

## **OBE's Meaning, Essence, and Evolution from Transcending 'Educentrism' to Empowering Learners' Futures**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is widely misunderstood to be the various accountability, accreditation, and evaluation practices and models prevalent throughout the world. It is none of those. They are expressions of education's, time-based, curriculum-based, and credentials-driven paradigm. This paper describes the foundational philosophy, principles, concepts, and history that have defined authentic Outcome-Based thinking and practice for nearly six decades. Starting with the pioneering insights of Carroll and the instructional model of Bloom, OBE has challenged educators to create and implement conditions in classrooms and institutions that foster successful learning for all students. The practices and configurations of these 'conditions of success' have taken four major forms over the decades—initially Academic, then Applied Performance, then Life-Engagement, and ultimately Self-Empowerment—each based on increasingly more complex, future-focused, and empowering modalities of qualities and abilities that institutions have defined as their 'Exit Outcomes' for graduates. Hence, authentic outcomes are not scores, numbers, percents, averages, or ratios; they are tangible demonstrations and encourage, document, and honor continued improvement. The paper contains many such outcome frameworks that embody and balance future-focused rational/technical performance roles with essential interpersonal abilities and intrapersonal capacities. OBE's evolution reveals two mega-paradigms of education: 'INpowerment', which is adult-driven, system-focused, and 'educentric'; and 'EMpowerment' which is learner-centered and awakens and activates innate potentials, intrinsic motivations, and special talents. OBE's evolution and future both represent a pathway for humanity toward ever-greater EMpowerment and conscious, creative, collaborative, competent, and compassionate learning and living.*

**Keywords:** *outcome; performance-roles; future; empowerment; evolution*

Millions of educators across the world know the letters OBE, and you are one of them. Moreover, to a person all of you believe that those letters stand for Outcome-Based Education. But if you can describe what those words actually mean, you are an exception to the rule.

### **What Outcome-Based Education Is and Is Not**

If you are in higher education, you are very likely to associate Outcomes Accreditation (OA) with OBE. Sorry, but *OA* is not OBE. For further explanation, please keep reading and also look into our 2018 book *Beyond Outcomes Accreditation: Exploring the Power of 'Real' OBE Practices*. Or you may be in a school facing policy-driven standardized testing and accountability mandates, usually in the name of school reform. My colleagues call this outcomes evaluation, and it is a long way from being OBE because, for starters, the scores, ranks, and percentiles derived from these tests are not the criterion-defined, tangible, and observable demonstrations that define outcomes. Finally, you might be in an institution that has the letters backward, thinking that EBO is OBE, which it certainly is not. Hence, let us agree that 'Outcome-Based Education' means: Basing education on intended outcomes that are deemed fundamental to learner success and lifelong empowerment – not basing outcomes on what education already is and does, which is EBO.

This widespread misunderstanding arises because almost no one alive today has gone to a genuinely Outcome-Based school or university. Hence, their frame of reference, which I call paradigm, has been shaped by spending many formative years in a system that is *Calendar-Based*, *Curriculum-Based*, and *Credentials-Based*. These three lynchpins form and reinforce EBO structural patterns and practices that I call the CBO Syndrome. The syndrome makes it impossible for education to be genuinely Outcome-Based. Its elements include Curriculum-Based Outcomes, Content-Bound Objectives, Calendar-Based Opportunities, Convenience-Based Operations, Convention-Bound Orientations, Compliance-Based Obedience, Cellular-Based Organization, and Credit-Based Obsession.

These CBOs form a deeply imbedded, closed-system paradigm of thinking and practice that my colleagues and I call Educentrism, which is exactly what authentic OBE seeks to transform and transcend.

#### ***Educentrism is Time-Based***

*Educentrism* is the way modern education has been structured and operated since anyone alive today can remember. It is modeled after Industrial Age factory assembly lines and limited 19<sup>th</sup> century understandings of learning, human potential, science, technology, and just about everything else you can think of. Because of their uniform, regulated processes and efficiency, the new, amazing factory assembly lines of that era were viewed as a perfect template on which to organize, institutionalize, and regulate schools. The ultimate regulators were clock time, schedules, and calendar dates, which simply make education time-based. Time-based systems are characterized by the following

1. Virtually everything is defined by how long it is supposed to last.
2. Everything, including learning opportunities, is organized around fixed time blocks of varying lengths, especially the credentialing system, which drives the instructional system.
3. Credits are defined around units of time and attendance.
4. Courses are not bodies of knowledge that are learned and mastered; they are time-based pre-scheduled events in which some learn well and some do not. Therefore, when the time runs out, the course is over. When educators run out of time, students run out of opportunity.

When the Network for Outcome-Based Schools (NOBS) was formed in the United States in 1980, it launched the OBE movement. Our small team agreed to challenge this time-based, deeply entrenched OBE, i.e., Orthodoxy-Based Educentrism, and replace it with one focused on success for all learners: Outcome-Based Education. We knew that this new, powerful OBE concept, model, philosophy, or paradigm rested on the firm, consistent use of the word ‘based’, a definitive construct that meant: defined by, focused on, organized around, operated around, and aligned with.

This definition or understanding gave the OBE movement a clear direction and two compelling message that persist to this day. First, your intended outcomes come first because they embody and reflect your declared purpose; then you define, focus, organize, operate, and align education so that all students can accomplish them. Second, you cannot base a system or organization on two or more incompatible things at the same time without generating major dissonance, confusion, and conflict.

### **Mission Impossible**

It is impossible to adequately describe and explain the full meaning, essence, and fifty-year evolution of OBE in one paper. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you develop a more in-depth understanding of this empowering concept by studying the extensive descriptions of these three issues in my 2020 book *Outcome-Based Education’s Empowering Essence: Elevating Learning for an Awakening World*. It is available in multiple formats on Amazon.com.

Consequently, this paper provides only a skeleton treatment of many issues that deserve a paper of their own, especially the birth and emergence of the concept in the 1960s and 1970s. Those two decades were critical in establishing the foundational and definitional components of OBE theory and practice that I now call its Standard Model (SM). SM characterizes two of OBE’s four major forms. When I refer to ‘we’, it can be colleagues from then all the way up to now.

### **OBE’s Four Evolutionary Constellations**

Today’s OBE is the result of its ongoing sixty-year unfolding that has now coalesced around four different domains of outcomes, dimensions of learning, and corresponding modalities or constellations of what its success for all learners’ philosophy represents. Each constellation contains essential aspects of the other three and represents a major step forward along OBE’s evolutionary pathway out of time-based educentrism and into learner self-empowerment.

I call Constellation 1 (C1) Academic Enculturation OBE. It emphasizes mental abilities and cognitive processing, i.e., what we consider to be one-dimensional learning, because it only happens in your head. Its outcomes are primarily based on existing discipline-grounded curriculum frameworks that convey society’s values and mainstream views of the world; and they reflect high-level mastery of their major content, concepts, and fundamental skills. C1 dominates today’s OBE world and contains more CBO elements than do the other three constellations.

Constellation 2 (C2), Applied Performance OBE, adds two-dimensional learning and tangible, practical competence development to the equation. It is learning that applies skills to content, both within education and beyond it in the form of tangible employment skills and abilities that meet the political and policy priorities and requirements of modern-day business and industry,

often developed through apprenticeships and vocational training. C2 represents the applied essence of OBE's SM and its mega-paradigm we call 'INpowerment'.

Constellation 3 (C3), Life-Engagement OBE, makes learning three-dimensional by adding performance context to the equation. Its outcomes develop lifelong attributes and complex configurations of competences and content called performance-roles that support success and fulfillment in a diversity of career, professional, and family life roles. By adding present and future life contexts to competence development, C3's life performance outcomes significantly stretch the boundaries of both academic curricula and skill-specific training and spawned the often-used term Transformational OBE. C3 is the gateway to C4 and OBE's mega-paradigm of 'EMpowerment'.

Constellation 4 (C4), Self-Empowerment OBE, turns the entire learning equation inside out by focusing its fourth dimension on developing and expanding learners' consciousness, perceptions, innate essence and potentials, and intrapersonal emotional intelligence and strength. C4 is grounded in today's ever-expanding body of cutting-edge research on human consciousness and its origins, essence, manifestations, power, and role in helping people negotiate the stressors and challenges of human existence. Its outcomes honor and foster learners' innate curiosity, talents, vast unaddressed capacities, resilience, dormant potentials, and continuous growth – all resources to becoming self-directed, fully empowered adults.

### **The OBE Movement's Genesis and Fundamentals**

OBE's sixty-year story began for me in 1967. I was being introduced to Benjamin Bloom's 1968 instructional improvement model called Mastery Learning (ML) by my friend James (Jim) Block, who had become Bloom's graduate student. Bloom derived ML from a unique insight in a 1963 paper by John Carroll called 'A Model of School Learning.' Carroll argued that aptitude is the rate at which people learn various things, not their ability to learn them. In effect, he reasoned, we all learn to do difficult things well, but not at the same time or pace, but learning time in schools is fixed, finite, and predetermined, which inherently handicaps those with slower rates of learning by not giving them adequate time and opportunity to learn successfully. What would happen, he wondered, if the school's learning conditions were reversed?

What if learning outcomes/standards were *clearly defined* and *fixed*, and time/opportunity to learn were allowed to *vary* consistent with a learner's aptitude? Wouldn't many more students succeed at learning those clearly defined standards than do so now?

### ***The Essence of Bloom's Mastery Model***

Carroll's insight about reversing the time-learning relationship led Bloom to formulate and test the ML model. I spell out the model in much more detail in Chapter 2 of my 2020 OBE book, and will point out only its essentials here. This cursory outline does not do it justice.

First, ML was designed to work in typical classrooms with existing curriculum and time parameters. It was focused on improvement on teacher instruction, not on broader system change issues. However, the major features of the model all had major implications for how the system functioned, which Bloom himself did not address. Since these issues were inhibiting ML's full implementation, there would have been no OBE movement if early ML implementers and I had not addressed them.

Second, ML required that great attention be paid to the sequencing of curriculum, so that prerequisite skills were always addressed and assured before new units of curriculum were

introduced. This strategy evolved into the OBE operating principle called Design Down (from where you want to end up), now known widely as backward mapping.

Third, Bloom asked teachers to define, explain, and model all intended outcomes before instruction began, so that students would have a clear picture of where they were headed, and both instruction and assessments should directly match and embody whatever the outcome was. This critical practice became OBE's first principle: Clarity of Focus on Outcomes of Significance, and OBE's powerful Law of Alignment.

Fourth, he advocated extending learning time for those who did not do well on an initial assessment of their progress. This was called a formative test or assessment, and was not to be given an official grade. Further, ML asked teachers to use the initial test results to diagnose learners' mistakes; use that diagnosis to correct any specific learning errors that arose; employ a different kind of instructional strategy for any corrective work; and then give learners a second chance to take the test for full credit.

Although these four elements ran contrary to established school norms that only provided single, fixed-time opportunities for students to learn, be assessed, and receive marks, they were essential in helping schools expand their conditions of success, and helped define OBE's second major principle: Expanded Opportunity for Learning Success.

Fifth, ML raised the conventional passing standard in U.S. classrooms from 70% to 80%. Any initial performance below 80 was given an Expanded Opportunity to reach that level. Since student success increased significantly even when teachers employed this higher standard, it became a common feature of the ML model and helped form OBE's third operating principle: High Expectations for All to Succeed.

At its core, the combination of Carroll's theory and the Bloom model was about the simultaneous reversal of two fundamental conditions of success: from uncertain and variable standards to known and criterion-defined standards; and from fixed-time and single opportunities to flexible-time and multiple opportunities.

Curricula, instruction, assessments, and record-keeping were to be designed and aligned accordingly. I had entered the meeting with Jim assuming that the American high school was literally based on the curriculum, the clock, the calendar, credit, comparison, competition, convention, and compliance, and that this syndrome of C's was fixed and permanent. But the logic of what he had presented and the magnitude of the learning results he described shifted my paradigm. I immediately knew that I could begin applying my sociological training and tools to reducing or removing the negative influence of those C words on what and how well students learned. I kept this largely to myself until Jim invited me to write a chapter for his 1973 book *Schools Society and Mastery Learning*. That brought me into contact with very early ML implementers, and they drew me in to what has become a career-long mission.

### ***OBE'S Defining Fundamentals***

By the time the Network for Outcome Based Schools (NOBS) launched the OBE movement in 1980, NOBS leaders were already armed with many positive ML results, a strong commitment to bringing Bloom's model to the world, and a coherent Success for All Learners philosophical framework that remains the bedrock on which OBE has functioned for forty years. It started with what is called OBE's all-embracing paradigm: 'What and whether students learn successfully is more important than when and how they learn it.'

In just a few words this short statement implies that the intention of Outcome-Based learning models is to help learners reach levels of proficiency that validate and assure consistent high-level performance, yet allowing them to make, correct, and learn from mistakes as they develop ever-greater familiarity, confidence, and expertise.

This intention is bolstered by OBE's three well-known foundational premises, or beliefs:

1. All students can learn and succeed (but not on the same day in the same way, because their aptitudes and dominant learning modalities vary).
2. Successful learning promotes more successful learning (cognitively, operationally, and motivationally, and the same applies to failure).
3. Schools control the 'conditions of success' (which determine what, whether, when, and how learning unfolds—and they can be expanded).

The key to expanding and maximizing these conditions of success, we felt, was the consistent, systematic, creative, and simultaneous application of OBE's four operational principles to how teaching, assessing, and credentialing are carried out. These principles are guideposts for how learning results in both individual classrooms and schools as a whole can be elevated. They are Clarity of Focus on Outcomes of Significance (before, during, and after instruction); Expanded Opportunity for All to Succeed (through diagnostic formative assessments, second chances, and initial grading in pencil); High Expectations for All to Succeed (by only fostering, accepting, and grading high quality work); and Designing (the curriculum) Down (from where educators want their students to end up, ultimately in life, with the abilities and attributes of empowered adults).

In my five decades of speaking about this foundational framework, I consistently emphasize that the lifeblood of OBE in action is these four *essential* principles working together to help educators fulfill OBE's two empowering purposes: (1) sending fully equipped and empowered graduates into the world, by (2) maximizing education's conditions of success for all learners.

### **Applied performance OBE and the resulting fault line**

Bolstered by many impressive results and a compelling congruent philosophy, the OBE movement grew rapidly in the early 1980s, unaware of the shockwave that was about to hit early in 1986 when I realized the OBE movement did not know what an outcome was.

The only thing actually being advanced was ML, and we and it never got beyond its micro focus on content learning and accomplishing small 'objectives' for each small unit of content. Anything that showed improvement was a positive result, and any positive result was thought to be an OBE outcome.

Hence, in the midst of a national OBE conference I saw that all ML teachers were trying to get all of their students to achieve at the 80 level, and 80 of anything achieved in any way was being called an outcome. Frustrated beyond measure, I quickly gathered a group of top OBE teachers and leaders and threatened to quit the movement unless we (they and I) could come up with a sound definition of what an outcome was, and soon.

### **Finally, a definition of an outcome—and it split the movement**

We met that Wednesday, we figured it out, I did not quit, and we defined an outcome as ‘a culminating demonstration of learning.’

Our definition sent shockwaves through the OBE community, and it soon split into two bodies: the Mastery Learning group that remained committed to having students achieve ‘80’ on small units of curriculum content, and those who went on to shift the greater OBE paradigm several more times as we probed ever deeper into what the words culminating demonstration of learning meant, implied, and might become. We had no idea at the time how much this definition would transform both our thinking and OBE itself.

First, the word demonstration meant that an outcome was not a score, a percent, or a number of any kind. It was a tangible, competent, two-dimensional action, shaped directly and explicitly by the action verb and words used to define the outcome. This meant and implied that you can average Numbers, but you cannot average outcomes. Moreover, students have to do all the words in the outcome statement; teachers have to teach all the words in the statement; and assessments have to evoke all the words in the statement.

In short, numbers are ambiguous symbols that educators pretend are substance, learning, achievement, and credit, then use to justify ranking and honoring students. Second, the word culminating meant and implied ‘at or after the end’, but which end? We eventually learned that culminating should not refer only to customary time blocks but to how good a student’s learning results could become by the time they graduated. This, in turn, shifted our focus to something we called exit outcomes, a system’s ultimate performance goals for students that would go with them at graduation and be useful in their post-education future.

Third, this-future focused revelation soon led us to create the term Outcomes of Significance, which meant ‘things that must last and really matter in the long run, defined by both verbs and content of significance. This, in turn, quickly thrust us into two more areas that academic classroom instruction at the time was not addressing, life beyond education, and could not provide: Contexts of Significance, the physical settings where outcomes were going to have to prove their significance. After grappling with these issues for some time, all of this eventually led Dr. Charles Schwahn and me to conclude that education may be good at preparing students for more education, but it was not preparing them for the realities they would be facing in their futures.

In response to this realization, he and I began developing a pioneering, non-educentric process we called Strategic Design that provided educators with a sound rationale for deriving future-focused exit outcomes of significance. It contained two completely original concepts: Future Conditions and Spheres of Living. Thankfully, two other very significant frameworks that linked all of this together were birthed at about the same time.

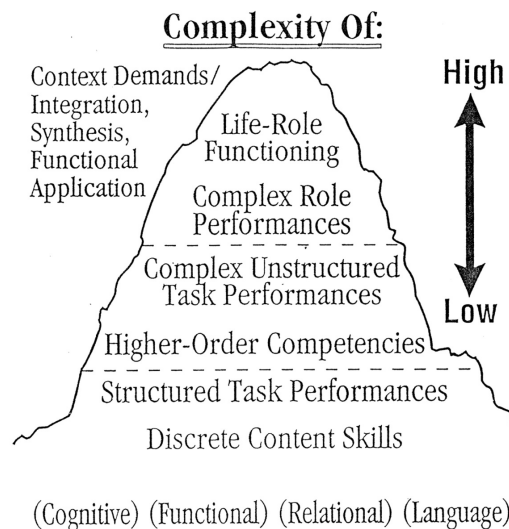
## **Crossing the Great Paradigm Divide**

We knew at the time (1989) that we were in unexplored territory. Life was not organized around the academic disciplines and school subjects. Moreover, what adults did in life to function and thrive was far beyond what schools required of students. Happily, we and our colleagues came to realize that demonstrations of learning take many forms and those forms varied in both size and complexity – from micro and simple to macro and complex. From this emerged a framework that we called The Demonstration Mountain, which even challenged the limits of Applied Performance OBE as it was being implemented up to that point.

## ***Climbing the Demonstration Mountain***

The mountain framework shown below contains six forms of authentic demonstrations of learning. As you climb, each form gets increasingly complex and significant: performance contexts/physical settings, as well as the integration, synthesis, and functional application of the content and skill elements required in that type of demonstration. At the peak lies life role functioning, which is as macro and complex as life performance gets. Since students while in school cannot authentically assume the full range of those life roles, we prudently decided to focus on the Mountain's fifth level – Complex Role Performances that are essential to, and play out in, all life roles. We now call them Performance Roles, which are coherent constellations of competences a person can carry out well, using a range of content applied in a variety of tangible contexts.

### **The Demonstration Mountain**



**Figure 1. The Demonstration Mountain**

Recognizing that a host of curriculum and learning configurations play out in the Mountain's three sectors, my colleagues initially named these three implementation sectors:

1. Traditional OBE, at the bottom with its prevalent disciplinary grounding;
2. Transitional OBE, with its much more inter-disciplinary and Applied Performance character in the middle; and
3. Transformational OBE, with its trans-disciplinary grounding and complex role performances that operate within ever-evolving Spheres of Living.

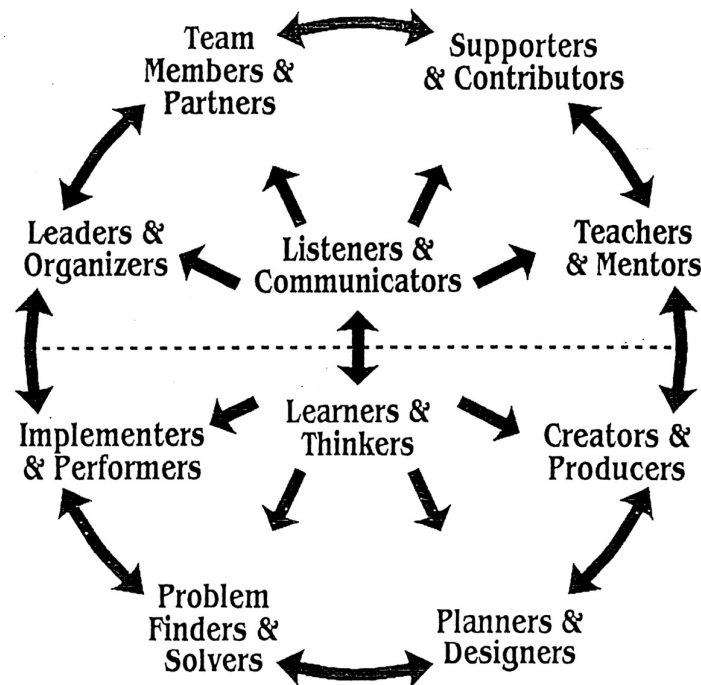
Back then my OBE teacher colleagues confessed that nearly all academic instructional activities and at-home assignments (structured tasks) barely reached, and rarely extended beyond, the Mountain's bottom sector. Hence, not knowing what lay head, we interpreted the Mountain to contain three different modalities of outcomes; three different dimensions to a demonstration of learning (content, competence, and context); and three very different ways that OBE could be developed and implemented (Constellations 1, 2, and 3), except that we had no tangible examples of Performance Role Exit Outcomes to point to.

I managed to make a breakthrough on the ‘missing outcomes’ dilemma by addressing in a novel way the potential I saw in Bloom’s overwhelmingly influential 1956 Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives, by translating its six domains into a framework of Performance Roles. My unanticipated result is called the Life-Performance Wheel.

### ***The Life-Performance Wheel Rolls Onward***

Please take a few minutes to assimilate what is in Figure 2 below, knowing that in just one day I had a rudimentary model with which to work, but it took two more years of continual trial runs, revisions, and intense scrutiny by dozens of diverse authorities and experts before it eventually evolved into the Life Performance Wheel you see here. Happily, the Wheel immediately became one of the most compelling, versatile, and enduring frameworks in OBE’s history.

## **Fundamental Life Performance Roles**



**Figure 2.** Life Performance Wheel

From the outset I knew that Bloom’s framework dealt exclusively with the IQ dimension of learning and performance and did not address any of the EQ (Emotional Intelligence, 1995) elements that Daniel Goleman had shown were critical to life and career success. Since EQ was too important to omit, I added to the framework what I believed to be its key interpersonal components. Hence, this final version of the Wheel portrays the broad range of IQ (bottom half) and EQ (top half) performance roles essential for all well-functioning adults in whatever career and life roles they pursue. The bottom hemisphere contains rational, analytical, and technical performance abilities that can be developed and demonstrated by students working individually.

But the top hemisphere embodies performance roles that are inherently interactive and require social skills that can be largely developed and practiced through direct, focused, social interactions. I often tell audiences, ‘You cannot develop or perform any of these by yourself. Other human beings are required.’ In addition, my colleagues and I quickly learned that, in order for performance roles to be well-developed and endure over the very long term, they should be modeled and coached by all faculty in all programs and courses; practiced regularly in ‘realistic’ high-engagement settings; and developed at ever-more mature/complex levels year after year.

Recognizing its enormous relevance and versatility, my colleagues were showing early primary teachers within a year of its development how to use the Wheel effectively by applying a multi-stage instructional process they had developed called the Action Learning Model. In fact, its IQ and EQ performance roles can be addressed every year across the entire range of K-12 classrooms and fully into graduate school and professional preparation programs. Therefore, when the 1980s had finished, we rejoiced at how the Mountain had given education a more relevant and useful performance-learning maturity scale, and how the Wheel portrayed the functional range that maturity might encompass. Little did we anticipate the mega-paradigm shift that lay ahead for OBE.

### **The Leap to Life-Performance Outcomes**

As we entered the 1990’s, OBE was focused on student success, both in school and beyond it. Using the Wheel as a prompt in our new Strategic Design process, school districts were generally creating lists of desired concepts, skills, and qualities their graduates would require in order to thrive in the future. But when working with a Colorado district in 1991, I quite spontaneously and intuitively came up with a remarkably straightforward and versatile template for addressing this issue that we soon called Life-Performance Outcomes (LPO). The first LPO Exit Outcome framework about human beings themselves contained five elements:

1. Self-directed LEARNERS, who:
2. Collaborative WORKERS, who:
3. Complex THINKERS, who:
4. Community CONTRIBUTORS, who:
5. Quality PRODUCERS, who:

After each role and its single attribute, we had placed the word ‘who:’, followed by a set of carefully worded and aligned Essential Performance Components (EPC) (not shown here) that stated what students would be demonstrating in order to fully embody that particular Performance Role and its attribute(s). EPCs were evoked by answering a deliberately provocative question: How would you know one (a \_\_\_\_\_) if you saw one? Said differently: What would a \_\_\_\_\_ have to demonstrate to convince you that they are, in fact, one? (Answer: Students would DO this and DO that . . . as ‘proof’.) Since these EPCs are the tangible, teachable demonstration elements in role performance outcomes, they must be developed and stated with exacting precision because they become and define each LPO’s building blocks.

Hence, they are what must be taught and practiced so that the LPO develops and matures. The LPO itself, then, is an umbrella construct that gives the EPCs coherence and creates meaning and identity for the learner.

The district in question was elated with their framework and formally stated that all of their students, regardless of background, personal attributes, or academic achievements, needed these LPOs and EPCs to succeed in the future. They also agreed that students of all ages could learn and demonstrate these LPOs at their respective levels of maturity, which would give all teachers a common purpose, regardless of grade level or subject specialty.

### ***The Template Evolved and Spread Rapidly***

Although I was not confident about what we had created, this new LPO template spread like wildfire across the U.S. and Canada. Educators loved it because it gave depth and meaning to learning; it was personal, dynamic, and directly relevant to students' futures; and it applied to students of any age, differing only in how maturely the LPO was carried out. Here is an example from another U.S. district, generated within weeks of the original via their own community dialogue: Self-Directed LEARNERS, Self-Actualizing PERSONS, Empowering FRIENDS, Involved CITIZENS, Caring STEWARDS, Quality PRODUCERS, and Enlightened CONTRIBUTORS.

Soon, however, Dr. Schwahn and I realized that using only one attribute (adjective) with each performance role (noun) was too limiting, so we encouraged districts to expand the format. Here are two of the more elaborate early variations:

1. Purposeful, Self-Directed, Adaptable:
  - a. LEARNERS & MENTORS
  - b. CREATORS & CONTRIBUTORS
  - c. ORGANIZERS & FACILITATORS
  - d. PROBLEM SOLVERS & INNOVATORS
  - e. LISTENERS & COMMUNICATORS
  - f. THINKERS & INVESTIGATORS
  - g. TEAM PLAYERS & SUPPORTERS
  - h. MEDIATORS & NEGOTIATORS
  - i. LEADERS & IMPLEMENTERS
2. Self-Directed, Inquisitive LEARNERS & THINKERS; Ethical, Versatile COMMUNICATORS & NEGOTIATORS; Imaginative, Discerning RESEARCHERS & PROBLEM SOLVERS; Visionary, Trustworthy LEADERS & MOTIVATORS; Adept, Resilient INNOVATORS & PRODUCERS; Responsive, Supportive PARTICIPANTS & COLLABORATORS; Thoughtful, Global CITIZENS & CONTRIBUTORS

As we went across the United States and Canada with our SD process, we were struck by how seriously and insightfully educators, community leaders, parents, and students took this LPO design task.

### ***Total Leaders, Total Learners, Total Living, and the Five Cs***

Even before LPOs emerged, he and I had begun formulating a framework about the factors that affected successful OBE implementation. A key factor was strong, enlightened leadership, but it is what leaders did and how they did it that mattered. We knew that top-down policies, rules, regulations, and/or mandates were totally counterproductive, so we began linking kinds of

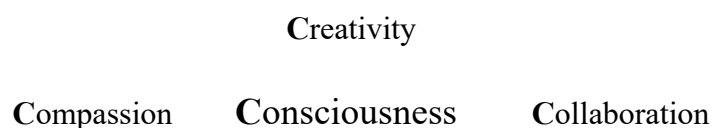
leadership with these change factors. They meshed, and our model's basic message was: Successful and lasting change efforts require a compelling *Purpose*; an inspiring *Vision*; cohesive staff and constituent *Ownership* for the change; organizational and staff *Capacity* to implement the change; and continuing political and resource *Support* for the change. This happens through the actions, qualities, and skills of *Authentic, Visionary, Relational, Quality, and Service Leaders*, respectively.



**Figure 3.** OBE's Total Leaders Model

In 1997, the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) asked us to translate our model into a book called *Total Leaders* (TL, 1998), which they published and marketed. Armed with the compelling five-factor model shown below, we explained that TL's integrity and impact emanates from and depends on the awareness, presence, values, honesty, modeling, and example of the Authentic Leader, who operates from the model's heart. It is their humanity and character that make the model Total.

In the process of formulating the model, we noted how similar the distinctive qualities and orientations underlying each leadership domain were to the essence of many LPOs. Therefore, when a blinding flash of the obvious hit me late in 1998, I was not surprised: How could you become a Total Leader if you were not also a Total Learner? And TOTAL LIVING too. The three belonged together and they constituted a new, ever-more concise framework of essential human qualities and abilities that profoundly influenced OBE's evolution. After several months of intense analysis and integration, my colleagues and I agreed on five 'C' domains as the essence on this new model, and they too received enthusiastic acceptance in the North America and abroad. Here they are, displayed in TL's 'star' format:



## Competence

**Figure 4.** Five Cs Framework

Their respective qualities, expressed in adjective form, are Conscious, Creative, Collaborative, Competent, and Compassionate; and their Patterns of Application in adverb form are Consciously, Creatively, Collaboratively, Competently, and Compassionately, giving this *Five Cs* framework enormous versatility and appeal. Adding to that appeal was the coherence and balance created by the underlying qualities of its vertical and horizontal dimensions – personal achievement and social bonding, respectively. Consequently, educators in Australia, South Africa, the USA, and the Philippines easily chose to base their LPO frameworks on the qualities and abilities implied in the Five Cs. Here are six of many such examples, which I will be calling Life-Engagement Outcomes (LEO) going forward:



Conscientious, Global STEWARDS, guided by an ethos of *Caring & Commitment*

Ethical, Paulinian LEADERS & PROFESSIONALS, who:  
Cutting-Edge, Resilient VISIONARIES & INNOVATORS, who:  
Engaging, Trustworthy TEAM BUILDERS & MENTORS, who:  
Reliable, Productive EXPERTS & IMPLEMENTERS, who:  
Dedicated, Transformative SUPPORTERS & STEWARDS  
of ALL CREATION, who:

Mindful, Self-Directed LEARNERS & ROLE MODELS, who:  
Courageous, Resourceful EXPLORERS & PROBLEM SOLVERS, who:  
Credible, Responsive COMMUNICATORS & TEAM PLAYERS, who:  
Conscientious, Adept PERFORMERS & ACHIEVERS, who:  
Caring, Committed ADVOCATES for PEACE and UNIVERSAL  
WELL-BEING, who:

### ***Reinforcing LEOs with Affirmations, Self-Assessments, and Games***

This latter framework was created by the St. Paul Community Education Mission (SPCEM) in the Philippines for its K-12 graduates in 2018. Capitalizing on the LEO template's versatility, SPCEM also worded this grade 12 framework in age-appropriate language for grades 3, 5, and 8. However, their biggest contributions to OBE design came in the form of identity-enhancing 'I AM' affirmation statements for each LEO, printed in a personal self-assessment handbook for every student. Named the OBE Affirmation Journal, the complexity of its language was adjusted to every level in their schools. Here are the statements as they appear in the grade 12 Journal. Since they reflect SPCEM's particular religious orientation, each statement begins with the preamble, As a Christ-centered Paulinian:

1. I am a Mindful, Self-Directed LEARNER and ROLE MODEL, consciously expressing my faith.
2. I am a Courageous, Resourceful EXPLORER and PROBLEM SOLVER, demonstrating my creativity and charism.
3. I am a Credible, Responsive COMMUNICATOR and TEAM PLAYER, building community through active collaboration.
4. I am a Conscientious, Adept PERFORMER and ACHIEVER, competently pursuing my mission in life.
5. I am a Caring, Committed ADVOCATE for PEACE and UNIVERSAL WELL-BEING, impelled by compassion and charity for all.

SPCEM chose to have one designated affirmation recited collectively and discussed at the beginning of each day in students' homeroom classes, then addressed silently as students reviewed their own progress on each LEO in a series of self-assessment questions in their personal journal.

Thanks to teacher commitment to this initiative, every class in their pilot OBE schools immediately set to work creating songs, games, skits, posters, and slogans about OBE and the LEOs, which were performed and displayed with great enthusiasm throughout each week.

### **Self-Direction Takes OBE from Life-Engagement to Self-Empowerment**

I urge you to go back and review all of the LPOs/LEOs shown here so far. If you do, you will find that most of them either start with or directly imply ‘Self-Directed LEARNERS’. To function well in the complex future that students were facing, many people, in fact, felt that they should become Self-Directed, Self-Initiating ‘EVERYTHING’. The paradox here is that neither my team (me included) nor all of those proposing that their graduates be S-D Learners actually faced the following contradiction: Modern education severely limits Self-Direction through its own contrasting Five Cs—Curriculum, Credentialing, Calendar, Competition, and especially Compliance. Which priority/reality will prevail in the future? History offers a compelling answer.

### ***Education’s Mega-Paradigm Of ‘IN’powerment***

I created this strange ‘non-word’ because, with the best of intentions, and even while advocating Self-Direction: Adults have always operated as ‘authorities’ over children/students and routinely put *INto* their heads and hearts what the adults deemed was important for them to know, do, and believe.

This ‘*putting-IN*’ process is known as direct instruction and enculturation. Its pedagogy is showing, telling, describing, explaining, persuading, and modeling. It’s the heart and soul of Educentrism, is prevalent in OBE Constellations 1, 2, and much of 3, and takes place when, how, how long, and how often the adults deem it suitable. It’s been with us forever to assure that children/students are adequately prepared to live/function congenially in the adult world.

Paradoxically, however, to ‘get an education’ that allegedly prepares them for life in a constantly changing world, today’s students face a career-long regimen of pre-established, adult-defined, adult-administered Curricula, Requirements, Credentials, and Compliance that foster and reward dependence on the adults in the system for instruction, approval, validation, credit, advancement, guidance, and recommendations. Much more could be said, but the contradiction and paradox are clear.

### ***The Emerging Paradigm of ‘EM’powerment***

What I call ‘*EMpowerment*’ is a mega-paradigm of educating and functioning that embraces Self-Direction, much of Life-Engagement OBE, Self-Empowerment OBE, the vast array of human potentials, an OBE I call *Openness Based Exploration*, what is called ‘learner-centered’ education, and a body of research and experience based on Quantum Physics. Rarely do official educational policies and priorities directly advocate or support any of these components.

### ***Explaining their Fundamental Differences***

Although major contrasts abound, these are not mutually exclusive paradigms. There is some of each in the other. What shifts is the massive imbalance in what learning, curriculum, and their intended outcomes are. *INpowerment* overwhelmingly emphasizes learning that is external to the learner. Its domain of learning consists of content, concepts, skills, and curriculum that lie

outside of students' experiences, which they are expected by others to acquire and assimilate. These are typically qualities and abilities that enable learners to function successfully within their proximate or likely physical environments.

*EMpowerment* is mainly about learning and experiences that are internal to students—motivations, capacities, and potentials that are innate and intrinsic. The Curriculum is largely exploration processes, experiences, perceptions, and feelings that awaken and activate capacities and potentials that are not activated by cognitive/rational mental processes. Learning itself is a process of ever-finer attunement to what these capacities are and how they function. Most people's *EMpowerment* capacities for well-being, compassion, and peace are overridden and limited by the larger society's *INpowerment*-driven beliefs, agendas, priorities, and emphasis on tangible success.

### **The Essence of Personal 'EM'powerment**

Self-Direction takes Life-Engagement OBE a major step beyond/deeper than SUCCESS. It implies that people will utilize their *intrinsic, self-generated* motivations, perceptions, and interests to chart their own course through life's challenges, experiences, and opportunities. It and *EMpowerment* emanate out of an evolved, mature, grounded, personal self-identity, consciousness, and sense of well-being, not just efficacy. *EMpowerment*, then, is about the deeper inner experience of being, and it falls fully within the Emotional Intelligence (EQ) domain that Daniel Goleman calls *INTRA-Personal Intelligence*, the capacity/ability to manage and direct one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward constructive life-enhancing ends.

Moreover, *EMpowerment*'s lifelong Outcome is a Conscious, identity-forming process of taking full responsibility for one's life in the choices s/he makes about how to respond—not react—in every moment of life. This closely parallels what I have learned through invaluable personal development programs and related experiences that true personal *EMpowerment* involves:

1. *Waking Up*: Exploring, awakening, and deepening one's states of awareness
2. *Growing Up*: Expanding self-compassion into larger more inclusive circles
3. *Cleaning Up*: Examining and eliminating one's limiting behaviors and beliefs
4. *Showing Up*: Experiencing and manifesting one's self-initiated path
5. *Opening Up*: Embracing and recognizing one's innate essence and gifts.

Yes, these essential aspects of personal *EMpowerment* may sound noble and inspiring, but they are NOT what *Curriculum-Based*, *Calendar-Based*, *Credit-Based* and *Compliance-Based* education fosters. Nor are they how Academic Enculturation OBE and Applied Performance OBE primarily operate, or what their respective Outcomes encourage.

### **Research That Supports 'EM'powerment**

In the face of *INpowerment*'s pervasive influence and the overwhelming trend to further saturate education with disempowering, standardized paper-pencil testing, I convened a distinguished team of widely-published learning experts in 2007. Our mission was to form a counter-voice to this policy juggernaut by integrating and synthesizing the 'cutting edges' and 'bottom lines' of the most advanced theory and research in human learning into an 'enlightened' declaration of how education should proceed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Over a two-year period, the team translated a major component of its work into succinct statements about humans' innate nature and capacity to learn, thereby challenging educentrism and wholly INpowering approaches to learners and learning at every turn. Here are their succinct conclusions:

1. Humans vary greatly in their rates and ways of learning,
2. Humans are born social, and their learning is naturally influenced by others,
3. Humans can learn, create, and change throughout their lives,
4. Humans naturally use all their senses to learn,
5. Humans can take charge of their thoughts and emotions,
6. Humans naturally appreciate and seek to create quality and beauty,
7. Humans can transcend their perceived limitations,
8. Humans can naturally access and utilize their innate inner wisdom, and
9. Humans' capacities for intuition, insight, imagination, and creativity are inherent, powerful, and unlimited.

### ***Adding Another OBE to Its Evolutionary Pathway***

What helps drive OBE's continuing evolution is an energy that is obvious to every parent within the first several months of a child's life: Every child is curious and wants to explore, starting with themselves and soon reaching out to 'grasp' the world around them. I call this natural OBE state Openness-Based Exploration. When this OBE is recognized and allowed to operate in schools, it takes the lid off of the word 'curriculum' and transforms its fundamental character by expanding conditions that further honor children's innate curiosity, and foster their unlimited inquiry, creative imagination, and self-generated innovation.

Here the boundaries of curriculum disciplines disappear, and the intrinsic interests and motivations of Self-Directed LEARNERS to develop and express their special talents and unique selves hold sway. This approach encourages an openness of both mind and heart and ultimately invites deep explorations of what the 'new sciences' of epigenetics, quantum physics, and cosmic archeology are revealing about humanity's essence and existence, the nature of the universe, the eco-system of the earth, the origins and essence of the human community, and humans' vast but hidden reservoir of potentials.

At its core, Openness-Based Exploration invites learners to engage in what Victor Frankl's famous book calls 'Man's Search for Meaning', and that search is bound to elevate humanity's consciousness and future by including explorations, information, possibilities, paradoxes, and controversial areas of learning and research that lie outside the current boundaries of cultural conventions, intellectual paradigms, and officially-sanctioned curricula.

### ***'EM'powerment Opens Vast Vistas and Potentials***

When I first began to explore and spell out humans' innate qualities, capacities, and deeper potentials in my 2001 book *Beyond Counterfeit Reforms*, what I discovered and reported there inspired me to expand and describe those understandings even further, which I included in *Learning Communities 2.0* (2010) and in the 2014 book I edited, *Bringing Heart and Soul to Education*. Then, bolstered by my own inner journey in the decade since, I felt compelled to take them even farther in my 2020 book *Outcome Based Education's Empowering Essence*.

All of this and the foregoing converge to undergird the expansive vistas that open when OBE's evolution transitions from INpowerment's externally determined and focused practices to EMpowerment's intrinsically grounded essence. For me the comparisons below illustrate education's over-emphasis on performance and achievement and how EMpowerment offers opportunities to awaken and strengthen learners' vast innate potentials, which balance them.

**Table 1.**

**OBE's Evolutionary Pathway**

| <b>Inpowerment emphasizes</b>    | <b>Empowerment encourages</b>         |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Knowing through Thought          | Knowing through Open Perception       |
| Pursuing Curriculum Priorities   | Inviting Inner Attunement             |
| Memorizing Prescribed Content    | Exploring Greater Possibilities       |
| Completing Assignments           | Creating What You Love                |
| Believing Accepted Knowledge     | Opening to Emerging Insights          |
| Rational Analysis                | Attuning to Inner Experience          |
| Competing for Rewards            | Collaborating for Mutual Benefit      |
| Conforming with Academic Norms   | Awakening to Inner Wisdom             |
| Critical Thinking                | Promoting Intuition and Receptivity   |
| Finding Right Answers            | Asking Deeper Questions               |
| Instructing                      | Evoking                               |
| Achieving Defined Goals          | Cultivating Individual Talents        |
| Avoiding Religious Issues        | Acknowledging One's Spiritual Essence |
| Focusing on Competence           | Embracing Compassion                  |
| Developing Cognitive Skills      | Fostering Expanded Perception         |
| Judging Weaknesses               | Highlighting Strengths                |
| Promoting Loyalty                | Cultivating Acceptance                |
| Requiring Compliance             | Encouraging Exploration               |
| Stressing Differences            | Emphasizing Commonalities             |
| Extolling Technological Skill    | Honoring Beauty and Nature            |
| Socially Endorsed Success        | Personally Experienced Fulfillment    |
| Implementing System Requirements | Awakening Learner Potentials          |

***'EM'powerment Compels OBE to Reframe Its Defining Elements***

In consolidating and analyzing the magnitude and significance of these differences, I felt compelled to assess and update at least three key elements in OBE's defining framework: its 1986 definition of Outcomes; the word 'based'; and its three fundamental grounding premises. The original basics still apply to Constellations 1 and 2, but, to be aligned with 3 and 4's EMpowering essence, they should be revised.

First, neither Life-Engagement OBE, self-direction, personal empowerment, Self-EMpowerment OBE, nor human Consciousness has a 'culminating' point. They are inner qualities, potentials, and states of being that continuously develop and evolve throughout one's lifetime with

no anticipated or realized end point, which the word ‘culminating’ implies. Therefore, LPOs/LEOs have no defined outcome point in Life-Engagement’s ongoing experiences and evolution. They, like OBE, just continue to mature and evolve.

Second, this ever-expanding essence of human potentials, abilities, and qualities implies that the word ‘based’ might better be replaced by words like ‘enhancing’ or ‘enhanced’. They align more with the function that the intrinsic psychological states of curiosity, efficacy and empowerment, among others, actually play.

Third, the fundamental assumptions on which EMpowering OBE is grounded should also reflect this mega-shift and expansion in perspective and approach. Hence, I have revised the original three OBE Premises and included them in a new framework of evolved premises that apply to all four of its Constellations:

1. Every learner has vast potentials for fulfillment and success.
2. Students learn successfully at different rates and in different ways.
3. Successful learning promotes efficacy and the desire for more learning.
4. Empowerment is consciously choosing how to experience every moment.
5. Education exists to elevate humanity’s evolution and future.
6. Human potentials and capacities far exceed what education now addresses.
7. Institutions define, control, and can transform what success means.

But if advanced forms of Life-Empowerment Exit Outcomes were, in fact, to be framed in OBE’s future, I would like you to consider that they might be in light of the Five Cs framework (see Figure 4) on which so many LPO/LRO Exit Outcomes frameworks are already based.

Given everything that has just been raised, please consider the following as likely possibilities:

1. Enhanced Consciousness: psychological serenity, mental clarity and focus, joy, perception of all kinds, awareness, intuition, attuned senses, emotional calm, love of all that exists, acceptance of differences, purpose/motivation, clarity, authenticity, integrity, and decision making.
2. Enhanced Creativity: innovation, imaginative designs, future-focused problem solving, entrepreneurship, initiative, risk-taking, resourcefulness, aesthetics, and receptivity to change.
3. Enhanced Collaboration: teamwork, cooperation, communication, friendships, relationships, trustworthiness, shared responsibility, interdependence, equity, equality, community building, reciprocity, acceptance of others, and mutual respect.
4. Enhanced Competence: quality, reliability, conscientious endeavor, expertise, productivity, performance, implementation, mentoring, and individual responsibility.
5. Enhanced Compassion: caring, dedication, selfless contribution, guardianship, persistence, service, stewardship, acceptance, support systems, peace, and social interventions/improvements.

### ***Embracing a More Conscious Future for Humanity***

There is more to each configuration of possibilities, of course, but each of these in its current form represents a constructive first step in enhancing the human condition and supporting humanity’s evolution—both individually and as a whole. Moreover, two decades ago I worked

with non-public alternative schools that resonated strongly with Self-EMpowerment OBE, and they chose to frame outcomes for their students around the Five Cs template. To illustrate their priorities, each placed the fully conscious, spiritual nature of learners at the center of their framework.

Visionary, Resilient  
EXPLORERS & PROBLEM SOLVERS

Discerning, Compassionate  
STEWARDS &  
CONTRIBUTORS

Ethical, Spiritual  
BEINGS &  
ADVOCATES

Receptive, Collaborative  
PARTNERS &  
MENTORS

Adept, Productive  
PERFORMERS & IMPLEMENTERS

Visionary, Innovative  
EXPLORERS & INVENTORS

Forthright, Global  
LEADERS &  
STEWARDS

Unique, Loving  
SPIRITUAL BEINGS

Heartfelt, Trustworthy  
COMMUNICATORS &  
MENTORS

Joyful, Talented  
PERFORMERS & MANIFESTORS

Aware, Reflective SPIRITUAL BEINGS, developing their *Conscious Identity* and inner growth

Visionary, Resourceful EXPLORERS & INNOVATORS, developing their *Creative Imaginations* to the fullest

Supportive, Trustworthy TEAM PLAYERS & MENTORS, developing their *Collaborative Interactions* with others

Versatile, Productive PERFORMERS & IMPLEMENTERS, developing their *Competent Implementation* abilities

Active, Global CONTRIBUTORS & STEWARDS, developing their *Compassionate Involvement* with the world

Gregg Braden, Nassim Haramein, Dr. David Hawkins, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Tom Kenyon, Dr. Ervin Laszlo, Dr. Bruce Lipton, Dr. Liana Mattulich, Neale Donald Walsch, Ken Wilber, and countless others all remind us in their plethora of books, videos, courses, and workshops that we all have remarkable, unrealized capacities for inner and physical transformation if we would just cultivate and apply them. OBE Constellations 3 and 4 combine to light a bright pathway to the EMpowering future that these eminent teachers describe, and I intend to join them

by writing a long overdue paper on a yet-to-take-form OBE Constellation 5. It is a journey into the essence of our existence, nature, and potential as seen through the paradigm lens of Quantum Physics, and I call this ever-evolving OBE Oneness-Based Embodiment. It has been with us since the beginning of time, and many are consciously on its pathway today.

The real OBE question going forward, then, is whether education will ever reveal the existence of this ultra-EMpowering pathway to students, or will it remain limited to its conventional educentric perspectives, priorities and mission?

We all have a role in how that question gets answered.

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## **Bionotes**

WILLIAM SPADY remains the energetic, creative catalyst for OBE implementation and evolution across the world after five decades of commitment to this concept. His ever-unfolding insights about the transformational potential of OBE are reflected in ten professional books and dozens of published papers. He agrees fully with John that education is long past due for a paradigm shift that transcends conventional practice and focuses on the enormous challenges facing humanity. Together they agree that it's time for education to stop pretending that scores, points, percentages, and averages are either 'effective measures' of meaningful learning or 'adequate functional criteria' for what empowered living requires.