

# **OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION & THE DEATH OF KNOWLEDGE**

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# OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND THE DEATH OF KNOWLEDGE

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## *Abstract*

*In a far off time, in the confederacy of Oz, teaching and learning coexisted in an artistically symbiotic relationship. Then the experts came along. No, not experts in educational theory, but experts in the art of Isms – scientific rationalism, reductionism, Fordism, Taylorism, sophism, postmodernism and above all, obscurantism. They took their Isms and applied them to the art of education, and lo and behold, outcomes-based education was born. The Ismistic parents cooed and gloated over their cleverly conceived offspring. In fact, the Ismites within one state of the confederacy hailed this birth as a watershed in education, a paradigm shift, and the dawning of a brave new era. “Let us devise a Curriculum Framework” they shouted with glee. The teachers, however, hung their heads in despondency, knowing that a dark beast of mammoth proportions and with great deceptive power had been created.*

## The Paradigm

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is like a chameleon – at the point when its defining attributes are becoming discernable, it changes form and colour. Even its chief architect keeps changing his mind, moving from traditional OBE through transitional OBE to transformational OBE (Spady, 1994; Spady and Marshall, 1991) – terms which, rather than clarify, morph the monster further. Others have seen OBE as being little more than an umbrella term for concepts such as Mastery Learning (Towers, 1992) and the Outcomes-Driven Developmental Model (Evans, 1994). Still others, as a reworking of the Total Quality Management model of the 1980s (Holt, 1994).

Little wonder that the notion of OBE has provided a rallying point around the Western world. Over the years, there have been as many who have wholeheartedly endorsed its agenda (e.g. Hargraves, 2000; Spady, 1994, 1996), as there have been who have vehemently disavowed it (e.g. Evans, 1994; Kohn, 1993; Schlafly, 1994). My personal position resonates with that of Dykman (1994) who wrote,

At first, people tend to agree with the broad premise of outcomes-based education – that all children can learn, that schools should set clear goals for students, that teachers be given the means to help students achieve the goals and that students be required to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. The problems crop up in the details (p. 37).

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, to briefly examine how the OBE agenda, which is now in full swing across Australia, is being interpreted, implemented, and received by the community of educators. Second, to focus on what I perceive to be serious deficits of OBE as a paradigm. Many have in a blinkered fashion lauded OBE's virtues but failed to address its glaring deficits. In part, my paper aims to provide the necessary corrective. In all of this, I intend examining the Federal context in cursory fashion and concentrating on the State with which I am most familiar and where OBE has now been the *modus operandi* for some ten years – Western Australia.

## The Concerns

OBE is currently the preferred model via which compulsory education in Australia is being interpreted. It is a train with a full head of steam. Extending the metaphor, I see a massive derailment in the not too distant future. Such a statement is bold, but made in light of five key concerns which have been in existence since the inception of OBE, and which still have not been satisfactorily addressed by Education authorities. These are identified and discussed in what follows.

### *Definitional, Philosophical And Epistemological Miasma*

OBE is confusing. Because of its amorphous and nebulous nature, OBE is not easily definable. The best that can be managed is a set of identifying attributes, the sum of which provide some insight into the nature of this slippery construct:

- It is a quasi-educational paradigm which finds its ideological genesis in models such as rationalism, mechanism, Fordism and Taylorism. It seems to have been distilled from the worldviews of rationalism and technical rationality (see Habermas, 1976), control, scientism, positivism and reductionism. This is a particular understanding of how the world works, and one which has been expertly demystified by John Ralston Saul (1992).
- The language of OBE is the jargon of corporate business, or what Kohn (1993) has termed the “market place”. It appears to be corporatisation applied to education.
- OBE is obsessed with accountability, or more accurately, hyper-accountability, with everything requiring proof and an adiposity of evidence.
- It speaks in terms of outputs (or exits) rather than inputs. In other words, it focuses not on content to be acquired, but on outcomes to be achieved. In this, classical OBE prides itself on being largely syllabus free.
- It is plagued with vagaries. Nearly all classes of activities with almost minimal effort can be subsumed under one or more outcome statements. Outcomes are usually so vague that almost anything a child does can be manipulated to suit one or other outcome.
- It does not like to differentiate on the basis of quality, claiming that the achievement of stipulated outcomes is all that is required. In this, it resonates with the TAFE competencies-based agenda.
- It does not have much evidence of its own successes, preferring rather to speak in terms of theoretical modelling.

OBE has been plagued by vagaries and misunderstandings since its inception. This continues to be the case. At a meeting organised by the WA branch of the Australian College of Educators (2004), Norma Jeffery, CEO of the Curriculum Council in Western Australia (CCWA), made the comment that “the *Curriculum Framework* can be anything that the community wants it to be”. At the same meeting, Greg Robson, Executive Director with the Department of Education and Training in Western Australia (DETWA), indicated that the “*Curriculum Framework* is a bulwark against faddism”. How can both statements be true? The document is either relative or it is a bulwark, it can hardly be both simultaneously. Prima facie, it would appear that confusion regarding the *Curriculum Framework* as an OBE document<sup>1</sup> begins with its leaders. Little wonder then, that teachers are finding it confusing.

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<sup>1</sup> WA education authorities might claim that OBE is not a term used in their documentation. Technically this is correct, with the preferred term being outcomes-focused education. The difference is little more than semantic. In terms of the underpinning philosophy, it would be difficult to mount an argument for the two connoting a substantially different concept.

Ultimately, the only way to test a curriculum model is to take it to teachers and ask: Is this workable? Is its meaning clear? Does it help in planning programs for students? Without answers to these questions there is no way in which one can judge the validity of a curriculum document. To my knowledge, comprehensive evaluation of the OBE approach, as it applies to Education in Australia, is yet to be undertaken. Some formative evaluation has been completed by the Department of Education and Training in Western Australian (DETWA) via its Curriculum Improvement Plan (CIP, 2003). As part of the CIP initiative, a document entitled *Curriculum Improvement Program – Factors Affecting Implementation* (2003a) was prepared. To say that not too many OBE plaudits were offered by those sampled, would be a generous understatement.

The general success of OBE still remains to be persuasively demonstrated. Apart from reference to several overseas exemplars (e.g. Johnston City, New York, Alessi et al, 1991; Thorpe Gordon Elementary School, Jefferson City, Guskey and Block, 1991), the literature is generally silent. Evans (1994) makes the point that “Despite the popularity of outcome-based education, research documenting its effects is rare” (p. 12). Failures receive even less publicity, although Deming’s research (in Neave, 1990) has indicated that in the now defunct Soviet Union, the enforcing of outcomes only led to inefficiency, management complacency and low morale.

OBE ascribes to schools and teachers god-like status. Spady believes that all students can learn if they are given the time and support to do so: “OB models are predicated on the premise that illiteracy and failure are neither inevitable nor acceptable consequences of schooling for anyone” (Spady, 1982, p. 123). He further believes that it is schools which both create and control the conditions of success (Spady, 1988; Towers, 1994). This is a compelling case of extreme naïveté. Schools and teachers simply do not possess that sort of power. Research has clearly shown that variables such as personal motivation, parental encouragement and especially socio-economic status, play a greater role in learning efficacy than does the schooling experience. In fact, studies identifying the importance of such factors are so voluminous the specific citations in support of this contention are unnecessary.

Regarding outcomes *per se*, Hargraves (2000) has stated that “learning outcomes...possess great potential to disestablish the academic, elitist subject-based curriculum of secondary schooling which has been and continues to be one of the greatest sources of educational and social inequality in the developed world” (p. 30). Nice mantra, but one which tends to betray an ideological and political sentiment. Using a key OBE criterion, namely validity, one could be expected to interrogate such a statement by asking ‘what is the evidence for this?’. And of course, there is none. Fundamentalist orthodoxy seldom provides evidence, rather, it offers an ideology, a soapbox, a *fait accompli*. Schlafly’s (1994) position on the issue of an “elitist subject-based curriculum” seems more compelling, namely, that “rather than enabling children to reach their full intellectual potential as individuals, outcome-based education, as an egalitarian process, holds the entire class to the same level of learning” (p. 26).

Good teachers have always educated via outcomes (although such outcomes were often nuanced as goals, objectives, aims, etc.). OBE ideologues have done little more than cloud the term in mystique and then present it as an epiphany. This is a case of forcing the emperor to wear new clothes when the old ones fitted so much better. The position of Fritz (1994) has been echoed by many: “I want to strip away from outcome-based education its euphemism of ‘education’ and rename it ‘outcome-compelled’ schooling” (p. 80). Holt (1994) concurs, stating that “OBE advocates misunderstand education. Education is not a product defined by specific output measurers; it’s a process, the development of the mind” (p. 85). Schlafly (1994) puts it even more strongly, “Outcome-based education is not education; it is

experimentation. It is not academic; it is psychological” (p. 27). It appears that the time has arrived to look elsewhere for theoretical enlightenment.

The Death Of Knowledge Occurs: Through Lack Of Conceptual Clarity.

### *Jargon Jargon And More Jargon*

OBE is jargon-impregnated. The philosopher Bryan Magee (1997) made the observation that for those who have nothing to say, “obscurity..... provides a smoke-screen from behind which they make their advances in the world” (p. 468). A fair comment. Why can people no longer “say what they mean and mean what they say”? Perhaps it is because they have nothing of any value to contribute, or conversely, because they are too frightened to say something clearly for which they will later be held accountable. Hiding behind the rhetoric of corp-speak is much easier than admitting that we live in a highly complex world which poses questions for which there are sometimes no glib rationalistically-motivated answers.

There can be no doubt that liberal (or economic) rationalism has affected the way in which education is currently being perceived in Australia. Both the culture and associated gobbledegook of business is now firmly entrenched within the amphitheatre of education – in schools and tertiary institutions alike. Educators could be forgiven for feeling like they are living in what one researcher has termed a perpetual “Edufog” (Fritz, 1994). In 2000, I investigated a large number of Australian university websites (Berlach, 2001) for signs of corp-speak. A synopsis of findings is presented in Table 1. For this paper, I have added the language found in Spady (in Schwarz, 1994), educational consultant and architect of OBE; and the words of Brendan Nelson (2004), the Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training. The comparison is found in Table 1. The similarity of the ideologically-laden language used is frighteningly unmistakable.

Table 1  
A comparison of Corp-speak in Education

| <i>Spady<br/>(in Schwarz, 1994)</i>   | <i>Berlach 2000<br/>University ‘Corp-speak’</i>   | <i>Brendan Nelson<br/>2004</i>   |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outcomes</li> <li>• generalizable</li> <li>• discrete content skills</li> <li>• microforms of learning</li> <li>• structured task performances</li> <li>• components in a larger block of curriculum</li> <li>• competence</li> <li>• performance enablers</li> <li>• execution</li> <li>• technical and strategic Life Performance Roles</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outsourcing</li> <li>• downsizing</li> <li>• interfacing</li> <li>• corporatising</li> <li>• multi-skilling</li> <li>• reskilling</li> <li>• stakeholders</li> <li>• synergism</li> <li>• efficiency driven</li> <li>• seamless education</li> <li>• market strategy</li> <li>• marketplace philosophy</li> <li>• delivery systems</li> <li>• product orientation</li> <li>• resource focus</li> <li>• strategic alliance</li> <li>• client-centred</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards</li> <li>• ongoing professional learning activities</li> <li>• reform agenda</li> <li>• no agreed means of assessment</li> <li>• curriculum outcomes</li> <li>• national standards</li> <li>• national benchmarks</li> <li>• performance information at the school level</li> <li>• initiatives</li> <li>• lack of transparency.</li> </ul> |

Jargon can so easily be mistaken for substance – it can sound so impressive, promise so much, but deliver so little. One always needs to scratch beneath the veneer of jargon and search for a well developed theory which has currency in praxis. If such is not found, then in the words of the venerable William Shakespeare, there may well be “something rotten in the state of Denmark”. The educator would do well to remember that “...truly transformational change requires a new language. OBE language is the scientific, industrial language of Tyler and Skinner as documented by Callahan (1962) in *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*” (Schwartz, 1994, p. 88).

Perhaps Harry Broudy (1973) was prophetic when he wrote with reference to the US scene (but with equal applicability to Australia):

Under the pressure and threats of certification boards and the U.S. Office of Education, not to mention the death wishes of certain educationalists, semantic incantations may become a way of institutional life. If using the right words will relieve the pressures, win certification and grants, then the right words will be forthcoming - by the yard, at so much a yard. As to performance, that remains to be seen (p. 10).

The Death Of Knowledge Occurs: Through Jargon Which Obscures Rather Than Illuminates The Significant.

#### *Redefinition Of Teaching*

OBE is deceptively transformative. It takes key terms from the lexicon of Education, ascribes to them new meaning, and then attempts to mould incumbents accordingly. *Teaching* is one such term. A standard dictionary definition of teaching (e.g. OED) includes reference to imparting knowledge or giving instruction. OBE largely strips teachers of this function and makes them educational technicians. They are to become facilitators, guides, curriculum developers, child-minders – in short – bureaucrats. Few teachers, I would venture to say, joined the profession with the idea of becoming indentured servants to the OBE agenda.

Not only has their job description changed but with it, their status. What students want has somehow become more important than what teachers want. OBE is all about the ‘stakeholders’, not about teachers. The ‘stakeholders’ rather than the educational providers, are now the educational experts. Some sixty years ago, Princeton don Jacques Maritain (1962/1943), wrote “..... educators cannot permit the students to dictate the course of study unless they are prepared to confess that they are nothing but chaperons, supervising an aimless, trial-and-error process which is chiefly valuable because it keeps young people from doing something worse” (p. 65). Under OBE conditions, teachers are now better positioned to make just such a confession!

In this enlightened age, perhaps Maritain’s first proposition about students having no input into their education cannot be accepted, but the second proposition strikes at the heart of teaching and is probably as true today as it was when the words were penned. Teachers want and need to feel that society has entrusted *them* to transmit the knowledge, attitudes and values which it perceives as valuable and worthwhile. It is this belief which gives teachers their mandate, their professional *raison d’etre*.

Little wonder, then, that disgruntled teachers are leaving the profession in droves. Teacher attrition is so serious, contends Ewing (2003), that it is being increasingly recognised as a threat to the very viability of educational systems. Federal Minister Nelson (2003), responding to the Report *Australia’s Teachers: Australia’s Future*, indicated that the Report “estimates that there could be an overall shortage of up to

30,000 teachers by the end of the decade if the high rate of teacher resignations and retirements continues unchecked". Such a figure represents around 10% of the total teaching workforce and twice the total annual number of teacher education graduates. Canavan (2004) further reports that "as many as 30% of teachers move out of teaching within the first five years" (p. 1).

On a State level, a recent DETWA report (2004), based on questionnaire findings, indicated that "Currently, approximately 500 permanent teachers are exiting the Department annually. The general trend, when taken over the ten-year-period, is for an increased rate amongst permanent teachers" (p. 8). The same report indicated that of the 1086 teachers entering the Department in 1992, 668 were below 30 years of age. Of these, over one-third had exited within 10 years. The DETWA report further revealed that of the 80 exiting teachers who responded to the "Reasons for Cessation" section of the questionnaire, the 'workload' and 'change' categories drew the highest responses: some 18% for males and some 27% for females (p. 39). In a profession which has vastly disproportionate female representation, this should be ringing an alarm bell cacophony in the ears of the DETWA. Even more so, given that a 2003 DETWA survey revealed that, of 521 teachers surveyed, "half of all respondents indicated that they were considering a career change, either to another role within the Department or to another employer" (p. 10).

Only a fool would suggest that such attrition is totally the result of dissatisfaction with the OBE agenda, but only a bigger fool would discount this as a possibility. Is it a coincidence that the mass exodus reported above occurred around the time of the DETWA's move to an OBE model of education? Matthew Byrne, doctoral student in Education at Edith Cowan University, thinks not. He is currently investigating the relationship between the introduction of OBE (via the *Curriculum Framework* and related documentation) and teacher motivation. Although the results, when available, should prove illuminating, one doubts whether they will be surprising, for the DETWA report (2004) already referred to indicates that:

Overwhelmingly, exiting teachers in the older, over 50 years age bracket, made consistent comments about the increase in paperwork that has resulted from implementing the Curriculum Framework and assessing students using Outcome Statements. Many retiring teachers noted that there had been a change in workload over many years with respondents stating that the paperwork took them away from their real job, teaching. (p. 40)

Such evidence tends to indicate that younger teachers, older teachers, and in-between teachers – it doesn't really matter – all have concerns about how OBE is being interpreted in the Western Australia context. Fewer and fewer teachers, it seems, are prepared to embrace the OBE agenda and consequently, are opting out of the profession. One wonders how much more human sacrifice must be placed on the altar of OBE before the ideology itself is sent packing.

The Death Of Knowledge Occurs: When Competent Teachers Are Forced Out Of The Profession By Ideological Aggravation.

### *Planning Documentation Deluge*

OBE is suffocating teachers. At the risk of being accused of revisionist/modernist over-simplification, in the past, a WA teacher whose goal was to teach a poem would have done so. This is no longer the case. The same teacher is now required to wrestle with 13 Overarching Learning Outcomes and 5 Values outcomes from the *Curriculum Framework* (1998); several Learning Area Outcomes; Layer 1 and Layer 2 Aspects from the *Progress Maps*, (2004d) And/Or *Achievements Targets* from the

'New' *Outcomes and Standards Framework* (2004, proposed, DETWA); the *Curriculum Guides* (2004e); *In Phase Scope & Sequence Charts* (2004, in press, CCWA); the *Competency Framework* (Maloney and Barblett, 2004, draft); and information contained within a plethora of "supporting materials". To teach a poem?? To their credit, many already overworked teachers are trying their best to comply. My question is, why should they have to? What evidence is there that this is a superior way of teaching a poem? What evidence is there that all of this planning helps to achieve better student learning?

The primary school area is the most problematic in terms of planning. If one considers that, theoretically, OBE offers each student individual learning opportunities, then teachers could be forgiven for gasping at the prospect of being called upon to cover 8 learning areas with a total of 54 Aspects, which equates to 432 outcomes. Of course, children in any chronologically arranged year group are unlikely to be working across more than 3 levels, which still equates to 168 outcomes (8 Learning Areas x 3 Levels x 7 Aspects). By comparison, secondary school teachers are fortunate, having to only cater for 70 outcomes (2 Learning Areas x potentially 5 years of secondary school = 5 Levels x 7 Aspects). Is it any wonder that teachers are weakening at the knees? This also has implications for the smooth running of schools, for as Ristau (1995) points out, "How schools organise if students are not all more or less at the same point at the same time has serious implications for the teaching process" (p. 44). Perhaps it's time to apply Ockham's Razor to OBE's hirsuteness.

The production of the *Curriculum Guides* themselves was a meritorious attempt on the part Curriculum Council to address teachers' urgent pleas to redress the content vacuum created by the move to OBE (Robson, 2001). This in itself, though, ought to have signalled to the CCWA that teachers want to know what they are expected to teach, they don't want to be, by and large, curriculum developers. Neither have their university initial teacher education courses prepared them for such a task. Reiterating a previously expressed contention, teachers joined the profession to gain a sense of value from actual teaching. The bulk do not appear to be interested in entering the never-ending cycle of generating designer outcomes.

Although a valid response by the CCWA to pleas from teachers, *Curriculum Guides* have, at least in prospect, generated a new set of problems. First, the *Guides* have been conceived of as "a 'minimalist' document that is a guide only..." (CCWA meeting, March 2004a, p. 2). In this, the tradition of OBE has been honoured, but frustrated teachers have not been appeased, for the *Guides* fail to provide the definitive and carefully sequenced content for which teachers have been crying out. In terms of content, in fact, anyone and everyone can teach anything at any time. Eltis (2004) made the observation that an OBE approach has the potential to fragment education. Don Watts (2004) puts it more forcefully, namely, that "the educational experience has become a repetitious smorgasbord of trivia".

Second, documentation-deluged teachers are likely to see the *Guides* as syllabus material. Anecdotal evidence from students returning from school practicum experiences suggests that many teachers did precisely this when the *Student Outcome Statements* (forerunner of the *Progress Maps*, Education Department of WA, 1998) were first introduced. Would such behaviour be viewed by educational authorities as "teacher resistance to educational innovation", or would authorities finally admit that teachers know better than OBE strategists how planning ought to be undertaken?

Somewhat unwittingly, the CCWA itself has promulgated a quasi-syllabus mentality among teachers. In its *Update* bulletin (Sept 2004c), the message reads "Curriculum Guides for each learning area will provide **guidance** for teachers....of what students



**should be taught** (p. 7, bolding added; for a similar statement see *Update*, 2004b)". A blatant contradiction or a Freudian slip? Could it be that the CCWA is itself being propelled, by forces beyond its control, in a direction to which it is not fully committed, and does not even fully understand?

Third, the *Curriculum Guides* appear to be only loosely tied into the *Progress Maps* in that the *Guides* do not speak in terms of Levels. One can only imagine that teachers will have to guess the Levels from the general Aspect descriptions which are supplied. Rather than providing teachers with an 'ah ha' experience in terms of interpreting the *Progress Maps*, my summation is that the *Guides* will merely add to the interpretative murkiness which already exists, that is, another layer of confusion.

There exists a final and more fundamental concern with reference to the *Guides*. If, as earlier indicated, the *Guides* are to "be a 'minimalist' document that is a guide only..." (CCWA meeting, March 2004a, p. 2), one is compelled to ask whether there really is no repository of *core* knowledge, attitudes and values that students are *required* to cover? Are we as a society so devoid of *essentials* that there is nothing definitive that we want to transmit to the next generation? Does everything that we know and practise really have equal value? I would hope not. In this, the *Guides* seem to represent the apogee of relativism. I, however, am still sufficiently naïve to believe that some content knowledge is absolutely mandatory for the maintenance of a civil society.

The Death Of Knowledge Occurs: When Hyper-Planning Takes Precedence Over Pedagogical Imperatives.

#### *Assessment & Accountability Aggravation*

OBE suffers from assessment overload. Teachers who are already battle-weary negotiating planning demands, are forced to confront a new enemy – assessment. In a recent NSW government commissioned report on OBE, Eltis (2003) indicated that the following comment was typical of what teachers were expressing:

Teacher workload, including paperwork, preparation and selection of assessment tasks, re-writing of report formats, has increased enormously since 1995. Not only are we still coming to terms with all of the new syllabus and associated documents, there are too many other added pressures on teachers that are expected to be included in an already overfull teaching load (p. 41).

Teachers are expected to produce never-ending tomes of evidence, usually in the form of student portfolios. The *value* of such evidence, however, is moot. Conclusive research evidence supporting the notion that mountain-sized portfolios assess learning any more effectively than do time-efficient, teacher-made, pen-and-paper tests, is difficult to find. It may in fact be the case that the acute monitoring and consequent documentary evidence required to form adequate OBE-type impressions of student performance, may simply not be worth the effort. Towers (1992) was correct when he stated that "Increased responsibility is placed on the teacher, who must adapt the instruction to each student. The teacher must continually monitor each student's work, determine what skills and tasks each student has mastered, and provide immediate feedback – not an easy instructional task in a class of 25 or more students" (p. 298).

There is also a danger that an over-emphasis on the mere meeting of outcomes may lead to mediocrity and complacency on the part of students. Mediocrity, because if a student simply needs to meet the outcome, they why strive for excellence, there's no

reward for it anyway. Complacency, because if a student fails to meet an outcome, so what? S/he can try again...and again...and again...and again...

School-derived evaluation and assessment procedures, for all their supposed benefits relating to contextualisation, have one immense downfall. Namely, that related to determining comparability between students. Such a task in the OBE environment is difficult enough in a single class, but becomes virtually impossible for children who move between schools or systems or States. For these children, the 'seamless education' so often touted may in reality be little more than a disjointed and incomprehensible potpourri of experiences as each school expresses its own individual planning and assessment preference.

Government authorities in numerous countries, aware that OBE has failed to find traction in the comparability stakes, have undertaken to introduce grand-scale testing (Wills and Kissane, 1997). Australia is no exception, with basic skills testing in WA now being undertaken in years 3,5,7,9 (WALNA assessment). Such an attempt to benchmark seems to be a strange paradox as it would appear to be contrary to the spirit of OBE. For, how can a system which prides itself on individually-paced progression, interface with chronologically-based testing? There seems to be a lack of both philosophical and epistemological resonance here, a concern which few seem to be addressing. Further, there is no evidence that a process which implicitly creates 'league tables' is advantageous to student learning or a country's system of education – but there is evidence to the contrary. Healy (2004) for example, speaking with reference to the international arena, indicates that "Experience in other systems in attempting to compare like schools have found it fraught with danger. Schools are highly individual and no matter how much the benchmarking and comparative data is refined, there will always be some comparing of 'apples with oranges'" (p. 14). The potential creation of a system of winners and losers ought to be anathema to OBE advocates. Sadly, this hybrid system which is neither fish nor fowl, has drawn little criticism from otherwise staunch OBE advocates.

In an impressively researched document, Wills and Kissane (1997) summarise the Scottish interpretation of OBE thus: "Not only is there no expectation of block testing of children of particular ages or grades, but it is strongly discouraged. Teachers are urged to test children when the children have engaged in a learning program which has addressed all aspects of the attainment outcomes for that level..." (p. 11). This seems a more honest option within the OBE *zeitgeist*. Unfortunately, Australian education authorities have not addressed the contradiction of how norming fits into a criterion-based system. This same contradiction can be seen with reference to secondary schooling. DETWA's Executive Director Greg Robson (Australian College of Educators forum, 2004) has argued that outcomes-based assessment formats used in lower school are not incompatible with the student ranking systems used in upper school. Such a statement seems to lack conceptual coherence. Whereas OBE is premised on criterion referenced measurement, ranking is aligned with norm referencing. But then, postmodernism and poststructuralism are not unduly phased by glaring contradiction.

The question of *value* must now be considered, albeit briefly. Under a regime where measurement provides the evidence of outcomes achievement, the more affective outcomes are likely to be made subordinate to those which are more easily quantifiable. As Gale and Densmore (2003) accurately point out,

.....with increasing aspects of teaching and learning translated into performance indicators and measurable outcomes, it becomes easy to assume that that which is or can be measured is important while what cannot be measured appears to be of less value (p. 27).

For the sake of expediency and possible professional advancement, teachers may be forced by bureaucratic expectations to maximise the measurable and minimise, or

even ignore, the more affectively-freighted aspects of learning. If this happens, then not only would teaching have been redefined as argued earlier, but so too would have the very concept of Education.

The Death Of Knowledge Occurs: When Evidence Of Learning Becomes More Important Than The Learning Itself.

### Epilogue

OBE lacks reflexivity. Even in the face of ever-mounting opposition, OBE keeps metastasising with apodeitic-like resolve. The bureaucrats and technocrats of the Education industry, probably because of the time and funds already expended, continue to justify and prop up a paradigm which experienced educators are finding increasingly loathsome (see for example, Gale and Densmore, 2003).

I will conclude with an anecdote. I have a colleague who, until recently, taught at Lyndhurst House Preparatory School in Hampstead, England. A Preparatory School is essentially a school that prepares children to enter selective schools, usually at age 11 or 13. There are many such schools around the country. Preparatory schools are a springboard to prestigious schools such as Eton, Westminster and Charter House. A significant aspect of the curriculum focuses on a classical education and encompasses exam taking technique as all these public schools (i.e. private under Australian nomenclature) base selection on the Common Entrance test which all children, including those in state schools, can attempt if they wish to go to a private secondary school. I asked my colleague whether her school was in any way committed to the notion of OBE. With a wry laugh she simply said “no, outcomes-based education is for the masses, here we teach the country’s future leaders”.

Perhaps the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1968/c.1890) was correct after all – the superman sits on the mountain ridges and watches the proletariat in the valleys below. For the privileged, it seems that the impartation and consequent acquisition of knowledge is still a teaching-learning priority. And for the rest of us? A continuing diet of outcomes I’m afraid. But then, as education authorities well know, the starving will eat anything.

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