

# Outcomes-based language education

**Peter Zoeffig** concludes his series, makes recommendations and raises points for reflection.

**O**utcomes-based education (OBE) is known for measuring outcomes against definite standards and a concept of *mastery*, and places more emphasis on learning by doing things, rather than on attendance in a classroom setting with input provided by a teacher or trainer. In other words, coaching helps the coachees to do what they *need* to do whereas, in teaching, the teacher *tells* the students what to do. I take this further to say that instead of being instructed by a teacher on how to climb a 'mountain of knowledge', coachees need to develop their own map, which they can use to make progress and clarify with confidence their own needs and aims.

## The coaching environment

Several ingredients are needed to ensure achieved successful outcomes.

- First, there should be minimum stress in the environment. Stress can be caused by externally-imposed expectations of student performance, and it introduces affective filters which hinder successful language acquisition.
- It is reasonable and proper to have clear personal targets and to involve the students in task-oriented preparation of information within their experience, such as a story, a presentation or participation in a discussion.
- Acquisition will be restricted unless there is a conscious focus on language processing and production so that some of the unconscious native-language reserve of resources is systematically re-programmed – not

exactly 'unlearned', but repositioned in order to be more resourceful.

Emphasis must be placed on these areas and not merely on 'performing'.

## Re-programming

Following the fundamental insights of NLP – that it is impossible not to communicate and that our unconscious contains limitless possibilities – a gradual 're-programming' of the unconscious reservoir needs to be undertaken. This can be achieved through better understanding and listening, painstaking re-focusing and re-iterating, switching from unconscious, natural delivery to production of language that is done in a more dissociated state of mind and with a deliberate focus on what is going wrong in the coachees' processing of the language. This is done by allowing the learners' minds to wander away from the specific goals which have been set and agreed, only to bring them back to the areas to be practised with an increased awareness of problems that hitherto have been filtered from their conscious awareness. Thus, in gradual shifting patterns and improved reflexes, adding to the detail and refinement of their inner map of the language, the learners will edge nearer to the desired outcomes in clear steps and with an awareness of their improved performance.

Outcomes can be defined and presented through any sort of 'modelling' exercise, using all kinds of model texts, listening and sentence- or utterance-based models. The learner has to read and repeat them, adapt and develop them, systematically and

incrementally. A limited amount of pre-prepared resource material is required, provided by and negotiated with the learners (who can select from notices, articles, dialogues, emails, reports, meetings expressions, as the case may be, to bring out suitable goals and outcomes). This conscious modelling phase is followed by a more unconscious, practice, experimental or 'gathering' phase, during which the learners visualise the task that they are about to perform. This finally leads to a more conscious mechanical delivery phase with essential

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performance aspects. Thus we have inverted the usual model that starts with mechanical practice and is meant to lead to a rapid 'jump' into performance. In this approach, we adopt a wholly different stance, allowing the coachees to listen to themselves more carefully.

## Perception

Metaphorically speaking, I invite my students to join me at the top of the mountain. Their terrain is their own; other peaks are distinct only in giving a personal or cultural difference. By having a clear eagle-eye view of the terrain below, the various problems that



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they perceive can be navigated to the chosen point on the terrain with support from the coach.

The essential thing is that this creates a cycle of success, clear viewing, positive rapport and student-led outcomes. The coach does not choose or determine the goals or outcomes, but carefully and purposefully matches and paces the learner during the navigation by providing challenges. It must be emphasised that such an approach is not merely in the domain of the classroom, though much of the metaphorical reframing can be done there – much can also be achieved by continuing the authentic immersion experience in all other aspects of the study and coaching programme. The school or training centre will benefit the clients by extending communicative practice outside the classroom or formal teaching environment to authentic social interchange, insisting perhaps on adherence to the target language.

## Implementation

These other aspects must be non-stressful, supportive, guiding, listening and challenging. An atmosphere of heavy stress and rigorously imposed or inflexible timetabling is not really appropriate for such an approach. Planning, yes, but above all, involvement and support, great flexibility and total commitment.

I feel that it is usually very important that every single timetabled class should culminate in a clear and measurable outcome that is consciously understood, or has involved a shift of personal awareness, finishing the session with a summary of what has been achieved. These outcomes can of course be recorded for further consolidation and can also be used to lead into new and further outcomes on a related topic or higher goal. Resourcefulness is key.

## Recycling

Recycled language is valuable also in generating more language that can be constantly re-framed and redeveloped during the course of study. It is the proud possession of the learner and contributes to their map of their

'terrain'. Language items should not simply be supplied by the teacher in a random way but should be matched to goals; these language items can be constantly upgraded and added to, reformulated and redesigned. They should be plentiful, or at least be as many as the learner can handle.

While students can read, do exercises and watch TV with subtitles, etc in their own time, the time spent with the coach should be of a different order. However, reflective study, reading and watching of good models, helping recycling, is very beneficial when guided and matched carefully to the coachee's developing insights; naturally, only deep listening by the coach can make this possible. Grammar exercises, texts and a variety of other materials can occasionally serve the purpose of training a discrete point, if they are geared to an outcome, and are not simply an easily-found input to fill time.

## Generative learning

In NLP, the term *transderivational search* refers to the means by which a person accesses layers of memory and opens up parts of the mind to the technique of modelling. In this case, the coachee is developing the inner insight to begin to compose language. The coach is a catalyst here, empowering the coachee and engendering the right approach.

In larger groups, students are co-opted into shared tasks, such as meetings, by virtue of their emerging skills. This encourages mutual support, yet allows a certain objective distance and clearer awareness.

In each session we build on the coaching points from a previous session. This leads to the coachees using different perspectives to enable them to start to think in the new language.

## Calibration

The coach should use a wide range of interesting conversational, textual, performance-based or listening-based resources that fit with the coachees' needs, and should give clear feedback, including references to the subjective shifts experienced by the coachees. At the same time, the coach should take care not to overload the coachees with more and more input but, instead, allow the natural development of clear insights into their own growth in the target language. The coach needs to

keep referring the coachees back to how they are developing inwardly, as well as to observable and more objective changes in behaviour.

## Acquisition

An important realisation is that coaching means making positive associations, termed 'anchors', for the deep insights that come from the re-working of language from different notional and perceptual positions, and that these anchors are the acquisitions that remain – long after short-term memorisation has faded.

## Reflection

Finally, here are some questions for reflection:

- *Generally, would you say that your expectations of what your students can achieve are higher or lower than their own?*
- *In general, how achievable do you feel that the weekly goals set for the students are?*
- *How often do you 'take over' the conversation with your students in class and in breaks?*
- *In a conversation with a student, whose focus of interest are you concentrating on?*
- *How does it feel when you only concentrate on listening to what the student is saying, without reacting?*
- *How do you feel when simply echoing the student's words, in your own head or aloud?*
- *How much noise is there in your classroom and how conducive is this to achieving alpha-levels of experience and concentration?*
- *How can you judge your student's inner dialogue?*
- *How can you encourage more dissociative learning?*
- *What key presuppositions would it help to have about the student?*



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