

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A PARADIGM FOR THE PROCESS OF SETTING
EDUCATIONAL GOALS

by

JOHN WALTER ILAVSKY .

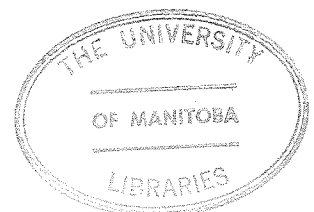
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop a paradigm for the process of setting educational goals for public school systems. It was proposed that the paradigm would stimulate critical reflection by would-be goal-setters upon the educational goal-setting process. Such reflection was deemed useful for directing the thinking and guiding the decisions of goal-setters.

A review of the literature on educational goals and the process of setting educational goals, followed by a more intensive analysis of selected sources in the literature, led to the identification of a set of nine questions which were considered critical to the process of setting educational goals. Three of the questions were labelled as "tactical questions" while the remaining six questions were termed "critical issues".

The paradigmatic framework provided a vehicle for discussing two goals projects recently completed in two public school jurisdictions in Western Canada. The discussion served to illustrate the applicability and potential utility of the framework for the goal-setting process.

A comparison of the two goals projects conducted within the framework provided by the paradigm along with some observations concerning the relationships between the paradigm and the two goals

projects provided bases for making five hypotheses about the paradigm and the process of setting educational goals. It was suggested that these hypotheses might be tested in future research.

Finally, a set of practical suggestions were proferred for consideration by educational goal-setters as guidelines for their goal-setting activities.

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My wife, Phyllis, typed the manuscript and gave birth to several ideas and a son during the study. Her contributions are appreciated.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM, SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY, METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

But especially today, when the very world in which we live is threatened with destruction, and when the fundamental values and purposes of human forms of association are under serious question, and most especially when formal education itself is squarely faced with the charge of being irrelevant to the lives of those whom it purports to educate, a full scale reassessment of the aims of education by educators and critics of education alike seems to be inevitable (Brown, 1970, p. v).

There is evidence of considerable recent interest and activity in the setting of educational goals. It also appears that this interest and activity stems from a real concern about the purposes of education and the role of the school in achieving those purposes.

Such concerns have been evident at all levels of education. Canadians have recently had the opportunity to review publications such as Learning to be (Faure, 1972) and The Purposes of Education (Lauwerys, 1973), the reports of international and national studies on the aims of education. Furthermore, major conferences have also been held in Canada recently on educational goals and educational planning.¹ In addition to the foregoing, the Canadian Teachers'

¹
Cicely Watson (ed.), Educational Planning: Papers of the Invitational Conference, March 20-22, 1967 (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1967); J.A. Riffel and E. Miklos (ed.), Social Goals, Educational Priorities, and Dollars: Planning Education in the Seventies, Proceedings of the Invitational Conference on Educational Planning (Edmonton, Alberta, Human Resources Council and The Canadian Council for Research in Education, 1970).

Federation (1973) has embarked on a national study on educational goals. This study, still in progress, offers yet another indicator of a nationwide interest in the goals of education.

Provincially, goals-related activities have been equally evident. Within the last six years, three provinces have received the reports of commissions established to examine the goals of education.¹ At least another two provinces are presently conducting an overt investigation into their school systems' goals.²

At the district or local level, numerous examples of goal-setting activities can be cited. School districts and schools across Canada have recently examined or are in the process of examining their educational goals and objectives.³

In short, interest and activity in the establishing of educational goals is very obvious in Canada today.

¹Living and Learning, The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1968); A Choice of Futures, Report of the Commission on Educational Planning (Edmonton: Queen's Printer for the Province of Alberta, 1972); The Secondary School, Report of the Core Committee on the Reorganization of the Secondary School (Winnipeg: Department of Education, 1973).

²Issues and Choices, A Summary of the 1973 Fall Conferences on Education in Saskatchewan (Regina: Saskatchewan Department of Education); "British Columbia minister announces broad changes for the educational system", School Progress, (April, 1973), pp. 22-24.

³Goals studies have been recently undertaken in Bayview Elementary School (Vancouver), Lethbridge S.D. No. 51, Saskatoon Public and Separate Schools, River East School Division No. 9 (Winnipeg), Altona (Manitoba), and Etobicoke (Toronto)—to name but a few.

I. THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to develop a paradigm for the process of setting educational goals through an analysis of the literature on educational goals and a study of selected experiences. The paradigm, to consist of a set of questions which raised important issues about the educational goal-setting process, was designed to promote critical reflection by would-be goal-setters on the process of setting educational goals. Such critical reflection could direct the thinking and guide the decisions of goal-setters.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It has been pointed out that goal-setting activities are currently absorbing considerable amounts of time and energy of educational agencies. While the existence of goals kits and their availability through commercial channels reflects a need for guides to the process of establishing educational goals, more direct demands for such guides can be cited.

Brown, in calling for a general theoretical framework to act as a guide, observed:

...at a more analytical level, one may consider a theory of aims (T) which is intended as a guide to the formulation of aims (F). If T is justified, it should precede F; that is, if it performs a role of clarification a case might be made for it as a discipline in its own right—a discipline requiring close examination before the task of actually propounding aims of education begins (1970, p. 145).

The Center for the Study of Evaluation, addressing itself to the nature of needs-assessment in education, noted:

To most people, the second alternative appeared most satisfying. It called for some procedure whereby the goals of the school would be set and declared as the intended goals.... The major considerations to the needs-assessment approaches were who established the goals and how were they established (Hoepfner et. al., 1973, p. 2).

The above appears to call for a framework which would facilitate analysis of or critical reflection on the process of setting educational goals. The role of analysis has been examined by Fisher:

I tend to visualize analysis as playing a somewhat modest, though very significant, role in the over-all decision-making process.... planning decisions problems must ultimately be resolved on the basis of intuition and judgement. I suggest that the main role of analysis should be to try to sharpen this intuition and judgement. In practically no case should it be assumed that the results of the analysis will 'make' the decision (1966, p. 11).

Defining the role of analysis more specifically, Fisher suggested:

"In sum, if we can structure the problem so that the right questions are being asked, we shall be well on the way toward a good analysis" (1964, p. 8, emphasis mine). Observing that the contribution of analysis to sharpened intuition and judgement may be modest, Fisher nevertheless observed that "only a small amount of sharpening may on occasion have high pay-off" (1964, p. 6).

Fisher was aware of the setting in which analysis was to occur. His comments seem very appropriate for the situation facing the goal-setter:

Usually the context in which the analysis takes place is fairly broad (often very broad) and the environment very complex, with numerous interactions among the key variables in the problem. This means, on the one hand, that simple, straightforward solutions tend to be the exception rather than the rule. On the other hand,

even in the most comprehensive systems analysis can never be complete. But an analysis does not have to be complete to be useful (1967, p. 2).

How does the foregoing apply to the problem identified in this study? Consider the following:

1. The process associated with the setting of educational goals is important.
2. The context in which this process occurs is complex and does potentially contain numerous interactions among many variables.
3. Some of these variables may prove to be key variables.
4. The various approaches to goal-setting advocated by publishers clearly imply that no straightforward solutions to the problem exist.

Consequently, the environment in which educational goal-setting occurs is such that analysis of the process by which the goals are set can provide a high pay-off. Furthermore, that pay-off need not be purchased with a prohibitive expenditure of time and energy. To paraphrase Livingstone (1973), goal-setters may well be advised to devote more critical reflection to the tactics associated with their activity.

III. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Terms used in this study were defined as follows:

Goal: A statement of broad direction or intent which is general and timeless.

Objective: A statement, arising from a goal, which identifies a particular achievement or accomplishment that can be verified at

a given time and under specific conditions.

Purpose: Synonymous with goal.

Critical Reflection: The systematic examination of alternative options to the resolution of a problem or issue, including the careful and explicit consideration of the perceived costs and benefits of these alternatives.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The first task of the study was to derive a list of questions pertinent to the process of establishing educational goals.

The review of the literature conducted for this study provided several themes. These themes were further explored by reference to several selected sources which could be assigned to three general categories:

1. Theoretical works which attempted to deal with the conceptual issues relevant to the educational goal-setting process.
2. Quasi-theoretical sources in which prescriptions or guidelines had been established for the goal-setting process in specific educational jurisdictions.
3. Documents of recently completed educational goals projects.

The list of questions derived from these sources was examined to uncover duplication and redundancy. A list of questions was then selected for inclusion in the paradigm.

In some instances, the questions selected for the paradigm were explicitly stated in the materials surveyed; in other instances, the questions were inferred from the reports and the literature. The

questions once selected were arranged in a 'logical' structure.

Discussion of the paradigm was undertaken with specific reference to two goal-setting exercises recently carried out in Western Canada; namely, in Lethbridge, Alberta and River East School Division No. 9 of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The discussion attempted to relate the paradigm to the field.

V. ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on several assumptions:

1. It was assumed that critical reflection by those who intended to establish goals upon the process of goal-setting would provide pay-offs in terms of effectiveness and efficiency for their enterprise.
2. The paradigm, consisting of a set of questions concerning the process of setting educational goals, was deemed a suitable device for provoking critical reflection.
3. The paradigm provided by this study was not intended to be scrupulously followed. Rather, it was assumed that the paradigm would illustrate the need for and value of critical reflection upon the process of establishing educational goals and would provide the impetus for educational agencies intent on setting goals to deal explicitly with those issues deemed critical to the process.

VI. LIMITATIONS

While promoting critical reflection upon the process of establishing educational goals, the study recognized that analysis of an issue so complex could never be complete. Consequently, a limited analysis was undertaken in the study. Such limited analysis did not detract from pointing out the value of reflection on at least several carefully selected issues.

It was not intended to provide, in this study, a comprehensive listing of questions relevant to the process under consideration. While the reports and literature surveyed by this study were of influence, the selection of questions for inclusion in the paradigm were dependent upon the judgement of the investigator.

The paradigm itself was considered to be one of several possible structures. Other combinations of questions and alternative orderings of these were certainly anticipated. In fact, it was considered a contradiction to advocate analysis of the process of goal-setting while arguing for a single framework for such analysis.

In short, the study urged potential goal-setters to parallel the analysis of process contained in the study itself. In so doing, it was envisioned that alternative paradigms having relevance to local issues would emerge.

VII. DELIMITATIONS

This study centered on the process of goal-setting in elemen-

tary and secondary school systems. It might not have relevance for institutions of higher learning or for non-educational agencies.

While many educational goals studies have been conducted in recent years, a select few were analyzed in this study for the purpose of generating the questions for the paradigm. Those selected were perceived by the investigator to possess a high utility for this study. The study was not considered to be an exhaustive analysis of goal-setting projects.

The search of the literature on goals was similarly restricted.

Discussion of the paradigm was intended to illustrate the utility of the paradigm as a vehicle for promoting critical reflection. Consequently, the discussion did not explore the full range of solutions and concomitant implications associated with the questions raised in the paradigm.

VIII. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The significance of and the need for a paradigm to stimulate critical reflection upon the process of setting educational goals was indicated. A methodology for constructing such a paradigm was outlined.

Chapter II, which follows, presents a review of issues relevant to the educational goal-setting process as found in the educational literature. In Chapter III, the data for generating the paradigm is outlined, the paradigm is presented, and a brief discussion of the paradigm is provided in order that its component questions be some-

what clarified. Chapter IV relates the paradigm to two recently completed goals projects in an attempt to demonstrate the utility of the paradigm. Further observation, together with hypotheses about the process of setting educational goals which might be explored in the future, are presented in Chapter V. The practical implications raised by this study are outlined in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Much has been written about the aims, goals,¹ and objectives of education. While many essays present persuasive arguments for certain educational goals or processes for formulating educational goals, that literature which attempts to analyze the issues relevant to educational goals and the goal-setting process provides a basis for critical reflection upon these matters and is reviewed in the following pages.

An examination of the literature on educational goals and the process of formulating educational goals indicates a diversity of interests and concerns on the part of writers. To facilitate an ordered presentation of these diverse views, several general themes apparent in the literature have been used in this study. These are: philosophical foundations relevant to educational goals; the functions of educational goals; characteristics of educational goals; the importance of the process by which educational goals are established.

¹In this chapter, the term 'goal' will embrace concepts such as ideals, purposes, functions, aims and objectives. This is necessitated by the fact that the terms are often used interchangeably. Where the term 'goal' is to have a particular meaning, that meaning will be specifically noted.