

# Teaching and learning newsletter

## Why set learning outcomes?

Despite being common practice in schools and colleges for many years, learning outcomes are still controversial. Some teachers argue that they are too restrictive - a class may result in many unexpected outcomes for learners - and they are not appropriate for classes that promote individual creativity or original insight. They are 'behaviourist' as they are limited to learning that can be observed and don't take account of internal change or insight. This article, while acknowledging some of the above, discusses why setting and sharing learning outcomes with learners is still very important.

Learning outcomes are statements of what students will learn in a class or course. They focus on student learning (What will students learn today?) rather than teaching (What am I going to teach today?). They are key to planning—once decided, the tutor can choose activities that will best help students achieve the outcomes. Finally, they provide a baseline against which students and tutor can assess progress.

Good learning outcomes are SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-based. To illustrate, suppose a tutor sets the following outcome in a language class: *'Describe what you used to do when you were young'*. Is this a SMART outcome? We can assume it is Relevant for a language course. It is Time-based as it is an outcome for one lesson. However, it is not very

*As a reminder*

### Checklist for writing learning outcomes

- Learning outcomes start with an active verb (list, name, perform, evaluate, create)
- They state what students should be able to do/achieve by the end of a session/course.
- They are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timed)
- They form a checklist against which learning can be assessed.
- They complete the sentence: *'By the end of the session students will be able to...'*

Learning outcomes should be shared with learners at the start of sessions and reviewed with them at the end.

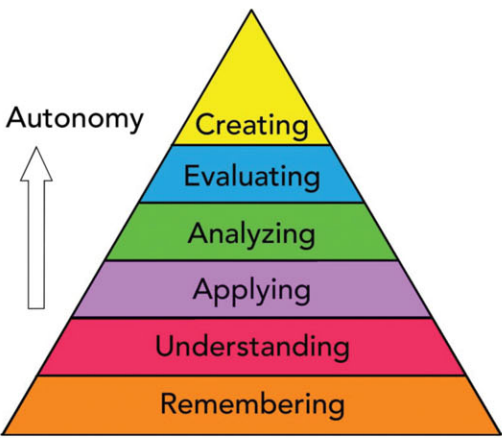
Specific or Measurable, and it would be hard to judge clearly whether it was Achieved. Learners might talk for 1 or 5 minutes. They may be incorrect in their use of tense. If the tutor changes the outcome to *'Describe 3 things you used to do when you were young using the past imperfect tense'* it is much tighter. (A trick is to include a number in learning outcomes as this makes them much more measurable.)

At the end of a lesson, the learning outcomes form a checklist for students to reflect on how well they have achieved. *'Did you manage the learning outcomes?'* *'What have you still to work on?'* *'Did you learn anything else?'* are good questions here. Self assessment is empowering for learners—but they have to know what they are assessing

themselves against. They have to ‘own’ and understand the learning outcomes.

It is undoubtedly true that learning outcomes are simpler to write, share and assess when teaching practical skills at more beginner levels eg ‘Copy and paste in Word’, ‘Use non verbal body language to indicate listening’, ‘Play Greensleeves using correct fingering’.

Ironically their creator, Benjamin Bloom intended just the opposite. He was so appalled by the quality of university teaching in the US in the 50s, where exams focussed on repeating facts and information, that he created his famous *taxonomy (classification) of educational objectives* in order to promote ‘deep’ rather than ‘surface’ learning in universities. His taxonomy (opposite) shows how students move from lower order thinking and dependence on the teacher to increasing autonomy in a subject as they progress. For each stage, he listed the active verbs that might introduce the objectives for that level (see table below).



Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy (revised 2001)

Outcomes from the earlier levels of Bloom are called ‘Mastery’ outcomes by Geoff Petty. Mastery learning can be broadly right or wrong and achieving mastery outcomes, such as ‘Name all the bones in the foot’, builds confidence in learners — they can award themselves ego-building ‘ticks’ when achieved.

Outcomes from the higher levels of Bloom are termed ‘Developmental’ by Petty. They are not obviously ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, but they promote critical thought and creativity. Eg ‘Respond to the offsite visit with ideas in your sketchbook inspired

Developmental

Mastery

Bloom’s (revised) categories of learning objectives	Examples of verbs to start outcomes as students progress in a subject
Creating	construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write, hypothesise
Evaluating	Critically appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, evaluate
Analysing	Analyse, classify, compare, give reasons, examine, experiment, distinguish, question, research
Applying	Apply, calculate, demonstrate, illustrate, interpret, operate, sketch, solve, use
Understanding	describe, explain, identify, locate, report, select
Remembering	State, define, describe, list, copy, repeat

*by what you have seen’. ‘Evaluate the impact of Jeremy Corbyn’s first Question Time in Parliament’.*

While Mastery outcomes predominate in earlier levels of learning, and Developmental outcomes in more advanced, both have a place in any class.

Beginner watercolourists will still paint (Developmental) alongside learning basic processes. Students in a history class might have ‘Give one view from each side of the debate on....’ as an outcome (Mastery), before moving on to evaluate the arguments.

Bloom is very useful for planning differentiated outcomes eg for more able learners. Differentiated questioning can be used, asking some students mastery questions and extending others with developmental ones. Some activities, such as research projects, are excellent for allowing students to achieve at different levels.

Learning outcomes help us turn teaching into learning. They form the ‘backbone’ of a class - core goals that students and the tutor can use to check progress. Students may gain more than the stated outcomes, but they still give teachers and students a ‘bottom line’ to work within.

## Adult learning and lateness

Lateness causes all sorts of problems in classes. Students miss out on crucial learning; late arrivals disrupt the rest of the group; teachers have to work harder to catch up latecomers. Additionally, Ofsted now check attendance and punctuality and use it as a quality check on our provision.

Sometimes adults have very good reasons for being late — transport, childcare or job requirements. However, if your students are being *consistently* late without prior arrangement, these are some things to try:

**Agree a contract** that everyone will be on time at the beginning of the course. This will establish that

‘being on time’ as a norm of behaviour. If you ask your students what should be in a class contract, they will almost always contribute ‘be on time’ themselves. You can then refer back to the contract if timing starts to slip.

**Always start the class on time.** If you wait for latecomers, then students will start to think ‘*I needn’t come on time as we never start on time*’ and everyone will start to arrive later and later.

**Start with something new and interesting**—make sure late students feel that they have missed something. One teacher asked his FE students why they were late. They said ‘because you don’t’ do anything important at the start of the lesson while you wait for people to arrive’. He changed his starts and they all arrived early.

**Don’t stop the class to catch up latecomers**, or go over what you have already said. Welcome them, then say you will catch them up later, or refer them to another student to find out what they have missed.

If students are persistently late, **have a quiet word with them in an adult way.** ‘*I notice that you are regularly 20 minutes late for class which means you are missing out on your learning. What would make it possible for you to get here for 6pm each week?*’ You can then start negotiating a solution. Often a simple discussion sorts the problem.

If you are teaching an accredited course with an attendance requirement, you may want to **point out the risk of failing** to the student if they are regularly missing chunks of classes.

Of course if students have valid reasons for being late, then its important to support them. Here Moodle sites can be very useful in enabling students to check what they have missed.

With a bit of attention, lateness can be improved without making adults feel they are being treated as naughty children.



## Learning and the environment

Those of you who have come across the work of Maslow in your teacher training will know that people learn better when their physical and safety needs are met.

Put bluntly, well organised furniture, a clean environment, a room at the right temperature and regular breaks will help foster better learning. Even more important is an environment where people feel safe and welcomed.

The furniture in City Lit classrooms is re-set overnight— it is not possible to do this after every class. By the evening, some classrooms are looking tired and messy.

Additionally, owing to pressure of timetabling, there is often only 5 minutes between classes. If a teacher overruns, the next tutor cannot set up the room or welcome their students properly.

Self assess yourself below on what you do to enhance the learning environment—and thus student learning:

1. Do you get to your class before the class starts so you can check and organise the room before your students arrive?
2. At the end of the class, do you make sure all your students have left by, or before, the timetabled time? (You can use the student lounge if they want to talk to you afterwards.)
3. Do you leave the room tidy, with the chairs in the standard setting for that room, and clean the whiteboard? Do you take all your handouts, flipcharts etc. away and make sure students put their rubbish in the bin?
4. Do you report things that don't work in your classroom to your line manager straight away? If we don't know something needs fixing, it won't happen.
5. Are you welcoming and helpful to any student in the corridors or lifts—particularly if they look lost? Do you walk over that dirty tissue lying in the corridor, or do you pick it up and put it in a bin?

For those of you scoring 5 out of 5 — good job!

## Gain credit for your experience....

After a successful pilot of the **Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)** project for City Lit teachers last year, the Staff Professional Development Dept. are continuing to offer it to our very experienced teachers as an alternative equivalence to the national qualifications. The emphasis is on self-assessment and the process is evidenced based, with reflection on individual roles against Professional Standards. Part-time tutors will assess against the criteria for the Award in Education and Training, and Coordinators and Programme managers will also assess themselves against the criteria for the Diploma in Education and Training.

The process takes about a term for the Award and a year for the Diploma. Once completed, an internal APEL panel will evaluate the evidence and make the awards.

*“Relevant”, “Supportive”, “Very motivating”, “Worthwhile”* are some comments from last year's participants.

To find out more about the process, and whether you are eligible to participate, please contact [Trevor.England@citylit.ac.uk](mailto:Trevor.England@citylit.ac.uk)

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