

Outcomes-Based Education: Planning, Teaching and Assessment Possibilities

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Abstract:

This paper discusses some of the basic principles of outcomes-based education, and addresses them in Indian Higher Education planning, teaching and evaluation. It will help teachers understand that OBE's theory and principles can be converted into concrete steps in the preparation, teaching and assessment of education for students. The paper acknowledges the fact that OBE has both opponents and supporters and quickly discusses some of the common concerns about OBE. In several ways, the paper is deliberately provocative and encouraging educators to challenge their existing teaching practices and explore ways of integrating those concepts in results-oriented learning. The article is not meant as a detailed OBE treatise. This presents several concepts that are central to OBE and suggests means of discussing these theories more closely.

Keywords: Teachers' instructional planning, teaching and assessment of student learning.

Introduction:

“A good archer is not known by his arrows but by his aim.”

-Thomas Fuller

“A windmill is eternally at work to accomplish one end, although it shifts with every variation of the weathercock, and assumes ten different positions in a day.”

-Charles C. Colton

Outcome-based education is easy to conceptualize but difficult to define. This is an education approach in which curriculum decisions are driven by the results that students must show at the end of the course. Education based on results can be summarized like 'results-oriented thinking' and is the opposite of 'input-based education,' which emphasizes the educational process and accepts whatsoever. The results agreed in outcomes-based education on what is being taught and assessed for the curriculum guide.

In the context of the learning outcomes it is clear what the education results will be and how they will be organized, the educational strategy, the teaching methods, the assessment procedures and the educational setting. At least three viewpoints are available to judge the quality of the educational system. The system inputs, what happens inside the system and the system outputs. Anyone willing to receive information should focus their attention mainly on money, capital, services, etc. and may base their opinion on the performance and usefulness of the process by using economic rationalism.

Those who are interested in results will focus mainly on products or educational outcomes. All aspects of education can be argued that are important and that quality is not to be assessed from a narrow perspective. However, there have been increased calls for more attention in western society in recent years to the outcomes of education in order to assess the return on educational investments (especially public education). The growing demand for accountability is one reason why diverse

forms of outcome education spread rapidly over the 1980s and 1990s, in countries like the United States and the United Kingdom.

Each education system has two basic types of outcomes. The first type includes results such as results of tests, completion rates, employment after-course, etc. The second type of result is less measurable and generally shows the skill, the ability or the essence of the training of the learners. This is the second kind of result.

In Spady's words:

“ Outcome-Based Education means clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences.” “This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens ”

(Spady, 1994:1).

Spady's main idea is that the OBE approach to planning, delivery and evaluation requires that administrators, teachers and students focus their attention and effort on the desired outcomes of education—the outcomes that are expressed by student learning in terms of individuals. One approach highlights the students' mastery of traditional academic results (usually focused on the subject) and certain cross-disciplinary outcomes (e.g. the ability to solve problems or work collaboratively). The second approach focuses on long-term cross-curricular results directly related to the future roles of students (e.g. productive workers or responsible citizens or parents). These two approaches correspond to the traditional and transitional OBE and transformational OBE that Spady (1994) calls.

Spady clearly favours a revolutionary approach to OBE where "high quality, culminating demonstrations of significant learning in context" (Spady, 1994:18). For Spady, learning is not significant unless the results reflect the complexities of real life and promote the life roles faced by the students after their formal education has been finished.

OBE is guided by three basic assumptions in addition to the belief that the findings must reflect meaningful long-term learning:

- Every student can learn and excel, but not all at the same time.
- Successful learning encourages much more learning.
- Schools (and teachers) monitor the circumstances under which students will or will not be successful in school.

From his three premises, Spady developed four essential principles of OBE.

1. clarity of focus
2. designing back
3. high expectations
4. expanded opportunities

The first principle is clarity of focus: this means that all teachers must clearly focus on what they want students to do. In planning and teaching teachers should therefore focus on helping students to develop the knowledge, competences and arrangements that ultimately will allow them to

achieve significant, clearly articulated results. This principle obliges teachers to make clear for the students at all stages of the teaching process their short-and long-term purpose for learning. It also needs educators to rely on clearly defined significant results for every student review.

The second principle is often described as a backrest and is inseparably bound up with the first principle. That means that a consistent description of the essential education that students should accomplish by the completion of their formal training must be made the starting point for all course development. All educational decisions are then based on the "desired final result" and the "building blocks" of learning that students must achieve so that the longer-term outcomes can eventually be achieved. Killen and Spady (1999) describes a systematic framework to develop curricula for higher education in this way, and Collier (2000) illustrates its application.

The third fundamental principle of OBE is that teachers should expect all students very much. In literature, there is ample evidence that teachers need to set the high and challenge level for performance to encourage students to get deeply involved in the issues they are learning from (e.g. Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study 1999). The idea that successful learning promotes successful learning is very closely related to helping students achieve high standards (Spady 1994). As learners excel, they build their confidence, increase their faith, and embark on further learning challenges. One of the main reasons for using OBE is that it can motivate all students to do hard things properly.

Intellectual quality is not something for a few pupils: something that all pupils should expect, which is linked with the fourth principle: that pupils should endeavour to offer all pupils more opportunities. The belief that not all students learn the same way at the same time is based on this notion (Spady, 1994). However, most students can achieve high standards by offering adequate opportunities—the truth is that the students learn important things; they do not learn them in a specific manner or by a certain arbitrary means.

For example, we cannot conveniently ignore the design principle or the expanded opportunities principle and continue to say that we have an OBE system. One of the attractions of results-based education is the ability for managers to control the outcomes of education while at the same time offering teachers a great deal of freedom to select the content and methodologies, they use to help their students achieve the results. Both of these issues of control and freedom can create tension; teachers can struggle with authority and teachers can not like how teachers use their choice. Alternatively, it will try and show that the teachers can operate within a results-based system and have the ability to deal with a lot of social, moral and racial issues of teaching and learning at the same time. The paper will not settle the controversy because that challenge is tough.

Instructional Planning:

The OBE system has three main elements: deciding what students are to achieve, how students are to help them achieve these results (i.e., decide content and teaching strategy) and how students are to be determined when the students have reached the results (i.e., decide assessment and reporting procedure). The system includes three main steps in educational planning. Such decisions are made as a curriculum expert (e.g. a secondary science teacher) in the view of most students. However, if students are to achieve broader results—for example the key skills—they have to organize learning programs in an integrated fashion that draws on elements from all areas of learning.

Curriculum documents are broadly written in any State or in any national education system; therefore, they do not address the particular needs of individual schools or particular groups of students directly. Teachers need therefore sufficient detail for their daily work in order to be able to

translate whatever course guidelines they receive into specific teaching curricula. The programs are therefore planning which guide the selection of lesson results, content, teaching strategies, resources and assessment procedures by each teacher. The programs may be for large work areas (e.g. four-year courses) or small work groups (e.g. a subject area). The nature of these programs will be very different, but they can be similar in structure. The objective of each program should be to clarify (to explain why it has been implemented), goal (to explain the successes of the program) outcomes statements, quality statements (to show the specific scope of the program), instructional method statements (to illustrate how the training experiences should be organized), and assessments. Every programming form addresses these questions at some point, but three basic styles of programming can be used by stressing different key elements.

1. Content-based programming:

The selection of content precedes the consideration of results or teaching strategies in content programming; content-based programming is the approach most teachers are familiar with. This stress "covers the course" almost entirely by implying that teachers must teach specified material over each period of time (lesson, word, year, etc.). In many cases, the content being taught is closely linked to a subject-based textbook. This approach takes little account of how much each student will learn in the time available and causes teachers to believe that it is acceptable and appropriate to learn different amounts of each individual student. However, we can find out that different differences are based on their learning ability. Yet teachers have not forgotten learner's outcomes.

2. Activities-based programming:

The choice of learning experiences takes precedence over other considerations in the activity-based programming; experience-based curriculum stresses student interactions by requiring students to think about what they could learn from these activities. It is very difficult to justify content or experience-based programming on a non-administrative basis.

3. Outcomes-based programming:

The first choice in outcomes-based programming is what students will learn about and be able to do when the course is done. "Scheduling results means organizing education to achieve predetermined results." It begins by specifying clearly what the students need to know, what they can do and what attitudes or values are desirable at the end of the programme.

"In outcomes-based education . . . you develop the curriculum *from* the outcomes you want students to demonstrate, rather than writing objectives *for* the curriculum you already have."

(Spady, 1988:6).

The program is built to offer all students equal opportunities for each outcome, using these findings as a guide. The most important element of results-based education is that 'all students are expected to be successful. There are many different means to approach results-based programming and evaluation.

In order for all the students to learn well and to achieve particular achievements, teachers must follow certain instructional processes and each has consequences for the plan and curriculum of their teachers.

- Teachers need to properly prepare their students to succeed. This requires teachers to understand exactly what students want to know, to anticipate difficulties and to minimize those difficulties.
- Teachers need to create a positive learning environment that helps students, no matter how easy or difficult the learning process is to find. In large part, your relationship with students depends on this positive environment, but it also depends on your effort to help the physical environment learn.
- Teachers need to help students understand why they need to learn (including what it will be of use to them in future) and how they will know when they learn it. Do not assume that students will notice the importance of what you teach because you know why. And never teach anything that is not useful to you.
- Teachers need to use a variety of teaching methods to help each student learn. We should not presume that all students are similarly capable of learning from one single education approach, and that no specific education method is a good way of helping students to achieve these learning outcomes. If you have taken the findings into account that students want to achieve, the content you are going to use to help students achieve these results, the characteristics of the students and the resources available, you have to select the best strategy. The so-called "student-centred" approaches should not always be considered to be the correct OBE technique to use. These are often adequate but more specific instructional approaches sometimes are acceptable (Killen, 1998).
- Teachers need to offer students sufficient opportunities to practice with their new knowledge and skills, so that they can explore, experiment, concrete errors and adapt their thinking under the guidance of the teacher. It is important to help students apply their new knowledge and skills instead of just building up new knowledge and skills.
- Teachers must help every student to personally each study episode (lesson or class of lessons) so that they are aware of what they have learned and where they are led. Don't assume that without your guidance students can do this.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Teaching is only teaching when students learn. Therefore, "it remains the responsibility of educators to construct meaningful learning experiences that lead to the mastery of outcomes" (Cockburn, 1997:7). Teachers have to make informed decisions about teaching strategies to build meaningful learning experiences. There are often two basic teaching approaches: teacher-centred and student-centred.

1. ***Teacher-centred approaches:*** These are also referred to as explicit, deductive and expository instructional — examples of which are lectures or demonstrations. Through these teaching methods, the teacher determines what is to be understood and how the knowledge to be learned is delivered.
2. ***Student-centred approaches:*** These also referred to as learning through discovery, inductive learning, or learning from inquiries emphasize much more the role of the learners in the learning process, such as cooperative learning and research projects for students. You still have the education agenda when you use instructional methods focused on students, but you do have much less influence over what and how students learn. You are no longer a filter that needs to pass through all information before you reach the learners.

Based on how learning is organized, teaching strategies often include labels such as reading, class discussion, group work, cooperative learning, troubleshooting, student research, etc. Killen (1998) explains how these and several other techniques can be used in a broad range of instructional

scenarios and points out that no technique is an appropriate method in which students can produce all learning results.

Whatever approach to teaching you use; it is important to keep the following points in mind:

- • LEARNING rather than teaching should be the main focus.
- • Impossible for students to learn unless they THINK.
- • The PROCESS you use to include students in material and the CONTENT itself will promote and enable the analysis.
- • There is no distance on your subject – you need to support students to make LINKS in other topics.
- It is your job to help LEARN HOW TO LEARN students.

In the OBE system, you cannot assume that all students learn from a strategy such as a small group discussion equally well, and you cannot assume that every student in any fixed time will learn the same thing. If you are to assist all students in achieving the results of what you teach, you have to be flexible in the way you teach and the expectations you have at any time for each student. You have to accept that students will be in different stages in most courses and therefore work towards various short-term outcomes at the same time. You'll have to be creative, and you'll probably notice that you won't use full class teaching very often to support each pupil in your curriculum (under the restrictions of a traditional school system).

ASSESSMENT

It is only natural to think about how far individual students achieve these results when we focus our planning and instruction on the results of education, so that we can see to what extent our intentions have been met if you wish. So, we must think about the evaluation and this can also be a matter for certain teachers in an OBE system. Nonetheless, in theory good assessment practices in OBE do not vary from good evaluation practices in any other education system.

The four concepts that characterize OBEs have many significant consequences for the assessment of student learning. If the concepts of emphasis and development are followed, all assessments must be related to the essential long-term outcomes to be accomplished by students, or to the short-term effects that can emerge from these long-term outcomes. Focusing evaluation only on specific results that neglect the long-term intent of the program of research is clearly not appropriate. Of example, it is important to periodically review the progress of the students towards the accomplishment of core competences.

To be useful in an OBE system, assessment should conform to the following principles:

- The evaluation methods should be valid — in reality, they should evaluate what you intend to evaluate.
- Reliable testing methods – reliable findings should be produced.
- Assessment processes should be realistic — no insignificant considerations such as the cultural background of the applicant can affect them.
- Testing must demonstrate the knowledge and skills that students need to learn more.
- Testing should suggest something that educators and individual students do not learn. This means that students should be able to apply their knowledge and to extend them to the limit of their understanding.

- A thorough and clear assessment should be carried out.
- Assessment will promote the ability for every student to know important things;
- The evaluation should allow this individuality to be demonstrated because students are individuals.

At OBE, assessment should always help improve the education of students. For evaluation should help research, appraisal activities will actually provide students with opportunities to show what they have achieved and recognize what they still need to learn. Since learning is not just an addition of prior knowledge, it should help student's connective what they learn to their prior knowledge. Because this process is continuous restructuring.

The development of equity evaluations would require careful analysis not only of our assessments and the way we conduct them, but also of how the evaluation processes we use respond to different individuals and groups. The challenge is to develop evaluation tasks flexibly enough to give students a sense of achievement, challenge the upper reaches of understanding of the student and provide a window in the thinking of each student. In this way, students may need to allow several points of entry and exit for evaluation activities and to respond in ways that reflect different levels of knowledge and sophistication. Equity involves every student being able to learn the significant knowledge and qualifications that are assessed and the content that they have not been given an opportunity to learn cannot be assessed fairly.

Evaluations can help students learn important things only if they are based on standards that reflect high expectations of all students; assessment equity cannot be achieved as long as excellence is not required of all. If we want excellence, the expectation must be high enough to allow each student to learn important knowledge and skills with effort and good instruction. This realism is important, as Gardner (1991) indicates, if teachers know what students learn.

Learner's Responsibility for Learning:

In an OBE model, "learners are responsible for their own learning and success" are often proposed (Cockburn, 1997, p.6). The issue was probably caused by a misunderstanding of the theory behind the concept. This is of interest for teachers and parents. The theory accepts that education is essentially an individual and private activity, no matter what the educators do. For its students the teacher cannot learn; the teacher can make learning easier only. In this respect, OBE stresses the teacher's role to clearly defining the goals and helping students achieve the results. It also stresses the responsibility of the learner to try and achieve the results.

One of the challenges that students are accountable for their own education is that they can find it very difficult to know if they are learning or not. They may be able to see that they make mistakes or answer questions wrongly, but this doesn't necessarily mean they are aware that they don't learn. Missing performance may be equated rather than incomprehension to lack of effort. Many people have trouble understanding why they don't understand even when they know what it is, they must remember (Killen, Meade, Yli-Renko & Fraser, 1996). This gives the teachers a new responsibility to help students to diagnose and evaluate their approaches to learning. One of the drawbacks of outcomes-based education is that it helps students understand, be aware of what they really know and be aware of their own control over their own learnings.

Conclusion:

The principles of the OBE and the philosophies discussed above in this article are subject to four simple questions: What do we want students to learn? Why do we want students to learn these things? How can we best help students to learn these things? and, how will we know when students have learned? Such concepts can be seen as an interesting mix of philosophical positions, but are naturally most strongly rooted in logical empiricism. Spady's view on OBE is that we should not allow schooling (or other aspects of education and training) to be driven by an

"Edu-centric paradigm—a paradigm defined by what the system is and (always) has been rather than by what it should and could be if student learning and future success in the Information Age were its true purpose and priority"

(Spady, 1998:10).

In the assumption however, that OBE offers a text as a way to achieve things that are appropriate for all school contexts, OBE becomes ideologically fixed. Successful implementation of OBE would allow educators to contextualize the OBE concepts correctly. It should be clear from these principles that OBE is not an 'event,' but a comprehensive approach to education. It is not a matter of "fitting the calendar" but of a set of ideas that affect the overall curriculum of the college. One of the reasons for successful student learning is that results-based education encourages teachers to be well-trained.

My answer to OBE's critics is generally to say: first understand, then try, then criticize. No learning system is perfect, and no program can "act," except for the dedication of educators. Clearly, OBE has not been the spectacular achievement its supporters have hoped would have been in certain other nations. Teachers should encourage students in their efforts to achieve significant and meaningful results to follow this approach to learning. Teachers will know that if all students succeed, and nobody engaged in the education should be satisfied by their efforts, they achieve their goals.

If teachers want to succeed with outcomes-based education, they need to adopt the position that "there is no such thing as failure, only feedback and results . . . success depends on how well we process the feedback we get regarding our efforts" (Alessi, 1991, p.14).

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