



The conceptual shaping of learning outcomes: dumbing down or opening up the learning process.

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**Third policy learning forum
Defining, writing and using learning outcomes
*21 and 22 June 2018, Cedefop, Thessaloniki***

Topics in Cedefop's Forum Invitation

Increasingly wide-spread use of learning outcomes for different purposes.

Relationship to behaviourism and constructivism.

Conceptual basis of the learning outcomes approach and its implications for practice.

Learning Outcomes : Forms and uses

OUTCOME STATEMENTS

to **describe** or **specify**

occupational standards

levels and/or requirements in other hierarchical and progression-related structures (related to sectors, competence, jobs, etc)

curriculum aims

the aims and/or targets of syllabuses or learning programmes

QUALIFICATION/CREDENTIAL OUTCOMES

to **specify** the **requirements** for a specific award

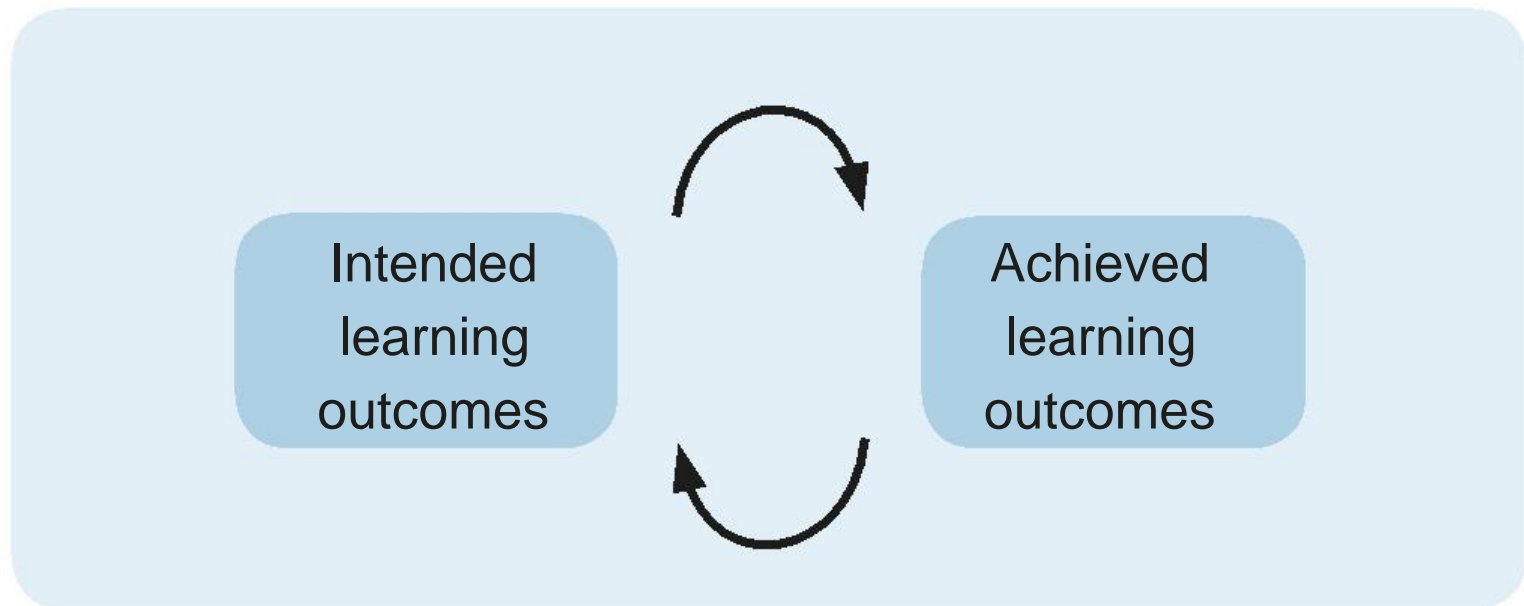
LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

to **describe** the **indicators** of level in a qualifications framework

Do these all share a conceptual basis?

Learning Outcomes: Cedefop

Figure 2.
Relationship between intended and achieved learning outcomes



Source: Cedefop

Learning Outcomes: Standard Definition

“Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do after completion of learning.”

Is this appropriate/sufficient for all the uses of learning outcomes?

How does this relate to the formula "knowledge, skills and competences"?

Outcome statements: proposed definition

Outcome statements either

(i) describe what an individual **can do*** relative to an agreed standard.

or

(ii) specify what an individual **is required to do*** in order to meet an agreed standard.

*including demonstrating knowledge and understanding

Is this the same as "intended" & "achieved"?

Emphasis on "doing": is this "behaviouristic" or "constructivist" or neither.

In this, the "statement" is less than the "standard".

Outcome statements

SIMPLE FORMAL DEFINITION

Outcomes statements include:

- an active verb

- an object

- one or more indicators of quality

Sounds simple and syntactical .

- is writing outcomes about syntax?

- does this reflect the variety of outcome statements?

Outcome statements

MORE REALISTIC FORMAL DEFINITION

Outcomes statements often/usually take a form which starts (in fact or by implication) with a phrase such as “The individual can” and includes:

- an active verb / combination of verbs / verbal phrase

- an object or objective

- one or more indicators of quality, scope and/or context

+ Idiomatic and other redundancies

Understanding outcome statements can require complex judgements which go well beyond the syntax.

EXAMPLE

[The individual can] take decisive and timely action to address any misalignment of ... management activities with relevant regulations and external standards

... (take action to) address
/ misalignments of ... management activities
/ with relevant regulations
/ with external standards
/ any (misalignments)
/ decisively + speedily

MATRIX FOR ANALYSING & TESTING* LEVEL DESCRIPTORS (MATLD)

* testing for coherence and consistency

Main Verb(s)	Object(s) / objective(s)	Modifier(s)	Scope / conditions
Carry out	tasks	routine	under supervision
Carry out	work	routine	with guidance
Plan and complete	work	non-routine	independently

sometimes the boxes have to be split

- (i) The structure of outcomes goes beyond syntax.*
- (ii) The level of demand can be set by any of these components or by a combination - not necessarily (not usually?) the verb.*

IT'S NOT THE VERB

Read, understand, and evaluate a straightforward document related to your work

EQF level 1

Analyse and evaluate the theory and research evidence relating to psychological topics.

EQF level 6

Would it be useful to establish a shared matrix for analysing and comparing outcomes? What would the components be?

SAME WORD: DIFFERENT LEVEL

Analyse and apply basic principles to ...

EQF level 5

Identify basic tools, materials and components associated with service and maintenance

...

EQF level 3

Would it be useful (possible?) to establish agreed level-free understandings of common terms?

SKINNER
Programmed learning

MAGER
Learning objectives

**MCLELLAND
BOYATZIS**
Competence

BLOOM
Mastery

Why move to an
outcomes
system?

SPENSER
Soft skills

**GARDNER
STERNBERG**
Intelligences

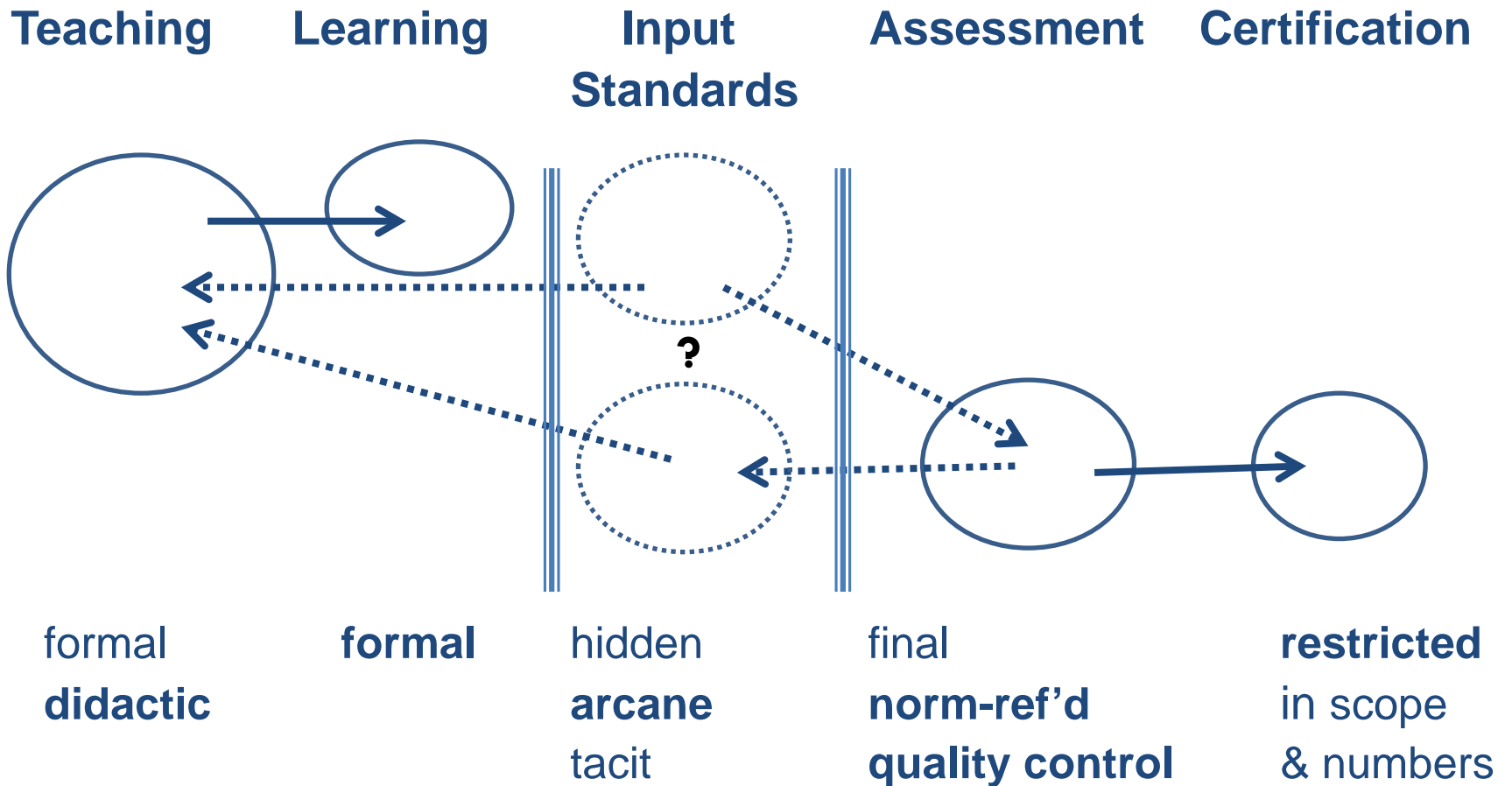
KOLB
Learning cycle

BRUNER
Spiral curriculum

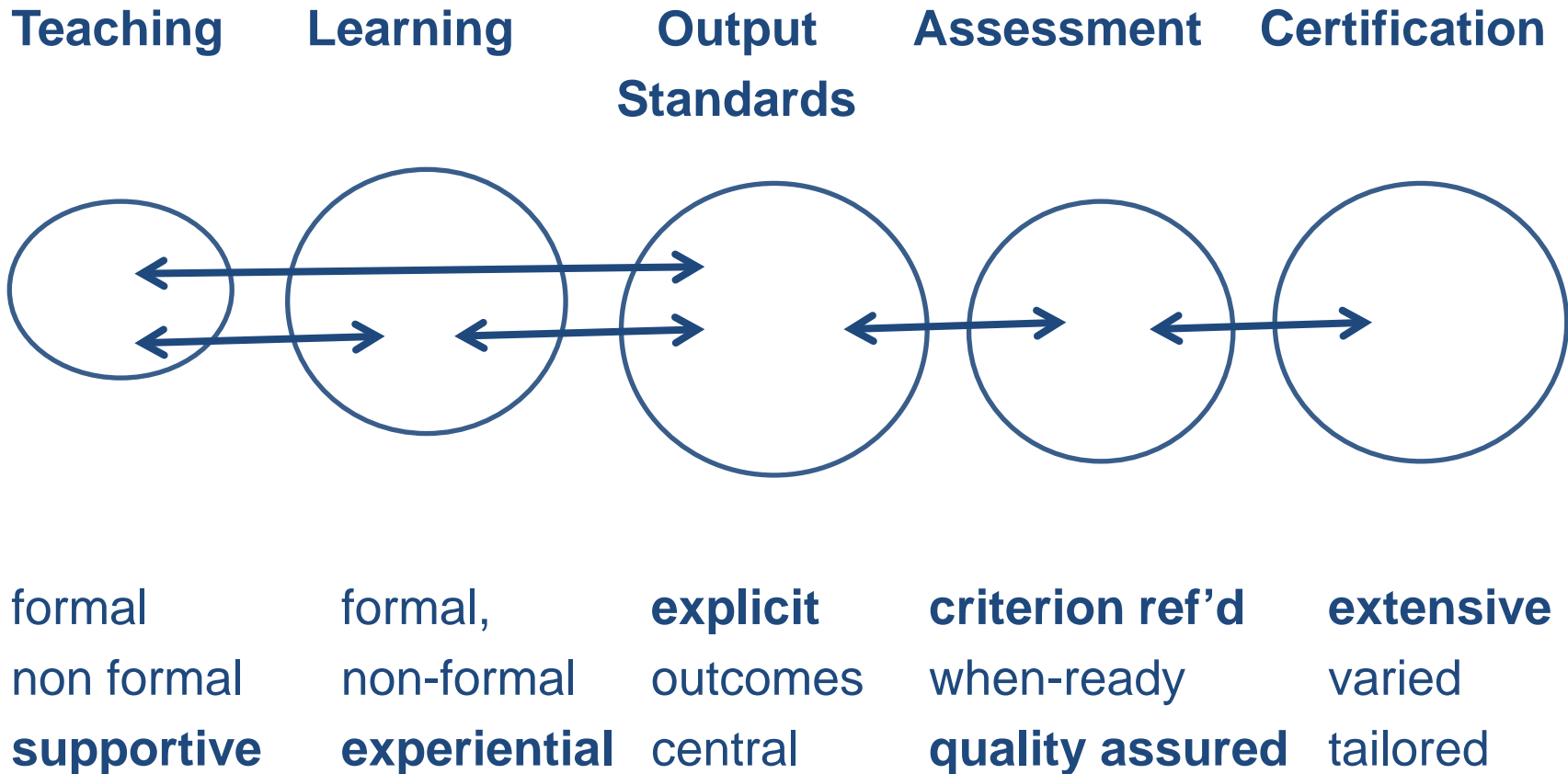
GLASER
Criterion
referencing

HAY
Job evaluation

INPUT SYSTEM



OUTCOMES SYSTEM



The move to an outcomes-based system is a change of default

from **NO** to **YES** on flexibility about
place of learning
pace of learning
mode of learning
means of assessment
forms of recognition
progression

The change is transformational and multi-dimensional .

But the effects may be limited by lack of capacity, "institutional logic" and insufficient policy breadth.

Learning Outcomes: revised definition

Learning outcomes describe or specify what an individual can or must do relative to an agreed social, academic or occupational standard, in a way which is neutral regarding the place, pace or mode of learning.

Therefore neutral as regards "behaviourist" and "constructivist" approaches to learning.

"Neutral" means "can accommodate both".

The expert outcomes writer can adopt the best style of outcome for the purpose.

Overlap with Behaviourism

Objective assessment of performance

No assessment of internal states unless they are evidenced

- in the course of performance/practice
- in a personal account/diary/etc
- by response to specially designed assessment tool

Overlap with Constructivism

Assessment should be part of the learning process

The learner should be an active, social processor of knowledge.

Knowledge should be developed by working on authentic tasks

The teacher/instructor should be a facilitator/collaborator.

Qualification/credential outcomes: definition

These are outcomes statements which specify what an individual must be able to do relative to an agreed social, academic or occupational standard.

They are stated in a way which is neutral regarding the place, pace or mode of learning.

They are intrinsically linked to consistent information* about nature, scope and/or amount of evidence required to justify the award of the qualification/credential.

** This commonly takes the form of*

- (i) explanations or elaborations of the key terms - usually in the form of "performance criteria" or "assessment criteria"*
- (ii) guidance on necessary and sufficient evidence.*
- (iii) guidance and/or support on assessment.*

Outcomes: a conceptual basis

The use of learning outcomes is based on the idea that publicly available standards can be identified and agreed for most forms of social, academic and vocational/occupational activity.

These standards are expressed in statements of capacity, which may be fixed or flexible, narrow or broad, basic or advanced.

Where the capacity of individuals is to be judged, this is done by comparing evidence of performance, understanding and independence with the detailed standards.

The outcomes approach implies that arrangements for both learning and recognition will be as open and accessible/flexible as possible.

The success of outcomes in education and training is limited only by our depth of understanding and the scope of our ambitions.

Possible actions to make qualification and credential outcomes more comparable arising from the conceptual basis.



Develop a common way of describing and analysing types of outcome?

Agree level-free definitions / connotations of common terms used in outcomes?

Agree a set of requirements for types of information to be included in award specifications?

Create a common check-list for (outcome-to-assessment) consistency in award specifications?