

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

EDL600

EDUCATION CHANGE AND TEACHER CAREER DEVELOPMENT

ASSIGNMENT THREE 50%

PROJECT: OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

I have chosen to explore the nature of **outcomes-based assessment** for my project. Many teachers are unfamiliar with the changes to the HSC for all sorts of reasons - ranging from 'I simply have too much to do' to 'Who cares anyway - they'll change it again before we know it'. One theory that I do have is that many teachers will just wait until they are told what to do by one of the following - the Principal, the Assistant Principal, the Curriculum Coordinator or their Subject head before they take this new approach on board. Of course it is important that all of the above people have a consistent approach to the current developments and, as I have stated in my Literature Review, it is vital that leadership be not only visionary and empowering but constant as well. In speaking with my colleagues who teach in other curriculum areas outside Studies of Religion (HSIE umbrella), I have experienced many different understandings of what outcomes-based education is all about. I have come up against the various ways to write programs and set out assessment tasks. From here there follows the divergent ideas that surround reporting. I have chosen to conduct a survey of teachers (see Appendix 1) across the Key Learning Areas prior to an inservice that I had arranged. The aim of this inservice was to make my staff (as well as other interested members of staff) become aware of the course that Catholic Studies and Studies of Religion will take in relation to Outcomes Based Assessment. I have also devised a Research Task for my Year Ten Catholic Studies classes (I have two). I have written a set of standards they can strive to achieve. I surveyed these students (see Appendix 2) on the setting out of this assessment as against any other tasks they have been given recently. It is important for me

to consider that in conducting this research that now is the time to change an existing 'mind-set' among the teachers on my staff as well as the students in the classroom.

I decided that I would look at the response of teachers first in relation to how much they know about the new approach to assessment and what will we as a faculty/staff have to do to come into line with the new approach?

I then decided that I would design a research assignment for my Year 10 students reflecting two of the outcomes from their current unit of work. I also designed a marking criteria and attached that to their assignment. When I handed out the assignment I further explained the reason behind the marking schema. I look forward to analysing their responses

METHOD

At the end of term two, I attended the launch of the new Studies of Religion Syllabus at the Australian Catholic University at Strathfield. I realised then that not too many people on my staff would be aware of how different the new approach was going to be. I felt that I had a responsibility as head of department to make sure that they were kept informed about these changes as well as engaging them into becoming instrumental in making these changes happen at Bethany College. The fascinating thing in all of this is that the curriculum document used in Catholic Studies in the Sydney Archdiocese is an outcome-based document. It was implemented in 1995 into all systemic schools in the Archdiocese. It has been my experience that even as far back as this document came into practice that teachers still did not follow the 'rules' in assessing each of the outcome bands (see Appendix 3). Of course when you mention the word assessment to teachers they often associate the term with a 'mark'. The new Religious Education document attempted to encourage teachers to use a variety of assessment techniques and some of those were not going to require actual marks. I then took myself off to yet another CEO information day. On this day representatives from CEO and the NSW Board of Studies once again worked with the group in establishing further familiarity with the new syllabus in Studies of Religion. Once again it was playing on my mind that I had to take a leadership role and invite our regional adviser to enlighten my own staff on 'outcomes-based assessment'.

On the 16th September, Luc Benedet, CEO adviser came to our school to address the Catholic Studies staff. His aim was to dispel the fear and anxiety that perhaps I had and that perhaps my staff didn't know they were going to have. His input centred around assessment and how we were to reshape our notion of assessment in light of outcomes. He reflected on some of the words of Mr Kemp, Federal Minister for Education and Training which included:

- It is outcomes which will have a formative influence on the curriculum of Australia's schools as we move into the next millennium... (National Profiles)
- The new goals for schools are student-centred...building confidence in school requires an explicit commitment to clearly defined high standards...
- National benchmarks permits the assessment of student performance against the agreed standard...
- Australia's education system for the next millenium must be focussed on outcomes if it is to achieve educational equity.... (in other words if we want funding we must conform) (taken from a talk by Mr Kemp May 1999)

Luc challenged the teachers to think 'outside the square'. This was too much for some and they began to question him , 'How are we going to get the time to do this? As well as 'Isn't this method too subjective?' As you can see, the 27 staff (me included) that attended this meeting were thinking! Now at 3.45 pm on a Thursday afternoon, after teaching all day, that

was some achievement. Aside from this, I began to realise that my theory was in fact true. Many staff did not have any idea of what was ahead of them.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Before Luc spoke I sent around a survey (See Appendix 1). Twenty-six staff completed this survey. There were 4 KLA heads in attendance and 2 fourth year student teachers in the group. Of these 26, 20 staff had read Curriculum Documents across 7-12 in Religious Education, Human Society and Its Environment, Technical and Applied Science, Mathematics, English, Language Other Than English, Science, Music and Dance. Unfortunately I am not sure how many have read the new syllabii in these areas. 4 staff had only read the 7-10 syllabus documents in Mathematics, Human Society and Its Environment, Religious Education and Personal Development, Health and Physical Education. (It may be important to say at this stage that my school is a two-campus school with 7-8 on one site and 9-12 on the other. Both staffs are discreet). One staff member had read only the 11-12 syllabus in Legal Studies and one staff member had actually owned up to having read the 7-12 'old' syllabus in English.

In response to Question Two **What do you understand by the term 'outcomes'?** the following were recorded.

- An achievement - varying levels based on knowledge, skills and values - 7 staff understood 'outcomes' as meaning this.
- Noone has been able to clearly define it for me.
- Work should be outcomes driven.
- Set of statements set where students can achieve either at the end of a lesson or unit - 5 staff said this.
- Statement of 'objectives in action'
- Observabe student product
- Tangible evidence of a teaching/learning strategy
- Levels to be achieved by students in different stages
- What the children should know
- Statements that are student-based
- The learning expected of the students
- The result wanting to be gained/achieved by a set task related to the ability to perform the task.
- Ability to complete a particular task/situation
- Ability to complete tasks according to a set of criteria.
- What the students are expected to be able to do at the completion (of what???)
- At the end of a period of instruction it is what we expect the students to achieve.
- Skills student will display on completion of the unit
- Knowledge that students are able to demonstrate in any given aspect.

Response to Question Three **When designing an assessment task do you focus on?**

Content, Outcomes or Standards?

Content - Very Important - 16 Important - 7 Average Importance - 3

Outcomes- Very Important - 13 Important - 10 Average Importance - 3

Standards - Very Important - 5 Important - 17 Average Importance - 3

There is a definition of outcomes-based education which reads like this: 'Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) means focussing and organising a school's entire programs and instructional efforts around the clearly defined outcomes we want all students to demonstrate when they leave school. Outcomes-based education is **not** a program, a package, a technique, a fad, a quick fix, a panacea, a miracle or an event. It is a transformational way of doing business in education' (Warhurst 1997: 3). This is what Bill Spady, the originator, said when he visited Australia in 1992. On reading through the responses of my staff I believe they have part of the idea of what outcomes-based education is all about but they have not carried this through to the end and that is, that fulfilment of outcomes goes beyond the classroom, in fact beyond the school. It has made for greater accountability not only for the teachers who teach but for the students who learn. 'Spady (1993) argues that the central focus is on how the student has changed as a result of learning rather than on the tasks that they perform to demonstrate learning' (Griffin 1997: 6) When looking at this idea then perhaps many are missing the point. This type of education causes a shift from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning - a shift that many teachers are well on the way to doing. In this method of teaching/learning more emphasis is placed on the student to perform against a set of standards as opposed to competing against other students in the cohort.

After the presentation, I asked the staff present to complete yet another survey. This was to establish if they had changed their understanding of outcomes and its relationship to assessment and how they were going to implement these changes.

There were 23 responses to Question 1, **How has your understanding of outcomes changed after the presentation** as follows:

- Awareness of teaching to outcomes and basing assessment around these outcomes
- Command words are the 'key'.
- Emphasis is on outcomes-based assessment.
- Needed to focus more on outcomes-based assessment in relation to content.
- Reinforces all that has been learnt at Uni - need to move with this change.
- Growing demand to formalise this as part of the whole assessment process in the future.
- Performance Bands will be used to assessment in 11-12 by 2003.
- Awareness of how much more complex the who issue is
- Understanding changed in that I now see how outcomes related to assessments. I had not previously used outcomes to base assessments on, however, I had used then when constructing units of work.
- Reinforcement and extension of ideas about how to link these (outcomes) to assessment.
- Broader knowledge of how it all works.
- Outcomes are important, because at the end of the day it is what the students achieve
- Some difficulties with some aspects
- Reinforced in terms of its importance to evaluate effective student learning
- It means we will have a great deal more work for the students.
- Clarified new procedures - made me look at my assessments and what I am trying to achieve. There's so much to do !!!
- Better knowledge on how they (outcomes) are related to assessments - still totally confused on how to do this in my subject (Mathematics).
- Encouraged me to drive staff towards this change.
- Marking scheme with the question and the hierarchy of verbs.
- Implementation poses enormous problems re retraining and expertise.
- It is going to take a lot of time to put it all together.

- I feel I have missed some basic introductory information about all this. Out KLA (Creative Arts) needs to do some work on this obviously!

Responses to Question Two, **How can you apply this information on outcomes-based assessment to your own KLA?**

- This is what I don't understand.
- It is designing time NOW
- We have no choice - we need to walk before we run.
- Assessment comes first
- Putting into place a process/system of preparing/planning assessments based on the outcomes.
- Clustering outcomes to reduce assessment tasks.
- Ensure that assessment matches/meets the learning outcomes.
- Helps to ensure the accountability and efficiency of teachers
- Match 'verbs' with assessment.
- Allowed me to think about what needs to be done.
- Good organisational model presented for developing assessment tasks
- Check that assessments currently being used are related to outcomes
- Useful to see practical examples.
- More planning is needed.
- Start using scales and outcomes with all in class tasks.
- Relevant to all domains of learning.
- I am not sure exactly - I will have to look more closely.
- Give out criteria and marking scale with assessment tasks. Assessment to match levels/bands.
- When we set a test/task we look to have question which covers the band of outcomes then grade them at the end.
- We need time to work on that, especially to bring reports up to scratch.

The responses after the presentation were varied but all began to realise that this new approach was mandatory and found in all of the new syllabii. If we want our school to continue to be funded by the federal government from 2003 we must be able to show that we are using outcomes-based assessment. I believe that it was interesting that only one person spoke of the need to get reports into line. This is an area that needs great attention when discussing the issues of outcomes-based assessment. The reports are to the parents. How many of them are aware of the changes to this degree. In our own situation where we have a high number of ethnic families - 27 different nationalities in all - they are more interested in where their child stands in relation to her peers than how well she is able to meet a set of standards. Unfortunately the mind-set of teachers is often a hard barrier to break as well. It takes constant encouragement for all teachers to move forward. The student teachers felt very supported because this is what is being taught at the university level. Teachers appear to be struggling with the concept that outcomes need to be placed on a continuum and that changes will be found in the student. This hierarchy of outcomes was something that many had not thought about. Now it appears that some syllabii have the outcomes arranged in an hierarchical way and others haven't. So there will still be further discussion among many teachers what they see as the order of prioritising the outcomes. Luc used Bloom's taxonomy to display the hierarchy when devising assessment tasks. He suggested that we begin with the easily achieved outcomes gradually moving towards those that would require a greater level of understanding and skill by the student.

It is evident that after the presentation many teachers began to take on board the need to act now and not leave this too long to put into effect. English has begun with their coordinator modeling an assessment task with a marking criteria attached. This enabled the

students to see what was required of them. She is hoping that her staff will soon come on board. In Year 11 Studies of Religion, a task was given to the students, the marking criteria was not with it, however one teacher did develop one for marking. In future this marking criteria will accompany the task. Last year in HSIE in the junior school all teachers were encouraged when they designed a task that an appropriate marking scheme be developed - it was not handed to the students as it was for teacher reference only. When the coordinator set this she met with great opposition and still today there are some in her department who will not do this. Unfortunately there will always be those who will dig their heels in no matter what. Most of the staff at my school will get on with the job some kicking and screaming but the majority will work with their colleagues to make things happen. However it is in knowing how to go about it that is of greatest importance. Once again leadership must know what they are doing in order to lead properly and with confidence. This is an area that may need some further development in my own context. Our own Curriculum Coordinator does not present himself as having any idea of how the new approach is going to work. Being a physics teacher has not given him a broad base in education and neither has it encouraged him to broaden that base. This is not the forum to complain about those I work with but at the same time the point is that we must be in this together and all working with a common goal.

Despite all of this, I felt that in offering this in-service for staff I was in fact giving them the opportunity to become familiar with the journey ahead. Their responses to the second questionnaire were uplifting and in most cases positive. For many this was the first time they had heard these ideas and now comes the challenge to implement them. Not only are we required to write new programs but we are also mandated to design reliable and accurate assessment tasks for all years. We are also called to report students' progress authentically with reference to the knowledge and skills that the student is able to achieve.

Now it is time to look at the responses of the students. The students I teach are from middle class backgrounds. Many of their parents were not born in Australia. Their parents have high expectation of their daughters achievements with very little understanding of the way the system operates. The students themselves perhaps could be described as not necessarily self-motivated. However when many of our students begin Years 11 and 12 a large number take these two years very seriously and work extremely hard to achieve the necessary results to get to University. I chose Year Ten for the criteria based assessment task because the School Certificate is closely linked with the Higher School Certificate in terms of outcomes. This Year Ten cohort will be the first group to begin the new HSC in 2000 therefore an obvious choice!

The Assessment Task that was based upon two outcomes from the unit of work "Ancient and Indigenous Religions". This task was set across the form in Year Ten and was a School Certificate Task with a weighting of 30%. All students were to hand this assessment in after a 4 week period of preparation. There are 6 Year Ten Catholic Studies classes and I happen to teach two of those. I surveyed my own classes believing that this was representative of the form. A copy of the assessment and outcomes for the unit can be found in Appendix Three.

In designing the assessment tasks I focussed on the following areas:

- Checked the type of assessment that was scheduled for this unit
- Chose the appropriate outcomes
- Prepared the task so that there would be a wide range of student ability shown
- Prepared the task using appropriate language
- Developed an appropriate marking criteria, based on the expectations of the task.

- Hoped that the marking criteria would enable the student to see their strengths and weakness.

Forty students responded to the questionnaire. The following responses were given to Question 1, **How useful did you find the marking criteria in preparing your assignment?**

Very Helpful 13 Helpful 26 No Help 1

They were also asked to list the reason/s for their answer and the following ideas were recorded.

- Showed what I was getting marked for.
- Expectation of the teachers x 12

- Fulfilled assignment needs
- Check criteria against assignment e.g. pictures helped me improve my marks x2
- Good outline of how to do well x 8
- Could have been more specific
- Good check list x 2
- I didn't really look at it x 2 (One of these students got less than 10 out of 20)
- Students are made aware of what they are marked on
- Showed the standard that was required to get high marks x 2
- A fair way of students receiving the mark they deserve
- Read over it but did not base my assignment on marking criteria
- No different from normal assignment.

The response to Question 2, **What other subjects have you used this method of assessment?**

English - 29 Japanese - 4 Sports Science - 1 Art - 2

Design and Technology - 2 History - 1 Can't Remember - 2 None - 10

(Some students wrote more than one subject)

Response to Question Three, **Would you like to see this happen with all your CAS (Catholic Studies) assessment tasks?**

Yes - 34 No - 0 Don't care - 6

Question 4, **Further Comments**, only 13 responded.

Appreciated the outline x4

Very useful - x3

More widespread use needed - x4

Assessment was well structured x2

Obviously the responses by the students of Year Ten were not as precise or thoughtful as perhaps older students may contribute. Nevertheless they still gave the impression that this

was a very useful exercise for them when it came to presenting an assignment for marking. I believe they saw it as being important, particularly when the mark they achieved was one that will go towards a final grade recorded on a credential for future employers. In further analysing their responses most students took the time to link the criteria with the question given to them. Those students who didn't check the criteria, found it more difficult to achieve the top marks. It was then an important link for all involved in having clear assessment criteria not only for the students in completing the task, but for the teachers in marking the task as well. The dots before the criteria were changed into boxes for marking and a number of teachers after consulting with each other were able to mark the assignment rather than one teacher marking the entire 136. Teachers discussed with one another the expectations they had when marking the assignments.

Informal discussion in both my classes further emphasised the appreciation the students had for such a shift. They generally found it easier to complete the task when they knew exactly what was expected of them.

CONCLUSION

There was a general feeling among staff that all this is a huge job. Despite this feeling, I believe, from the ideas shared through the surveys given, the staff are ready to take the plunge and make a concerted effort to ensure that this venture operates effectively at Bethany. The essential ingredient in a teacher is the ability to try new. The staff I work with are very dedicated and talented people in the main. They will contribute with new and fresh ideas and things will happen. Of course those who don't will be left behind. It is obvious from looking at the teachers responses that the time factor is high on most people's list of the obstacles that need to be overcome. Already we have been given two extra Staff Development Days in Term 4 to work on new programs for the year 2000. This will incorporate looking at the types of assessment that will be used for all classes. Staff have had many opportunities to attend in-services relating to the new syllabii particularly for the HSC. Most staff by the end of the year will have a fair idea of what is required of them in setting up outcomes-based assessment.

The students will be the benefactors of all this work. It is obvious that most of them see the criteria as a fairer way of measuring their achievements. It will still be difficult for many parents to understand that achievement is not always measured in marks. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the New South Wales School Certificate Tests and Higher School Certification Examination still record results using numbers.

The overall feeling of the teachers about the quality of the assignments presented was very positive. The students themselves still have to get used to following a criteria however many of them submitted outstanding assignments that had taken many hours of research and design. The thing I found with this assignment was the trouble many had gone with the inclusion of appropriate maps and pictures taken from the computer. Most students had used a computer to word process their assignment. Over 50% of the students had used the Internet to research their chosen topic. Where most students fell down, was copying directly from their source material and unfortunately were penalised for this. Nevertheless, as a teacher, I found the marking criteria beneficial in that it gave me a starting point rather than reading through a number of assignments first and looking to see the standard - I already had the standards list in front of me. In completing this project, I know that at least there will be one advocate of OB Assessment on my staff!

APPENDIX ONE

APPENDIX TWO

APPENDIX THREE