

ON OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND CREATIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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This article questions the potential of Outcomes-based education (OBE) in South Africa to be rational and imaginative, that is, creative. Our contention is that the notions of outcomes seems to be trapped in a technicist orientation of deciding in advance what is good and worthwhile for learners to do in education. We argue that OBE is not a sufficient justification of what education means, thus impeding the very act of creative reconstructions of knowledge.

The South African justification of OBE

February 1995 saw the Education White Paper I on Education and Training being gazetted by the Department of Education. This document can be seen as the first official government framework aimed at overhauling the entire system of education in line with the Constitution (1996). Following Kholofelo (1998), the framework recommendations reinforce four key educational rights guaranteed by the South African Constitution (1996): Everyone has a right to:

- Basic education;
- Equal access to education institutions;
- Choice of language of instruction where reasonably practicable; and
- Establish education institutions based on a common culture, language and religion, provided that there shall be no discrimination on the grounds of race (South African Constitution 1996).

Furthermore, the White Paper on Education and Training (1996) identifies many problems with regard to the current system in terms of facilities, resources and the provision of quality education. It defines education as a basic human right based on the fact that all citizens should be allowed the space to further enhance their potential capabilities that would allow them to make their full contribution to society. According to Greenstein (1995: 200), the goal of education is seen as uplifting individuals so that they may contribute to the development of the economy and society, which in turn, can lead to the development of previously marginalised individuals and communities. In this sense, the emphasis is also on the development of the individual rather than just transforming the society. The White Paper on Education and Training (1996) refers on numerous occasions to the development of the individual and the capacity of individuals to become critical thinkers. It also expresses concern, with challenges such as productivity, economic growth and technological advancement. However, Greenstein (1995: 201) posits that *there is an implicit tension between technological education and education for democratic awareness and critical thinking*. Terreblance (2003: 17) argues that the government has bought into the agenda of the neo-liberal, free market economy, marked by fiscal restraint. For the reason that scientific-

orientated education plays a major role in sustaining economic growth, promoting such a form of education at the expense of critical awareness and critical thinking may seem as the politically correct thing to do especially in the case of South Africa where one has *huge inequalities in skills and competences in the nations labor force, with the same racial, ethnic and gender hierarchies reproducing themselves in private and para-statal employment, and in the public services* (Greenstein 1995: 200). The upshot of such an approach on the side of government implies that it (government) has *retained little of its sovereign power to implement a socio-economic policy that will address the ugly remnants of apartheid in an effectivemanner* (Terreblance 2003: 17).

Moreover, Christie (1997: 119) posits that *this formulation of an education-economy link bears the hallmarks of human capital theory, which asserts that education brings returns for both individuals and society more broadly, and that education is linked to productivity*. In essence, what the White Paper on Education and Training (1996) calls for is a shift in focus towards a more technocratic discourse which would clearly focus on performance and outcomes thus paving the way for an Outcomes-based (OBE) approach to education in post- Apartheid South Africa.

As the evidence has shown, OBE as a model was chosen to alleviate the crises in education. The new democratic government has for obvious reasons opted for transformational OBE. Following Malcolm (1997: 3) it is learner-centered, where learning results in students changing the way they understand and act in the world around them. What this implies is that learners accept responsibility for their beliefs and deeds while the educator assumes the role of performer. Moreover, the new OBE Curriculum, however, has often been seen as being *retrogressive and in a certain sense even more technicist and mechanistic than the previous curricula* (Meerkotter in Morrow & King 1998: 57). Moreover, the government's position with regard to this view is succinctly captured by Dick (2001: 40) who argues in the following way:

The vocabulary of OBE reflects a shift to *market speak* – the language of neo-liberalism and GEAR. This means that we now speak about transformation more in terms of the market than in terms of the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). So, for example, words and phrases such as *international competitiveness, fiscal discipline, budget deficit, foreign direct investment, economic growth, investor friendly, deregulation, privatization* and so forth have replaced the more familiar *basic needs, social spending, equity, key performance indicators, monitoring progress, targets and deadlines*.

The conclusion is that this technocratic OBE discourse has deeply influenced current debates around the formulation of policy in education in South Africa. Our concern now is to establish to what extent the technicist approach of OBE has influenced the development of critical consciousness and creativity in the practice of teaching and learning in schools.

As mentioned earlier, it is evident that changing the South African education system is of paramount importance if the country wishes to keep up with the imperatives of the global market economy. Furthermore, the kind of education provided needs to be fundamentally different from the old educational system. Why? The education system supported by proponents of apartheid were characterized by rote learning, loyalty, obedience, narrow cultural advancement, and a deliberate inculcation of misinformation and ethnic prejudices about blacks (Asmal & James 2001: 198). For this reason, any attempt to transform the educational landscape in South Africa needed to be viewed within the epistemological framework of post-modernity which demands a student-centered approach. In this way Pretorius (1998: 1) posits that South Africa needed to develop a radically different thinking about educational provision.

One way of improving education and which has been perceived as a viable education system over the past few decades is Outcomes based Education (OBE). Supporters of OBE see it as ... *a means of meeting the needs of all students regardless of their environment, ethnicity, economic status or disabling condition* (Capper & Jamison 1993: 2). This brings us to a discussion of OBE, particularly analyzing the historical origin and some of the basic tenets of the education system.

OBE is considered to be a learner-centered, result-orientated education system which is based on the belief that individuals have the capacity to learn, as well as to demonstrate learning after having completed an educational activity. OBE therefore claims to encourage independence of mind. That is, learners are to develop, through a system of fixed outcomes, into autonomous beings. According to Spady and Marshall (in Pretorius 1988: ix), we are Outcomes-based when we teach a child to cross the road. We know exactly what the child must do and see it in our mind's eye. We go to great lengths to teach skills correctly to the child and insist that he or she practices it until we are convinced that he or she can do it safely. Put differently, OBE accentuates the demonstration of learners who have completed a specific learning activity.

In contrast to OBE, Spady sees curriculum selection as a shapeless heap of knowledge subjected to time constraints known as semesters. Educators then face the daunting task of working through this morass of knowledge in record time. Thus, learning and teaching is calendar driven rather than driven by the need of students. The system, therefore, becomes input-driven rather than Outcomes-based. Inputs refer to the experiences from which we learn and outcomes are the results of learning. Thus, according to proponents of OBE such as Spady, learning is dictated to by an *ill-defined curriculum, and the pace at which the material is covered is driven by the calendar, rather than student needs* (Capper & Jamison: 1993: 3). To understand the rationale behind a system of OBE however, one firstly needs to consider the historical development of OBE.

Historical development of OBE

King and Evans (in Capper 1993: 2) trace the roots of OBE back to that part of the USA education system which has developed over a period of thirty years (1970s – 1990s) and which includes the work of Tyler and Bloom. OBE assumes that all students have the capacity to learn and succeed whether gifted, disabled or in-between. Schools, therefore, control the conditions that determine whether or not learners are successful. Furthermore, Spady (1994) claims that illiteracy and failure are neither inevitable nor acceptable. The vehicle that makes this success a reality in the OBE approach is located in mastery learning. Mastery learning, according to Torshen (in Naicker 1999: 48) drawing on the work of Carroll (1971) and Bloom (1971), is the name that is given to a model being used to structure a curriculum. According to him, *the mastery process operates on the proposition that almost every student can learn the basic skills and knowledge that is the core of the school curriculum when the instruction is of good quality and appropriate for him (her) and when he (she) spends adequate time in learning* (Torshen in Naicker 1999: 48). The assumption here is that ... *the ability (intelligence) does not set a cap on the amount that a student can learn, but rather on the time needed to master the material* (Carroll in Capper & Jamison 1993: 3).

Moreover, Bloom's mastery learning principles require learners to master pre-requisite skills before being promoted to advanced skills. No student shall be required to master a skill for which he or she does not possess the pre-requisite knowledge. According to OBE philosophy, the learner should be provided with additional opportunity to master the pre-requisite knowledge as it is taken for granted that the learner simply requires more time to learn (Spady in Malcolm 1999: 90), for the reason that no student moves to the next unit until he (she) has mastered the current one. Towers (in Naicker 1999: 48) argues that whilst OBE and mastery learning are not synonymous,

the two concepts have a great deal in common. He adds that the important connection between OBE and mastery learning techniques are generally employed by teachers professing to have implemented Outcomes-based learning environments. He suggests that mastery learning is often the engine that propels OBE programs and argues that understanding the tenets of mastery learning is fundamental to understanding OBE. Thus, like mastery learning, OBE demands that learners *master* pre-requisite knowledge which can lead to the successful completion or attainment of a learning outcome, the latter also signifying the *mastery* of an advanced skill. For this reason Jasper (in Boschee & Baron 1994: 195) claims that OBE is essentially a more advanced version of Benjamin Bloom's Mastery Learning technique which is pure Skinnerian, behaviorist, stimulus-response conditioning tantamount to indoctrination.

If the above explanation of OBE is taken into account, Spady seems to be trapped in a behaviorist position. Why? Outcomes, according to Spady (in Malcolm 1999: 91), must be demonstrations or performances of learners and not thoughts, understandings, beliefs, attitudes and so on. Morrow (1999) argues that outcomes are examples of good training, the efficient use of effective means to reach an unambiguous and clearly circumscribed end. The force of the example is that the *outcome*- what we were being trained for - was a measurable skill; we might add, the exercise of which did not require reflection or autonomous judgment. Morrow, in his argument, clearly accentuates the relevance of notions such as reflection and autonomy in education which we intend to further investigate in this article. In a different way, learners should be able to show some form of competency at the end of a learning program if he (she) wants to progress to the next level. Furthermore, he makes a clear distinction between psychological models of learning (what happens in the head of learners) and sociological models (ability to translate mental processing into forms and kinds of action that occur in real social settings) (Spady in Malcolm 1999: 91). Outcomes must be based on the sociological kind. What occurs in the mind assists the learning process, but the outcome should be seen in terms of the behavior. The behavior is the learning and the thing assessed (Macolm 1999: 91). Verbs such as understanding, knowing and so on, do not feature in Spady's OBE (Malcolm 1999: 91). However, Ashworth and Saxton (in Kraak 1999: 46) regard *the depiction of competence as a complex entity made up of simpler items of ability*, as a problem. They view the *atomization* of knowledge as something which impedes the learning process as the following example of a motorist highlights. A motorist never learns separately to change the gears, to turn the wheel, to control the pedals, and to judge the distance between the vehicle and the vehicle in front; all this happens as a coordinated whole. A complex skill such as learning to drive a vehicle entails a coordinated array of elements and cannot be defined independently of the rest.

Moreover, competence models such as OBE fail to recognize that human behavior and understanding entail a complex series of activities, none of which can be defined in terms of outcomes. In this way, it (OBE) is flawed because of its insistence to interpret the complexity of human activity in terms of outcomes. Kraak (1999) argues that competence models (like OBE) tend to describe competence in precise, transparent and observable terms, in order to predict the specific outcome of effective action. However, the above discussion clearly suggests that all human knowledge (which incorporates human action and understanding) cannot be explained with such precision.

From a global perspective, Spady and Marshall (1991: 91) draw a clear distinction between traditional, transitional and transformational OBE. We shall now briefly expound on those three types of OBE for further clarity on the historical development of the concept.

Traditional Outcomes-based Education

The emphasis, according to Spady, is on the knowledge and skills of the traditional subjects. In a different way, traditional OBE is defined in terms of instructional objectives which are based on the existing curriculum. The focus here is on the mastery of content which puts emphasis on understanding. The challenge of this approach is that the culminating demonstration is frequently limited to small segments of instruction which makes each an end in itself while the curriculum content remains unchanged (Pretorius 1998: x).

Transitional Outcomes-based Education

Its roots can be traced back to the early 1980s. It moves away from existing curricula and identifies outcomes which reflect higher order competences that cut across traditional subjects. The result is outcomes which *emphasize broad attitudinal, affective, motivational and relational qualities or orientations* as well as *critical thinking, effective communication, technological applications, and complex problem solving* (Pretorius 1998: x).

Transformational Outcomes-based Education

Spady refers to this form of OBE as the highest form because it demands a radical change to existing structures and operations in schools. Unlike the transitional and traditional approaches, transformational OBE does not acknowledge subjects but focuses rather on role performances in order to meet the demands of society. Moreover, Spady and Marshall (1991: 68) view transformational OBE as a collaborative, flexible, trans-disciplinary, Outcomes-based, open-system, empowerment-orientated approach to schooling. Its main aim is to equip all learners with the knowledge, competence and orientation needed for success after they leave school. Furthermore, transformational OBE takes nothing about education as a given, *non-existing features are considered untouchable in carrying out a curriculum design* (Pretorius 1998: x).

With the above discussion in mind one could quite easily assume that transformational and transitional OBE are beyond traditional OBE, however, as Waghid (2002: 10) aptly argues that those who formulate policy are also guilty of authoritatively constructing outcomes which implies that their noble claim to operate in a framework of critical thinking (with reference to critical thinking and problem solving competencies learners need to acquire) becomes flawed by power structures such as control and manipulation (Waghid 2000: 10). In this way OBE with its preordained outcomes leaves little space for creativity. To become creative therefore implies that one should become critically aware of one's surroundings. It is with such an understanding that I now wish to explore the idea of what constitutes the notion of creativity.

On a justification for being creative

In our view, the need for creativity is best supported by the words of Albert Einstein when he argues that *Our thinking creates problems that the same kind of thinking will not solve*, hence, the need for creative thought. We contend, however, that much confusion seems to surround the notion of creativity. We have a tendency to view creativity in terms of having the ability to create something of artistic value. In other words, we view creativity and art as being synonymous. This distorted view implies that in order for one to become creative one needs to be artistically inclined. De Bono (1996: 3) posits that at the simplest level it (creativity) *means bringing into being something that was not there before. In a sense, creating a mess is an example of creativity* (De Bono 1996: 3). In other words something of *value* has been created which did not exist before.

In a similar vein Elliot (1998: 224) distinguishes between two forms of creativity. According to Elliot (1998: 224) there is a clear distinction between the *traditional concept* and the *new concept*

of creativeness. Elliot (1998: 224) views the *traditional concept* as an evaluative expression. For Elliot (1998: 224) the *traditional concept* is firmly imbedded in the uses and usages of our ordinary language, fairly readily allows creativeness to be attributed to makers, but resists its aspiration to persons who bring no new thing into being. In other words, according to the *traditional concept* creating something new seems to be a condition for being creative.

Following Elliot (1998: 224), the *new concept* on the other hand does not link creativity to bringing about something new. This form of creativity rather values *getting novel ideas and making something of them* (Elliot 1998: 229). In other words, *making surprising and original connections between seemingly unrelated elements* (Mattimore 1994: vii). De Bono (1996: 3) contends that when we start to introduce concepts of *unexpectedness* and *change* to the equation of creativity, we start forming a different picture of what creativity ought to be. In this sense De Bono (1996: 35) makes a very important observation when he posits that you are certainly in a better position to be creative if you are free to play around with strange ideas and to express new thoughts. In our view the real spirit of creativity lies in its ability not to lend itself to systems or rules. Creativity to us ought to be a free spirited exercise, that is, *about moment to moment inspiration* (Mattimore 1994: 3). In short, creativity is about having the ability to be imaginative. In other words one's creative abilities should be complemented by one's imagination.

In this sense Dewey (1966: 236) posits that only a personal response involving imagination can possibly procure realization even of pure *facts*. The imagination is the medium of appreciation in every field. The engagement of the imagination is the only thing that makes any activity more than mechanical. Passmore (1998: 238) makes the following subtle point: *Imagination, as such, has no boundaries, or more accurately its boundaries are set only by the fact it has to have some, however remote, connection with our prior experience.*

However, very often the imaginative is often confused with the imaginary and this gives rise to *an exaggerated estimate of fairy tales, myths, fanciful symbols, verse and something labeled Fine Art, as agencies for developing imagination and appreciation and by neglecting imaginative vision in other matters, leads to methods which reduce much instruction to an imaginative acquiring of specialized skill and amassing a load of information* (Dewey 1966: 236). Moreover, it (imagination) is often associated with a childlike activity such as play. Again Dewey (1966: 236) posits the following:

And to overlook the fact that the difference between play and what is regarded as serious employment should be not a difference between the presence and absence of imagination, but a difference in the materials with which imagination is occupied. The result is an unwholesome exaggeration of the fantastic and unreal phases of childish play and a deadly reduction of serious occupation to a routine efficiency prized simply for its external tangible results.

A case in point is OBE's preoccupation with achieving its external tangible results, namely, outcomes at the expense of imagination. In other words it is a technicist response to pressures of the market place which guides exit outcomes. For this reason Marx states in his book *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that the foundation of social life evolves around the material productive forces – that is the way in which man makes a living from nature – and in the relations of production necessary to the harnessing of these forces. Marx (in Banton 1967: 165) continues by saying that peoples thoughts concerning the society they live in reflect its institutions and ideologies, but in fact the categories in which they organize their thoughts are in fact determined by the economic base of the society. The upshot of such a mindset is that

achievement becomes a well planned mechanical effort and the main idea of education, which is to achieve a life rich in significance, falls by the wayside. Dewey (1966: 236) notes the following in this regard:

An adequate recognition of the play of imagination as the medium of realisation of every kind of thing which lies beyond the scope of direct physical response is the sole way of escape from mechanical methods of teaching. In other words imagination should become as much an integral part of our daily activity as our muscular movements are.

Furthermore, we want to argue that an integral part of imagination is curiosity. In other words, if one is imaginative one would more than likely be curious and, for this reason Bruner (in Jarvis 1996: 86) maintains that *instruction should facilitate and regulate the exploration of alternative and a major condition for undertaking this curiosity is aroused in adults, as well as in children, when their interpretation of their socio-cultural environment no longer provides them with relevant knowledge to cope with the present experiences.*

To be curious means to wonder why, to question and to ponder and therefore, one can use one's curiosity as a means of becoming more imaginative. However, Passmore (1998: 240) says that fancy can be destroyed only by rigorously confirming the child's education to dogmatically presented facts, habit-formation closed capacities. Suffice to say that any democratic society has the ability to flourish when the system of education enhances possibilities for its citizens to become more informed *by a grasp of their history and current affairs and when they are encouraged to explore ideas to their fullest* (Asmal & Wilmot 2001: 200). In essence, it is important for us as educationists to guard against a system of education in which nothing is deemed as being more important than getting learners to be good at what they are being told to do, in other words, getting them into a system of conformity which leaves little or no space for instances of rationality and imagination. For this reason we contend that OBE stifles creativity of learners in school. To prove this point it might be useful to distinguish between the various forms of education. McKernan (1993) identifies three learning types. The first one he refers to is *training* which concerns itself with such student performances as making a picture frame, kicking a ball etc. *Instruction*, according to McKernan (1993), hints at retention of information for example, knowing the names of roads and so on. Finally, *induction into knowledge* gives rise to human understanding. He uses *induction into knowledge and understanding* synonymously with *education, for it represents initiation into culture and worthwhile episodes of learning* (McKernan 1993: 344). What makes *education as induction into knowledge* so successful, as perceived by him, is the fact that it makes the behavioral outcomes of the learner unpredictable thus making the possibility of predetermined outcomes virtually impossible. In a similar manner, if we plan to use knowledge in a creative way, then it would be a senseless exercise to define education in terms of desirable behavioral outcomes. This implies that to have fixed objectives or outcomes leaves little freedom for creativity, and thus imagination.

The point we wish to make is that these pre-packed finished products deprive learners from engaging in a rational way with outcomes. In this regard Capper and Jamison (1993: 8) contend that: *OBE policy dictates and controls the social educational possibilities of students in terms of what they should be like on graduation.* This is done in the name of rationality and reason. However, we contend that it seems irrational to specify objectives in areas of the curriculum that seek to enhance creativity in subjects such as music, art, poetry, etc. These subject areas, however, make it virtually impossible to predetermine *what they should be like on graduation* (Capper & Jamison 1993: 8). In addition, outcomes, according to Waghid (2000: 14) are transmitted to

learners who are expected to uncritically accept and apply a *stock of ready-made ideas*. Education ought to be viewed as a critical dialogue between learner and educator who are both constantly searching for truths in order to clarify their understanding of the solutions to the problems being raised. But more importantly is the fact that, in this critical dialogue between learner and educator, all individuals should be freely allowed to express justifiable opinions.

Why is OBE uncreative?

To have a fixed set of goals and outcomes, decided in advance, impedes the ability of the learner and educator to embark on the *wonderful, unpredictable voyage(s) of exploration that characterize learning through discovery and inquiry* (McKernan 1993: 345). In this way OBE has a negative impact on the freedom of learners and educators because it does not allow the necessary space for its learners and educators to become creative. OBE reduces education to episodes of human engineering *procedures that view education as an instrumental means to specified ends* (McKernan 1993: 346). Moreover, OBE expects all learners to demonstrate similar outcomes and behaviors at the end of the program. In this way OBE has a tendency to indoctrinate and to become manipulative. Therefore, we contend that the aims and objectives of OBE are out of synch with the ideals of creativity (as I have argued for).

In conclusion we wish to echo the words of McKernan (1993). We tried to approach our task in this article as *a critical friend of the OBE movement*. For this reason we have come to the following conclusion: Although there seems to be some evidence that OBE attempts to operate within a paradigm of critical theory, there are strong indications to show that OBE continues to perpetuate *an ideological hegemony and its control of meaning* (Claasen 1998: 39). Moreover, as we have shown that although OBE claims to be transformational and emancipatory, it in fact has a tendency to reproduce and exacerbate educational and societal inequities (Capper & Jamison 1993: 9). Therefore it remains inconsistent with aims and objectives of creativity. Because of these inconsistencies, OBE on its own does not hold much promise for critical emancipation and student autonomy. Hence, OBE does not necessarily engender space for creativity.

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