

Book Review

JASMINE NADJA J. PINUGU
*School of Social Sciences and Education, Mapua University,
Manila, Philippines*
jnjpigu@mapua.edu.ph

Received: 23 December 2021 / Revised: 29 December 2021/ Accepted: 29
December 2021/ Published: 30 December 2021/ © School of Social Sciences and
Education, Mapúa University, Intramuros, Manila, Philippines 2021

Beyond Outcomes Accreditation: Exploring the power of real OBE practices, W. Spady, W. Hussain, J. Largo, F. A. Uy, Manila, Philippines, Rex Bookstore, 2018, 184 pp., P498, ISBN 978-971-23-9342-6

When the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) released CMO no. 37, series of 2012, endorsing Outcome-Based Education (henceforth OBE) as an educational system and methodology for Engineering programs, educational institutions immediately recognized the need to transform their policies and practices to comply with the policy. The need to conform was not merely to be compliant to the CHED memo but to ensure learners benefit from a quality educational system that espouses a learner-centered framework, where the focus of instruction is not only on content of instruction but more importantly, on what learners need to learn to prepare for the future. Such is the promise of OBE, which focuses on outcomes, defined as demonstration of skills students learn after a significant learning experience.

Aside from quality instruction, education stakeholders and institutions are also concerned with accreditation. Among engineering institutions, ABET accreditation has been sought after, since it provides a prestigious validation of academic programs and services being offered. Mapúa University, a premier engineering school, was the first institution in Southeast Asia to have acquired ABET accreditation across nine of its tertiary programs. Since then, other technical and engineering universities have been able to obtain ABET accreditation and more institutions have followed the same path. However, the nature of accreditation and its procedures have been criticized, largely due to the lack of emphasis on outcomes and instead on quality of educational programs and its components. Schools are spurred by pressure for accreditation supposedly anchored on outcomes, and labelling it as OBE, when it is not. Outcome accreditation is not outcome-based education. It is from this trajectory that the book *“Beyond Outcomes Accreditation: Exploring the power of real OBE practices”* by Spady, Hussain, Largo, and Uy (2018) explains and expounds on how ‘real’ outcome-based education may enrich the accreditation process.

The book contains three primary parts, and an introduction that provides an overview of how OBE has evolved, its authentic elements and misconceptions, and how it can be applied by educators in their instructional practices. In Part 1 titled “Exploring ‘Real’ Outcome-Based Education”, covering chapters 1 - 4, Spady makes a comprehensive review of the philosophy and principles of OBE, detailing how it initiated, evolved, and continued to transform educational institutions, veering away from a content driven educational practice and orthodoxy-based education. Spady invites the readers to consider these principles and to incorporate it in their

instructional practices to make a meaningful contribution to significant learning of learners. Reviewing the original principles and tenets, Spady expounds on a transformational paradigm shift in education, which can only be possible if these are imbibed by educational stakeholders, primarily faculty members and administrators. In Chapter 1, Spady reorients his readers with authentic OBE and how it is grounded in the principle that learners must successfully demonstrate the outcomes they need to learn for future life roles. *Educentrism* is the enemy of OBE and stakeholders should ensure that they imbibe the philosophical premises and operating principles of OBE to ensure learning success for all learners. Authentic outcomes are not numerical but should be qualitative descriptions of what learners can do. Principles of OBE (clarify of focus, high expectation, expanded opportunities, and design down) should be constructively aligned to outcomes of significance and apply practices consistently, systematically, creatively, and simultaneously. Outcomes of significance are further extrapolated by Spady in Chapter 2, where he emphasizes the importance and value of outcomes as qualitative in nature and should show demonstrative targets. He criticizes the “Numbers Game”, which is the pervasive practice in education around the world. Numbers and scores are not outcomes. Outcomes are stated as verbs and they happen at the end of the learning experience. Spady also recognizes the contribution of Bloom’s taxonomy in the history of OBE, but also explicitly states that they are not the same. Lastly, the chapter highlights outcomes as those that prepare the learners for future roles. Here, Spady articulates three models: the demonstration motivation (DM), life performance wheels (LPW), and action learning model (ALM), which graphically present the crucial role of outcomes in preparing learners for their future life roles, in personal and professional capacities. In Chapter 3, Spady continues his discourse on real OBE by explaining the deceptive Numbers Game. In this chapter, Spady establishes that actions are defined by merit. As he often mentions, ‘we can always average numbers, but we cannot average outcomes’, since they are qualitative in nature. Outcomes should always be demonstrated, in tangible and observable actions. He encourages the use of rubrics, anchored on fluency, accuracy, challenge, thoroughness, and style (FACTS), which should be the underlying elements. In Chapter 4, Spady continues his warning of being deceived by the Numbers Game; education stakeholders should move away from CBOs (see Spady in this issue) and educentrism contexts and resolve a compromise in terms of incorrect outcomes accreditation paradigm, heavy emphasis on time-boundedness, and consider the role of contexts in formulating OBE practices within one’s institution. The chapter focuses heavily on the principle of *Design Down*, by taking a look at the future: considering not learners but professionals, learning modules instead of courses, and performance criteria, instead of grades and credit. Embodiment of these OBE constructs in practice will surely transform education, as is the vision of Spady.

The second part of the book titled ‘Compelling Case Studies’, comprised of Chapters 5 and 6, highlights applications of OBE, starting with history, policies, and ASEAN contexts, to program transformations within universities, particularly in legal education and engineering. The section narrates how OBE continues to make significant evolution and transformation in education, in ways that benefit schools and, more importantly, learners. In Chapter 5, Joan Largo of the College of Law, University of San Carlos (USC), Cebu, Philippines, narrates the local and global considerations in adopting the OBE framework. She considered the global demands on graduates, critical outcomes that have been shaped by global mobility, especially in the ASEAN region. She also highlights legislative policies in legal education, bar examinations, and an institutional landscape which mandate adoption of ‘real’ OBE principles in the College of Law and how it has resulted in a 100% passing rate of their student examinees, with some alumni emerging as bar topnotchers – an unprecedented achievement of USC. While she acknowledges that there is still a

long way to go before a complete adoption of OBE in her university, she remains optimistic that it is possible and their present OBE commitments have shown promise toward that end. For chapter 6, Francis Uy of Mapúa University, Manila, Philippines, shared his OBE best practices and experiences within the programs of Civil Engineering and Environmental Engineering. He started with the success of accreditation efforts in the past for the two programs, only to realize these were not authentic OBE systems in place. Thus, the challenge of ensuring adoption of authentic OBE principles and practices, coupled with the challenge of entailing paradigm shifts among faculty members and other administrative personnel, were daunting to say the least. However, through a close collaboration with Spady, Uy and his department were able to hurdle this challenge, embodied in the review and revision of context, competencies, outcomes, and learning modules. Further, the exemplary performance of graduates in the licensure examinations and recognitions gained by the program is attributed to the adoption of an OBE system. Uy closes the chapter with how he is able to share his experiences to industry partners, who are relevant stakeholders in the successful implementation of OBE.

Part 3 of the book titled ‘Moving Beyond Outcomes Accreditation’ by Wajid Hussain details how ‘real’ OBE practices can enrich the accreditation process and makes suggestions on how to implement reforms in this area. He highlights valid points to improve the accreditation system and to assess whether the goal of achieving learning outcomes is successful in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively. In Chapter 7, he made observations on how outcomes accreditation is not the same as OBE. For one, he explained that outcomes accreditation is not aligned with life performance roles, that is at the heart of OBE. He also cites how standards of outcome accreditation are inconsistent, poorly implemented, and monitored, which is not surprising, considering that it is not based on authentic outcomes. There are also problems with learning domains, performance indicators, developmental levels, and poorly constructed, generic rubrics, which do not imbibe the FACTS model or the four operating principles of OBE. The key to coming up with an OBE guided accreditation system is by ensuring that the Design Down principle is properly implemented. In Chapter 8, Hussain proposes practical solutions to the problems of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), which is not grounded on ‘real’ OBE. A successful CQI system is in place when it articulates student progress in the attainment of goals, across several levels. According to Hussain, instead of focusing on elements of the institution and programs, it should zoom in on student performance and progress. There should also be clear, inductive goal setting, from Program Educational Objectives (PEOs) to Student Outcomes (SOs), to Performance Indicators (PIs). The problem is if PEOs are not clear, then SOs and PIs will also be vague and ambiguous. Another problem raised by Hussain is the inability of assessing progress in real-time. A delay in assessment will not provide benefits of educational improvement to stakeholders and learners. In light of these problems, Hussain proposed a technology to ensure problems in Outcomes Accreditation and learner-centered CQI are addressed. He proposed EvalTools[®] 6 as the ideal technology solution tool that will enable assessment of learner progress in outcomes attainment. It will be able to manage large amounts of data which can be processed in real time, thus, resulting to on-time presentation of assessment report of learning progress. In the appendices section, screenshots of the system are presented to prove the effectiveness and utility of the technology tool.

The eight-chapter book is a valuable resource on OBE. With the first four chapters, Spady communicates to the readers the core principles of OBE, coming straight from the horse’s mouth, so to speak. How he eloquently lays down the evolution of OBE, highlighting the contributions of Bloom and his taxonomy and Mastery Learning (ML), from a content-driven curriculum which was the pervasive practice across educational institutions worldwide, to the transformation that

OBE promises, is thoroughly explained in this book. He speaks from his experience as an educator, which will allure his readers, especially those interested in heeding the call of transforming the educational landscape of the Philippines. Apart from the premises and practices discussed in the book, the second section demonstrates that the application of OBE has resulted in educational success, rooted in the monitoring of progress of learners, towards attainment of outcomes that are not only academic in nature, but are also anchored on future life roles of learners. Both case studies in the section emerged from local contexts and serves as further proof of the effectiveness of OBE across geographical contexts. The last two sections, focusing on accreditation systems and continuous quality improvement (CQI) provide concrete and tangible scenario when these two institutional activities are not informed and driven by real OBE. Hussain can articulate where the problems lie and how outcomes can be intentionally put at the heart of these two institutional initiatives. Such strategies will improve accreditation and will yield valuable results that can help not only the school but ultimately, the learners. Whereas current accreditation and CQI seem to benefit only institutional programs and services, an OBE driven system will result to significant gains for all members of the institutional community.

While the book provides valuable insights on OBE and practical suggestions on implementation, there are still room for improvement in succeeding editions. In Chapters 7 and 8, Hussain mentions scores, exam, and numbers that may be collected via the technology solution proposed. Spady warns us against these metrics and how they cannot be qualified as outcomes. Future editions may improve on this aspect and ensure alignment of principles and practices across all chapters of the book.

Beyond Outcomes Accreditation: Exploring the Power of 'Real' OBE practices indeed lives up to its title. It presents foundational tenets of OBE, application of OBE practices to higher educational institutions, and how it guides institutional initiatives of accreditation and CQI. Educators and other education stakeholders will certainly gain a lot of insights in this book that can empower them to be channels of OBE transformation in the Philippine educational system.

Bionote

Dr. Jasmine Nadja J. Pinugu is Department Chairperson of the Department of Psychology, School of Social Sciences and Education, Mapúa University, Manila. She holds a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology (major in Human Development and Learning) obtained from De La Salle University in 2021. She also currently serves as President of the Association of Education Researchers and Trainers (ASSERT) and was a member of the board of trustees of Philippine Society for Talent Development (PSTD). She has a wide range of research-related professional experience, including publication of Scopus-indexed research articles, presentation in local and international research conferences, mentoring of senior high school to graduate students, handling university-level research courses, and supervising a pool of research mentors in the university. Among her advocacies are mental health and outcomes-based education.