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# Outcomes Base Education: Dumbed Down and Politically Correct

A presentation by  
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- 18 years as a secondary school teacher
- Member of state and federal education bodies, including Victorian Board of Studies
- Worked extensively in the Asia/Pacific region benchmarking school curriculum
- Author of *Why Our Schools are Failing* -  
<http://www.mrc ltd.org.au/>
- Education commentator - *The Australian* newspaper

# Australia's approach to curriculum

1. During the 70s and 80s, focus on inputs
2. Emphasis on school-based curriculum development
3. In response to lack of accountability and fear about standards, during the 1990's outcomes based education (OBE) adopted
4. Australian national statements and profiles developed along with various state and territory equivalent documents - Perth, July 1993
5. States and territories undertaking a new round of curriculum development (Spady's transformational OBE model)

## Characteristics of OBE

1. Focus on learning outcomes
2. With resources and time, all students can succeed
3. Emphasis on politically correct and new-age dispositions and feelings
4. Developmental approach - students learn in different ways and at different rates
5. Constructivist approach - learners construct their own learning, discovery learning, real world learning
6. Teachers as facilitators. Students as knowledge navigators, life long learners, autonomous learners.

## Why OBE has failed

1. Untested and untried nature of OBE
2. Jargon and edubabble
3. Superficial and vague outcome statements
4. Teachers overwhelmed by the number of outcomes and related indicators - check list mentality
5. Failure to deal with 'the structure of the discipline'
6. Lack of regular testing and consequences for failure
7. Failure to adapt to research about effective learning - direct instruction and whole class teaching

## Characteristics of stronger performing systems

1. Adopt a strong discipline-based approach
2. Provide clear, rigorous, teacher friendly *intended* curriculum documents
3. Have greater time on task in the classroom and a greater emphasis on more formal, whole-class teaching
4. Have regular testing, generally at each year level, with consequences for failure
5. Have centralised, norm-referenced examinations in the senior school

## How stronger systems define curriculum

1. Teachers given a clear and succinct road-map
2. Relate to specific year levels
3. Differentiated curriculum - recognition that students have different abilities, interests and destinations
4. Based on established disciplines
5. Curriculum descriptors specific, easily understood, concise and measurable
6. Greater use of direct instruction and explicit teaching
7. Greater focus on teacher directed, whole class teaching

# Outcomes based education - myths and facts

## Myth

OBE is widely accepted and a proven success

## Fact

- Only adopted by a handful of countries
- NSW Eltis Report states OBE untested and unproven
- Stronger performing countries have a syllabus approach
- Bruce Wilson describes OBE as an: “unsatisfactory political and intellectual exercise” and that “it is difficult to find a jurisdiction outside Australasia which has persevered with the peculiar approach to outcomes which we have adopted”.



# Outcomes based education - myths and facts

## Myth

OBE is a syllabus and embodies high standards

## Fact

- OBE never designed to be a syllabus
- A syllabus is succinct and clear, teacher friendly, focused on essential academic content, measurable and year level specific
- OBE curriculum is overly wordy and vague, time consuming, dumbed down and equates to a number of year levels

# Outcomes based education - myths and facts

## Myth

Trust me - don't panic

## Fact

- Crisis management
- Political expediency
- Too little, too late
- Sanity will prevail



# Outcomes Based Education: Dumbed Down and Politically Correct

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