

Re-examining the Philosophy of Outcome-Based Education

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Abstract

In order to provide an alternative to the traditional and transmissive methodology of teaching, the Philippines implemented Outcome-Based Education (OBE) in 2013. This implementation was based on the claim that OBE promotes a more holistic type of education, which rests on pragmatist and constructivist roots. William G. Spady, the father of Outcome-Based Education, indeed claims to have philosophically grounded OBE on John Dewey's pragmatism. Going further back in philosophical traditions, Elias Sampa discerns Aristotelian influences on OBE. Cesar Unson follows suit but sees also OBE's Deweyan roots. As such, I intend in this paper to critically engage these treatises that purportedly support OBE's pragmatist and constructivist foundations in an attempt to debunk its alleged Deweyan and Aristotelian educational philosophical grounds.

Keywords: Outcome-Based Education, Pragmatism, Dewey, Constructivism, Spady, Philosophy of Education

Introduction

Education is a construct; so are its outcomes.¹ The “essence” of being an educator and a learner is transformative and capable of transformation. The reality is that not all of these multiple “essences” have had unanimous acceptance in particular societies. However, the debates over who, what, how, and for whom learning and education is to be understood have entered a fresh round with the new and reinforced call for the internationalization of Philippine education. The increasing dominance of the knowledge economy² driven by a neoliberal political-economic philosophy³ manifested in the prevalent official doctrines of internationalization and outcome-based education leads to the production of not what individuals and societies have autonomously seen themselves to be, but what the new neoliberal global order demands instead: the knowledge worker. The demand for the knowledge worker has impelled the Philippines to rethink its educational system and introduce,

¹ David H. Jonassen, *Evaluating Constructivistic Learning. Constructivism and the Technology of Instruction: A Conversation*. (Routledge, 1992).

² The “knowledge economy” refers to the new form of production driven by information and “intellectual capital.” In the knowledge economy, the old relations of production are re-engineered to allow a greater dependence on information systems and services. The so-called “mind-intensive” sectors take center stage particularly in software development, mass media, healthcare, and education. According to Peters et.al. (2014), governments catering to knowledge-based production restructure their national economies to concentrate on digital education and electronic creativity.

³ The term “neoliberal political economic philosophy” or “neoliberalism” underlines a system of political and economic practices that advocates the creation, through state policies, of a strong private business sector operating within the bounds of free trade. Springer, Cahill et.al. (2018) admit of a particular complexity of the term since it covers a wide range of political, social, and economic relationships spanning ‘cities to citizenship, sexuality to subjectivity, and development to discourse to name but a few,’ (p. xxv). However, reduced to its basic (and admittedly dangerously simplistic) political and economic configuration, current perspectives are rooted in the proposition that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005).

therein, reforms and innovations aimed at its internationalization.

Of the many innovations that were introduced of late in the field of Philippine education, Outcome-Based Education (OBE) is one creative appropriation that has had a profound impact on the tertiary level.⁴ In due time, OBE became the standard for quality assurance in all Philippine Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in 2013 as embedded in the CHED Memorandum Order 46, series of 2012 and its Implementing Guidelines issued by the Commission on December 11, 2012. In the global scene, however, this is not exactly a novelty.

A core question I ask in this article is, “Are the philosophical roots of outcome-based education veritable as claimed?” William Spady claims that OBE is based on John Dewey’s educational pragmatism. This paper looks into the veracity of this claim. I do this by critically engaging two treatises, those of Elias Sampa and Cesar Unson that argue for OBE’s pragmatist and constructivist foundations to debunk Spady’s claim to a Deweyan educational philosophical heritage. Later, I will use the engaged ideas of John Dewey and Friedrich von Hayek to clinch the arguments against a Deweyan thought, energizing and driving outcome-based education.

Dewey’s Philosophy of Education

John Dewey (1859–1952) is one of the most influential philosophers of education. His ideas have been used to model

⁴ There is a certain inconsistency in the use of the term. William Spady, using the singular form, calls his model “Outcome-based Education.” (Spady 1994) Harden (2007), one of the most ardent defenders of OBE follows Spady’s form. However, when it was appropriated in South Africa (Botha 2002), Australia (Donnelly 2007), and other countries (Ruitenberg 2010), it was referred to in the plural, that is, as “outcomes-based education” and some of its subsequent critiques labelled it as such (See for example Armstrong 1999). In the Philippines, the Commission on Higher Education used the plural form, i.e., “outcomes-based.” For the sake of consistency in this work, we shall use Spady’s singular form throughout the article unless a source originally quotes it in the plural.

higher education curricula, and as a guide for a philosophy of children in various countries.⁵ Dewey's notion of child-centered learning has been used as a basic principle in basic education.⁶ Child-centered learning is anchored on the educator's consideration of the overall learning environment of the child, which leads to the child becoming "a culmination of himself (or herself)." The learning environment – which includes the curriculum, methodology, and the classroom relationships – must be designed to bring about the learners' discovery of themselves and their potential as learners.

As a liberal humanist, Dewey developed his educational philosophy around pragmatism. He adhered to the belief that education should center on the actual experiences of students. Knowledge should be practical and its generation should be directed towards solving societal problems.⁷ Not all experiences are educational though and because of this Dewey emphasized the importance of critical thinking and reflective interaction between teachers, students and the school itself. For him, the school was a model for society where learners came to know and understand how society worked and what would be their significant roles in it.⁸ Dewey also highlighted the school as a platform for democratic engagement and the formation of socially conscious and involved citizens.

⁵ Carmencita Dueñas, "An Interdisciplinary Curriculum Model for Service Learning in Philippine Christian university," in *Proceedings of the 10th International Conference on Arts, Social Sciences, Humanities, and Interdisciplinary Studies*, 97-102. (Manila, 2017; Holder Jr, John J. "Philosophy for Children in Developing Countries: The Philippine Experience." *Analytic Teaching* 9, no. 2 (1989): 83-86.

⁶ Allan B. De Guzman, "The Hermeneutics of Learner-Centered Approaches and Initiatives in the Philippine Basic Education Sector." *Educational Research for Policy and Practice* 3, no. 3 (2004): 223-241.

⁷ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*. (New York: Swallow Press, 1927).

⁸ John Dewey, *Essays on Education and Politics, John Dewey: The Middle Works (1889-1924)*, Vol.8, edited by J.A. Boydston, (Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

Democracy was understood as the promotion of popular interests and a form of social and critical inquiry into its processes. It should encourage the citizens' individualities. It was a way of living and belonging, a vision of the relationships between groups and individuals, and the skills or processes they required for flourishing. It was a democracy of ordinary people in communities actively engaging in their own social evolution. In Dewey's own words, "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience."⁹

Spady's Philosophy of Education and the Development of OBE

William Spady is inspired by Dewey's philosophy of education. Spady claims that much credit in his work go to the legends, in particular, Dewey, along with Steiner and Montessori. In "Learning Communities 2.0: Educating in the Age of Empowerment," Spady and Schwahn write,

...we take little credit for being original thinkers or educational pioneers. Those credits go to legendary figures like Rudolph Steiner, John Dewey, and Maria Montessori. We've simply done our best to synthesize their work and all of this other knowledge into a framework and implementation strategy that people can work with effectively.¹⁰

Spady claims that Dewey's philosophy of education is one of the pillars of outcome-based education. Two recent critiques, however, attempt to trace OBE's roots to a much earlier tradition.

⁹ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education in Philosophy of Education: The Essential Texts*, edited by S. M. Cahn. (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 418..

¹⁰ William G. Spady, and Charles Schwahn, *Learning Communities 2.0: Educating in the Age of Empowerment*, L(anham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), vi.

Elias Sampa¹¹ frames OBE within Aristotle's four causes: its material, formal, efficient, and final causes. Aristotle argued that in explaining why something exists, it is necessary but insufficient to point out its material components. The elements that constitute or make up the thing are more important than the form of the thing. In other words, what makes something what it is, is comprised of what caused it to be (i.e. the four basic causes of things). Since these elements comprise education, these are essential to explaining its nature. Cesar Unson¹² likewise inquires into the roots of OBE philosophy by critiquing Sampa's¹³ work and outlining a thesis grounding OBE on both Aristotelian and Deweyan thoughts.

Sampa¹⁴ notes that Spady considers the integration of Aristotle's four causes of things into a unified strategic educational design. The project's material cause "would include the education inputs, students, curriculum, course contents, teachers, and the teaching-learning process." Thus, the material cause of OBE is the input or the resources that go into the system. It also includes the people involved in it (the teachers and the learners) and the materials and methodologies used. It encompasses not only the curricula but the course offerings and various syllabi as well.

The formal cause embraces "the curriculum standards, competencies, regulatory and statutory requirements, quality assurance mechanisms, and various specifications." This means that the formal cause includes the minimum specifications that regulatory agencies (such as the Department of Education [DepEd], the Commission on Higher Education [CHED] and the various accrediting associations to which various educational institutions belong) require schools to attain and, of course,

¹¹ Elias M. Sampa, "Forging a Philosophical Foundation for Outcomes-Based Education," in *International Journal of Education and Research* 2, no. 6 (2014), 517-528.

¹² Cesar J. Unson, *Spady's Outcome-Based Education Framework: Philosophical Foundations and Teaching applications*, (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Manila: De La Salle University, 2019).

¹³ Sampa, 2014.

¹⁴ Ibid.

surpass. These minimum standards and quality assurance levels are specified in the various issuances and memoranda of the regulatory agencies and accrediting institutions.

The efficient cause of the project is the combination of the “state, regulatory bodies, investors-owners, the school campus, pedagogies, curriculum developers and other workers who brought together the education system in accordance with the blueprint for its development” while its final cause would be, of course, “the educational outcomes.”¹⁵

Sampa clearly points out an important observation of OBE’s educational project – the primacy of outcomes in the ultimate ordering of the causes. He states that “OBE designs *reverse the ordering of causes*... as: clarity of purpose (final cause), designing backwards (material cause), high expectations (efficient causes), and expanded opportunity (formal cause).”¹⁶ However, he glosses over how this reversal impacts the teaching-learning processes. Such a discussion is missing in his work. Instead, he derives a series of hypotheses, that “(f)irst, OBE reflects a constructivist knowledge paradigm... second, OBE is grounded in relativist ontology; third, OBE embraces a subjective epistemology; and fourth, OBE thrives on naturalistic pedagogy.”¹⁷

I contend that the reversal of causes impacts on Sampa’s hypotheses in significant ways.¹⁸ I elucidate this and disprove the constructivist foundation of OBE. The reversal of the causes negates the constructionist argument offered by Sampa.¹⁹ When the end dictates the means for its attainment, the end is no longer constructed by the learner. The learner, instead, becomes its captive. The effect of the reversal of causes is that educational outcomes become the determinants of educational systems and processes.

¹⁵ Ibid., 519-520.

¹⁶ Ibid., 521. (emphasis mine)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Spady, 2010.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The first hypothesis: OBE reflects a constructivist knowledge paradigm

Winch and Gingell define constructivism in the context of education as an offshoot of the Kantian idea that what we gather from the outside world through our senses is organized by our mind into something that makes sense to us.²⁰ Constructivists, therefore, claim that there is no objective reality. The knowing individual interprets and constructs reality based on how one experiences and relates to his/her environment. Ernst von Glasersfeld refers to constructivism as a theory where “knowledge does not reflect an objective, ontological reality but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience.”²¹ In relation to learning, we construct what we learn.

Sampa bases his definition of educational constructivism on James Bruner’s²² original theories. Drawing from Bruner, Sampa states that “learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon existing knowledge.”²³ This is accomplished through the “active process (of learning whose) facets ... include selection and transformation of information, decision making, generating hypotheses, and making meaning from information and experiences.”²⁴ He quotes Bruner asserting that, “to perceive is to categorize, to conceptualize is to categorize, to learn is to form categories, to make decisions is to categorize.”²⁵ He uses the following Spadian passage to justify his categorization of OBE as constructivist,

²⁰ C. Winch and John Gingell, *Philosophy of Education, The Key Concepts*, 2nd edition, (London: Routledge, 2008).

²¹ Ernst von Glasersfeld, *The Invented Reality*, (New York: Norton, 1984).

²² James Bruner, *The Process of Education*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²³ Sampa, 2014, 523.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ James Bruner, *The Process of Education*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960) cited in Elias M. Sampa, “Forging a Philosophical Foundation for Outcomes-Based Education,” 523.

“The basic tenets of OBE are shifting the focus of educational activity from teaching to learning; skills to thinking; content to process; and teacher instruction to student demonstration.²⁶

Constructivism (in educational philosophy) has ramified since then. However, Hoover reduces it into a pair of essentials.²⁷ First, it entails learners constructing new ways of understanding concepts from what they know at present, with their current knowledge influencing the emergence of the new. And, second, the constructed knowledge or understanding emerges through a dialectical process between the learner and his/her learning environment. In the words of Amineh and Davatgari, “learning is an active process in which learners negotiate their understanding in the light of what they experience in the new learning situation.”²⁸ Bruner extends the idea of negotiations further and says constructivism contemplates even the negotiation of the curriculum.²⁹ In short, real constructivism envisions that the students are welcome to negotiate changes in the curriculum and, through it, the educational program, itself, and – more importantly – its outcomes.

These discussions disprove Sampa’s first hypothesis. The fact that in OBE, outcomes – the final cause – constitute the primal cause and determine the form and substance of the subsequent causes, cancels out its constructivist assumption. If determined outcomes preordain the curriculum, lesson plans, choice of books and references, and the course content, (i.e. the material cause),

²⁶ Sampa (p.523) credits a certain William (cited in A. Tavner, “Outcomes-Based Education in a University Setting.” *Australian Journal of Engineering Education* 2, 2005, 1-14). Yet, neither William nor Tavner is found in his bibliographic entries.

²⁷ Wesley A. Hoover, “The Practice Implications of Constructivism,” *SEDL Letter* 9, no. 3, (1996). <https://sedl.org/pubs/sedletter/v09n03/practice.htm>

²⁸ Roya Jafari Amineh and Hanieh Davatgari, “Review of Constructivism and Social Constructivism,” *Journal of Social Sciences, Literature and Languages* 1, no. 1 (April 2015), 9-16.

²⁹ Bruner, 1960.

the evaluation tools, examination forms, competency standards, mechanisms of quality assurance, and other course requirements (the formal cause), and the competencies and qualifications of the faculty as well as their methodologies (the efficient cause), then learning and teaching acquires, not a constructivist, but a linear, structured, controlled, and even a straitjacketed character. Both teacher and learner are then steered toward preset learning goals through formalized pre-structured techniques and methodologies of teaching and learning. The primacy of the final cause rules out new and emergent knowledge, methodologies and pedagogical techniques designed to arrive at alternative results (other than the predetermined outcomes) and negotiated curricula. Needless to say, predetermined learning goals present difficulties in the emergence of negotiated outcomes envisioned by constructivist education.

Second hypothesis: OBE is rooted in relativist ontology

Relativism refers to “the idea that there are belief systems – whether factual or ethical – which are somehow constitutive of a given society or social group; which conflict in some way with the belief systems of other societies or social groups, and for which there is no objective decision procedure when such a conflict occurs.”³⁰ This idea suggests that knowledge – and its acquisition or generation – varies from society to society or from group to group. Ontologically, reality depends on how it is perceived or constructed. Thus, the acquisition of the knowledge of reality or the *ac-knowledge-ment* (this is the author’s construction) thereof also depends on relativistic (or constructivist) approaches. Sampa sees relativistic ontology as implying “an existence of multiple realities, multiple answers, multiple perspectives and so forth.”³¹ These multiplicities arise from social constructions and formulations of knowledge and reality. He expounds, apropos his first hypothesis,

³⁰ Winch and Gingell, *Philosophy of Education, The Key Concepts*, 2nd edition, 180.

³¹ Sampa, 2014, 524.

In the Constructivist theory, learners *invent their own ideas* through interaction with others and the environment. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions; its focus is on knowledge construction. Knowledge is constructed through one's personal experiences, previous knowledge, and beliefs. Learners have to be simply encouraged, *to discover principles by themselves* through varied opportunities for dialogue among their peers and with the teachers. Teachers' task is to present information to be learned that matches or closely matches the student's current level of learning. The curriculum is to be organized in a spiral manner, so that students continually build upon what they have already learned. The teaching strategies have to be diversified to suit student responses and encourage them to analyze, interpret, and predict information in the course of their learning.³²

Given this, it is, therefore, difficult to follow Sampa's³³ argument that, "when OBE is defined as a process that focuses on what is to be learned - the outcomes, it is arguable that there is an implied relativistic ontology there." Sampa declares that in constructivism, "(d)etermining what things are 'essential for all students to be able to do' is also a transitional one."³⁴ Indeed, citing Biggs, Sampa notes that constructivism "goes further to provide a more dynamic approach to understanding learning outcomes to include both *emergent outcomes* and *unintended outcomes* that are equally beneficial to the purposes."³⁵ If so, then the argument on OBE's constructivism self-destructs with his

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 524

³⁴ Ibid., 523

³⁵ Sampa (p. 523) cites J. Biggs (2007) yet what is found in his bibliography is J. Biggs., *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does?*, (Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1999).

own vital discovery that OBE's final cause (i.e. pre-determined outcomes) is the system's primary determining cause.

Following the constructivist educational theory, learning then becomes a process through which students develop and discover knowledge through their personal experiences and interactions with their social and physical worlds. The knowledge and reality thus discovered are continually molded and shaped by further ongoing experiences. It is a constantly negotiated reality. As a consequence, the learner him/herself, is *emergent* and *negotiated* in the construction process.³⁶ In the relativistic paradigm, a relativist approach that sets up "expected" outcomes does not reject this type of learning, nor does it merely tolerate it. It recognizes that the growth and expansion of learning and knowledge are constantly influenced by the learner's evolving interpretations of the world and his/her experience of it. These negotiations (and subsequent re-negotiations) are precluded from OBE.

Third hypothesis: OBE embraces a subjective epistemology

Sampa defines a subjective epistemology as the co-creation of knowledge by the teacher and the student. He says, "knowledge in this philosophical mode is a product of encounter between the teacher and the students, and it is this meeting or convergence of thought and experiences that provide justification of knowledge and refutation of skepticism."³⁷ As argument of OBE's adherence to subjective epistemology, Sampa cites Spady in connection with the assessment of outcomes as "a culminating demonstration of learning. It is a demonstration of learning that occurs at the end

³⁶ The "negotiated self" is a concept derived from George Herbert Mead. Basically, Mead explains that the self consists of an "I" which is the active, directing component and a "me" which is the receiving, passive component. The resultant self is the result of the interaction between the I (e.g. "I want this!") and the me (e.g. "But society wants me to be this."). Thus, Mead argues that the self is always negotiating what the individual wants and what society wants him/her to be (Ritzer and Stepnisky 2018).

³⁷ Sampa, 2014.

of a learning experience. It is the result of learning which is a visible and observable demonstration of three things: knowledge, combined with competence, combined with orientations.”³⁸ In a somewhat unrelated vein, he cites Towers and Towers who argue that “Education that is outcome-based is learner-centered, results-oriented system founded on the belief that all individuals can learn.”³⁹

The third hypothesis is perhaps the weakest of the four propositions of Sampa regarding the philosophical orientations of outcome-based education. I have previously argued that the primacy of outcomes that are predetermined in accordance with the priorities and interests of the educational system preclude a constructivist as well as a relativist orientation for OBE. The second OBE principle entails a designing down process where curricula, teaching methodologies, and educational materials (i.e. the material causes of education) are designed backwards or, in other words, formulated to attain outcomes that are already determined strategically.

In this case, knowledge and its production no longer rest on the dialectical encounter of student and teacher. There is no longer the possibility of the student engaged in the practical search for learning and knowledge. Sampa misconstrues Spady’s statement. If outcomes are predetermined, then it would be merely the student’s performance as measured against these outcomes that would be assessed. Indeed, “all individuals can learn,” but the results of learning will have to be assessed vis-à-vis the standards that have been determined a priori and toward which methods and strategies of teaching and learning are specifically and unilaterally designed. Learner-centeredness does not mean placing the student as the aim and goal of education but focusing all that constitute the material cause on the child so that he/she will be directed toward the goals and outcomes that have been preset. And if the outcomes of learning

³⁸ William G. Spady, *Outcomes Based Education: Critical issues and Answers*, (American Association of School Administrators, 1994).

³⁹ Sampa, 2014.

have been preset by conditions, processes, and factors outside of the learner, how can they be considered subjective?

Fourth hypothesis: OBE thrives on a naturalistic pedagogy

Naturalistic pedagogy, according to Sampa underscores learning as based on the experience of the natural world.⁴⁰ He argues that the following excerpt from the founders of OBE echoes this philosophy, to wit:

Outcomes are clear, observable demonstrations of student learning that occur after a significant set of learning experiences. They are not values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, activities, assignments, goals, scores, grades, or averages, as many people believe. Typically, these demonstrations, or performances, reflect three things: (1) what the student knows; (2) what the student can actually do with what he or she knows; (3) the student's confidence and motivation in carrying out the demonstration. A well-defined outcome will have clearly defined content or concepts and be demonstrated through a well-defined process beginning with a directive or request such as 'explain', 'organize', or 'produce'.⁴¹

He also argues that Boschee and Baron⁴² place OBE squarely within naturalistic pedagogy and cites them as saying, "Learning is facilitated carefully toward achievement of the outcomes, characterized by its appropriateness to each learner's development level, and active and experienced-based."⁴³

⁴⁰ Sampa, 2014.

⁴¹ Ibid., 525

⁴² Floyd Boschee and Mark A. Baron, *Outcome-Based Education: Developing Programs through Strategic Planning*, (Lancaster, Pa: Technomic Pub, 1993).

⁴³ Sampa, 2014.

It is difficult to reconcile Sampa's selection of excerpts with naturalistic pedagogy given his definition of it. The processes mentioned do not have anything to do with placing the learner in the context of a physical environment (i.e. the natural world) with which he/she engages in order to learn. A naturalistic pedagogy, in fact, leads to the development of values, feelings, and beliefs which OBE fails to consider as several studies have argued.⁴⁴

Cesar Unson, on the other hand, reverses two of Sampa's conceptual equations.⁴⁵ He equates OBE's expanded opportunity principle, which Sampa identifies as Aristotle's formal cause, with the efficient cause, using house construction as a metaphor to identify the "educators who give support to the learning success of students. Curricula developers, schools, utilized pedagogies, and the teachers" as the builders⁴⁶ of OBE. The high expectations principle of OBE, which Sampa linked to the efficient cause, is identified by Unson as the formal cause, "the structure or blueprint of the house," as he says in his metaphor.

One need not follow intensively Unson's explorations into OBE as being grounded in Aristotelian philosophy since his arguments in this regard would apply to most if not all educational approaches. It could be argued that Aristotle's philosophy of education guides, not only OBE but also traditional education, the critique of which OBE was supposed to be designed and launched as well. Aristotelian educational principles cited by Unson such as education as "a matter of public concern and that the purpose of the state is to educate its citizens", that schools are where students learn virtue as leading to happiness and a good life, the philosophy of the "golden mean," that "self-realization is needed in order to attain happiness, and education is the cultivation and perfection of human potentialities," and that "education should be towards an end, that is, the perfection of

⁴⁴ See for example William Cox, Alan Arroyo, Evie Tindall, and Milton Uecker, "'Outcome-Based Education: A Critique of the Theory, Philosophy and Practice,'" *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 6, no. 1, (1997), 79-94.

⁴⁵ Unson, 2019.

⁴⁶ Referred to as "implementors" in Cesar J. Unson, *Spady's Outcome-Based Education Framework: Philosophical Foundations and Teaching applications*, 53

human nature,” are general principles that most educational systems uphold in society.⁴⁷

Unson’s thesis traces some of OBE’s philosophical roots to John Dewey. He explores this in his study more deeply. I agree that many of the statements made by Spady and the proponents of OBE conform to Dewey’s pedagogical beliefs. Unson notes that Dewey’s pragmatic education underscores the need for “practical solutions to practical problems” and that, similarly, Spady and Marshall believe that “school success is of limited benefit if students cannot apply what they learned to real-life situations.”⁴⁸ He also parallels Dewey’s disapproval of “authoritarian structures and the traditional teaching methods in schools” with OBE’s rejection of “time-defined and calendar-driven systems of education.”⁴⁹

Unson sees Dewey’s belief that “individuals should be educated as social beings that are capable of participating and directing their own social affairs... in OBE’s second purpose that states that schools should be structured and operated so that competencies for success could be achieved and maximized for all students.” He says further that Dewey’s notion of education as “a way to free the individual to engage in continuous growth directed towards appropriate individual and social aims... mirrors the expanded opportunity principle of the OBE framework in which students are afforded different learning opportunities for success.”⁵⁰ The Dewey principle that “schooling and learning... must always be directed toward an end in view,” according to Unson, reflects Dewey’s recognition of importance of “outcomes” contemplated in OBE. The importance of outcomes is further seen in Dewey’s philosophy when he claims that the learning process should have a clear purpose and an understanding of surrounding conditions.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁸ William G. Spady and Kit J. Marshall, “Beyond Traditional Outcome-Based Education.” *Educational Leadership* 9, no.2 (October 1991), 67-72.

⁴⁹ Unson, 2019, 55-56.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Unson notes that “in Dewey’s philosophy of education, a close link can be seen between a child’s life and his or her experiences as a continuous process” and that “Dewey believes that education should be a journey of experiences, building upon each other in order to help students create and understand new experiences... (with) the scope of equipping a child with social competence” and relates this “to OBE’s first purpose of ensuring that all students are equipped with the knowledge, competence, and qualities needed to be successful lifelong learners”.

Unson makes further parallels such as Dewey’s principle of child-centered education to OBE’s learner-centered education and Dewey’s belief that children are variably situated and, therefore, must be educated from variable approaches to OBE’s “first premise... which states that all students can succeed, but not in the same way and on the same day.” According to the argument, Dewey’s idea that “teachers should, thus, serve as knowledgeable guides and resources for students (and not) be seen merely as task masters, who just drill students in subject matter is ... echoed in OBE’s third premise, which calls for its implementers to encourage all students to be successful learners.”⁵²

Unson clarifies that there is no contradiction between Dewey’s child-centered approach and OBE’s emphasis on pre-defined outcomes. He argues,

...if one looks closely...Spady has already noted of the importance of different institutions having differing ways of implementing the OBE system, depending on the kind of outcomes each has defined on the onset. So, for example, a business school may have different culminating outcomes from, say, a fashion school or a school that is known for sports-related programs. It is assumed here, of course, that parents or guardians are, in fact, free to choose, rationally, which institution they would wish to place their child - that is, taking into consideration their child’s own inclinations.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., 57-58.

⁵³ Ibid.

Yet, it takes more than simply a juxtaposing of selections to prove the Deweyan roots of OBE. Doing so exposes the danger of misunderstanding the directions toward which Dewey intends pragmatism, child-centered learning, and other pedagogical concepts to lead. Unson apparently conflated these directions of Dewey's educational philosophy with OBE's outcomes. They could not be any more different from each other.

The key to Dewey's understanding of pragmatic education is, as a matter of fact, touched by Unson when he cites the democratic and child-focused elements of Dewey's philosophy. This key is the individuality of the learner. OBE's design is toward the attainment of standardized outcomes, a concept that clashes directly with the concept of child-centered education. As a matter of consequence, OBE somehow blurs the uniqueness of the individual learner's experience and how these experiences shape individual's responses to the social conditions that confront him/her. For OBE, pragmatism involves the selection and prescription of a set of competencies that all learners must acquire. The role of the teacher is to facilitate the acquisition of these prescriptions. In contrast, Dewey, sees the teacher as a mediator of knowledge, not a facilitator, so that the individual learner experiences education each in his/her own revealing way. Mason elaborates on this educational experience:

Dewey's defense of the role of experience in education is based in his pragmatist understanding of knowledge. For him, knowledge is an instrument for action, rather than a passive reflection of given or fixed essential phenomena. Teaching is thus not about the transmission of a static body of representational knowledge, but about creating worthwhile educational experiences. It is the teacher's task to create a learning environment which "will interact with the existing capacities and needs of those taught to create a worthwhile experience." This interaction of a learner's existing capacities with the appropriately structured challenges of the learning environment enables the learner to develop new knowledge. For Dewey, a

worthwhile educational experience is one that stimulates the desire to go on learning. The teacher thus plays a vital role in carefully structuring an educational environment with which the learner, given his current knowledge and potential, can interact. In her careful, thoughtful, and active creation of a worthwhile educational experience – one which will in turn lead to further experience and ultimately to growth – the teacher is certainly not a merely passive facilitator, even less a transmitter of static information.⁵⁴

Thus, contrary to Unson, there is apparently a contradiction between Dewey's child-centered approach with that of OBE's emphasis on pre-defined outcomes. A business school may prescribe different outcomes from a fashion school or a sports school and parents, indeed, are free to choose where their child will be enrolled taking into consideration their child's preferences. However, each school – and indeed, each program within that school – will have its own set of standardized preset outcomes which all students must attain and against which their performances will be measured at the end of each term.

Engaging Dewey and Hayek

Dewey saw development and growth in education as requiring flexibility and fluidity which are antithetical to the rigidity of outcome-based education. This was indispensable in the quest for democracy. The child has to “learn how to learn.”⁵⁵ According to Oelkers, Dewey eschewed learning delivered in packages. Learning has to occur as a process where, in its course, both teacher and student adopts and adjusts to certain

⁵⁴ Mark Mason, “Teachers as Critical Mediators of Knowledge.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34, no. 2 (2000): 343-362.

⁵⁵ John Dewey, *Essays on Education and Politics, John Dewey: The Middle Works (1889-1924)*, Vol.8, edited by J.A. Boydston, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 50.

consequences that may happen along the way.⁵⁶ In this train of thought, Dewey also frowns upon the idea of ultimate outcomes. Students cannot be regarded as blank slates upon which the new knowledges and skills required in the new world order have to be written. Students can learn in their own way and can be trusted especially in their adulting years to know what they want to learn.⁵⁷ This means that at the tertiary level, at least, methods of delivery as well as the specific content of courses need not be rigidly mandated. The determination of specific outcomes in OBE indicates an adherence to the blank-slate presumption both on the part of the teacher and the student; the learner needs to learn what the system mandates he/she should and the teacher needs to learn how and what to teach in the manner the system requires him/her.

It is here that I introduce Friedrich von Hayek. Hayek was a neoliberal thinker whose advocacy of the free market is often to be taken at odds with Dewey's position against the former's social reformist conception of liberal democracy. According to Chandler, Dewey wanted to move beyond the public-private divide while Hayek sought to preserve it.⁵⁸ Yet there are certain similarities between these two strange bedfellows that bears much on our discussion of the role of the educational system and how democratic values are to be formed in this context.

First, Dewey and Hayek both regarded with suspicion the traditional linear relationship between society and government – that is, that government, its nature and composition, depended on the straightforward rule of the majority and, through this, democratic government, thus, is representative of the rule of the people. For them, the relationship is non-linear and the will of the people is thus a collaboration of sorts among various sectors of interest. The development of democratic governance, therefore,

⁵⁶ Jurgen Oelkers, "Democracy and Education: About the Future of a Problem" *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 19, no. 1 (2000), 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁸ David Chandler, "Democracy Unbound? Non-linear Politics and the Politicization of Everyday Life," *European Journal of Social Theory* 17, no. 1 (February 2014), 20.

does not progress in a linear evolution. It shifts according to new social relations both within society and in the international community.⁵⁹

This conception of democracy is important for outcome-based education in at least three ways. First, the nonlinear character of democratic governance means that it would be counterproductive to promote liberal democratic values by centrally designing the educational system along a set of predetermined outcomes that purport to prepare the graduate for the challenges of employment in an integrated international economy. Even Hayek, the neoliberal, argues that since nonlinearity characterized the world order, a rigid and inflexible package of educational reforms would not be able to anticipate the rapidly changing needs of the globalized world. Second, and corollary to the first, imposing through a centralized public institution a set of outcomes relevant to current world conditions would produce four or five years later a batch of graduates whose knowledge and skills would be dissonant with the global society that has since transformed into new forms and relationships. And third, the nonlinear character of society would sunder apart the standardized modes of learning in the classroom as the multicultural character of tertiary students would work against the imposition of centralized forms of learning. Standardization works against the students' (and the teachers') rational ways of teaching and learning as formative and developmental responses to the world they live in.

As Chandler says, both Hayek and Dewey maintain that "reasoning was not something separate from experience and social practice: reasoning was not a rationalist reflection upon the world but a response to the world based on associational norms and experiences."⁶⁰ The following excerpts illustrate the parallelism of these ideas though Hayek's was more biologically focused and Dewey's was more sociological.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 50-53.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 51.

When Dewey said,

[S]ingular beings in their singularity think, want and decide, what they think and strive for, the content of their beliefs and intentions is a subject-matter provided by association. Thus man is not merely de facto associated, but he becomes a social animal in the make-up of his ideas, sentiments and deliberate behavior. What he believes, hopes for and aims at is the outcome of association and intercourse.⁶¹

Hayek similarly argues that,

...the continued existence of those complex structures which we call organisms is made possible by their capacity of responding to certain external influences by such changes in their structure or activity as are required to maintain or restore the balance necessary for their persistence.⁶²

Hayek was, therefore, more constructivist than he might admit. If this was the pattern of human reasoning and the school is an indispensable institution for the formation of democratic values, then students must not be made to undergo systems of learning that aimed for pre-designed knowledge and skills. The goal of educational institutions must be democratic values themselves in order that, from social practice, students (and teachers) would be able to design and construct a democratic system of governance that reflects their common will and shared desires.

⁶¹ John Dewey, *The Public and its Problems*, 25.

⁶² F.A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, (United States: Liberty Fund Inc.), 1952.

Conclusion

Both pragmatists in a sense, Dewey and Hayek believe that the realm of the practical (not the predesigned) governed the functionality of knowledge and the progress of educational reform. In the words of Koopman, both believe that progress “contingently emerges within complex processes — it is not the preordained result of the successful execution of a plan.”⁶³ Koopman sees two crucial features in Hayek’s concept of rationality, which we find relevant to our critique on OBE. The first is process, that is, that knowledge is functional only when it was understood and acquired through actual practical processes. The second crucial feature is plurality which means that there can be no single form of knowledge that can be imparted and imbibed. Both these crucial features militate against outcome-based education’s clean-cut plan whose internal consistency binds learning outcomes at all levels of the educational structure. At the very least, it imprisons students and teachers within an undemocratic system. At the very worst, it leads to educational experiences that ultimately become the basis for undemocratic systems of governance that political leaders pass off as genuine democracy. We could, therefore, ask now: Is our present system of unquestioning obedience the outcome of a system of education that required us to stifle our initiatives and simply imbibe the knowledge and skills we were taught to acquire but not those we ourselves thought we needed to develop?

From the above discussions, it can be deduced that outcome-based education cannot have strong and unshakeable claims for rootedness in constructivist, relativist, subjective and naturalist pedagogical philosophy. Neither can it claim to be based on Deweyan pragmatic philosophy. Hayek’s idea also lends support to the argument that OBE would lead to a democratic form of governance. If so, then in what philosophy are OBE’s roots planted?

⁶³ Colin Koopman, “Morals and Markets: Liberal Democracy Through Dewey and Hayek.” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 23, no. 3 (2009), 155.

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