

# President's Ponderings

It is good to know, as we approach our fifth convention, that the world is so much wiser for our existence. As we assemble in Boston and talk among ourselves, we can pat ourselves on the back for the effectiveness of our communications with the world beyond our fraternity.

Have you noticed the flurry of activity in the educational system? No teacher can now enter the school as a certified practitioner until she has demonstrated on a rigorous test that she can take any statement of broad educational goals and translate these goals into observable activities. At the best colleges, of course, student teachers must demonstrate proficiency in translating into observable behaviors not only "THE STUDENT WILL KNOW" and "THE STUDENT WILL UNDERSTAND" and other such simple tasks, but also "THE STUDENT WILL GRASP THE SIGNIFICANCE OF" and "THE STUDENT WILL CRITICALLY EVALUATE". It is truly marvelous to contemplate the effect we have had on the training of teachers. Of course, the schools of education have recognized the importance of this proficiency for their own professors as well. The professors themselves are experts. In chaining the decision points for effective instructional practices, they are teaching this step last because it is the first and basic skill for instructional planning.

**You say your child's teacher can't specify what your child should be able to do?**

There used to be a strange attitude toward education. Administrators counted the number of students who sat in the same room with an instructor for a certain number of hours. A certain amount of this sitting activity earned the student a degree. It was sort of an award for persistence. In fact, the students generalized the reinforced response. Whenever they wanted to achieve an end, they would sit somewhere until it happened. We changed all that, of course. Nowadays a student can sit as long as he likes — learner-control, you know — but he doesn't pass his courses until he exhibits certain competencies. When a student says he has completed a course, you can tell what he can do.

**You say you just hired a high-school graduate who couldn't read simple instructions?**

It wasn't too long ago that we achieved the distinction of being among the new media. Audiovisual people were prone to this classification scheme, but I remember a few frame writers who thought that way too. There was a certain ironic satisfaction in being so classified, of course. To most of the people who talked that way, only a programed text was truly a program. So the oldest of the conventional media — print — discovered it was still a new medium. We can point with pride to the success of our plea for validating instructional sequences for all media. No television producer will now allow a professor to face the camera before he has faced a student or two with the instruction. It's just too expensive to use videotape on the first draft. And educational films are packaged with criterion tests.

**You say that someone tried to sell you a filmstrip last week that had no objectives?**

Do you remember the question people used to ask in the good old days? It went something like this: "Can programed instruction be used to teach X?" It was hard to tell what they meant, of course. Some of them seemed to be asking whether paper and pencil was an appropriate medium. Others seemed to be asking whether you could communicate in thirty words or less. A few, we suspect, were asking whether, if they became programmers, they could finally figure out how to get students to learn the X they had been teaching for years. I remember one or two who insisted that "programed instruction" couldn't teach what they wanted to teach. They were really surprised when a program came along that produced the results they wanted. Their only defense was that this new thing wasn't really programed instruction. Yes, it's marvelous to think how effective we've been in persuading people not to ask the question that way.

**You say you heard someone say yesterday that programed instruction is all right for teaching facts but it can't teach students to think?**

Yes, it has been a good five years. They used to talk of the fifty-year cultural lag in educational techniques. But we've changed all that. This is the year of the tiger — fast, smooth performance. Anyone for a snail?



Susan M. Markle

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