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Toward Objectives and Assessment: Means of Control

Alan Block University of Wisconsin - Stout

Ralph Tyler has hovered over the field of education as a thickening cloud for more than seventy years. As with that of John Dewey, it has become impossible to discuss education without confronting Tyler's influence on it. A leadership role in the move toward the development of objectives and learning outcomes as the first step of all pedagogical thought and the emphasis on evaluation of those designated outcomes that naturally followed has more or less been placed at Tyler's door. The question of aims and interests had been argued out in the latter part of the nineteenth century between John Dewey (1916) and William Torrey Harris with Dewey claiming that "education as such has no aims" (107) and Harris emphasizing that young wills needed, above all, to be trained to society's needs and purposes. Rather, said Dewey, all 'aims' are merely suggestions "as to how to observe, how to look ahead, and how to choose in liberating and directing the energies of the concrete situation in which they find themselves." Dewey's description of aims sounds not unlike our present definition of dispositions, though Dewey did not suggest that these ought to be quantified. Of course, Dewey never believed that education was an aimless and directionless exercise; rather, he held that aims were always to be discovered in activity, and therefore, could not be set prior to that activity.

William Torrey Harris, on the other hand, always the good Hegelian, held that the will had to be trained, and therefore, students in school had to endure curricula not necessarily appealing to them. Objectives were necessary to organize this training, and the achievement of these objectives could and should be measured. If Dewey argued that education was not training for life but was life itself, Harris held that education was not meant for the brief moments of childhood, but for the hopefully long extent of life. Arguing that curriculum should serve as windows on the soul, Harris held that education should raise the race culturally and train it physically. Education must estrange the individual from his natural self; must overcome his isolation, must lead him to adapt social custom so as to realize his true self. For Harris, education was not, as it was for Dewey, the process of the natural development of the powers of the mind along the lines of their natural growth, but a process by which the powers of the mind are changed from their natural character in conformity to the demands of society. Harris and the Hegelians knew in what direction the change should proceed, though they did not focus on the evaluation of that change. Harris held that education was a social process, and that a successful education facilitated adjustment of the individual to society by imparting to the pupil the great literary, aesthetic, scientific and other inheritances the race has built up. In such a way, the individual is fitted to take her place in society and carry on the work of the race.

Harris did not talk in terms of objectives; rather, he spoke in terms of moral education: the formation through curriculum of right ideas, of right habits, and of the development of deliberate actions based on principles. Later, this formulation would become the foundation of today's dispositions, but first these general goals had to be made specific. If Harris intended the development of character, then the behaviorists averred that human character was the sum of behaviors, and that each separate behavior must be individually taught. We have since theorized that processes of generalization and transfer of learning facilitated learning, but the idea of directed learning (Bobbitt's term, actually) as the substance of curriculum has continued almost unabated since the beginning of the 20th century. Objectives became the term for such educational purpose, and educators began to formulate hundreds and thousands of behaviors that the child must acquire in school.

In 1918, Franklin Bobbitt had argued that the function of education was to prepare students for the activities life required, and that a scientific study of that life could discover exactly those activities which present life required. Education was responsible for teaching students what they needed but did not yet know. These activities would be the objectives of education, and curriculum would be those experiences given to students in school by means of which the objectives would be achieved. Those objectives were defined as learning achievements, and the school must be charged to address that learning that could not be attained outside of school—this Bobbitt called intended training. Bobbitt wrote (1918, 44) that "The curriculum of the schools will aim at those objectives that are not sufficiently attained as a result of the general undirected experience" defined by the school as requisite for participation in society (italics in original). And since "human activities exist on different levels of quality or efficiency," (1918, 48), then, in a prefigurement to the initiatives of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, education must be responsible to raise all to their highest possible level of attainment. Harris's windows on the soul (mathematics, geography, literature, grammar and history) could and should now be measured. Though in this defining text Bobbitt did not address matters of testing, implicit in his definitions is the assumption that the competency of an objective was the aim of education: some evaluative process must take place. "Whether in agriculture, building-trades, housekeeping, commerce, civic regulation, sanitation or any other, education presumes that the best that is practicable is what ought to be" (1918, 48). Evaluation entered the discourses of education.

In 1949, this orientation to curriculum shifted, *but only slightly*, when Ralph Tyler, in *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* defined curriculum not only as the *activities* in which students engaged, which was how Bobbitt had defined curriculum, but also as the *objectives* those activities were meant to fulfill, as well as the *organization* and *evaluation* of those activities. Evaluation, thus, became inseparable from and integral to curriculum. Though Tyler insisted that the local teachers themselves ought to select and define the objectives, education (1949, 5) was meant to "change the behavior patterns of people," and defining objectives carefully was always a first and crucial step in the process. Those objectives could be defined by some comparison to an acceptable norm, be it local or national in

scale. Education should be organized to ensure that the objectives, carefully selected and defined, were achieved, and to accomplish this goal evaluation was necessary: a quantitative measurement assessing to what extent the behaviors, indeed, had been changed. Evaluation became the fourth component to what would soon be named the Tyler rationale. Tyler formalized into a rationalized methodology what Bobbitt had begun.

What Tyler added to curriculum discourse was the centrality of evaluation, or, as Tyler would come to call it, "assessment." Tyler boasted, "I invented the term 'evaluation' when applied to educational procedures . . . And when it began to be a cliché and evaluation meant so many different things to different people, I invented the term 'assessment' and that's what we used next" (Finder, 106). Tyler seems to acknowledge that his work with curriculum was really work meant to incorporate 'evaluation' or 'assessment' into the curricular mix. In fact, evaluation had been Tyler's focus for much of his academic life. Tyler's dissertation was titled "Statistical Methods for Utilizing Personal Judgments to Evaluate Activities for Teacher Training Curricula," and Tyler bragged that to complete it, "We reduced two million cards to what were called in the book "a thousand and one activities of teachers." Tyler's work in education had actually begun with the quantification of what in teacher education has come to be called *dispositions*. By his own boasting, Tyler assumes responsibility for this emphasis in education. We are the present day heirs to Tyler.

RALPH TYLER AND THE EIGHT YEAR STUDY

Stories of the Eight-Year Study: Reexamining Secondary Education in America, by Craig Kridel and Robert V. Bullough, Jr., positions the essentially conservative Tyler as central to that ultimately progressive study, defining Tyler as one of the key figures in the development and execution of this important experiment organized and carried out from 1932-1940 by the Progressive Education Association (PEA). In chapters alternating between discussion of specific issues with which the Study struggled, and vignettes of the people central to those issues, this text attempts to recover the history of this important, though, relatively little known experiment in education in America. And in almost the physical center of the text appears a vignette entitled, "Understanding Ralph Tyler (1902-1994)," in which, consonant with the treatment of him throughout the book, Tyler is portrayed not only as a solid member of the progressive movement, but a central figure in the enactment of this ultimately failed progressive experiment.

If the authors of this text wonder, "Why is the Eight year Study drawing increased attention now?" (2), then I am interested as well in the motives of these progressive educational theorists— Kridel and Bullough—who situate Ralph W. Tyler so prominently in the camp of the progressives, albeit in somewhat equivocal terms. After all, it was Tyler's Rationale at which more recent progressives have aimed their virulent critiques (Kleibard, 1975, Huebner, 1975, Pinar, 1978, Pinar and Grumet, 1981, Macdonald, 1988). Perhaps it is that in situating the conservative Tyler at the center of the Eight-Year Study, Kridel and Bullough mean to give mainstream status to this progressive experiment in education. Ralph Tyler epitomizes the mainstream in education. That is, in their strategic positioning of Ralph Tyler within the book and the study, the authors also situate the process of evaluation and assessment instituted by Tyler at the center of the Eight-Year Study's center, and offer these processes some legitimation from the progressive elements in education. At the same time the authors posit the progressives as original advocates of the recent emphasis on standards, objectives, dispositions, assessments, measurements and accountability. The authors (2007, 60) argue, "The Eight-Year Study never attempted to free students from tests but only to release schools from the standard Carnegie units required for college admission." Though the members early rejected the notion of testing, in fact, the authors write that the revolt against testing and measurements was not a rejection of evaluation per se. Rather, participants held that the responsibility for evaluation was to rest with teachers and not with standardized tools. Ralph Tyler, established as the coordinator of evaluation, "called for new methods of collecting student data so that important educational purposes, previously thought to be intangible and incapable of assessment, could be appraised" (2007, 75-76). With this reformulation, the authors of our text situate standards and quantitative measurement at the center of the progressive movement, implicitly offering legitimation to such agencies as NCATE and INTASC that now advocate for an increasing quantification and control of all teacher behaviors in teacher education and licensure programs.

From the beginning, the authors of the book suggest that evaluation was always the concern of this progressive experiment, thus situating evaluation at the center of the progressive movement. And no one knew more about evaluation in the schools than Ralph Winslow Tyler. The Study enlisted Tyler to organize and run the evaluation staff for the Eight-Year Study, work which Kridel and Bullough (86) assert changed the nature of evaluation in education: "No longer used for sorting students, evaluation was returned to its etymological roots: the process of drawing out values and of examining and reconsidering what should be educationally important." The authors suggest (85) that the Eight-Year study, early torn by dissension over the controversy regarding testing and evaluation, was saved by Tyler's Evaluation Staff: "By 1937, eighty-seven tests and appraisal instruments constructed by Tyler's staff were used by 285 schools and by several hundred teachers outside of those working directly with the Eight-Year Study." Evaluation, or as he would soon refer to it, assessment, was Tyler's contribution to the curriculum conversation begun in 1918 by Franklin Bobbitt. And it is this conversation, I believe, that has led to the present emphasis on the assessment of dispositions in teacher education.

Tyler's book, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction, has now achieved canonical status. It is translated into a variety of languages, and, according to Tyler, remains popular "because most people that are really concerned with the curriculum . . . are people who have to make one or deal with one" (in Finder, 141). Of course, this would include everyone engaged in the schools today, but it is not insignificant to me to note that Tyler assumes here an instrumentalist approach to curriculum: for Tyler, curriculum might be intellectualized, but only according to the principles of his rationale. Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction has become the scripture for curriculum construction, and Herbert Kleibard's claim more than thirty years ago (1975, 70) that "over time, [Tyler's] proposal for rationally developing a curriculum has been raised almost to the status of revealed doctrine," remains true today: a vast majority of students inevitably are taught to think about curriculum using some version of Tyler's prescriptive rationale. Curricula and individual lesson plans follow with remarkable regularity the structure proposed by the rationale sixty years ago by Ralph Tyler. Finally, Tyler's work with the series of tests called the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), which were devised as a means to assess what students in schools were learning, has been transformed in recent days into the preferred instrument of national testing. No doubt, as the subtitle of Finder's book announces, Tyler "taught America to teach," and without doubt, it is Tyler's framework that organizes the structures of teacher education in this twenty-first century. Today government agencies of oversight have begun to focus on the assessment of the objectives and dispositions in teacher education that they

have previously mandated as standards to be met.

It is interesting to consider that a great deal that Tyler developed was by his own account misused, but it is also possible to note that, in a certain sense, just the opposite occurred: that his ideas were used in exactly the manner they were first intended. To the concern (in Finder, 76) that the use of behavioral objectives "dehumanizes education" by setting criterial norms rather than addressing individuals, Ralph Tyler, the self-proclaimed developer of behavioral objectives, says "I would say that if the current interest in behavioral objectives implies only specific training, then I agree with the criticism of this type of activity. It ignores the notion that learning involves acquiring new behavior" (in Finder, 76). But in an interesting way, Tyler expresses a non sequitur: if an objective is a statement of a specific educational outcome, then specific training is exactly what the use of behavioral objectives implies as long as that training represents new behaviors. Advocates of behavioral objectives have thus acted in exactly the manner Tyler proposed. And to the complaint that evaluation has taken on a life of its own, Tyler off-handedly responds, "That happens in all professional fields . . ." (in Finder, 100). In this blithe discounting, Tyler implicitly agrees that the business of evaluation has lost sight of the learner, and that somehow evaluation, which was supposed to assist the teacher and the learner to enable and enhance learning, has become its own end. In this vein Tyler complained: "So there is all this evaluation business up here, without considering what it is the learner is doing" (in Finder, 100). That is, Tyler notes that assessment now drives curriculum rather than be driven by it.

However, it seems to be that according to Tyler it could not be otherwise: if evaluation, as Tyler defined it, were meant to discover "How far the learning experiences as developed and organized are actually producing the desired results," then only that which could be evaluated could be taught. If something exists, Thorndike long ago had suggested, it could be measured. Hence, the requirement of quantifiable results determines what must count as education, and determines what can be selected and defined as a legitimate objective, the first step in the Tylerian Rationale. The recent push to discover a method to assess teacher dispositions is the inevitable result of the centrality of evaluation to Tyler's curriculum applied now and with a vengeance to teacher education programs.

Tyler's complaint that his work has been misused is, therefore, a bit specious and not a little self-serving because *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* says exactly that to which Tyler takes exception. If, as Tyler says, "education is a process of changing the behavior patterns of people" (1949, 5), then objectives "represent the kinds of changes in behavior than an educational institution seeks to bring about in its students." Though Tyler says that "objectives are general modes of reaction to be developed rather than highly specific habits to be acquired" (1949, 43), in fact, not a few pages later he says "the most useful form for stating objectives is to express them in terms which identify both the kind of behavior to be developed in the student and the content or area of life in which this behavior is to operate" (1949, 47). The specificity with which the objective must be written belies the generality of his formulation. What else are objectives for except to specify the exact behavior to be changed?

Peter Hlebowitsh, (1992, 536) an apologist for the Tyler Rationale, admits that "Tyler valued clarity in the specification of the behavioural (sic) objectives, [claiming] that desired behaviours (sic) must be accompanied by some specification of a particular content or area of life in which the behaviour (sic) is to operate." But Hlebowitsh seems to accept this damning stricture as long as Tyler "did not at any time make these claims in the name of efficiency and cost-saving." That is, for Hlebowitsh, as long as the claim was not sullied with the scientific efficiency motives of the early 20th century, Tyler's insistence on the specificity of behavioral objectives remains valid. The clarity of the objectives led to

the belief in the possibility and transparency of their assessments. A little falseness made everything seem so clear.

Tyler claims to have developed his rationale during his work with the Eight-Year Study. Kridel and Bullough (2007, 94) write that "Tyler lore describes a lunch occasion in the 1930s when 'Mike' Giles, Hilda Taba, and Tyler were discussing curriculum development and the 1949 Rationale's legendary questions were conceived by Tyler and written on a napkin." Perhaps this story is as apocryphal as the one ascribing Lincoln's composition of the Gettysburg Address to the back of an envelope. But indeed, Tyler had been advocating such structure for years. About Tyler's work with the Eight-Year Study Morris Finder (2004, 17) writes: "What a school ought to teach and what a student ought to learn, Tyler argued, determine and legitimize all aspects of teaching and testing. This simple forceful logic—the plainest of commonsense it seems to us now, but alien thinking in those days—came to be known as "the Tyler Rationale." To me it seems, then, that the Eight Year Study, at the center of which Kridel and Bullough situate Ralph Tyler, was organized by the structure which only years later would be formalized in *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* and termed the Tyler Rationale. At the center of the Eight Year Study sits the structure that has organized education with only slight variations (see the work of Madeleine Hunter, for example) since the end of World War II.

For Tyler, educational purposes were to be termed 'educational objectives,' and they were to frame what was to be done in the classroom. And for the remainder of his life, Tyler tried to escape his own definitions. For example, in a 1973 interview, Tyler would claim that "I am using the term *behavior* in the broadest psychological sense. It includes any reaction a human being in capable of making. It includes attitudes towards subjects or things. It encompasses being able to solve problems and to acquire intellectual skills like reading or physical skills like running" (Finder, 72). But as Herbert Kleibard (1970) has pointed out, the broadness of Tyler's definition renders it useless: the objectives of an educational institution include everything, and the objectives a school chooses to assess are, therefore, clearly and only ideological. Though Tyler seems to have spent his life trying to talk his way out of his linguistic prison, his own definition of behavioral objectives is clear: an objective is a statement of what teachers "are attempting to do . . . stated in terms of what the student is supposed to learn, and state[d] in terms of the kinds of behavior which the teacher hopes the student will acquire as a result of instruction. These become behavioral objectives" (in Finder, 72). Measuring to what extent students' behaviors have changed during the course of instruction is the origin of present measures of student evaluation, and measurement is the concern of the present emphasis in teacher education on assessing dispositions.

Finally, comparing himself to Dewey, whose work Tyler acknowledges was also misunderstood and misused, Tyler complained that the Tyler Rationale has come to exist not as a real dynamic tool but as a cliché. But I think that Tyler's plaint exposes a certain blindness: it is not so much that his work was misused as that Tyler did not see how his work could and would be used. Tyler lacked a sense of history. Tyler criticizes (Finder, 141) those curriculum theorists who would wonder say, about an architectural style, "Is it Georgian or it is Old Colonial something?" preferring those curriculum workers who would actually build either Georgian or Old Colonial. But Tyler never wonders why an architectural style might be called one thing rather than another. Nor does he consider why one architectural style comes into vogue and another falls out of it. He doesn't seem concerned with whether an architectural style actually suits human habitation, or who is served by the style. For Tyler, curriculum must be first instrumental and utilitarian. Tyler urges curriculum workers to "help people build curriculum," but in this directive, Tyler ignores history. Tyler would build in an historical vacuum. If he wondered about the social in the construction of curriculum, Tyler did not wonder about the historical in the construction of the social.

HISTORICAL CONCERNS

And so I am in this conversation of objectives, assessment, and evaluation drawn to two sections of Walter Benjamin's Theses on the Philosophy of History (1968). The first to which I am presently drawn is Thesis VII, which has to do with the source of our cultural treasures: curriculum on the most basic level preserves and perpetuates these cultural treasures. Benjamin acknowledges that these cultural treasures can be, indeed, the products of great and creative minds, but he also demands that we recognize that these cultural treasures are the products of the anonymous toil of others as well. This considerable effort in the treasure's creation is rendered invisible by the very appearance and reification of the cultural treasure as culture, the focus on which renders invisible the work that was entailed to create it. Thus it is, says Benjamin, that every document and artifact of civilization is also a document of barbarism. The appearance of each cultural treasure occurs as a result of the often violent suppression of the workers who have helped produce it and/or the suppression of some other artifact vying for social and cultural space and acknowledgment. Implicit in every cultural treasure are the traditions, values and beliefs which its appearance suppresses. These suppressions, Benjamin avers, are written into the preserved treasures, and the historical materialist must learn to read history against the grain to give voice to the anonymous toilers, to discover that which has been suppressed to make possible the treasure's appearance, and to study critically the appearance of the cultural treasure.

So it seems to me concerning the issue of dispositions and/or behavioral objectives and the push to quantify all assessments of these artifacts. Obviously, the creation of any objective *and its assessment* precludes the creation and *assessment* of another objective, and therefore, the evaluation of it is blind to the learning that takes place outside of the objective and blind to the learning the particular objective forestalls. Similarly, whatever is chosen as a means of assessment precludes the choice of another method and instrument of evaluation which might observe a wholly different aspect of the artifact. Furthermore, each defined behavioral objective precludes the creation of its opposite, its opposing voice, and in this suppression the objective appears as a document of barbarism. Furthermore, the assessment finalizes the reification of the artifact by defining it quantitatively. These objects are made separate and distinct by establishing impermeable boundaries about them that might then be precisely measured and evaluated, and these measurements then affirm the existence of a defining boundary about the artifact that separates it from its context, provide a specious solidity which gives that artifact an illusory independence, and permit measurement of it with appropriate tools.

This reification and the suppressions and barbarisms that accompany that process, however, are rarely the subject of our classroom pedagogies. Each selected and defined normative objective represents a cultural treasure, and each defined normative objective, given substance and legitimacy *because* of its measurability, becomes the measure of reality. Each defined objective, often with some violence, must suppress alternative realities. As a statement of answers, the objective denies the question, and therefore, the possibility of critical learning. And in the end, the absolute need to assess the stated behavioral objective determines what counts as knowledge and suppresses all else. In the classroom, carefully defined objectives become the definition of education and severely limit the conversation,

and in teacher education, carefully defined dispositions become the content of the teacher's character. Such measurement does more: quantifying objectives and dispositions does more than define the proper education or the right character: it places learning and character on some criterial scale set for some ideological purpose and usually by someone outside the educational establishment. However, that purpose is masked by the establishment of the evaluative norm in the first place. The critical educator, that creature who the dispositions imagine, must read those objectives, assessments and dispositions against the grain. But in so doing, she must first look with skepticism on that which she is to transmit, and in that skepticism, complicate and muddy those measures. Finally, that critical educator must work with objectives that oppose those for which assessment has been created.

Curriculum is always a choice of documents, and teaching involves the transmission of these cultural treasures. Curriculum, I repeat, is the story we tell our children, and we are capable of telling only one story at a single time. But when any single objective is viewed through the kaleidoscope of history, then that objective becomes a multitude of stories. However, the carefully selected and defined objective inevitably reduces that multiplicity to singularity, and creates a monotonic and simple narrative. The instant we attempt to attach any finite assessment to the treasure we falsify its reality, and deny the complexity of the history of which it is a part and which it means to appropriate. In this manner, falseness makes so much clear. What seems to characterize the Tyler Rationale and the present emphasis on dispositions and their assessment, a result I believe of the movement of the twentieth century of which the Tyler Rationale is so much a reflection in matters of education, remains a belief in history premised on the ideology of progress: the emphasis on specific behavioral objectives to be learned and the measurement on some linear scale of that learning assumes the possibility of forward measureable development, be it in a subject or the field as a whole. But such a view, in order to recount a simple story of advance and improvement, ignores the complexities of the historical and social fabric that plays an enormous role in the possibility of anyone ever having the capacity to fulfill carefully selected and defined objectives.

And so I am thinking also of *Thesis IX*: here the face of Benjamin's Angel is turned toward the past. The angel, looking back, sees not a series of events, but one huge catastrophe that keeps piling "wreckage upon wreckage" at his feet. To the angel, history is not some forward progress, but one disastrous error after another. The angel would love to stay and to make whole what has been broken, but "a storm blows from Paradise," and that storm irresistibly propels the angel, head now turned toward the past, into a future the angel cannot see. This storm, says Benjamin, is called progress, and represents some violent and uncontrollable force blowing him blindly into an unseen future, even while we stare at the shards of a broken past which we would but *cannot* repair. We are blown forward blindly into a future we cannot know. Our blind and will-less steps into that future by the storm called progress is hardly a sign of progress, though our movement appears to us as forward.

So, too, with our standards and objectives and dispositions and our insistence on their quantification. They assume some progress into the future, but our eyes are forever directed towards the past. We cannot know where we are going, because we are forever looking to the past, and perhaps we blindly throw up some clearly drawn paths that hide our deceptive, innocent ignorance. Falseness makes so much seem clear.

Those who would demand specificity in objective writing and authority in assessment demonstrate their ahistoricity. On the one hand, even if we assume that these cultural treasures—objectives— are valuable, the acknowledgment that they are built from the anonymous toil of others would not only alter the objective by increasing its scope, but would open the objective to unending questions which would bury the objective under Benjamin's junk heap of history. The objective and its measurement would be rendered meaningless. And the cultural treasure represented in each stated behavioral objective points towards a future into which we are blown willy-nilly despite the objective. Our view is always towards the past, though in our illusions, supported by our measurements, we pretend we are moving forward.

The Rabbis say that merely obeying the law is not enough; we are compelled to always go beyond that law if Jerusalem is to be saved. It is not the measured and measurable answer that we seek, but the next question that draws us to study. We cannot measure the object of the question. Study is to stand always in awe of the question. Study refuses the clarity of the answer.

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