instruction, Facilitation of evaluation, Creation of a public record. In spite of some shortcomings, behavioral objectives can be of conspicuous effect on art material development in the use of language.

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