OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION
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"The educational system is not working. Teachers are not teaching. Students are not learning. Something needs to be done! The schools need to change." This is the battle cry of parents, students, school boards and governments. Many view the educational system lacking when preparing students for a world beyond academia. This battle cry can be heard coast-to-coast and country-to-country. What are educators doing to address these concerns? One solution proposed is the development of an outcomes-based educational system. Proponents of outcomes-based education believe this educational focus can help overcome these concerns and create an environment where real learning takes place. But what is outcomes-based education (OBE) and can it better prepare students for the tasks that lie ahead of them after graduation? These two issues will be examined in the following article.

What is OBE?

In general, the theory behind the development of OBE is simple and clear cut. OBE sets clear educational goals and then designs curriculum that enables students to meet those goals. Needham (1995) concisely describes OBE as "stating what you want students to be able to do in measurable terms, then designing curriculum that lets them learn how to do it (p.10). Others consider OBE in more complex terms such as a fundamental rethinking of the function and structure of education. So what is OBE?   It is both. This is where much confusion develops over what OBE is and how it is developed in the classroom and the educational environment in general. To begin our discussion a few of the more common definitions of outcomes and OBE will help illuminate the basic characteristics of OBE.

King and Evans (1991) suggest that outcomes are the end products of the instructional process. These outcomes may be observable or internal changes in the learner. Goals and outcomes are synonymous to William Spady (1994) a leading proponent of OBE. In other words, outcomes are the end results, the goals to be attained, the ideals to be demonstrated for mastery at the end of a particular unit, course, or program. The key term for many educators is the word: demonstrated. Spady writes, "demonstration is the key word: an outcome is not a score

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or a grade, but the end product of a clearly defined process that students carry out" (Spady, 1994, p.18). Therefore, the outcomes-based educational process is a way of designing, developing, delivering, and documenting instruction in terms of its intended goals and outcomes. Or in other words, OBE means organizing the educational process to obtain the desired results and allowing students to demonstrate their achievement as a means of evaluation (Spady, 1994). Gerber (1996) describes OBE as defining, organizing, focusing, and directing all aspects of an instructional and credentialing system in relation to things all learners need to demonstrate successfully when they exit the system. John O'Neil (1994) suggests that OBE is the simple principle that decisions about curriculum and instruction should be driven by the outcomes students should display at the end of their educational experience. The outcomes become the foundation for decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, staff development and so on (p. 8).

Characteristics of OBE

Definitions go on, but some general characteristics of OBE can be summarized from the above examples. OBE makes the educational process intentional. An intentional process now decides decisions about curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, etc., not the whims of educators or politicians. Some order is to be followed as the instructor picks and chooses the educational experiences the students will follow through the course. Also, the teacher and student can experience results-oriented thinking as they work together toward student mastery of certain outcomes. The curriculum and instruction is then designed with the end in mind. Once outcomes or exit goals have been mastered the student can progress to their next step.

Most educators already have an end in mind when they begin a course, so how is OBE any different than what schools use today? Dale Shipley (1995) suggests there are several fundamental shifts that must occur for a unit, course or program to become outcomes-based. They are listed below.

Program Design or Course Design

Traditional	**OBE**
inputs are important *	results are important
time-based; courses are specified by time	Outcomes based; courses are

and subject with number of hours per week/ term

linked to outcomes and imply flexible use of time, resources, and space

learners are grouped in classes and move through the courses/subjects together

learners advance through the courses in various ways to achieve outcomes

subjects and sections are assigned to teachers who prepare and teach classes and evaluate learners

teachers are responsible for a set of outcomes related to a course or program

learners accumulate courses and grades over a set number of terms which eventually lead to a credential

learners demonstrate achievement of outcomes over time and according to their own abilities

Teaching Roles

faculty prepare, teach, evaluate with

teachers design, plan, instruct,

respect to their own subjects/courses (learners learn what is taught)

facilitate, demonstrate, assess, evaluate related to a set of predetermined , community based outcomes

teachers stand and deliver in class; are seen as repositories of information which they disseminate

teachers advise, consult, coach, facilitate, provide resources, demonstrate, and instruct

most teacher-student "contact" is classroom-based

teacher-learner "contact" may be based on the number of learners a teacher as member of a teaching team has responsibility for

teachers provide teaching and usually work autonomously

teachers facilitate learning and usually work as members of teaching teams

 (Shipley, 1995, p. 18-19).

* inputs are defined as things contributed to the learning environment such as per-pupil ratio, number of books in the library, number of computers in the classroom..... (O'Neil, 1994, p. 7).

It is interesting to note in the synopsis that Shipley chooses to use the word learners and not students. This is a basic assumption of OBE. Students or learners become an integral part of the educational process and their learning experience. As the student develops ownership of the outcomes, that student becomes not just an observer, but a participant in his education. The instructor and the learner become partners in the educational experience, a major ideological shift for many educators. This paradigm shift has other effects on the classroom.

Preparing Students: OBE in Classroom Design

There are several characteristics of an OBE classroom. The OBE classroom is full of energy and excitement as the teacher and learner participate fully in the educational experience. Other characteristics of the outcomes-based classroom influence the way teachers develop curriculum, focus instruction, utilize resources and ultimately assist students in processing information.

Curricular Development: Outcomes

With OBE teachers approach curriculum design from generally defined exit outcomes to program outcomes to appropriate course outcomes, unit outcomes and lesson outcomes. Each outcome fits into the larger scope of fulfilling the exit outcomes. (Exit outcomes are the characteristics or outcomes exhibited by a successful learner who has graduated from the program.) Spady (1994) illustrates the development of outcomes in this model.

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Exit Outcomes
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Program Outcomes
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Course Outcomes
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Unit Outcomes
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Lesson Outcomes**

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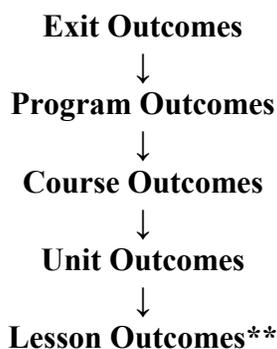
**See glossary at end of the article

When following this model for curriculum development, the teacher and learner can understand how each lesson, unit and course supplies the needed knowledge, skill, or attitude to become a

successful learner of the program. Learners can see the intentionality of the curriculum and the educational experiences within each unit and course. Learners can participate more fully in their own educational experience when they know where they are going to end up and what is expected of them along the way.

Focusing Classroom Instruction

OBE educators shift the focus in the classroom from teacher centered to student centered. The learner and his achievements, weaknesses and strengths, become important to the teacher and the attainment of the outcomes of the program. Accountability for performance falls squarely on the learner.   There is an emphasis on exit not entrance requirements, so OBE can accommodate different learning achievements, degrees of intelligence and levels of literacy. The focus for the teacher becomes assessing the achievement of the learner at the beginning of the unit, course, or program and then designing individualized instruction along with group instruction to help the learner master the agreed upon outcomes of the lesson, unit, course or program. The teacher's role changes from a gatekeeper of the knowledge to a partner in education. This in turn changes pedagogical practices to a more active, engaging and frequent feedback type of classroom. Sizer (1983) considers the role of the teacher in OBE as a coach helping learners achieve the expected outcomes.

This student-focused environment reinforces Spady and Marshall's (1991) basic contentions of education. They believe all students can learn and succeed, they also believe success breeds success, and that schools control the conditions of success for each student.
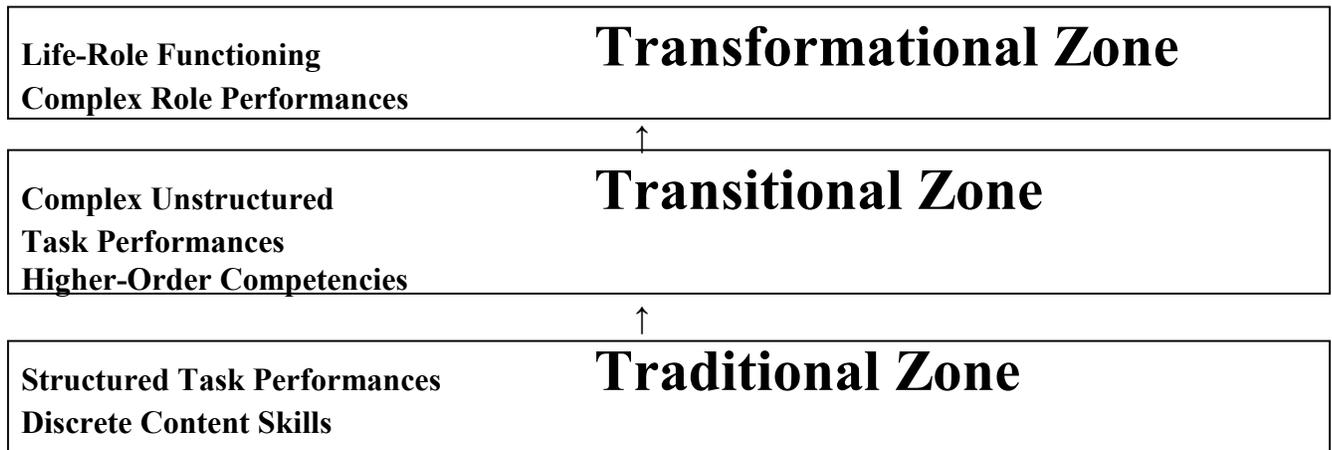
OBE and Learning Environments

OBE accommodates learning environments and resources available to the instructor. Because outcomes are general in nature they are not tied to particular texts or resources. The instructor is able to use the resources on hand to design educational experiences for the learner. This is especially important in remote parts of the world where educational resources may be at a premium.

OBE and Processing Learning

OBE accommodates process learning more readily than traditional education. Bloom's taxonomy of Learning details six levels of cognitive development. The lower levels involve

lower critical thinking skills and less cognitive challenge. The upper levels require process learning. That means the cognitive ability cannot be achieved with one set of activities. To achieve synthesis or analysis or evaluation requires multiple tasks, thus a process must be followed to achieve the higher end of the cognitive abilities. Often times exit outcomes involve process learning. These particular outcomes require the learners to achieve higher cognitive ability to master the outcome. Spady (1994) describes the development of higher order cognitive skills in an analogy to a mountain. He describes it as the Demonstration Mountain. The mountain represents the act of climbing from basic demonstrations (outcomes) of classroom learning up to demonstrations that involve living effectively in the face of real-world challenges at home, at work, and in the community. For Spady following the demonstration mountain in curriculum development allows the instructor to help the students achieve the higher end of Bloom's Taxonomy. Spady's Demonstration Mountain is designed as:

The Demonstration Mountain

Life-Role Functioning   **Transformational Zone** **Complex Role Performances**

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Complex Unstructured   **Transitional Zone** **Task Performances** **Higher-Order Competencies**

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Structured Task Performances   **Traditional Zone** **Discrete Content Skills**

Spady's paradigm reveals how each zone shapes different student outcomes:

      Step 1: Traditional Zone

The outcomes in this zone are developed in subject matter content and are usually limited to a particular discipline or knowledge domain.   An example of this type of outcome would be:

          "All students will correctly identify the themes in the book of Matthew."

      Step 2: Transitional Zone

The outcomes in this zone are higher-order cognitive abilities such as analyzing concepts and their relationships to other concepts. Application of particular ideas and concepts in a problem-solving arena would be another type of outcome for this zone. An example of this type of outcome would be:

> "All students will examine Paul's road to salvation and then compare or contrast it to their own path to salvation."

Step 3: Transformational Zone

The outcomes in this zone move from the academic realm into the authentic life contexts students will experience once they graduate. These outcomes also require complex applications of many kinds of knowledge and all kinds of competencies. An example of this type of outcome would be:

> "Having examined several different ways to present the Gospel, all students will pick a particular culture and decide how best to present the Gospel to a member of that culture. All students will present their model to the class."

Spady's model allows movement within the outcomes from the lower level cognitive abilities to the highest level of cognitive development. The desired curriculum then would be a balance between the levels of cognitive ability and the information and demonstrations needed to meet the outcomes. This type of curriculum would also develop process learning over rote memorization of facts and statistics.

One advantage to this approach to curriculum development is that activities and outcomes pertaining to the affective domain can be more readily developed and used. Oftentimes awareness of issues or development of opinions, as seen in the affective domain, can only be developed through process learning. For a long time, affective domain knowledge was not considered relevant because of behavioral objectives, but affective exit outcomes can once again take its rightful place within the curriculum.

Conclusion

As can be seen, OBE has wonderful potential for revolutionizing the educational experience of students. But the approach does have its criticisms. Some critics charge that OBE lessens the rigors of academic preparation. Educators are concerned that, as students are trying to

meet the larger more general outcomes of the entire program, particular disciplines are left out. Rote memorization of facts and knowledge, critics contend, is taken out of the curriculum and replaced with subjective, introspective types of issues that lack substance. If the educator follows the model of Spady's Demonstration Model, rigorous academic knowledge is needed to move to the heights of the Transformational Zone.

One thing is certain, in this day and of accountability, schools now more than ever are being held accountable for learning that is taking place within their walls. OBE is able to give concrete evidence on whether the educational experiences of the students are achieving the expected outcomes. Also, OBE has the added luxury of encouraging local autonomy. As long as the exit outcomes are developed with a shared vision within the specified community, then the local educators can control the means to those ends. This educational plan seems to enable educators to create environments where intentional learning is taking place and where learning is mapped out to create a successful journey for the learner. What more could an educator want? OBE is not the ultimate solution for the challenges facing students and teachers of today, but it is a good step on the road to reform.

Glossary of Terms

Exit outcomes: The outcomes to be demonstrated for graduation from an institution or to receive credentials. These outcomes come from a shared vision from the community to what a graduate should be able to do, what to think and how to act.

Program: The particular field of study in which a student participates.

Course: A particular module or class in which a student participates. The sum of all the courses when taken creates the program the student will graduate from.

Unit: Each course is made up of certain areas of study deemed appropriate for the course.

Lesson: A lesson is an individual teaching segment of a set time or set amount of information.

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