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.
Seems so reasonable, eh?

http://cei.ust.hk/node/1156/guidelines-producing-effective-ilo-statements

https://techknowtools.com/2013/02/11/using-verbs-for-specific-learning-outcomes/
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/

https://www.sotvkcccreatorsclubs.org/blog/blooms-taxonomy-illustrates-knowledge-retention-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**: errrrr.....no. Not a lot.

* note: this never happens
Another way of seeing it

The Spiral Curriculum

https://drfautley.wordpress.com/2015/05/16/on-linear-progress-and-spiral-curricula/
The illusion

What we teach

What we assess

What a student learns
The illusion

What we teach

What we assess

Intended learning outcomes

What a student learns
The reality

What a student learns

What we teach

What we assess
The reality (with excellent constructive alignment)

Intended learning outcomes

What we teach

What a student learns

What we assess
The reality

What a student learns

What we assess

What we teach

Actual learning outcomes

What we assess

What a student learns
What a student learns

What we assess

What we teach

Actual learning outcomes

The reality

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.

Adapted from: http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/andragogy/
Outcome harvesting

Customising an Outcome Harvest

1. Design the harvest
2. Review documentation, draft outcomes
3. Engage informants
4. Substantiate
5. Analyse, interpret
6. Support use of findings

http://outcomeharvesting.net/the-essence/
Getting-started resources

- The Trouble With Learning Outcomes (Hussey & Smith, 2002)
  - http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1469787402003003?
journalCode=alha

- Andragogy
  - http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/andragogy/

- 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