



Aligning Student Learning with Institutional Strategic Direction The Role of OBL

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There are good reasons for making student learning the focus of what is done in universities.. A focus on quality does this & OBL can do it.. but how to marry the two...?






Purposes: In this presentation I want to do three things:


- 1. Discuss OBL in the context of establishing a a context for quality enhancement in the university;
- 2. Discuss a conceptualization of OBL that can meet the demands of quality enhancement; and
- 3. Use an organizational case study to show how quality enhancement and OBL can be used together to make student learning a strategic objective for universities.




OBL and quality enhancement in the university


Quality enhancement is any strategy that might lead to improving the student learning experience and consequently student learning outcomes. These outcomes would usually be measurable but ,may not always be so. As the University of St Andrews QEP put it:

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- “it is increasingly recognised that some activities of improvement are not easily subjected to measurement and are more appropriately subject to judgement. Such judgements might be determined by student feedback, by recognition of improved outcomes amongst staff, or by external recognition, such as external examiners or reviewers.” (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/Quality%20Enhancement%202007-2008%20Strategy.pdf>)

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- **St Andrews' strategies for quality enhancement:**
 - Enhancing employability;
 - Implementation of Personal Development Plans and a new Personal Tutoring scheme;
 - Further development of E-Learning in order to complement high quality face-to-face learning.
 - Improving the Learning Infrastructure in order to improve the student learning experience.



“Quality enhancement will **embrace experimentation and innovation**, but it is a more inclusive value that **includes all efforts to improve the quality of learning in the institution**, whether innovative or not. Such enhancement, and even transformational change, will often be accomplished in an incremental way. It will also recognise the diversity of learning experiences offered within the University, so that a “one size fits all” approach is not always appropriate. Just as our enhancement activities will be suited to our institution, as indicated above, so also within the University enhancement activities will adapt to differing disciplinary cultures and needs. Moreover, the University will seek to create a culture to support Schools in their attempts to promote enhancement activities appropriate to their disciplines.” (University of St Andrews Quality Enhancement Strategy, 2007-2008)



Given this approach to quality enhancement, OBL can be seen as one strategy designed to enhance the quality of student learning...

it should be seen as one among many such approaches... it should not be reified as though it is the only strategy or even the most important strategy since... the assumption of quality enhancement is that there is a culture focused on improving teaching and learning...

BUT what is OBL???



OBL – Defined by Context?

UGC's approach to OBL – it is what you say it is- has both advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages: Universities can adapt an approach to their own contexts and circumstances;

Disadvantages: Given the contested nature of OBL, some of its worst features could become institutionalized.





OBL – The HKIEd Way


We developed a paper – “OUTCOMES BASED LEARNING: CONCEPTS, ISSUES AND ACTION”

(<http://www.ied.edu.hk/obl/resources/7-2.html>)

We did so because OBL is an intellectual debate – not a set of practices or a formula for designing curriculum


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- There is a kind of calculus about OBL that reduces it to a process for standardizing curriculum planning.....often the focus becomes the calculus – the objectives, the activities, the assessment....the minutiae...the forms to fill in..... This is not the way to adopt OBL....rather....

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- Outcomes can be defined at different levels for different purposes.
 - Outcomes are complex, based on the integration of knowledge, skills and values
 - Multiple outcomes need to be integrated and treated holistically
 - The outcomes will provide the springboard for students to become active learners.
 - The process for creating outcomes at different levels needs to be collaborative and open. It needs to involve a broad range of stakeholders.
 - Staff development and support will be necessary to assist individuals and teams at different levels to define learning outcomes that are significant.
 - Assessment needs to be in place at different levels to monitor students' progress in their learning and provide constructive feedback.
 - Assessment's primary role is to promote learning.

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- Our basic question is an old one – but it is a question relevant for new times: what do we want our students to know, be able to do and to value as the teachers of Hong Kong’s future generations?

Our initial response to this question was to view required learning within four broad *Learning Domains*:

- **Character and Moral Education**
- **Cultivation of Wisdom & Intellectual Engagement**
- **Competence and Professional Excellence,**
- **Citizenship and Social Responsibility**

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- Character and Moral Education
 - Cultivation of Wisdom & Intellectual Engagement
 - Competence and Professional Excellence
 - Citizenship and Social Responsibility

These domains frame student learning. They will drive the 334 curriculum to ensure students will experience multiple ways of understanding the world around them, multiple sources of knowledge that will aid in their personal and professional development and learning activities that take place both within the Institute as well as outside of it. We believe this approach to learning will produce competent professionals, inquiring intellectuals as well as learning citizens for the knowledge society.



The **4Cs** provide the framework for the 334 curriculum – they set the directions and describe the main emphases.

- **Generic Outcomes** represent the expectations of all graduates - they are often referred to as 21st century outcomes
- **Programme Outcomes** represent the distinctive characteristics of graduates who undertake specific majors
- **Course Outcomes** represent the pathways that will assist students achieve Generic and Programme Outcomes **PLUS** other outcomes determined by the students themselves.



Institutionalizing OBL: The Message from Quality Enhancement

Quality enhancement needs to be driven by strategy,
not hope.

Funding is important but by itself will not secure
effective implementation.


Commitment is essential but it needs to be
embedded organizational development.

Strategic Plan 2009-12 and Beyond


Planning for the Future

Making a Difference

- Transforming People -Our Students and Our Graduates
- Transforming Our Capacity
- Transforming Schools and the Community
- Transforming Regional Education

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- *Transforming People -Our Students and Our Graduates*

1. Grooming educational professionals through broad-based curriculum with diversified learning experiences




Redesign our undergraduate curriculum in preparation for the new '334' academic structure, to encompass:


- an integrated and broadened learning framework that acknowledges the global vision and ongoing challenges that characterize Hong Kong;
- **an outcome-based approach in curriculum design with integrated learning;**
- a credit-based modular structure with different learning pathways to cater for multiple students' needs, career aspirations and lifelong learning;
- total learning experience embracing an enriched campus life and a full range of co-curricular learning experiences that widen students' horizon both locally and abroad;



Transforming People -Our Students and Our Graduates

2. Assuring quality education

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- Lead in student-focused and outcome-based learning through the promotion of innovative curriculum design, the application of Information and Communication Technology, new pedagogies and assessment that facilitates learning.
 - Move towards a quality enhancement culture that will create an environment of self-regulating continuous improvement.

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- By bringing OBL under the quality enhancement umbrella, we can view it as **one** strategy to improve teaching and learning and not the only, or even dominant , strategy;
 - By embedding quality enhancement and OBL in the *Strategic Plan* , we move the focus from the calculus of OBL to its strategic intentions;
 - As the *Strategic Plan* makes clear, we are about the transformation of our students and it is this to which OBL now contributes.