The Nonsense of Outcome-Based Education

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The most controversial words in the education world today are Outcome-Based Education (sometimes called Performance-Based Education, and formerly called Mastery Learning). Parents recognize it as a process that rejects the basics, subject matter knowledge, competition, meaningful report cards, and the Carnegie units, and substitutes material that is subjective, often psychological, and usually not capable of measurement.

Parents object to Outcome-Based Education because it uses children as guinea pigs in an experimental process that has not been proven anywhere. There is absolutely no research that proves academic gains from using Performance or Outcome-Based Education.

Outcome-Based advocates use Kentucky as their Exhibit A. Kentucky embarked on a massive restructuring in 1990 and spent more than $1 billion of additional tax money on the changeover. Yet Kentucky Commissioner of Education Thomas Boysen said last October that test scores show "no clear difference between schools that have been deeply involved in reform efforts and others that have made no changes."

Kentucky's Learning Goals and Outcomes prove that the whole system is a cheat - on students, on parents, and on taxpayers. It starts with platitudes, then progresses through bureaucratic jargon, then spells out subjective outcomes that cannot be scored, and finally descends to specifics that range from the ridiculous, to a waste of time, to the downright offensive.

Kentucky's six "Learning Goals" established by the State Legislature sound like Mom and apple pie. Here is the second of the six: "Students shall develop their abilities to apply core concepts and principles from mathematics, the sciences, the arts , the humanities, social studies, practical living studies, and vocational studies to what they will encounter throughout their lives."

The Learning Goals then moved into the hands of the state Department of Education, which wrote the Learner Outcomes. Here is Learner Outcome #2.32 listed under the above Goal: "Students demonstrate positive strategies for achieving and maintaining mental and emotional wellness."

How is the school going to grade the child's performance of "emotional wellness"? It is obvious that this kind of "outcome" is wholly subjective and psychological, as well as being non-academic.

But stay tuned. Now we move to typical specifics of how the schools actually teach Mental and Emotional Wellness. The quoted material below is taken directly from Kentucky's published Goals and Outcomes.

1. "Establish goals for improving and maintaining self-esteem; plan implement, and record accomplishments." Tell me, how would you "plan" a self-

esteem accomplishment?

How would you score it? How would a child get an A or an F? It becomes obvious why Outcome-Based Education eliminates traditional letter grades.

2. "Identify and analyze stressful situations in your life." That's an outrageous invasion of the child's privacy!

3. "Interview a graduate from a substance-abuse program; create a case study of his/her drug history."

4. "Research as a class the issue of teenage suicide by engaging in the following activities: Read a novel and watch a movie that focuses on teenage suicide. Interview a psychiatrist who has worked with teenagers who have attempted suicide. Read articles and books about teenage suicide. Interview parents of teenage suicide victims."

This depressing activity sounds like it is calculated to destroy a child's emotional wellness, rather than improve it.

5. Here is the activity specified for the Science class: "Role-play a doctor who has diagnosed a patient as being HIV positive."

6. Here is the activity specified for the Mathematics class: "Identify dependent and independent variables in situations involving stress."

It's no wonder that American students are scoring last on international math and science tests when classroom time is wasted on this kind of nonsense.

7. Here is the activity specified for Social Studies class: "Examine the mental and emotional wellness of past or present world leaders." So, this is how History has been degraded; instead of studying about George Washington's great achievements, the student is taught to psychoanalyze his mental and emotional wellness.

There are so many things wrong with putting this type of teaching in the public schools that it's hard to know where to begin. It is not education; it's experimentation.

It's not academic; it's psychological. It's not uplifting; it's depressing. It's a terrible invasion of privacy. It won't improve students' test scores. It's not capable of objective scoring. No wonder parents are up in arms against it!

Parents don't send their children to school to study self-esteem or to engage in gab sessions with drug abusers, HIV victims, and people who are thinking about suicide. Parents send their children to school to be taught reading, writing, mathematics, history, geography and science.

When will the schools bring traditional basics back to the public schools?