The ToolBox

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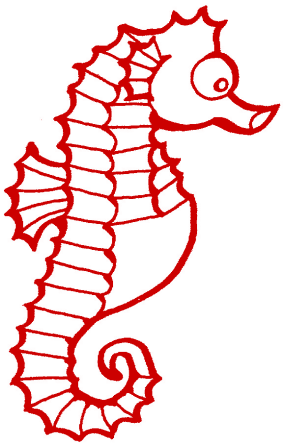
A Teaching and Learning Resource for the Faculty of Indiana Wesleyan University

Learning Outcomes and Expectations

Once upon a time a Sea Horse gathered up his seven pieces of eight and cantered out to find his fortune. Before he had traveled very far, he met an Eel, who said, "Psst. Hey bud. Where 'ya goin?"

"I'm going out to find my fortune," replied the Sea Horse, proudly.

"You're in luck," said the Eel. "For four pieces of eight you can have this speedy flipper, and then you will be able to get there a lot faster."



"Gee, that's swell," said the Sea Horse, He paid the money, put on the flipper, and slithered off at twice the speed. Soon he came upon a Sponge, who said,

"Psst. Hey bud. Where 'ya goin?"

"I'm going out to find my fortune," replied the Sea Horse.

"You're in luck," said the Sponge. "For a small fee I will let you have this jet-propelled scooter so that you will be able to travel a lot faster."

So the Sea Horse bought the scooter with his remaining money and went zooming through the sea five times faster. Soon he came upon a Shark, who said,

"Psst. Hey bud. Where 'ya goin?"

"I'm going out to find my fortune," replied the Sea Horse.

"You're in luck. If you'll take this short cut," said the Shark, pointing to his open mouth, "you'll save yourself a lot of time."

"Gee, thanks," said the Sea Horse, and zoomed off into the interior of the Shark, and was never heard from again.

Source: Robert Mager (1984). *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, (Fearon Teachers Aids), p. v.

According to Wikipedia, "Orienteering is a running sport involving navigation with a map and compass….The competition is a timed race in which individual participants use a special purpose map and a magnetic compass to navigate through diverse terrain (often wooded) and visit, in sequence, control points that are indicated on the map." Doesn't that sound like what faculty members and students do every semester (e.g., running a timed race, using a special purpose map, navigation through difficult terrain)?

In *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (AACU, 2002), this connection between orienteering and learning outcomes was expanded in the following ways:

- Orienteers use an accurate and detailed map and a compass (and faculty members use curricula that articulate student learning outcomes).
- Novice orienteers begin with simple courses and proceed to more difficult courses (and students progress through courses of varied developmental and academic difficulty).
- A standard orienteering course has as starting point, a series of control points, and a final destination (and courses include a finite collection of checkpoints for progress and a final set of identified learning outcomes).

As faculty, it is critically important for us to remember that the classes we teach are a journey and that we have an obligation to assist our students in finding their way to the final destination for each course that we are teaching.

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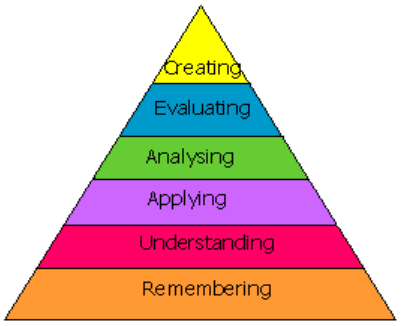
Considerations for the Crafting of Learning Outcomes

Levels of Learning

In 1956, Dr. Benjamin Bloom lead a group of educational psychologists in creating a hierarchy of intellectual behaviors that can occur during the learning process. The chart below depicts this hierarchy of learning as it was revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

This graphic provides an excellent tool for thinking about the types of tasks that we require of our students as we ask questions, design assignments, and create assessment tools. Anderson and Krathwohl would encourage teachers to think seriously about designing instructional experiences and assessment strategies that move beyond a simple recall of facts. We should think about ways of teaching and assessment that require "higher order" thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creation. Where do your course objectives, teaching strategies, questions, and assessments fit in this hierarchy? How might you revise the courses you teach to encourage your students to engage in higher-order thinking?



Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (Eds.). (2001). A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of educational objectives: Complete edition, New York : Longman

How Do You Eat an Elephant?

There is an old, and overly used, adage that asks the question, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer, of course, is "One bite at a time." This example begs the question that is an eternal challenge to college faculty members: How much is enough (or too much, or not enough) content to cover over the course of a semester? Consider these facts:

- You can't teach your students all there is to know about your discipline
- You can't teach your students everything that you know about your discipline, and
- You are the person in the best position to systematically identify the direction, focus and quantity of content that will be covered. Take seriously your power and ability to determine the most cogent and significant knowledge, skills, and dispositions that you will emphasize over the course of the semester.

A Framework for Thinking About Learning Outcomes

The National Council on Accreditation in Teacher Education (NCATE) is the organization that is primarily responsible for assessing and accrediting teacher education programs in the United States. As part of their framework, prospective teachers are expected to demonstrate competencies in the areas of knowledge, skills, and dispositions. These three categories of performance can also provide a relevant and meaningful way of thinking about the kinds of learning outcomes that can be articulated for the college classroom. Consider these dimensions when thinking about the competencies that you wish for your students to acquire in the courses that you teach:

Knowledge: This area of learning includes an awareness of empirical research and information in the field of study, the ability to engage in critical inquiry, and an awareness of key discipline-specific facts, truths, and principles.

Skills: Skills performance involves the application of knowledge in a variety of contexts. This performance area would also include prescribed proficiencies and techniques that can be selected and applied appropriately in varied settings and under varied circumstances.

Dispositions: Dispositions are defined as habitual inclinations, tendencies, values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors, choices, and courses of action

Check out the syllabi that you use and the course objectives that are identified for student learning. Do these outcomes consider the varied aspects of knowledge, skills, and dispositions? In what ways could you modify these course objectives to mirror these competencies?

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