OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION:
A CASE STUDY OF CHANGE IN A SECONDARY SCHOOL

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) and the basic processes of this Action Research program has been elaborated in previous papers within this Symposium (see, Retallick et al, 1994). While there are some specific situational variations of form and implementation across sites, the focus of the present paper is upon the processes of development of exit outcomes at the case study site of one secondary school. This paper examines the context and two year history during which OBE has been a particular focus in the overall school development process. We do so to provide an indication of the 'whys' and 'wherefores' with a recognition that the processes are still in action. This report focuses explicitly on the early stages of an ongoing and changing process of school-based change which is in itself consistent with the overall notions of Action Research which underpin the development of OBE at this site.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The impetus to introduce an OBE approach came from the Principal, initially derived from his own studies for an MEd between 1988-91 where the work of various writers had alerted him to the potentialities of OBE. This had further developed through contact with various American exponents (such as Spady, 1988, 1993) of OBE, and inaugural developments of OBE at his previous school. Following his transfer to Parkes he maintained contact with both the overseas sources and his previous school, although the transfer delayed his further direct involvement in OBE processes. This background and experience, on the other hand, directly contributed to the decision to involve both his new school and others in the region in developing an OBE approach. He also saw this approach as commensurate with both the national and local context.

With this background, he suggested that Parkes High should implement elements of OBE. The first attempt at introducing the notion of OBE commenced in March 1993 when a member of the Department of School Education (DSE) provided a 'Keynote Address' on OBE at a School Development Day. The intention was to initiate discussion on OBE but this presentation had a negative effect for a variety of reasons. Among
these, executive staff noted the format of the introduction of the proposed change appeared 'top down', there was considerable 'resistance' to change in many schools following major reports such as the Scott Report (see Cocklin, 1992), personnel issues surfaced including resistance to the ideas of a 'new Principal', there was a lack of knowledge among staff regarding the OBE approach and many staff saw the messenger as inappropriate. Following this presentation, some staff exhibited considerable resistance to the idea of OBE as an approach with the consequence that further development did not proceed until 1994.

1994 saw the appointment of a new Leading Teacher at the school and the development of a range of alternative implementation strategies which were more commensurate with a collaborative decision making model involving staff, students, parents, and wider community in the process. An overview of this process is provided in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

1994: INITIAL INFORMATION GATHERING

As indicated by Figure 1 the school firstly continued the processes commenced in 1993 (see Retallick et al 1994) focussed on two main aspects. The first was to explore the OBE approach, and in particular what the school understands by the term 'exit outcomes':

By designing our education system to achieve clear defined exit outcomes, we will free ourselves from the traditional rigidity of schools and increase the likelihood that all students will learn. (Spady, 1988:4)

One issue discussed during this initial period was the areas of both commonality and contestation with 'syllabus' outcomes. The 'exit' outcomes came to be referred to as 'whole person outcomes'. The notions that exit outcomes can be developed through achieving syllabus outcomes and that exit outcomes are compatible with syllabus outcomes was discussed but is still being accepted. Indeed, as Retallick et al (1994) have pointed out, all the schools involved in the overall project are seeking to come to terms with both 'forms' of outcome and to do so in a manner commensurate with their community - both within and outside the school surrounds.

The second concurrent initiative was to form an Action Team. The calling together of an Action Team of interested (not elected) staff is the accepted method of collaborative decision making at the school. An Action Team would also be able to address some of the perceived difficulties inherent in the 1993 perception that this was 'yet another
top down' process, particularly one emanating from the DSE. Due to his long term association with the concepts of OBE the Principal was elected the nominal 'chairperson' of the Action Team but the staff and student members 'ran the agenda' and assisted in developing a wider sense of 'ownership' of both the direction and processes of change.

The next stage of the process lead to the start of establishing what 'exit outcomes' would be acceptable to all members of the school community. This process addressed two central questions:

1. What do we want our students to be able to do when they leave Parkes High School?

2. How do we respond to the issue of 'outcomes' in terms of the school mission statement of Caring and Learning Together which had been developed in 1991 but had not flowed through into planning as yet.

In addressing these questions, the Action Team saw that it was essential to get as wide a range of inputs as possible to reflect the attitudes of school staff, parents, students, community, as well as various groups within the school such as Executive, Management Teams and Faculty Groups. There were two distinct steps in gathering this information.

The initial step asked these groups to provide an open 'brainstorming' response to each question during a series of group meetings.

Group Meetings

The Action Team instigated a series of meetings both within the school and with the P&C to record first thoughts on the two questions.

An Executive Conference was held on March 8 so the executive would be the first group in the school to go through the process. From this full day meeting many potential 'outcomes' were listed in response to both of the questions shown above. Head Teachers were then asked to conduct the same process with the members of their faculty and with any school management teams they chaired. The delegation of the gathering of ideas to the executive contributed to the ownership of the entire process.

The P&C were also invited to contribute and at the P&C meeting held on April 13 the Principal reported attendance at 25 (student population approximately 750), but noted that this was 'one of the better' attended meetings and well above 'normal' for most P&C meetings. The group brainstormed their preferred outcomes in response each question and this produced a list of 28 items. A similar meeting was then held during school time with the Student Representative Council members who
are drawn from Years 8 to 12. The students experienced difficulty in responding in such a short time period because they had not come across the concepts involved with OBE before that meeting.

On the 14th April, a Staff Meeting was held with a similar agenda. Here, after some initial comments on the notions of OBE, the staff were split into two predetermined groups. The first was chaired by the Principal with 26 suggestions being recorded on butchers paper in response to the first question 'What do we want our students to be able to do when they leave Parkes High School?'. The second group that was chaired by the Leading Teacher recorded 12 responses the question 'what student outcomes relate to our mission statement of Caring and Learning together. In both contexts, discussion was wide-ranging and open. It was also evident, as in other contexts, that the term 'outcomes' was still subject to some confusion. In particular, there were those who saw outcomes in primarily 'content' form in terms of academic achievement and others who saw them as more generic competencies related to the individual student at the time they leave the education system (see Retallick et al, 1994). There was also some evidence of resistance to the idea of OBE with one teacher commenting "this is just the same as was done years ago - the same as the aims and objectives movement - and nothing would change anyway". However in both groups a majority of teachers participated and at least some of the executive staff felt that the exercise had contributed something to the sense of 'ownership' of the change process.

The responses from the brainstorming sessions with executive, staff, faculties, management teams, P&C and SRC were then compiled into a list of 240 statements ready to be edited.

The second step in gathering information from a wide range of stakeholders was to design and conduct a survey.

The Survey

The Action Team analysed a series of surveys obtained from other schools and the 240 responses gathered from the group meetings and decided on 68 statements that covered most areas of personal learning and growth. A five point scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' was used in order to clearly establish what respondents thought about each statement. Over 400 surveys were printed and distributed to all stakeholders in the school and to interested community members not necessarily connected with the school.

Survey forms were distributed to all staff, all work experience providers, all SRC members, all year 11 and 12 students, year 6 parents at all feeder primary schools, all P&C members who attended the previous meeting, all school council members, all ancillary staff and to any member of the community who contacted the school in response to
a series of newspaper and radio advertisements. In addition, a member of the Action Team randomly selected every tenth student from years 7 to 10, explained the survey to them and then assisted them to complete the survey during class time.

The Results

The Action Team compiled the responses and analysed the data in a series of working days and after school meetings. The 240 responses gathered at meetings were written onto individual pieces of paper and literally pasted together on a wall under broad headings that emerged during the day. Many statements were similar and could easily be combined but others took considerable discussion before being placed under a particular heading. At the end of the day a general statement was written by the Action Team members to cover each group of responses. The eleven statements written at the end of the day became in effect the first draft of the school's 'student outcomes'.

The Draft Student Outcomes were:
1. Students should be literate and numerate and be able to make decisions and solve problems.
2. Students should have the skills to play a positive role in society.
3. Students should be achieving their potential.
4. Students should value lifelong learning.
5. Students should be able to communicate effectively with a range of people in a variety of situations.
6. Students should respect the rights, opinions, feelings and values of others regardless of religion, race or culture.
7. Students should understand technological advances and its impacts on society.
8. Students should be aware of the environment and accept that the future is our responsibility.
9. Students should have a knowledge of career options and possess a range of workplace skills.
10. Students should have the ability to function in the community, confident and secure with their own being.

The compilation of the results from the survey was left to the Principal to complete. He presented to members of the Action Team a graphical and statistical summary of the results of each question for three groups - staff, students and parents and community. At present the results of the survey still have to be considered. The staff are still to see and discuss the survey results in total and the Action Team are yet to consider what impact they will have on the wording of the draft outcomes.

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAYS

Two School Development Days were planned for 1994, both focussing on
student outcomes. The first day, held on May 17 comprised three sessions - an introductory session about student 'success', a session where groups of teachers discussed the first draft of the students outcomes and a session where different groups considered possible implications these outcomes would have on school structures. The groups were determined beforehand by the Action Team.

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAY: MAY 17

In the introductory session (9am to 10am) small groups of teachers discussed three questions which were drawn from the basic premise of OBE:

1. What is success?
2. Is it the same thing for all students?
3. How can we be certain that ALL students are experiencing success?

A carousel brainstorm method was used where each group discussed the questions, wrote their responses on butchers paper and then rotated around all other groups to consider their responses. One member of each group was left behind with their own butchers paper to explain their responses to the following groups and to answer any questions. The final step involves all original groups altering their own thoughts in the light of other people's responses.

This lead to considerable discussion, and indeed some initial alterations of ideas, while other 'suggestions' were strongly contested and even resisted. Finally, each original group reported back to the whole staff. Here again there appeared to be a continuation of the confusion between syllabus outcomes and exit outcomes (see Retallick et al 1994) along with a questioning of how these exit outcomes could be measured. Indeed a few staff firmly expressed the opinion that the OBE approach would never work as student success was always dependent upon quantifiable results such as those provided by external examinations and credentials. Even the idea of a student's 'potential' as expressed in the draft outcome of students 'achieving their potential', attracted considerable discussion both as to meaning and to how this could be quantified. The extent to which such views still remain and indeed the overall notions of resistance and contestation have yet to be fully explored in this research project.

Other groups brought out issues such as success is both 'relative' and 'individual' which often lead to discussions as to who should set the standards - teachers, community, students or some combination? Overall, a general consensus was given that there was at least a subjective and an individual element to the notion of success and that the teacher did have responsibilities in this area. The responsibilities and how these were to be achieved was not elaborated upon. Perhaps then this becomes a further important aspect as issues of curriculum and pedagogy are
examined in terms of the outcomes decided upon within each particular school.

The second session of the School Development Day saw a whole group presentation by the Leading Teacher who described the process used to establish the first draft of the student outcomes. The original 240 responses were displayed and discussed as were the paste up sheets used by the Action Team to combine each group of similar statements. Ten groups were formed with 5 or 6 members each. Each group was provided with an overhead projector transparency sheet showing the ten draft outcomes. Each group was asked to respond on the OHP sheet to:
* how they feel about the draft statements in total
* how they feel about each statement individually
* if there is anything left out
* any other comments

One member from each group then reported back to the whole group. The intention was to collect feedback - not to make changes - and to provide some comments for the action team. There was no attempt to achieve consensus at this point.

Many of the issues raised in this feedback session focussed on 'measurement'. For instance Group 3 reported the following:

Outcome #1 - What's the 'minimum' standard - how do we judge the standard - do we have a basic level, who sets it? All outcomes must be measured.

Outcome #2 - What's a 'positive role'? As that's a problem here, leave this outcome out - the idea is contained in all the other outcomes.

Outcome #3 - Kids would have to be pre-tested to determine their 'pre-potential' - then, how do we measure 'potential', what happens if students don't reach their potential?

Outcome #4 - Is this measurable? In fact, are any of these outcomes measurable? Who judges and how?

Outcome #7 - Is 'understand' the right word, be 'receptive to' might be better

Outcome #8 - How do you measure this value? - some emphasis was put on this, and it appeared some 'concerns' that 'greenies' were dominating without necessarily 'understanding' the 'important issues'.

Outcome #9 - Measurable? Is it appropriate for all - e.g., the 'academic career' doesn't need 'workplace' skills - seemed to be
suggesting that this would 'waste' the time of the academic student who was going on to the professions/tertiary education.

Group 8 were the most vocal advocates for 'academic outcomes' and these were to be derived from maths, languages, science, and computer studies, as set out in syllabus documents and determined by the Board of Studies and DSE. While there was support for more focus on syllabus outcomes the majority of the discussion focussed on either changes to wording to make the outcome more 'exact', or various 'combinations' to avoid 'duplication.

The third session of this School Development Day involved groups of no more than 6 teachers 'selecting' one outcome they wished to focus on. While there was some discussion about being able to discuss their 'first preference' each person did finally make a selection. Others suggested that the changes that emerged from the prior session had not been taken into account and that they would therefore be repeating the same 'discussion' on the unchanged outcomes statements. Here it was noted by the presenter that any final 'changes' to the wording must come from the 'wider community', not just the staff, although one or two did reject this notion.

The group was asked to consider some implications for the school of adopting their selected statement as one of the student 'exit outcomes'. A possible list of areas that outcome might impact upon was provided with the instruction that the group was to select three or four of these areas and record how they think this outcome would impact on this area. The possible list of areas included the curriculum offering, student reports, student welfare systems, teaching/learning activities, resources, period length, timetable structure, student management, teacher welfare, school planning, faculty teaching programs, training and development, executive structure, student participation, parent participation, vocational education, decision making and finances. The Action Team aimed to point out to staff that the OBE process could and should effect every area of the school's operation.

While some of the groups again focussed on the wording of the outcome statement, more attention was directed towards the 'implications' for curriculum, pedagogy and organisation than had been evident in the prior session. As an 'initial consideration' of these aspects, discussion was very general focussing on issues such as more resources rather than upon issues of changing practices and content.

By the end of this session then the staff had discussed at considerable length many aspects of the draft outcomes. The Action Team considered this input which lead to the development of the following second draft outcomes produced on 16/6/94:

When students leave Parkes High School they should:
LITERACY AND NUMERACY: be literate and numerate, able to make decisions and solve problems

COMMUNITY: have the skills to play a positive role in the community

LEARNING: enjoy and value learning and be achieving their potential

COMMUNICATION: be able to communicate effectively with a range of people in a variety of situations

RELATIONSHIPS: respect the rights, opinions, feelings and values of others regardless of religion, race or culture

TECHNOLOGY: understand technological advances and their impacts on society

ENVIRONMENT: be aware of the environment and accept that the future is our responsibility

VOCATIONAL: have a knowledge of careers options and possess a range of workplace skills

SELF: be confident and feel good about themselves

As at the date of this paper, these remain the current version of the draft student outcomes at the school. The Action Team still has to consider many other comments from this School Development Day and the results of the survey before modifying the draft further and then attempting to achieve consensus on those changes. The Action Team made a deliberate decision to place the development of the student outcomes on the 'backburner' after sensing the mood of the staff and facing a quality assurance review and extended period of absence by the Principal.

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT DAY: JUNE 17

The second School Development Day was held on June 17. It involved a full day presentation by Dr Alan Rowe an OBE consultant with the High Success Network in the USA. Dr Rowe was brought from USA with outside funding to work for two weeks with all the schools in the cluster. His impact will no doubt be evident in the papers presented by the other schools in this symposium. He was fully briefed by each school prior to his visit so he could match his presentation to their particular stage of development of OBE. Teachers from all schools in the cluster were invited to attend all presentations and many senior executive heard him speak on three or four occasions.
His presentation at Parkes High School centred around the idea that all students can experience success but not all at the same time or in the same way. We (schools) control the conditions of success and success breeds success. Given the comments from the staff at the previous School Development Day, his discussion was designed to 'get us all singing from the same sheet of music' as far as OBE is concerned. He defined an outcome as a performance or demonstration or exhibition of learning that really matters which he referred to this as a 'Taa-Daa'!! Alan Rowe discussed notions of 'What is Quality' and he gave practical examples of how to 'design down' from the whole school level to individual classrooms. He presented ideas for practical planning in outcomes terms and for negotiating new roles in the new paradigm.

Many staff commented on the quality of his presentation and the benefits of his talk, but much more has to happen at whole school level to follow up this School Development Day. The Action Team are hopeful of including many of his notions in implementing outcomes during the following years.

CURRENT SITUATION AND SOME CONCLUSIONS

At the end of Term 3 a meeting of the Action Team, the University Associates and two school-based researchers determined the following course of action in an attempt to trial the idea of the P/D/S/A model of action research when implementing one of the draft student outcomes.

Initially the action research would focus on the implementation of the literacy exit outcome across the curriculum. This was decided as a response to the importance attached to this 'outcome' in the data gathered, by it being a current focus area within the DSE, due to the available expertise of the school-based researchers and due to the fact that everyone is involved with teaching literacy.

This 'phase' of the action research would comprise three stages. Firstly, all Head teachers across all faculties would be asked to provide any documentation they had pertaining to literacy in their faculty. The university associates would seek to access any other published material through their resources. The second stage involves all staff on a voluntary basis completing a 'diary' of their teaching practice which relates to the literacy outcome. It was suggested that this be over two separate weeks and would cover a variety of classes. Finally, and based partly on this 'diary', selected volunteer staff would be interviewed and possibly observed in the classroom by the school-based action researchers. The interview would focus on the importance of the literature (gathered in the first phase) on thier teaching of literacy and the teaching strategies they use to improve
literacy in their classroom.

The final step involves putting all this information together - evaluating the existing policies, programs and literature together with the current teaching practices - and then making a series of recommendations in areas like training and development of staff, school and timetable structure, faculty programming and policies, teaching practices and whole school literacy programs to make sure the students can achieve this exit outcome. This process, if successful, could be used as a model of operation for the implementation of all the exit outcomes the school community finally agrees upon.

The research team will need to focus on a number of issues which have emerged during the investigation, some of which have been indicated in this presentation, others which have to do with furthering the processes of professional development, considering the implications and 'applications' of OBE in secondary schools and others likely to emerge as the study progresses. One issue among many could be ways of developing a more active role and involvement by the university associates in the process.

While we have not offered this paper as a panacea for either OBE or professional development and there are still a number of questions and issues to be addressed as the investigation proceeds there have been definite 'learning' processes from both school and university staff. Perhaps the most important lesson is that effective collaboration between us can only be beneficial for education as a whole and students in particular.

REFERENCES


   Educational Leadership, 46(2), pp.4-14.