A Response to the Audit of the Implementation of the Reform curriculum

Denis McLaughlin
Dr Michael Tapo,
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Port Moresby
Papua New Guinea.
10 February, 2010.

Dear Dr Tapo,

At your invitation I have written a response to: Audit of the Implementation of the Reform Curriculum.

I have identified twelve areas which frame my response to the Audit.

They are:

1.0 The Audit has generated considerable valuable data

2.0 The Audit is too long and its framework reporting document undisciplined.

3.0 The Audit has an absence of research that has occurred in Papua New Guinea or similar developing countries

4.0 The Audit is prejudicial in support of the Reform

5.0 The Audit fails to critically interrogate the data

6.0 The Audit fails to demonstrate a justification for the education reform.

7.0 The Audit’s recommendations ignore the real problems facing PNG education and are impractical because they fail to demonstrate an appreciation of the PNG teaching context

8.0 The Audit fails to address a major impediment to any authentic education reform: Most teachers do not speak English well enough to be able to teach the language effectively.

9.0 The Audit uncritically accepts OBE as addressing the real problems that will promote quality in the PNG education system

10.0 The audit failed to critique appropriateness of OBE as a vehicle for authentic educational reform

11.0 The Audit defines learner-centredness entirely from a western perspective

12.0 Conclusion: OBE has failed to be an authentic quality agent of change

Sincerely

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1.0 The Audit has generated considerable valuable data

The content of the Audit contains considerable valuable data emanating from multiple sources. I found the data most insightful and they should offer evidence for future decision making.

2.0 The Audit is too long and its framework reporting document undisciplined.

It took me 7 hours to thoughtfully read the 200 pages, making notes and trying to identify themes. The reason for this is that most of the Audit is a data dump, a display of data (exemplified by the predominance of dot points) and as such invites substantial further analysis and synthesis so that the intelligent reader might thoughtfully read in a couple of hours. As it stands one has to fight to squeeze coherent understanding from it.

It is customary to present a shorter sophisticatedly analysed response so that stakeholders may more quickly appreciate the issues and evidence that invite focus and debate. Methodological and demographic information and the data dump could have been deposited in another volume as evidence. The report is not an easy read; It needs to be made more readily accessible to busy professionals. (For example: http://www.equip123.net/docs/E1-NamibiaPilotStudy.pdf)

The Audit itself asserts that its final document: “is to be accessible to a diverse readership/audience who will find it illuminating of people’s inside/outside views of the curriculum reform implementation.” The document is NOT accessible to a diverse readership/audience.”

3.0 The Audit has an absence of research that has occurred in Papua New Guinea or similar developing countries

Inexplicably, the considerable PNG research is completely ignored. The research in the Audit is dominated by research undertaken either in Australia or the United States. What is presented is not a literature review but a set of directions to read identified references. The absence of any scholarship that has occurred in Papua New Guinea or similar developing countries opens the Audit to criticism the Audit is culturally insensitive to PNG contributions (Mohok-McLaughlin & Hickling-Hudson, 2005) or an example of the uncritical acceptance of inappropriate western protocols (O’Donoghue, 1994). The authors are conscious of this deficiency when they comment:

While comparisons with other jurisdictions around the world and especially the Asia Pacific can be useful, they can also be unhelpful. While PNG can be affirmed and confirmed in its curriculum reform directions it must not be deflected into a pathway of thinking that success has to be equated with being exactly the same as its neighbours. (p.20)

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This is an embarrassing assertion\(^2\). Such a statement supposedly provides a justification for the Audit’s abandoning scrutiny of appropriate research and academic debate. A scholarly basis of research ought to have been incorporated in the Audit, especially when its focus is as contentious as OBE.

In contrast to the Audit reluctance to engage in the comparative education scholarship, the following is a very informative easy to read report from Namibia focussing on similar educational problems PNG is experiencing. *Namibia Pilot Study of Teacher Professional Development Quality in Education, Teaching, and Learning: Perceptions and Practice 2006* (American Institutes for Research under the EQUIP LWA.). This report’s literature review has a comprehensive incorporation of scholarship from developing countries, which in turn offered an authentic foundation for the study.

### 4.0 The Audit is prejudicial in support of the Reform.

The Audit has prejudicial themes that are present throughout:

> While comparisons with other jurisdictions around the world and especially the Asia Pacific can be useful, they can also be unhelpful.

So we don’t try because we are not intelligent enough to know the difference.

> While PNG can be affirmed and confirmed in its curriculum reform directions it must not be deflected into a pathway of thinking that success has to be equated with being exactly the same as its neighbours. (p.20).

The irony of this comment is that OBE was the flavour of the month in Australia in 2000 when it was introduced to PNG. The question many now ask was OBE introduced to PNG because PNG could be exactly the same as Australia?

Regretfully, the authors deviate from the ethic of impartial critique of the data and regularly insert their own views offering a positive spin to explain the negative data. Any attempt to preserve impartiality has been surrendered. Irrespective of evidence, the Audit contains many statements like the above which uncritically dismisses the need for further scholarly debate. Because of the absence of a scholarly dialogue of the findings with the available literature from PNG or comparable developing countries, the Audit’s very first finding appears over simplistic:

> The curriculum reform implementation in PNG will be enhanced when the outcomes based curriculum is understood by all stakeholders at all levels and in all areas (p.163)

Insightful !!!

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\(^2\) Thankfully scholars like Isaac Newton refused to listen to similar advice: “If I have seen further than other men, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants”.
5.0 The Audit fails to critically interrogate the data.

This lack of scholarly debate is embarrassingly exemplified in the endorsement of the following quotation. (It also is an example of prejudicial intrusion):

One comment from one principal reminded us that an “outcomes based approach is the way we have always thought about and done things in PNG”. If this is so there needs to be a strong advocacy at all levels to correct the misconception that an outcomes based approach is a foreign imposition... (p.160)

Later, I will engage research to entertain the view that OBE is perceived by many researchers as “an imposition from the Western world,” generating a “cultural imperialism” on teachers and learners (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002). Likewise, there is substantial alternative evidence to describe PNG traditional education as embedded in a revelatory epistemology where knowledge is believed to be discovered not generated, as supposedly it is in developed countries (McLaughlin, 1994). Traditional PNG education is characterised by the valuing of learning (in contrast to outcomes), mentorship and respect for the spiritual in learning, with the outcome at times having a minor importance. To be specific, traditional PNG village education, from the stand-point of Western education, for very defensible reasons does not expect or encourage the young learner to be independent. Indeed, such independence “might well be frowned on as rebellion against the superior knowledge and power of the elders. He/she is called upon to observe, learn and reduplicate received knowledge and tribal mores” (Wong & Swan, 1984, p.7).

6.0 The Audit fails to demonstrate a justification for the education reform.

The need to justify the purpose of any educational reform is appropriately illustrated in a story from the respected scholar on leadership, Stephen Covey (1989):

A group of workers and their leaders are set a task of clearing a road through a dense jungle on a remote island to get to the coast where an estuary provides a perfect site for a port. The leaders organise the labour into efficient units and monitor the distribution and use of capital assets – progress is excellent. The leaders continue to monitor and evaluate progress, making adjustments along the way to ensure the progress is maintained and efficiency increased wherever possible. Then, one day amidst all the hustle and bustle and activity, one person climbs up a nearby tree. The person surveys the scene from the top of the tree.... And shouts down to the assembled group below... “Wrong Way!”

The Audit identified extensive opposition to OBE. In the light of this criticism, the Audit might have revisited the reasons for the reform, if for no other reason to provide evidence that the Reform was not the “wrong way”. The cartoon below offers a pictorial rationale for the need for such evidence.
Throughout the Audit, a number of participants indicated that they wanted to know what is the contemporary problem in PNG education that the education Reform was supposedly addressing? “Did OBE come from foreigners?” Who chose the approach for PNG? These are fair questions, which imply that the experience of OBE maybe inappropriate for PNG as the quotation below implies:

...my children understood the old curriculum. The new curriculum is so confusing. I now have to send my child to an expensive private school to ensure she is taught in English. What made them bring the new curriculum to PNG (p.67)

Inexplicably, this mother’s relevant question is not addressed in the Audit. Unless one is aware of the problem that the education Reform is supposedly addressing, then how does one know, that what is proposed is defensible.

This lack of information may explain why so many teachers opposed OBE: “There was a prevailing view that teachers had not been dissatisfied with the previous approach and hence had a reluctance to accept the need for change” (39). These PNG teachers can be comforted that their perspectives resonate with research:

Good teachers have always educated via outcomes (although such outcomes were often nuanced as goals, objectives, aims, etc.). OBE ideologues have done little more than cloud the term in mystique and then present it as an epiphany. This is a case of forcing the emperor to wear new clothes when the old ones fitted so much better (Berlach, 2004).

Some believe the basis of OBE had a strong political dimension to it. 

OBE was introduced to PNG ... by the controversial Curriculum Reform Implementation Project (CRIP), sponsored by AusAID. CRIP consisted of a team of education consultants from Australia, most of whom who had never taught in a PNG classroom before, and the closest some of them ever got was a brief visit to Wardstrip Demo. (Demonstration School). They worked with a team of counterparts in the PNG Department of Education, most of whom had never heard of OBE before, were not aware of its failures overseas, and were not in a position to evaluate its suitability for PNG schools.
Incredibly, CRIP did not undertake any research studies on what was wrong with the old objectives-based curriculum and how it might be improved, and did not report on curriculum models being used in other developing countries (for example in Africa, the Caribbean), to give us some other options to look at.

Instead, there was just an announcement that “we are introducing outcome-based curriculum in PNG” and it was all twisted to make it sound like it was PNG’s own idea. I know that this is how it happened, because I was there at the time. I was one of the Education Department’s own technical experts in the Education Standards Wing. (Hayes, 2007)

One has to engage this scenario with caution but not dismiss it, for there may be substance in this hypothesis for political pressure has been the fundamental motivation for other PNG educational innovations (McLaughlin, 1991).

The Audit likewise identified the perception that the education Reform had a basis that was not education:

The curriculum reform and its implementation were seen to be dividing the country – it is a controversial issue. It was noted that academics were not consulted in developing curriculum reform which was perceived to be forced on the country by politicians who now seem to be critical of it. Teachers were seen to be at a crossroads, with implementing it and others opting out. A range of supports were suggested to help it survive. The Language Policy was seen to be a very significant contributor to much of the discontent about curriculum reform and Bridging was not seen to be working... (p.68)

7.0 The Audit’s recommendations ignore real problems facing PNG education and are impractical because they fail to demonstrate an appreciation of the PNG teaching context

The Audit’s exclusive use of western scholarship and the lack of PNG research and other research from developing countries indicate that the Audit appears to lacks an appreciation of the reality of what is occurring PNG classrooms. Any authentic Reform is obliged to understand this peculiar dynamic.

The PNG research explains over a considerable time a phenomenon that exists in too many contemporary PNG classrooms.

7.1 The quality of teaching in PNG classrooms

I have been a regular visitor to PNG classrooms for over 30 years and have taught in them constantly in the 1990s both in the Sepik and in Port Moresby. I have been a regular visitor to Madang classrooms in the last 10 years. Thankfully there are exceptions to the descriptions below especially in some urban areas. However, it is still more the norm than the exception. Lady Carol Kidu unapologetically concludes: “Education declined some 15 years ago and has steadily declined”. (p.40):

The classrooms appear to be operating at peak efficiency when children are given rote tasks such as writing, spelling, mechanical
arithmetic or reading comprehension exercises. Repetitive writing activities remove the uncertain aspects of teacher/pupil relationships, but more importantly, "writing down" is perceived by children as "work"... Children say they are "learning English" (mathematics, reading etc.) when asked why they are writing which suggests that they conceive the classroom experience in a deterministic sense...Outcomes are guaranteed in a sense when correct procedures, such as the sequencing of activities and rituals are brought together in village life. Teacher behaviour too might well be seen in this way as they strive to work in a situation where their formal teaching "methods" are perceived to be a guarantee that students will learn (Smith, 1975, p.8).

This phenomenon has been noted regularly in the research.

Markwell (1975, p.84) observed that "in all subjects in the primary school, teachers in PNG lean heavily on lesson plans provided for them, often resulting in little or no communication between teacher and child". Moreover, in a study focussing on community life (social studies) lessons, Otto (1989) concluded that much of what was observed was a communication of labels, in contrast to a communication of concepts. "The teacher...told me that he did not know anything about these three religions. But he believed that "to have heard the words" would help the students who were going to high school and who would deal with China again" (Otto, 1989, p.28).

For over forty years educationalist (Jones, 1974; 1975; Roberts & Kada, 1979; Apelis, 1980; Pearse, 1990; Fife, 1993; Kian, 1996; McLaughlin, 1996; Nongkas, 2008) have commented that a noticeable feature of PNG classrooms is the apparent industry of the teachers and students with little communication between either. The teachers are said to use teaching "recipe" strategies and follow lock step procedures, while the children respond ritually. More recent research has indicated that in some contexts such teaching learning behaviours maybe an oversimplification, and represent a more complex, culturally appropriate pedagogy. (Pickford, 2008). The issue he raises is important in the context he researched, but it does not negate the basic conclusion of the cited research. The fundamental problem hindering qualitative education change in PNG is that many teachers in the mid to upper primary classes have a relatively facile understanding of the subject matter they have to teach:

Students need teachers with in-depth knowledge of topics; allowing specialisation to draw on teachers strengths would result in higher quality teaching and learning. (p. 75).

This issue and teachers’ tenuous capacity to use English with ease need to be addressed. (I will address this latter problem, later in this response).

These deficiencies occur because the majority of teachers have had a general education only to grade 10, along with a very basic teacher education program of two years. The latter has been criticised as being more mechanistic than educational (McLaughlin, 1996). Indeed, the quality of education provided in the teachers’ colleges invites examination, if substantial authentic reform is to be implemented and be sustainable. The
Audit identifies in three places the Papua New Guinea Education Institute as lacking credibility in providing relevant professional development.

One of the advantages of engaging research from developing counties is that their context seems to resonate with PNG educational problems than those in Australia or the United States: I would like to refer to the research done in developing countries: a study done recently in Namibia: The report speaks for itself:

Despite a strongly theorized new education paradigm that is well aligned with government policies, Namibian teachers, like teachers in many countries that have adopted reform policies based on constructivism (active-learning, student-centered, critical-thinking approaches), have found it increasingly difficult to interpret and practice the new education policies, especially in the context of extreme overcrowding and severely limited resources (NIED 2003).

Does this description resonate with Papua New Guinean conditions?

The research concluded:

Despite these promising features, the program is presently being revised because of increasing concerns that teachers gain neither the subject knowledge nor the teaching skills needed to promote good student learning (NIED 2003).

http://www.equip123.net/docs/E1-NamibiaPilotStudy.pdf

7.2 The quality of teaching in PNG teachers’ college

Though lecturers in teachers colleges are more educated, a variation of ritual teaching is commonly observed in the teachers' colleges; O'Donoghue (1994) observed thus:

Rarely are questions posed requiring lengthy responses, and a high level of cognitive functioning. Furthermore while an extensive use during this section of lectures is made of plans, diagrams and pictures and paragraphs on the blackboard, what is usually sought is simply naming, labelling and cloze-test type of activities...much of the time is taken up with note-taking, with the lecturer writing on the chalkboard and the students without receiving any explanation of the content, copying it down at high speed. The situation can reach the ridiculous giving out notes about the notes, as evidenced by the following: it doesn’t matter if what you have been writing down off the board is a bit confusing to you. I will be giving you typed notes on it tomorrow.

One would have expected this situation to have improved since the research was undertaken, but Nongkas's (2008) research reports a similar style still existing among teacher educators. This appears surprising since most lecturers have a master's degree. However, the master's degree is not in their subject specialisation, so that any formal qualification in the area they are teaching is approximately at Diploma or at most Bachelor’s degree. There are almost 300 teacher educators and barely 5% would
have a higher degree in the area of their teaching. They simply do not have content discipline specialisation and this deficiency must have an impact on their own teaching and naturally the young student teachers.

8.0 The Audit failed to address a major impediment to any authentic education reform: Most teachers do not speak English well enough to be able to teach the language effectively.

In a nature wide audit I participated in 1980 concerning the quality of PNG education, Kenehe concluded:

...most (primary) school teachers and a large proportion of high school teachers do not speak English well enough to be able to teach the language effectively. So, across much of the country there is a situation where teachers lacking in knowledge are expected to do something that they cannot do (Kenehe, 1981, p.31).

This observation is supported by research. Mohok (1989) researched the reading levels of eighty in-service teachers studying at the then Port Moresby In-service Teachers' College using a cloze test. The results revealed that only 5% could read at the independent level. These findings are not surprising, since the English course that was offered at the college was optional:

The students find studying this (English) course very difficult. When they realise they cannot cope, the stream to other courses. To be specific, the teachers who really need this course avoid or stream from it. They don't want to fail. After all, Language Curriculum Studies is only an elective (Language lecturer in Mohok, 1989).

McLaughlin, J. (1991) explored how studying in English as a second language influenced the learning of 90 community and secondary teachers and teachers' college lecturers studying at the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), by using a cloze test with a grade 10 readability level (15 years). Results concluded that 75% of the teachers read at instructional and frustration levels. Interview data suggested that their problems with reading were not so much concerned with English as a language code, but with their own deficiency in background knowledge that permits and promotes an intelligent assimilation of new information. This observation is as relative today as it was 30 years ago.

Any education reform must address this reality, if it has any chance of success. This Audit ignores it and assumes the problem with poor English with students is entirely a student problem. It inexplicably sees the English language in schools entirely as a political problem offering this naive statement:

The language policy for example was highly criticised by teachers, parents, business leaders and administrators. This issue while not directly related to the implementation of a National Curriculum is seriously impacting on community perceptions of curriculum in general.” (p.83).
But poor English capability among teachers and students is a learning problem inextricable involved with any Education Reform.

The data speak for themselves concerning this issue:

- **Some urban people are expressing concern about the teaching of English** (42).

- Sir Arnold Amet believed that “there had been a declined in English language proficiency and that children were struggling as they did not have competency ...”

- **Before the children’s English was much better... (now) the children’s English is worse and there is no consistency in what teachers do** (p.74)

- “...there was a feeling that the levels of spoken and written English had dropped. (p.99)

I counted quickly over thirty references to the observed decline in English standards among students.

In contrast to the Audit’s silence on this issue, I see that the teachers’ lack of mastery in English as a major impediment to teaching for meaning in particular, and the overall quality of the education system in general: “...qualitative changes in classroom practice will occur only when the teachers understand them, feel secure with them, and accept them as their own” (Beeby, 1979, p.291). Such an insight is very relevant to those planning authentic educational reform. By neglecting this reality the Reform is merely focussing on symptoms and not the problems impeding educational development (Lotherington, 1998).

Ritualistic teaching seen in so many PNG classrooms (see section 7.2 above) is compounded through teaching in English by teachers who themselves feel in inadequate in its use. Students in such a “learning” environment either survive or they don’t. Further explanation is invited:

In the early stages of primary school the pupils' lack of comprehension is almost complete. At this stage imitation or parroting is almost the only response they can make. Later this incomprehension is replaced by the grey world of partial understanding, a world in which the teacher's utterances may or may not mean anyone of a number of things; a world in which the safest strategy is to catch on the teacher's actual words. They are concrete, definite while the meanings that the pupils attach to those utterances are vague, and often prove to be illusory (Dutton, 1977, p.28).

In a situation where pupils partially understand what is being said, they are unable to ask questions. Consequently, the teacher does most of the talking, though pupils do respond to questions generally by way of chorus answers (Pearse, 1990). This is a safe strategy and camouflages the lack of full understanding. Indeed, from the beginning, school children are introduced to a pattern to be quiet, not to ask questions and to speak only when requested.
OBE’s “child centred” approaches do not address the real issue for such behaviour. More often enough PNG cultural mores dictates such extraverted interactions are culturally inappropriate (Lindstrom, 1990; McLaughlin, 1994; Guthrie, 2003a). The same supposedly “passive” behaviour in the classroom has also been identified in Asian students from Confucian heritage backgrounds. Ironically, these students describe their teachers as “student centred” not by the teaching methods they use but their capacity to teach students to understand subject content (Watkins & Biggs 1996; 2001; McLaughlin, 1994b).

The way forward to assist learning in a second language is not to force upon students and teachers culturally inappropriate teaching methods, but to help both teacher and student become more competent in English. OBE does little to address this as the scenario below illustrates:

After having observed a large number of Community Life lessons, having heard hardly any student ask a question and having listened to teachers talking most of the time with students parroting back I realised that this overall lesson pattern, to a large extent, was the result of teaching Community Life in English, which is for Manus children their second or third language. They did not understand properly, and were certainly not able to engage in dialogue (Otto, 1989, p.29).

Because of this feeble grasp of English, students who have developed a tolerance of not understanding (i.e. they accept words, rather than their meaning) evolve survival tactics, in contrast to learning strategies, to enable them to function. Behavioural manifestations of these tactics include the remembering of the right answers, and the refusal to admit to or demonstrate a lack of understanding, as is aptly illustrated below:

Teacher: A gibob is a zingut and is used for willoting things together.
Alfred, What is a gibob?
Alfred: Sir, a gibob is a zingut and it is used for willoting things together.
Teacher: Excellent answer.

Thus, it is possible for behaviour, superficially resembling comprehension, to take place even in an incomprehensible situation. OBE has a tendency to exacerbate this situation because in the use of OBE “the evidence of learning becomes more important than the learning itself”. (Berlach, 2004).

Not surprisingly, these language issues among teachers were identified with PNG student teachers. A cloze reading test was administered to 200 first year pre-service students from four community teachers’ colleges (McLaughlin & McLaughlin, 1995). Results concluded that 96% read at instructional or frustration levels. This problem with English needs to be systematically addressed in a holistic language context, if quality education is to be promoted.

The Audit clearly identified this problem to be as current as it was fifteen years ago.

There was widespread agreement about the decline in oral English expression with obvious links to a decline in written English expression. The declining standards in English were very evident at entry to primary (grade 30, secondary (grade 9), and tertiary (teachers’ colleges) (p.85).

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3 There is a cultural issue that also explains this phenomenon (McLaughlin, 1994)
A contributing reason for this decline is that many teachers do not speak English competently. OBE is not addressing this deficiency.

To repeat any Education Reform must fail, unless this issue is realistically addressed. Both the Audit and OBE have ignored this as a phenomenon for serious consideration. From a leadership perspective, such neglect in strategic planning may be appropriately labelled “Titanic” thinking (Duignan, 1998). The neglect leads to disaster.

9.0 The Audit uncritically accepts OBE as addressing the real problems that will promote quality in the PNG education system

The Audit recommends the provision of more professional development on assessment and its accompanying infrastructure and leadership. This will fail. The authentic way forward must be based in scholarship, not in rhetoric. In contrast to the adoption of OBE, authentic educational reform in Papua New Guinea is dependent on three variables being honoured.

They are:
1. The teachers’ levels of general education.
2. The teachers’ amount and kind of professional education. (Beeby, 1966; Guthrie, 2003b)
3. The teachers’ competency with English, the language of instruction (McLaughlin, 1995)

These three variables are pivotal in the promotion of qualitative educational change, since qualitative changes in classroom practice occurs only when teachers understand them, feel secure with them, and accept them as their own (Beeby, 1979, p.291).

The Audit clearly indicates that teachers in general do not understand OBE, feel secure with OBE, and accept OBE as their own. The Audit’s various recommendations will not change this situation because the recommendations focus on symptoms. We need to start in ensuring competency in what teachers teach and not on developing outcomes. Let’s address the problems the research has identified. Moreover, the research sadly concludes that OBE is the not the answer if teacher subject mastery and English competency is the problem. “The death of knowledge occurs, when evidence of learning becomes more important than the learning itself”. (Berlach 2004).

10.0 The audit failed to critique the appropriateness of OBE as a vehicle for authentic educational reform

The Audit reported considerable disquiet with OBE, especially among primary teachers.

10.1 Some negative experiences with OBE noted by the Audit

Below are some representative quotations from stakeholders from the Audit:

1) More difficult for them to manage assessment. More time needs to be given (sic) to ensure fair assessment.(p.53)
2) The consequence at the classroom level is that teachers are teaching an outcomes-based curriculum but reporting as if they are using an objectives based approach. (p.61)

3) It is difficult to understand the students as there is a language gap. They can’t construct sentences. I have listened to teachers in primary schools teaching in pigeon (p.66)

4) College personnel commented that their students and graduates reported that there was often a wall of resistance to OBC in schools (p.71).

5) The OBE was “thrown to teachers’ without adequate awareness training or resources (p.73)

6) The majority of staff are opposed or at best not enrolled in OBE (p.81).

7) “We started off with CRIP, then it stopped and IP came in. It was all too quick. We need more support to really understand the curriculum reform (p.101)

8) The main concern was insufficient curriculum support materials for teachers and students; and insufficient guidance for teachers compared with previous curriculum materials; this was seen to affect the effectiveness with which OBE could be implemented (p.108).

9) There was confusion what an outcomes-based approach is, confusion on how to plan and program, confusion about roles and responsibilities, confusion about training, and confusion about English as a language of instruction and English as a language of learning (p.117).

10) It is difficult to implement OBC with a student-teacher ratio of 1 to 60; teachers give up reverting to objectives based assessment (p.119).
10.2 The alternative research on OBE

If OBE has generated such persistent and widespread criticism, I am surprised the Audit did not revisit the appropriateness of OBE addressing PNGs education problems. In ever so many contexts, OBE is seen not to deliver.

William Spady, (1994, p.1) the originator of OBE envisaged it as the catalyst to focus and organise:

...everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences. This means starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organising the curriculum, instruction and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens.

Spady (1994) postulated that there were five principles that were foundational in understanding and successfully implementing OBE:

1) The beginning point of learning is not inputs but outputs. That is, once the end product of learning has been established, only then can curriculum design be considered: principle of 'designing back' or 'designing down'. This of course assumes the teacher knows inputs and is competent in the language of instruction. Because of this difficulty with content the Audit identified new graduates doing the opposite and being chided for it: “Recent graduates from teachers colleges stated that they looked at the outcome and then chose the content to be taught which is not the outcomes approach for programming”.

2) Schools accept responsibility for determining how the big picture outcomes are to be achieved. Teachers are best described as moving from a primary responsibility of the facilitator of a syllabus to one of becoming curriculum designers. There is evidence to suggest that this may be a big challenge to many PNG teachers;

Grade three teachers stated that they found difficulty in implementing the language syllabus that had outcomes for vernacular and outcomes for English. They suggested the syllabus be reviewed. Some teachers lamented the loss of teaching drills and grammar exercises...a need was felt for more structured materials...(pp.51-2)

3) Norm-referenced assessment is unfair in that it ranks students, often on single-test performance, rather than expecting the best of all students and finding precisely that via multiple assessment scenarios. To facilitate what he terms 'high expectations', students ought to be given as many opportunities as required to demonstrate criterion-based success, so as to obviate the need for what amounts to mandated 'failure'. This is simply not occurring in PNG because of the reality of a grade system and external examinations in PNG.

The consequence at the classroom level is that teachers are teaching an outcomes-based curriculum but reporting as if they are using an objectives based approach. (p.61)
4) In the task of learning, importance of understanding ought to have precedence over time constraints. In other words, students should be allowed as long as they need to exhibit mastery over a particular concept. This is not happening in PNG.

5) The process of learning is as important as the content to be learned. Learning should be enjoyable rather than be, as is often the case, the agent for disenfranchising the learner. We all agree with this, but OBE has no mortgage on how this may be facilitated.

It is now appropriate to view the track record of OBE.

In a review of research of the adoption of OBE in a variety of countries, Donnelly (2007) concludes:

**England**

Significant, in those systems that have adopted OBE, is that there is also evidence that the experience has been less than satisfactory. In England, the first edition of the *National Curriculum* was widely criticised. In particular, teachers attacked it as unwieldy and cumbersome and, especially at the primary level, argued that it was impossible to implement in a balanced and effective way.

**Canada**

In relation to the implementation of OBE in Ontario, Canada there is also evidence that teachers found the process frustrating and difficult (Hargreaves & Moore 1999, p.7).

**United States**

While many states in the US, during the early 90s, also began to adopt OBE approaches, or what some termed subject area standards, the experience was such that OBE was soon jettisoned in favour of a standards approach (see ERIC 1993 for an outline of a number of criticisms directed at OBE, these include: lack of any research evidence supporting OBE, the way OBE values the process of education to the detriment of essential content and the time consuming and onerous assessment practices associated with OBE.).

Andrew Blyth (2002, p.14) cites William Spady in this regard and concludes "In any case, OBE as a reform movement was dead by 1995. There has been virtually no research or reference to it in the US educational literature since then". The past head of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker (1993), criticised OBE for advancing curriculum descriptors that were often vague, ambiguous, difficult to measure and low in academic content. In explaining the demise of OBE in the United States, Watt (2000, p.46) also suggests that part of the critique related to conservative groups attacking OBE as politically correct and focusing too much on affective matters to the detriment of worthwhile content.

Possibly, the most embarrassing of all the US research occurred in 2000, when the Illinois School Board approved the hiring of William Spady to direct the Strategic Design Process. Despite Spady’s direct involvement, the Board
jettisoned OBE as practically unworkable. The following is taken from its record of meetings:

Unfortunately, we have found little evidence of positive results from affective outcome-based programs like Dr. Spady's. States that have implemented them, such as Pennsylvania, New York, Minnesota, Oregon and Ohio, have largely abandoned them and are returning to strong academic standards-based curriculums... The real issue with the Strategic Design Process centers on the process itself. The types of questions asked lead to defined outcomes (goals) that are vague, fuzzy, and difficult to implement and measure... (46th Illinois School District http://www.watchd46schools.org/SpadyInfo.html)

In summary, the once bright promise of subject area standards (OBE), born from a desire to improve the rigor and effectiveness of American education, has faded under a wide array of criticisms, and the movement itself is bogged down under its own weight. (Marzano & Kendall ,1997, p.5)

**Australia**

Australia became involved in OBE at a time when it was being abandoned elsewhere: "During OBE's phase of slow growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s only a few educational systems adopted the reform, notably New Zealand, Australia, England, and Wales, Canada and the United States" (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova & Johnson, 2006, p.6). The reason for OBE abandonment was clear.

Donnelly (2002) has provided a catalogue of research that documents the disaster OBE has in the Australian states which adopted it. Most disturbing of all is the observation that OBE has adversely impacted on teachers and failed to satisfactorily address 'deep learning' in students (Wilson, 2002). Sadly, a review of Australian OBE curriculum documents concluded that OBE not unexpectedly failed “to deal adequately with subject disciplines, in part, ...(because) so many outcome statements are vague, difficult to measure and overly generalised (Donnelly, 2007).

**South Africa**

There are close contextual parallels between the adoption of OBE in South Africa and PNG. In both nations OBE was a government agenda, that had little support except from Government bureaucrats, who when questioned knew little of its philosophy and track record elsewhere (Jansen, 1998).

Like PNG, OBE in South Africa has met considerable resistance from teachers and the community and as a result has been like a chameleon and regularly changed its form (Botha, 2002). Jansen and Christie (1999) offer fuller insights into the misadventures of OBE in South Africa.

Possibly, the most acerbic study on OBE in South Africa is from Stephanie Matseleng Allais, Director of the Research and Development, for the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training. She is also a doctoral candidate at the School of Public and Development Management, University of the Witwatersrand. Her research is entitled: *Education service delivery: The disastrous case of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks* (Allais, 2007). Her conclusions invite leaders in developing countries to be cautious:
Problems with the framework as a basis for education reform became rapidly apparent, and the system is now deadlocked in a series of unresolved policy reviews. A key to understanding this collapse is the role of knowledge in relation to education. The outcomes-based qualification framework approach turns out to have very little to do with education, and in fact to have the potential to increase educational inequalities, particularly in poor countries.

Tom O’Donoghue and Simon Clarke’s (2010) latest book Leading Learning: Process, themes and issues in international contexts, provides ample international research evidence that an outcomes basis for curriculum is not the vehicle for the promotion of “deep” learning among students. Moreover, they offer two detailed case studies graphically illustrating the disastrous effects OBE had on the education systems of Hong Kong and Turkey.

11.0 The Audit defines learner-centredness entirely from a western perspective

The National Department of Education aspires to have an education Reform characterised by:

- A curriculum suited to the needs of a modern PNG
- Students at the centre of learning;
- Holistic development of the child (Pagelio, 2008)

Sadly, because of the lack of homework done from the very beginning the NDOE been exposed to the spin that it is only OBE that can deliver these goals.

When we do our homework and we think it is actually important to critically study research especially from developing countries, then it is more likely that wise decisions are generated. OBE is equated with the catch cry that OBE in contrast to alternatives is student centred. From a Western is perspective, (not Asian) this is characterised as something like the following:

A specific textbook is not used. Since a regular textbook would bring a sense of confinement, it is preferable to use a varied range of reference books and materials. Each year, units of study are developed according to the changing needs of the student population and integrated into the curricula. In this manner one can build upon the interests of the students and individualise their classroom experience. Integral to this program is the completion of projects, reports, and group activities to evaluate a student’s thoughts and process of development. The projects are often open-ended, giving the students freedom to explore whatever their interests and abilities lead them to. (see Spady, 1988).

Such an idealistic perspective stands in sharp contrast with PNG teachers interviewed in the Audit: “Some teachers felt that the old curriculum was better and cited the Pacific series Minenda materials providing much better details and structure and guidance for what was to be taught and how it was to be taught” (p.74).
Now from a developing country perspective these teachers are authentically learner-centred, because they are centred on creating a meaningful learning experience for their students that both they and the students understand (Rogan & Grayson, 2003, p.1174). They eschew OBE not because they are against the reform per se, but because the Reform compels such teachers not only to learn new teaching skills, but more importantly to adopt new and sometimes conflicting cultural frameworks about teaching and learning: “Did OBE curriculum come from foreigners?” “Who chose this approach for PNG?” (p.74). It now becomes understandable why teachers resist OBE so vigorously: “...there was often a wall of resistance to OBC in schools.” (p.71). For teachers such as these, OBE is representative of a form of “cultural imperialism” (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani, 2002).

For those of us with a scholarly education in comparative educational and an extensive experiential background in teaching in many developing countries, especially in the rural areas, there is sensitivity to the uncritical transfer of western models onto developing countries. {For those interested is seeing a review of failed western curriculum innovations that have been forced onto PNG education see McLaughlin (1996)}. Such sensitivity leads me to revisit the concept of “learner-centredness”.

In contrast to the concept of learner-centredness described above from a western perspective, students in developing counties classify a learner-centred teacher as linked to teacher competency derived from the teachers’ mastery of subject knowledge and their ability to teach content for student understanding effectively (Tabulawa, 1997; 1998; 2003). In developing countries, the concept of learner-centred is linked on the promoting of understanding in their students (O’Sullivan, 2004). Just how this is done is not linked to the employment of a variety of teaching methods, but linked to the learning satisfaction of the students. Here is a plea from a PNG learning centred teacher using his PNG learning centred methods:

One teacher commented that teacher directed lessons were more effective than student centred lessons as student learning was kept on track and more was achieved. It was difficult to supervise students if they were doing activities in groups (p.52).

It seems to me in developing counties good teachers try to ensure subject matter competency, then thoughtfully generate appropriate learning strategies for their students. For them being learning centred is equivalent to being learner centred.

This issue of choosing between adopting OBE and attempting to teach for understanding is exemplified with following observation: “Recent graduates from teachers’ colleges stated that they looked at outcomes and then choose the content to be taught, which is not the outcomes approach for programming” (p.109).

The tension between learner-centred and learning-centred was poignantly described by a very much respected senior politician, who was also an experienced teacher. For her, OBE asked too much of “teachers to keep track of students without resources. The children are learning nothing” (p.40).

Yet learning-centred teachers are derided for the methods they understand and feel comfortable with:
Teachers need to unlearn the old ways of chalk and talk; they are not used to children being noisy and lessons being a little chaotic in student activity based lessons; they are used to dictatorial control; they need to adopt flexibility in their practices’ (p.65).

In developing countries like PNG, there are a number of real issues that affect teachers to be supposedly learner-centred. These include their own professional teaching capability, competency in the language of instruction, limited resources, distance disadvantage, cultural factors concerning traditional roles of students and teachers and the students’ backgrounds. Within these multiple parameters teachers in developing countries intelligently choose from their own limited repertoire whatever approaches, methods and skills they believe best nurtures their students’ learning. Within such a developing country context, the students themselves label student centred teachers as those who promote learning among them. The use of teaching methods is not the characteristic that contributes to this definition in this context. In developing countries like PNG the focus is traditionally more important on learning-centred rather than learner-centred approaches (O’Sullivan, 2004). OBEs student-centred teaching is culturally at odds with the PNG perspective.

Guthrie (2003a;b) has written extensively on this and other aligned concepts and argues with extensive empirical evidence that authentic educational reform in PNG must be evolutionary not revolutionary, and it should reflect a respect for and understanding of PNG, its people and its culture. In addition, I would respectfully believe that expatriates who are guests in PNG be open to listen and learn and not merely talk at Papua New Guineans. This is difficult for it is generally the expatriate who has the power to withdraw aid funding for non-compliance. And they know it.

12.0 Conclusion: OBE has failed to be an authentic quality agent of change

The evidence is overwhelming in concluding that Outcomes Based Education in Papua New Guinea will continue to fail for the following reasons:

- Its advocacy seems to have a political dimension not an educational one;
- Its genesis is devoid of a scholarly justification;
- There is a lack of a rational that OBE is addressing PNG education problems better than the old curriculum
- Inadequate professional development
- Majority of teachers have rejected it;
- Incompetently implemented;
- Inadequately resourced;
- OBE does not address the fundamental impediments of progress for PNG;
- It is culturally at odds with PNG’s traditional practices and;
- Lastly it has been a disaster in so many other countries.

I conclude with a story:

If the horse you are riding dies, you should get off it. Sadly when critiquing a dud aid project, too many people choose one of the following

1. Change riders.
2. Buy a stronger whip.
3. Do nothing: “This is the way we have always ridden dead horses”.
4. Visit Australia to see how they ride their dead horses.
5. Perform a productivity study to see if lighter riders improve the dead horse’s performance.
6. Hire a foreign consultant at $20,000 a month tax free to ride the dead horse.
7. Harness several dead horses together in an attempt to increase the speed.
8. Provide additional funding and/or professional development to increase the dead horse’s performance.
9. Assess how dead, a dead horse actually is.
10. Re-classify the dead horse as “living impaired”.
11. Develop a Strategic Plan for the better management of dead horses.
12. Rewrite the Outcomes expected for riding dead horses.
13. Modify existing standards to include dead horses along with live ones.
14. As the dead horse does not have to be fed, it is less costly, carries lower overheads, and therefore contributes substantially more to the bottom line.
15. Promote the dead horse to a management position; there are already plenty there.

The conclusion of this Response is unambiguous.

OBE is dead.

It cannot be resurrected. Bury it and spend time and money on a defensible, researched, culturally sensitive alternative that is more likely to be the “right way”.
