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FOCUS ON THE EDUCATION DEBATE - CURRICULUM 2005

Curriculum 2005 is the boldest attempt at curriculum renewal in recent South African history. It seeks to align what happens in our schools with both the demands of the global workplace, and the social and political aspirations of the new South Africa.

Curriculum 2005 aims to:

- \* develop citizens who are active and creative, inventors and problem solvers, rather than meek and unthinking followers.
- \* inculcate an appreciation for diversity in the areas of race, culture and gender.

Two mechanisms are proposed for achieving these aims. First, the stuff of teaching and learning - the contents of the curriculum - are to be written in terms of clearly defined outcomes: what students are expected to know and do after successfully completing a unit of learning. This, it is proposed, will not only make the object of the unit explicit to both teacher and learner, but will also facilitate assessment. In addition, specifying the outcomes makes it possible to link school-based learning with learning that occurs in the workplace and in non-formal sites.

A second mechanism driving the new curriculum involves a shift in the focus of classroom activity. No longer will classrooms be dominated by teacher talk and authoritarian relations. There will now be a

## CURRICULUM

2005:

### SOME ISSUES

By Nick Taylor,  
Executive Director - JET



greater emphasis on student activity and collaborative learning. This shift, it is argued, will bring out the natural inquisitiveness and creativity of students and develop their communication faculties.

South Africa follows a long list of countries who have attempted to implement an outcomes-based curriculum over the last decade, and these initiatives have raised many issues which require closer examination.

Unfortunately, the debate in the country has been polarised to such an extent that a serious look at these questions has become very difficult. On the one hand, supporters of Curriculum 2005 label those who raise questions as unpatriotic, and even as protectors of previous privilege in education. On the other hand, many of the opponents of the new initiative have not always provided constructive criticism.

The present edition of the JET Bulletin attempts to open for debate some of the most critical issues at the heart of the new curriculum. Eric Schollar, in his article, looks at international and local views on some of these issues. Additional articles focus on three broad areas: the approach to **knowledge** advocated by Curriculum 2005, the most appropriate **teaching/learning methods** for developing that knowledge, and the **classroom**



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**materials** used to support teaching and learning.

### **Knowledge**

There are two strong arguments in favour of making the content of the curriculum more relevant to the 'real world.' First, by locating school knowledge in the everyday activities of children, it becomes more accessible and interesting. Second, by linking classroom activities to economic, political and social issues, the practical application of school knowledge is promoted.

Curriculum 2005 has taken a number of bold steps to make the curriculum more relevant. The first is to re-design the way the curriculum is organised. Subjects or disciplines have been clustered into eight learning areas. In addition, the goals of learning are now defined as eight critical cross-field outcomes which are generic,

cross-curricular outcomes: communication, problem-solving, personal management, teamwork, critical analysis, environmental awareness, systems thinking, and citizenship/entrepreneurship.

Another way of making the curriculum more relevant, which is popular with many of those leading Curriculum 2005, is to adopt a theme-based approach. Thus, instead of teaching the traditional school subjects, all knowledge will be conveyed through an exploration of themes, such as 'the sea', or 'farming'.

In a separate article in this Bulletin, Joe Muller and I unpack some of the debates around these issues, many of which are far from resolution within the Learning Area Committees responsible for constructing the outcomes for the new curriculum.

### **Teaching and Learning Methods**

The kinds of child-centred classroom methods advocated for Curriculum 2005 are by no means new to the world - to whom they were first introduced by Piaget and his followers nearly three decades ago - nor to South Africa, where they are the focus of the majority of the more than 100 in-service training programmes for teachers currently in operation. Over the past five years JET has undertaken evaluations of some two dozen of these initiatives in order to assess their impact on the quality of classroom outcomes. In addition, the Trust has conducted an overview analysis of more than 50 such evaluations.

The overwhelming conclusion emerging from this work is that, whereas it is now commonplace for teachers to adopt the **forms** of child-centred methods, improving the quality of learning **outcomes** - in terms of children being able to read, write and calculate more efficiently and more meaningfully - is quite another matter. In other words, children may be sitting in groups and talking to each other, but they are not necessarily learning more than they would have in a more conventional classroom.

Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that, under certain circumstances, child-centred approaches may inhibit learning. These circumstances include an inefficient civil service, badly managed schools, overcrowded classes, poor resources in schools and, above all, teachers who are themselves unsure of their subject matter and who use group-centred methods indiscriminately and inappropriately.

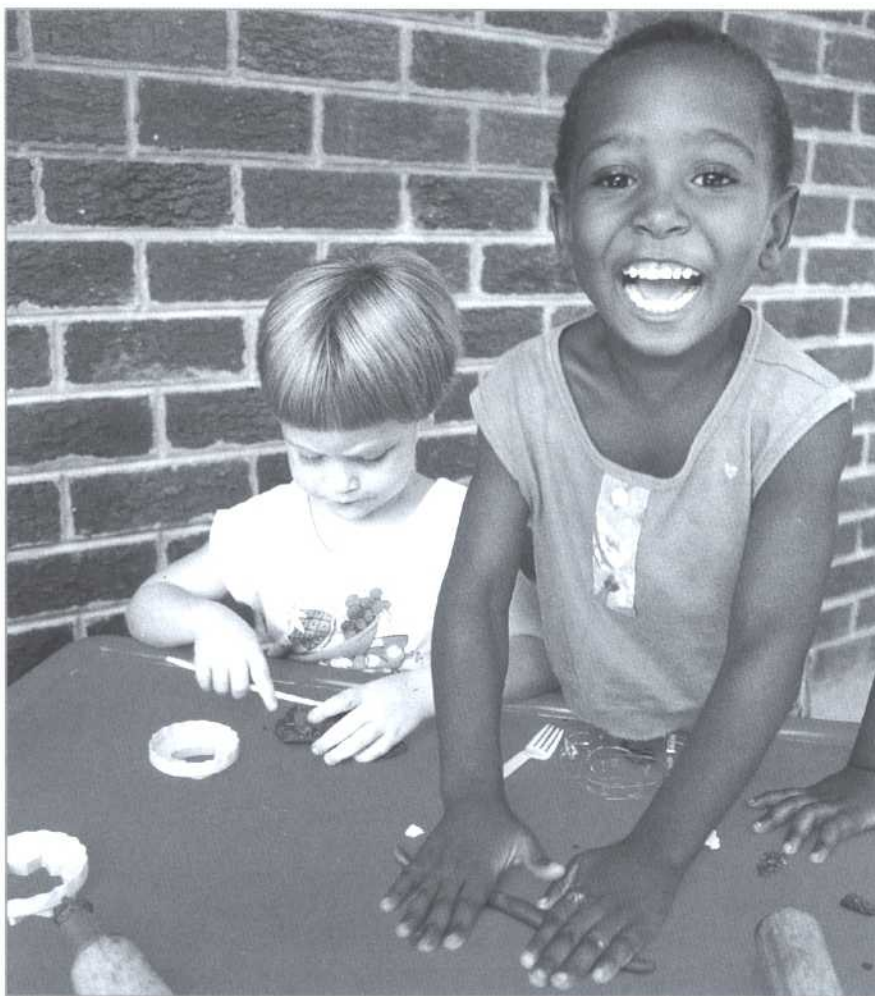
Bothhale Tema examines some of these issues in more detail in her article. In particular, she looks at some of the ways in which child-centred methods can be implemented appropriately and effectively under the conditions pertaining in the majority of our schools.

Pupil assessment is a central component of the teacher's pedagogical repertoire. Assessment enables both the teacher and learner to ascertain whether the outcomes are being achieved, and guides them in improving their teaching and learning strategies. Erik Hallendorff examines some of the facts and fictions surrounding the question of assessment in current debates.

### **Classroom Resources**

Traditionally, the syllabus and the textbook have been key classroom resources. A good syllabus sets out a detailed and carefully structured learning programme for each school subject at each of the respective grades. Ideally, the textbook translates the syllabus into an interrelated set of activities and exercises that explore and practise the concepts, skills and attitudes which constitute the learning programme.

There have been and still are many bad syllabi and textbooks at large in South Africa. Further, there is little doubt that elements of the strong commercial textbook sector, in collusion with the apartheid civil service, engaged in practices which were often shady and sometimes corrupt. Clearly these practices and products need to change and Curriculum 2005 provides such an opportunity. However, official policy on the development of detailed learning programmes and on the production and



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deployment of teaching and learning materials is unclear. In addition, in most if not all provinces around 90% of the education budget is spent on salaries leaving little for the provision of resources. There are those who do not see this as a problem. These supporters of Curriculum 2005 assume that the sets of outcomes produced by the eight Learning Area Committees are sufficient to drive the whole initiative and that it is up to schools and individual teachers to produce their own learning programmes and classroom materials.

In her contribution to this Bulletin, Penny Vinjevoold investigates the feasibility of this approach, through an examination of the international and local evidence.

### **Conclusion**

That Outcomes-Based Education in general and Curriculum 2005 in particular will impact profoundly on our schools and classrooms, and in the longer term on many aspects of our public and private lives, is beyond question. But these initiatives are not good or bad in and of themselves. The quality of their impact will depend in large measure on the choices that are made with respect to the different forms of curriculum knowledge, classroom strategies most appropriate to teaching and learning, and the deployment of textbooks and other resources. The extent to which we can debate these issues without feeling threatened or threatening will, in turn, reflect the degree to which our fledgling democracy has begun to mature.



# THEMES, LEARNING AREAS AND CURRICULUM 2005: The view from nowhere?

by Dr Nick Taylor - JET  
and Prof Joe Muller - University of Cape Town

Much emphasis is given in Curriculum 2005 to making the curriculum more relevant to the 'real world'. However, there are different views amongst curriculum planners as to the proper place of 'real life' objects and topics in the curriculum.

While some advocate a straightforward version of 'theme' teaching, others believe that the traditional school subjects should be taught by using real life examples and objects, and others again believe that learning programmes should be derived directly from the new learning areas, which are themselves an attempt to make the content of the curriculum more relevant.

## Theme-based approaches

Those proposing the theme-based approach suggest two or three themes, such as transport or building, as vehicles for teaching the entire Grade 3 maths curriculum. Within this approach real life is foregrounded and the mathematics is engaged as and when it arises, for example, when calculating the cost of a tank of petrol.

Critics of this approach point to the danger of losing sight of the knowledge structures which underlie the examples, such as the base ten number system. The use of themes, they argue, means that mathematics becomes a set of puzzles related to real life but not to each other. Hence the

real power of mathematics - the generic nature of the concepts and their wide applicability - is obscured. Ironically the attempt to make the subject more relevant and applicable to the lives of the learners actually renders it less so.

## Relevant subject-based approach

An alternative approach to that described above is to foreground the systematic development of subject knowledge and to animate it with real life examples or objects. For example, when introducing decimal fractions at Grade 3 level, the teacher locates the lesson within the pupils' understanding of the base ten number system and then extends this concept to



progressively smaller numbers where tenths are understood to be ten times smaller than units and so forth. Within this approach relevance is achieved by using 'real' examples - money transactions, calculations with distance - to motivate, illustrate and apply the generic concept of a decimal fraction.

There is a fine line between subject-focused and theme-focused approaches and ideally teachers will move seamlessly between the two.

However, this is a tall order requiring enormous skill, dedication, time and energy from teachers. Even the very best teachers are likely to achieve this ideal only occasionally, and then only under optimal conditions. Under conditions prevailing at present the subject-based route seems the safer, offering less chance of concepts being fragmented and lost in confusing detail and a greater likelihood of children learning the essential knowledge and skills which are in such short supply from our current school system.

### **The Learning Areas as organisers of knowledge?**

The national Phase Committees have clustered subjects or disciplines into eight learning areas. These learning areas consist of what are considered to be similar subjects or disciplines. So, for example, the learning area social science is a combination of history and geography. In describing the learning outcomes they have attempted to map a new, extra-disciplinary, knowledge structure. This becomes the new trans- or extra-disciplinary unifying discourse for both conceptual objects and styles.

But in this approach and in the theme teaching approach, where does the new discourse come from? It cannot be neutral, it has to come from somewhere. The options are four-fold.

- \* It draws predominantly from *one discipline* - in which case, the chances for coherence amongst the specific outcomes in that area are maximised.
- \* It attempts to be eclectic and draw upon a *range of disciplines* - in which case, incoherence will be built into the knowledge structure since it will represent a hotchpotch of concepts.
- \* It remains at a *pre-disciplinary* common-sense level, thus avoiding the difficulties created by the first two options but delaying learning. Sooner or later, the teacher and the students must address the learning task by defining it in terms of one conceptual language or another.
- \* Finally, it may succeed in constructing a new conceptual language, becoming in effect a *new discipline*. This would be an extraordinary feat, one normally accomplished only by international disciplinary communities, over time, in relation to a series of protracted disputes about definitional and explanatory methods. It is not impossible for Curriculum 2005 writers to achieve this, but it is overwhelmingly unlikely.

One is left with the impression that the architects of Curriculum 2005, perhaps because they see disciplines as oppressive and wish to flatten disciplinary hierarchies, have decided to ignore or at least blur them when it comes to specifying outcomes. It would seem that they have tried to construct, in the learning



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architecture, a position that commits itself to no discipline and position, a view from nowhere. Yet everything we have learnt from curriculum theory and development over the past 50 years tells us that such a view does not exist. All learning requires a specific conceptual language, with its specific objects and styles. An *extra-disciplinary* outcomes set cannot and does not exist, and a *trans-disciplinary* one is extremely difficult to construct coherently. The ones being piloted now are either *pre-disciplinary*, in which case the students may have fun but they won't learn anything; or they are *disciplinary*, in which case conceptual confusion will arise when other disciplines and learning areas are introduced. Evaluations of the pilot projects will be important for understanding these issues. 🌿

# CLASSROOM PRACTICE IN OBE

by Botlhale Tema  
Director, PROTEC

It is possible that much of the present hue and cry about outcomes-based education stems from the fact that many South African schools have not ever experienced fundamental changes in teaching practices such that we could talk of eras of particular practice in the same way as people in other countries can.

My father went to school here in South Africa in the 1930s but I bet my bottom dollar that he would not feel lost if he entered most South African classrooms today. The classroom setting will be as he left it - the rows of desks will still be there. He may have a hard time with vectors and calculus, but the practice will surely be familiar. The teacher will still come into the class and announce the lesson topic for the day as teachers did in his youth. The teacher will, if he has prepared, then "budge" as they say in the townships. He will rattle on with regular pauses of "is that clear?" or, "do you understand?", to which a chorus of voices will shout "yes sir". Sometimes he will spice it up by saying part of a sentence or word so that the students may complete it. This particular variation often has disastrous consequences, as in an ecology class I once observed where the teacher, while naming the different types of herbivores hinted at the answer he was looking for by saying HIP, HIP..... One

half of the class then shouted **hooray!** and the other shouted **popotamus!** Some of you will say that happens only in the worst classes but in my experience, South African classes proceed under one assumption and that is that the teacher is the dispenser of knowledge. The mug-jug metaphor with regard to the student-teacher relationship is commonly held.



OBE requires a shift away from the mug-jug paradigm. However, the proposed shift has resulted in a number of misconceptions about the types of classroom practice promoted by OBE. It is commonly held that OBE prescribes teaching through

collaborative work or group work.

Another concern is that the child-centred discovery method may lead the child on wild goose chases. Nick Taylor has, in his introductory article, stated this concern bluntly when he writes: *"Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that, under certain circumstances, child-centred approaches may inhibit learning."*

## **What teaching methodology is recommended for outcomes-based education?**

First, it is important to stress that every method or approach has inherent dangers and needs careful handling. My ecology teacher provides notable evidence of the corollary to Taylor's statement above: "under certain circumstances teacher-focused teaching may inhibit learning." This suggests that we need to use any approach with discernment and discretion.

Second, child-centred discovery approaches need not lead to undirected learning. Rather OBE sets out to give direction to the process of discovery through the stated outcomes. The methodology that will be used in any learning programme is suggested by the specific outcomes to be achieved. For example, when the outcome states that "learners should use process skills to investigate phenomena related

to natural science", the teacher may design a learning activity which gives students an opportunity to go outside and investigate phenomena or to work in the laboratory or to read and analyse a publication which contains the information required. The teacher will then decide whether this activity will be best done individually or in groups or by the teacher explaining. So, for example, teacher telling is clearly not appropriate when pupils already know what is being taught or can work out for themselves what is being explained. But it is appropriate to explain things pupils would find difficult to fathom for themselves such as that matter consists of electrons, protons and neutrons. This explanation will be news worth hearing!

Similarly group work has clear advantages for particular learning activities. Pupils feel bolder to say things they might not say alone. Group work gives them an opportunity to test ideas on peers. Students in groups can also challenge each other's thinking, making the learning experience richer and more meaningful. However, it is important that group work is a learning experience. The teacher has to ensure that the pupils are aware of the deliverables or outputs so that groups are working groups and not chat groups. Group work also needs constant monitoring by the teacher to guide, act as a resource and to prevent dominance by one or two pupils.

Thirdly, the choice of teaching and learning methods is also

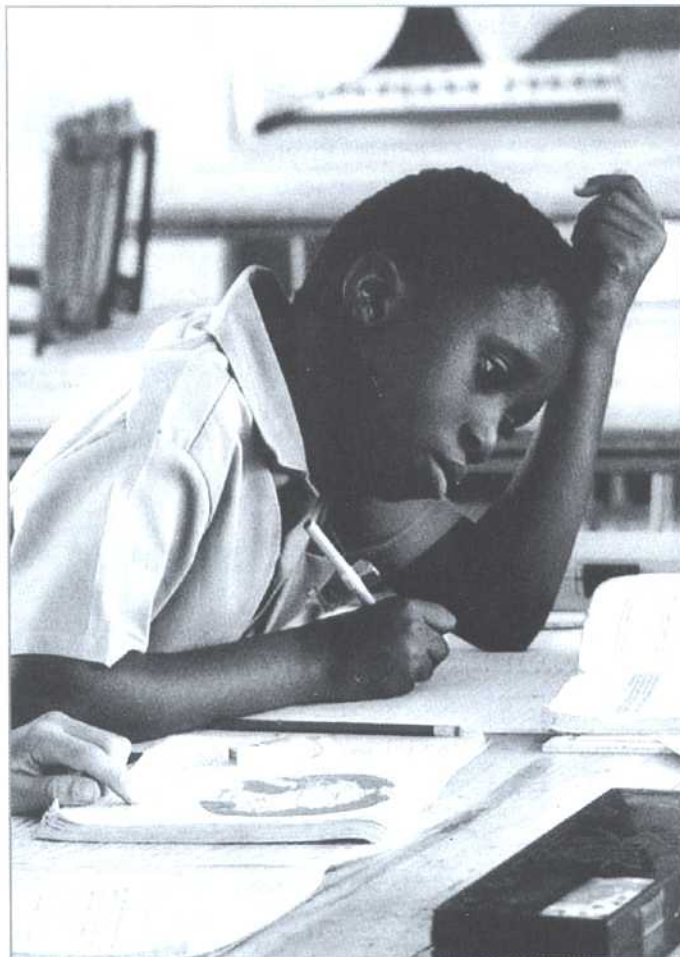
guided by the critical outcomes - the cross-curricular outcomes such as critical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving and effective communication. Group work would thus be suitable when attempting to meet the critical outcome of working co-operatively. Similarly, class discussions will provide opportunities for pupils to develop the ability to think critically and to communicate effectively.

OBE thus recommends the provision of a variety of learning opportunities or teaching methods which

outcomes. The teacher's role can therefore be compared to that of a soccer coach. He does not offer the same coaching to all the players but provides help that is appropriate to each player, that is, meets the needs of the individual player. The coach does not play the game on behalf of the player but attempts to get each player to improve his/her skill. The teacher's role thus also involves the ability to recognise individual needs.

The success of outcomes-based education depends on the teacher's good judgement and on her possession of a wide repertoire of teaching methods. Many teachers in South Africa have a sorely limited repertoire. Teachers also come from a highly prescriptive educational dispensation so that they have never had to make critical decisions about which method to adopt when.

Given this situation, Curriculum 2005 presents an implementation challenge of a scale we have never experienced. It will require the provision of a lot of training and classroom support to ensure that teachers are able to adopt a variety of appropriate teaching and learning practices.



include group work. The teacher's role is to exercise professional judgement when deciding on which method is appropriate for any learning activity. The teacher's role as facilitator is to coach her learners towards the achievement of the set

# THE ROLE OF MATERIALS IN THE NEW CURRICULUM

by Penny Vinjevold  
Consultant

Many international and local studies point to the importance of learning materials in the provision of quality education. World Bank studies over the last twenty years have found that the most important classroom resource, after the presence of a teacher, is a basic textbook. More recently, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which compares the maths and science performance of Std.5 level pupils in 41 countries, has shown the decisive effects of materials on pupil learning. The study found that one of the most important ways of improving the quality of maths and science learning is through the provision of 'standard teaching manuals.'

In South Africa a large number of teacher development projects support the idea of teacher development linked to learning materials. The Primary Science Project (PSP), Science Education Project (SEP), English Language Education Trust (ELET), READ Education Trust and the Education Support Services Trust (ESST) among others have, over the years, seen the benefits of providing teachers and pupils with learning materials. An evaluation of the ELET programme by Thulisile Dlamini in 1996 concludes that "The provision of instructional materials brought about major positive shifts in the participation of learners in the learning process".

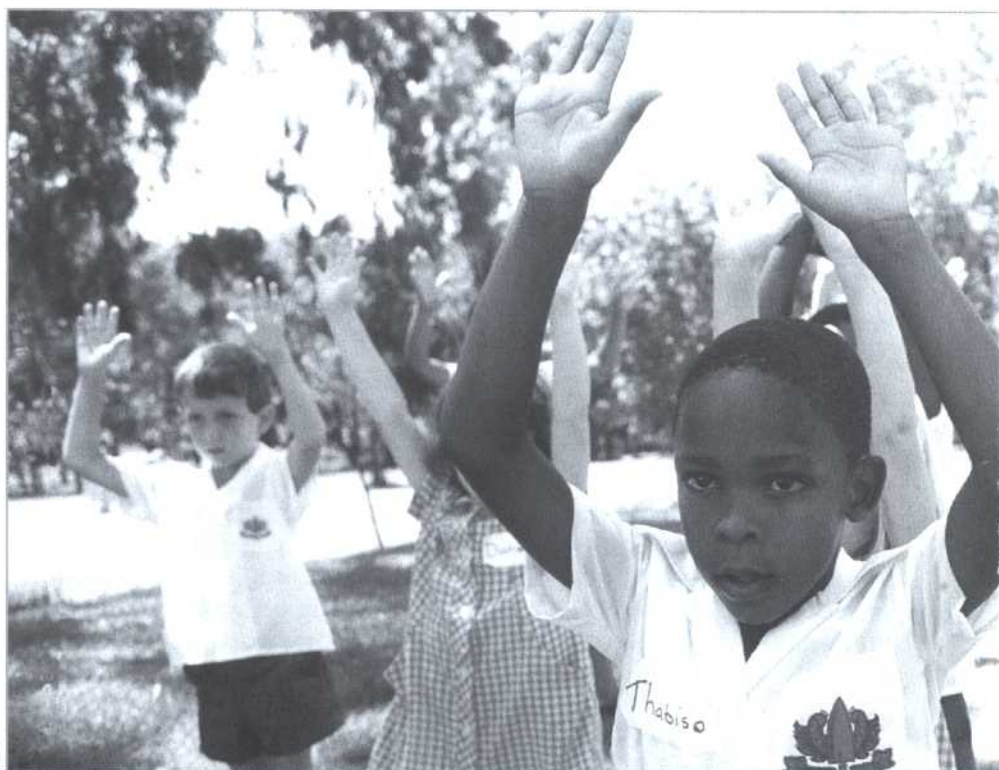
## Widening the gap

The proposed role of learning

materials in Curriculum 2005 is unclear. Official policy on the development of detailed learning programmes and on the production and deployment of teaching and learning materials has not yet been spelt out. Publishers have spent millions of rands over the last couple of years developing outcomes-based education textbooks/learning materials. But, because most provinces allocate 80 - 90% of their education budgets to salaries, it seems unlikely that the state will be buying these materials for use in the schools. This situation looks set to widen the gap between a small privileged school sector and the majority of South African schools. The better off schools and their parents will themselves purchase the necessary books and those who cannot afford them will go without. Many

proponents of Curriculum 2005 do not see this as a problem; they argue that once sets of learning outcomes have been produced, it is possible and even desirable for individual teachers to develop their own learning programmes and materials.

Is this feasible? Emilia Potenza, who has extensive materials development experience, believes it is unrealistic to expect teachers to develop their own learning programmes. Her experience as a teacher involved in developing materials over four years, with a team of highly motivated, highly skilled teachers with ample resources at their disposal and a supportive principal, was that the process was difficult and time-consuming and in the end not sustainable. Examples of outcomes-based





materials developed in Potenza's *Upbeat* series and *The Integrated Approach* series illustrate the point. These materials contain carefully selected comprehension or reading passages, questions on the passages, a variety of activities, essay topics, discussion topics, assessment strategies etc. Each set of lessons involved at least ten to twelve hours preparation by an experienced writer with access to a wide range of resources. In fact Potenza claims that developing one good activity can take a month of research and writing.

### **Learning programmes or worksheets**

There are those who claim that teachers do not have to develop whole learning programmes. Instead they can develop worksheets and individual lessons. Some of the Learning Area Committees in the provinces have small groups of teachers dedicated to this 'prepare and share' approach. Many teachers have also received training in developing materials because teacher education programmes introduced

materials development components into their programmes in the 1980s and early 1990s, in reaction to the absence or low quality of textbooks in schools. These materials development courses generally concentrated on developing worksheets. Potenza concedes that teachers can produce worksheets but claims that even this is complex and time-consuming, especially if one hopes to provide coherent and meaningful learning activities.

However, there is a more fundamental problem with providing only worksheets, as is shown by the Northern Cape Workbook Project. The workbooks were compiled from tried and tested worksheets. A study of the impact of the workbooks on pupils and teachers found that the workbooks were very attractive to pupils and led to the following trends in pupil activities: increased individual work, increased group work, increased homework and unprecedented voluntary engagement with reading material.

However, both teacher interviews and pupil 'tests' indicated that the workbooks would have been more effective if they had been graded by language and concepts. The majority of teachers interviewed suggested that the material should be arranged more systematically and be graded.

The pupil tests were designed to assess two types of activities: the ability to engage in the kinds of games and puzzles contained in the workbook, on the one hand, and the ability to read and write with understanding and solve simple problems on the other. The study found that pupils who used the workbooks showed considerable improvement on the first kind of task in comparison to pupils who did not use the book, but did worse on the second set of tasks which require systematic development and practice of reading, writing and computing skills. This suggests that worksheets have their place in the classroom but that the ideal learning programme should approximate Taylor's ideal textbook - "an interrelated set of activities and exercises that explore and practise the concepts, skills and attitudes".

It is the provision of structured coherent learning programmes that will be crucial to the success of Curriculum 2005. Potenza goes as far as to question whether the new curriculum will be implemented if teachers are left to develop their own materials. "The new approach expects so much," she says. "Teachers must be supported by models of good practice and clear examples of what is required if they are to implement the new curriculum".



# OUTCOMES-BASED ASSESSMENT

by Erik Hallendorff  
Adult Education Consultant

Outcomes-based Education (OBE) has as its starting point the definition of agreed outcomes of learning. Once the outcomes have been agreed the next steps are to:

- \* design and implement learning programmes that enable learners to become competent relative to these outcomes;
- \* design and implement appropriate assessment tools that enable us to find out whether learners have in fact reached these outcomes.

Curriculum 2005 advocates two major changes in approach to assessment: new ways of assessing and new ways of recording assessment.

## New ways of assessment

Because the outcomes of Curriculum 2005 require diverse skills, knowledge and applications, diverse means of assessing outcomes are needed depending on what is being assessed. Oral presentations, observation, simulations, written examinations, continuous assessment, projects, portfolios, performance appraisal, self and peer assessment, are just some of the ways in which outcomes can be assessed.

One of the fears of opponents of OBE relates to the perceived demise of the 3 Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) in favour of the 3 Ps (projects, portfolios and performance appraisals) as means of assessing pupils. Written tests are a valid means of assessment for certain types of knowledge and activities, but are restricted in their ability to



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gather valid information concerning learners' abilities in many areas.

Educators have always appreciated the fact that it is not appropriate to ask learners to *describe* how to make wooden furniture or to *list* the important features of oral presentations. When assessing such abilities, educators have rather required learners to demonstrate their ability to make wooden furniture or make an oral presentation. OBE simply requires educators to apply this notion of appropriate assessment to all outcomes. Those outcomes that can be reliably assessed through written tests can still be tested in this way, but there are a host of others that require different forms of assessment.

How better to assess a learner's abilities in art than through the presentation of a portfolio of artwork prepared by the learner over a period of time?

How better to assess learners' abilities in information gathering, analysis, interpretation and presentation than through realistic projects involving surveys of some kind, whether in the mathematical, geographical or social science areas of learning?

The point made here is that educators need to spend time designing the most **appropriate** tools for gathering **valid** and **reliable** evidence about learners' abilities relative to certain outcomes of learning.

In many cases, assessors will not need to design assessment activities at all, but will be able simply to record **naturally occurring evidence** of ability. For example, as part of the learning programme, a teacher might require learners to demonstrate competence in a certain area before moving on to the next step. Such evidence can simply be recorded and then considered as evidence of ability. Being alert to opportunities for gathering evidence during normal learning activities is crucial to **continuous assessment**.

In terms of implementation, this implies a need for the provision of resources that make appropriate assessment possible. Resources include materials and facilities, but of critical importance is the training of educators as assessors. A quick glance at teacher training courses reveals the low emphasis placed on assessment. The mistake we make is to assume that all teachers are automatically good assessors. Assessment itself is an expert activity in the same way that teaching is an expert activity.

### **New ways of reporting results**

Another significant change brought about by OBE is the need to **report results** differently. Norm-referenced reporting has been used almost exclusively to report results. The validity of such reporting must be questioned. If the outcomes are carefully described such that all the skills, knowledge and understanding are described together with the assessment criteria and range of contexts, then we should be able to report on individual performances in relation to these standards.

Our reports of learner progress should indicate which outcomes have been satisfied

according to the criteria, and which have not.

### **Difficulties**

One of the concerns of teachers is that continuous assessment will be unmanageable as teachers will spend all their time assessing learners and keeping records. First we must acknowledge that a single test at the end of a year is an unreliable indicator of true ability. Educators have always known this, hence the incorporation of class marks and periodic progress tests into the final grade. Continuous assessment simply means that teachers should be more systematic in recording the progress of learners and trust that the results of progress tests are just as important, if not more so, than a final test.

Teachers should be aware of the points at which the significant outcomes have been reached, and design and complete records of achievement to coincide with these points. In many cases, these outcomes will not need to be re-assessed, but in other cases, further tests may be required in order to assess learners' abilities to **integrate** their skills and knowledge. Given that OBE means each and every outcome must be assessed, we can no longer rely on tests that only *sample* the year's work, hence the need for continuous assessment.


Another concern relates to the possibility that learners in one class could be at vastly different stages in terms of outcomes met, given the fact that learners progress at different rates. It is conceivable that a Grade 4 learner could have met the outcomes of Grade 5 in mathematics, for example. The question is, how does an educator cope with this? Do we allow learners to be at different grades for different subjects? This would make

school organisation difficult to manage. Aside from the logistics, we should also question the desirability of allowing learners to advance beyond their peers. Education goes far beyond the intellectual dimension and peer group learning is important in terms of the psychological, emotional and physical development of children.

Rather than those learners who have attained the outcomes of their grade moving to the next age or grade level, learning programmes could be designed to include outcomes that extend some or most of the 'compulsory' or core outcomes in such a way that they are worthwhile and represent true enrichment. In subjects like language, this could be in terms of more demanding literature, in mathematics, more complex problems related to the concepts addressed in the compulsory outcomes.

At the end of the year, learners who meet all the criteria for all the compulsory outcomes would move to the next grade. Those who also meet a specified number of merit outcomes would move to the next grade with a merit (distinction).

### **Conclusion**

OBE offers us the opportunity to define curricula that our society wants and needs. Significant and sustained resources will be needed to enable teachers to teach in such a way that the outcomes are in fact reached. In all of this, appropriate and valid assessment is the key that enables us to monitor progress, make input decisions, and ultimately report on what skills and knowledge our pupils have. 

# OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM 2005 - Utopia or Dystopia?

by Eric Schollar

Eric Schollar and Associates

Two core justifications have been advanced for the adoption of Curriculum 2005 and outcomes-based education:

- \* The need for a more relevant and effective education system. The previous system was based on an outmoded model which has led to the endemic under-performance of the majority of schoolchildren. One significant consequence of this under-performance has been an inadequate flow of properly prepared pupils into the vocational, commercial, technical and industrial sectors of the education and training continuum - themselves undergoing transformation.
- \* The need to equalize educational opportunities. The previous system was developed in the interests of minority sectors of the population and produced an elitist and class/cultural barrier to the educational advance of the majority.

There has been a great deal of debate around these justifications. Proponents of Curriculum 2005 assert that similar systems have proved more effective than 'traditional' systems in other countries, while its critics assert precisely the contrary. They also differ over the question of equity, with the critics of Curriculum 2005 asserting that the children of the working class will bear the brunt of the inevitable failure

of the new system, as they did in other countries, while a continuation of the flight to private schools will protect the children of the more affluent.

The international critics of outcomes-based education, and the local critics of Curriculum 2005, do not dispute the need for a more effective education system or for the establishment of equity. Their objections rest not so much on these strategic ends of 2005, as on the specific means through which it proposes to achieve them.

The differences between the competing views on Curriculum 2005 rest upon three central issues: methodology; content and assessment.

## Methodology

Are techniques like group and project work, discovery and process learning more or less effective than techniques like whole class teaching, assignment work, factual and content teaching?

Critics of 2005 argue that rather than teachers becoming learning facilitators and pupils becoming self-motivated learners, the promotion of 'warm fuzzy' methodological concepts, like discovery learning, results in teachers disengaging from active classroom teaching as they try to understand exactly what their role is supposed to be. Their pupils consequently fail to develop the skills and habits of systematic study as productive classroom

instruction is replaced by superficial activity. An admittedly extreme, but actually observed, example is of the teacher who hands out books to pupils, sitting in groups, who are told to discuss what they read together. Project work, for example, generally seems to consist of uncomprehending pupils copying aimlessly from books rather than from the blackboard. The issue, critics insist, is not whether to replace whole class teaching with group work, or rote learning with discovery learning, but whether the classroom applications of the different methodologies available to teachers are clearly understood in terms of their usefulness, requirements and limitations.

## Content

Should the focus of schooling be on the teaching and learning of established knowledge within its various disciplines, or should it be placed on learning the integration of disciplines in various 'relevant' contexts, with the focus on 'learning-to-learn'? Should the curriculum describe a developmental progression through a series of established disciplines to a minimum level and depth, or should it describe a broad series of desired outcomes and suggested topics?

Further, should syllabi be prescriptive, or should they be open-ended and situational, allowing teachers to develop their own learning programmes?

Curriculum 2005 has abolished the traditional distinctions between different subjects in favour of the adoption of new Learning Areas. This, critics argue, will lead to a little bit of everything and very little of anything. They note, also, that the syllabi of the various Learning Areas barely attempt to create a developmental progression in what will be learned. They speak instead of the same Specific Outcomes dealt with each year, differentiated in a 'spiral of widening content and context'.

Non-specific syllabi create the possibility, clearly observed in other countries, of teachers simply teaching their own obsessions year after year. When teachers can develop their own learning programmes in the context of general curriculum guidelines, and in the absence of a prescribed course of study and required texts, they tend to fall back on the familiar or on what they find personally interesting. The progression of educational experiences to which children are exposed then becomes a lottery - what you learn depends on who teaches you in each successive year.

### **Assessment**

Should individual pupil achievement be quantitatively measured against objective standards in a national product-oriented system, or should it be measured in terms of outcomes in a situational process-oriented system?

The assessment of education through its outcomes is not a new concept, indeed national examination systems have always argued that they were measuring the successful achievement of outcomes by learners. 'Pure' outcomes-based education was

particularly effectively applied in technical and industrial training in the form of Criterion-Referenced Instruction (CRI). The essence of this training is that it can be based on a *precise* description of the technical skills required to perform a *specific* developmental series of tasks. Successful performance of each task leads to the next module of skills training, and so on.

On the other hand, say the critics, general education is an enormously more complicated enterprise. Not all of its outcomes can be physically demonstrated, especially when they deal with attitudes, opinions and values as does much of Curriculum 2005. The amount of attention and record keeping required of teachers to assess changes continually and qualitatively in these kinds of outcomes for whole classes of individuals is vast. Giving them the primary responsibility for the assessment of pupil achievement, in the absence of National Achievement Examinations, is dangerous, not least for the pupils. The degree of subjectivity and variation in standard evident in teacher assessment of pupils was unacceptably high when it was tried elsewhere. Employers rapidly lost faith in the value of school certificates, and entrance tests were often substituted for them. It is inherently unfair, argue the critics, to allow a child's progress through the school system to depend upon the accidents of which school he or she attends, and to which teachers he or she may be exposed.

Taken together with the potential for semi-random learning programmes inherent in non-prescriptive syllabi, this potential for subjective assessment adds up to a persuasive argument to re-

examine the means proposed to achieve the strategic goals of Curriculum 2005.

This overview does not pretend to any degree of rigour or completeness of analysis of the objectives and methods of Curriculum 2005. It has, for example, ignored the central delivery questions of the scale of INSET and materials development and distribution assumed by the new system; they represent formidable problems in themselves and failure to solve them will prove fatal to 2005. The purpose of this overview is to raise the issues around OBE and 2005 that have become contentious internationally and at home.



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## Information booklets on OBE for educators

from the Department of Education

As part of the implementation of the new school curriculum, which is based on outcomes-based education, the national Department of Education is providing educators with a range of support materials. This includes a series of booklets reflective of the objectives of Curriculum 2005 and the Department's commitment to OBE.

The series will consist of four booklets focusing on the following topics:

- \* An introduction to Outcomes-Based Education
- \* Assessment in OBE terms
- \* Classroom Practice and OBE
- \* School Management and OBE

It is hoped that the series will be available for distribution in November '97. Issues will be distributed to the provincial

education departments for further distribution to educators. If not available from the provincial departments, copies of the booklets may be requested from:

Directorate: Communications  
Private Bag X895  
Pretoria 0001  
Tel: (012) 312 5271  
Fax: (012) 325 4419



## A new locomotive for the teacher education train

from SAIDE - the South African Institute for Distance Education

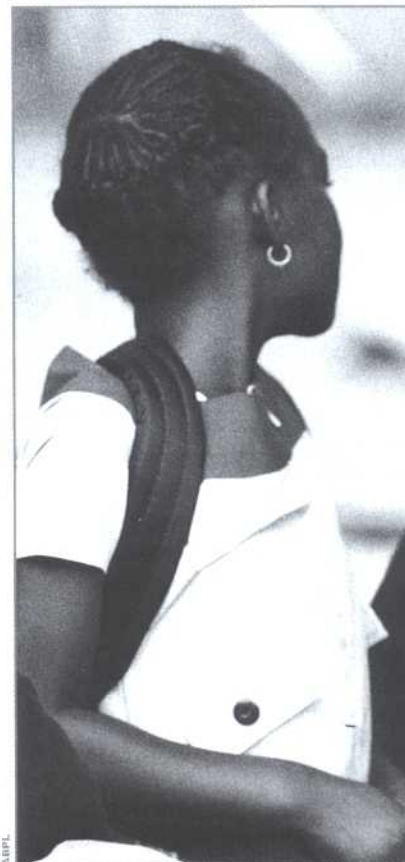
Perhaps the metaphor is a little grand, but that's how one college lecturer described SAIDE's *Study of Education* project - a collaborative, cross-institutional effort to develop a series of mixed media, interactive modules for use in teacher education in South and Southern Africa into the next century.

The locomotive image is apt in that the project aims to provide a relevant and competence-based alternative to the Fundamental Pedagogics curriculum in the crucial areas of general education theory and teaching methodology. In addition to developing the ability to resolve common educational dilemmas and use educational theory as a tool in the practice of teaching, the materials are designed to foster active learning styles and skill in critical thinking and problem solving.

The two series, *Becoming Competent* and *Getting Practical*, break with the didactic, doctrinaire and content-led texts that have characterised much teacher

education in the past. The issues-based modules, each consisting of a learning guide, reader, videotape and in some cases audiotape, use a variety of means such as case studies, narratives and activities, to engage students in moving reflectively between theory and practice and from their own experience to academic texts and back.

At present ten modules are planned or in process. All of these will attempt to model a distance education approach that is flexible enough to be used in both face-to-face and contact situations and in pre-service and in-service teacher education. A pilot module, *Understanding Outcomes-based Education: Knowledge, Curriculum & Assessment*, was commissioned by the national Department of Education and distributed to teacher education institutions throughout South Africa. Results of the evaluation survey are still coming in but the reception of the module



has, in general, been very enthusiastic. Oxford University Press will publish the revised OBE module and *Creating People-centred Schools* early in 1998.

For further information contact Mike Adendorff at SAIDE, Tel: (011) 403-8934. 🌿

### **OBE Workshop - Magic not Mystery**

*from the Independent Schools Council (ISC)*

The OBE workshop run by the ISC in Johannesburg at the beginning of September was attended by nearly 2,000 teachers. The overwhelming response to the workshop is clearly indicative of the great demand amongst teachers for practical information and guidance regarding OBE at all levels.

The success of the workshop was that it generated

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excitement among the teachers regarding OBE, replacing the uncertainty that has surrounded this new approach.

Government workshops, outreach programmes as currently run by many independent schools and NGOs providing INSET programmes, all offer a means of addressing the need for similar OBE information and training opportunities to be extended to teachers throughout the country.

For further information contact Mark Henning at ISC 🌿 Tel: (011) 648-7208.

### **Eastern Cape Primary Schools Improvement Project**

A Joint Venture formed between JET, ITEC (Institute of Training and Education for Capacity Building) and Crown Agents was recently awarded funding from the British Department for International Development (DFID) to manage the Eastern Cape Primary Schools Improvement Project.

ECPSIP, which will run over a period of three years, provides an opportunity to realistically pilot the implementation of education reform policies, including the new curriculum, in 500 schools and all Colleges of Education in the Eastern Cape. The project will focus on: development of

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government management capacity at provincial, regional and district levels; development of management, motivation and organisation skills amongst school principals; training of maths, science and English teachers in terms of the new outcomes-based curriculum; selection of appropriate OBE materials; and mobilisation of community support to create effective school governing bodies.

The Joint Venture, led by JET with Nick Taylor as chairman, will make cost-effective use of existing proven project management and financial systems at ITEC in the Eastern Cape and JET in

Johannesburg. Jonathan Godden has been appointed project co-ordinator and will operate out of Bisho. Crown Agents introduces an international dimension and brings to the Joint Venture extensive experience and well developed systems for project management, with an understanding of DFID procedures and requirements.

The project management contract is currently being negotiated and the Project Steering Committee will begin planning the various training activities and the participation of outside agencies in October. 🌿

## Update: the President's Education Initiative

by Mashwale Diphofa

The report on Phase I of the PEI was completed in June 1997 and distributed to the national and provincial education departments and the international donors that had expressed an interest in the project (see JET Bulletin No.6). A meeting was held on 25 August in Pretoria, bringing together provincial PEI representatives and donors. The meeting provided an opportunity for provinces to address donors on their respective development and support needs with regard to serving teachers. It was agreed that, after perusing the report, donors would engage with the Department of Education on specific programmes they would like to pursue.


The Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) has approved a further grant in support of interim activities to facilitate the transition from Phase I to actual implementation of provincial programmes. This interim phase will encompass the following activities:

- \* refinement of funding proposals, with the respective provinces, to present detailed implementation plans;

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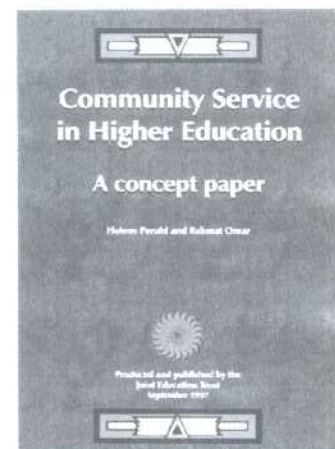
- \* planning for a Teacher Development Centre - it is envisaged that this Centre will be located within the national Department of Education, initially providing management and support for the implementation of projects emanating from PEI Phase I and gradually becoming the locus for all departmental teacher in-service activities;
- \* initiation of a research project directed towards establishing best practice in relation to key concepts underlying the PEI.

When DANIDA was approached for this interim grant, the DoE was also planning the revision of the current Norms and Standards for Teacher Education which had been declared policy in 1995. The concern is to ensure that the Norms and Standards become compatible with the National Qualifications Framework and Curriculum 2005. DANIDA agreed to fund this revision exercise as well, adding it to the three areas of activity outlined above, to be undertaken under the interim PEI grant.

The interim activities are scheduled for completion at the end of this year. 

## Community Service Initiative Concept Paper

In Bulletin No.6 (June '97), JET announced that a team of researchers, based at the Trust under the leadership of Rahmat Omar, would investigate the feasibility of establishing a Community Service Initiative as a means of increasing financial assistance to students at tertiary level, making higher education curricula more relevant to the 'real world' and providing services to communities. A concept paper has been prepared by the research team as a basis for consultation with stakeholders - from government, private sector and donors to higher education institutions, youth and student organisations and communities. Copies of the concept paper are available from JET on request. The project was funded by the Ford Foundation. 



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