Doubting Learning Outcomes in Higher Education Contexts: from Performativity towards Emergence and Negotiation

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Abstract

Learning Outcomes models, particularly constructive alignment, are the default 'theoretical' tool underpinning HE curriculum design in the UK despite continuing doubts as to their efficacy. With reference to the literature, this article summarises the history of the Learning Outcomes movement and charts the perceived benefits and deficits of Learning Outcomes/Assessment as it pertains to art and design. It proceeds with an examination of the theoretical assumptions that underpin its principles specifically in relation to inclusivity and creative practice. Drawing on cultural historical activity theory, a case is made for a less prescriptive model, one that recognises socially constructed, situated meaning-making, and the impossibility of second-guessing the affect-laden motivations that generate specific learning needs.

Keywords
HE art and design, critiquing learning outcomes, activity theory, negotiated learning, constructive alignment

The wrong version of this article was previously published online and in print. This has now been amended in the online version
iJADE 33.3 (2014)

Introduction

The concern is partly whether the faith in Outcomes Assessment is built on wishful thinking… Where is the research showing that this step leads to better education of students? (Powell 2011, 6)

Under the auspices of quality and efficiency and, more recently, widening participation and inclusion, most Higher Education (HE) institutions in the UK have adopted, or have had to adopt, Learning Outcomes (LOs) as markers of what it is students are expected to achieve through particular programmes of study. In terms of quality, LOs therefore correspond with the aims, skills, aptitudes and dispositions that constitute entry to a disciplinary field, specifically as they are applied and *performed* within activities that represent, simulate or situate disciplinary knowledge and purpose. As Jackson (2002, 4) argues, the subject benchmark statements commissioned some years ago under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) 'are intended as the key source for reference information' in the design of learning outcomes (see that for Art and Design, QAA 2008). More recently, the specific disciplines have been sidelined in favour of more generic graduate competences and attributes, those 'transferable skills' seen as productive of the flexible professional class deemed necessary for global citizenship (Barnett 2006; Barrie 2007). Here learning is conceived as a universal process framed within the context of global markets and collaboration/competition with emerging nations.

With respect to inclusion, advocates claim that LOs provide consistency and reliability because they ensure clarity, coherence, accessible goals, a framework for assessment, measurable evidence of learning and thus a fair assessment process. Such a system can therefore 'help improve quality of choice for the learner and help to avoid drop-out. It can also help both learner and tutor to recognise existing learning more efficiently' (UDACE 1992, 7). At the local level, within institutional frameworks and procedures, the various elements of curriculum design including learning outcomes and activities, assessment tasks and criteria, can be interdependently co-related as recommended within the organisational system termed 'constructive alignment' (Biggs 1996). This system, given careful and sympathetic, iterative application, enables students not only to know what they have to achieve, through which activities and with what resources and support but also how and when they are to be assessed.

Laudable as this system may appear in addressing aspects of inclusion at a structural level, when managers first made LOs mandatory in the late 1990s the 'imposition' was immediately queried. In particular, policy makers were accused of taking away the integrity of HE teachers by seeking to control learning and by inflicting bureaucratic systems for its management (Coats 2000; Harrison 2000). Reform had been initially mooted in the UK following the perceived success of an outcomes-based system within vocational courses (Wolf 1995; Yeomans 2002). This orientation was supported by the Dearing Report (1997) which, among other recommendations, called for increased HE provision, systems of support to address low expectations, an emphasis on student learning and the pedagogic training of all HE teachers. The QAA was immediately established to co-ordinate this process. In addition, there was renewed interest in the cognitive taxonomy from Bloom's (1956) behavioural objectives which was revised by Anderson (1999); Bloom's psycho-motor and affective taxonomies were largely ignored. Extracted from their broader progressive context, Bloom's hierarchy of thinking skills were adapted to provide action-based outcomes, formulate assessment criteria, provide anchors for level descriptors and ensure the credibility for the 'higher' in Higher Education. Given this theoretical basis, it was also argued that grade differentiation would be more objective and thus fairer. To further enhance the movement towards professionalisation, a new agency, the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was established in 1999. Meantime, the advocates of LOs responded to continuing resistance with accusations of vested interests and elitism, dismissing

the doubters as reactionaries blind to inevitable change as the culture of the university shifted from an 'academic oligarchy' to a market orientation disguised as 'open access' (see Becher & Trowler 2001).

The critics of LOs soon rallied, producing more scholarly, measured and philosophical arguments (Ecclestone 1999; Hussey & Smith 2002; 2003), although at the outset few stemmed from an art and design perspective (with the exception of Davies 2000). Nonetheless, in the context of a consolidating audit culture, with its technologies of accountability, LOs have undoubtedly won the day (for further discussion of this history see Wolf 1995; Ecclestone 1999; Maher 2004). The development and sanctification of such systems as constructive alignment (Biggs & Tang 2011, fourth edition) has resulted in outcomes-based principles being accepted as an ethical means to 'entrap' students 'in a web of consistency' (Biggs 1999), an encoding of 'good sense'; any remaining and resurfacing doubts have been out-manoeuvred.

In 2012 the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (founded in 2004 to replace ILTHE) standardised the 'areas of activity', 'core knowledge' and 'values' expected of HE teachers, identified and elaborated within the UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA 2012). The 'values' gravitate towards inclusive principles and professionalisation: respect for learners (diversity), participation (equal opportunities), the use of evidence-based approaches and CPD (reflection and de-mythologisation) and education-in-context (economic, social, cultural, global). Despite the benevolent profile of this quartet, it has been cogently argued that such frameworks, contrary to their democratic aims, produce a matrix of neoliberal 'performativity' within which students and teachers have to (re) act (Ball & Olmedo 2013). This matrix situates learning within a behaviourist rather than constructivist paradigm, leaving students and teachers to navigate the affective dissonance and ethical contradictions involved in performing an inclusive agenda within an apparatus determined by a competitive, neoliberal 'market fundamentalism' (Giroux 2011).

Motivation and method

I have returned to this issue because many art educationalists continue to offer critiques (Scott 2011; Davies 2012) and many art and design lecturers still doubt that LO systems deliver the benefits attributed to them. Lecturers engage in writing LOs and in interpreting their implications with students as a process to which they are subjected (Furedi 2012). They acquiesce to these imperatives before getting on with what they consider really matters in support of learning. Yet, from primary education to Higher Education, the imperative to produce LOs is likely to increase; see, for example, Pearson's move to instigate measures of efficacy (Barber & Rizvi 2013).

I therefore intend to revisit the literature outlining the differing positions on LOs by constructing a sequence of tables charting their perceived benefits and deficits. The tables turn out to be somewhat stark in their polarities, the claims on one side being flatly contradicted on the other. Each table outlines a different category, some generic, others art and design-specific. I discuss each in turn (although attending to subject-specific categories in more depth), working through contradictions by arguing from a theoretical position based on constructivist principles. I thereby suggest alternatives in an attempt to ameliorate the current impasse.

Benefits and deficits of Learning Outcomes systems

The lists of benefits are drawn from QAA and HEA documents and from Biggs & Tang (2011). The deficits are drawn from more diverse sources (including discussion of possible dangers by the advocates of LOs themselves, e.g. Biggs & Tang 2011; HEA). The comments in italics are drawn from two group discussions with three lecturers (Records 2013) representing experiences from four art colleges. My apologies for the condensed bullet-points, parodic, as they are, of LO communications.

INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES	
BENEFITS	**DEFICITS**
Learning Outcomes:	**Learning Outcomes:**
• ensure 'democratic' purposes are met: economic, social, cultural (government priorities); • encourage 'employability' (skills-focused); • move towards equity: diminish exclusivity, elitism, self-reproduction, thereby widening participation; • enable parity and access across courses (inter)nationally.	• inhibit personal/local interests, emergent needs, Freire's 'problem-posing' (1972) • neglect pedagogy as political (Osberg & Biesta 2010); as affect-laden (Probyn 2004); • fail to consider multi-contexts and difference (see complexity theory, Haggis 2007); • encourage standardisation, homogeneity, micro-management; • close down critical, esoteric discourses (Ecclestone 1999, 36).

Many educators recognise that learning rather than teaching is foregrounded in LO systems, an emphasis that has countered the content-heavy syllabuses, transmission-led and laissez-faire practices of the past. Such a system enables programme teams to design 'intended' outcomes and so provides one functioning model. Indeed it can be argued that LO systems are appropriate from some disciplines and at different stages within courses, for example at the beginning, where prerequisite disciplinary and proto-industrial skills are agreed. In art and design education, however, given its complexity and multifaceted contexts, LOs cannot hope to predict the situated and unresolved basis of learners' motivations, their agency in 'problem-posing' (Freire 1972). LO systems thus limit and inhibit students' input, particularly as students move towards self-initiated activities and objectives, for example (co-) designing briefs, or embedding learning within emerging interests/needs. By providing a clearly articulated route through the learning process in an attempt to address parity and equal opportunities, LOs in effect discourage difference and close down potential.

LO systems are readily applicable to distance provision because they can be packaged (they do not require teacher–learner dialogue at the design stage) and, given the imperative toward digital access, they support efficient management. Students who might otherwise be excluded from formal education are able to participate, thereby widening access. But distance learning leaves the teacher communicating through virtual platforms as a sort of avatar. Online, the multimodal nature of human interaction (Kress & Leeuwen 2001) is reduced and individual learners may have their 'preferred' mode of access ignored. For example, within art and design, haptic knowledge (that accessible primarily through touch) is of primary importance in some disciplines. Consequently, many practices evidenced through material processes require both temporal records and physical presence to enable valid assessment. It is unlikely that an inclusive art and design education could be exemplified in end-of-unit outcomes or could be entirely distant.

Accountability

LO systems are usually identified with student-centred approaches because the learning process is mapped out by taking into account what students need *to do* to realise outcomes. But it is teachers who determine these outcomes and curriculum content and establish prototypical processes, thereby privileging institutional priorities and potentially perpetuating forms of 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passerson 1990). While this can be construed as teacher-centred, it may actually reduce the teacher's role to designer/assessor and, as Orr (2005) warns, to interchangeable status (management owns the script and regulates the criteria). LOs thereby facilitate management-centred learning, reconfiguring teaching away from an enabling role to

ACCOUNTABILITY	
BENEFITS	**DEFICITS**
Learning Outcomes:	**Learning Outcomes:**
• foreground institutional contexts/priorities (mission and management); • facilitate management/leadership to: overcome outmoded, unjust practices; ensure parity (EO); • account for and measure the impact of teachers; • enable a transportable, technologised curriculum; • establish 'teacher proof' scripts.	• commodify learning, promote the fiction of 'parity' (Hussey & Smith 2003); • produce a technocratic culture (Orr 2005), one of surveillance and performativity (Ball & Olmedo 2013); • undermine academic independence, autonomy; learning for learning's sake; • negate teachers' agency and dissipate energies (Carroll 2010); • reduce teacher to designer/assessor; teachers become interchangeable (Orr 2005).

one revolving around revising, policing and judging. In turn, teachers' 'performance' becomes accountable through statistical measurement. This is not what the advocates of LOs intended, but it has been an effect of LO systems implementation. The system has been configured to align with audit/target culture, valorising attainment and retention rather than development and sustainable relationships (Ball & Olmedo 2013 discuss forms of resistance to this regime).

Curriculum design

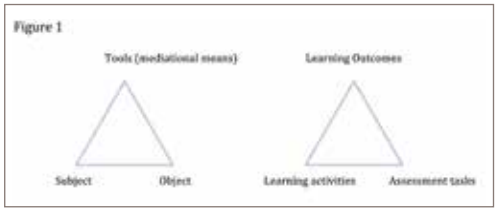
The design of curriculum is always conditioned by the values and aims of an educational institution; the claim is that LOs make these transparent. But aims and objectives such as creative action, critical thinking, equity or sustainability, can become distant ciphers within LO design because outcomes tend to atomise practice into discrete skills. Once published, it is almost impossible for teachers to revise outcomes to

CURRICULUM DESIGN	
BENEFITS	**DEFICITS**
Learning Outcomes:	**Learning Outcomes:**
• guarantee transparency, clarity, accessibility and are thus motivational; students know what is expected; • make possible modularisation and credit accumulation; • ensure coherence between learning and assessment; • prevent narrow curriculum and replication; • revolve around criterion referenced assessment; • militate against teacher bias and norm-referencing; • foreground generic skills, • undo content-heavy curricula and lecture-based (transmission) formats; • undermine hidden curriculum and vested interests.	• depend on language and transmission, requiring interpretation and negotiation (Hussey & Smith 2002); • are context-specific (Scott 2011); confusing to all but the author (Ecclestone 1999); • produce either general (vague) or detailed information (procedural overload); • fail to recognise learning other than that intended; • reduce assessment to what is easily measurable (Ecclestone 1999); • belittle holistic approaches (Davies 2012); • dismiss tacit understanding (Polanyi 1966); • undermine situated, self-determining communities of learning (Wenger 1998); • reduce disciplinary specificity and cultural inherence as a resource.

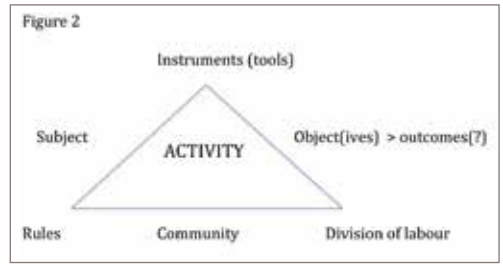
meet immediate needs militating against development and potentially solidifying the curriculum. Curriculum design is, however, a necessity, so I wish to look at an alternative, cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), rooted in Vygotskian theory where objectives rather than outcomes are the design focus.

Vygotsky (1978) posits an object or objectives as one of three elements from which to start designing learning, the other two being the subject (the learner[s]) and the tools for learning. In this way, although learning is conceived as goal orientated, it is mediated and thus relational, dynamic and contingent, enabling dialogic, negotiated and generative processes to emerge from within specific situations (Engestrom 1987).

If we compare the triangular models of learning devised by Vygotskians (1987) (see Figure 1) with that of Biggs (1996) respectively, it is evident that the focus of the Vygotskian framework is on mediation, in deploying cultural tools to aid the subject (learner) in addressing their object (motivation or purpose); the outcome is as yet undefined. The teacher's role is to support that mediation, in a sense teachers are mediators. The tools here hold a similar function to the learning activity in Biggs, but in constructive alignment the outcome is privileged and, unless it is assessable, any related activity (the use of cultural tools) is unlikely to appear.



CHAT (see Figure 2) is an extension from the Vygotskian model (Stetsenko 2008) which takes into account three additional concepts: rules, community and division of labour. By foregrounding rules, CHAT recognises domain-specific practices, acknowledging specific learning environments and disciplinary traditions but seeking to develop them. CHAT accepts that learning is not an isolated event but has an impact on communities outside the educational institution; in other words CHAT design recognises the wider social implications of learning. It also understands that to realise real-world objectives (not simulated or reproductive ones) activity may need to be divided, for in achieving complex objectives learners may be required to do different things (here there cannot be common outcomes). The object of CHAT is the activity itself, moving attention away from individual learners and on to processes of interaction, initiative, invention, realization and reception. Engestrom (2008, 91) evaluates the application of this model by examining a global education team designing curriculum in a primary school. Here a more diverse community is recognised: teachers, students and parents; the 'rules' are negotiated; the division of labour is collaborative. Such an approach indicates the dialogic and emergent processes that occur in much art and design HE teaching, demonstrating how the CHAT model can be productive in this context and certainly less restrictive than constructive alignment.



Constructive alignment and other LO systems negate emergence because teachers predetermine learning (Biggs has acknowledged the notion of 'unexpected' and 'emergent' LOs but they remain peripheral). Although this process clarifies the purpose of education it also limits it, tidying up the messiness, contingency and excitement of experimentation, discovery and potentially failure indicative of creative endeavour (Davies 2012).

Learning

For Vygotsky (1978) learning is primarily social (even if the presence of the 'other' presents itself in surrogate form, e.g. a book or a podcast) that

LEARNING	
BENEFITS	**DEFICITS**
Learning Outcomes: • advocate student-centredness (empowerment); • lessen teacher idiosyncrasies/prejudices; • encourage: deep approaches to learning and ownership, via self-management and evaluation 'metacognition'.	**Learning Outcomes:** • disable learning-centred, co-constructive methods (Vygotsky 1978); • impede responsive teaching, 'learning moments' (Hussey & Smith 2003); • perpetuate false dichotomies (Ecclestone 1999); • reject the teacher as model (citizen), public intellectual (Giroux 2013); • produce cynical instrumental attitudes (Ecclestone 1999); • encourage teaching to the test (Powell 2011, 13); rewarding strategic approaches; • breed a culture of cynicism (Furedi 2012); • homogenise learning identities (Atkinson 2008).

is, learning is constructed in interaction and is always conditioned by available resources, the tools of a given culture. Development in adulthood is not dependent on biological maturation but on access to the knowledge about how to use and apply cultural tools. Therefore *knowing about* the world (through transmission) is less significant than *knowing how* to use tools to *find out about* and potentially *transform* the world (supported by instruction, practice, negotiation) (Biggs would concur with this). In this way the learner realises a motivation by putting it into action; take, for example, riding a bicycle, which one can achieve without knowing how (Polanyi 1966,18) or a domain-specific example, drawing. Knowledge here tends to be both practical and 'tacit', 'we know more than we can tell' (Polanyi 2009 [1961]), although in getting to a position of active 'mastery' such learning often requires the presence/guidance of a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO). In formal settings this is usually the teacher, but in HE may also be the technician or peers (the community of learning, whether proximate or distant) or some surrogate. This process is often mediated through language and demonstration (Franks 2013), so that the doing is augmented by instruction, exemplification, discussion or reflection; it is experiential in the fuller sense. It could be said that the knowledge of the teacher here is explicit rather than tacit, in other words the teacher is able to explicate the content or process in question. The vehicle for this process, the 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), the space between what a learner can do now and what they can do guided by an MKO, is thus relational only later is it internalised, that is transforms learners' patterns of thought and behaviour; in this sense learning precedes development (Vygotsky 1978; for a problematisation see Marsh & Ketterer 2005). In the adult learner the ability to use tools (particularly psychological tools) leads to individual autonomy, an ability to self-generate ideas and imagine the not-yet.

Art and design specificity

It may be apparent that throughout these charts the deficits side contains aims and practices associated with the so-called distinctiveness of art and design pedagogy and its evolution (Soules 2013), not least because it acknowledges the situated, contingent and generative processes indicative of creative practice.

For Vygotsky (2004) creativity is the basis for perpetual change, imagination its engine. Humans use cultural tools (affective, mechanical, semiotic) to reconfigure materials so as to

ART AND DESIGN SPECIFIC

BENEFITS	DEFICITS
Learning Outcomes: • privilege predetermined, time-bound, linear/convergent procedures; • provide identifiable, evidenced, measurable skills/competencies; • ensure intentionality, purposiveness; • promote the development of 'transferable', cognitive skills; • ensure students learn by 'doing'.	**Learning Outcomes:** • militate against negotiated, emergent (Hussey & Smith 2003) and divergent processes (Davies 2012), cogitation (Claxton 1998), e.g. 'unconscious scanning' (Ehrenzweig 1967); • discourage explorative and experimental teaching (EU 2011); • ignore the notion that learning is domain specific (Vygotsky 2004); • are unsuitable for complex, indeterminate processes such as: imagination, creativity, risk-taking (Davies 2012); • neglect Bloom's affective and psychomotor skills, practical knowledge (Bourdieu 1990); • limit teachers' opportunities for reflection-in-action (Schon 1983) (to be part of the doing).

transform the social environment. In this sense our relationship with the world is always mediated by the tools made available to us through culture and framed by socially agreed values; a cultural inherence. It follows that human interaction with the world is never direct; culture extends the possibility of what it is to be human by inventing prostheses and projections (from pencil and paper to the artwork), imagined extensions that once realised enter reality. The culture within which individuals are raised therefore provides multiple resources in the form of tools with which they can respond to emerging contexts. Creative activity is in this way a process of becoming. Rather than privileging and reifying essential identities and values in the form of dogma, it questions and transgresses fixity by acknowledging the inevitability of change.

Formal pedagogic institutions often close down the possibility of creativity by privileging stasis, reproduction (Bourdieu & Passerson 1990), what Engestrom (1987, 101–2) terms 'dead objects'. LOs solidify this process, whereas art and design, at its best, lays out a field of possibilities and allows learners to transform social relations through cultural interventions (IFACCA 2014). The teacher can embody this way of being, engaging in a resourceful, outward-orientated practice focused on (ethical/sustainable) possibility (Giroux 2011), a practice that functions only in an affective economy where there is mutual recognition between all social actors (Watkins 2010).

In constructive alignment, Biggs' 'web of consistency' can become a trap, which, despite its liberal credentials, packages learning into digestible but processed form (a recent development building on Biggs, the SOLE method, is less rigid and appears to address some of these concerns, see Atkinson 2011). Nonetheless, constructive alignment denies learners' and teachers' creative, organic capacities, the ability to think other and think again. As Davies (2012) observes, 'In art and design, outcomes are not achieved once and that is it. They are regularly returned to within and beyond levels. Therefore, assuming that outcomes, once addressed, are completed does not reflect the "spiral" nature of the pedagogy of the discipline.'

There is, then, a sense that LOs may inhibit learning within creative domains, supporting only those students who work strategically to meet largely pre-determined, necessarily accessible outcomes. After all, LOs 'can be decoded and performed, resulting in dull prac-

BEGINNING AND DEVELOPING TEACHING

BENEFITS	DEFICITS
Learning Outcomes:	**Learning Outcomes:**
• provide a framework for designing curriculum; useful departure point (Scott 2011); • enable collective assessment by teachers; • can be used to encourage development; • encourage assessors to debate what learning is important; • should be for students not teachers; • are shared, thus militating against student self-obsession.	• need to be understood as flexible; supporting a sustainable practice, ensuring diversity of practices, developing an area of interrogation, feeding students with their interest; • require open reflection, a non-judgemental environment; • depend on negotiation (between staff & staff and staff & students).

tice that may not go on to survive'; they 'can be over-determining, squashing invention and creativity' (Records 2013).

Beginning and developing teaching

Recently, in my role supporting beginning lecturers, I have moved from curriculum design exercises using constructive alignment to ones using a CHAT framework. This allows designers to build in possibilities for dialogue and for negotiating educational objectives and evaluative criteria based on student motivations/need and changing circumstances. Within constructive alignment assessment is aligned in absolute terms, thereby shaping the outcomes because only that which is measurable is given credibility. Thus any student support needs can be predicted, based on other systems of accountancy in which learners are interpellated into a typology of need. Such LO systems have resulted in what Torrance (2007) terms 'assessment as learning', a profoundly non-educational practice leading to 'criteria compliance'. Nevertheless, inclusive forms of education require a degree of pragmatism, a recognition that assessment can be 'for learning'. How then to moderate its worst effects?

One site in which assessment regimes and their paraphernalia, including LOs, are usually suspended is within extracurricular forums, including activities instigated through staff research. Why is it that within such contexts significant learning is often the result? Let me have recourse to instances.

As a part of her doctoral research Hjelde (2013) explored the meeting of art practice and art pedagogy in a hybrid, reflexive space she termed 'praxis'. The research/pedagogy evolved through negotiated practices, forming a collective known as FL△G. As a social entity, the collective proceeded through acts of conviviality (sharing food, hopes, motivations), developing an affective economy emphasising 'cultural production, collaboration and the levelling of hierarchical structures … (utilising a reflexive methodology and promoting student/tutor collaboration)' (Hjelde 2013, xiv). Similarly, in the context of doctoral research, Dafiotis (2013) elaborated a social/pedagogic space in an HE context in which affable, curious and agonistic conversation characterised activity. His 'benevolent trap' was an event in which visual/textual pleasure and provocation drew in spectators who were then invited to contribute in any way they wished. Although framed by an ongoing art installation/learning space, its state of incompletion was an incentive to act. Dafiotis hoped that participants would take his proto-installation as a starting point, a point of departure for their own interventions. To a limited extent this occurred, but rather than encouraging making activity, the space generated convivial relations and sustained conversations about learning. In a sense, and from Dafiotis' standpoint, the dialogic premise of the event required not knowing how participants would respond.

Within fine art education in particular, there has been much discussion of the importance of

'not knowing'. For example Fisher & Fortnum's compendium (2013, 7) provides a series of arguments and test cases that in their own words 'describe a kind of liminal space where not knowing is not only not overcome, but sought, explored and savoured; where failure, boredom, frustration and getting lost are constructively deployed alongside wonder, secrets and play'. They begin to articulate a set of productive dialectical practices, highlighting the difficulties and delights of learning through continuous making, a process of never quite reaching goals.

It may be that assessable and non-assessable learning themselves work dialectically, that if one or the other goes, the benefits of both would be negated. While such extracurricular instances offer opportunities for student learning in which peer learning and mutuality in staff student relationships are fostered, they are not necessarily available to all. It could be that students already marginalised to some degree (by the need to work, the need to care for others, who do not 'fit in') may not be able to contribute and thus be further excluded. Should then assessment be suspended in some of what students do within the curriculum offer so that all can benefit?

Conclusion

As Haggis (2009, 383) notes in her examination of research into HE learning over the past 40 years:

Social constructivist approaches… begin to consider the implications of not thinking of the individual as at the centre of all that might be designated 'learning'. This is a radical conceptual departure which is still almost completely absent in the non-North American HE journals by 2007.

Although not conceived within an activity theory paradigm, many of the alternative pedagogies circulating in art and design colleges encourage situated, emergent and dialogic practice and might be better understood and evaluated by applying CHAT analytic descriptors. Although these alternatives may not pass muster within the prevailing technocratic regime, they currently work dialectically with its apparatus to provide the necessary uncertainty that creative activity requires. It may be that such alternatives include, at least potentially, that which falls, and those who fall, outside institutional intentions and the agendas of professionalisation.

Given their benevolent aims, the inclusive rhetoric of Learning Outcomes has made it difficult for critics to counter their pernicious effects. As a consequence, the resulting technocratic trap is well attested but ignored. Driven by assessment and by management concerns over accountability and efficiency, LOs deny the complexity of learning/teaching by rejecting its contingent, emergent and unknowable qualities. In particular, LO systems dismantle the affective relations that underpin the sociality of learning, the give and take of human interaction. Rather, if a degree of trust were opened up to allow teachers to design programmes with the use of open frameworks (e.g. CHAT), learning could be negotiated to meet student motivations, disciplinary imperatives and social need, enabling teachers and learners to assess meaningful activity.

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