

The Key to Lesson Planning: Clarifying Objectives

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What Am I Teaching?

Before a teacher begins teaching his lesson, he must decide what he wishes his students to learn. That goal is termed an educational objective. To proceed in teaching without clearly knowing one's objective is inefficient, ineffective, and, as Srila Prabhupada says - foolish.

Karandhara: They want to become minus.

Srila Prabhupada: But he is plus always. No, if you have no goal . . . There is example: "Man without any aim is a ship without any rudder." So suppose if the airplane is going with an aim to land in some country, but if he goes on simply without any aim, then there will be disaster.

Karandhara: Well, they have an aim.

Srila Prabhupada: That you say they have got; he does not say. You say.

Karandhara: No, but I mean philosophically considering, they have an aim, but it's very obscure. The substance and the significance of that aim is without form or conception.

Srila Prabhupada: So without aim, what is the use of practice?

Prthu Putra: He says he likes the practice without goal, and he doesn't give any value to the practice because there is goal.

Srila Prabhupada: That is foolishness. Without goal, practicing something, it is foolishness. Conversations, Vol. 10, Paris, June 13, 1974

As human life has a purpose distinct from animal life, a teacher's educational objectives should not be whimsical; rather, they should be carefully taken from one in knowledge.

Srila Prabhupada: No, it is not imagination. That is another foolishness, to imagine a goal. If we imagine some goal, that is another rascaldom. We have to understand what is the goal of life from superior. Just like a child. He does not know what is the goal of life, but his parents know he must be educated. So goal has not to be imagined. Goal has to be understood from superior. So if the superior man is also blind, then he cannot lead other blind men forward. If a blind man takes the position of superior, then he will lead these followers to the ditch only. That's all.

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Long-range goals, such as becoming Krishna conscious, learning the Bhagavad-gita and chanting offenselessly, are called educational objectives. Short, one-lesson goals are termed instructional objectives. Even if these short-term, instructional objectives are simply within the sphere of academics or are directed towards teaching some basic etiquette, they too should be supportive of the Krishna conscious educational goals and connected either directly or indirectly to serving Krishna.

Bob: What is the duty of the teacher in society? Let's say a science teacher. What should he be doing in the classroom?

Srila Prabhupada: Classroom, you should simply teach about Krishna.

Bob: He should not teach about . . .

Srila Prabhupada: No, that will include everything. But his aim should be how to know Krishna.

Bob: Can a scientist teach the science of combining acid and alkaline and this kind of science with Krishna as its object?

Srila Prabhupada: How it can be?

Bob: When one studies science, one finds general tendencies of nature, and these general tendencies of nature point to a controlling force.

Sria Prabhupada: That I was explaining the other day. "Who has supplied these chemicals?" I asked one chemist that according to chemical formula, hydrogen and oxygen mixed, it becomes water. Is it not?

Bob: That's true.

Srila Prabhupada: Now this vast water in the Atlantic Ocean and Pacific Ocean, how much chemicals were required? How many tons? So who supplied it?

Bob: This was supplied by God.

Srila Prabhupada: Somebody must have supplied You can teach like that.

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Writing Instructional Objectives

After completing the next section of this chapter, one will be able to do the following:

1. Describe the difference between educational objectives, implicit instructional objectives, and explicit instructional objectives.
2. List in writing the three ingredients for writing an explicit instructional objective.
3. When presented with an objective, characterize whether it contains the ingredients for an explicit objective.

Before a teacher can decide how he will teach a particular subject, lesson, or skill, he must first decide exactly what he wishes to teach.

The tendency of many teachers is to respond to the question, "What was I trying to achieve in that lesson?" with answers such as, "I was teaching them about Srila Prabhupada," or, "I was teaching them how to treat a guest," or even more lofty, "I was developing their Krishna consciousness." Of course, such aims are laudable and should be meditated upon, but they are long-term and cannot be nailed firmly to specific teaching episodes or student behavior. These non-specific, long-term aims are called educational objectives.

Implicit vs. explicit instructional objectives

Instructional objectives are aims that accurately specify what we intend the students to learn in a lesson or a course.

Implicit instructional objectives are when these aims are expressed only in terms of inner changes in the students. When the aims are expressed in terms of observable student behavior, we speak of them as explicit instructional objectives. Generally, explicit instructional objectives are preferable to implicit instructional objectives when planning a lesson. They allow us to evaluate and improve upon our teaching.

Of course, students of Krishna consciousness must also learn subtle items that cannot be neatly packaged into an objective, especially one that is tightly woven and swathed in scientific jargon. For example, attentively hearing the mah€-mantra should certainly be an objective while chanting japa. But chanting attentive japa is an activity for which it would be difficult to write an explicit instructional objective. Nevertheless, we should contemplate, as much as possible, what we are explicitly trying to teach our students. In this way, we will be able to pinpoint our successes and failures for the purpose of improving our methods of instruction. Furthermore, the task of writing explicit instructional objectives helps one clarify what he wishes to teach. This allows him to organize his lesson plans accordingly.

Writing Explicit Instructional Objectives

When writing explicit instructional objectives, specify the following:

1. Performance: what the student will be able to do at the end of the lesson or course. This is known as the terminal behavior.
2. Conditions: the important conditions under which the performance will occur.

3. Criteria: how well the student will have to perform the terminal behavior so that the learning will be evaluated as successful.

First attempts at writing objectives often produce implicit objectives. To change an implicit objective to an explicit objective, first check the objective's verb. For example, to understand, to grasp, to appreciate, to think, are all implicit verbs. Implicit objectives containing these verbs may be changed into explicit objectives simply by changing the verbs. The implicit instructional objective "to understand the Bhagavad-gita" can be translated into the explicit instruction objective as:

"By the end of this course, the students will be able to recite from memory, without a single mistake, and in both Sanskrit and English, ten verses from each of the following Bhagavad-gita chapters: 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 12."

Notice how translating implicit objectives into explicit ones forces us to be more specific. When clearly specified like this, explicit instructional objectives also go a long way towards the choosing of appropriate procedures for teaching.

What we want the students to learn, what the conditions of learning should be, how we will measure their performance, all are now lucidly defined.

Practicing Instructional Objectives

Writing instructional objectives is the most difficult part of planning a lesson. There are two pitfalls: vagueness and over-specification. Carefully steering between the two will yield a clearer picture of the sequence of instruction that a teacher will use. To choose that sequence, vague objectives must be translated into relatively precise ones.

General instructional objectives are necessary but insufficient. They must be translated into explicit objectives, so we know how to convert a vague hope into a concrete reality. It is possible, for example, to teach Bhagavad-gita to both seven-year-olds and seventeen-year-olds. Precisely how and what you teach will naturally differ. Though in both cases the implicit objective might be the same, to understand Bhagavad-gita, the difference will be reflected in the explicit objectives. Explicit objectives take into account the ages, levels of mastery, and experience of the students.

If you expect your students to achieve many objectives in any one lesson, you are probably being over-ambitious or over-precise. If you cannot indicate clearly how you will observe (or measure) the students' learning, you are probably being too vague. If you don't think a lesson's instructional objectives can be made concrete, beware, you may not have anything to teach.

Summary of Writing Effective Explicit Instructional Objectives

Understanding how to prepare instructional objectives is essential for teachers. The reason is obvious. You cannot select the best method of reaching your destination until the destination is clearly defined. Only when the educational goal is known can the procedures, content, methods of learning, and evaluative procedures be effectively discussed.

Here are definitions of three kinds of objectives:

1. Non-specific, long-term aims are called educational objectives.

2. Aims that express the desired terminal behavior only in terms of the unobservable inner changes in the students are called implicit instructional objectives.

3. Aims that precisely and explicitly express student's terminal behavior in observable terms are labeled explicit instructional objectives.

Explicit instructional objectives are generally preferred over implicit instructional objectives when planning a lesson because they allow us to evaluate the success of our teaching. Some pointers on writing explicit instructional objectives are listed below:

a) A well-written objective is not a description of what will be done. It specifies the kind of behavior that will be accepted as evidence that the learner has achieved the objective. Write a separate statement for each objective that you wish the learner to master.

b) A well-written objective does not have general words like "know," "appreciate," or "understand" in its statement of the successful terminal behavior of the learner. Rather, it uses specific words like "identify," "construct," or "contrast," which denote activity. Such words clearly tell what one should be able to do if one "knows," "appreciates" or "understands."

c) In describing the terminal behavior, the well-written objective defines the conditions under which the behavior will be expected to occur. It also states the criteria for minimum acceptable performance. One way of doing this is by expressing a time limit.

If one feels his teaching objectives cannot be evaluated, he may find that he is actually teaching nothing at all.

An instructional objective is "bona fide" if it answers the three questions of performance, conditions, and criteria.

a. Performance: What do I want the students to be able to do?

b. Conditions: Under what important conditions or constraints should he do it? What obvious undesirables, if any, should he do without?

c. Criteria: How well must the student do it for me to be satisfied?

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