

Learning Outcomes: The Good, the Bad & the Ugly - Experiences from practice

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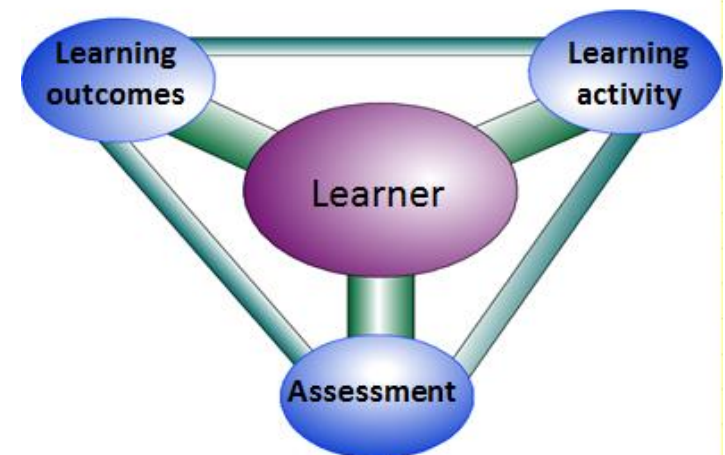
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Some Historical Background

- Outcomes-Based Education grew out of the 1990s.
- In UK, Dearing report (1997) was highly influential. *'The evidence received from employers...urges that learning outcomes be explicitly stated.'* (Dearing report 1997 p.156)
- Constructive alignment

(Biggs 1999)



The Good

*“Learning outcomes are indeed key to a meaningful education, and focusing on learning outcomes is essential to inform diagnosis and improve teaching processes and student learning.” (AHELO feasibility Study Report - vol 1, p.9).
(e.g.s of module descriptors)*

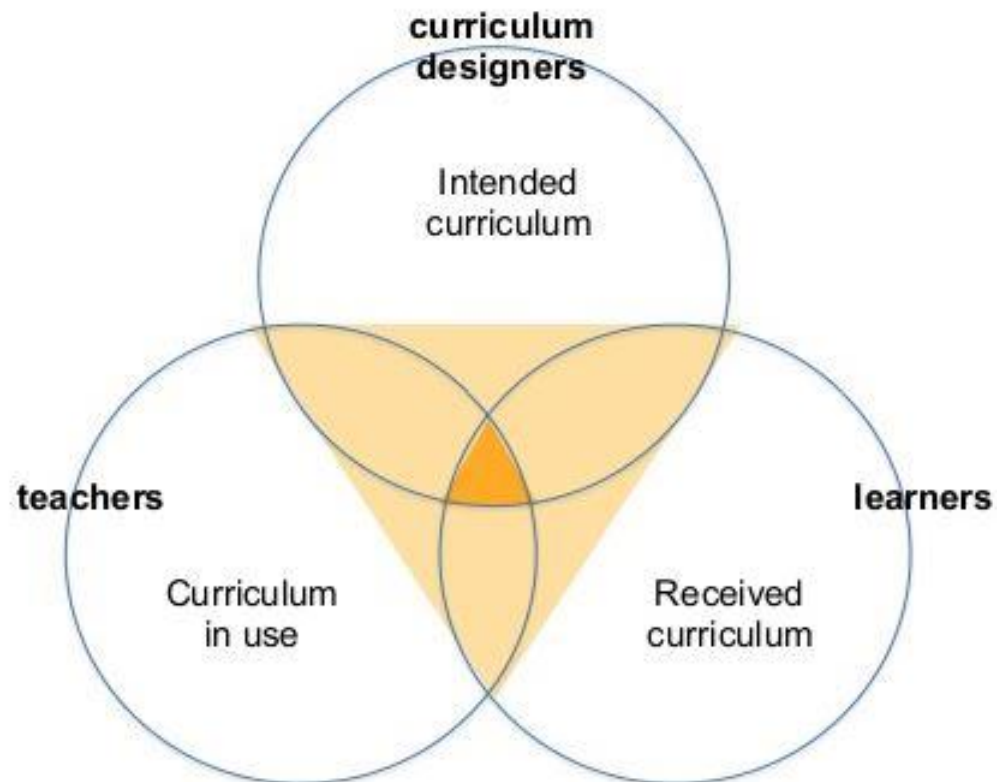
1. Learning Outcomes

	On successful completion of this module, students will be able to:	Brookes Attribute developed*	Other GAs developed, if applicable
1	Develop, implement and critically evaluate effective learning designs, showing awareness of ethical practice in your professional context	Academic literacy	Research literacy, Active citizenship

Curriculum Development

Consistent, high quality curriculum

Explicit - reduces 'hidden' curriculum (Margolis 2001), students guessing what is required.



Lecturer Education & Learning Activity

- Biggs (1999) Levels - Learning outcomes shift the focus from levels 1 & 2 to level 3.
 - Level 1: What the student is
 - Level 2: What the teacher does
 - Level 3: What the student does
- Hugely important for student centred education

Assessment for Learning

Assessment focused on what has been learnt - the outcomes of learning.

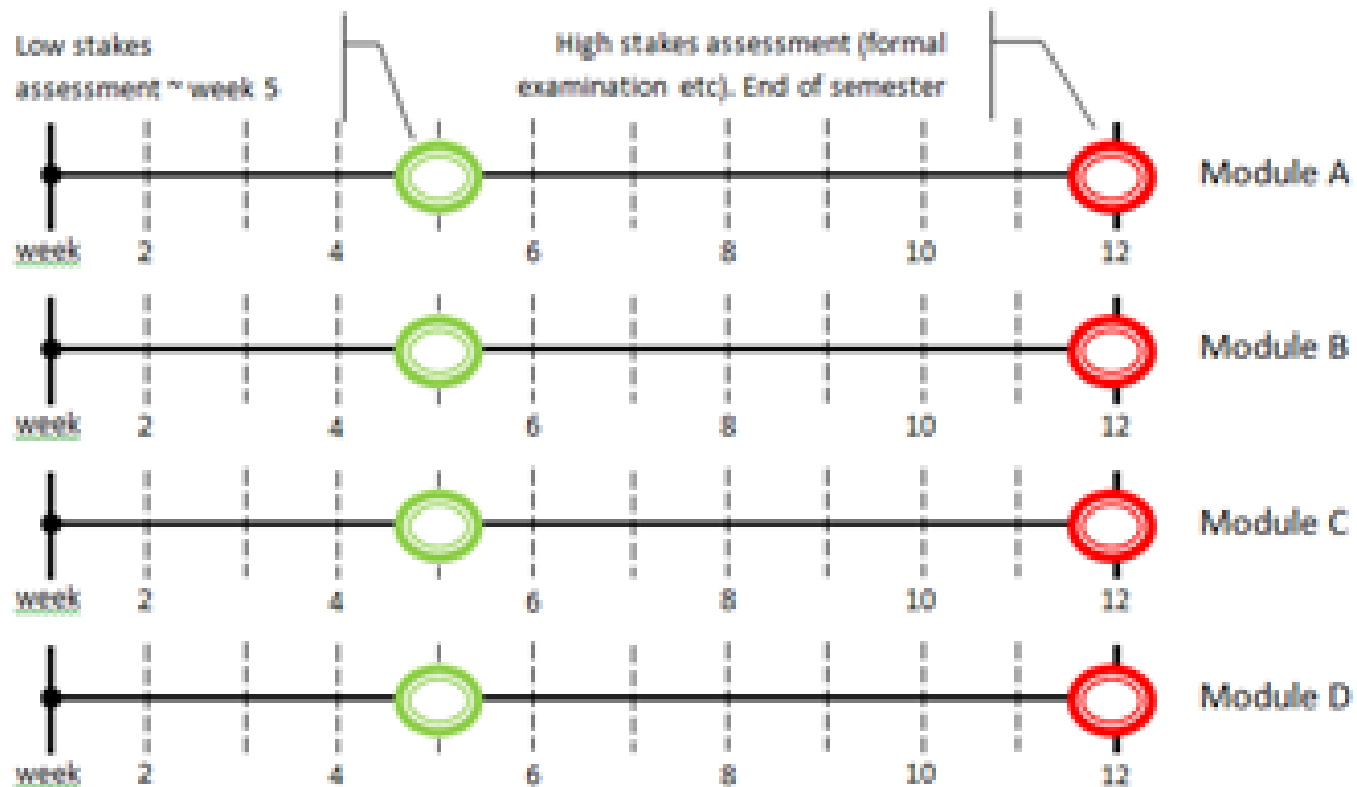


The Bad: Over-assessment

- Learning Outcomes at what level: Programme, Course / module, session?
- Assess LOs multiple times.
- Formative assessment (error correction, students should be able to take risks) becomes summative (high stakes) ‘students don’t do tasks unless they are graded.’

Assessment bunching

Students focus on the need to pass assessment rather than deep engagement with learning.

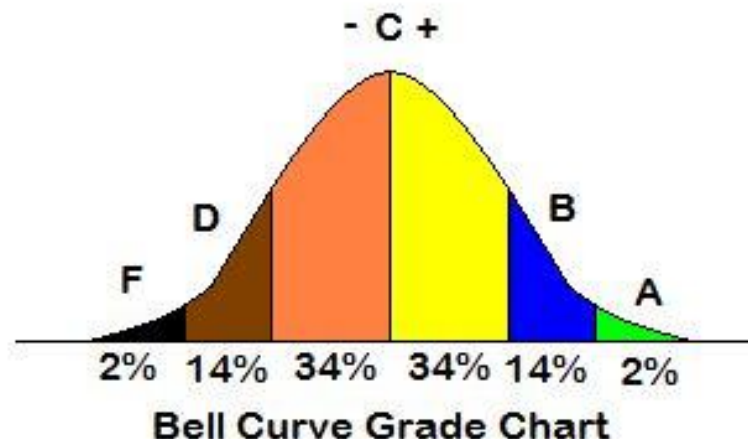


Dealing with unintended outcomes

- Can we actually specify what we want students to learn?
- Is assessment flexible enough? (exams or tasks that are too prescribed can stifle this.)
- Can original ideas be credited?

Purpose of Grading / Marking

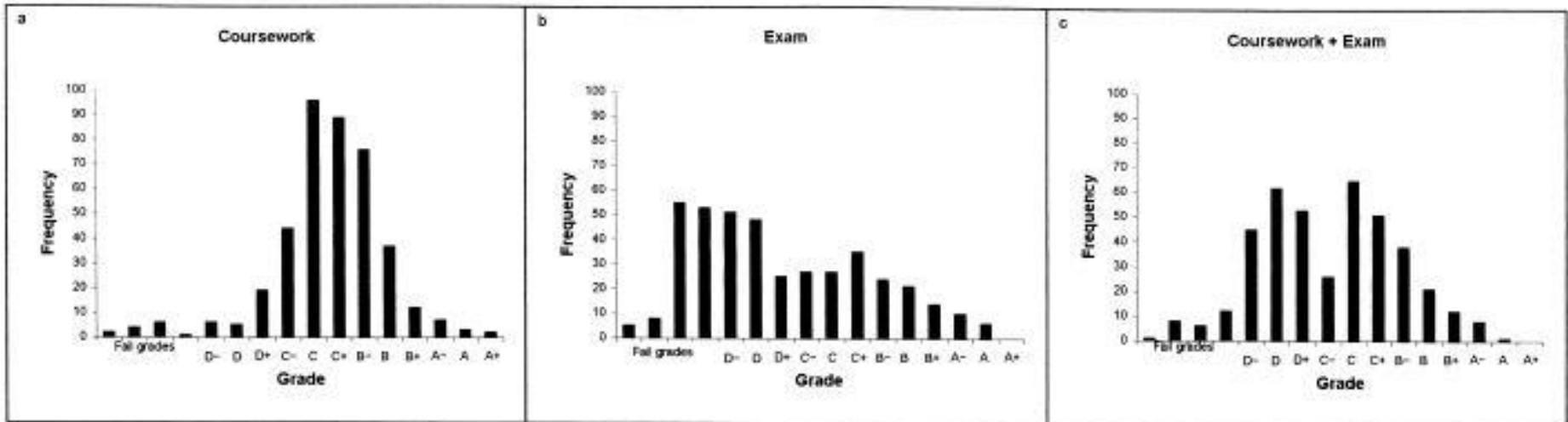
Conflict between **Norm-referenced** (often the way lecturers view the role of grading) and **Criterion-referenced** (which is the aim of outcomes based education.)



The importance of assessment criteria (and moderation processes)

Diederisch (1974) Yorke et. al.(2000) massive difference in grades because of unclear criteria, assessment types and practice not shared across graders / markers.

Business Economics I



Assessment Compact

1. There are five fundamental tenets behind this compact, namely that:

1.1 Effective assessment is central to learning.

1.2 To be effective the relational nature of the assessment and feedback process needs to be emphasised, particularly in terms of the need for active dialogue between students and staff.

1.3 To be effective, assessment must be recognised as a joint responsibility between staff and students.

1.4 The ability to assess, the work of both self and others, is an essential skill for all graduates.

1.5 For the above tenets to be met in full, students and staff need to be 'assessment literate' and actively participate in disciplinary communities of assessment practice.

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/>

The Ugly

Complex LOs that can be meaningless to students.

“The graduate will be able to identify the gaps of incorrect programming, access to the files of cyberattacks DoS and DDoS, know the Burp Suite, understand the security of WEB components – forms, session management, cookies, configuration of authentication”

Outcomes are not a list of content.

Conclusion

Learning outcomes are fundamental to Higher Education Learning but...

Can be easily misinterpreted.

Can become a bureaucratic tool rather than an aid to good learning, teaching and student centred education.

References

- Biggs, J. (1999) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, SRHE: London.
- Diederich, P.B (1974) *Measuring Growth in English*, NCTE:Urbana, Il.
- Margolis, E. (2001) *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*, Routledge: London.
- Yorke, M. et al (2000) 'Mark distribution and marking practices in uk higher education', *Active Learning in Higher Education* 1 (1)