

Producing Standard Issue From the Odd Lot Factory

When I began researching the education system, it was because I read the conceptual design of a computer system that incorporated school records and work history records into a consolidated information system for a lifetime history of behavior, performance and achievement. Information Systems don't exist in a vacuum – especially government computer systems. There are political, moral and legal ramifications to Information Systems and it was my judgment that the National Human Resource Management – cradle-to-grave tracking – was not in keeping with American values and traditions. Just because it is technically feasible to build a system doesn't mean that it should be built.

Naively, I jumped in and quickly found that research in the field of education is like scuba diving for pearls in the swamp. It was in 2005 that I began researching the system of education and “workforce development” and it was just a few days ago that I found a little snippet on the Federal Department of Education website that their primary mission was to collect and disseminate information.

When I think about the education system as an Information Systems Analyst with consideration for the requirements of codifying all the attributes of all the entities to standardize the process for the purpose of controlling the quality of the output, it makes me wonder how much money is wasted attempting to mold the teaching and learning process into a system that can be quantified in binary format. Put another way, how much money is wasted trying to produce a standard issue product output from an odd-lot factory input.

The odd-lots are of course, the children in the classroom. The United States has a system of universal education K-12 education. The children have differing abilities, backgrounds, maturity and personality. From that stew, the classroom teacher must try to serve two masters: first, the master that wants a standard issue product output that can be quantified in binary format (and that signs the paycheck); and the other master, the one who strives to see the light go on in a child's eyes when they have learned something new. Considering all the possible scenarios of hell, being a teacher in an American public school must surely be on the list.

Producing a standard issue from the odd-lots means having to reduce the standardization ceiling to the lowest common denominator. Because of that, our schools are being converted to a system of polytechnical vocational training system where kindergarteners are being taught “worker skills” with classroom training continuing through about the 8th grade and then vocational training will begin.

Since the earliest days of the Ed system, there have been vocational classes, but the fundamental shift away from academic education to a training system began in 1983 with the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). This was also the beginning of privatization. JTPA included the following:

Called for the creation of a private industry council for each service delivery area. The majority of members from the private sector selected by the chief local elected official with certification by the Governor. The remaining members will be representatives of educational agencies, organized labor, rehabilitation agencies, community-based organizations, economic development agencies, and the Employment Service.

The JTPA target was the “lowest common denominator” from the odd-lots but as the consolidated and harmonized student information system grew and the failure to quantify the unquantifiable became apparent, the whole system was turned over to business to redesign – and it was redesigned as a training system. Who needs literature, history, art and music right?

It’s hard to argue against it because the schools are graduating students who are functionally illiterate, can’t do basic math and can’t name a country that begins with ‘U’, but it seems to me that since children have not changed – only the standardized, packaged teaching methodologies designed to produce standard issue product outputs from the odd-lots has changed continuously, it must therefore be that the real problem is with the administration of the schools and the priorities they set.

The priorities of the education system are to serve the information requirements of the computer system. In other words, the computer system requirements are driving the education process. The children are incidental – transient through the system.

People who are in the education system are very territorial. If you’re an “outsider”, then the assumption is that you know nothing about education regardless of the fact, that we were all students at some point and most of us have or had children. It’s true I don’t speak psycho-babble as a second language but I can recognize when a system is devised for standardized coding of results. Outcome-based Education is such a system. I was researching OBE because the name implies it and I wasn’t disappointed.

Here are the significant entries I found in this research:

[Crossroads – Chronology of U.S. Education](#)

1965. The U.S. Congress passed the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Months later, it decided to fund *Citizens for the 21st Century*, a book by UCLA Professor **John Goodlad**, who wrote,

Although the conduct of education and especially the clientele have changed.... the school is perceived very much as it was then: a partitioned box where boys and girls come to sit still for six hours a day and to be told about some fragmentary pieces of "knowledge" thought to reflect the rudiments of their "culture." *This image must be*

shattered, violently if necessary -- and forever. The future of mankind may rest upon it.^[11]

1968. Professor **John Goodlad** reported that Professor **Benjamin Bloom** [called Father of OBE] "was invited by UNESCO in 1968 to submit a proposal for a six to nine week training program which would partially fulfill recommendations made at **UNESCO's Moscow meeting** dealing with the formation of national centers for curriculum development and research...." Bloom's "program was ultimately approved by the UNESCO General Council..."^[12]

[Crossroads – Bush, Gorbachev, Shultz, and Soviet Education](#) (this is a great article – not about OBE, but related to UNESCO and the American education system.

[NCREL – “Outcome-Based Education”](#)

“Concerns that the education system cannot adequately prepare students for life and work in the 21st Century have prompted people across the country to explore new ways of designing education. In several states, educators and policy makers are attempting to change the way we measure the effectiveness of education from an emphasis on traditional inputs, such as course credits earned and hours spent in class, to results or outcomes.

The shift toward outcome-based education is analogous to the total quality movement in business and manufacturing. It reflects a belief that the best way for individuals and organizations to get where they're going is first to determine where they are and where they want to be--then plan backwards to determine they best way to get from here to there.

Why is there so much confusion about outcome-based education?

Debate about outcome-based education reveals widespread confusion about terminology and concepts. The term "outcomes," "standards" and "goals" frequently are used interchangeably, and individuals disagree about their meanings and applications. These terms also are used indiscriminately to refer to different types of results, including content outcomes students performance outcomes and school performance standards.”

Benjamin Bloom is considered to be the “father of OBE” as stated above –

Obituary

<http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/990923/bloom.shtml>

Wikipedia on Mastery Learning when the coding system development becomes apparent

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mastery_learning

But the clincher is this article where the definitions for codes are essentially spelled out.

<http://hs.riverdale.k12.or.us/~dthomps/exhibition/blooms.htm>

I found this article last year and kept it. The writing is taking issue with OBE on education and psychological terms. She apparently doesn't know about how computer systems work but I bet she'd grasp it in a second if somebody pointed it out to her. The purpose of including it here is to show how a system devised for computerized accounting for the odd-lots is confused with the teaching and learning process itself.

[Words Have Exact Meanings by Jeannie Georges](#)

No matter how much psycho-babble they wrap it in, OBE is about the coding system for standardized product outputs from the odd-lot factory. And that's the pearl from the swamp today.

Vicky Davis

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