


Learning outcomes - between education policy and education planning

NASJONAL KONFERANSE OM VURDERING I
HØYERE UTDANNING
Kristiansand, UiA 17. Oktober 2017
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What's up with learning outcomes ?


- Shift in Norwegian education policy in the 2000s - movement from being content and teacher focused to becoming more results and learning outcomes oriented (student centered?).
- Part of a general trend in international education policy development where important drivers have been the EU og OECD in the 1990s
- In Norway an explicitly expressed policy initiative and priority since 2005
 - Bologna process/EU qualifications framework/National qualifications framework 2009/2011
- ...but learning outcomes are more than policy initiatives....
 - important tool in curriculum planning, teaching, learning and assessment since 1920s in a range of Anglophone countries .




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Learning Outcomes as a Key Concept in Policy Documents throughout Policy Changes
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Learning outcomes in professional contexts in higher education
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Disciplining the disciplines? How qualification schemes are written up at study program level in Norwegian higher education



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Learning outcomes: What are they? Who defines them? When and where are they defined?
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Why use learning outcomes in higher education? Exploring the grounds for academic resistance and reclaiming the value of unexpected learning
Authors: [Authors and affiliations](#)
Anton Havnes, Tine Sophie Prøitz



General trends in curriculum development

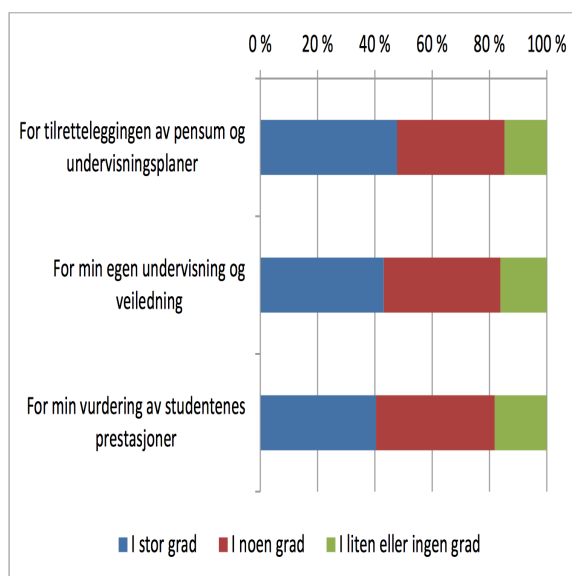
- Contemporary curriculum developments tend to be framed around **capacities, key competencies** and **broader learning outcomes** (Lundgren 2006, Binkley et al. 2012)
- Continuation of **assessable learning outcomes**, less prescriptive in terms of content, framed by standards and potentially “assessment driven teaching”
- Researchers worry that the curriculum developments are paired with (or too strongly driven by) economic arguments and motives, that lead to overly rationalistic and/or technical approaches which are considered contraproductive in teaching and to student learning. (Priestly & Biesta 2013, Fullan & Langworthy 2013, 2014; Havnes & Prøitz, 2017)

Learning outcomes with a double intent

Today:

- Renewed focus on LOs in many countries
 - Internationally it is at the core of a broad initiative for quality improvement
 - Carries with it a double intention of both changing higher education systems and the teaching and learning practices within it.
- The current introduction of LOs is both a policy initiative and a pedagogical undertaking brought forward by curriculum requirements
 - As a tool for governance, management and quality control
 - As a platform for course design, teaching, learning and assessment

Norwegian faculty and LOs



To what extent do learning outcomes have a part in curriculum development, in my teaching and in my assessment of student performance?

(I hvilken grad spiller læringsutbytte noen rolle i utforming av pensum, i undervisning og i vurdering?)

Respondents drawn from Forskerpersonalregisteret
Response rate 52,5 (N=4440).
(Aamodt, Hovdhaugen & Prøitz 2014)

Norwegian students and LOs

Dominating pattern: students say that they have no use of LOs in their own learning...but they report that LOs have a function at the beginning of the study and at the end....



N=20 students in 7 group interviews at four HEIs in Norway (Prøitz & Havnes 2015)

Learning outcomes for student-centered learning?

- Learning outcomes affect curriculum development and teaching – but how and to what extent varies
- Whether LOs result in a more student centered learning is a question for debate
- To work with LOs enhance transparency and contributes to constructive alignment, it is also considered to strengthen the quality of teaching among the informants
- Informant also report that LOs strengthen the alignment between LOs and assessment
- It is a question if LOs strengthens the general alignment in studies in higher education – the strongest examples of this can be found in studies where the more subject specific and more generic LOs are integrated in exams and assessments – for example in different types of project work or group assignments.

(N=29 Norwegian and English students and teachers) (Sweetman, 2017)

Understanding learning outcomes?

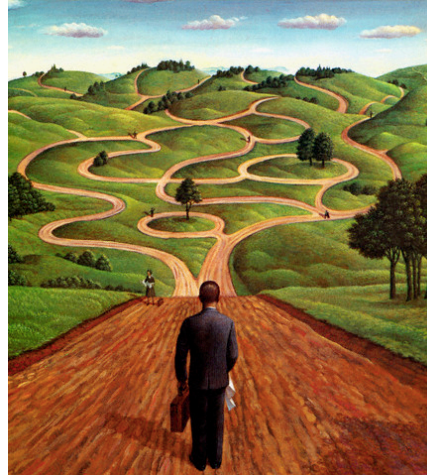
- *Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning (Kennedy et al. 2007, European Union 2011, Adam 2004)*
- *Learning outcomes represent what is formally assessed and accredited to the student and they offer a starting point for a viable model for the design of curricula in higher education which shifts emphasis from input and process to the celebration of student learning. (Allan 1996)*
- *One possibility is to work with a flexible understanding of learning outcomes. This all seems a long way from learning outcomes, but it does mean when we construct these we need to do so in terms of the creation of a writerly text, one within which both teachers and students can write themselves. (Avis 2000)*
- *Outcomes are singular, measurable, standardised and unequivocal second-order consequences of the management and pedagogy of schools and school systems and are constructed within a view of knowledge that is largely fixed, supposedly objective, uncontested, ahistorical and unitary. (Smyth and Dow 1998:295)*

Variations in understandings of learning outcomes

- **Outcomes of learning** for the purpose of including all products of learning (Buss 2008:306).
- **Expressive outcomes**, defined as:
 - “outcomes of learning where purposes are formulated in the process of action itself as outcomes becomes emergent and clearer during the learning process” (Eisner 1979:103).
- Others suggest using terms with a wider scope:
 - **intended outcomes** specified at the beginning of learning,
 - **holistic outcomes** encompassing ways of thinking and practicing which may not be evident until the end of learning or even after it has been completed,
 - and **ancillary or emergent learning outcomes** at a higher level than those specifically related to the main objectives—value-added learning resulting from the learners’ ‘own unique journey’ (Buss 2008:307, Entwistle 2005).

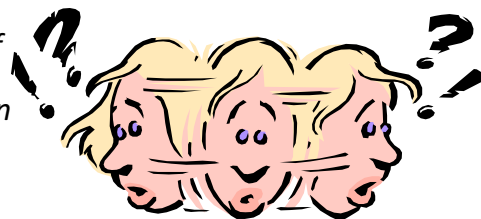
Learning outcome as the defining point of departure

- Adopting a learning outcomes oriented curriculum approach has consequences for the design of the curriculum and its functionality
- It positions LOs as the defining point of departure
 - What do I want the students to achieve and
 - how will I know that they have achieved it? (Otter 1995)



Definitions – "classics"

- *Distinguishing the types of human capabilities, considered as learning outcomes, makes possible a refined understanding of the learning process and thus permits a drawing of relatively precise implications for the design of instruction*
(Gagnè 1974:51)
- *...essentially what one ends up with, intended or not, after some form of engagement*
(Eisner 1979:101)



Perceptions of learning

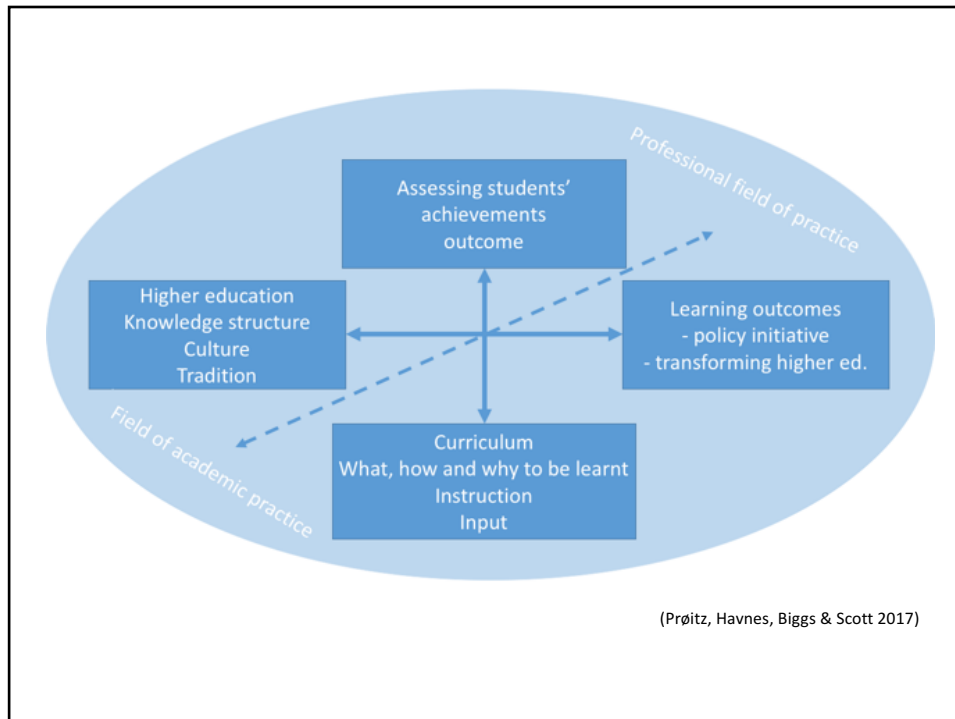


Results oriented, full-ended, measurability (Gagne 1974)	Examples of learning outcomes		Process oriented open-ended limited measurability (Eisner 1979)
Behavioral outcomes	Problem-solving outcomes	Expressive outcomes	(Prøitz 2015)
<p>The student is able to....</p> <p>-run 60 meter within 11 sec.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-describe three traits of the Nordic model and how it is challenged by international movements in assessment</p>	<p>The student is able to find out...</p> <p>-how to evaluate the results of the class on the 60 meter test</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-how to prepare and present a lecture on a given thematic on the Nordic model that meets the requirements of the evaluation committee</p>	<p>-I have experienced the excitement and energy of running on time.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-inspired by the given thematic I can use theories and concepts to develop my ideas and express them in a lecture.</p>	

Multiple layers of LOs and interlinked documents

TABLE 1 Overview of interlinked documents

Levels and types of documents	English case	
National	National standards For teachers QTS standards N For Nurses in the UK the N Midwifery Council Standards registration nursing. Benchmarks statements	The candidate has broad knowledge of important topics, theories, issues, processes, tools and methods within the field
Institutional	Institutional standards for Programme Handbooks.	(Institutional template for Programme Handbooks)
Programme	Programme specification for validation purposes Programme plan	The student can share professional views and experience and contribute in developing justifiable nursing practice
Subject		
Module	Module Specifications Practice assessment document (PAD) School based training handbooks (for teaching)	I will be able to accurately record and document manual and electronic blood pressure, pulse, respiration, temperature.
Mini		



What kind of LOs do we need?

- The looseness of LOs seem to be a primary advantage as regulative mechanisms for policy, teaching, learning and assessment.
- At bullet point level, LOs are precise enough to warrant an acceptable level of transparency and loose enough to allow different and conflicting interpretations.
- The first is essential in a policy context and the latter in an academic education context.

To sum up...

- Learning outcomes is a two sided phenomenon – as a policy tool for governing, management and quality control and as a platform for pedagogy that can provide direction to teaching, learning and assessment.
- Adopting a LO oriented approach requires taking the LOs as the point of departure
- Different levels of the education system requires different LOs for various audiences and purposes
- It is important to keep LOs at overall levels loosely defined to allow LOs at teaching and learning levels to function with the flexibility and space that is needed to

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