The meaning of learning outcomes – depending on what you do and where you stand

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The presentation and the project

Two goals for the presentation:

1. Summarize the results of a case study of how learning outcomes are conceptualized by:
   – International scholars (document analysis of publications)
   – Norwegian teachers (interview of 41 teachers on grading practices) and
   – Norwegian policy makers (document analysis national budget from 1997-2011)

2. Facilitate an arena for discussion of the meaning of learning outcomes.
   – Is there such a thing as a common/universal or even dominant conceptualization of learning outcomes?
Definisjoner – ”klassikere”

• *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)

✓ *A learning outcome is a written statement of what the successful student/learner is expected to be able to do at the end of the module/course unit, or qualification.* (Adam 2004)

✓ *Learning outcomes refer to the personal changes or benefits that follow as a result of learning. Such changes or benefits can be measured in terms of abilities or achievements.* (Nusche 2008)

✓ *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)

✓ *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)
Issues of concern?

• Scholars operate with a far broader concept than the two other groups, but mostly with an internal focus, missing out the external focus?

• Policymakers mainly closed and externally focused approach, missing out the internal and more open approach?

• Teachers inside focused, subject important for their perception of LOs
A dominant conceptualization of LOs?

Where do you stand?

Undergraduate, graduate/professional student learning outcomes at IUPUI: “Student learning outcomes are statements that specify what students will know, be able to do, or be able to demonstrate as a result of successful completion of the experience. Outcomes are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, attitudes or value.”


The case studies


• Prøitz, T. S. (2012) Learning outcomes as key concept in policy documents. in progress