

tion is read, only possibly during the first couple of sentences. If a student has great difficulty, you could read all the words of the story as the student points. Vary the pace some from sentence to sentence, so the student has to listen, rather than just move along each line of text at a fixed rate.

After the student is fairly reliable about reading and pointing, change the format so that the student reads the first word. Also, change the number of words you read and the number the student reads. The simplest format is for you to read two words and the student to read the next two. (It's sim-

pler because the pattern is the same, two for you, two for the student.)

Next, you could change the procedure so you read one word and the student reads three. After 4-8 sessions in which the student reads words accurately at the rate of around 50 words a minute or more, drop the duet reading. *ADI*

BOB DIXON



Give Me That Old Time Behavioral Objective

Many years ago, I found myself criticizing behavioral objectives. I'm talking specifically here of behavioral objectives as first described by Mager and expanded upon by Waina. "Good" behavioral objectives had to specify the conditions under which a student would perform, to use a descriptive action verb, and to give the criteria for determining whether a given objective had been met. Here's an example of such an objective: *The sixth-graders will correctly spell this week's words in no more than 5 minutes with at least 90 percent accuracy.*

What was my beef with such highly specific learning objectives? One problem I had was not directly related to the construction of an objective, but rather, to the attitude so many people had toward them: If you constructed an objective correctly, you were just about finished. There used to be a pervasive attitude that if you had a good set of objectives, something magical would take place to ensure that students would be successful. I used to read and hear a lot about the power of objectives, but couldn't find much on the magical part of the process.

I also used to argue that most highly specific objectives *weren't specific enough*. The spelling objective above isn't so bad *except* that the writer probably meant "write with correct

spelling" rather than just spell, which could be oral. And will the words be presented in the order in which the students have been studying them all week? And should this really be the goal? What about including words from previous weeks' work? My precision teaching friends rightfully wouldn't be that thrilled with a goal of 90%. (Imagine if a student misspelled 10%

of all the words in a piece of writing.) If the goal is narrow minded, then it doesn't matter how well the objective is written.

Some objectives are okay, but humorous, due to the tendency writers have to using dangling participles in order to get all the essential characteristics of the objective into a single sentence: *Without the aid of an atlas or other visualization references, the student will be able to complete an outline map of Pennsylvania, including the major cities and rivers introduced in class with 90% accuracy.* Personally, I think the teacher should be 100% accurate when introducing rivers and cities in Pennsylvania.

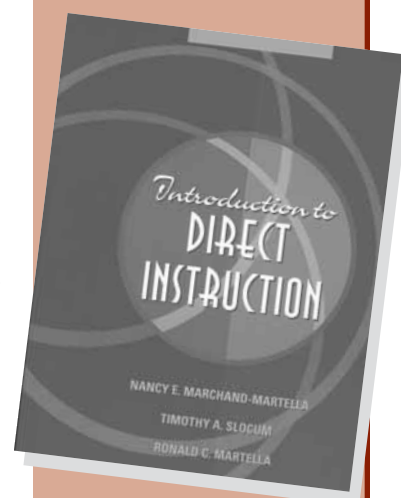
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I used to argue that if you really wanted to get specific about student outcomes, then the first thing you should do is *write the test*. With the test or quiz in hand from the beginning, you could just say, "All the students will get 100% on this test," and if rate is important, then you could add, "in under 30 minutes." Outcome assessments are always going to be highly specific because they illustrate exactly what the student is going to have to *do*. That is, the actual *tasks* that the student has to perform are obvious in an assessment. Verbal descriptions of tasks are often ambiguous, and no two tasks are created equal.

I've more or less implied that the actual outcome test *and* some verbal description make learning outcomes about as specific as you can get. For example, in the many cases when generalization is the goal, you couldn't tell by looking at the test whether generalization was being assessed. A specification of the outcome needs some indication of which items, if any, the student had encountered before instruction.

I should add that despite some misgivings, I liked behavioral objectives for the simple reason that if we were going to try to take students to some

particular place, it was a good idea to decide where that place was before starting the journey. In the '60s, when behavioral objectives became popular, there was a strong tendency in the schools to take students on long journeys without destinations.

What I never envisioned while picking nits over behavioral objectives was our current movement: *standards*. No one (like Mager in the '60s) has established any criteria for "good" standards, which might be the reason that there aren't any good standards. Standards are "things" written by committees whose members hope to sound erudite. I could go on and on about how standards get written (at least in my native Washington State), but if we look at examples of actual state standards, we see that it doesn't matter how they were written. They are much, much worse than useless; they are harmful. Take a look at some kindergarten standards for language arts:

- **Texas:** Choose and adapt spoken language appropriate to the audience including appropriate volume and rate. (*What????*)
- **New Jersey:** Participate in conversations with peers and adults. (*Presumably, lots of kids in New Jersey are going to do well on this one, irrespective of whether or not they go to school.*)
- **Florida:** Connect thoughts and oral language. (*Although I've heard a politician or two from Florida who failed to connect thought with their oral language, for the most part, it's sort of challenging to not connect thought to oral language.*)
- **Ohio:** (a) Choose a topic for writing and (b) determine audience. (*If kids in kindergarten are doing this, by second grade, the kids in Ohio should be writing publishable novels.*)
- **Illinois:** Demonstrate focus, organization, elaboration, and integration in written compositions (e.g., short stories, letters, essays, reports). (*Those low socio-economic kindergartners in Illinois are going to be able to write their way right out of poverty when they meet this standard.*)

DI-ANNOUNCE Electronic List

An electronic list is now available: DI-ANNOUNCE. As its name indicates, DI-ANNOUNCE is an electronic list for announcements on resources for those studying or implementing Direct Instruction. List topics include the following:

- research articles, news articles, and other publications on DI;
- updates on DI implementations;
- meetings, conferences, and workshops on DI;
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Note that DI-ANNOUNCE postings are limited to ANNOUNCEMENTS. The list is NOT a discussion list, and it is moderated. Any replies, jokes, or other off-task messages will be rejected. There is an on-line, web-based archive of postings for later reference and retrieval. In this way, the list is designed to be a streamlined tool for communicating information on the most critical developments in the field of Direct Instruction.

To subscribe, send a message to join-DI-ANNOUNCE@lyris.nifdi.org.

You will then receive a "welcome" message with additional information about the list. You can also go to <http://lyris.nifdi.org/> to see an archive of past announcements sent to the list, including the "welcome" message.

The list launched last October. You are invited to join the list and send announcements as appropriate. Feel free to call Kurt Engelmann at the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) via 877.485.1973 toll-free or email kurt@nifdi.org if you have any questions about the list.

- **Georgia:** Increase vocabulary to reflect a growing range of interests and knowledge. (*Does this mean that in order to demonstrate that the kindergarten's range of interests (and range of knowledge) is growing, they should learn vocabulary?*)

OK. One more.

- **Minnesota:** Follow print (words and text) from left to right and top to bottom. (*Students should certainly do this when learning to read. My question is this: Before Minnesota developed this standard, was anyone there not teaching kids to read English from left to right and top to bottom? Apparently. The people who sat on that committee and collectively decided to write this out as a standard for the children of Minnesota—did they feel literate and scholarly and innovative when the final vote was tallied? I hope this standard makes a significant contribution toward correcting the problem with the way people used to teach reading in Minnesota.*)

These standards are harmful because they are, for the most part, meaningless verbal detritus on the one hand, but textbook publishers live and die off them, on the other. Even with respect to clearly incomprehensible standards, publishers have to come up with *something* to stick in a textbook that helps

Figure 1
Standards (Goals, Objectives) → → ■ → → Assessment

create the illusion that the textbook is aligned with some set of standards. I am empathetic with the publishers ... to a point. The standards are a major incentive for the publishers to produce crap. Over the years, I've worked with several major publishers, and none of them has aspired to produce crap. They do it, though, because the market demands that they do it.

And standards and state tests, taken together, are *very* harmful. First, because the standards are so bad, it is nearly impossible to assess them. In short, the standards and the state tests don't align, except in the most meaningless and specious ways. But here is the biggest problem of them all, and the reason the tests and standards are so damaging. IF the standards were really "good" according to some criteria that would make sense to the average educated person on the street, and if they were precise enough to be aligned with assessment tools that were actually technically sound, widespread failure would continue, unabated. Figure 1 shows Doug Carnine's illustration of the problem.

The black box in the middle is the magic by which teachers start out with goals for students and end up with students performing brilliantly on tests that are valid and reliable. The black box is the instruction, and the states and just about everyone else are so clueless about instruction that they give it very little attention. With the *best* standards and the *best* assessments, the system is doomed to failure if, at the center of it all, we don't have the best instruction. As it stands now, the standards are, for the most part, ridiculous, and few if any of the state assessments have been certified as valid and reliable.

Dropping standards altogether and going back to behavioral objectives would be a gigantic improvement. For the most part, behavioral objectives are comprehensible. For the most part, they are adequately specific as the basis for creating technically sound assessments. The entire effort to make such a reform would be nearly useless if we don't attend first and foremost to the magic in the black box. [ADP](#)

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DI Feeder System Closes the Achievement Gap in Gering, NE

As in many rural districts throughout the country, the eight-school district in Gering, NE, serving about 2,000 students, suffered from an achievement gap in 2004. About half of all second-grade students were reading below grade-level expectations as measured by the DIBELS fluency measures, and the difference between ethnic groups was large. Only 36% of Gering's second-grade Hispanic students were meeting the Oral Reading Fluency

benchmark as compared to 59% of the second-grade Caucasian students. The situation at Gering Junior High was similar, with eighth-grade students scoring well below the national average on ACT's EXPLORE College Readiness Test.

The district administration took decisive action to correct the literacy problem. The district received a \$1.2 million Reading First grant and started

implementing Direct Instruction reading and language (*Reading Mastery, Language for Learning, Language for Thinking and Reasoning & Writing*) for all students in grades kindergarten through third grade with the assistance of the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) during the 2004-05 school year. NIFDI provided comprehensive on-site and off-site implementation support, including weekly analysis of student performance data and problem-solving conference calls. Students were placed in the appropriate level in DI programs. Teachers were trained in the specific DI formats that met their