

## 2.2 Preparing Operational Objectives

### *The Nitty Gritty of Daily Planning*

If you are not yet fully convinced of the need for written daily plans, your Mentors have powerful allies to support our claim. They are your students. Unless you think through your daily objectives carefully and follow through on reaching them, the consequences will be bad, and your students will deliver the message to you. Without meaningful planning you may find yourself the victim of what experienced teachers know as “ugly October” (although any month could be ugly). Simply put, your students will be sizing you up from the first day you meet them. If class work is not established as a routine, your students will let you know. After about a month of sketchy plans, last minute ideas, or instructions to answer the questions at the end of the chapter, behavior problems will suddenly erupt. We don’t claim that all classroom misbehavior results from neglecting to prepare adequately and in advance. We do claim, without equivocation that lack of proper planning is a major factor resulting in rowdy classes.



*Him who’s busy has lots to do. Him who’s not busy finds lots to do too.*

### *About Objectives. . . A Rationale and some Definitions*

The two terms, “goals” and “objectives” are unfortunately often misused by being applied as if they were interchangeable. They are not. Here is our explanation of the difference:

- A **goal** is a longer term learning expectation; e.g., for the year, or even for the whole program, K - 12.
- An **objective** is a shorter term learning expectation; e.g., for a lesson or for a series of lessons (*i.e.*, a unit), perhaps even for a segment of one lesson.

For our purposes here, we will use the term “objective” in our discussion of daily lesson planning. Objectives then, are, as a general rule, part of the *beginning* of a lesson plan. There are two reasons for this assertion. First, the objective(s) set(s) the foundation for the rest of the plan. Second, it is important, as we have asserted earlier, to let the students in on the objectives for the lesson, and this should happen at the beginning.

Many rubrics exist for writing daily lesson plans. Earlier, we have referred to the seven part format developed for exceptional children, but applicable to others, and to the KWHL format. Your school district may have a sample format which they prescribe for daily plans. Our favorite daily plan format derives from the thinking of a person who is not a teacher, but actually a computer specialist. Robert Mager<sup>2</sup> had the vision to organize his communicative presentations

### *A Three-part Model for Operational Objectives*

following a three-part plan which he called an *instructional objective*. In Mager's terms, an instructional objective has these three parts:

- A **statement of the change** that the instruction is planned to produce in the learner (What should the learner have come to know or be able to do as a result?)
- A **description of the learning conditions** under which that change is expected to occur (What will the teacher do or cause to happen to produce the learning?)
- A statement of what will be accepted as **evidence** that the change has actually occurred (How will you assess the effectiveness of the teaching?)

We have adapted Mager's three components into more teacher-friendly language, calling the result of the adaptation Operational Objectives. Three questions must be answered when writing operational objectives:

- *What is it you want your students to learn?*
- *How are they going to learn it?*
- *How will you know that they have learned it?*

What?, How?, and How will you know? Pretty straightforward, right? And clearly an operational plan. We think so. The first part of an objective statement *à la* Mager, *the statement of the desired change*, needs to be as specific as it reasonably can be. This isn't easy. There is almost a compulsion to use terminology such as "*The students will learn . . .*," "*understand . . .*," "*develop a sense of . . .*," etc. Whatever those words mean. The only thing clear about those terms is that they don't mean the same thing to everyone who reads or uses them.

There are three ways in which we can define such words so as to be "reasonably specific." [Wow! Even your Mentors sneak in some wiggly words – "reasonably."] These ways are: (a) Convert the statement into a "the student will . . .," or "will be able to . . ." format; (b) put the term(s) into explanatory context (*i.e.*, put operational definitions into the form of "what" statements); or (c) define the term(s) as a function of part three, the *evidence*. The first two are cumbersome. The last is the better option. A good way to do this is, for example, to define "Learn," by stating literally what evidence you will accept that they have *learned*. In any case, the importance of being clear in your own mind what you mean by those wiggly words cannot be emphasized too strongly! When you say, "The students will learn . . .," you must define *learn*. This is easier to understand when your learning intentions involve a set of facts to be learned, a concept to be developed, or a skill to be attained. But it can also be done for things like an attitude to be developed.