Outcomes-based education: Issues, challenges, action
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• Why bother with learning outcomes?
• What are learning outcomes?
• Some challenges
• Integrative learning?
• Assessment, learning outcomes & change
Why bother?

- Compliance

- $$$$$$

- An opportunity to review and refresh programs

The first challenge: To develop a compelling rationale
Learning Outcomes: Type 1

- A general term describing the outcomes of learning at any level, but typically at the level of the module.

- Focused on outcomes rather than content

- Based on the module/discipline

- Bloom’s taxonomy
Learning Outcomes: Type 2

“The distinctive qualities of a graduate of the university that will equip the graduate for roles in society and the workplace”

They guide:

- students as they develop personally and professionally as they progress through their courses
- staff as they develop curricula, learning & teaching strategies, & assessment practices
- supervisors, in mentoring and supporting higher degree students

University of Wollongong, 2007
The University of Wollongong is committed to developing graduates who are:

- Informed
- Independent learners
- Problem solvers
- Effective communicators
- Responsible
What are learning outcomes?

Some related terms:
- Learning outcomes
- Key skills
- Generic skills
- Transferable skills
- Graduate qualities
- Graduate attributes
Learning outcomes

- are limited in number

- are located in life and professional practice beyond the university

- have a job to do
Conceptions of learning outcomes:

1. A precursor to university learning
2. An addition to other learning – discrete, separate, skills etc
3. A transforming mechanism so graduates make use of knowledge through application in the real world – related to this knowledge
4. Infusing and enabling all scholarly learning – fully integral

Barrie, S. (2006). Understanding what we mean by the generic attributes of graduates
“The language associated with the concept of generic skills is quite complex and there is no real agreement as to what constitutes those skills, let alone how to validly and reliably recognise them in practice. It is evident that practitioners do not speak, or think, about generic skills in the same terms.”

“Despite reports of individual curriculum initiatives, the overall picture in higher education systems around the world is one of patchy implementations and uptake of such graduate attribute initiatives.”

“Attempts to implement attribute curricula have been remarkable unsuccessful.”

Learning

- Learning versus development
- What is happening when students are learning or developing these attributes?
- Where does the learning occur?
- What theories, frameworks or models of learning help our understanding?
Teaching

- What supports students’ learning and development?
- Is special expertise required?
- What attributes do we need as teachers?
- What resources are required?
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Some assessment challenges

- Can learning outcomes be assessed?
- Can *learning outcomes* be assessed separately from other outcomes?
- Where do we see learning outcomes?
- What are the qualities of an assessable construct?
- Criteria and standards?
- Validity? Reliability? Fairness?
- ‘Claims making’
Learning outcomes and integrative learning

“In most cases the key competencies were being integrated into other competencies. As a consequence, they were being assessed holistically as part of the overall assessment of vocational competencies, that is, their achievement has been inferred rather than measured explicitly.”

“One of the great challenges in higher education is to foster students’ abilities to integrate their learning across contexts and across time.”

A model of institutional impacts on assessment, learning and teaching

Good practice: Assessment for
- Learning
- Measuring achievement
- Ensuring standards

A. Module ensuring standards
   - Students’ experience of assessment
   - Module design
   - Teachers’ experience of assessment

B. Course/program
   - Program design
   - Student overall learning experience
   - Innovation & improvement

C. Department/faculty
   - Staff development
   - Departmental culture
   - Procedures

D. Institution
   - Resources
   - Principles, policies & regulations
   - Recognition and reward

E. External
   - Context - government policy, funding, participation, employers, etc.

Source: modified from Joughin and Macdonald, 2004
