

# The limits of learning outcomes: breaking boundaries

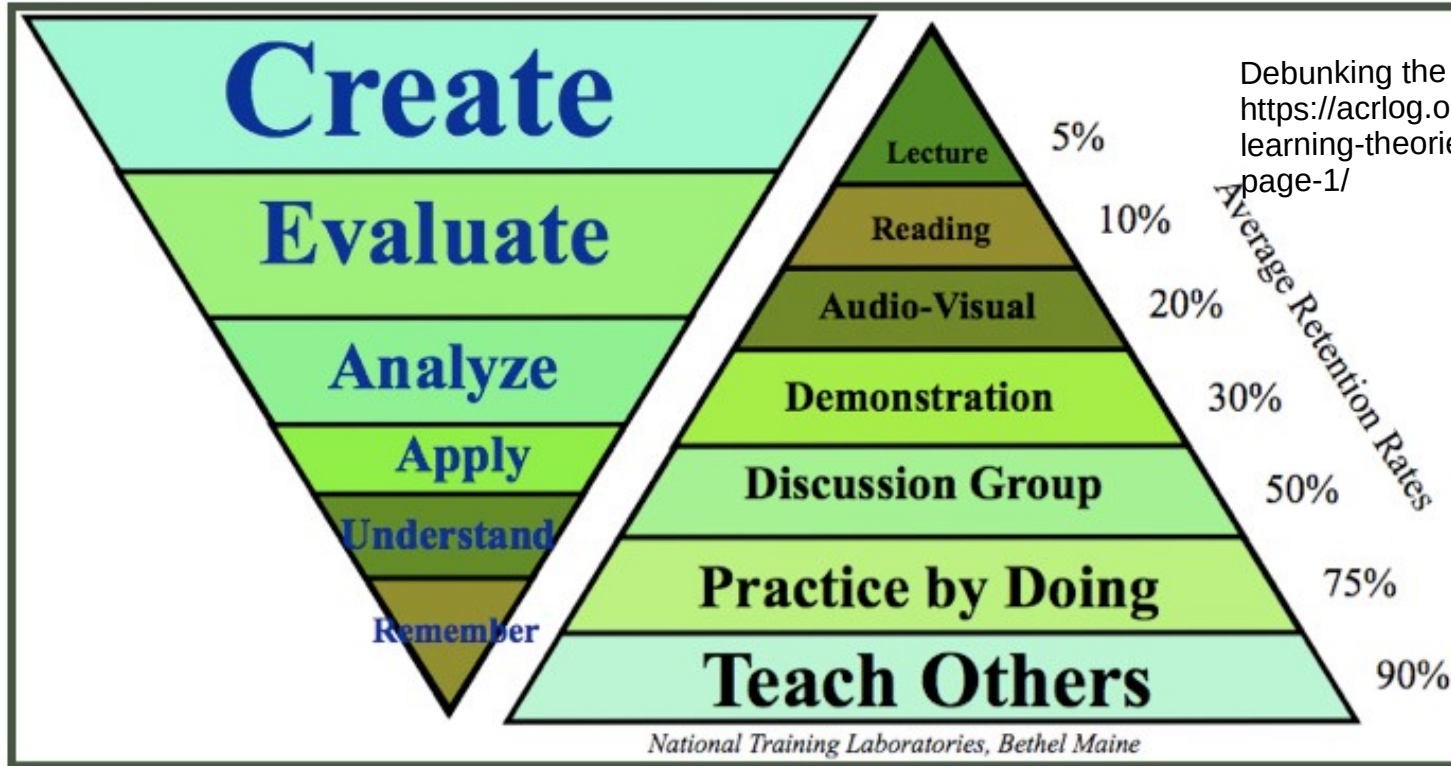
Jon Dron, October 31 2018

# At the end of this session, the successful student will be able to:

- Assess whether they made the correct choice of lunch;
- Compare what they are doing now with what else they could be doing today;
- Judge Jon's teaching;
- Evaluate whether or not they can wait till after the next session to visit the washroom;
- Produce an elaborate doodle;
- Question everything about their role and purpose as a teacher;
- Positively transform their teaching, and the learning experiences of their students.



# Well, maybe not always...



Debunking the learning pyramid:  
<https://acrl.org/2014/01/13/tales-of-the-undead-learning-theories-the-learning-pyramid/comment-page-1/>

# Armchair theories with no empirical validation



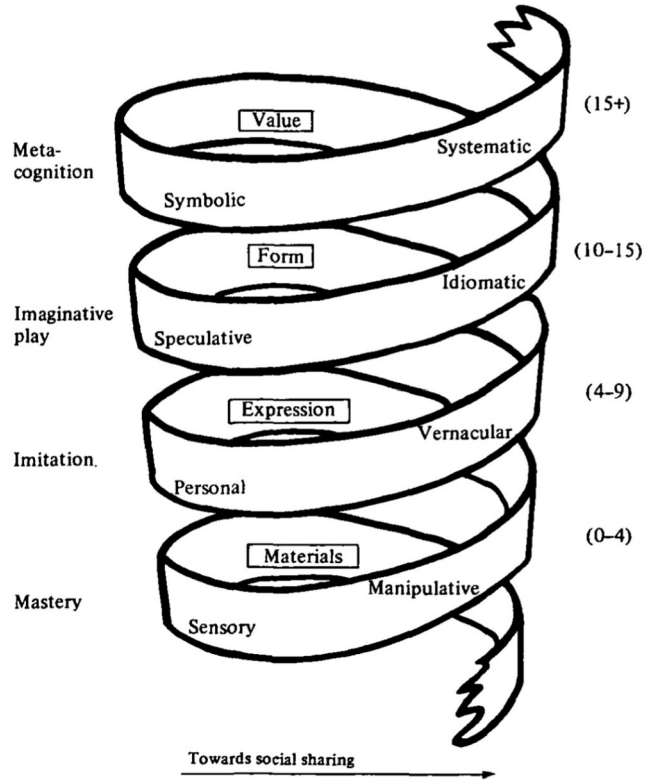
But....

# Who benefits from learning outcomes?

- **Teachers:** a great *design* tool for learning and assessment. Useful sanity checks while teaching. Something to kick against.
- **External bodies:** *potentially* useful for quality control and credit transfer *if* everyone understands them in the same way\*
- **Our students:** errrr.....no. Not a lot.

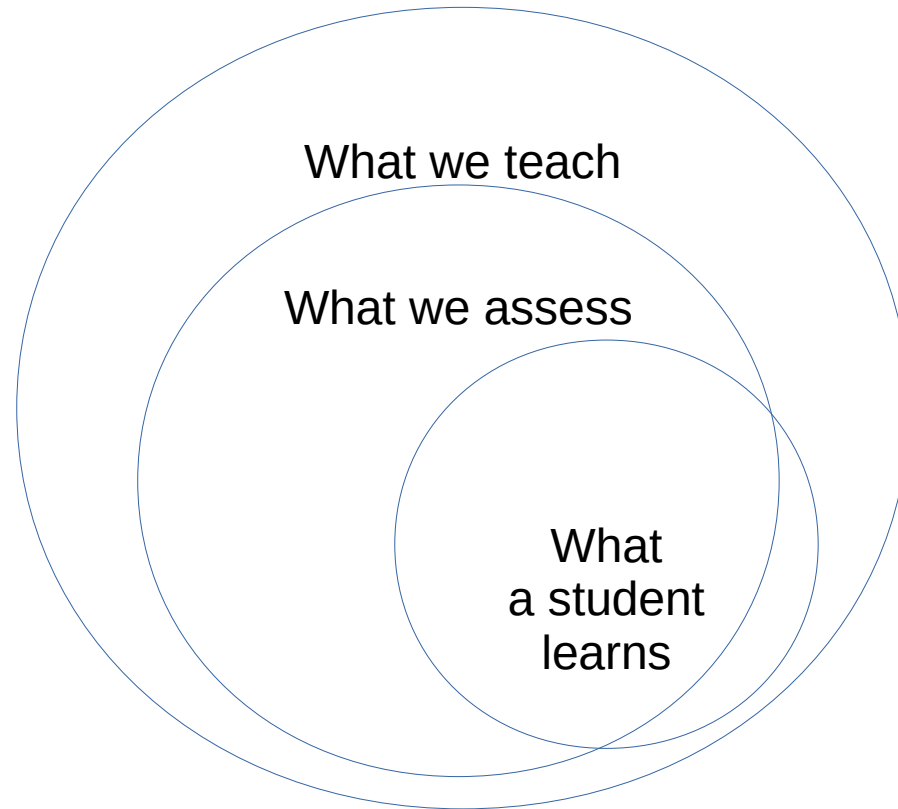
\* note: this never happens

# Another way of seeing it



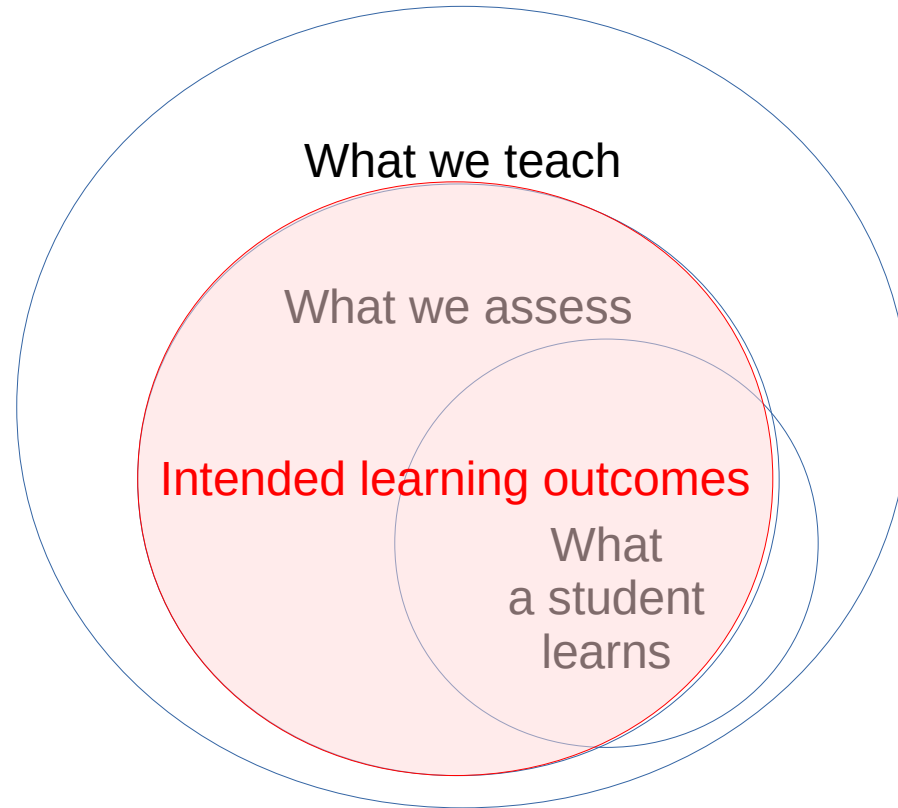
## The Spiral Curriculum

# The illusion

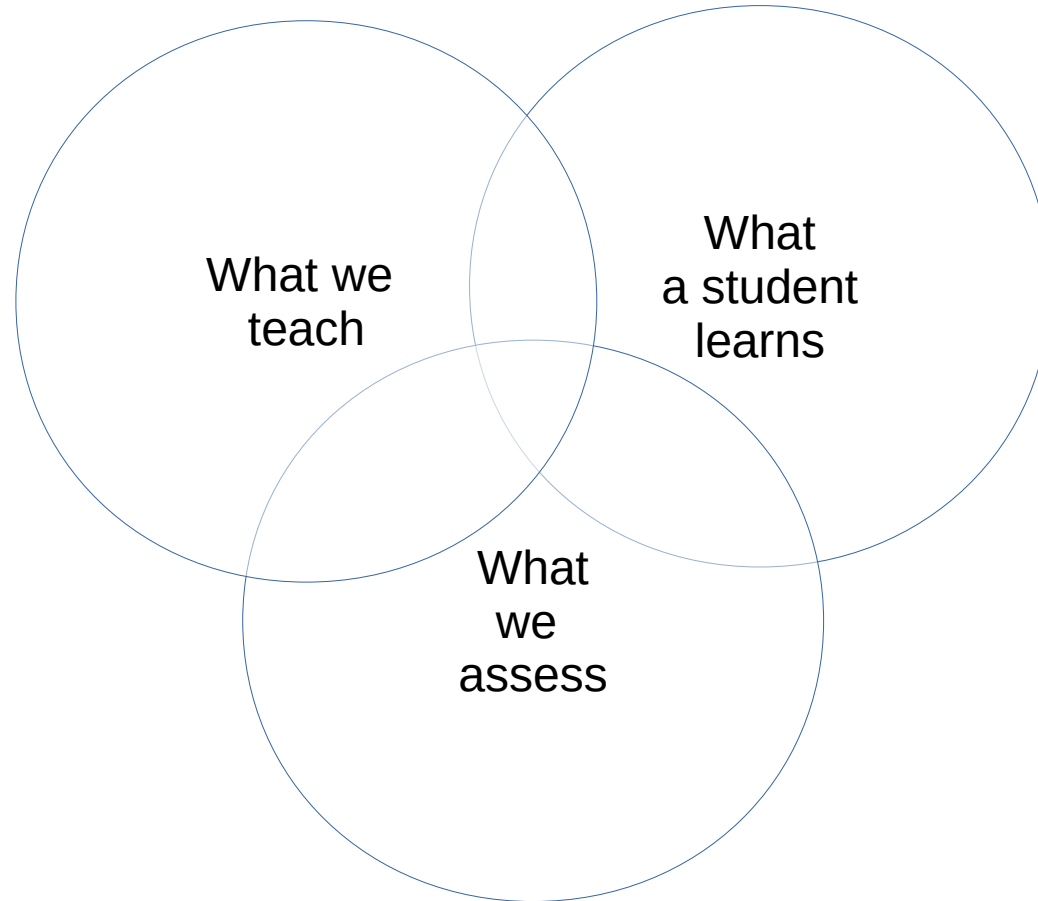




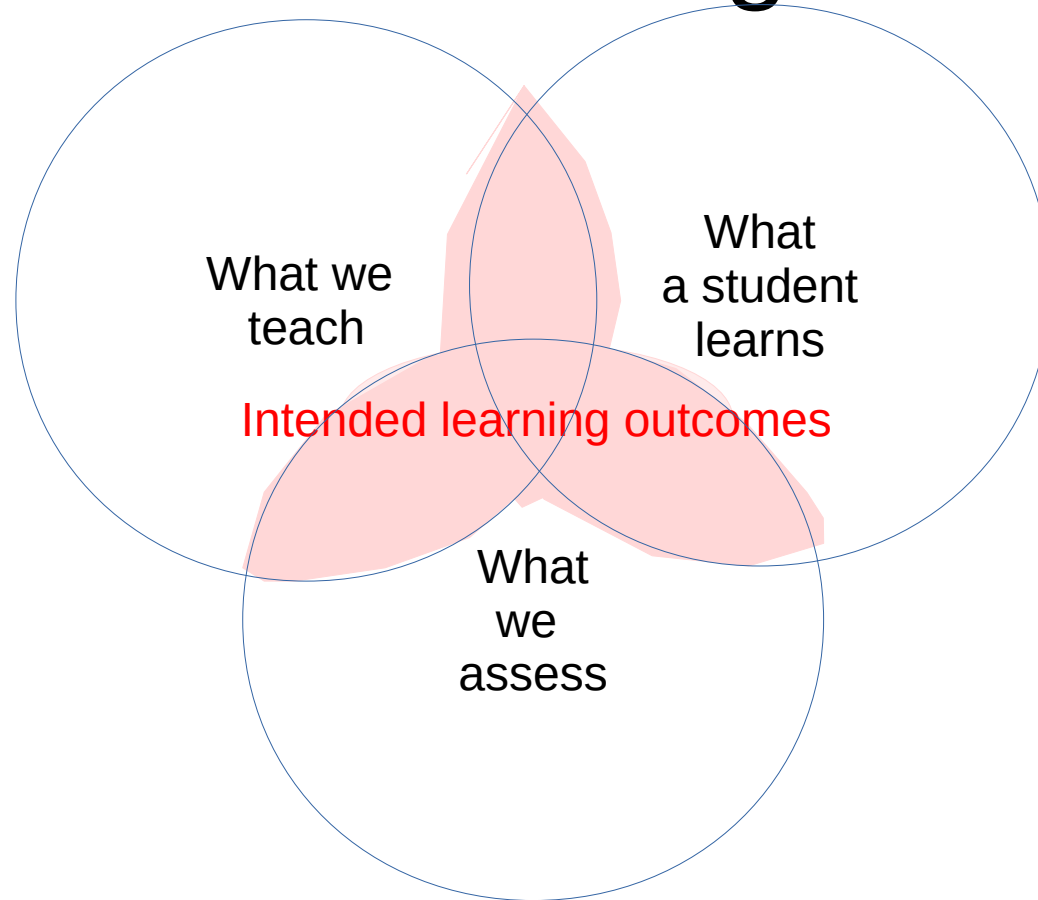
# The illusion



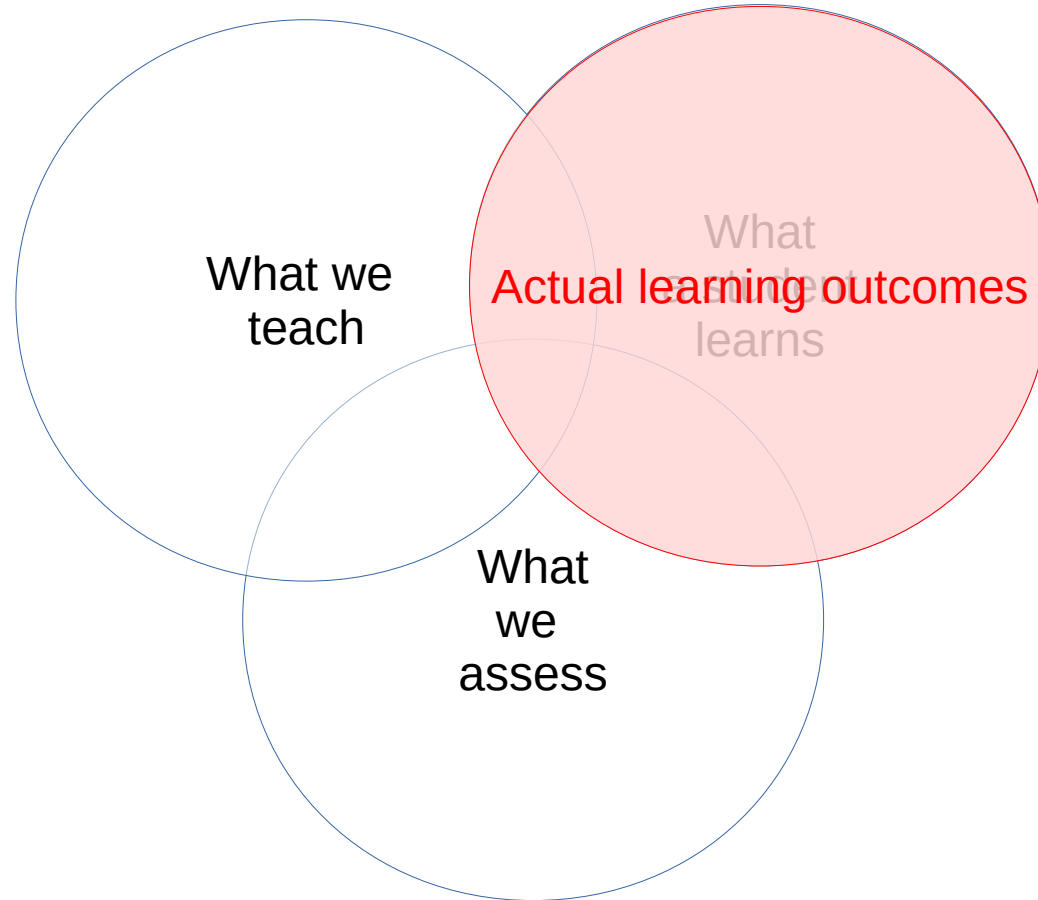
# The reality



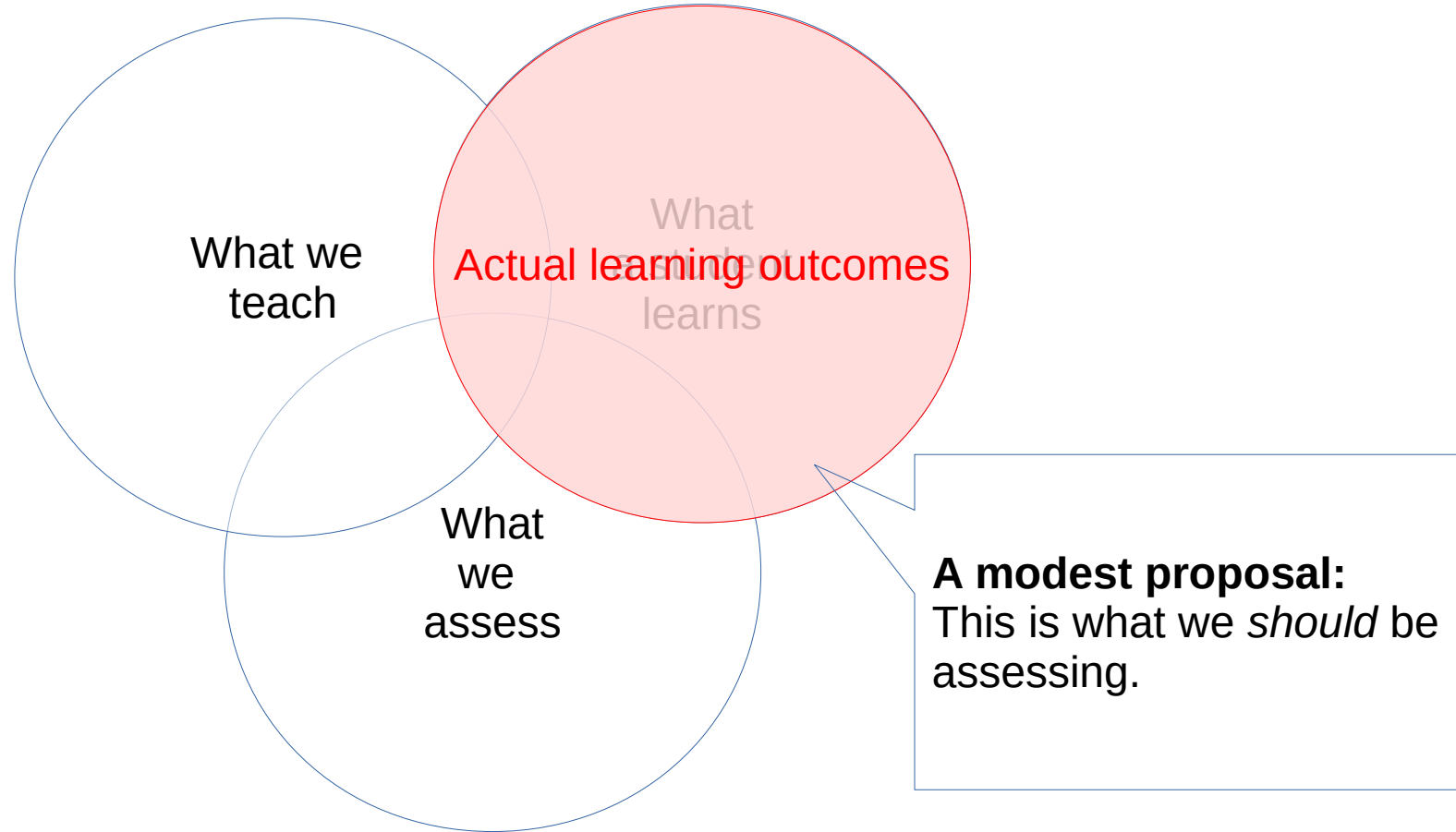
# The reality (with excellent constructive alignment)



# The reality



# The reality



What we  
teach

Actual learning outcomes

What  
students  
learn

What  
we  
assess

**A modest proposal:**  
This is what we *should* be  
assessing.

# Other ways of thinking

- **Appreciative inquiry:** research method designed to bring about positive change
- **Andragogy:** adult learning theory that treats adults like adults
- **Outcome mapping/Outcome harvesting:** approaches to identifying changes, and what led to those changes

# Appreciative inquiry principles

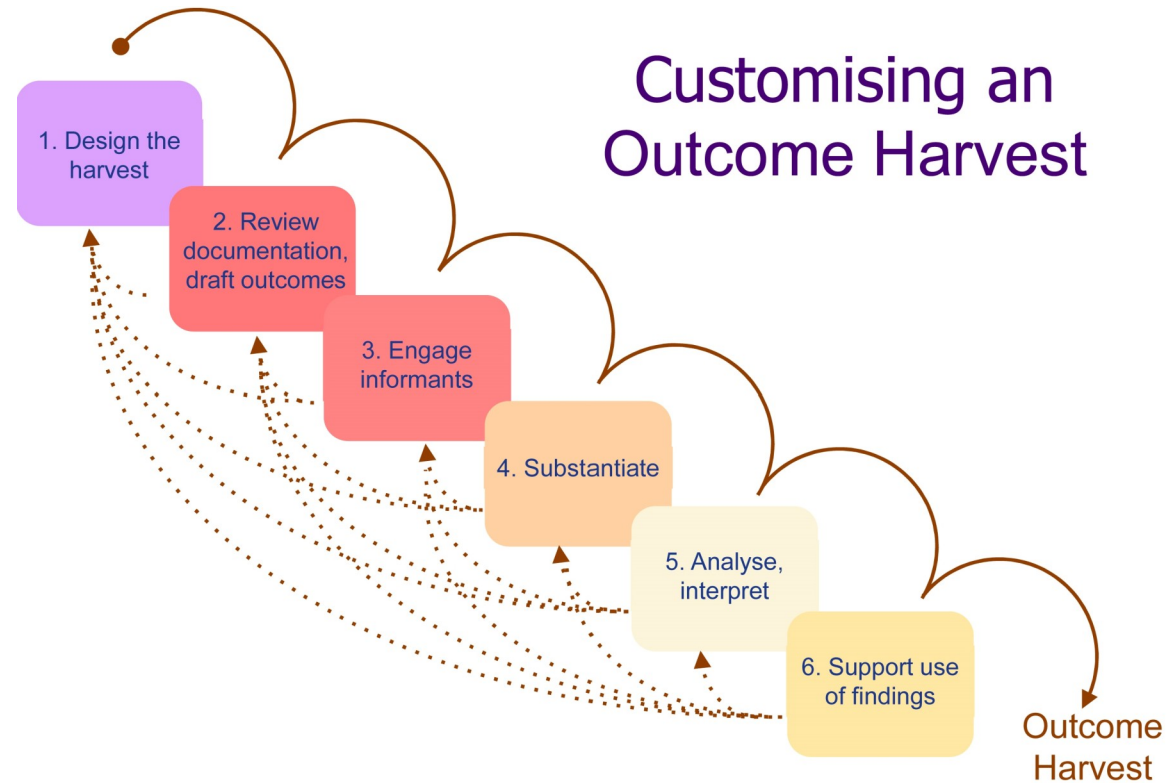
- Constructionist (we co-create our world)
- Simultaneity (every question creates change)
- Poetic (every choice is meaningful)
- Anticipatory (think positive to effect positive change)
- Positive (momentum best created through positive questions and positive amplification)

# Andragogy

- Adults must be involved in planning and evaluation of their own learning;
- Experience provides basis for learning activities;
- Learning must be relevant to perceived current and future needs;
- Learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented
- Explain why and how you are teaching it. Negotiate with the learners. Let them identify their own outcomes.
- Learning activities should be in the context of tasks to be performed (not stuff students should know).
- Learning materials and activities should allow for different levels/types of previous experience and background.
- Let learners discover things for themselves; give scaffolding, challenges, guidance and help when needed.



# Outcome harvesting



# Getting-started resources

- The Trouble With Learning Outcomes (Hussey & Smith, 2002)
  - <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1469787402003003003?journalCode=alha>
- Andragogy
  - <http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/andragogy/>
  - Knowles, M. S. (1975). Self-directed learning: A guide for learners and teachers. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.
  - Knowles, M. S. (1986). Using learning contracts. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Outcome mapping and harvesting
  - <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/>
  - <http://outcomeharvesting.net/resources/>
- Appreciative inquiry
  - <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>
- Misc
  - <http://donaldclarkplanb.blogspot.com/2015/03/7-reasons-why-we-need-to-kill-boring.html> - Donald Clarke explains why learning objectives (and, by extension, learning outcomes) are not useful for learners