

A Subjectivist Contribution to Outcomes-Based Education

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Objectives:

The study is to

1. provide a subjectivist perspective on outcome based teaching and learning method.
2. suggest an alternative teaching and learning approach, namely “subjective understanding” to supplement the outcome based education.

Two kinds of science, namely, natural and social sciences:

Positive approach 實證方法 **in social sciences?**

Given Isaac Newton's "experimental method of reasoning" is so successful in dealing with physical phenomena in science, scholars in social sciences then investigate the possibility of applying the scientific method to explain human action in general and social sciences in particular.

- Many scholars in social sciences strongly support the positive method.
- Milton Friedman(1953) believes that given assumptions and careful investigation, economics can be an exact science, just like physics.
- Positivist method belongs to the British philosophical tradition (David Hume and J.S. Mill):
 - Logical empiricism 經驗主義
 - Logical positivism 實證主義

Outcomes-based teaching and learning method originating in positive empiricism

- OBTL is essentially the application of the philosophy of logical positivism in educational training.
- OBTL emphasizes observable and measurable outcomes.
- The content of the curriculum and learning outcomes should be specific and measurable.
- Assessment methods measure observable student's knowledge and skills.
- For instance, a learning outcome such as “a student can handle physical education class” cannot be measured and therefore should be changed to “a student can run 100 meters in less than three minutes”.

How do we know what students know and more importantly, what they don't know?

- Outcomes-based teaching and learning which focus on observable and measurable outcomes can partially assess what students have learnt, but not the whole.
- In particular, the social world is multi-layered and complex and a single phenomenon is open to multiple interpretations.
- To tackle the non-measurable learning outcomes, we suggest a subjective understanding approach, originated by the sociology giant, Max Weber.

Method of subjective understanding (Verstehen 詮釋)

- Max Weber (韋伯 1864 -1920)
- Continental philosophy
- German idealism 唯心論(Hegel黑格爾 & Kant康德): emphasizes the independence of conceptual thinking from sensation.
- Social sciences differ from natural sciences
- A science of human action which consists in meaningful behavior & **cannot** be observed as in physical science.



The subjectivist approach in social science 主觀方法

- “First person perspective” 第一身 to look at the world through the human agent’s mind.
- Human **experience** is the sole foundation of factual knowledge
- All objective facts goes through the human mind.
- No objective standard of value; all values are subjective.
- " The things are what the acting people think they are“ (I. Kirzner 1979)
- The job of social scientists is to interpret or understand the acting people.

Why interpretation and understanding others are possible?

- Intersubjectivity 互為主觀: "common-sense" or **shared meanings** is constructed by people through their interaction with each other. 共同意義從交互建立
- If people share common sense, then they share a definition of the situation.
- Intersubjectivity is used as a base to interpret the meaning of an action in everyday life.
- Phenomenology 現象學 is associated with Edmund Husserl 胡塞爾 & Alfred Schutz 舒茨.

Subjective understanding as a teaching and learning approach

- The positivism of OBE focuses on the objective and measurable state of affairs. In the subjectivist perspective, teachers open up the communication channels with students and reach an understanding of students' understanding.
- The subjectivist approach argues that “whatever we choose to do as teachers, we must begin with the students' own view of things” or what we call the “first person perspective”.
- Subjective understanding in education implies that the content of teaching must be made meaningful to students.
- A meaningful lecture must be relevant to the listener's own stock of knowledge or experiences. If topics presented in classroom are irrelevant to students' experiences, students would not understand.

- As mutual understanding between teachers and students is biographically determined. Teachers must not only focus on the topic they teach, but also need to consider students' backgrounds and their understanding of the world.
- In subjectivist perspective, teachers attempt to make sense of what students mean. At the same time, students also make sense of what teachers mean. Together, both teacher and students make a 'common' sense.
- In other words, subjective understanding means that both parties share the same definition of situation and experience in the 'communicative common environment'.

1. On assessment methods: multiple choice versus essay questions

Multiple choice questions:

- problem-solving and novel thinking are not assessed.
- limited hint and restricted choice: even if the student's answer is potentially valid, it is considered wrong.

Long essay questions:

- allows individual expression
- can evaluate depth of learning and written communication skills.
- examines students' ability on formulating coherent arguments, the breadth of knowledge and the degree of understanding.
- a free response in essay writing allows students to make novel points and receive credits.

2. **The apprentice system:**

- It is a holistic form of learning, involving the education of both the student and teacher
- Through the apprenticeship, students interact constantly with their teachers and fellow trainees in everyday life.
- Promoting tacit understanding and mutual understanding

3. **On school life:**

- Non-measurable learning can be known via school activities such as teachers and students taking lunch together in school; cleaning classrooms and washrooms together, team gardening and lawn mowing the schoolyard.
- Though working and growing up together, teachers can best know how much students learn, and also the reasons why they do not learn. Likewise, students are able to find out how much and why they do not understand. In simple words, non-measurable outcomes can be better known.

Thanks for listening