Navigating Learning Outcomes: tensions and potentials in media HE in Ireland

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mother, Eileen Macklin McCormick, who wisely says: *'It's great to want something, work for it and then get it; that is the ultimate satisfaction.'*

Abstract

This research explores the experiences and views of education professionals around the learning outcomes (LOs) approach to education currently prevalent in higher education (HE) in Ireland. LOs have been used to help manage education and enhance teaching and learning in HE over the last decade. Their influence has grown rapidly in line with the rising impact of the Bologna Process in guiding European higher education.

This thesis focuses on media education and the opinions of teachers, managers and teaching and learning 'experts' regarding LOs. In total 17 individuals were interviewed between December 2012 and June 2013. Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. Touraine's 'Sociological Intervention' was employed to draw different actors' issues together. The computer programme NVivo 10 was utilised to manage and help analyse the data within a CDA construct.

The research revealed that LOs are complex representations of learning and the goals of education and are not mere statements on a page. LOs provoke and signify the type of tensions that are possible between individuals playing different roles in HE; such as managers and teachers. But they also show divergence between different institutions in how they concern themselves with certain processes and values in HE; like, for example, the struggle between oversight and autonomy. The research also revealed that LOs can represent potential and opportunity. Some readings of the outcomes approach regarded LOs as engendering fairness in that they are transparent, offer clarity and can signify a democratic approach to education. Managers tended to support LOs as a positive input into teaching and learning in this study whereas coal-face experiences had led teachers to be less enthusiastic about writing and using LOs, rather opting for a strategic use of them in their work.

The research concludes that LOs as concepts are at times divisive and often come to signify the divisions between schools of thought; those who find them to be a representation of the continued marketization of education and the embodiment of managerialism and 'quality' in HE and those who feel they epitomise a certain conception of democracy in their begetting of fairness and transparency.

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List of abbreviations

LOs	LOs
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
OBE	Outcomes-based education
OBA	Outcomes-based assessment
DA	Discourse analysis
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CAQDA	Computer-aided qualitative data analysis
QQI	Quality and qualifications Ireland
HETAC	Higher education and training awards council
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training.
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

This study came about because of an interest in learning outcomes (LOs) and the on-going debate around what they represent in terms of the meaning and purpose of higher education. In this chapter I will make an argument for the value of my study. I will outline the research questions to be answered in this thesis and I will reveal my own position and background with regard to LOs. Lastly, I will give a brief summary of the content of the chapters to follow.

1.2 Why this study matters

The 'outcomes' approach to education is one that has gained favour in higher education (HE) in Europe and particularly in Ireland (Adam, 2008a) over the last decade. LOs are one of the chief instruments of this movement. These short statements that describe the desired outcome of a programme of study (European Communities, 2009) can have a major impact on the way students learn and the way in which teachers teach and also, significantly, LOs have guided the way in which higher education is managed and organised (London Communiqué, 2007) which impacts all involved in the education process.

In small countries, like Ireland, LOs have, to a large extent demanded a change in the focus of education from the teacher and the content to the student and her learning. This new approach represented and required a substantial shift in culture, practice and philosophy for teachers and other staff who came to work with LOs. Despite this crucial change very little has been written about LOs in the Irish context (outside the handbook offerings) and research into teacher and staff experiences is not recorded. Given this, I feel it is very timely that a study looks at the state of LOs in HE in Ireland, a decade after their arrival proper, and that we record the experiences of teachers and staff in HEIs in order to understand what LOs mean and what they represent in the Irish context.

The thesis aims to make a contribution to further research, institutional policy and practice. Firstly, the conclusions generated here could help other researchers map a

wider view of the LOs model in Ireland or elsewhere and launch comparisons of the use and meaning of LOs between other countries and Ireland, again with the aim of broadening the global understanding and best use of LOs. Secondly, regarding institutional policy and practice, this thesis is well placed to influence leaders in HE to understand that meaningful engagement with LOs is essential. This can be enshrined in policy and fostered through collegial influence and the supported work of teaching and learning centres who help teachers and managers write and use LOs with confidence and an understanding of their meanings and purposes.

I chose to explore the experiences and opinions of media educators in this study of LOs because of my own background. In the next section I will tell the story of my own position on LOs as a media educator, which has informed this study.

1.3 My Positionality

In order to give context to this study I feel it is appropriate to give some space to my own experience of LOs and how my involvement with outcomes-based education has brought me to this research theme. Also, I will make clear how doing this research has developed my view of LOs and changed my outlook on the outcomes approach to higher education.

I began teaching communications and media studies in the Institute of Technology, Carlow in Ireland in 2007. I came into higher education after 17 years working as a producer/director in the broadcast television industry in the UK and Ireland. A lot of the systems and structures in HE seemed strange to me after the more unstructured firmament of the Features TV where the journalist is led by the story. Conversely, LOs statements in syllabus documents describe what a learner should know after a course of study and in many ways define the story before it has happened. This represents a very different milieu and a different proposition from the business of TV and one that intrigued me.

Working with LOs over the last number of years in my own institution I have observed many different conceptions of LOs. To most teachers they were mainly a

part of education administration; something you might have to write to keep the paper-work in order or to satisfy external invigilators. Also these statements often caused confusion in meetings and there were unresolved discussions about what they meant or how to pitch them. Some colleagues used LOs as a guide to what the learner should know at the end of a course of study and referred to them, particularly at the end of the teaching year to check that the course was covered, but most of us worked to a content-led paradigm and hoped it all fitted in with the outcomes while paying little heed to them.

My view of LOs was formed by absorbing these experiences and also finding LOs culture contrary to the less managed situation of my previous environment of broadcast television. I felt that LOs were bureaucratic and instrumentalist with little value and I was, like most, unreceptive to them. They were invisible to the students and when one tried to introduce them in class they had little impact. Indeed it seemed students were completely unaware of how these short statements were central to their learning. In my experience, back then, LOs were a management function that just created work for teachers. Also, for me, they represented an attempt to take the spontaneity and heart out of teaching, such was their prescription. They also struggled to represent the objective nature of judging achievement in media practice, whether that was through general LOs or outcomes-based assessment.

Despite my early misgivings I felt there had to be something useful behind the successful advance of LOs in HEIs in Ireland. I began in earnest in 2010 to research the background to LOs as a way of trying to understand LOs. I read extensively about mastery learning (Malan, 2000), learning objectives (Tyler, 1950), the work of William Spady (1994), the Bologna Process (Keeling, 2006) and the European Commission's drive to make Europe the leading provider of HE graduates in the World (Ewell, 2004) through enhanced quality markers. LOs underpinned this drive. One could not remain unmoved by this research which has spanned four years. Over this time I was able to reflect on the debates surrounding OBE and I came to see OBE as oft-times a sadly divisive approach (Ecclestone, 1999) to education in which the debates sometimes lacked measure. Authors often were drawn down very strict lines of 'for'

or 'against.' Those who criticised LOs outnumbered those who promoted and supported LOs by a large margin. Indeed articles redolent with warnings seem to be infused with a passion and interest that was lacking in those articles that endorsed LOs. Also LOs tended to be primarily promoted and defended in anodyne handbooks and Bologna sponsored documents rather than peer-reviewed journal articles which robustly argued and debated the LOs issues. As a result of my reading, and with the help and guidance of my supervisor, I began to take a more reasoned view of LOs and the outcomes approach to education. I realised that if I were to scrutinise approaches and conceptions of LOs I had to be prepared to understand the plurality of influences that underpin LOs.

So where am I positioned now regarding LOs? This research has given me the privilege of time to reflect on the nature of HE in Ireland and the values that drive it. Perhaps the values of the market and neoliberal discourses which pervade in Ireland, as elsewhere, are not as authentic as what happens on the ground in the process of education and how students learn and teachers teach. I take a measured approach: LOs are problematic and can be divisive but they also represent an opportunity, through teaching and learning-driven reflection and engagement, to enhance learning and promote fairness.

1.4 Research Questions

Below are the research questions I wished to explore in this study. They are broken down into an overarching research question and 5 sub-questions.

Overarching research question:

'What are the tensions and potentials associated with using learning outcomes in media higher education in Ireland from the viewpoints of teachers, managers and teaching and learning experts?'

Below are 5 sub-questions which are posed in this research in order to answer the primary research question. Creating these sub-questions has created a pathway to investigating the overarching research question and this approach has helped me

examine and understand the place of learning outcomes within media higher education in Ireland in a clear and methodical way.

1. In what ways do lecturers engage with LOs in media higher education?
2. What potential do LOs offer in media higher education?
3. What tensions are identifiable regarding the use of LOs in media HE?
4. What differences are there in relation to attitudes to LOs across HEI sites?
5. To what extent, if any, is the LOs model part of a neoliberal discourse in higher education?

1.5 A synopsis of chapters

Chapter 2 is the literature review chapter. This chapter looks at outcomes-based education (OBE), of which LOs is the chief instrument, across three levels. The first level sees LOs in use at the coal face of education by individual teachers and looks at the issues facing teachers when working with, and writing LOs. The second level sees LOs operate at national and European levels as driven by management systems encouraged by the Bologna Process and the drive for 'quality' in higher education by European and national institutions. The third level of inspection looks at the contested nature of LOs and OBE as an abstraction; as constructs of a global neoliberal discourse. The last section of the chapter assesses where the outcomes project is today in terms of its diffusion, acceptance and meaning. The chapter finishes by looking at OBE as a possible mechanism of democracy, challenging its many detractors and defying its neoliberal tag.

Chapter 3 addresses the methodological approach which underpins this research and describes what I did to achieve my results and analysis. I set out my ontological and epistemological stances using theory to justify my choices while giving example of what I actually did in terms of research design and gathering data. I chose Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as my methodological stance and again I explain how this informed the research design and data analysis, giving examples along the way to make real the connection between methodology and methods. I also explain my use of the under-used Sociological Intervention pioneered by Alain Touraine (2000) and I

outline how I achieved my data management and part-analysis with the computer-aided qualitative data analysis programme NVivo 10.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with the findings and analysis of the data gathered. Chapter 4 sets the context of the research revealing the experiences of teachers who steer teaching and learning and examining their engagement with LOs and their frustrations and confusion with the design of LOs. Chapter 5 investigates the tensions and potentials associated with LOs as viewed from different institutional and individual role levels. Resistance to LOs is one of the themes that give rise to tensions between manager and teacher viewpoints. This struggle is brought to us through the use of Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention as outlined in chapter 3. Positive constructs of LOs are also offered and sometimes contested in this chapter, revealing a complex picture of how individuals and institutions conceive the role of teaching and learning in HE as seen through the LOs project. Chapter 6 deals with the counter arguments that LOs are both instruments of neoliberalism and democracy. The data is analysed and found to show that LOs can be construed as being part of the neoliberal agenda and a conception of a kind of democracy, depending on one's reading of them.

Chapter 7 concludes the study and alludes to the implications of the research. The following chapter is the literature review; chapter 2. This chapter looks particularly at outcomes-based education as the basis for the development of LOs and examines the wider meaning of this approach to education in terms of the management and marketisation of education and the possibilities for other readings of OBE as democratising and enhancing learning through clarity, transparency and fairness.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Outcomes-based education is not an ideology. Neither is it a kind of school system. Outcomes-based education is only a tool, albeit a very powerful one.

William Spady (Tucker, 2009, p. 18)

In this chapter I will review the theories and debates surrounding LOs and their origins and developments. LOs are an instrument of an educational movement that is known as outcomes- based education (OBE). Education based on 'outcomes' begins with the end in mind and LOs are statements describing what a learner should know at the end of a course of study (Spady, 1994). These statements known as 'LOs' are embedded in course documents and have replaced the previous objectives-driven syllabi (Allen, 1996) in higher education institutions (HEIs) over the last decade. They represent a move away from process-driven curricula to outcomes-driven curricula (Harden, 2002) and a focus on learning and the learner rather than the tutor (Tam, 2014). The arrival of outcomes based education and LOs has had a significant impact on higher education across the Western World (Lawson and Askell-Williams, 2007; Hussey and Smith, 2003). In Europe the diffusion and adoption of LOs has been driven on by the European Commission sponsored movement known as The Bologna Process (Keeling, 2006). In this chapter, as well as reviewing the development of OBE as a movement that is ideologically (Berlach, 2004) philosophically (Kennedy, 2011) and politically (Jansen, 2006; Jackson, 2000) driven, I will examine the growing role of OBE in higher education globally and study the on-going debates that surrounds this significant movement. I will look at OBE through three themes: the first which includes the pedagogic and design issues surrounding LOs as used at the institutional and teacher-led activities in higher education; the second theme looks at the development of OBE as a tool of management, and the third theme where the debate involves LOs and OBE as instruments of neoliberalism versus their possibilities as instruments of democracy and meritocracy. But before I delve into the

3 themes outlined I will discuss the concept of LOs and map their meanings and uses in the HE sector today.

2.1 LOs: understanding the concept of learning outcomes

Most teachers who first encounter LOs in their career see them in terms of a list of short statements that come embedded within syllabi documents describing what a learner should know at the end of a course of study; these statements are commonly known as 'learning outcomes' and are most often defined as 'statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to demonstrate at the end of a learning experience' (Adam, 2004). Learning outcomes have their origins in 'mastery learning' which is akin to the apprentice model of learning, and are associated with many different conceptions of knowledge apart from the traditional HE notions of academic learning; they are also closely associated with the skills and competencies that are highly valued in applied learning (Malan, 2000).

The presence of these LO statements in course document belies the wider presence of LOs in the overall education system where they are found as desired endpoints for short programmes, degrees, masters etc. and are visible in institutional and national education policy documents. LOs, with their method of beginning with the end in mind, have permeated all strata of educational activity and governance.

Beyond the use of LOs as markers of educational output there are other conceptions of learning outcomes that go beyond their presence in programme and policy documents. In pedagogic terms LOs have come to mean a learner-centred focus in education (Spady, 1994) which puts student needs at the centre of the learning process focusing on what they need to know, as opposed to what the expert teacher might want to teach. Within this effort to put the student at the centre of learning comes the need to help this happen through learning approaches that work with learning outcomes (Enwhistle and Ramsden, 1983) and using learning strategies that scaffold the LO approach to HE (Zimmerman, 1990). Following on from this LOs can be seen in a complex relationship with the aforementioned strategies, approaches and also assessment. In this way LOs can be conceived as more than merely one part

of the process of learning but perhaps be known as a process in itself (Souto-Otero, 2012) also because outcomes commonly build on the achievement of previous outcomes leading to a stepladder approach to learning that gives students a pathway to follow in their learning careers (Werquin, 2012).

The previous positive conceptions of LOs have not gone unchallenged over the years. Detractors have had grounds to conceptualise LOs as a negative event in HE over the last couple of decades. LOs have become the bête noir of educational policy for some who see the policy of favouring LOs as another instrument in the marketization of education globally (Saunders, 2011; Giroux, 2004) as LOs can, among other things, set quality standards akin to those found in industry which might be construed as controlling rather than improving education (Serrano-Velarde and Stensaker, 2010). This will be discussed in depth in sections 2.4 and 2.5 of this chapter.

In practical terms LOs have become part of the pedagogic and policy firmament in HE. Next is a diagrammatic summary of these pedagogic and policy meanings in terms of their uses across the HE sector.

Figure 1: Uses of LOs in pedagogic and policy terms in HE
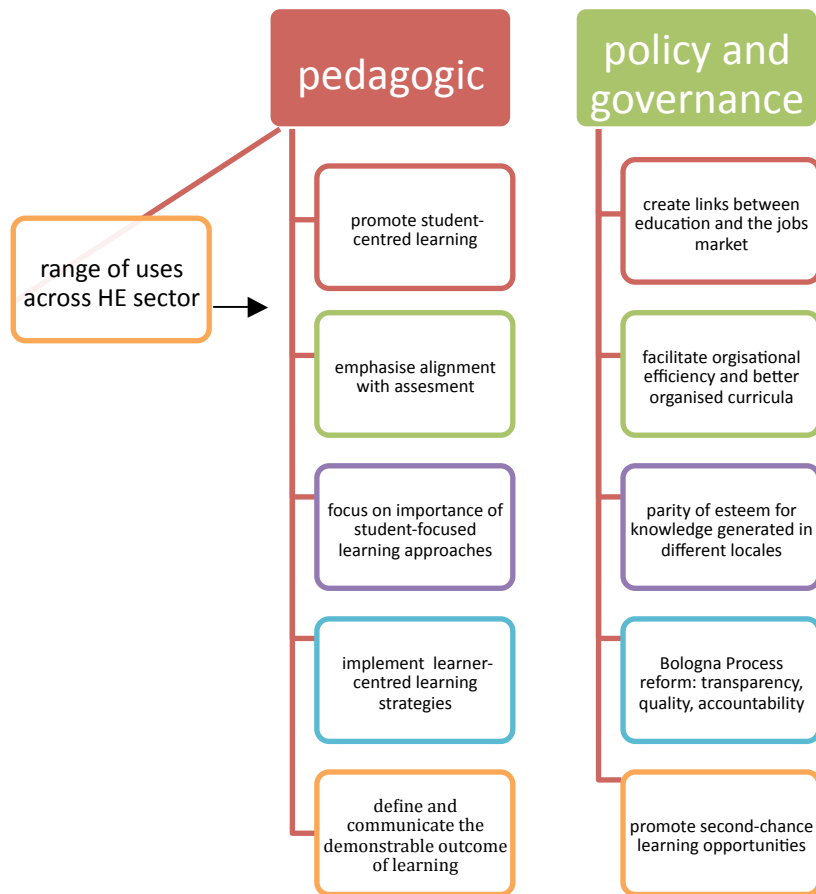
2.2 LOs as teaching and learning instruments: problems and pedagogy

OBE: Background

I now turn to OBE in an effort to contextualise LOs. LOs are considered the chief instrument of outcomes-based education (OBE), the educational movement that uses LOs to achieve its ends. To begin I will briefly outline what is understood by the concept of OBE.

Outcomes-based education is an approach to education that shifts the emphasis away from the teacher and teaching to 'the desired changes in students' learning' (Hargreaves and Moore, 2000). Previous to the emergence of OBE education had generally worked on a transmission model where the teacher controlled, directed

and created learning (Killen, 2007). OBE, in contrast, put the student's needs and behaviours at the top of the education hierarchy. For this reason OBE is often referred to as being 'student-centred' rather than 'teacher-centred.'

OBE is based on building blocks known as 'Learning Outcomes.' These are statements of what a learner should know at the end of a programme of study (Adam, 2008b). LOs predetermine the outcome of an education experience for the student in terms of guaranteeing what the student will know after undertaking a course: starting with the end in mind (Spady, 1994). A learning outcome can be used in different scales: they can be written into a curriculum or syllabus to designate the outcome of a course of study, a module or they can be written by a teacher or lecturer to define the outcome of a small activity such as a class or learning event (Hussey & Smith, 2008). OBE also includes the development of outcomes relating to assessments and the marking criteria associated with assessments.

OBE has four key principles which define its approach; a focus on what learners are supposed to be able to do at the end of a programme; a curriculum built with the end in mind; high performance expectations from the students and flexible learning opportunities and methods to be made available to the learners taking in to account their different needs (Spady, 1994; Killen, 2000). Jackson (2000) adds that OBE should also have 'the criteria for judging achievement of the intended outcomes (assessment criteria)' (p. 167). In the next section the critical relationship between the outcomes approach and assessment in higher education is examined as a particular issue in the adoption of OBE.

The critical relationship between OBE and assessment

Outcomes-based education is inextricably linked to assessment as all LOs are written with assessment in mind: that is, all LOs must be assessable, and all assessments must be linked to the LOs set for the programme and module. OBE owes its genesis from the 'assessment movement' in America in the 1980s (Ewell, 2008, p. 16) which focused on 'student LOs as the emerging measure of institutional excellence and effectiveness' (Tam, 2008, p. 159). In Ireland, The Hunt Report (2010) into the future

of higher education in Ireland stressed the importance of aligning LOs, pedagogy and assessment as a means of developing HE's readiness for the needs of global economy. Daugherty et al (2008) contend that LOs control assessment and thus control the curriculum. It has been posited that it is only a matter of time until 'codified LOs will define and control assessment practices and the curriculum in Europe' (Souto-Otero, 2012, p. 251).

Ecclestone (1999) described the arrival of outcomes-based assessment (OBA) as creating a 'polarising debate' in the HE community as stakeholders did not seem to be able to agree as to whether this new approach would empower or ensnare teachers and students. It is fair to say, given what has been written here about OBE generally that the same debate still continues 15 years later with neither side victorious.

A most interesting issue that Ecclestone takes up in her 1999 work is the negative effect that OBA is often said to be having on teachers and students. Drawing on the work of others she creates a picture of assessment that is so bureaucratic that leaves students as 'objects of surveillance and regulation' (Edwards and Usher, 1994, p. 11) This leaves us in mind of Foucault's evocation of Bentham's 'Panoptican' prison with its 365 degree central pillar that gives officers total control and view of prisoners (Shore and Roberts, 1993) as a metaphor for control and power in modern education. Lynch (2012) refers to this auditing as being 'Orwellian' in the Irish context. Ecclestone eventually rejects Edwards and Usher's view as 'it is difficult to equate competence and outcome-based assessment with 'discipline' and 'surveillance.' Indeed, it is possible to argue that all forms of external assessment impose conformity and surveillance on learners and teachers alike and are heavily based on extrinsic motivation' (Ecclestone, 1999, p. 40). This quote applies to all assessment forms but since OBA is the dominant form of assessment over the last decade the highly structured approach to assessment offered by OBA is particularly open to this charge. She concludes that OBA can in fact be adapted for progressive ends if they are not prescriptive and in this way they need not just be the preserve of the Conservative Right. I return to the role of assessment in the outcomes model at

the end of this chapter when the idea of whether OBE offers an opportunity for the pursuit of democratic ideals of meritocracy within HE is discussed.

OBA and Media Education

Assessment is important in media education as media education is poorly regarded as a 'soft' discipline in some quarters. Rigorous assessment is needed to augment its academic heft according to Worsnop (2008). Media education is a sub-field that has its own issues with assessment (Christ, 2007) and some of these relate directly to the rollout of outcomes-based assessment. Particularly the need to measure, inherent in the LOs culture, is causing difficulty for media educators (Beghetto, 2005; Cowdroy and Williams, 2006). Media projects' merit often lie in the creative realm and 'it is a daunting task to objectively and fairly evaluate artistic multimedia projects' (Shepherd and Mullane, 2008, p. 29). Teachers are often asked to follow an instrumentalist model (McCormick, 2013) and measure achievement but this drive for measurement reveals a tension between the positivist and interpretivist approaches and current views of assessment are dominated by a 'techno-rationalist' approach (Orr, 2007, p. 2). Describing achievement through grading systems is not ideal either as Yorke insists that 'grades do not possess the characteristics of true measures' (2010, p. 1).

Because of the OBA emphasis on assessment as a measure of how the student has achieved the learning outcome, LOs need to be outcomes that can be assessed and thus measured. This can prove problematic. In this way assessment tells us what is of value (Wolfe et al, 1991). In media education we are often assessing that which defies measurement; creativity and artistry (Bensur, 2002), yet these are very important tenets of media education. Some educators are adamant that evaluation cannot cope with the complexity and ambiguity of artistic learning (Haynes, 1996, Ewell, 2008).

Applied media education often relies on the expertise of teacher-practitioners to recognise creative achievement through assessment and this, again, is difficult to measure. Ecclestone (2001) warns against the 'I know it when I see it' culture of

assessment which is sometimes invoked by teachers justifying grades. It hardly seems fair from the students' perspective to rely on this vaguely intuitive mode of judgement. Measuring the outputs of education is important in the OBE paradigm (Keeling, 2006) in order for us to show that we know. Although, having said this, Eisner (1985, p. 141) regards the soft concept of the '*connoisseurship*' of experienced teachers, that is, the ability to identify and recognise the value of something (particularly artistic effort), or as he terms it 'the art of appreciation' and disclosure, as something to be recognised and valued. Some might view learning outcome statements as lacking this connoisseurship; the ability to capture the 'ineffable' component of learning. Ewell (2008) worries about possible 'reductionism' and 'reification' of learning through the use of LOs, and the tendency of LOs to presume that 'the ways a learner can construct meaning in the context of a particular discipline or ability are known in advance' (Tam, 2014, p. 165). The current system of OBA is seen by some as a grades- focused activity that encourages instrumentalism and does not recognise the possible value of failure as a valid by-product of risk-taking leading to growth (Jackson, 2005; Ecclestone, 2004). Risk taking is important in media practice to promote novelty and creative endeavour but the rise of prescriptive grading systems typical of OBA has been shown to make students risk-averse (Walker and Gleaves, 2008; Sabol, 1999).

Based on what has been proffered in this section on assessment, concerns are emerging about the use of OBA and its propensity for a kind of instrumentalism that is undesirable in many disciplines. Ecclestone suggests one possible solution to the polarising viewpoints that dog the OBA debate. She suggests a loosening of the precise interpretations of LOs (2001) and the use of more broad readings of LOs 'as a basis for more rigorous and democratic assessment' (1999, p. 31), this being a goal both sides would be happy to achieve.

OBE: Pedagogy

In this first section of the chapter I shall look at the pedagogic basis of OBE, some of it contested, and try to identify where various viewpoints might converge. I will

illuminate teacher concerns and pay particular attention to issues concerning the language of LOs and the resulting discourses in an effort to unpack the key contentions surrounding LOs.

A positive conception of OBE is its characterisation as a transformational approach to the curriculum. That is, 'the learner interacts with the curriculum; its sources of knowledge, reconstructing knowledge and acts as an independent learner taking responsibility for his or her own LOs' (Malan, 2000, p. 26). There are overtones of constructivism in this description but there are divisions on the theory of learning applicable to OBE. OBE's pedagogical parents have been described as behaviourist, constructivist and socio-constructivist, with behaviourism being cited most commonly as the learning perspective associated with OBE (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011b; Lomas, 2004; Butler, 2004). This seems apt as one of the chief goals of OBE is to effect a change in behaviour in the student (Butler, 2004; Tyler, 1949) which is a cornerstone of behaviourist thinking (Skinner, 1973) along with the performance aspect of instruction (Kennedy, 2011). Kennedy (2011, p. 210) comments that: 'this behavioural orientation to learning is an underlying assumption rather than a necessary defining characteristic of outcomes-based approaches.' Despite the poor image behaviourism has, mostly likely because of a backlash against Skinnerian 'operant conditioning' which advocated the punishment of undesirable behaviours (Skinner, 1973), a focus on preordained behaviours and achievements has been identified as a key aspect of OBE. The changes that are desired in the student exposed to OBE relate to an increase in learning and the development of competencies and a move in attitude on the part of the learner (Butler, 2004). It is difficult to argue against such goals except perhaps in the last case where the students' values might be manipulated by the teacher or institutional system. This could be viewed negatively. It could be argued that this manipulation happens anyway, whether implicitly or explicitly stated and that the education experience is value laden with beliefs being promoted in the classroom and by the institution in the way it constructs the education experience. Education has the ability to emancipate the individual (Barnett, 2000; 1994) and yet it can also domesticate the

student for their future life in work, which can mean that the manipulation of the individual comes as a form of indoctrination.

Student-centred learning is an explicit characteristic of OBE (Spady, 1994) and a significant move from the previously favoured 'transmission' mode of teaching and learning which was teacher -focused. The 'progressivist' nature of student focused learning is a constructivist tenet (Kennedy, 2011) that allows for the creation of new knowledge by the learner who builds and connects previous learning with the help of a teacher/mentor. The assessment protocols of OBE also add to the evidence of OBE having constructivist leanings. Biggs' 'constructive alignment' (2003) insists on the aligning of LOs and assessment so that all learning methods, activities and assessments are inter-connected to the LOs. Again, knowledge is constructed through the intersection of assessment and the desired outcome. It is advised in this model that all LOs should be assessable (Moon, 2002). This is contested on different points by critics. Firstly, it is contended that this pedagogy reduces the acceptance of the unknown (Gibbs and Iacovidou, 2004) and secondly, that behaviour or outcomes that cannot be seen are ignored by this method (Tam, 2008; Smyth and Dow, 1998). Thirdly, not all LOs are intended (Hussey and Smith, 2003) and that chance may lead a learner to learn something that has not been defined beforehand. Does this mean unintended learning has no value? Most would agree that an unintended learning outcome is generally a happy event in any educational experience and a frequent one. These learning moments may defy assessment or may not be part of the assessment given that they were not predetermined, but they still have value. In this way the OBE message does not recognise fully the value of unintended learning (Tam, 2014).

The constructivist credentials of OBE have been further attacked by Jervis and Jervis (2005, p. 9) who could not agree with the premise that OBE and constructive alignment of assessment and LOs was a constructivist process:

> *We cannot reconcile this claim (i.e. to be constructivist) with admonitions to get the students to do the things that the objectives nominate, - and test to see if the students have learned that the objectives state they should be learning (Biggs, 2003). Students are trapped into learning activities but free to construct knowledge they may or may not have acquired in the in the process,*

in their own way. This appears to us to be a constructivist epistemology, which is embedded in behaviourist pedagogy.

Teacher Concerns with OBE and LOs

The rise of OBE and specifically LOs has been welcomed by some and lamented by others. Dykman (1994) believes that people broadly agree with the premise of OBE; the ideas of setting clear goals and that students should be able to show what they have learned, but that there are inherent problems in the detail of OBE. In this section I will endeavour to look at the problems that have surfaced with OBE and LOs, some of which are criticisms of its choice of language and the complexity of concepts, and some of which revolve around what it means in practical terms to, and for, teachers.

As stated before there has been a mixed reaction to the introduction of OBE across the globe, most of it negative in terms of academic voices. One commentator in Australia likened the phrase 'outcomes-based education' to a term of abuse in that country (Alderson and Martin, 2007), showing us just how divisive the debate has become. Educators have issues with LOs, in particular some do not want to be accountable for outcomes they have no control over and have not created (Skolnik, 2010). Also, teachers often feel marginalised in this new world order; they feel 'unloved' (Shearman, 2009, p. 97; Keeling, 2006). This creates difficulties because even though OBE is a student-centred, transformational approach to education, rather than a teacher- focused transmissional approach, many in higher education still believe the teacher ought to have a central role in the educational process by setting the teaching and learning agenda (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011b). Some disciplines find it difficult to dispense with the old content-driven syllabi and take a mechanical approach to the use of LOs, which lacks pedagogic rigour (Ahkmadeeva, 2013). It is apparent that leaving the central figure on the margins of OBE will not contribute to its success as consensus is needed to drive forward this project that has yet to achieve legitimacy in many academic minds. Teaching is being side-lined (Henkel, 2002) and for some the role of the academy is under threat with the rise of the Registrar, indeed the very nature of being an academic is under threat; 'one sort

of romance about being an academic is no longer speakable, thinkable, do-able' (McWilliam and Hatcher, 1999, p.69). In this scenario the new academic is enterprising, competitive and performing to the instrumentalist agenda which is, one could surmise, is the way in which OBE has been able to manifest itself in this 'new' way of being a teacher/academic.

The kind of knowledge that OBE is 'transferring' is also contentious for educators. There is the accusation that OBE encourages instrumental knowledge over critical thinking (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011b), that there must be a recognised usability about the knowledge acquired and that critical thinking is consigned to the margins. This is perhaps because critical thinking is not easily measured in assessment form and OBE puts a measurement on the level of learning attained. Interestingly, some disciplines diverge on what is considered to be knowledge in the first place. OBE does not seem to address this problem. For example, Karseth (2008) makes the point that research in Norway showed that what constitutes knowledge in an arts or music department may not correspond to other disciplines' concept of knowledge. This disparity and conceptual discord makes it difficult to draw frameworks that have the OBE standardising effect. Some might argue that standardising education, especially in the realm of the arts, is not advisable at any rate (Jackson, 2000).

Language, Authorship and LOs
A chief concern, and one that this thesis is preoccupied with, is the language of OBE and how this has been received and perceived by educators. In this section I explore the tensions around the perceived shortcomings of the language of LOs as against their potential to introduce clarity and facilitate understanding in the education process.

Karseth's (2008) research showed the inadequacy of the language and terminology of OBE for capturing the more ethereal knowledge concepts of arts disciplines in Norway. The language of LOs is often criticised and rarely praised, except perhaps by those who point to the clarity they offer (Werquin, 2012). Certainly those who are happy to endorse OBE find that LOs, through their simple language, make learning

perspicuous and that this is advantageous for all stakeholders (ibid.). The simple statement of what the learner is supposed to know makes it clear what is expected at the end of a course of learning and helps learners and teachers craft teaching and learning to achieve those goals. Notwithstanding this there are criticism of the lexicon and construction of the outcomes model. Chief among these is the recurrent observation that that OBE, in line with its managerialist bent, is jargon heavy, relying on the language of corporate business (Berlach, 2004). This lends itself to vagueness and the result is that teachers are often confused as to what is required (ibid.). This confusion has led to a debate about whether the language of OBE should make LOs specific or general. Sometimes authors of LOs are instructed to be specific when writing LOs (Keravnou-Papapiliou, 2009), this approach is embedded in the Tyler (1949) mould of objectives-based education. LOs as advocated by Spady and his followers were much less specific in terms of their language (Tucker, 2009). Others insist that outcomes should be broad and that problems arise when outcomes are too narrowly posed (Kennedy, 2011). This broadness has led to practitioner confusion and criticisms of 'vagueness' (Berlach, 2004) being directed at the LOs lobby. Bologna promoter Adam (2008) concedes that there is no broad agreement on the depth of LOs and that this is hampering the Europe-wide immersion of education in the OBE model.

Hussey and Smith (2003) criticise the 'fog of rhetoric' inherent in OBE and claim that this 'fog' threatens to stifle originality in the classroom (p. 358). The tight focus sometimes created by the technicist language of OBE can lead toward instrumental reasoning (Rust et al, 2003; Jansen, 1998) which ignores the messy and complex nature of learning. Authors often create LOs which are over-specified; an attempt to trap learning to ensure consistency (Avis, 2010). Not all learning is intended, nor does it happen in a straight line, but according to OBE epistemology learning in the LOs mode is prescribed within the framework of the statement of intended outcomes and has restrictions embedded (Tam, 2014).

There are academics who are trying to soften this rigid approach by urging the authors of LOs to consider a space for emergent outcomes which are those that allow for the possibility of chance learning (Hussey and Smyth, 2003). And there are

those who take the view that LOs can succeed if they are developed with 'care and sensitivity' making them broad and 'appropriate for higher education where creativity and imaginative leaps are highly valued' (Adam, 2008, p. 15). Avis (2010) makes the distinction between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts based on the work of Barthes (1973). Barthes advocates a writerly text which engages the reader in the production of the text and requires the reader to be an active participant in the decoding of the text. In the case of writerly texts the reader is written in as part of the learning outcome. In readerly texts the reader is passive and lacks agency. Avis (2010) advocates that we write LOs in a writerly way (something that is often missing) so that teachers and students can be involved in the authorship of the LOs.

Whether Avis' proposition is possible or will gain support is not known yet. Views on the issue of language and authorship of LOs tend to be more orientated to the Hussey and Smith (2003) belief that LOs have the possibility of being helpful in higher education but that 'the concept of LOs has become so entangled with the notions of specificity, transparency and measurability as to become largely irrelevant to classroom activities and practices, as well as being unachievable' (ibid., p. 367). Part of the blame for this rests with the language of the LOs and OBE in general which is often complex and inaccessible for teachers (Jansen, 1998).

In sum, the way in which LOs are being written is divorcing many practitioners from their usage; their reliance on sterile terminology places LOs, for many, at a perilous remove from the human relationships central to teaching and learning, while others applaud their simplicity (Werquin, 2012) it seems again that LOs have proved divisive in nature.

2.3 The role of OBE in the development of HE globally

OBE in Global Higher Education: Policy and Politics
Although Spady is considered the father of the OBE paradigm he was not the only person involved the development of OBE. This movement which began in the US in the late 1980s was promoted and shaped by many individuals, agencies and

governments in different parts of the globe. Over the decades OBE may have lost favour in high schools in the US, and the universities of South Africa of late (Allais, 2012), but it has travelled well and is now the basis of most higher education learning frameworks in first world economies (Tam, 2014). For instance, in Australia OBE has been adopted by government in schools and universities as the new educational way despite vocal criticism from practitioners (Lawson and Askell-Williams, 2007; Smyth and Dow, 1998). Likewise in South Africa (Allais, 2012; Waghid, 2003; Manson, 1999) parts of China (Ng, 2008) and Canada (Haug, 2000), OBE is controversial but widely adopted (Hussey and Smith, 2003). In Europe the drive for quality and standards that came from the Bologna Process of higher education reform in Europe, which began in 1999 and is on-going today, has made OBE one of the key building blocks of European higher education policy over the last 15 years (Adam, 2008). Since the writing of the Lisbon Agenda (2000) the creation of a sophisticated knowledge economy, assisted by the HE sector, has been the goal of governments across Europe (Capano and Piattoni, 2011). Governments teased the nay-sayers with discourses that promised 'choice', 'ownership' and 'autonomy' while at the same time maintaining 'a heavy degree of steering at a distance' (Hartley, 1993, p. 107). In reality a new relationship between education and economics was being forged in which education would be expected to drive economic enhancement and be itself a commodity to be traded (Ball, 2012), this view was reflected in the language of relevant policy texts being issued by the Commission (Keeling, 2006).

Higher Education as Commodity

Apart from creating industry-fit graduates the new educational way has been active in promoting the commodification and industrialisation of education. The creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which will have unified standards and quality is expected imminently. Concerned US commentators fear that Europe will filch foreign high yield students from the very successful American universities who have hitherto been hegemonic in the global higher education industry (Ewell, 2004). Winston (2000) refers to this as a kind of academic 'arms race.' The drive to sell Europe as an education destination has been explicit over the years. The Prague Declaration (2001) described one of its tenets as 'promoting the attractiveness of the

European Higher Education Area' (Tomusk, 2001). The EU Commission- sponsored drive for notifiable quality standards in higher education has been seen as a key driver of the European threat from the US perspective (West, 2010). This shift from the Humboldtian ideals of the German universities of the 1920s to the market driven European and Western World map of the new century marks a radical change in ideology. Academic knowledge in the higher education sector has been re-organised in such a way that 'the dominant legitimating idea of public higher education has changed from that of a social institution to that of an industry' (Gumport, 2001, p. 94). Ball (2012) rejects the neoliberal view of higher education and 'the very real economic and political dynamic to the reform of Higher Education, a business dynamic which seeks profit from the buying and selling of education 'services' (p. 18). Nevertheless the exchange value of education is being decided by the market with, for example, engineering degrees occupying three of the top ten high earning career spots for graduates over a lifetime (The Daily Telegraph, 2012). This valuing of one degree over another leads critics to denounce the so-called commodification of learning into goods (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011a). LOs as designed by curriculum managers have helped define education as a product and this is supported by the EU Commission's stance in its policy documents that educational activities are measurable and that the output of individuals and countries can be measured (Keeling, 2008). The new thesis of economic rationalism is rejected by many within the professoriate but given its widespread adoption and the weak position of academics today in the higher education decision-making process it does not look like it will be reversed or superseded in the near future (Poole, 2010).

2.4 LOs: managerialism and quality in HE

Managerialism in Higher Education

> *Managerialism involves the development of a formal organisational structure with central control (Holmes, 1993), which often leads to less consultation, fewer committees and a concentration of power at the centre of the university.*

> (Lomas, 2007, p. 405)

The quality movement's global march on education has created a culture of managerialism in higher education. 'Managerialism characterises an ideological enterprise aimed at conceiving, meaning making, legitimating and delivering desired sates of change' (Brancaleone and O' Brien, 2011b, p. 11). Managerialism is also a technology of governance and is heavily influenced by the quality movement (ibid.). OBE is in turn one of the chief instruments of the quality movement and this will be investigated in more detail further on in this chapter.

Quality assurance has its genesis in American business management models that successfully helped rebuild Japan after World War II (Poole, 2010). Poole (2010, p. 11) loosely describes quality as 'a set of procedures that makes sure nothing goes wrong.' LOs, an omnipresent device in modern higher education curricula, are designed to ensure that all goes right, to guarantee that the learner learns what the learner is supposed to learn. Learning can be overseen and managed by managers through the use of controlled outcomes. Proponents of OBE argue that this helps learners achieve high standards. De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2007) align the rise in standards to the idea of 'total quality management' (TQM) which is a managerial term for a model that places the customer at the centre of the transaction.

Ball (2012, p. 17) is concerned at how managerialism is affecting teachers who are being asked to justify their existence and make themselves 'calculable rather than memorable.' The requirement to 'perform' is described by Ball as 'a moral system that subverts and re-orients us to its ends. It makes us responsible for our performance and the performance of others' (2012, p. 19). This model has left many teachers feeling marginalised (Skolnik, 2010) and 'unloved' (Shearman, 2009). Many in education see the advance of quality assurance in the new managerial age as a negative as it reduces the human component of teaching, the contrary view being that learning is 'a matter of personal contact' (Poole, 2010, p. 13) where different students may have their own experience of education, one which might not be captured in the LOs model as it defies description and is certainly not calculable, but which is nonetheless valuable in its own right.

OBE and the quality movement

A key policy driver for the enhancement of higher education in Europe has been the quality movement, of which OBE has become an important instrument (Adam, 2008). Fournier (2005) refers to quality in terms of its evaluative function. In this case, in order to assess the quality of a programme or institution, quality comes in the form of an evaluation as an 'applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesizing evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance or quality of a program, product, person, policy, proposal or, plan' (Ursin, 2008, p. 110). Martin and Stella (2007, p. 34) characterise quality assurance in a more direct, succinct and pointed manner as 'the monitoring, evaluation or review of higher education in order to establish stakeholder confidence that it fulfils expectations or meets minimum requirements.' These two definitions highlight different elements. The first highlights internal processes and judgement while the second relates to accountability purposes and 'external stakes'. The first interpretation can be seen as giving teaching the attention it deserves on behalf of the students. In the second interpretation of quality, in the context of European higher education policy, we could say that OBE offers the instruments that quality needs to measure the success or failure of an institution, programme or module. In this way OBE has been beneficial to the goals of output-focused managers and policy developers and conversely it can also be interpreted as a model that gives teaching and learning the consideration it merits through the creation of bespoke outcomes.

Across Europe there has been a raft of new quality agencies created at European, national and local levels (Huisman and Westerheijden, 2010). Governments through their quality agencies and national qualifications frameworks monitor institutions and in their turn institutions monitor their programmes internally. One of the key ways that Europe has been able to reach into institutions in various countries and create the impression of quality is through the promotion of outcomes-based education. According to Keeling (2006) the Commission's policy documents are clear in the idea that 'educational activities and outputs are measurable' (p. 209). This measurability is pursued using the model of OBE which advocates a 'comprehensive approach to organising and operating an educations system that is focused on and

defined by the successful demonstrations of learning sought from each student' (Spady, 1994, p. 1). This form of education based on objectives endorses the use of LOs and is actively advanced by the Commission 'positioning it in opposition to an emphasis on the learning process' (Lassnigg, 2012, p. 308). The report that followed the Ministerial Conference in London in 2007 stated that a key aspect of the Bologna Process was now: 'a focus on learners and a focus on LOs' (Stocktaking Report, 2007, p. 3) and subsequent papers produced by the Commission use LOs to 'underpin the architecture of the Process' (Bracaleone and O'Brien, 2011, p. 503). The intertwining of the quality agenda with OBE is very pertinent to the charge that OBE can be captured by ideology, a charge that Spady wanted to dismiss (Tucker, 2009). Nevertheless as OBE has moved through different hands and jurisdictions it becomes more apparent that being ideologically laden is a contention that OBE cannot evade.

2.5 Learning outcomes and Neoliberalism

Learning outcomes are often associated with the quality movement and its penchant for measuring and auditing; this in turn is connected to the marketization of education and the concept of neoliberalism. This section of the literature review looks at the possible influence of neoliberal discourses in higher education, starting with an explanation of the concept followed by how the neoliberal movement has made its way successfully into higher education. This part of the chapter will examine the rise of neoliberalism in Ireland and juxtapose criticisms and defences of neoliberalism as an ideology within higher education in Ireland and globally. Neoliberalism is posited in one conception as an overarching ideology that promotes managerialism and uses LOs as an instrument.

Figure 2: LOs and neoliberalism in HE

Neoliberalism

New Public Management/
New Managerialism

Outcomes-based
Education

Learning
outcomes

One possible conception of LOs as flowing from the overarching notion of neoliberal ideology through to the syllabus document containing the LOs and resulting in student learning
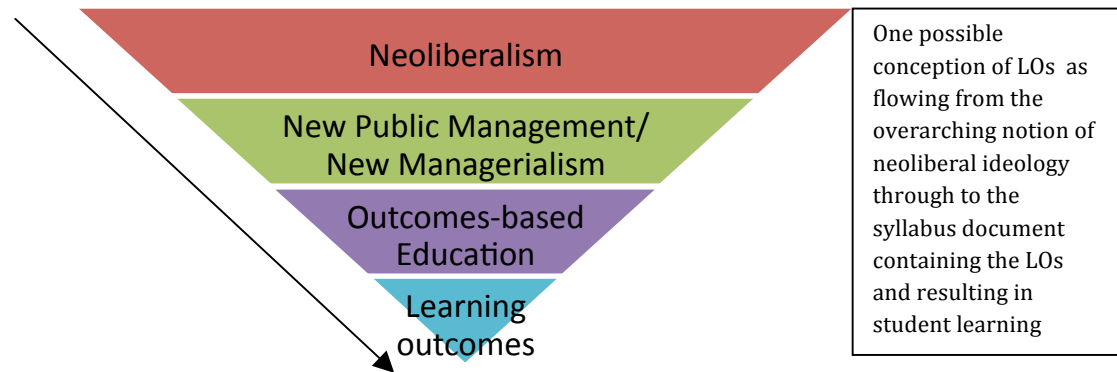
Neoliberalism is the concept and economic position or programme that supports the free market and public-private partnerships (Ayres and Carlone, 2007). Three beliefs are held in neoliberal thought: that a free market is good, that there should be only minimal intervention by the state in business and finally that the individual is characterised as a self-interested actor within society (Harvey, 2005; Turner, 2008).

Neoliberalism is 'the big story of our time' according to Roberts and Peters (2008, p. 22), a dangerous ideology (Giroux, 2002) and representative of the dominant hegemony (Saunders, 2010; 2011) in western societies. It is a much debated concept. It is a term that is often used pejoratively (Fish, 2009) to refer to political and economic policies that encourage and have trust in the benefits of the free market to society. But neoliberalism can also be considered 'a positive conception of the state's role' in providing the conditions for the market to flourish (Olssen and Peters, 2005) and represents a move from the bureau-professional to the consumer-managerial (Radice, 2013).

Neoliberalism in Higher Education

There is evidence that neoliberalism has a strong presence in HE across the Western World, whether in implicit or explicit forms.

Knowledge itself has become a form of capital according to neoliberal tenets (Radice, 2013; Olssen and Peters, 2005); something to be traded in the form of certification or

with colleges exporting their reputations abroad with new campuses thousands of miles from home (Ball, 2010). What counted as knowledge is also mediated by the new neoliberal agenda, according to Lynch (2012, p. 6) 'within education, neoliberalism redefines what counts as knowledge, who are the bearers of such knowledge and who is empowered to act.' The result is considered by many to be the 'commodification' of education (Baez, 2007) and the vocationalisation of the curriculum to concur with what business and the economy needed to expand (Levin, 2005; Aronowitz, 2000) to provide future managers and entrepreneurs. The arrival of neoliberal power within the management of higher education lead to tertiary education being viewed in many parts as a private good to be purchased by a student who was redefined as a 'customer' (Wellen, 2005). The 'student-as-customer' theme is prevalent in the literature and is reviewed the next part of this section.

Student-as-customer

In South Africa where LOs and a neoliberal agenda gained popularity in the nascent democratic nation of the 1990s the student was fully recognised as a customer and 'value-for-money came to supersede social justice and democracy as the primary principle underpinning student demands in the post-apartheid University' (Luescher-Mamashela, 2010, p. 227). This example of the new emerging student/customer of the South African paradigm was replicated across the western world and gained a legitimacy that stands today (Saunders, 2010; Apple, 2004; Giroux and Giroux, 2004). Giroux and Giroux (2004) view this appellation of 'customer' within the higher education sphere as some kind of surrogate for learning rather than learning itself. This assessment aligns with Brancaleone and O'Brien's (2011a) opinion of academic certification as a surrogate for learning; the trappings of management and bureaucracy indicating learning but not actually being learning but a manmade substitute.

Detractors imply that this model of the-student-as-customer engenders a strong degree of undesirable selfishness in student behaviour, with students operating in an individualistic manner, concerned only with their own patch, and missing out on the

possibilities of being an actor within a community of learners (Saunders, 2010; Olssen, 2005). Slaughter and Rhodes (2004) insist we cannot view higher education as a simple service provider where the customer is always right: in higher education the 'customer' is not always right. Nevertheless, as higher education loses its 'free' status and students struggle to pay to access the curriculum 'the economic exchange between the student and institution becomes the defining relationship between the two' (Saunders, 2010, p. 62).

In sum, from the neoliberal viewpoint, 'education is a service with customers and those customers express satisfaction about the institution's services and instruction offered' (De Jager and Nieuwenhuis, 2007, p. 254). OBE may be 'customer' focused tool, whether that be looking at the 'student as customer' or the 'customer as student' as a positive development in HE, but equally the notion of the student as 'customer' is an anathema to many educators:

> *Students are not products, customers, consumers, service users or clients – they are participants. Education is not a service for a customer (much less a product to be consumed) but an on-going process of transformation of the participant.*

> (Harvey and McKnight, 1996, p. 7)

Neoliberalism in Ireland

Neoliberalism in Ireland is currently a topic for debate. In 2013 The President of Ireland, Micheál D. Higgins, in a speech at Dublin City University, launched a barely veiled attack on the values presented in the neoliberal model and questioned the emphasis on measurement 'by which we gauge economic value and human worth' (2013, p. 4). His comments were in turn criticised for their political hue and their divisive nature. In the Irish Times, influential economist Dan O'Brien dismissed the President's comments insisting that 'because nobody anywhere defines himself/herself as 'neoliberal', this makes dialogue impossible and the making of conspiracy myths all too easy…' (O'Brien, 2013). Indeed Saunders (2010) agreed with this notion of the world being devoid of any self-processed 'neoliberals', such is the pejorative nature of the moniker (Fish, 2009).

In 1997 the government passed The Universities Act which gave the state a bigger say in the control of universities and included the explicit provision for quality assurance (Headley, 2010). This decision clearly indicated the state was moving closer to private business by introducing the business concept of 'quality' to the once autonomous universities. Lynch (2006), who the President quoted in his controversial DCU speech, is fiercely critical of rise of neoliberalism in Ireland where she sees students paying to fund the development of education to service the economy. In 2010 the same author further charged neoliberalism as being involved in institutionalised practices of 'surveillance and the unrelenting measurement of performance' (2010, p. 53), measuring and auditing which was often meaningless but nonetheless normalised in everyday life.

Contesting anti-neoliberal dogma

Although not many call themselves 'neoliberalists' there are many who defend the needs of the market and its ability to be beneficial to society. Baez (2007) identified the argument that neoliberalism frees people from the oppression of the state because each individual is an autonomous economic actor, the beneficiary of equal opportunity within the neoliberal model.

The mixed approach of state and industry working together to create a society, as cited by O'Brien (2013), seems to be one that has gained traction and a school of thought revolves around the idea that neoliberalism is not as rigid a proposition as once feared. Roberts and Peters (2008) say that neoliberalism seems to have lost some of its hard edges. Although staff and teachers in higher education are required to fulfil the requirements of neoliberalism through the instruments of NPM, and managerialism generally, not all have complied without protest or maintaining their own progressive values within the management structures of their institution (Ayres and Carlone, 2007). Deem (2004) explains that there is evidence of soft resistance through the testimony of people who use the language of NPM in higher education without necessarily being signed-up to NPM, although she does concede that not using the language of NPM leaves one marginalised within a neoliberal workplace.

Lastly, Headley (2010) contends that neoliberalism is the dominant narrative in the Irish Universities, but he adds that neoliberalism, in the micro form of managerialism, is not the only narrative in this context and that departments do retain autonomy of thought and sometimes deed.

To finish here, it would seem that neoliberalism ideology is prevalent in Western HE and indeed in HE in Ireland where this study takes place. Neoliberalism is a divisive ideology but it is worth taking into account the important contention that 'neoliberal ideas gain meaning only as they are translated within particular discursive and institutional contexts' (Kjaer and Pedersen, 2001, p. 232), and individuals may chose not to interpret their practice within neoliberal norms but may instead chose to adhere to their own values which are still relevant and possible within the hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism.

2.6 LOs: An assessment of their contribution to HE 15 years on

After almost fifteen years of the growing power of LOs from a method to a movement to official European HE policy (cedesop, 2009) the discourse surrounding the use and authorship of LOs has shifted from pedagogy to policy (Souto-Otero, 2012). This final section looks at the most up-to-date work and seminal texts on LOs which reveal a concern with the LOs direction of education policy and the asks of the literature: Did LOs deliver on their initial promises of clarity/ transparency, flexibility, improved quality and act as the panacea for the ills of higher education?

Clarity and transparency

The terms clarity and transparency occur as synonyms of each other in current literature concerning LOs. It was hoped and believed that the advent of LOs in education would increase transparency (Bohlinger, 2012) for the student, teacher, institutions, employers and governments alike, in terms of what the student needed to be able to do to achieve in a programme of study and for others to precisely know what the student could do and what knowledge he or she had at the end of a module or programme of study (Tam, 2013). Hargreaves and Moore (2000) believed that OBE, a scion of neoliberal activity, freed people from the shackles of the established

academic elite in the UK because it offered transparency; in that planning through outcomes helped 'crystallize teachers' real intentions' (p. 29). Hargreaves and Moore also viewed OBE as promoting fairness as they were in some cases explicitly pegged to policy which linked 'education to goals of social equality and social justice' (2000, p. 30). Werquin (2012, p. 264) believes that LOs do 'bring transparency to the world of education, training and lifelong learning.' He cites the move to National Frameworks of Qualifications (NFQs) that are being rolled out across the world as an example of this. The framework model creates a pathway of achievement a student may travel, at their own pace, to fulfil their educational potential.

Figure 3: Example of an NFQ graphic: Ireland.
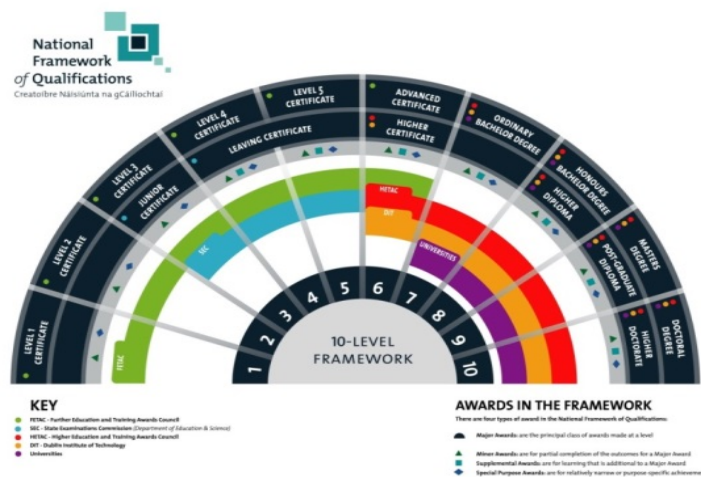
Source: www.qqi.ie

NFQs describe qualifications in terms of LOs (Young, 2005), and the Commission strongly encourages the use of NFQs by EU member states (Lassnigg, 2012). The NFQ system of mapping learning in terms of the rungs of a ladder reflect the use of LOs as a key driver of HE learning while offering the student transparency in terms of what they will know as the end of a course of study. Also, LOs help to make the pathway of educational progression clear through the NFQ which gives students an opportunity to plan their academic futures (Souto-Otero, 2012). On a smaller level, LOs can make

it clear what a student has to do to on a programme level to achieve and this can help retention rates (Werquin, 2012) and stave off drop- out rates.

Transparency when referring to LOs might be understood as 'making plain' that esoteric content of specialised knowledge which is often available only to those who have been initiated into the discipline. LOs aim to offer a kind of 'short-hand' that most can understand (Werquin, 2012). Such claims regarding the transparency offered by LOs are contested by those who insist that LOs have increased complexity with a proliferation of specifications (Wolf, 1995). The claim of offering clarity is described as spurious by some. Hussey and Smith (2002) felt LOs gave off a false sense of clarity to students because they are understood in the context of prescribed knowledge and are thus 'parasitic upon the very knowledge and understanding that they are supposed to be explicating' (Hussey and Smith 2002, p. 225). Equally Bohlinger (2012, p. 292) contends that there is no evidence to show that LOs have solved the issue of transparency for stakeholders using LOs.

Learning-focused approach

LOs were conceived with flexibility in mind to promote a learning-focused approach to education. Their use and interpretation were designed to be flexible, meaning that they are pliable, can be modified and adapted so that the 'different abilities and backgrounds of students can be accommodated through different instructional paths, technologies and modes that are allowed in an outcomes-based approach' (Tam, 2008, p. 164). In terms of their use we have seen that the aforementioned NQFs can help students pause their journey into education across the NQF fan and restart their education at a more propitious time (Werquin, 2012) which is useful for the student planning their education in terms of lifelong learning and with a focus on learning. This understanding of LOs as presented could signify a refocusing on learning rather than the stratified individual trajectory of learning offered prior to the advent of OBE. This, and the following interpretations of flexibility with regard to LOs, leads us away from education based on the traditional prestige of the degree and toward the actual learning that has occurred.

In terms of their language and interpretation, LOs can be viewed as a cross disciplinary tool which puts 'knowledge generated in different contexts on an equal footing' (Souto-Otero, 2012, p. 249), again displaying a concern with learning rather the seat of learning. Werquin (2012, p. 265) maintains that LOs 'facilitate the establishment of a common language across different fields' but this contested by Allais (2012) who feels that LOs cannot disclose meaning across disciplines or capture the essence of a programme; two particular uses that were specifically in mind at managerial level. Flexibility is hard to achieve when there is a lack of agreed meaning concerning LOs across Europe (ibid.). This might reflect vagaries in translation and linguistic emphasis or a difference in interpretation of the role of LOs. Again, Allais (2012, p. 335) feels that LOs have worked for managers and as agents of the quality agenda but points to their inherent weakness in that 'knowledge cannot be mapped onto or derived from LOs.' This view may be interpreted as endorsing a view of LOs as an instrument of policy rather than a shared pedagogic language across disciplines that can be interpreted across a broad range of disciplines. Most authors writing in this area endorse the need for flexibility of use and interpretation as a key trait needed for LOs to succeed in their goal of helping students learn in a real way (Souto-Otero, 2012; Avis, 2010; Daughtery et al, 2008; Harden, 2007; Hussey and Smith, 2003; Eisner, 1979). There has been some scepticism as to whether LOs can be flexible because of a tendency to over-specify (Wolf, 1995; Sartori, 1984) which, ironically, has seen us move from one type of specificity (that of disciplinary language) to the over-specificity of the oft-times narrow learning outcome. A more helpful might be to view LOs as a process rather than an outcome (Souto-Otero, 2012).

In sum, it is contested LOs whether operating within curricula or guidelines in the guise of NQFs, have made learning more accessible and effort-free for the individual. Raffe (2009) noted that when the NQF was introduced in Scotland it was heralded as the education equivalent of penicillin, but subsequent criticism and resistance have meant that LOs, although widely adopted may not always be used in the manner intended (Adam, 2008; CEDEFOP, 2008). This lack of proper engagement has been seen by promoters of the LO approach as a lost opportunity or weakness, but one

which puts the user at the centre of blame. Some authors writing on this topic see the issue as one of inherent deficit in the nature of LOs which they view as lacking in transparency and flexibility, while others see LOs as engendering transparency and clarity to the benefit of the student. Burnham (2011, p. 56) regards LOs value as being very limited 'outside the context of specific tasks and their relationships', but also adds 'LOs cannot simply be abandoned' as he sees some value in them in the less complex stages of education. Indeed Burnham touches on something here that is not often elucidated: so much effort has gone into rolling out LOs by the European Commission and at national level over the last 15 years that it is difficult to see how LOs and the OBE approach generally could be abandoned, especially since the education establishment has nothing as stout to fill what would be perceived as a vacancy.

2.7 The open debate:

The LOs journey: from 'progressive' to the Right

LOs have travelled a curious road from originally being cast as 'progressive' to being later denounced as utilitarian and marketised. This section will first examine that journey before investigating LOs credentials as a democratising force in HE.

If we cast our minds back to the work of Spady in the early 1990s we see that the original drive towards an outcomes based educational paradigm was one which put the learner at the centre of the education (Spady, 1994) with Spady's own contention that following the outcomes model was to ensure that 'all can achieve'. In this guise OBE and its instrument, LOs, were envisaged as having the power to promote the democratisation of HE by widening access and eroding the perceived elitism of education with its academic standards based on faultless track records and academic content. Indeed this was happening with the massification of HE across the EU. Taking Ireland as an example, French (2010, p. 13) tells us that HE 'moved from an elite system in the 1960s when ten per cent of school leavers accessed higher education to more than 40 per cent by 1998 and more than 60 per cent today.' This scenario came about because LOs challenged differences between sites of learning

like the traditional university and other newer and rapidly expanding HEIs and replaced what we know as 'equality of access' with what Souto-Otero (2012, p. 250) refers to as the 'equality of outcomes' which allowed for the notion of parity of esteem across HEIs. Furthermore, it was believed that it was possible to craft 'outcomes technology' for different social histories and social geographies if 'equity goals are explicit' (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 32): indeed LOs promised a lot in terms of the meaning and purpose of education which could see the century end by offering equity of access and opportunity to learners (for first and second timers) from a wide range of background, some of whom were previously locked out of the system.

The 'progressive' credentials of LOs have come to be verified by the evidence above but somewhere along the way the nature of LOs have come to be acutely associated with the other end of the ideological spectrum: the Right and the concept of neoliberalism as explained in section **2.6**. How might this have happened? Perhaps it was the result of the drive to use outcomes in HE that can be traced back to the UK's Conservative led Government issuing of the Dearing Report (1997). The Dearing report was commissioned by a Conservative government but followed through by a newly elected Labour government (Blake, 2010) which introduced a proliferation of new stakeholders in HE some of whom were interested in aligning the needs of the economy to the goals of HE; something that is at the heart of the neoliberal agenda (Radice, 2013). Avis (2010, p. 40) contends that 'the assumed relation between an engaged educated populace and economic renewal' was at the heart of New Labour's education and social agenda. Education today is seen as an explicit answer to the economic imperative in Europe through the likes of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs (European Council, 2000), and is still seen as the answer to economic renewal, where graduates are created to perform activities that employers need doing and OBE is a significant attempt to see that this is achieved (De Jager and Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

French (2010, p. 15) describes the situation in Ireland where 'education is used as an instrument of government policy' and it is accepted that it has a strong role in the development of the economy. In the recent recession, HE through its teaching and research programmes has been earmarked by ministers for finance to support jobs

and the 'smart economy' (ibid.). LOs are seen by their promoters as being tools that can construct graduates that will contribute to the economic and social life of their communities (Kennedy, 2011).

In sum, I have given a brief overview of the divided road that LOs have travelled: hailed in the 1990s as a new progressive educational tool in HE which has helped many gain access to and successfully complete HE programmes. Juxtaposed with this positive conception is the reality that LOs have also been overrun, more recently, by claims that they are the instrument of neoliberal advances in HE. Indeed LOs have been used to manage HE structures and staff as well as manage learning, and governments have adopted LOs to further ensure that HE contributes to economic progress. In the complex arena of LOs and their uses and purposes I would contend that both conceptions have validity: as seen in section **2.6** the neoliberal argument has been discussed in some depth; in the next section the less promoted issue of the democratising capabilities of LOs will be examined.

OBE and Democracy

Those from the right and the left can equally endorse the benefits of progressive or anti-elite education. Ownership of the democratic ideal within HE is not the preserve of one ideological viewpoint. This is seen in the context of the OBE debate. There are pro-instrumentalist commentators who view OBE as an instrument of meritocracy and a democratic endeavour which helps students take control of their own learning (Avis et al, 2002) and there are those who criticise it as 'technical rationality', which is a kind of positivist epistemology of learning (Schön, 1983) and view it as anti-democratic. Spady himself felt that OBE was progressive in that it was the antithesis of the 'bell curve' educational paradigm that went before (Tucker, 2009). In the OBE view all students can succeed and the expectation is that they would. The 'bell-curve' pre-ordains that some will excel, some will fail and the majority will be middle-ranking achievers. It presupposes success based on IQ (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). Spady's belief that OBE can be viewed as a democratic device is endorsed by

others although authors read the democratic nature of OBE in different contexts and in different ways.

The context of South Africa has seen vigorous debate grow around the acceptance of OBE in the schools system (Waghid, 2003). It may be perhaps because the very survival of a new democracy is at stake that education commentators need to feel that their education system mirrors the high hopes for a new South Africa. Malan (2000) sees OBE as the best solution for a nascent democracy. He sees the benefit of what he calls OBE's 'socio-constructivist' approach (Malan, 2000, p. 26) where the ideals of co-construction and participation are encouraged. The curriculum is open: it is 'democratised and is the result of negotiation' (ibid., p. 27). Baez (2007) further posits the idea that neoliberalism does not discriminate as discrimination does not make economic sense. Also, OBE can, as mentioned before, be regarded as a transparent system where 'the secret garden of curricula and assessment' is revealed (Avis, 2010, p. 42) by employing a language that makes the esoteric understandable to the many. The result can be that 'transparency will enable learners from non-traditional backgrounds to compete on the same terrain as the privileged' (ibid., p. 42). Again, as was posited before, this view of OBE is one that shows us how OBE can allow real learning to be at the centre of education and reduce stratification that allowed for elites to benefit from the hegemony of the established university system.

The South African experience seems to have ended in failure with the authorities there now moving away from the LOs model (Allais, 2012). Allais (2012) insists that LOs, in the drive for transparency, ended up increasing complexity rather than reducing it by opting for precision and detail rather than disciplinary language. The failure of the model was exacerbated by its introduction (intended to promote democracy in education) at a time of accelerated neoliberal activity in South Africa, an event that was at odds with the development of a new outcomes-driven 'egalitarian system' (Allais, 2003, p. 305).

The issue of whether outcomes-based *assessment* (OBA) reflects democratic ideals of empowerment and meritocracy or not mirrors the general debate around OBE. Ecclestone (2004, p. 29) relays the case in favour of LOs which describes it as a

'motivating' approach to assessment which 'would offer students who might not otherwise stay on in further education a qualification that had parity of esteem with well established, high status advanced general qualifications' and in doing so we might argue that focusing on what is learned can militate against stratification based on traditional hierarchies and prestige. This is further clarified in the assumption that 'precise definitions of outcomes and criteria lead to more democratic practices in assessment by demystifying the process' (Ecclestone, 2001, p. 302) and individualising education where the student can act autonomously (ibid.). Ecclestone (1999; 2004) points out that these claims are rejected by Progressive or Liberal educators who see OBA as instrumentalist and reductive (Ewell, 2008) and against the humanist movement in education lead by Carl Rogers. Again, there are two views here that do not converge.

The attack on the notion of a democracy-promoting OBE comes chiefly from anti-managerialist and anti-neoliberal centric standpoints. Gibbs and Iacovidou (2004) bemoan the preoccupation of HE with the drive for jobs. Manager control of education is 'seen in the reliance on employment opportunities to drive learning agendas and creates a form of education that is inconsistent with desires to unify, not divide, society under the principles of democracy and humanity' (p. 115). Brancleone and O'Brien (2011, p. 14) attest that the LOs component of OBE is a tool of management that 'lacks an emancipatory quality' and instead of freeing us from encyclopaedic knowledge and offering us the right to question (which I include as a function of democracy) OBE with its authority over the outcome of education ties us to pre-set answers and limits our freedom. Conversely, Hargreaves and Moore (2000) argues that, in the case of second level education, OBE frees us from the shackles of the established academic elitist school system in the UK which he characterises as 'one of the greatest sources of educational and social inequality in the developed world' (p. 31). Schlafly (1994) cites a core criticism of OBE LOs rhetoric: that outcomes consign all students to the same level of learning by pre-proposing the outcome; this he characterises as anti-egalitarian. With such differing standpoints, most of which are value-laden and may be dependent on the proposers own

experience and background, it is difficult to ascertain if OBE is contrary to the spirit of democracy or in fact an instrument of freedom in educational terms.

2.8 Learning outcomes in Ireland

Background: HE in Ireland
Before I delve into the place of LOs in Ireland I will outline the context of the HE landscape in which LOs reside.

Ireland's HE system has been very much influenced and contoured by its colonial and religious past. The British created Trinity College in 1592 but the other universities and colleges that followed were primarily under the control of the catholic hierarchy, some of whom retain this catholic influence until this day (White, 2001). After hundreds of years of British rule the Irish Free State was set up in 1922 which paved the way for the current Republic. Although independence had been established the instruments of the state still held on to many of the structures and approaches of the old colonial system and today HE in Ireland does not look too unlike that of our neighbours in the UK.

Historically HE opportunities in Ireland would have been the preserve of the elite but a journey of massification over the last 20 years has changed HE access. HE is now widely available to the population and moving towards universal participation (Osbourne, 2003) aided and supported by a government run grants system for those that need financial help.

Higher education in Ireland is represented by seven universities, 14 Institutes of Technology (which are akin to the old polytechnics in the UK), seven colleges of education and a growing number of private colleges (education.ie). There were over 111 thousand students of all kinds enrolled in the university sector alone in 2013-14 (hea.ie) which is a large number considering the relatively small population of 4.5 million on the island. This growth has mirrored growth in the UK where government policy has encouraged participation and reformed funding as a response to Acts such as the Education Reform Act (1988), the Further Education Act (1992) and The

Dearing Report (1997). In Ireland today HE policy makers are also preoccupied with reform and funding issues. The National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 (2011) is a significant report which has led to moves to consolidate HE in Ireland by creating cluster institutions and strategic alliances between partner institutions in a move to reduce the number of HEIs in favour of smaller numbers of more robust cluster and partner institutions.

Quality is a key tenet of the report's recommendations and this is to be achieved through answerability. According to the report: 'Funding and operational autonomy must be matched by a corresponding level of accountability for performance against clearly articulated expectations' (p. 14). This funding through reduction differs perhaps from the UK model where funding issues seem to be concentrated on the disbursement of student tuition fees as articulated by the Browne Review (2010) and efforts to create competition between HEIs in the UK (hefce.ie) as opposed to moves to consolidate institutions in an attempt to save money and strengthen HEIs in Ireland. The reforms in Ireland, outlined above, are only in their early stages and it is not yet clear if they will all be realized.

The outcomes model in Ireland
The idea of 'context-dependency' regarding OBE adoption is apparent in Ireland. The 'National Strategy for Higher Education 2030' (2011) outlines the future goals for HE in Ireland and LOs are cited as an instrument that will help education work for the renewal of the economy. The institutions I have studied in this research embrace the recommendations of that report to varying degrees and the findings in this thesis bear this out. The institutions studied include a university, a technological college chasing university status and a private college without delegated authority to award its own degrees. All of these HEIs regard the outcomes approach differently and are influenced by their history and status within the HE firmament and the ideologies that underpin their approaches to HE. In short, there are many variables that influence any individual or institution's enthusiasm for LOs and the outcomes approach. National, institutional and private-individual concerns impact the successful implementation of LOs in Ireland. This happens against the backdrop of

the continuing Bologna Process and the constant wish of the Irish people to be 'good Europeans.'

2.9 Summary

Although Spady never sold OBE as a more than an educational tool it cannot be denied that the spread of OBE across the globe has created 'camps' in which ideological and political viewpoints aligned and opposed to the OBE construct have been erected. OBE represents a shift to The Right in higher education policy. The autonomy of the University is reduced and government is taking a central role in moulding systems that have put employability and fiscal concerns at the heart of higher education reform over the last 25 years. Outcomes-based education with its focus on transparency and outputs is proving to be a powerful mechanism of this new instrumentalisation; the rise of the market and the move of neoliberal ideology into the public sector. Without doubt neoliberal discourses pervade in higher education in Ireland (Lynch, 2012) as efficiency, accountability and the need for economy-fit graduates moves centre stage.

Many teachers are unhappy with the lean towards neoliberalism and its instrument OBE. Change is difficult but in this case many feel that the changes engendered in OBE negate the important role of the teacher in the learning process, that the learning being achieved is prosaic, that the method itself is confusing, the language is alienating, ambiguous and empty and that OBE attempts to 'systemise diversity' (Karseth, 2008, p. 91). And yet, given all this there is a compelling argument that sees OBE and LOs as providing an important kind of shorthand that makes learning understandable to a wide audience and an agent for the democratising of HE.

The EU Commission reports (Bologna Process Stocktaking, 2009; London Communiqué, 2007) that there is a long way to go before the full implementation of the LOs paradigm across Europe and urge a redoubling of efforts to this end. This slow progress might be speeded up if teachers could be drawn into the fold and given some authorship and ownership of this model which would benefit from more flexibility, or less prescriptive technicism at least, and a context-sensitive implementation process. Or perhaps the reality is that divisions are too wide in this

standoff and OBE might never be acceptable to some stakeholders who are opposed to it on ideological and practical grounds. While the debate continues the policy drive for total implementation of OBE across the higher education sector in Europe continues apace. This is happening in Ireland where the institutions studied in this research clearly were aware of the importance of LOs as state-sponsored instruments connected to helping create competent graduates to aid the recovery of the global economy. The adoption of OBE is also seen as key to the future goal of the creation of European Higher Education Area (Adam, 2008) securing the hegemony of European higher education worldwide as an industry leader and a means of economic renewal.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the philosophical underpinnings which guided the design and research actions of the study undertaken and describe how the research was conducted. My area of interest is LOs; how they are viewed by their writers, users and managers in media education in Ireland and the tensions therein. The following pages will make clear the beliefs that guided the conduct of this research; my beliefs regarding the nature of reality (ontology), my chosen theory of knowing (epistemology) which influences this research, and the theoretical lens through which the study has been carried out. I will also explain what methods were used, how they were used, and within what methodological framework they were situated. It is worth noting that social science is not an exact science and here I am working with methodological considerations that rest on the complex and often 'messy' study of the world of human perceptions. As a result the work presented is very much my studied view of the best methodological approach to fit the research undertaken rather than an axiomatic approach to data gathering and analysis.

3.2 The Research Paradigm

Bogdan and Biklen define a paradigm as a 'loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research' (2007, p. 62). Although visual paradigms can be reductive they are also helpful in giving a snapshot of the research pathway and an excellent mental task to help clarify one's philosophical stances and course of action. In **Figure 4.** on the next page, I have endeavoured to represent the related propositions in my research paradigm in visual form. The wave connectors represent the circuitous and sometimes roundabout route that the research travelled. The waveforms also aptly visualise the connectivity of all the elements involved. This framework represents, in a basic way, the beliefs that informed my methodology and methods, and, in reflexive mode, it represents

the methods and methodology that were sympathetic to my beliefs regarding 1)
possible ways of knowing (epistemology) and 2) the essence of being (ontology)
which is crucial for any researcher to honestly acknowledge to themselves and their
audience along the research pathway. Please note the inclusion of Touraine's
Sociological Intervention (2000) as a method in the research paradigm. This under-
utilised method introduces a 'confrontational element' to the research which is
beyond the normal empathetic interview.

Figure 4. <u>Research paradigm</u>
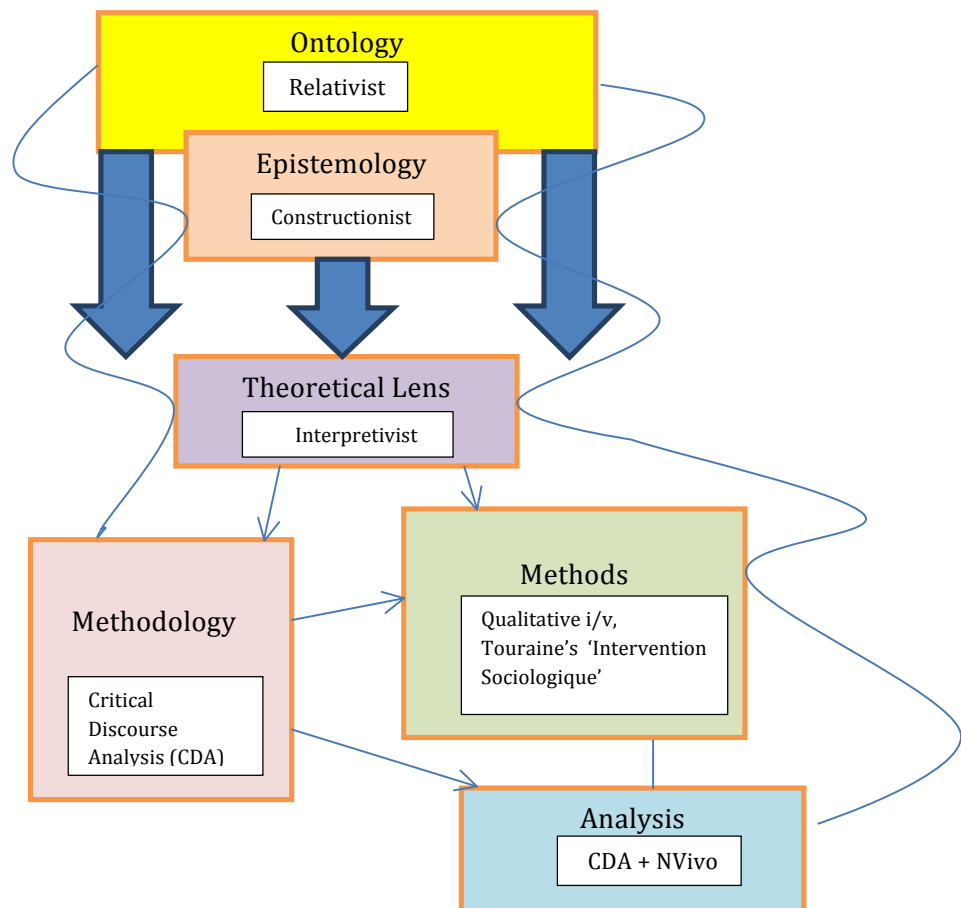
Ontology is represented above in **Figure 4**. as the overarching belief in the nature of
existence and *being* that influences all beliefs and actions. Epistemology is nestled
within the realm of ontology and helps us understand the ways in which we might
know or experience knowledge. Both ontology and epistemology are the major

influences that impact the research design (as illustrated by the block green arrows). I will begin this chapter by discussing these two overarching entities and revealing my own beliefs regarding ontology and epistemology in terms of the research undertaken.

3.3 Ontology

In developing my research pathway I started out with what can be characterised as a concern with 'the nature of knowledge, of being, reality and existence (Friemuth, 2009, p. 2). This concern with and the study of 'being' is known as ontology: one's own interpretation of reality 'as known to human cognition, not as it is in itself' (O'Grady, 2002) and the nature of reality is keenly dependent on the person who holds the belief (Guba, 1990). In order to honestly and truthfully and reflexively conduct my research I needed to examine my own ontological stance and address my interpretation of reality in order to show how I went about my research and made sense of my findings.

Developing one's theories of 'being' is not a clear cut choice. Social science research, with its interest in the social is not a fixed process filled with axioms and undisputed paradigms. Rather, social science research, such as this project, is filled with humans in all their individual complexity and contextual complexity, is often messy and the pathway from ontology to outcomes is one that gathers epistemology, theory, actions and analysis into its orbit as the research progresses to its conclusion. This study reflects that complexity with managers and teachers approaching the LOs issue from different and sometimes surprising angles. To add to this, these individuals are people with backgrounds (personal and professional) that inform their positions in different ways and furthermore they represent institutions offering very different experiences in terms of education outlook and management. And of course the researcher is also a significant person in the research process, in that my beliefs and experiences also colour the conduct and choices inherent in this work and further add to the complexity of this undertaking.

It is always important to acknowledge that our views of knowledge and social reality have a significant impact on how we view phenomena (Mack, 2010). It is with this in mind that I approached the research from the ontological stance that views life and its interactions as something that is created through the 'evolved perception' (Raskin, 2008, p. 13) of the individuals experiencing life. This ontological position is referred to as 'relativism' and it is the position I have adopted with some caveats.

Relativism highlights the subjective nature of reality (Scotland, 2012). Blaikie (2007) would tell us that our minds alone allow the existence of the external world; without us considering an object it ceases to exist. This form of relativism is more extreme than I would advocate. For example some feminists have an issue with relativism as they see gender as a real social construct that harms women and not as a perception of the individual (Hepburn, 2000). I would agree with such criticisms and have adapted the methodological approach to include the possibility of 'truth' and that which is 'real.' From this researcher's perspective the work of Crotty (1998) holds sway where the argument is that we see our reality as being constructed individually by our senses and interaction with the world; without the human to perceive something, that object lacks meaning but it can exist. Stanley (1990) says something similar when she defines relativism as 'an insistence that, although there is 'truth', judgements of truth are always and necessarily made relative to the particular framework or context of the knower' (p. 60). The world is material and we work with the objects that fill our world to make meaning of it (ibid). This is consistent with Hammersley's (1992) view of *subtle realism*, which might equally be called 'subtle relativism.' This view sees a middle ground between realism and relativism which;

> *Acknowledges the existence of an independent reality, a world that has an existence independent of our perception of it, but denies that there can be direct access to that reality, emphasising instead representation not reproduction of social phenomena*

(Andrews, 2012)

In fact there are many interpretations of relativism (in keeping with relativism itself) and I feel it is appropriate that researchers decide their own variegated model of this methodology; as indeed I have endeavoured to do here.

Crotty (1998) offers a compelling view of relativism which implies, there are endless realities and ways of interpreting the world as there are billions of people in the world and an infinite number of objects, people, concepts, events (hereafter referred to as 'objects') available to be interpreted by us.

Crotty (1998) also emphasises the historical importance of when something is perceived by us as being crucial to how it is perceived. For example, in terms of this research, ideas about the role of neoliberalism which are relevant in today's world and central to this study may not seem so relevant if this research was to happen in 50 years' time. Neoliberalism may be out-moded or side-lined as a concept by then. As for LOs; in 50 years' time they may be a dim and distant memory, replaced by a new way of describing and measuring student achievement. That is not to say that the research conducted here is not valuable but that in the relativist's mind, everything is of its time. This approach to the nature of reality and being as being relativist is the overarching idea and belief that has steered my research. The concept of relativism is a philosophical one and not as simply defined as presented here. There are branches and approaches to relativism that space and word limit constraints do not allow me to elaborate on, but as with the interconnecting nature of the research paradigm chosen (**see figure 1.**), the interpretative stance of relativism is imbedded in the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical stance of interpretivism and also in the practice of methods undertaken here (Blaikie, 2010): relativism, with an injection of subtle realism as espoused by Hammersley (1992), is the stance and belief system that permeates this study.

3.4 Epistemology

As previously stated, ontology is the reflection of our stance and belief in the nature of being. Embedded in this belief is the subsystem that is known as *epistemology*. Epistemology relates to our individual 'theory of knowledge that defines what kind of knowledge is possible and legitimate' (Feast et al, 2010, p. 1). Freimuth (2009) tells us that epistemology and ontology are connected in their joint concern for the nature of knowledge, truth and being. Epistemology is concerned with theories of

knowledge that help us understand how we know or think we achieve knowledge (ibid.). Epistemology tells us what it means to know (Cohen et al, 2007). Our methods, theory and methodology are all connected to our epistemological outlook (Crotty, 1998) which in turn is mutually inclusive with one's ontological outlook. It is fitting; therefore, that all these elements should be in agreement within the research paradigm a researcher develops since, fundamentally, they are inextricably linked to the researcher's chosen ontology.

3.5 Constructionism

Following on from my ontological stance, my view of how knowledge is known is embedded in the *constructionist* tradition. This position is congruent with relativist beliefs. Constructionism tells us that truth and meaning are constructed through our interaction and engagement with the world (Feast et al, 2010). Constructionist research 'assumes that people construct reality out of their interactions and beliefs' (Neuman, 2011, p. 201). For me, knowing is dependent on the perceiver's reception of an object and her building of knowledge through perceiving that object. Individuals can view the same object or event but receive them in very different ways, with even subtle differences apparent. Why might this be so? Perhaps because so many complex social variables collide when we encounter objects it is almost impossible for humans, with their disparate backgrounds and feelings, to achieve identical perceptions of a given object. As Crotty (1998) assures us, when we experience something, an object or text, we are describing our experience of this object or text, rather than describing an axiomatic truth. In this study managers and teachers describe their experience of objects known as LOs, which are physical statements on a page, but there is no one truth in these descriptions and this study is not searching for that; rather it is looking to see how varying experiences are constructed by the participants and how these experiences might reflect tensions and potentials around the adoption of LOs in Ireland's HE sector. This truth-free approach casts into question the whole notion of 'reality' and 'truth.' For the constructionist researcher, knowledge does not reflect a *de facto* reality but a reality based on our discourse which is really a reflection of our 'ways of categorising the

world' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 5). This is not to say that constructionist research is 'lacking in critical interest' as suggested by Schwandt (1994, p. 247). 'Just because people's experiences are socially constructed does not make them illusionary, immaterial or unimportant' (Neuman, 2011, p. 103). And, with the proper rigour and depth a constructionist research project can yield generalizable results that illuminate topics which are important, in this case, leading to a deeper understanding of higher education and its role and place in society at a this time.

Constructionist driven research allows 'individuals to develop subjective meanings of their experiences- meanings directed toward certain objects or things' (Cresswell, 2014, p. 9). In my research this meant leaning on the views of the interviewees' which were framed by complex historical events (e.g. The Bologna Process) and the interviewees' previous engagement with and experience of LOs policy. In this way I was learning about the topic through highly personal experiences with historical and biographical components relating to the cultural and social norms of a particular time (Berger and Luckmann, 1991) which were not verifiable as objective 'fact' through any numerical theorem, but which capture the perceptions of the participants, mediated by the researcher, at a certain time in history. From these subjective accounts I was able to derive meaning in so far as the interviewees' stories revealed a reality of their own making. Some of these participant realities converged (though were never identical) and some diverged allowing me to identify and construct interesting comparisons and contrasts regarding the diverse discourses across HEIs and staff roles regarding LOs. In this way I was able to make meaning of the participants' reality, built up from a number of 'viable renditions' (Bryman, 2012, p. 529), regarding their experiences of LOs in the Irish higher education context.

In the constructionist interpretation of my research I did not discover the meanings assigned to LOs, rather, they were given life and constructed by the participants and further perceived and constructed anew into another form by my research. To play with Newman's (2011) example of how this concept works in real life: I might say that LOs, which I investigate in this study, have no 'learning outcome-ness' and 'no inner essence causes the reality people see' (Neuman, 2011, p. 103). The various meanings assigned to LOs; be they considered useful educational tools, structure

givers, mechanisms of surveillance or neoliberal drivers, are all constructions of the perceivers. This description of my research approach agrees with Crotty's view that there is no objective truth out there waiting to be discovered but that it is the human mind that creates meaning that we use to construct our social world (Crotty, 1998).

3.6 Social constructionism

Social constructionism is another branch of constructionism that moves away from the individual and her cognitive powers as the central component in meaning making and moves the focus to the social world, with an emphasis on language (Andrews, 2012) which is a key component in my efforts to understand the LOs culture in higher education in Ireland today. To this end I am using discourse analysis (DA) as my overarching methodology and method guiding my data analysis in this study, which I will elaborate on later in the chapter.

Within the social constructionist belief system the influence of social and interpersonal factors cannot be underestimated in our understanding of the world (Gergan, 1985). This branch of constructionism is of interest to me as it connects individuals to culture, politics and history in a way that reflects how LOs, or the perception of them by users, are interconnected with the history of their development and the histories of those experiencing LOs. Equally with claims of cultural and political underpinnings (Jensen, 1998), LOs and the experience of them is couched in the culture that surrounds their adoption in higher education.

In the social constructionist model posited by Berger and Luckmann (1991) there is the possibility of acknowledging an objective as well as a subjective world; another construct of 'subtle realism' (see **figure 2**. p. 58). Social interaction creates patterns that we use as shortcuts and become an objective reality that we refer to and reproduce. Our culture and institutions internalise and legitimise this knowledge as objective through habitulization. In this way social constructivism can accommodate the dual notions of objective and subjective realities, although both have been created by social activity. I believe that this view is compatible with my study where institutionalised knowledge, for example, regarding LOs as central to the

development of HE across Europe gains objective status and where oft repeated
assertions and beliefs by participants are possible proofs of an objective reality which
stands independent of our perception but built on historical ones.

Figure 5. My Constructionist Epistemology
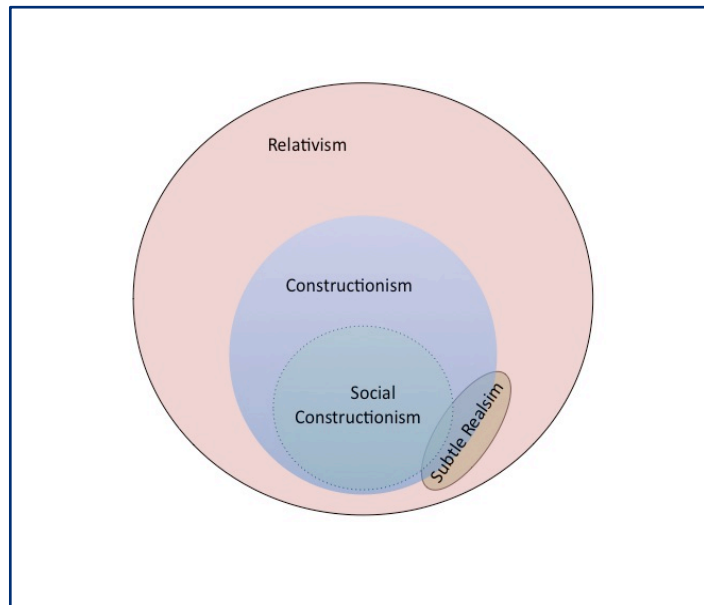
In the next section of this chapter, in keeping with the flow of **Figure 4**. I will move to
discuss the conceptual underpinnings of my methodology. In my case, I have viewed
this study through the interpretive model which is congruent with the
relativist/subtle realism stance of this qualitative dissertation.

3.7 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is 'the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus
providing a context for the process and grounding of its logic and criteria' (Feast et al,
2010, p. 1). Again, as with the epistemology of constructionism, interpretivism is
compatible with the relativist mode of interpreting reality; a view of social reality as
something that is seen by lots of people who all develop different interpretations of
any given situation or object (Mack, 2010). 'Social interaction and behaviour is
determined by the participant's unique interpretations and the meaning they attach

to events' according to Cumming et al (1984, p. 52) who see the perceiver as the constructer of meaning and reality.

The concepts of meaning and interpretation are crucial to the interpretivist researcher. Pring tells us that 'truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors' who are realising meaning in different ways (2004, p. 12). This process of 'consensus formed by co-constructors' is something I observed during my own research: participants often elucidated cognate and agreeing views on the topic but approached the problem in different ways and from different histories and cultures. Nonetheless viable truths appropriate for that place and time were possible. I say this because interpretivism has come under attack for being un-scientific, merely explanatory and lacking generalisability (Scotland, 2012; Cummings, 1984). As stated before in the last section, this kind of research, rigourously and properly conducted like any research project, does yield valuable results that benefit society. In my study I used the interpretive view to work with staff from an Institute of Technology in Ireland. Their input, I would argue, is generalizable to the 13 other Institutes of Technology in Ireland which operate within a tight charter and have similar outlooks, funding structures, governing legislation and cultures. Although no research approach is perfect, and interpretivist research is time-consuming, I would reject many of the well- worn criticism of the interpretivist philosophy, many of which seem to be driven by disciplinary rivalries.

Interpretivism is about seeing the world through the eyes of others while being mindful of the structures which run the world. Scotland (2012) contends that interpretivism means 'to bring into consciousness hidden social forces and structures' (p. 12). In order to reveal this consciousness the interpretivist researcher 'gets to know people in a particular social setting in great depth and works to see the setting from the viewpoint of the people in it' (Neuman, 2011, p. 102), in this way we come to see events through the eyes of those experiencing it. This study of LOs followed this pathway by looking beyond the physicality of LOs as a collection of words that have come to describe student learning to the underlying influence of the pan-European Bologna agreement and the umbrella movement of the hegemony of neoliberalism in the western world. Through the interpretivist lens I was able to

identify these meta-forces by following the interpretivist philosophy of trying to understand the phenomena from the perspective of the teachers and managers involved with LOs at institutional level; investigating social activity and thoughts while noting the historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2009, p. 8).

From this examination of interpretivism so far I aim to show that interpretivism is a dynamic approach to research which is well suited to my socially focussed project. The interpretivist researcher is not intending to discover a passive reality that awaits discovery, rather, the interpretivist researcher 'sees human life as an accomplishment. People intentionally create social reality with their physical purposeful actions of interaction as social beings' (Neuman, 2011, p. 102).

3.8 Values and positionality in Interpretive Research

In qualitative research, such as this, it is important to allude to the issue of research values and how they might impact the direction and interpretation of the research undertaken. Research values need to be explicit. It is considered that interpretive research is not value free. Most social science authors assert that value-free knowledge is not possible as the researcher makes a value judgement by simply choosing a topic (Edge and Richards, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Stones, 1995). Lincoln and Denzin (1994, p. 536) assert that all research is 'guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied' and they go as far as charging that even facts are value-laden and theories are 'value statements' (1994, p. 107). If one believes in absolutes then this is not a satisfactory proposition but in the relativist/constructionist paradigm this is not a problem but an acceptable and accepted reality.

Creswell (2014) and Crotty (1998) urge the researcher to recognise that one's own background impacts our interpretation of our findings. In making sense of our world we use all available tools to us and constantly cross reference new ideas and experiences with those that have gone before. Certainly in my own case, my decision to use Discourse Analysis (DA) and, in particular, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as my methodology is in some way informed by my background as a communications

and media teacher. My primary degree is in Communications Studies where I took modules in linguistics, sociology and psychology; all of which led me to value language as central to understanding the social world we live in. Consequently, CDA fits in with my research as a methodology and method with its emphasis on text as a way of interpreting the social world of faculty discourse around LOs. I acknowledge that this proclivity for language on my part impacts on the execution and outcome of the study undertaken. According to Moss (2009, p. 502) there are layers of contexts that add to the complexity of interpretation:

> *Meanings are embedded in complex social contexts that shape what can be understood in ways that the actors involved may not perceive, something argued to be equally true of researchers as of the people they study.*

Hammersley (1992b) asks us the keep facts and values separate from each other so that values do not distort the facts (although it has previously suggested here that facts cannot themselves ever be value free). Moss (2009) feels that a heightened awareness of the role of values in research prevents such dangers because researchers who emphasise the role of values in shaping researchers' outlooks 'are likely to privilege as rigorous those methods that illuminate the nature of the bias and the social, cultural and political forces that shaped it' (p. 502). I support this position and add that Lincoln (2002) tells us that it is possible for researchers to stand away from the phenomenon being researched 'to permit recording action and interpretations relatively free of the researcher's own stake' (p. 9). Indeed this is also a stance encouraged by my methodology of discourse analysis (DA). In the DA approach to research it may often be difficult to remain at a distance from discourses with which you are familiar, leading to 'taken for granted' knowledge and common sense understandings. These are precisely the unquestioned understandings which we should be investigating (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002).

In this research I have honestly endeavoured to park my own values and experiences of the LOs phenomenon; which was difficult at the outset. To explain further: I undertook this study as a person who had recently left industry and come to the academy. I had a poor view of LOs which seemed bureaucratic and akin to a case of

'The Emperor's New Clothes.' I then embarked on this doctoral project and I found myself studying and gathering data from within the system, which can be considered advantageous and precarious: advantageous in Fairclough's (1992) view of the insider researcher as a 'member resource' and problematic from the point of view of maintaining a proper distance from the subject and the subjects I was talking to. This required me to develop as an analyst and researcher. Over the course of the study I changed and became more distant from my original sceptical views regarding LOs that prompted the research: I believe I moved to more neutral ground to inhabit the researcher perspective which might be represented as casting a 'cool gaze' across the data gathering and analysis after experiencing the literature review. The role of researcher superseded my role as a lecturer/practitioner who, like the participants being interviewed, had encountered LOs in the course of their work and had a lot to say about the system. No one can be certain that I have been freed from the 'researcher's own stake' as Lincoln calls it but I think to say I am 'relatively free' (ibid.) feels like a fair and accurate estimate.

3.9 Methodology

The methodology chosen as most apt for this research is Discourse Analysis (DA) and its particular branch known as Critical Discourse Analysis, hereafter CDA. In this section I will explain what CDA methodology means in terms of my research, what understanding of CDA I adhere to (there are many) and I will outline the viewpoint of writers and theorists that have influenced me. Lastly, I shall show how CDA acts as a theoretical rudder for this research. CDA is a methodological approach but, in practice, it also guides the analyst, so I shall also be taking into account analytical issues relating to CDA in this section rather than later in the 'methods' section.

I might begin by noting that it is perhaps unfortunate that CDA has the moniker that it has. Since CDA arrived on the social sciences research map in the 1970s (Wodak, 2001) its name has caused confusion. Van Dijk wanted a name change because CDA's methodological possibilities was getting lost in the focus on method; he preferred the title 'Critical Discourse Studies' and he founded an eminent journal in that name

(Rogers et al, 2005). Being referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis has led to the reasonable but erroneous assumption that CDA is connected only to the analysis phase of research. CDA has both methodological and a method conception inherent but it chiefly represents a growing and important theoretical approach to qualitative research in the social sciences (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse is a 'particular way of talking about and understanding the world' but not in a neutral way (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 2). Discourse Analysis understands that discourses create and change our world. They constitute it and they are constitutive of it. For a definition of discourse I favour the one offered by Wodak (2001, p. 63). Discourse, she says:

> *…constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationship between people and groups of people. It is constitutive of both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.*

In this way discourse helps shape our world and it also reflects our world; that is why it is worth studying, so that we can know who we are and understand the forces that direct social action. While discourse is vitally important and gives us access to reality, it is one of many aspects of social practice that go to form that reality (ibid.).

Example of DA as a method of analysis in this study

Below a teaching and learning expert speaks about how teachers might work with LOs to overcome their misgivings:

> One is to resist and one is to get strategic and I think in terms of LOs and the language that's associated with it… when I heard that language first I was appalled that education was going to be described in that way and I suppose over time you see it coming in and you think 'ah what's the point?' but then you think well actually there's opportunity here. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

Eileen, a teaching and learning expert and a manager in an established university, is a supporter of LOs status quo. It is interesting to see her plot her own journey with LOs

in this quote from being 'appalled', which is a very strong put-down, to seeing the opportunities with LOs. We don't know what opportunities she is referring to here but given her other contributions it could be interpreted as being opportunities for enhanced teaching and learning strategies. She inhabits an ambivalent world where it might be permitted to be strategic when using LOs in order to prioritise getting your way as a teacher. But she also views LOs as an opportunity for teachers, perhaps to achieve more with their teaching and learning. She intimates that it is difficult to resist LOs; they have arrived and 'what's the point?' of resisting. There is an element of defeat there initially, an acknowledgment of the hegemony of LOs, and then the possibility of thinking new thoughts, over time, which might lead one to accepting, even welcoming LOs. Eileen, through her talk, shows us the complex relationship one can have with LOs, a relationship which can develop over time depending on one's personality, one's role and one's engagement with the OBE movement.

As seen from 'Eileen's' contribution, the power and influence and the constructive might of discourse are held within language used in social settings. This comes in many forms (texts); most usually in the form of written or spoken language and its delivery (Huckin et al, 2012). Language texts are the basic unit of discourse and language is something that; 'speaks through the person. The individual self becomes a medium for culture and its language' (Kvale, 1992, p. 36). This is an important concept that views the human (or policy paper) as a conduit for the message and upturns the common notion that the person speaks through the language when it is really the reverse. My use of DA in this study was able to reveal the distinct educational cultures housing LOs in three different HEIs, and this was achieved through the DA lens that focuses on how language uncovers cultures and mediates power in specific social contexts like HEIs. CDA is a branch of DA which 'places weight on the active role of discourse in constructing the social world' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 7) which I use along with general DA as a methodology and method of data analysis. For me this methodology was very appropriate and it appeals to many education researchers who 'increasingly have turned to CDA as an approach to

answering questions about the relationships between language and society' (Rogers et al, 2005, p. 369).

The 'analysis' in Critical Discourse Analysis

CDA operates as both a methodology and a method. In this section I shall explain how CDA works as an approach to the data, the way in which CDA is used by the analyst and how I as a researcher worked with this method of analysis.

The role of the researcher using CDA is to identify and explore 'patterns in and across statements and (to identify) the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 21). It is the discourse that is the object of scrutiny here rather than reality, since reality cannot really be reached outside of discourse. In CDA we try to show the connections between the discursive and broader political, social and cultural activities in society. CDA works best when it is trans-disciplinary (Van Dijk, 1993) but in the main it uses social theory and text analysis when acting as a method, to make sense of the social world.

Fairclough has afforded us a model to follow when implementing critical discourse analysis:

Figure 6: Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis
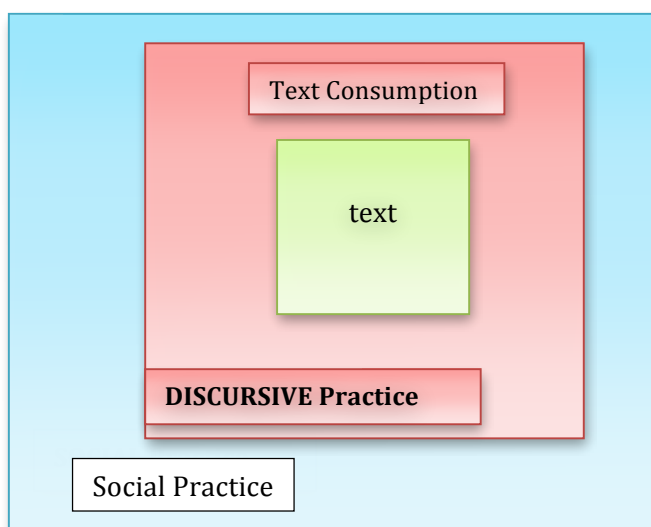
This practical framework is the one I used when analysing the findings of my study. Using the three levels of analysis I was able to look at the dialectical relationship between the interviewees' actions and attitudes around the use of LOs and integrate those conceptions with the non-discursive activities of national and European institutions and entities, when possible and appropriate, as revealed in the literature review. Here is an example of inclusion of non-discursive concerns in the analysis of a manager's attitude to LOs:

> I'm not against the idea of learning outcomes. I'm not against the Bologna Process. I think it's good to have uniformity. That's my military background coming out but I think it's a good thing. Again maybe people say that maybe that is managerial in outlook. It is. You know, I like the system. (Mark, IoT-L)

This discourse reveals that the manager believes LOs represent and create uniformity and that this is reading of the roles and goals of the Bologna Process. CDA allows us to connect up the themes of military-type uniformity, managerialism and the bigger goals of the European Commission within the perspective of one senior manager who confidently supports the outcomes model.

This type of analysis looks at the text first and its linguistic features including vocabulary and intonations, metaphors, clichés, symbolism and grammar (Wodak, 2001). The discursive practice is an important component in explaining and unpacking how the text is produced and understanding the relationship between speakers and who might have the power in these relationships (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Lastly, the social practice tells us what kind of network the social practice belongs to in terms of institutional and economic cultures. Fairclough refers to this as 'the social matrix of discourse' (1992b, p. 237). Within this social practice there lies a genre of language that constitutes and takes part in social practice and this happens markedly in education circles in policy documents and in discursive terms at faculty meetings and in the way that educators and their managers speak about education issues like the role of LOs in the management of education in the HEIs I studied. I see my role as being like that described by Rogers et al (2005, p. 370); 'the role of the analyst is to study the relationships between texts and social

practices' with an emphasis on explaining how discourse constructs the social world; how the discourse came to have a meaning today it didn't have before; how the discourse interplays with other discourses and how 'actors draw on the discourse to legitimate their positions and actions' (Bryman, 2012, p. 537). It is worth noting that although my chosen analytical approach, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model, presents three distinct levels of analysis, it is usual to present the analysis as a combination of all three levels (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). The theory underpinning Fairclough's approach to CDA is discussed in more detail in pages 69-72.

As previously alluded to, I implement both a general DA and a specific CDA approach during data analysis depending on the contribution I am analysing; if it has significant contextual interferences it may warrant a CDA method to unveil the social world rather than an analysis that just explicates the motivations of the individual. The analysis part of CDA is important but more important is that CDA 'positions subjects in relations of power rather than analysing language as a way of explaining the psychological intentions, motivations, skills, and competencies of individuals' (Rogers et al, 2005, p. 371). The power-relations conception is the key to the successful use of the CDA approach, and it is one that is difficult to keep to the forefront when one is knee-deep in data. While the individual and her motivations are important, this version of DA also allows us to consider larger forces and context in the analysis of text. For example; the private college studied is a business which forms graduates for direct entry to the jobs market. Not surprisingly, managers reflect the desires of their institution to connect LOs to the goals of the market and the employer. There is a symbiosis of the need for the graduate to be employed and the employer to have a useful employee:

> I think that pure laser vision of a learning outcome that says: at the end of this course he will be able to increase the Google hit rates on his website, why? Because it will help the profile of the company. Why? Because it will increase sales. Why? It will increase profitability. Ah! OK. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

This personal and institutional view is interesting but must be recognised as part of a meta-conversation about power and productivity in society. Dermot reproduces ideas about the marketization of the graduate and HE which are ever popular and supported by institutions like the European Commission and soft policies like the Bologna Process. In this way Dermot's comments are more than just Dermot's comments but his comments are also part of the dialogue about HE globally and its economic role in developing the world economy. Through this approach to text analysis we can recognise CDA as a powerful methodological position, one that is informed by trans-disciplinary theory (Fairclough, 2004). CDA is certainly strongly based in theory but this is not a united or cohesive approach (Wodak, 2001), rather it has a lot of routes and tangents. In the next section I will make clear the theorists I have followed in constructing my understanding of CDA.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Theory

Critical Discourse Studies has come from the Frankfurt and neo-Marxian tradition (McKenna, 2004). It derives from the hermeneutical rather than the analytical tradition of social science research (Wojak, 2001). In terms of this study I have been drawn by the work of Michel Foucault (1980) who paved the way for Critical Discourse analysts in his examination of power and the use of it for both constraining and productive purposes through text production. I do not go into great detail regarding Foucault as time and space would not allow for an analysis of his seminal work but I view him as a key influence in terms of those who have moulded my interpretation of CDA. Foucault has inspired a raft of CDA adherents who have in turn informed this research (see **Figure 6.** p.70). Fairclough's (1992) early work, with its popular framework for analysis and broad scope, is the cornerstone of my view of CDA as is his later work (1999 onward) which is geared toward the specific concept of neoliberalism (among other interests such as globalisation and the Knowledge-based Economy) which is one of the themes in this research. Lastly, I have been somewhat influenced by the theorist Van Dijk (1993) and his reading of CDA which is also concerned with the issues of power, but as an instrument of dominance and

constraint. All three are interesting and have provided helpful contributions which have informed and steered this research in a valuable and appropriate manner.

Foucault, Fairlcough and Van Dijk:

Foucault in the 1970s progressed the theory that power and knowledge is inextricable linked and power produces our social world (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Interesting in Foucault's conception of power is the idea that power retains the possibility for positive action and can have positive connotations, something that other theorists like Van Dijk do not agree with. Fairclough takes the middle ground on the issue of power and sees it as something that is negotiated, somewhat in the vein of Gramsci's view of hegemony (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 14-16). This offers us the idea of our own agency in resisting power or accepting the powerful who dominate over us (at times), if it suits us to do so.

In terms of discourse, Foucault's work has been very influential and is very helpful to those of us studying discourse in specific domains like HEIs. Foucault was particularly interested in orders of discourse; the discursive practices in society and institutions (Rogers et al, 2005). He shows us that although we have infinite possibilities to express ourselves with endless combinations of linguistic opportunities we use relatively few of them in specific situations (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). I find this resonates with my own experience: in educational circles, as with medicine or law, there is a linguistic pattern that keeps us operating within the confines of the culture of the group or organisation and we tend to adhere to this tight linguistic lexicon without much variation. Even looking at my own study of the discourse surrounding LOs it is very obvious that using a limited vocabulary, sometimes called 'the fog of rhetoric' (Hussey and Smith, 2003, p. 361) or 'Edufog' (Fritz, 1994, p. 80), is widespread and trying to understanding why this is so and to what purpose this is so makes for very interesting research.

Figure 7. CDA: Theoretical Framework
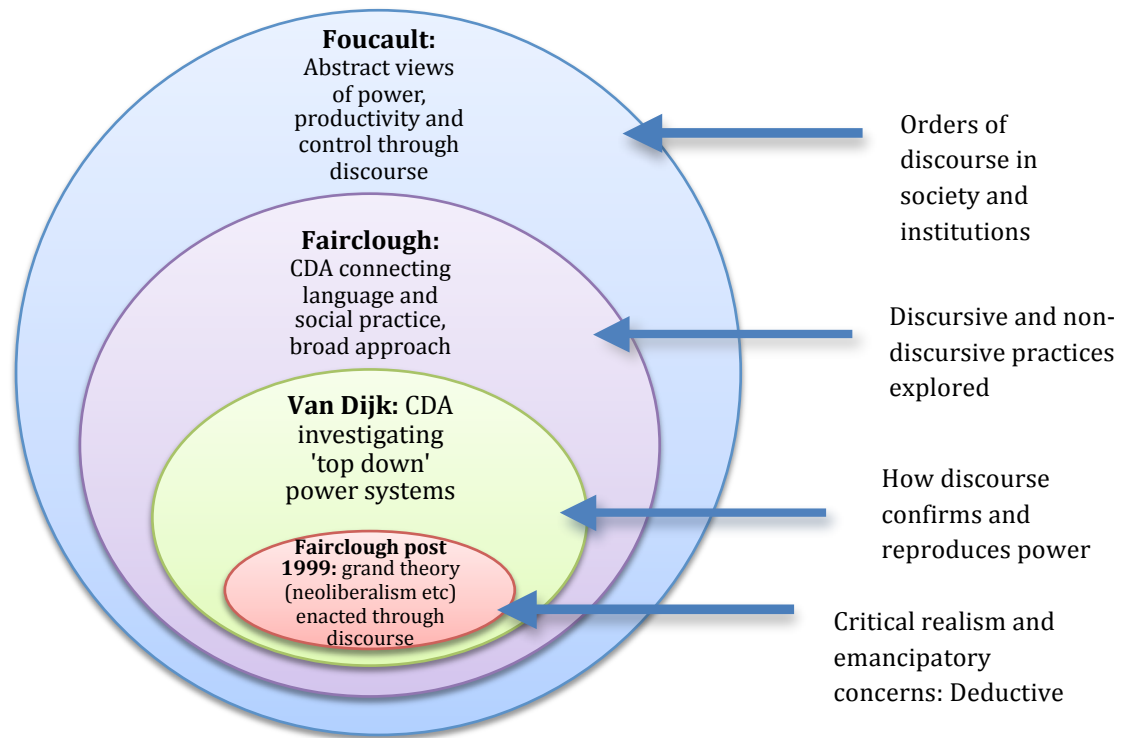
Fairclough takes a broader view of 'discourse' than Foucault and offers us both theoretical and practical uses for CDA. This form of CDA is 'not as interested in investigating the single linguistic unit *per se* but in studying social phenomena' (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) Fairclough sees CDA 'as a textually orientated form of Discourse Analysis (DA)' (Fairclough, 1992, p. 73) which differentiates CDA from Foucault's more abstract view of DA. Fairclough frequently refers to 'communicative events' which either challenge or reproduce what Foucault called the order of discourse (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999) which, to restate, is the configuration of discourses which are used in particular settings, shaping and shaped by language with a potential for conflict (ibid). According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), Fairclough's aim in using CDA as a methodology is to 'explore the links between language use and social practice… in the maintenance of the social order and in social change' (p. 69-70).

Fairclough (2005) is a critical realist who sees institutional and organisational social structures as an 'interactive accomplishment', giving them meaning beyond the

relativist perspective of something that does exist, but only according to meaning ascribed to it by members. Fairclough's critical realist approach allows those interactive accomplishments an existence in their own right, external to the conceptions of the members. I see my own ontological stance as being that of relativist with elements of Hammersley (1992) *subtle realism* (see **Figure 4**.). The two stances are not so far apart as to be incompatible and Fairclough's work is still appropriate to reference here.

One of the important contributions of Fairclough is his CDA work in relation to organisations which is pertinent to the study here of conceptions of LOs across three HEIs in Ireland. He managed to break CDA into the two elements that represented the relationship between them in terms of the 1) discursive and 2) non-discursive components of discourse (Bryman, 2012). The discursive practice focuses on the text and the use of text by subjects and the non-discursive practice focuses on the background elements which may impact and contribute to the discourse. In the case of my study an event like the Bologna process is a significant non-discursive event, on -going, which has a great impact on the status of LOs within HEIs across Europe. Within the unfolding Bologna Process we have seen a drive to enhance education through the 'quality' movement (Keeling, 2006) which is a non-discursive approach to HE which helps form the social practice around LOs. In this case the non-discursive influence of the 'quality' movement could be seen as a kind of representation of power structures which underpin a particular philosophical view of education and its role in society. Fairclough choses to focus, in his more recent work, on the tensions between the discursive and non-discursive, and among his concerns about organisations are three that tie in with my research focus: a focus on how particular discourses become hegemonic; seeing how external discourses become internalised in institutions; and a focus on 'how discourses are operationalized, transformed into new ways of acting and interacting, inculcated into new ways of being, or materialised, within organisations' (Bryman, 2012, p. 537). This internalising of external discourses is certainly true of the LOs culture in HEIs influenced by the Bologna Process. The Process itself has been driven by external communiqués drafted by Ministers of Education within the EU. In this way CDA can give us insight

into the discourse practices and help with individual agency in resisting the less positive outcomes of some power relations and structures.

Van Dijk's work on CDA links to the aforementioned individual's agency in the face of dominant powers. Van Dijk believes discourse to be constraining and does not hold with the productive possibilities that Foucault saw various conceptions of power (Wodak, 2001). I do not necessarily see all power as negative but Van Dijk has much to say about the expression of power through discourse that is helpful. His work looks at the way social inequality happens or is 'enacted, reproduced or resisted by text and talk' (Van Dijk, 1998, p. 352). His concern with social change also refers to the researcher as activist; an interested person who needs to contribute to change which combats social inequality and the dominance of particular discourses and everyday taken-for-granted power which may be injurious to society (Van Dijk, 1993). It is interesting to see that Fairclough (1999 on) has moved closer to this position with his later work on CDA and its usefulness in exploring the effects of movements such as globalisation and neoliberalism while developing his theory of the dialectical relationship between the discursive and non-discursive elements of discourse.

3.10 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is very important in the process of CDA. The critical discourse analyst, in keeping with the interpretivist view outlined before, believes that research cannot be value-free. Van Dijk (1998, p. 353) believes we should account for all relationships and that our descriptions and our explanations are 'socio-politically situated.' Wodak (2001) asks us to be aware of and contain our preconceptions. Also Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) regard reflexivity as very important in CDA and that the research benefits from an openness about the choices we make as researchers. An example of this is in the choice of research sample. In my case I did qualitative interviews with some individuals I knew previously. This was difficult in some respects and advantageous in others. As Fairclough (1992) suggests, there are good things about using 'members' resources' but as a result 'the classic tension between distance and

closeness in the research setting is often blurred in education research' (Rogers et al, 2005, p. 382). Either way, these relationships need to be explored, although this may be complicated as all the information necessary for 'full disclosure' may not be available for public consumption if anonymity is at stake' (ibid.).

3.11 Methods

In this section of the chapter I will outline some of the more procedural aspects of the data gathering and analysis phases of the research. This will include how the sample was constructed, my approach to interviewing including the influence of Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention which could be described as a process of experiencing, reflecting and self-analysis for the participants who encounter the opposing views of colleagues, and my use of the computer programme NVivo to manage and analyse the data.

The primary data collection method was the face- to- face semi-structured interview, aided by Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention. I did consider other forms of data gathering such as focus groups and document analysis. I would particularly have liked to include a focus group made up of teachers and managers and teaching and learning experts: that is, contesting viewpoints. Unfortunately, the HE community in Ireland is very small and there is always the possibility that one might meet one's fellow focus group members on an interview panel at a later stage. This might make it difficult for teachers in particular to be totally honest in the company of those who are, or might one day be their employers or managers. I think this decision was justified as some teachers used very strong language in the interviews which I could not envisage them using in the company of senior academics or managers. I have tried to compensate for the lack of focus groups by the using Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention, which is explained later in this section, a method which supports the meeting of contesting viewpoints. With regard to document analysis; a strict word count made it difficult to include more methods but I have endeavoured to refer to relevant legislation and seminal HE strategy reports such as The Hunt Report (2011) in the compilation of this thesis.

Sampling

After deciding to research attitudes to and experiences of LOs for my doctoral thesis I began to look toward developing a sample of individuals to interview. I wanted to interview media teachers (like me) with a practice focus because media practice is highly creative and this creativity is difficult to capture in LO statements and assessment criteria. Also using a niche group such as media practice educators helped narrow the focus of the study while incorporating outsider views from the media industry as most media practice educators have industry backgrounds. There is a small cohort of media practice educators in Ireland so I used purposive sampling; that is the identification of key persons who might represent this professional view across different sites (Sarantakos, 2013; Robson, 1993) in 'an attempt to establish a good correspondence between research questions and sampling' (Bryman, 2008, p. 458).

After conducting two pilot interviews with media teachers I could see that the research might lack a contesting view and be somewhat one-dimensional so I applied for a review of my original ethical approval from the Ethics Review Panel in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield and then expanded the sample to include managers of media education and teaching and learning experts across three sites. I did consider speaking with students and with student representative bodies such as the student union but my pilot interviews and my own experience suggested that although students are the key stakeholders in HE, and LOs are supposed to have been conceived with them in mind, the evidence from interviews conducted here is that LOs are 'invisible' to students; as one interviewee observed. This in itself is very interesting but I felt that asking students about something that is not on their radar did not seem like it would yield helpful data for the purposes of this study. In the end I chose to leave this cohort out.

The sites represented three types of HEI in Ireland; a technological college, a private college and an established university. This is very representative of the general HE landscape in Ireland. Again I was looking for comparisons; across the different institutions and the differing roles, and looking for a comparison between individuals in terms of their reception of LOs.

Below is **Table 1** which gives a list of those interviewed for this thesis; the institutions they work for and some biographical information. Unfortunately more comprehensive notes which would give a rich view of the participants and their institutions was not possible as the media HE community in Ireland is very small and giving any more information (in particular in the case of the university as only a few universities run media degrees) would certainly compromise the promised anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 1: Interviewee profiles

Site X = University

Site Y = Institute of Technology

Site Z = Private College

	Lecturer
	Manager
	T & L 'expert'

Name	site	age	Role	Field of interest	Pre-academy	Role in study
Gina	X	30s	Lecturer	Communications and media	N/A	Lecturer
Nadia	X	30s	Lecturer/ Co-ordinator	Digital media	Digital media Industry	Lecturer
Maura	X	40s	Lecturer/ Manager	Social Science & media	Media Production (on-going)	Lecturer and manager
Brian	X	50s	Mgr	Education	N/A	Manager
Eileen	X	50s	T&L/Mgr	Social science & Education	Community Work	Teaching and learning Expert and manager
Darragh	Y	30s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry	Lecturer
Alison	Y	40s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Barbara	Y	20s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Gerry	Y	60s	Mgr	Engineering	N/A	Manager
Mark	Y	40s	Mgr	Engineering	Armed forces	Manager
Una	Y	50s	T&L	Social science	Social work	Teaching and learning expert
Kate	Z	30s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer

Paul	Z	30s	Lecturer	Digital media	Digital media Industry	Lecturer
Patricia	Z	50s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Lorcan	Z	50s	Mgr	Media	Media	Manager
Dermot	Z	50s	Mgr	Maths	N/A	Manager
Susan	Z	40s	T & L	Business & education	Business	Teaching and learning expert

Not all of the sampling decisions were clean cut. I incorporated the 'snowball' sample option whereby one interviewee might recommend another (Neuman, 2011; Punch, 2009). I interviewed Eileen in the university site; she was recommended by Maura who cited Eileen as a very influential T&L person, even though Eileen's primary role was as a senior manager in the university. Also, Maura herself was an industry person and a lecturer/manager who worked through a private company with a service agreement with the university. This illustrates how complex sampling can be as you are trying to access the best possible participants but sometimes categorising them can be unhelpful as roles may not always be defined clearly.

Interviewing

I relied on face-to-face qualitative interviews to help me understand the 'being' of LOs in media higher education during this research. This decision was based on my understanding of conversation as a form of knowledge (Breakwell, 2012). The exchanges that occur during interviews constitute knowledge and seemed like the proper conduit to knowing how LOs might represent opportunity and or threat for the actors involved in using them.

For this research I gathered data using semi-structured interviews according to Bryman's (2008) approach: I drew up guide questions (see **appendix vii**) which I memorised and was flexible about the scheduling of these questions. I listened carefully and asked questions off the back of the interviewee answers; looking for clarification and elaboration (May, 2011) while mindful of asking the entire guide questions (Bryman, 2008). The flexibility of this approach was appropriate to the exploratory and inductive nature of my research.

The interviews took place in the interviewees' place of work in offices and empty classrooms which is considered an advantageous naturalistic setting for a qualitative interview (David and Sutton, 2007). The interviews were recorded on an iPad and later uploaded to a secure Drop Box site for access by the transcription service. I also took some notes during the interviews, as advised by Creswell (2009), to remind me of key moments or follow-on questions I needed to remember.

Researcher Bias

On one occasion I was alerted to a potential issue of 'interviewer bias' including my way of 'being' with the participants (David and Sutton, 2007, p. 89) by one interviewee: it was my practice to set up the interview by giving a short introductory spiel about the research but one interviewee early on in the process objected strongly to this and told me to stop. I was 'rattled' by this experience and wondered if I was 'leading' the interviewee. I reflected on this afterwards. I concluded that I was appropriately circumspect in my context-setting of the interview (the interviewee turned out to favour laconic interaction) but I was reminded that I needed to be extremely careful not to inject any bias, whether known or unacknowledged on my part, into the data gathering process as it can negatively impact the reliability and validity and 'truthfulness' of the research (Golafshani, 2003). It was a valuable learning moment for me as a researcher.

Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention

In chapter 5 (findings and analysis) I focus on the tensions and potentials associated with LOs and I use a method inspired and directed by the work of French sociologist Alain Touraine known as the 'Sociological Intervention.' My aim was to bring the ideas of different actors, who might be perceived as being from different and oppositional viewpoints, into 'contact' with one another. This approach allows differing ideas and cultures to meet within a 'space' but with additional focus on the actor as an individual with agency and not just a reflection of their role or status in life (Touraine, 2000). McDonald (2002) calls the Sociological Intervention 'one of the

most significant innovations in qualitative research strategies over the past quarter century' (p. 248).

Touraine and his co-researchers believed that the researcher, particularly the sociologist researcher, could become part of the research process by handling the conditions of the research, for example, by bringing significant players in a struggle together; players that might not usually meet (Hamel, 2000). These actors might, for example, be terrorists from different countries (Wieviorka, 1993) with widely differing motivations and actions, or youth unemployed finding themselves in the same space as the Mayor or industry workers and the police (McDonald, 1999). These groups are being significantly affected by national and global policies which frame their experiences; what would be termed non-discursive elements in CDA terms. When these actors meet stress is placed on 'the search for issues, the analysis of the contradictions of action and distance between a struggle, a discourse and a movement of opinion' (Touraine, 1978, p. 66). Those participating in the 'intervention' come to the process with a common issue but they represent different groups and approaches (McDonald, 2002) in much the same was as teachers and managers and teaching and learning experts might be expected to come to the LOs issue with a common struggle but differing viewpoints. The outcome of this method should be that the reflexivity and self-analysis experienced by the actors helps the researchers and participants 'discover the actor as actor, in other words as a participant in the 'production of society'' (Touraine, 2000, p. 906).

I was not physically able to bring my actors into the same room as Touraine and his researchers did but I developed a method for drawing individuals together in a 'virtual' space. I drew-up a paper list of anonymous statements made by teachers about LOs (see **appendix viii**) and brought them to my manager and T&L expert interviews. It was only at the end of the interviews I asked the interviewees to read the statements and comment on any that struck them as noteworthy. I would suggest one if the interviewee was getting stuck. These are presented as 'vignettes' in the findings and analysis chapter 5. In this way I was able to, on some level, utilise Touraine's method to represent a grouping of interviewees or individual as an actor 'trying to impose their own ends to their environment' (Touraine, 2000, p. 912). This

meant that when a manager reacted to the sometimes negative comments of a teacher regarding LOs they were often engaging in a high degree of reflexivity because in order to answer the charge of an 'adversary' they had to dig deep to situate their answer within their own value system and yet meet that challenging charge and consider it against their own beliefs. This could be described as a process of experiencing, reflecting and self-analysis for the participants.

Example of the Sociological Intervention at work:

Managers chose to react to the statement below made by a media teacher who criticises the LOs culture as experienced by that particular teacher. The statements presented were anonymised.

> ***Vignette: example***
>
> They're spoon fed because it's, pardon my French, it's ass covering…That's what it is. It's learning outcomes. This is what they're supposed to know…they know it. Boom!
>
> Male Teacher, HEI

After reading the quote the contributors respond to it reflectively:

> I mean yeah in the early days but I wouldn't call it… no. It's a duty we have. (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

> I feel people say that because they don't know enough about them and they don't want to engage with them, you know, so if I have someone like that here saying, you know…'we just think it's all about QA and we just think it's daft and its covering your ass', I would say to them it's not. It's a responsibility we have to the learner. (Susan, Private-T&L)

The resulting discourse from the managers is interesting in that it reveals a high level of civic duty to the learner that we do not always associate with managers who are sometimes thought of as being more interested in managing. These contributions

also reveal the people beyond their roles as being individuals putting the student at the centre of the learning experience. It is interesting to see that Susan is strong in her defence of LOs as the teacher is in his/her condemnation. This shows something that is not so evident in the literature; that there are equally strong defences available of LOs as there are criticisms.

Touraine (2000) tells us that the social actor is defined by his relations with others 'whether different or similar, yet to whom this actor is connected by a specific relationship, in the field of action which is studied' (p. 911). In the case of this research, all the actors are bound by their experience of OBE and the Sociological Intervention used here gave different actors the opportunity to 'meet' and create a virtual dialogue that yielded rich results in terms of the actor acting 'as an agent of transformation of his environment and of his own situation, as a creator of imaginary worlds, as capable of referring to absolute values' where the researcher has lead 'the actors from a struggle they must carry on themselves to an analysis of their own actions' (Hamel, 2000, p. 2). The Sociological Intervention method works well within the CDA methodology, which is context-sensitive and power-relations sensitive, as the 'intervention' has typically been used in situations where context impacts significantly on the groups' or individuals' experiences. Terrorists, young offenders and educationalists all operate within structures affected by national and international policies and mores. Touraine's (2000) method, working with CDA, acknowledges dissent and conflict and allows contrary views into contact with one another resulting in important and enlightening knowledge.

Data Analysis

Once I had gathered my data and had it transcribed I prepared to analyse the material using computer aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) and manual techniques. I first undertook a two-day course in the CAQDA programme called NVivo. I decided to use NVivo due to the large volume of text data I had accrued and because it is the most common CAQDA software in use in the IoT sector where I work; which gives rise to the possibility of future research collaborations. NVivo at its

most basic is a useful data management tool, reducing the use of manual coding which can get messy (Bazeley, 2007) and adding to the reliability of the outcome of the research as the storage of the data and pathway of the analysis is perspicuous. Using CAQDA software also speeds up data searches and the creation of codes and the identification of relationships (David and Sutton, 2007). Sarantakos (2013) refers to this method of managing and analysing data as 'accurate, reliable and flexible' (p. 396) .This is not to undermine the expertise of the researcher as, ultimately, I was the one who conducted the analysis and am answerable for all outcomes (Gibson and Brown, 2009). CAQDA programmes can also get us too involved in coding and distance us from theory (Sarantakos, 2013) and we must be mindful that machines cannot always represent the essence of data (ibid.) that is still the role of the researcher.

Stages and Process involved in Qualitative Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) suggested stages of analysis as a guide, I began the process of analysis using NVivo as a management tool and a tool of analysis, but later relying on my own research skills to making meaning of the data in the write-up.

The Braun and Clarke model (2006) of approaching data is most helpful in identifying emerging themes. As seen in **Table 2** (p. 85), this is a very intuitive approach; you might do this anyway but their pathway is a good and perspicuous tool to use. In my own case I read the data several times and created a list of headings that quotes could be filed under. This was the beginnings of developing themes from the data. It is also how the data is prepared for uploading to Nvivo, so two tasks are happening at once: I was manually looking for themes and also creating the headings so that Nvivo would be able to collate matching questions and answers into bespoke nodes.

One example of how a theme emerged was in relation to the language used in LO statements. Over the course of manually reading over the interviews I could see a lot of talk around the language of LOs. I created a heading above each of these quotes called 'Language'. When the data was imported into Nvivo the programme recognised all quotes under this heading and placed them in the same node. Nvivo was able to tell me that 17 participants (all) cumulatively had referred to 'Language'

on 51 occasions. I could see this was significant, but alone 'Language' did not represent a single theme as there were other cognate headings that could be connected to it to create a grand theme. Sub-themes like 'Language' emerge through frequency, but not only through frequency. Some concerns can be chosen for inclusion because they represent insight or an interesting perspective; this is where the skill of the researcher is required to recognise such contributions.

Through my own thought processes, and my manual and CAQDA mapping of what seemed to be coming through from the interviews, I could see that language was part of a greater theme which I named: 'LO Design'. This theme also encompassed several other tenets (some of which were later dropped or merged with others, see **appendix X**) which ended up including 'assessment and measurement' and 'flexibility' as well as 'Language' as key concerns in the design of LOs. This is one example of how manual and computer-aided data analysis and investigation, over time, lead to the creation of a theme.

Table 2: Thematic analysis: Adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006

Analytical Process	Braun and Clarke applied to NVivo	Goals	Iterative Analysis Process
1. Get familiar with the data	Transcribe, read and re-read data. Creating headings. Import data into NVivo.	Data Management (open and detailed coding using NVivo	Assigning data to refined concepts to show meaning
2. Generate initial codes	Phase 1: open coding. General groupings		Refining and distilling
3. Search for themes	Phase 2: creating nodes. Collate nodes into possible themes	Descriptive accounts	
4. Review themes	Phase 3: checking nodes against data set and generating thematic map		Assigning themes and meaning
5. Define	Phase 4: Data reduction-	Explanatory Accounts leading to	

themes	refine themes.	deeper meanings	Generating themes and concepts
6. Final analysis	Final analysis of extracts and connecting to research questions and literature. Write-up.		

The analysis begins with a first touch: reading the transcripts and undertaking the time-consuming job of preparing them for uploading to NVivo by creating coded headings that allow data to be clustered. In this process interview extracts are given headings which allow NVivo to later identify patterns and group extracts together into themes. These results in the creation of initial open codes within NVivo (see p. 87). Braun and Clarke (2006) identify their approach to thematic-driven analysis as being congruent with constructionist methods as it is concerned with reporting experiences, 'meanings and the realities of participants' (p. 9).

Figure 8: Example of open coding in this research
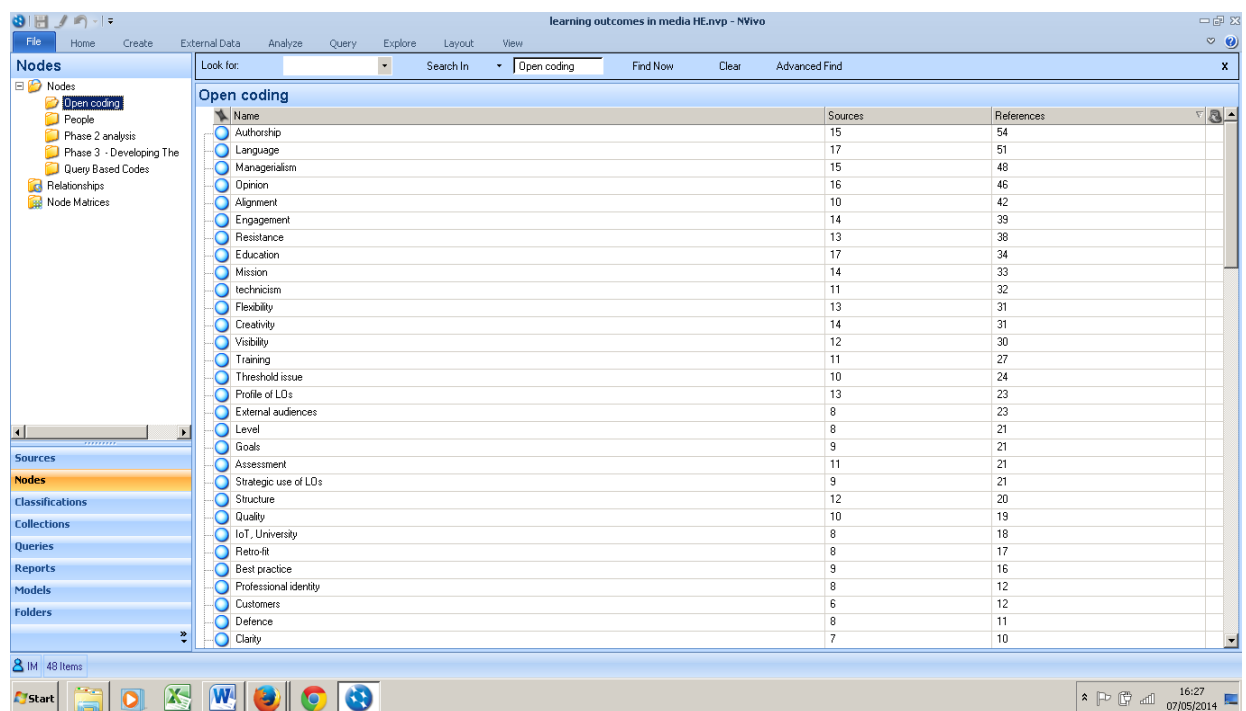
Creating themes helps organise your data and 'captures something important about the data in relation to the research question' (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Taking an inductive approach to the development of themes through the creation of nodes

containing relevant quotes means that themes were directly connected to the data rather than the researchers preconceived ideas about what the results should be (ibid.). This increased the reliability of the results as it reduced the chances of bias and lets the data speak, rather than the researcher. The use of NVivo has also created traceable data that that enhances reliability by creating findings that are 'supported by sufficient and compelling evidence' (Somekh and Lewin, 2012, p. 328).

Working with NVivo was a good choice for me because using NVivo is essentially an iterative process whereby one continues to revisit the data distilling it down to the most important themes and bring the researcher ever closer to the meaning of the data.

Figure 9: Phase 3 of coding
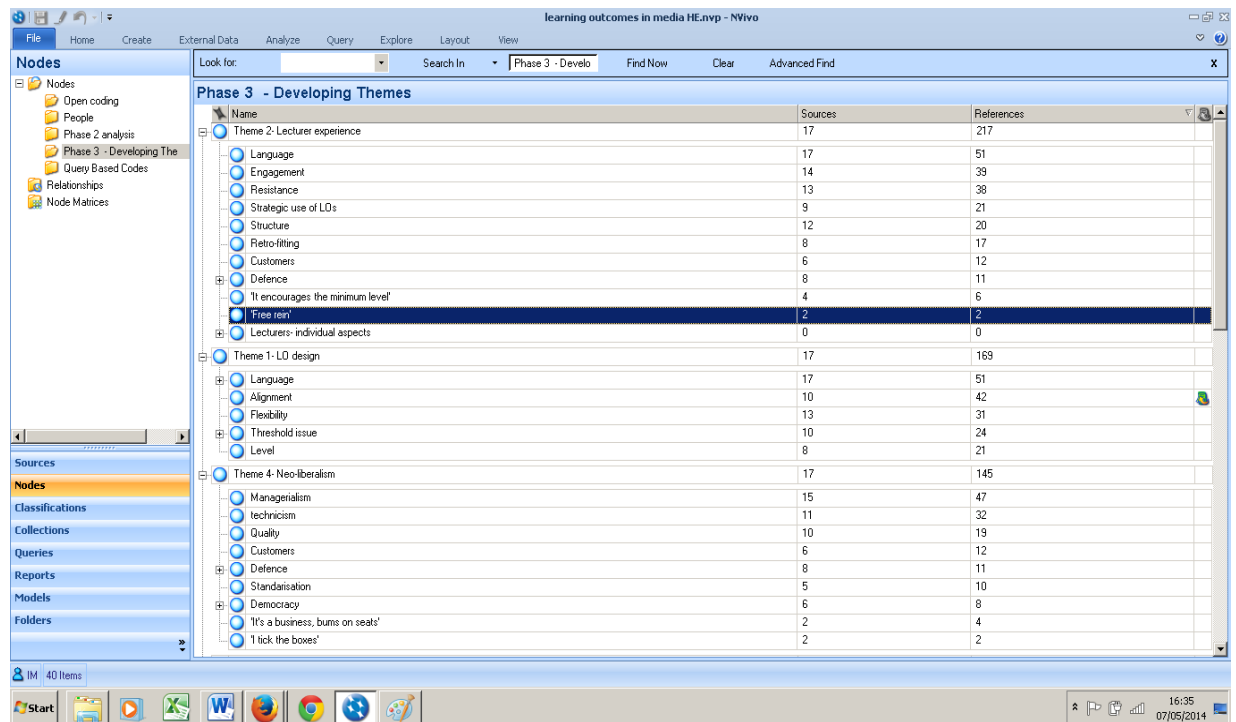
In my experience this initial analysis, while very helpful, is only one level of meaning making and perhaps not the most important. This type of analysis may have revealed

the tensions and potentials of LOs as alluded to in the title of this research but it was the researcher's subsequent cognitive work using critical analysis that revealed meaning. This meant that after isolating key quotes from NVivo it was my role to unpack the material and allow it to speak to me and for me to interpret the meaning of the data in terms of what groups of participants were saying and in terms of what individual participants were conveying.

The actual analysis of discourse is described as the seventh step in the discourse analysis method by Potter and Wetherell (1997). This was a most complex procedure and this phase of analysis involved endlessly reading and rereading the NVivo coded data in order to make sense of it. NVivo showed-up the patterns forming around the LOs discourse but I then devoured the text in order to form hypotheses about the function of the talk I was reading in the nodes in line with the advice of Potter and Wetherall (1997). A last level of analysis happened during the write-up when I revisited the findings and analysis repeatedly in order to amend, elaborate, edit and repack the data and rethink my interpretation of the repertoires therein.

3.12 Ethics

'Empirical research in education inevitably carries ethical issues, because it involves collecting data from people, about people' (Punch, 2009, p. 49). With this in mind I was careful to follow the rigorous procedures set out by the examining institution for this research. The contributors to this research were all adults with advanced degrees working in higher education as leaders and teachers and who would not be considered vulnerable. This made my task less onerous but I was careful to develop a detailed participant information sheet (see **appendix iv**) and use the university consent form (see **appendix v**) during data collection. The participant information sheet had multiple iterations and was detailed about the confidentiality offered and the storage and destruction of the audio material. The point of this detail is that the participant can be confident of participation in a process of 'informed consent' (Bryman, 2008) and, in the case of this research, the participants were free to speak with the knowledge of protected confidentiality which Neuman (2011, p. 457) considers a 'moral obligation' once offered.

This research received ethical approval from the ethics committee of the University of Sheffield (see **appendix i** and **ii**). I sought an update of my ethical approval (see **appendix ii**) when I widened my interview base and was commended on my 'openness' (see **appendix iii**). I feel all necessary has been done to 'protect participants and the integrity of the inquiry' (May, 2011, p. 61) in accordance with the protocols set down by the university and the ethics committee.

Chapter 4: 'LOs: experiences at the coal face of teaching and learning'

4.1 Introduction

The following 3 chapters concern themselves with the findings and analysis of the research undertaken in this thesis. The current chapter explores the tensions around issues with the design of LOs and the lecturer experience of, and engagement with LOs as they arose in the research. The succeeding chapters 5 and 6 focus less on the practical user issues involved with LOs but rather look at the deeper conceptual level issues regarding LOs. This marks a more abstract and interpretative view of the meaning of LOs in higher education based on the findings.

Below are listed the key themes that emerged in this chapter of the data findings and subsequent analysis as a result of open-coding of the semi-structured interviews with participants.

Theme 1 - Lecturer engagement with LOs
Theme 2 – LO language + design

In '**Theme 1**' teachers speak of their engagement with and experience of using LOs.

'**Theme 2**' is concerned with the design of LOs. Here I describe and analyse the tensions surrounding teachers' difficulty with the design and authorship of LOs as against the view of non –teaching staff that defend LOs and point to the supports available to overcome any perceived obstacles.

*** *

4.2 Theme 1: Lecturer engagement with LOs

The aim of this section is to find out to what extent teachers engage with the LOs project and what influences their engagement with LOs. The research showed that

lecturers displayed a complex collection of activities and attitudes that represented their experiences with LOs and that these experiences reflected how LOs impact lecturers' lives in helpful and hindering ways. Also notable was how the activities surrounding LOs can manifest themselves as deep and thought provoking challenges and also as quotidian and bureaucratic tasks.

I will begin by looking at teachers' level of engagement with the LOs project and how they use them in their work.

Engagement

The level of engagement with LOs by lecturers tells us about how they view them and value them. I use the word 'engagement' in this section for its positive connotations of 'meaningful taking part.'

All lectures interviewed used LOs to some degree and there was a strong awareness of LOs and their profile within each institution. I have tried to uncover what and who might influence a teacher's engagement with LOs and whether the institutional profile of LOs might hold sway over how, and to what degree, teachers engaged with the LOs model of education. I begin with a look at the influence of colleagues and teaching and learning experts as a way in which teachers might engage with LOs

Engagement through the influence of advocates

All teachers interviewed used LOs in their work. Some teachers had affirmative conceptions of the role of LOs, like Nadia (Uni-L) who describes them as 'an important anchor' leading her to a discursive practice which included an appropriate and thoughtful use of LOs. Outside of the management level, interviewee Nadia (Uni-L) was the most positive of all the teachers about her experiences of LOs. Key to Nadia's (Uni-L) engagement seems to be her route to LOs through an influential colleague. In this case her colleague Gina's discourse around LOs (Uni-L) was an important influence in Nadia's (Uni-L) positive experience of LOs. Gina (Uni-L) had worked for a number of years in the Australian higher education system and had a

deep awareness and knowledge of LOs. LOs have been adopted fully in Australia and are embedded in the HE system (Lawson and Askell-Williams, 2007) and this might explain Gina's (Uni-L) advanced thoughts on LOs generally. Nadia (Uni-L) cites Gina (Uni-L) as a positive influence in her interview. Gina(Uni-L) herself calls LOs 'a useful tool' in the vein that Spady (1994) suggested, but also uses language like 'bullshit' and 'bollocks' to describe them, which leads one to believe that although she is an 'expert' author and proponent of LOs she does not want to be identified too closely with their culture. Also, this dismissal shows us the extent to which the outcomes approach can inspire complex and sometimes polarised attitudes as alluded to by Ecclestone (2001).

Maura (Uni-Mgr/L), who is both a manager and lecturer working for the university through a service agreement with a media production company, also cites an influential colleague who brought her into the LOs fold. In this case it was Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) who I interviewed as part of this research. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr), as head of a department, has a quasi-teaching and learning role in the university and was able to work with Maura (Uni-Mgr/L) in introducing her to LOs. These successful relationships lead to a deeper knowledge of LOs and an openness to their use endorses Poole's (2010, p. 13) description of learning as 'a matter of personal contact' and shows that having a mentor is a very effective way of communicating the value and use of LOs.

It is noteworthy that the profile of LOs in the university setting was much more low-key than in the other two colleges and yet meaningful engagement with them seemed higher. Some of this might be to do with these key teaching and learning advocates and the ease of changing and refining LOs that make them more malleable in the university system.

From this research it is apparent that the inside influence of a teaching and learning advocate, engaging in positive discursive practices around LOs, has a powerful role to play in the acceptance and engagement with LOs in the institutions studied. This was again apparent in the private college. All five of those interviewed in this site spoke spontaneously of the positive role of the teaching and learning co-ordinator Susan

(Private-T&L). Despite these positive T & L experiences there were deficits in engagement:

> So in terms of what I want to teach I often don't use them that much so day to day. I don't really mind too much. It's a bit of extra work but I'd probably say they're not really that relevant to me as a lecturer. I wouldn't say they're very useful. For me the formality actually doesn't help. (Paul, Private-L)

And yet this contributor referred to Susan's (Private-T&L) teaching and learning course as a positive development for those engaging with LOs. It would appear from the research that the influence of institutional staff who would be viewed as experts in the understanding of LOs and who promote LOs on a personal level are important if individuals are to work with the LOs model but they do not appear to over- ride all personal misgivings about LOs.

Engagement: Institutional influences

Non-discursive influences, as described by Fairclough (1992), such as institutional policies and guidelines, can shape positive staff attitudes regarding LOs according to this study, but perhaps not as successfully or as persuasively as influential colleagues. Teachers can be aware that LOs have a strong profile in their institution and they work with them but in a more technicist fashion, leading to the observation that the 'engagement' with LOs might be more superficial than the 'meaningful taking part' would imply. Paul (Private-L), cited above shows his lack of enthusiasm with LOs; 'it's a bit of extra work', as does Darragh (IoT-L) in the IoT who says:

> The limitations of, well they're not followed… some people can dismiss them off hand or whatever. I mean it shouldn't be what everything hangs on when you're delivering a programme. (Darragh, IoT-L)

And on the writing of them he comments:

It just, you know, it's like a level eight we got to verb this. The verbs have got to be different to the level seven and I'm just like 'ah come on!' (Darragh, IoT-L)

The notion of 'verbing' as a discursive practice, that is the conversion of this noun to a verb, reifies the LOs process as feared by Ewell (2008). The 'verbing' of a learning outcome conjures up the idea of inputs, like one is baking a cake to a recipe. LOs in the IoT where Darragh works (IoT-L) enjoy an elevated position. Darragh (IoT-L) refers to them as 'king of the castle by all accounts' and this endorsed by others; discursive texts revealed that teachers tended to have scant use for LOs unless it was in a retrospective way, or at key moments in the calendar:

I would forget about them until I have an essay or an assessment coming up. They don't really enter into my every day teaching as such because it is so practically based. Most of the time they wouldn't really if I tell the truth, but when it comes to an assessment or when it comes to coming towards the end of the year or whatever I look back and say 'Oh God have they ticked this, this and this box?' So there might be a bit of mad scramble the last few weeks to squeeze in a few more learning outcome type things. (Alison, IoT-L)

The experience of the IoT teachers who were using LOs as a requirement of their job was similar to those in the private college studied. LOs enjoyed a very strong profile in the private institution, perhaps even stronger than in the IoT:

They are important definitely and people always refer to them. (Kate, Private-L)

I think it's quite big in the institution. I think in the last three or four years it has become very important and because when you have faculty meetings you can see programmes are structured to outcomes. (Patricia, Private-L)

Like their colleagues in the IoT, the private college teachers are more engaged at certain times of the year when the LOs become most relevant as dictated by the non-discursive policies of the institutions perhaps.

…when I think about programme lesson plans and stuff at the very, very beginning, I'll be thinking of my LOs right…But when I'm in the middle of teaching the class, like week three, week four, no, no concern. Gone. Completely gone. (Kate, Private-L)

Kate's experience reflects the influence of LOs in the formal aspect of teaching around planning, assessment and reporting but as LOs have only been in use for the last number of years it is difficult to predict their future role. They may come to shape teaching practice in a deeper dimension or they may become ossified and obsolete.

The perception of managers in these two institutions is that staff engages 'hugely' (Dermot, Private-Mgr) and not 'just out of habit' (Gerry, IoT-Mgr). The research based on the teachers interviewed would indicate that that perception might be overly optimistic. This may be because they sit outside the practice of teaching and pedagogic relationships and are considered a function of a social practice situated in education management in terms of quality enhancement (Lassnigg, 2012) rather than a central plank of the teaching and learning process.

4.3 Theme 2: LOs Design

The next section deals with '**Theme 2**'; looking at the experiences and tensions associated with writing and designing LOs which have often be viewed as jargonistic by detractors and perspicuous by proponents.

Based on data input into the CAQDA programme NVivo, issues concerned with the design of LOs and their sub themes were recognised. Participants spoke in detail about their experiences and opinions of designing and writing LOs. The key sub-themes are set out here:

- **Language**
- **Assessment and measurement**

- **Flexibility**

Language

All 17 participants in this research referred to the issue of language in the design of LOs with 54 references being cited across the three sites. Overall there was criticism of the language on offer in the writing of LOs with the bulk of these negative comments coming from the teacher participants. At times teachers did qualify their criticism of LOs but generally speaking those who supported LOs were in the manager/co-ordinator class, whilst this group admitted that there were issues surrounding the use and choice of language in the design of LOs.

Criticisms of language used in LOs (LOs) design

The teacher interviewees were most direct in their criticisms of the language of LOs and what Hussey and Smith (2003) might refer to as the 'fog of rhetoric' or 'Edufog' (Fritz, 1994) that surrounds outcomes focused education. Again, this can be seen as a discourse which is situated in a social practice aligned with education management networks. The language is criticised as being too business orientated, confusing and unhelpful:

> Managerial speak yeah. I don't think you need it. (Kate, Private-L)
>
> It's very formal. It's quite confusing as well as to actually what you're trying to do. I think if you write in a simpler language, it's easier for you and the students to understand what you're trying to get at. (Paul, Private-L)
>
> I think the language of them can be bollocks.... (Gina, Uni-L)

As we can see from the text above, the language associated with LOs comes in for some stark criticism; its management speak; its 'maze of jargon' (Jansen, 2006) and its inaccessibility can be problematic for teachers. Gina (Uni-L) refers to it as 'bollocks;' a coarse term that was used in the formal setting of an interview between two educationalists. She breaks out of the semi-formal context of the interview to represent her frustration using the discursive practice of street slang relating to a formal system. This underlines her disdain and distances her from the formality of the language of the learning outcome in a fierce manner. Berlach (2004, p. 5) echoes the sentiments expressed by some of those interviewed and asserts that 'both the culture and gobbledegook of business is now firmly entrenched within the amphitheatre of education', much of which he see as originating in the work of William Spady, the architect of outcomes-based education. In essence you have an imported discursive and social practice (from business) which might not be native to the discursive and social practices of the field (media) it is describing. This esotericism may lead to disenchantment for teachers and could also be one of the reasons that students do not engage with LOs. Alternatively, the discourse associated with learning outcomes can be viewed as type of short-hand that educators can communally access despite disciplinary differences; this viewpoint is elaborated on later in the chapter.

'Frustration' is the *mot juste* to describe the anti-LOs stance held, at times, by teachers, with aspects of the language in use being deemed unnecessary and unhelpful. These uncomplimentary comments are found across the three sites visited, which would lead one to consider that there is something that connects the attitudes of media teachers across the three sites. All teachers expressed some sort of exasperation with LOs (and in particular the language available) at some stage of their careers which would indicate a level of dissatisfaction with LOs and perhaps a detachment from LOs which represent something divorced from the nuanced and complex arena of the class. And yet much of the current negative comments voiced by teachers were balanced out in this research by the same teachers who are happy, or resigned, to working with LOs and managers and co-ordinators who recognise issues but focus on the possibilities. There is a recognition that education and

learning needs to be managed to avoid chaos and provide structure for all participants in the HE process and perhaps as Hargreaves and Moore (2000) suggest, LOs help provide this structure. Nevertheless, there is an apparent tension around the arcane nature of LOs, and despite the best efforts of Bloom (1956) and others the language of LOs continues to frustrate teachers, this might be partly because of their perceived remoteness from the complexity of teaching and learning as happens in class.

Problems and opportunities

Those in management or teaching and learning roles are quick to defend LOs while acknowledging that there have been problems with the acceptance and use of LOs. It is interesting to see that these individuals across the three sites are unified in their view of LOs as an 'opportunity.' Accordingly, one is encouraged to take what is good, lose what doesn't work and actively seek to make LOs work for the teacher using inventive and creative language.

> The verbs are helpful but if they're not don't use them. (Susan, Private-T&L)

> We're getting better at making the language more accessible for the learner. We're getting better and more confident around recognising that this is a programme for the learner and not for the validation or the review panel but the language used to be quite complex and still is a little bit complex. (Susan, T&L, P)

Susan's (Private-T&L) assertion that LOs are not being written for external audiences and networks with their own distinct social practices (e.g. the Higher Education authority, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) or visiting panels for reviews or accreditation of new programmes) is not a commonly held view but her criticism of the language of LOs is familiar.

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Potential and acceptance of the language of LOs

While all interviewees bar one expressed some exasperation or acknowledged a deficit with the language of LOs it is important to note many interviewed expressed an acceptance of the language and its structure as a function the social practice that is education management:

> And I haven't really been critical of them. I just sort of go these are what they are and I need to make sure I've achieved them and that the verbs match the level of… (Nadia, Uni-L)

One senior manager, a mathematician, voiced full praise:

> I think the focus on active verbs which are directly measurable is a good development. Avoiding general expressions like 'develop an understanding' is also worthwhile. (Mark, Private-Mgr)

Here Mark (IoT-Mgr) is concerned with measurement, reflecting perhaps the more instrumental nature of LOs as they are used in this site. Brancalone and O'Brien (2011, p. 504) see this as placing LOs in the realm of the behaviourist school of education (and not in a good way) and claim they are 'concretely valued because they are product-assessable.' The literature promotes the development of broad outcomes (Adam, 2008) and cautions against instrumentalism (Ecclestone, 2004) but this can lead to difficulties in interpretation and understanding of the exact goal of LOs which might dilute their meaning. Also, I think it is important not to misinterpret Mark's stance. Instrumentalism is seen as a self-evident 'bad' and yet from my assessment of senior manager Mark it was apparent to me that he was a very caring, interested professional with a concern for fairness afforded by LOs and espoused by Hargreaves and Moore (2000), and securing student achievement was evidently a cornerstone of his work.

In sum, the combined views of interviewees above tell us that the language used in LOs is not universally endorsed by teachers and managers in media higher education. In fact most hold mixed feelings about the 'jargon' used as it is connected to a social

practice closely associated with business and management texts and practices. Many in senior positions and T&L experts tend to see the opportunities that LOs present and put the onus on their staff to solve issues and be creative with the language to best enhance practice but the overwhelming attitude of teachers to the language of LOs contributes to their being seen as remote from the complexity of the class and positioned as a function of education management rather than teaching and learning, which might be viewed as a lost opportunity some and a result of a needless distance between teachers and managers.

Writing LOs

The experiences of those writing LOs indicate the place LOs has in the education firmament. All interviewed, bar one (a new teacher), had experience of LOs as authors.

Writing LOs: experiences

In this study it was noted that some of those interviewed viewed the task of writing LOs negatively. Words to describe the writing of LOs were 'crazy' and 'onerous' and one participant said 'Oh Jesus! They do my head in.' Maura (Uni-Mgr/L) said; 'it's a very technical art form' indicating that a high level of expertise, and perhaps artistry, is needed to write effective outcomes. Why are they so difficult to write? The answer to that seems to lie in the necessary use of a tight band of verbs as proposed by regulating bodies and the on-going influence of Bloom's taxonomy (1956) in the writing of LOs and the surprising finding that there was no consensus about what level they should be pitched at. Lecturers realise that certain verbs have to be used and they are strategic about how they satisfy their own needs while satisfying the non-discursive influences in the system, such as Quality and Qualifications Ireland:

> Now I had to couch (them) in kind of business (speak)… they want certain kinds of buzz words and verbs and I had to give them that but I did get in the things that I thought were necessary (like) story telling. (Patricia, Private-L)

It is obvious that some take a purely compliance-orientated approach to the writing of LOs which can well be characterised as lacking value as an activity and seen as reductive (Ewell, 2006). A senior manager admitted that some staff regarded the writing of LOs as a 'token exercise' while another described the process as 'very difficult' for the uninitiated. From this it is clear that writing helpful LOs is not easy for those who are new to the task and this highlights a central misunderstanding of LOs as a mere tool (Spady, 1994) rather than the value-laden philosophically driven approach to conceptualising learning it has come to represent (Jansen, 1998). Later in this chapter I address the strategic approach taken by teachers in greater depth when I discuss how teachers make LOs work for them.

Writing LOs: writer responsibility

An emergent theme from this section was the importance of the writer of the LOs for any media programme to be *au fait* with the media industries. Four teaching participants across two sites were strong in the belief that the weaknesses in LOs design was often due to the creator being unfamiliar with the media world, an issue that has been highlighted by Skolnik (2010):

> I think if somebody is coming a bit wrong footed around media production and what it's all about really and has never worked in it for instance, then I think they can get very anxious and nearly start matching a and b where *'oh this is what the industry says it wants so I'll put that into a learning outcome'*, not quite sure what the hell that even means (laughs)... (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

> The LOs for this course some of them that I'm teaching here have been drawn up by people who haven't worked in the industry and so I find them quite irrelevant or quite basic. (Barbara, IoT-L)

Perhaps this criticism arose because of a lack of what Fairlough (1992) describes as inter-discursivity; the LOs lacking the joint discourse of the media field and the common education discourse usually used to write LOs. This shows that there is a

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need for writers of LOs to have knowledge of the field the LOs belongs to, plus an expertise in the common language of LOs which allows a programme to be accessible to colleagues generally as observed by Avis (2010) and Werquin (2012).

Alison (IoT-L) suggested that industry people might be brought in to help write LOs to make them more relevant to industry practices, but this encourage esotericism and estrange the general education community. Alison's suggestion could be interpreted as a reflection of a neo-liberal standpoint that connects the academy to an economic imperative (Ayres and Carlone, 2007; Smyth and Dow, 1998) but it also reflects a classical debate about academic versus professional types of curriculum as posited by Giroux (2002). For media educators this goes to the heart of the purpose of media education and the theory/practice nexus. What is it that the students need to know and what do media educators feel they need to teach? This is the debate exposed by the teachers' views here. Interestingly, the four individuals who posited the industry deficit in LOs were all practitioner/teachers, that is, they had professional careers in the media and three were still involved in media production apart from their teaching. Media education needs practitioners and might be considered different in that the department would, more often than not, include people who have industry experience. This closeness to industry has obviously affected their view of how LOs need to be close to industry norms and indeed indicate that media education itself needs to be built on industry norms and expectations of graduate expertise rather than Humboldtian ideals of citizenship and academic freedom (Serrano-Verlarde et al, 2010), although both are not mutually exclusive. In this case LOs do not create any new tension but rather uncover and existing tension between what employers and educators might view as the role of education in society generally.

The expression of expertise was alluded to in another manner by 'Paul' (Private-L) who felt that writers of LOs needed an expertise in LO thinking apart from their own industry expertise:

> …but some of the LOs, they were just very, very different because they'd
> been written by different lecturers, some of whom had never heard of what a
> learning outcome was supposed to be. They hadn't done Susan's (Private-

T&L) course and they wrote down what they were going to teach. Paul, (Private-L)

This time the lack of expertise is related to a deficit in training in writing LOs and reflects a reversion to the old content-driven curriculum identified by Úna, and might reflect 'mechanical' pursuit of LOs (Akhmadeeva et al, 2013, p. 1). The college Paul (Private-L) teaches in has a very influential teaching and learning centre and the college has a compulsory teaching and learning certificate run by the aforementioned 'Susan' (Private-T&L). The possible impact of this four month long level 9 programme in education is that the authorship of LOs has an elevated status in the private college environment studied and the discourse surround LOs is influenced by this heightened awareness of the importance of LOs in the private college environment. As alluded to previously, the teaching and learning expert that one has a personal relationship with coupled with a strong emphasis on LOs institutionally can make LOs more embedded and accepted by teachers. In my study I found that interviewees from the private college were well-versed on the mechanics of LOs and had thought about the issue a lot. Regarding the impact of the teaching and learning co-ordinator; those without Susan's (Private-T&L) training are seen as less well prepared for producing LOs.

Writing LOs: blaming the creator of the LO for its weakness

I think the weaknesses aren't necessarily in the concept of LOs. The weakness is in how people draw up LOs.

(Mark, IoT-Mgr)

It is interesting to note that managers and T &L co-ordinators interviewed in this study were often seen to put the onus for the success of LOs on the teacher or writer of the LOs, urging them to come up with ways to address issues. According to this discourse we all have the wherewithal to write effective outcomes but perhaps we are not getting it right? This has the effect of distancing management from the problem. The problem is seen not to be with the outcomes but with the creators of

the outcomes. Una, a T&L professional from the IoT gives us the picture of a shopping list that you can choose verbs from, thus reducing the activity to something quotidian and not to be over stated in its importance:

> I think you can write a learning outcome about anything. It's not about the learning outcome. I think it's about how you achieve the learning outcome is the issue. I don't see writing a learning outcome as a problem. I mean you have the whole list of verbs from Bloom Taxonomy to help you with that. So I don't think that's the issue. It's as much how you achieve the learning outcome that people might struggle with. (Úna, IoT- T&L)

Ewell (2008) and Bagnall (1994) would view this approach to education as mechanical and undesirable.

> …you may need to create new language and that's what language is supposed to be as well so to me that's kind of against the idea of creativity to say that you can't write in these, and you mightn't be able to. I don't know what you wouldn't be able to write. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

Again, the deficit here is not in the LOs but the fault of the writer, which can be interpreted as an attack on the writer for their inability to engage with the LOs process properly. This might reflect suspicions that managers have about teachers and their commitment to the current approaches to the management of education. If teachers do not engage with or use the language of managerialism there is a danger they may find themselves outside of the decision making within HE (Deem, 2004).

> Well you see it's compressed knowledge in a line, that's what it is and that will always tend towards jargon and it will tend towards educational jargon but, anybody who's involved in communications and journalism should understand that there's got to be a way of escaping from that. (Lorcan, Private-Mgr)

Lorcan's (Private-Mgr) view is that media people, in particular, with their focus on the communication of ideas, should have the skills to overcome the reductive nature

of LOs and perhaps create meaningful LOs. Apart from Nadia in the university, teachers did not seem to have identified this opportunity to use their media writing skills to write enhanced learning outcomes for media practice in the mould of the 'writerly' texts as promoted by Avis (2010).

Writing LOs: the management view

The LOs experience is seen as an opportunity by managers who accentuate the positive aspects of engaging in the writing of outcomes. But managers are not without their own internal tensions regarding LOs. The following two contributions show how LOs can offer a chance for reflection while at the same time managers are wary of the possibility of LOs being reductive (Ewell, 2008). Brian (Uni-Mgr) and Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr), managers from the University, both saw the possibility for a kind of reflective practice when designing and writing outcomes but within a framework of healthy scepticism:

> I found the process of trying to write sensible LOs from my modules clarified, forced me to clarify what I wanted the modules to do but when you get to the point where you're expected to fill in exactly five LOs for each module, you find that the structures, the bureaucratic structures are then shaping what should be good practice rather than the other way round so I had mixed feelings about it. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

Manager ambivalence

'Clarity' and 'transparency' appear as almost interchangeable terms describing LOs, indicating the notion that LOs make knowledge and intentions clear and perspicuous in education circles. They are presented as positive attributes associated with LOs in the literature (Bohlinger, 2012, Werquin, 2012). These two terms seem to have captured the imaginations of managers and policy-makers and appear as part of the vocabulary associated with LOs (clarity, transparency, flexibility) that spread with the

diffusion of the model. They are repeated often perhaps because they represent 1) LOs ability to provide a roadmap for students during their academic careers and 2) the ability of LOs to make plain the esoteric content of specialised knowledge. Clarity is expressed as a positive norm by interviewees but 'bureaucracy' is seen as a block to success and a negative development in the LOs model. This is discussed further in the chapter that connects the culture of LOs to neoliberalism in higher education.

> I think sometimes when I think when I'm writing them (laughs) that it really makes me think about learning, do you know at another level. I find I'm resistant to it but at the same time I kind of think well this is really helping me think about education. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

These contributions reflect deep understanding of the ambivalence that comes with the LOs project, one that is acknowledged by Adam (2008b). There is a realisation that the issue of LOs is complex and that simply accepting or dismissing this movement is to miss the tensions that pull practitioners both toward the positive structure LOs can offer and away from the narrowness of some conceptions of the system.

Alison (IoT-L) as a teacher had a similar feeling of ambivalence; intrigued by the experience but with a caveat:

> I became more comfortable with it last year when we were writing the programme for the honours degree, the *ab initio* add-on year 4 so that was quite insightful really because I suppose you're writing LOs for a course, so that definitely became a bit more insightful but even with that it wasn't so much.

And although managers/T&L co-ordinators on the whole voiced support for LOs one senior figure was very direct in describing the tensions and shortcomings regarding authorship in his own institution:

> There is a feeling in the organisation that 'ah yeah we know what LOs are'… well I don't think we've got it, and this is a personal view, not an institute

view. I don't think we've got to the point yet of, I wouldn't be confident picking up a programme document and going into the LOs and actually reflect what the programme will be able to do from either a programme or module level. (Mark, IoT-Mgr)

Mark's (IoT-Mgr) view might also reflect a sort of unrealistic expectation about LOs opening the 'black box' of learning and teaching as well as hubris on the part of teaching staff. After eight years of the hegemony of the outcomes model in the IoT sector this statement reflects a poor indictment of the model's roll-out. It may also reflects the lack of engagement or acceptance or understanding on the part of teaching and academic staff that might underscore LOs in this particular site and this is a risk associated with the possible diminished efficacy of LOs.

Summary to date

Certainly the pressure on the writers of LOs is noteworthy according to most of the interviewees in this study. Most find it a difficult task and those who excel in this area usually get 'dogged into being the LOs person' (Gina, Uni-L) and Gerry (IoT-Mgr) agrees, but this might happen when anyone in any sphere of life is identified as having a particular ability (through training, experience and perhaps willingness) in an area where there is demand for their skill. This contribution tells us that there is tension around teachers' feelings regarding time and work pressure in this aspect of LOs activity and managers may view teacher/author shortcomings as contributing to a weakening of the possibilities and potential of LOs.

Outcomes-based assessment and measurement

Teacher experiences of the OBE assessment and measurement of some complex achievements was identified as a central preoccupation in this study, especially given the creative and often subjective nature of media practice education (Worsnop, 2008). Yorke (2011) maintains that it is impossible to grade complex achievements, including; autonomy; independent thinking and creativity. Ecclestone (2001) regards what she calls 'I know it when I see it' statements as an internalising of the assessment criteria. This happens when an experienced marker has an intuition for

the value of the work without having particularly to refer to a marking scheme. This is often evident with expert assessors but does not negate the usefulness of outcomes. Criteria are preferred by Gina (Uni-L) who is both an experienced teacher and criteria-focused in her approach to assessment:

> I think there is always a problem when you're looking at things like… creativity in particular is a really difficult one because… 'I'll know it when I see it.' (Laughs). And it's very difficult to, you know, to write clear criteria for students around it because your assessment criteria are what I'm looking for.' (Gina, Uni-L)

'I know it when I see it' approaches to assessment is a recognised view which indicates what Eisner (1985) calls 'connoisseurship' on the part of the teacher, but it is not satisfactory in the outputs model where achievement must be measured in a way that is transparent to all:

> …you can write down: *'you'll get bonus marks for creativity'* but who can mark that. (Darragh, IoT-L)

Darragh (IoT-L) expresses a general frustration among many teachers, although some (Nadia, Uni-L) have incorporated expectations of creativity into the design of their LOs. But even so, this leaves us with the difficulty of measuring nebulous concepts and assigning marks:

> …the last two reports from the last two external examiners in the media course were' I'd like to see more creativity assessment', blah, blah, you know and I said *'fine that's good'*… it's not an easy one mind you creativity…I honestly don't know how you measure creativity. (Mark, IoT-Mgr)

Mark's difficulty is echoed in the literature: Eisner says 'not everything knowable can be articulated in propositional form' (2004, p. 7). Schlafly (1994, p. 85) takes a wider view in his contention that 'education is not a product defined by specific output

measures; it is a process, the development of the mind.' Hussey and Smith maintain that this drive for transparency and measurability associated with LOs has made LOs 'largely irrelevant to classroom activities' (2003, p.367) a feeling echoed by Maura, a manager/lecturer, who worried about LOs becoming 'the thing' instead of the learning being 'the thing.' There is evidence from this study that this could be happening in the IoT and private colleges studied here where LOs are at the centre of teaching and learning in terms of what management expect of its teachers and this OBE view has come to underpin the education process in institutions with a marketised view of the role of HE generally. Jackson (2008, p. 4) rejects the outcomes focused model for the creative disciplines saying 'creativity is inhibited by predictive outcome-based course design, which sets out what students will be expected to have learnt with no room for unanticipated or student determined outcomes.' Jackson's gloomy view is not the same as that voiced in this study where teachers tend to get on with it and offer as many opportunities for the students to be creative through the LOs and sometimes despite them.

In sum, the findings here resonate with the literature that characterises assessment, in particular assessment of creative endeavour as a difficult proposition. Teachers express their frustration with using LOs to capture the artistic nature of media production. Earlier non-teaching interviewees contended that it is possible to have a learning outcome for everything so perhaps the difficulty lies with assessment, considering that some artistic and creative processes are regarded as defying measurement (Zinkhan, 1993).

Alignment of assessment to LOs

I have written generally about assessment and the outcomes approach and this next section delves deeper into one area of OBA which is the specific alignment of assessment to LOs which is central to the OBE model. 12 of the 17 educators interviewed for this study talked, without prompting, about the concept of 'alignment' in terms of LOs and its close relationship to assessment. 44 references to 'alignment' were made by the 12 interviewees leading me to believe that

'alignment', whether it be in terms of assessment, or module LOs, or programme LOs, is a crucial concept in the design of LOs and it is also a concept that is upper most in the minds of educators, in particular senior managers and T & L experts.

'Alignment' most often refers to the work of Biggs (2003) who proffered the idea that all LOs should be assessable and that LOs should be written with assessment in mind. Assessment and LOs are inextricably linked in this model; they are aligned.

In this section I am going to separate the data I received from lecturers and manager/co-ordinators to give a clearer picture of the different approaches to alignment by the two professional groups.

Teachers and alignment

Four of the nine lecturers who took part in this study spontaneously talked about the alignment of LOs to assessment: that is, that all LOs must be assessable (Moon, 2002). Three spoke of alignment in a technical fashion, as an activity that had to be done as part of the culture of their institution:

> If the assessment matches the LOs that's good enough, whether or not we've actually taught it successfully or they've learnt it properly. (Alison, IoT-L)

It is interesting to note that here we see that learning and teaching is not the main issue for the teacher, instead the LOs exercise is what is of importance; in essence the alignment of LOs is an exercise which defeats the original purpose of the exercise, which is something that concerned Wolf (1995). Alison (IoT-L) is pragmatic but supportive of the alignment model as espoused by Biggs (2003; 1996); later stating that it keeps her 'on the straight and narrow.' Inherent in the material given is the notion that alignment is something you do to satisfy the system or external audiences, that it involves accountability and making learning and teaching transparent. This partly reflects Brancelone and O'Brien's (2011) view of LOs as a simulation of reality that is mistaken for reality. Also, when she talks about the alignment being 'good enough' we are not told who it is good enough for but the unsaid leads us to suspect that this might be interpreted as a teacher's cynicism, or a

low value of her work, or an optical activity to satisfy higher internal and external powers. Alan (Private-L) echoes this when he states:

> It's like the formal educational part so that if somebody from HETAC or QQI comes in they can say *"Oh yes that's what you're teaching. I can see the LOs. I can tally them up with the assessment"* and I think it's kind of a formal thing. (Alan, Private-L)

Managers and T&L experts and alignment

Contrasting what might be termed the sometimes 'cynical' views of teachers regarding LOs is the promotional discourse of the managers and T&L 'experts'. Here we see a positive disposal toward the alignment model. These contributors are very committed in their belief in the efficacy of the alignment model. Brian (Uni-Mgr), a senior manager in the University, is asked if LOs promote quality assurance and he answers; 'Well yes but I'm going to repeat myself, if and only if, first of all they're good outcomes and secondly if the assessment really is aligned with the outcomes.' The alignment of the assessment and LOs was a mantra of sorts for this interviewee advocating the adherence to Biggs' (2003; 1996) theory of constructive alignment which was prominent among this manager group:

> The connection of the assessments to the LOs: that's the big one. That's the critical one. There's no point having lovely outcomes and a lovely assessment and they don't, they're not comprehensive…All I can do for the media lecturers is instil in them what we mean by assessment and connected outcomes and I keep that going and it's working. (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

Mark (IoT-Mgr) extrapolates his enthusiasm for the alignment model to his team. He refers to it as an 'ethos', thus allowing the model to become more than a tool for learning. It takes on the role of a value, or an ideology or a belief system. It has become something that underpins the philosophy of the whole institution.

All know how to constructively align assessment around it and it's not just ticking a box. They (the teachers) believe fundamentally that there's fundamentally an ethos behind what they're trying to do. (Mark, IoT-Mgr)

What that ethos or philosophy of education is in any given site depends on the institution involved, and the epistemological standpoint of the author and/ or user. Jervis and Jervis (2005) are critical of the constructive alignment model as a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing. They contend that LOs promise a constructivist view of learning where LOs are student-centred (Kennedy, 2011) but they feel that constructivist attributes are negated by the behaviourist characteristics of LOs which look for changes in student behaviour and where 'students are trapped into learning activities' (Jervis and Jervis, 2005, p. 212). This tension is real and reflects ontological and epistemological differences in the actors and institutions involved and shows us that LOs can take on loftier roles than that envisioned by Spady (1994) who preferred to refer to them as a tool for achievement. This is an important moment illustrating the transformation of LOs from the technical to the philosophical in media HE in Ireland. This comes back to conflicting ideas about the democratic function or lack of democracy implied with the use of the outcomes model, as outlined in the literature. Malan (2000) observed the 'socio-constructivist' nature of OBE gave it a collaborative aspect that allows many interested parties to get involved in training and education. Avis (2010) contended that the transparency offered by the outcomes approach to education contributed to its fairness and its opening up of education to those from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. Avis' viewpoint was reinforced by Mark's observation that outcomes-focused education had made it possible for students to go to his college with lower points and still attain a degree; which he believed created opportunity and equality that would not have been there otherwise. In this kind of forum; the IoT, there seems to be a more positivist epistemology of knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge is perspicuous through the defining language of the learning outcome statement. This is not to say that individual teachers and managers do not differ in their outlook from their institution's outlook (Deem, 2004, Ayres and Carlone, 2007). One example of this is Patricia (Private-L) who, although working in a market focussed institution, was very passionate about

giving the students experiences that allowed them to think conceptually about existential themes (e.g. art and social responsibility). Her efforts were not always supported fully but she continues to work within the institution and its parameters and values her work highly. This would mean that teachers may sometimes be out of kilter with the culture of the employer but, as academics, they manage to work around these issues, for the most part.

From this research it is noted that the IoT and the private college are most vocal about the alignment of assessment to LOs and a lot of this work is with an eye on external audiences. This can take the form of visiting panels who are accrediting new programmes or review panels overseeing the delivery of programmes, in the latter case it is a case of accountability and the maintenance of programmes to keep them relevant and in line with QQI guidelines.

> Oh yeah it's a huge part of our work. Well one of the modules on the Special Purpose Programme that all the lecturers take is just called Programme Design so that's all about writing up a programme, constructively aligning it, doing so within the national and European context and framework so we're looking hugely at all the different sort of descriptors and the strands and sub-strands and the history of that through the Bologna process and then we actually write up modules and critique them and write them at various levels. So it's a huge part of our work here. (Susan, Private-T&L)

Although LOs were not referred to in the original Bologna documents in 1999 relating to the new process they became inextricably linked to the Bologna Process as it progressed. The London Communiqué of 2007 mentions LOs specifically as a driver of quality and the Bologna reforms and according to Adam (2008, p. 5) 'the humble learning outcome has moved from being a peripheral tool to a central device to achieve radical educational reform of European higher education.' Adam goes on to tell us that 'LOs represent a way to communicate external reference points at regional, national and international level' (2008a, p.10) and that their use is most developed in Ireland and Scotland. Susan's observation above is illustrative of Adam's contention of the absorption of LOs in Ireland.

Flexibility

In this penultimate section of Theme 2 on the design of LOs teachers indicate the importance of flexibility regarding all aspects of LOs. The ability to offer flexibility has emerged as a positive conception of LOs, along with 'clarity' and 'transparency', as the LOs model was being rolled-out over the last 15 years. Coincidentally, in this research, 'flexibility' regarding the use of LOs is something that was seen to be connected to teachers' feelings about their professional autonomy within their institutions. 13 people interviewed brought up the issue of flexibility in the design and use of LOs as being something of concern. 'Flexibility' is seen as a self- evident 'good' by contributors, and the lack of flexibility to amend or work with LOs is seen as bad. This view is upheld in the literature (Souto-Otero, 2012, Avis, 2010, Daughtery et al, 2008, Hussey and Smith, 2003, Harden, 2002, Eisner, 1979). Some teachers felt that media education was a particular field where flexibility was needed because of its creative bent, 'there has to be free rein' as one teacher puts it. The key issue in this section is how participants viewed the issues of flexibility and how they framed 'flexibility' and its responsibility in different ways. Some saw 'flexibility of LOs' as an institutionally driven goal while others saw the responsibility for 'flexibility' lying with the author and user of the LOs.

This mechanism for 'free rein' differs across institutions. In the university setting studied here, staff was in a position to change LOs online each year without managerial input. Because of this teachers and managers do not seem to see an issue with flexibility of LOs in the university studied while noting that it is very important in the construction of relevant outcomes. Nadia (Uni-L), who used to teach in an IoT could see the augmented level of flexibility which seems to be underpinned by a general atmosphere of autonomy in her new position in the university.

> That's what I remember in the Institute of Technology. I remember rounds and rounds of programmatic reviews and that was a lot of work and everyone is tortured by them and still are... even though they're important... so I was

surprised here when people said 'oh well if there's anything you want to change just let us know and we'll change it. (Nadia, Uni-L)

In other sites there was a desire for this flexibility but it was not in evidence, although in the IoT a new programme called 'module builder' (Mark, IoT-Mgr) was to facilitate the kind of flexibility enjoyed by the university but in a more monitored fashion.

For some the rigidity of LOs is an issue constructed by the culture in the institution where they work. In the IoT and private college teacher autonomy was not as visible as in the university. Institutionally speaking, the university would also enjoy more autonomy and less oversight from external agencies such as QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) which is the overarching body that is 'responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training and validates programmes and makes awards for certain providers in these sectors' (www.qqi.ie). QQI also manages and develops Ireland's National framework of Qualifications (which is a central plank of the IoT's mission (www.ioti.ie) so it has a central role in promoting LOs and overseeing the activities of institutions regarding the quality of programmes on offer. The IoT's have delegated authority to make awards (such as degrees and masters degrees). Private colleges do not have this delegated authority and universities make and award their own degrees (www.qualificationsrecognition.ie); further proof of the universities' sector autonomy and their reduced dependence on QQI wherein the universities have only recently come under the remit of QQI for the monitoring of the quality of their programmes.

The IoT and private college staff interviewed were very aware of the presence of QQI type oversight in their institutions. The dominant view from HEIs which are more connected to QQI is; 'this is the way things are done' and the teachers have to work with the system even though it lacks the desired flexibility, as found in the cases of the IoT and private college studied. QQI's role is regulatory and this implies constraints and perhaps those constraints do impede flexibility. But there is another

view that puts the flexibility issue back in the hands of the author and user rather than the institution or the regulating bodies such as QQI.

Flexibility through LOs is a reflection of the freedom and autonomy a teacher has within their institution. Autonomy is more evident in the older more established classically academic institution of the university where academic freedom is more of a given and LOs are not prominent. This might reflect the idea that LOs in their management of education have reduced teacher autonomy in those institutions where they are more prominent within management circles.

Flexibility through broad outcomes

The flexible version and view of LOs urged in the literature (Souto-Otero, 2012; Avis, 2010; Daughtery et al, 2008; Hussey and Smith, 2003; Harden, 2002) is often the remit of the teachers at the 'coal-face' writing the LOs. Some participants talking in this study call on teachers/writers to build in flexibility when writing and using LOs:

> I understand also that you don't make your programme outcomes so tight that you are producing widgets. (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

The onus is again on the teacher/writer to design and use LOs in a creative and flexible manner. These views were expressed across the board.

> I think they can be really useful. I think if you don't let them constrain you too much. They're like anything. So I think LOs need to allow for a lot more mistakes but the learning to come from the mistake. That's the key piece. (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

> That doesn't mean that as a lecturer I can't go beyond that standard. I think that anyone who's restricted by LOs, hmm, is thinking about it maybe differently to what they should be. (Barbara, IoT-L)

I think what happens is, and it happens a lot at lower levels, 4, 5, and 6 on the framework, that you get these prescriptive LOs, that people say 'I must, I must , I must' and people get into perma-frost and frozen and they say 'I must be doing my LOs' and it's the standard 'can't see the wood from the trees. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

I think that the problem with LOs is that we say as long as we see them as flexible and malleable and see them as something that is just a guide, I think you're fine. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

Eileen's (Uni-T&L/Mgr) view can be understood within the context of her institution where LOs are easily updated but in other sites 'perma-frost' might set in if lecturers don't have opportunities or knowledge of how to adapt and reframe the outcomes regularly. The need for flexibility in the reading, writing and interpretation of LOs is broadly agreed on throughout the literature (Souto-Otero, 2012; Avis, 2010; Daugherty et al, 2008) but there is scepticism as to whether we can move from the predilection to write and interpret them in a prescriptive and literal way (Wolf, 1995; Sartori, 1984). Again, it would seem that those involved in teaching and learning could help develop teaching staff who construct LOs in a more evolved 'writerly' way as espoused by Avis (2010), where teachers and student become part of the process rather than passive receivers of the instruction connected to the LO.

From reading the comments of participants regarding flexibility it would seem that the issue of flexibility is closely related to teacher autonomy. Perhaps to promote flexibility in the use of LOs there might need to be support for autonomy within institutions generally, which would involve a whole rethink of the HE sector in Ireland. Although authors and users are responsible for the flexibility of the outcomes, institutions may need to support this flexible approach by making it possible to adapt LOs with reduced interference from bureaucratic oversight,

although this runs contrary to the accepted idea that education needs to be managed.

Summary

To sum up to date, colleagues well-versed in the use and writing of LOs working closely with teachers in the area of LOs are key to teacher engagement with LOs. The influence of a mentor is powerful as it encourages teachers to engage through human relationships. The mentors' expertise in understanding LOs helps disseminate the LOs message. It is noteworthy that all the teachers who referred to key LOs mentors liked and admired their mentor on a personal basis, using phrases like 'she's great' and 'you must talk to her.' The institution is influential in terms of the teachers' engagement with LOs, but in the role of employer concerned with quality systems as a marker for improvement.

Regarding the writing of LOs, a lot of pressure is put upon the writers of LOs to write LOs that encourage their use. Problems with LOs are often traced back to the authors by managers who defend LOs. In their conception LOs need to be flexible and broad. The flexibility of LOs in use and reading is connected with teachers' perceptions of autonomy and flexibility is seen as part of a teacher's ability to enjoy academic freedom.

Teachers use LOs in order to comply with procedure, but it would appear that they are not used in a way that profoundly affects or transforms how they think about their teaching, although writing LOs can at times offer valuable opportunities to reflect on what they are doing and make programmes communicable to wide audience. Overall, the institution has an important role to play in encouraging engagement with the process of LOs and most certainly is a driver in their usage and designated status within the institution but it depends how prominent LOs are in the institution in the first place.

Chapter 5: LOs Tensions and Potentials

5.1 Introduction

This chapter represents a move away from the descriptive view of LOs in the last chapter to a more conceptual view of this approach to teaching and learning. In this part of the thesis I look at the tensions that arise between what academic staff and managers deem valuable about the outcomes approach to education and juxtapose that with what these HE professionals also experience as vexing and challenging about LOs. These strains can be internal; within the person, or they can occur between professional roles, or manifest as different ontological perspectives between colleagues happening in specific institutional contexts. The tensions between these two viewpoints are characterised here as tensions between the potential of LOs to improve education and the possible risks to institutional, teacher and student advancement sometimes associated with this approach to learning and the management of learning.

Some of the following material arose during direct interviews with participants and some arose as a result of presenting the manager and T & L experts with a series of statements by teachers from across all sites. The interviewees were asked to choose from a selection of anonymised teacher statements and react to those that struck them as warranting a comment or response. This method comes from the work of Touraine (2000) as described in the methodology chapter and the teacher statements are presented as 'vignettes' throughout this chapter. In this way I have been able to bring different individuals together and create an engagement between participants who never meet but did manage to 'interact' at some level in this research.

The chapter concerns itself with four main areas; structure, quality, oversight and resistance: four abstractions of the use of LOs where we find tensions and contrary feelings regarding the practice and adoption of the LOs model of education and assessment.

Figure 10. LOs: Tensions and Potentials
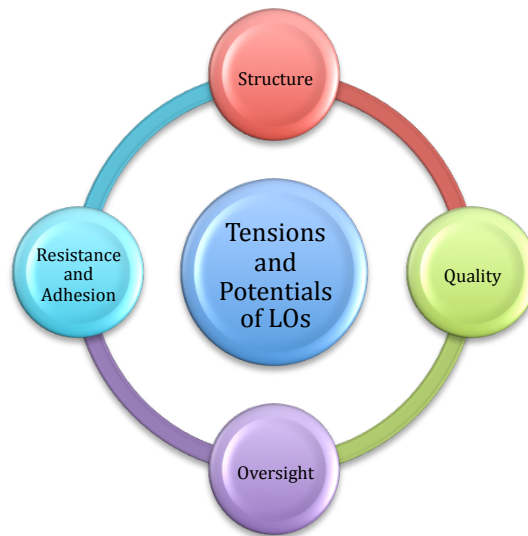
Structure: LOs are shown to have the potential to offer clarity and transparency to the student through their structure but this is mitigated by claims that their structure leads them to be prescriptive and a risk to natural student learning.

Quality: LOs have the potential to offer an enhanced quality of education for the student but they risk being a paper exercise fulfilling the requirements of the management of education.

Oversight: LOs are seen on one hand as having the potential to defend individuals and institutions against threats from outside auditors and also as risk in that they can be used to attack the institution and teachers if LOs are found not to have been fulfilled.

Resistance: LOs are presented as a risk as teachers could show strategic resistance to a manager backed model of education. But some of this resistance is 'soft' and marks the academics tendency to make LOs work for them while doing their job and satisfying the system.

5.2 Structure

Despite the often cited negative aspects of LOs detailed previously there is one area in which they maintain support across the board and this is in the provision of structure to programmes and teaching. Structure, in its various conceptions, is viewed by all who cited it as a self-evident 'good' which helps teaching and learning. Structure was referred to in many guises, using many different words in the data collection; framework'; 'map'; 'plan'; 'guidelines'; 'parameter'; 'focus'; 'scaffolding' and also 'somewhere to start.' In the literature structure and its helpful outcomes; clarity and transparency are positive attributes of LOs and the OBE model (Souto-Otero, 2012; Werquin, 2012).

The support for, and understanding of structure, was seen across the board by 12 respondents who referred to it on 20 occasions.

> You know I just have to use these words but I do understand that there needs to be a framework there that we work to… (Nadia, Uni-L)

The literature promotes the use of frameworks in particular the National Qualifications Frameworks (NFQs) being used in EU countries (Souto-Otero, 2012), and which are underpinned by LOs. The usefulness of the Framework approach is contested by LOs supporter Eileen (T&L/Mgr-Uni), and strongly so, who refers to it as 'rubbish' and who regards the Framework's assumption of a hierarchy of knowledge as restrictive, while most others view it in a more practical sense as an organising tool.

> You know there's a structure in place. So I think it's more for that. That's not a bad thing. You know you do need structures. I'm all about structure. (Alison, IoT-L)

> The role of LOs is to help structure a programme to provide an overall cohesive development opportunity for learners / teachers. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

Again, Werquin (2012) would agree with this assertion and adds that LOs help dropout rates as student can see their future because it is a transparent pathway provided by the OBE model.

> The strengths are that you have some sort of benchmark or some sort of parameters to work against. (Darragh, IoT-L)

Structure is described here as a' need', as something that is 'not bad', as a 'strength' and an 'opportunity.' This is significant as it seems that this positive aspect propounded by Hargreaves and Moore (2000) is something that over-rides many of the negative views of LOs, this and the acceptance of the hegemony of a regime that has to be followed. The fact that LOs provide structure (although T&L expert Eileen is an important voice who views the outcomes-bound NFQs as restrictive) and is seen as an unequivocal good as most people like and want structure; the result is acceptance and the acknowledgment that 'I don't know what would replace them' (Alison, IoT-L), this echoes Burham's (2011) conclusion that even if LOs are not near perfect, we cannot just throw them away.

5.3 Quality Enhancement

Quality enhancement is an on-going process in HE across the globe. The quality agenda is considered a preserve of the management class within HE (Allais, 2012) but in this research there was room for managers to show a measured and reflective view of LOs which did not always match with assumed promotion of OBE. In the vignette presented below, which forms part of my use of Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention bringing contrary viewpoints into the same 'space', a manager is faced with a teacher opinion of LOs. The outcome is somewhat unexpected: we see a qualified response by two managers who, surprisingly, when faced with a teacher commendation of LOs, offer caveats that could be construed as a type of 'health warning' that might come with LOs.

> **Vignette 1**
>
> I think they offer great quality assurance because they give you that sense of; yes those outcomes have been assessed so yes I'm confident that the learner has achieved them.
>
> Female Teacher, HEI

The quote above by a teacher represents the most positive view of LOs as an instrument of quality. Maura (Uni-Mgr/L) questions the veracity of statement on the basis of; 'who is deciding what quality is?'

> I think that gets into the territory of being a little bit too instrumental, you know, quality assurance like from who, when, like who wrote these to begin with. What do they know about what they were writing? And then you've met the extern but like I know some of our externs aren't production backgrounds, they're academics so they can be signing off on stuff without really knowing fully what they're signing off on either. So the whole system in 'quality assurance' can actually be a bit tricky. (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

While Maura highlights concerns about instrumentalism, the EU Commission who promote LOs thorough a plethora of quality agencies certainly believe that 'educational activities and outputs are measurable' (Keeling 2006, p. 209) and Allais (2012) feels that LOs have worked for managers and as agents of the quality agenda but points to their inherent weakness in that 'knowledge cannot be mapped onto or derived from LOs' (p. 335). There is a case for Maura's (Uni-Mgr/L) assertion that it is difficult to find appropriate external examiners to assess quality from an industry pool that is small in Ireland: Maura (who occupies a unique position between business and the academy as a manager/teacher providing services to the university through a private media production company) questions the quality of the quality-judgers.

Brian (Uni-Mgr) questions the quality of the LOs: for him, LOs are only instruments of quality if they are of high quality themselves.

> Well yes, but I'm going to repeat myself, if and *only* if, first of all they're good outcomes and secondly if the assessment really is aligned with the outcomes. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

What is interesting here is the manner in which individuals, mostly managers and T&L staff, are offered a validation of LOs but rather than agree outright with the teacher statement they choose to reserve some space to critique the approach and while they endorse the potential are also mindful of the risks of taking a dogmatic view of the total efficacy of LOs. Again we see here the complex nature of the LOs debate as we see different actors traversing lines which are surprising and sometimes contrary to the assumed stance we expect them to take.

5.4 Oversight

In HE there is plenty of oversight and watching or perceived watching enjoyed and endured by institutions and teachers. LOs has come to be connected with this invigilation; an instrument of oversight. There are tensions between the contrary conceptions of the role of oversight; the concerned outsiders who help us make our institutions better by giving advice, and there are negative connotations with this oversight verging towards the notion of surveillance. This negative perception moves the conceptions of LOs from something that engenders fairness, transparency, flexibility and structure for the student and teacher to a less desirable conception of LOs as a defence mechanism for managers and staff against potentially negative external auditing and the rare but possible threat of litigation. Here I will examine these divergent possibilities and the LOs role in each beginning with a positive view of LOs contribution to oversight.

Oversight: a common language in use

LOs have proved useful in bringing together multiple audiences under the umbrella of one language to engage with LOs (Werquin, 2012). This shared language has allowed teachers, managers and external auditing bodies to work within one field. In terms of external auditing, Adam (2008, p. 10) identifies the connection between LOs and external oversight in that 'LOs are a way to communicate external reference points at regional, national and international levels.' The chosen language of this audit trail seems to be that of the management professional (Berlach, 2004). This change in design moves the power-base away from the teacher who traditional controlled learning by controlling the content and taught to the content. Now there is a move towards a predetermined end agreed by teachers and panels and mirrors something that Feilden (1976) characterised as 'The decline of the professor and the rise of the registrar' in his eponymous work. This is not to say that this is a poor move as this change has led to a more student-centred learning environment (Moon, 2002) and a recalibration of the student as the most important person in the education process.

External audiences are any bodies and/or individuals who come to HE institutions to audit or question the institution's programmes and practices. In Ireland the chief auditing body is Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) but visiting external examiners from other colleges are also frequently used to help maintain on-going programme quality in all HEs in Ireland. The positive conception of the potential of LOs posited here revolves around how they provide a kind of 'shorthand' through their common language for making complex practice communicable to the outside world (Werquin, 2012; Avis, 2010). In these external examiner activities the management and faculty come together to defend their programmes and take constructive advice from outsiders with the aim of improving courses and practices. Again, this shared language shows up the propensity to move toward management-driven conceptions of HE that funnel the articulation of disparate disciplines into one dock where all can benefit from a shared understanding of the goals of HE in any given setting.

Oversight: negative perceptions

There is a less admiring view of LOs which can be set against the previous positive view of LOs being used by the valuable visiting auditor working through institutional and programme LOs while making use of a common language to communicate difficult ideas. In the course of this research a negative perception of LOs occurs around talk associating LOs with Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the body which regulates quality and accredits institutions for the awarding of awards. There emerged, in the data collected, an acute awareness of the regulating role of external bodies in the IoT and private college interviews, and we see, in the comments below, LOs presented variously as a paper exercise, or trivial (Bagnall, 1994) or conversely as valuable oversight:

> So really, it's kind of like the formal educational part so that if somebody from HETAC or QQI comes in they can say "Oh yes that's what you're teaching. I can see the LOs. I can tally them up with the assessment" and I think it's kind of a formal thing. (Alan, Private-L)

> Yeah they will always check the assessment nowadays, external examiners will always check… does the assessment cover all the LOs between it all, the broad spectrum of assessment and we're now getting reports back from external examiners. 'I note that the assessment doesn't assess programme outcome number one or module learning outcome one' or whatever and they're bringing back this and that's good. (Gerry, IoT, Mgr)

This is part of a national system and one that has to be adhered to (Mark, IoT-Mgr). Manager Gerry views it as a positive and teacher Alan almost dismisses it as protocol, but we can still see in this quote the opportunity for a shared language as posited by Werquin (2012) and it is important to have this shorthand between professionals which makes various disciplines understandable through LOs.

Despite this LOs dialogue available to professionals there is always the threat of coming up short when outsiders are involved. As a result of the interest of invigilating outsiders in LOs, LOs take on a particular role and great care is taken with

getting them 'across the line.' Tensions arise and a threat may be perceived when panels are unhappy with the idea of threshold (understood as standards or levels here) as outlined by Susan (Private- T&L) below and supported by Gerry (IoT-Mgr).

> When the validation panel have got high expectations of a programme and so if you were to explain something, well that's a minimum learning outcome, you know, 'I would expect that better students would get higher' (the externs say). It may not get across the line with a programmatic review panel or a validation panel because they like to see a particular type of language for a particular level. (Susan, Private- T&L)

Again there is a feeling of surveillance and tension here in the phrase 'get across the line.' Shore and Roberts (1993, p. 5) characterise this watching as part of a 'rationalist epistemology' associated with 'good management.' The authors feel that the so-called 'new quality management' in HE mirrors this paradigm with teachers living under the watchful eye of a growing quality agenda. Teacher Alan's (Private-L) characterisation of this surveillance is not as sinister as that of Shore and Roberts (1993); it is more of a degrading of LOs to an administrative function. Gerry (IoT-Mgr) emphasises the checking done by external examiners. Even though he rates this as a good thing it leaves us with the feeling of 'watching' which creates an atmosphere of tension around the outcomes especially during a panel visit. In the Irish context Lynch (2010) regards this kind of watching as normalised and Orwellian in nature. She criticises the constant external monitoring, some of it 'meaningless' and leading to 'personal inauthenticity' (p.53).

An illustration of Lynch's beliefs is to be found in the data gathered. In the third vignette of the chapter, employing the Sociological Intervention method developed by Touraine (2000), managers face a challenge regarding the empty exercise that writing LOs can be. This exercise is said to be promulgated by external, invigilating bodies, in this case Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI):

> **Vignette 2**
>
> > So if you write them correctly QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) will give you a thumbs up and go; 'that's it, you've hit the nail on the head.' The LOs match up with the assessment, well done. Okay. You can go and teach that and then we're gone and you can do whatever you want after that.
> >
> > Male teacher, HEI

On reading this vignette managers reacted to the teacher's technicist view of the LOs process, endorsed by Orr (2007), by rejecting it as part of the past or bad practice. Again we see that manager and teacher beliefs and ontology can diverge regarding LOs.

> …anything that's a paper exercise that has no impact on what the student experience is has no impact on the real outcomes. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

> Yes and in the early days that was it. That described it. It no way describes us now in my experience. And emphatically I say that, but certainly, it was totally true in the beginning. (Laughs). (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

Brian, a senior manager in the university, believes in the potential of LOs for learning and consigns the teacher interpretation and use as a mere 'paper exercise' while his peer Gerry in the IoT sector takes it more lightly but is dogmatic in his assertion that the teacher does not represent the adoption and use of LOs as he knows it. The manager and teacher conceptions of LOs and their use are at variance here. This may be that their different removes from LOs allow them to view LOs from different vantage points or that given their different roles the manager has to defend LOs as they are supported by institutions nationally and internationally and to reject them would be to open their own group to unacceptable criticism.

Oversight: Protection

It has become apparent in the course of my study of the experiences of LOs by those working in higher education that defence is often cited as one way in which LOs can benefit the teacher or manager. In fact some feel defence is a function of LOs as well as a use, but that 'defence' can be inverted and become an attack, which is discussed later.

The notion of protecting oneself, of 'covering' oneself came up numerous times in this study. Two of the excerpts below are from IoT contributions:

> I check off the LOs as a defence. I feel like I'm covering myself somehow although it will be interesting when the externals come in January that I've ignored the ones (regarding) 'X module' completely. (Barbara, IoT-L)

> …there's such a heavy emphasis on it is because everyone is in the clear then. They've been designed. They've been scrutinised. They've been defended. They've been validated… it's to cover our necks and anything else. (Darragh, IoT-L)

Phrases like 'covering myself' and 'in the clear' (and 'ass covering' which is a phrase which is discussed later) indicate the anticipation of surveillance or threat that indicate a level of fear of censure or being caught out. A reason that the teachers quoted above might feel defensive is that often they are not using the LOs in the intended way. An extreme example is Barbara (IoT-L) who chose to ignore LOs when they didn't suit her teaching but was aware that it was incompatible with the institution's culture to do so. This defiance of authority, although defended, causes stress for the teacher.

Alison, a lecturer from the IoT site called the LOs process a 'kind of bureaucratic protection in a way that we are seen to lay out a structure that the students have to

fulfil.' Alison (IoT-L) may be referring to the student goal of achieving the LOs here but her comments also show LOs as a kind of vacuous procedure that operates on the surface, this view echoes some issues that Orr (2007, p. 2) has with OBE which he viewed as a 'techno-rationalist' approach to education and in particular assessment. This method may protect teachers who can refer to the LOs when validating their work or, in extreme cases protect against the remote but scary spectre of litigation; this is an idea that is pursued in the next section. Unfortunately the perceived threat of litigation only further advances the use of LOs in a manner not supported by their initiator and again lead to LOs as a technical activity rather than a vehicle by which students can achieve.

Oversight: Defence and Attack

While LOs can be viewed as a protection against attack from more senior bodies they can also be viewed from the opposite angle; as a mechanism for attack, or possible future attack, perhaps by students. LOs protect by showing what the teacher has covered in the programme or module but they can also reveal what has not been done according to two managers in the IoT site:

> … They protect an institute but they can also be used to kill you. They can be
> held up and say why didn't you teach me this? (Mark, IoT-Mgr)

Gerry (IoT-Mgr) from the same site invokes the notion of vigilance when he says about writing outcomes that 'they won't allow you to write anything that you could be sued on.' The use of the term 'kill you' is extreme and shows the level to which LOs can cause fear (even though it has been used in an argot fashion), the reality is that managers have to be aware of the larger issue of a possible court case, bringing outsiders into the institution to judge, if the LOs are not fulfilled. This is a rare occurrence but it tells us something about the context in which teachers teach and that even a remote threat of litigation is something that managers, according to this study, are thinking about and regarding seriously as a modern-day threat.

In a third vignette, chosen to illustrate teacher feeling in this area, we find a very blunt assessment of the protection and defence claims for LOs from a lecturer to which the non-teaching interviewees respond.

Vignette 3

> They're spoon-fed because it's, pardon my French, it's ass-covering…that's what it is. It's learning outcomes; this is what they're supposed to know. They know it: boom!
>
> Male teacher, HEI

The quote above was made by a lecturer and it represents a degree of teacher alienation. Teachers no longer have to care about teaching. Rather, they have to fulfil what the terms of the LO agreement state. This has echoes of education as a transaction as posited by De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2007). When presented to managers, this statement produced a surprising collection of cohesive responses, which are summed up by the first:

> I mean yeah in the early days but I wouldn't call it… no. It's a duty we have. (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

> I do think there is a tension there. But let's look at the spirit in which LOs are done, right? This is really the core of education and, ultimately what we are trying to do is; we are taking someone's life for three years and we're saying 'we know what we are doing; we are gonna have you better off at the end of the three years.' If you're going to do that I think that it's just not viable not to have a plan. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

Dermot seems to imply that without LOs there is no plan yet the previous attempts to organise learning through aims and objectives were ways in which learning was structured. Perhaps with the advent of LOs the learning is structured and student

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centred but also the teacher's work is also structured now in a way it had not been previously with the old content driven syllabi of the past.

> I feel people say that because they don't know enough about them and they don't want to engage with them, you know, so if I have someone like that here saying, you know, we're not doing. We just think It's all about QA and we just think it's daft and its covering your ass, I would say to them it's not. It's a responsibility we have to the learner. (Susan, Private-T&L)

The managers quoted above all express a duty of care toward the student which is contrast to cold conceptions of what managers do and conceptions of managerialism. In this vein the manager reveals a moral commitment to the student which is in contrast to the student-as-customer view of education seen on page 157. All accept that a negative attitude to LOs may well exist in the academic hinterland but all three reject the statement in favour of characterising the LOs process as a duty the institution has to the learner. The managers' remarks remind us of a 'constitution' reflecting the relationship between the citizen and the state, connecting with formations of OBE as a tool of democracy (Tucker, 2009; Hargreaves and Moore, 2000; Malan, 2000) and fairness. This is far removed from the previous understandings of defensive LOs and reflects a moral stance by the interviewees. But then again there can be anomalies; some interviewees gave testimony, at different times, which might be construed as somewhat contrary. An example of this is visible in this discourse: while Gerry (IoT-Mgr) says using LOs is 'a duty' and rejects the charge of 'ass-covering' he was previously concerned with being sued and presumably was involved in making sure that did not happen. Either way the views above show the tension and ambivalence upon which practice is being built. This is not to place a charge of improper thought or deed at the foot of the interviewees but it does show the complexity of the LOs system which can have many facets which challenge users and authors and custodians of LOs in many different ways, sometimes as protectors, sometimes as attackers, sometimes as guardian and sometimes as the embodiment of a moral standpoint or a 'value' as articulated above by those managers who felt a strong duty towards the students in their institutions to provide them with a high standard of tertiary education .

One manager in the private college studied agreed with the defence interpretation of LOs but regarded it as context driven showing us that they can be contingently associated with other things happening inside a HEI from where they borrow s deeper 'rationales':

> So they can be restrictive in that context and they are a kind of defensive way of learning and a defensive way of applying learning. So, that's certainly a possibility but then it depends how afraid the lecturer is of what they do and how self-confident they are in relation to their students and also in relation to the institution that they work for so...So that would be contextual, context driven really. (Lorcan, Private-Mgr)

A lack of teacher autonomy might lead to LOs being used in this defensive manner as teachers who feel watched would logically act in a way that might see-off any possible criticism of their practice. Teacher autonomy seems to be more the preserve of the university setting and the data does not indicate that LOs are used as a defensive mechanism there.

5.5 LOs: Resistance and adhesion

In this section of the chapter I will look at a reoccurring theme that emerged during the data analysis; lecturers' resistance to the LOs model of education and its implementation. Although some lecturers and managers report resisting LOs they also vouch to adhering to the institutional policy of using them and outline their developing strategies for doing so in a way that blended in with their own beliefs. In the main managers characterise teacher resistance to LOs as historical, while some teachers contradict this by displaying resistance today to the activities that surrounding LOs and the use of them. Later on the chapter I will examine how, despite this resistance, lecturers are using LOs and making them work to suit their needs.

Thirteen interviewees of the 17 interviewed made 38 references to faculty resistance to LOs.

Table 3: Nvivo generated 'sub-themes frequency table'

Sub-themes frequency table	Sources	References
Authorship	15	54
Language	17	51
Managerialism	15	48
Opinion	16	46
Alignment	10	42
Engagement	14	39
Resistance	13	38

The table above represents the frequency at which different themes were spoken about in this research. In this case I am looking at teacher resistance to LOs. Resistance came 7th in the table in terms of frequency but as it was a theme that arose organically (it was not specifically sought out in the interviews) it is an important emerging theme that was uncovered by the research.

Resistance: why teachers resist LOs

From the analysis of 38 references to 'teacher resistance to LOs' the following were the reasons cited for resisting LOs by the 13 sources who addressed the issue:

- Dislike of change

- Complexity around the concept
- Loyalty to content driven syllabus
- Ideological tensions
- Lack of training
  Extra/ new work

The data indicates that a multiplicity of factors is behind the resistance to LOs. Two managers who spoke admitted that they did not understand LOs in the early incarnation when they first came to prominence in their institution. Berlach (2004) describes this lack of understanding as an issue with outcomes based education (OBE) generally. The terminology was difficult, they were 'difficult to pin down' (Dermot, Private-Mgr) and LOs were presented in the broader QA system that teachers did not embrace as 'a must-do' in a quality system that they didn't, weren't engaged with' (Gerry, IoT-Mgr). This quote has echoes of Sherman's (2009)

contention that teachers feel marginalised and 'unloved' in the new outcomes focused world but it also shows that LOs came from the outside; this is another language and conception of teaching and learning, things that are at the core of one's job, yet were introduced by external constituencies like the plethora of quality agencies that have appeared since the Bologna Process began (Huisman and Westerheijden, 2010).

Of course change was a factor, as previously stated by Mark (IoT-Mgr) and endorsed by others. Part of this change was the move from a content driven syllabus to an outcomes driven syllabus. It became apparent that some teachers were not happy to, or were unable to let go of this mode of curriculum design which renders attempts at a LOs approach redundant. This reflects a teacher preoccupation with the subject rather than students which was common in the past but would not be expected in the current 'student-centred' approach to learning and teaching, although Akhmadeeva et al (2013) contend that a preoccupation with content-driven curricula still exists.

> So if you looked at a syllabus from the Engineering School, it probably would look like, the LOs would look like content. So, they probably have about twelve maybe to fifteen areas of content and that's because engineers would argue that unless I cover the content that they will not achieve the outcome. (Una, IoT- T&L)

This in itself poses a risk to the outcomes model and its success as content driven curricula undermines outcomes curricula in how teachers construct their teaching and learning in the real environment of the classroom.

Brian (Uni-Mgr), a senior figure in the university setting saw the resistance to LOs in his workplace as have two sources:

> I heard resistance in two forms. One; 'this is another stupid bureaucratic exercise. Why should I have to do it and waste my time on it?'... there were always some people who are more interested in doing some work that

involves change and others that are less interested but there's an ideological tension about LOs, because for some people they are an attempt to reduce education to a series of deliverables and for other people they're about focusing on what you're trying to achieve and so some people resist it on ground of inertia and others resist it on grounds of principle. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

I think Brian's (Uni-Mgr) contribution is important from the perspective of a senior figure supporting the outcomes model and from his insight into the nature of LOs as seen by practitioners. Again, here we see tensions in teachers' practice: one is the reluctance to change and shows teachers as conservative professionals, and the other is the clash with pedagogical ideals and conceptions. There is still a lot of ideological resistance to LOs in the literature which attacks the neoliberal underpinning of OBE (Gewirtz and Ball, 2010) and their association with the marketization of education (Brancelone and O'Brien, 2011). A lot of the noise surrounding outcomes involves the house-keeping aspects of the bureaucracy involved; Nadia's (Uni-L) initial reaction to LOs was 'this is rubbish.' Less is heard about the perceived reductive quality of this approach (Ewell, 2008). In the next chapter this charge with be looked at in depth in a discussion of the neoliberal discourse surrounding LOs.

The last issue surrounding the teacher resistance to LOs in the institutions studied was the lack of training which served to compound the initial resistance to LOs. In the IoT setting people characterised the change from the content driven syllabus as something that happened 'over- night' with little or no training and an expectation that one would change a few verbs and thus create outcomes. It can be deduced that this lack of preparation contributed to the poor reception for LOs when they were introduced a decade ago.

Resistance to LOs today
While resistance to LOs is easily documented in an historical context as many believe this phase to have passed, it is less easy to pin down in the current context. Perhaps

teachers do not want to seem overtly outside the systems of the institutions since the LOs model is in use in all three sites. Perhaps to criticise LOs is to criticise your institution, so embedded is the culture of LOs in some HEIs. Certainly there was a feeling of awkwardness about criticising LOs at times during the interviews from the interviewees and the researcher, as if being negative was akin to being disloyal. Nevertheless there were signs of resistance among lecturers, particularly in the IoT site:

> I can get the students to a higher level and so I'm not going to be restricted by them (LOs). (Barbara, IoT-L)

> You get bogged down in it (LOs) and frankly it does annoy me at times. It's a good guideline but I think it goes too deep in what we do anyway. (Darragh, IoT-L)

Resistance here is characterised by the refusal to be 'bogged-down' and the annoyance the LOs culture generates in teachers. More often teachers have experienced this feeling of annoyance but come to some accommodation within themselves through experience or working with teaching and learning influencers who have created a rationale and a relationship in which LOs become palatable and even useful (Patricia, Private-L). It is worth noting that Barbara (IoT-L) displayed the most significant resistance to any stricture by LOs. This may be due to the fact that she has been teaching for a very short time and the exposure to the outcomes model is recent and/or she has not engaged with training in this area. Teachers who were media practice specialists displayed the strongest negative views towards LOs. This may be because they are still close to industry and may value industry norms more than the education firmament of LOs and education management. There is also the problem that some media educators expressed disdain for LOs that they inherited that were obviously (to them) not written by media practitioners. Other teachers who were also resistant to LOs but had a longer association with HE tended to have overcome the more acute reactions that characterise the early experiences of using this method.

Barbara's (IoT-L) strident approach to LOs is perhaps more typical of a new teacher who has just joined the academy from industry and in her case still has one foot in industry. After a period, it would seem from the research, that the longer one is in the academy the more one is able to use LOs as one needs while still operating within the confines of the institution's *mode d'emploi*. I have termed this circumnavigation of the perceived strictures of LOs the *'Strategic use of LOs'* and the next section deals with the tactical way that teachers use LOs within the system to suit their own tastes and needs.

But first in the vignette below we see an example of how the pull between teacher and non-teacher views of LOs can be interpreted as a risk to the efficacy and understanding of the outcomes approach as hoped for by supporters. The use of Touraine's (2000) Sociological Intervention has enabled me to bring opposing conceptions into a 'place' where different views can meet and participants can reflect on their values and that of others they would not normally encounter due to power-relations issues. A teacher expresses frustration regarding the language of LOs; saying that the media teacher's concern is with the media artefact and not the language of the learning outcome: the non-teaching staff push the criticism back on the teacher:

Vignette: 4

It has to be (visually and orally appealing) otherwise it's not going to sell or it's not going to be successful and we just cut to brass tacks. We just, we've no time for this jargonistic world (of LOs). It annoys me frankly.

Female Teacher, University

The non-teaching interviewees from the IoT who responded to the teacher view above rejected the negative proposition and intimated that teachers need to take

responsibility for their own engagement with what they believe to be a valuable system.

> Sounds like people who hadn't any training in programme outcomes, LOs and it is something you have to grasp. There are lecturers and they're younger than I am who do cringe at outcomes or used to but from working with them and so many reviews we eventually (they) get in on it and get in on why it's so meaningful but certainly yeah the jargon is all jargon and whatever… (Mark, IoT-Mgr)

> In general most people use our own guide that we have developed there in 'IoT Y' through Academic Council and through the Teaching and Learning Centre here which is a guide to writing LOs can sometimes be structured very much on Blooms taxonomy or whatever, who's an educationalist…so you can use any words you like. (Úna, IoT- T&L)

In essence the two participants with management and T & L roles refuted the leading quote. Úna does it more by tone on the recording but the inference is there; people are given the tools to do the job, whether they do or not is another thing. Úna later uses the phrase 'you can take a horse to water but you can't make him drink' to galvanise her point. It would seem that the views and stances of managers and co-ordinators veer from that of the teaching faculty. If the respondents here react a tad defensively to the teacher's accusation of 'jargon', perhaps it is because the success of LOs is a marker for their own success as the adoption of this educational movement is one plank of IoT and national HE policy (The Hunt Report, 2012) and the dismissive tone of the teacher statement could be received as a threat to their identity and what they stand for as managers. This vignette is indicative of the kind of tensions arising out of the focus on outcomes which sometimes jars with teachers concern with the reality of learning and 'doing' in media education.

Resistance: Strategic use of LOs or Teaching and Learning opportunity?

This section might be better characterised as 'making LOs work for me' for that is what teachers, in particular, tend to do according to the findings of this research. Lecturers bring creative thinking to the writing of LOs and to their use of LOs so they can get what they want from them while still satisfying the needs of their institution and ultimately the needs of the system, be that QQI or the DES (Department of Education and Skills), or the myriad of European quality agencies that govern HE across the EU higher education zone. There is a sense of 'what do I need to do? I'll do that and then get on with the real job', which for most is the job of teaching in a classroom or lab. This highlights the disconnect between the abstraction of learning as posited by LOs and the real environment of the class, which is a real issue in terms of how do we capture the essence of learning in these pithy LO statements? The answer to this question has not been found in Bloom's taxonomy according to this research.

> …you make language work for you. (Gina, Uni-L)

> Some of them I ignore…Some of them I reinterpret and some of them I try and aim for [Laughs]. (Barbara, IoT-L)

> I looked at them and within the rigidity of the outcomes (and) I've tried to find a creative way… (Patricia, Private-L)

> I mostly skirt around them. (Paul, Private-L)

From what these teachers say the message seems to be that they use LOs with the least disruption to their teaching or the teachers involved work to make LOs fit their own agenda which is an experience that is not uncommon (Ayres and Carlone, 2007). Eileen a teaching and learning expert who is also a manager in the university setting sees the teacher as having two possible roads to travel on the outcomes path.

> One is to resist and one is to get strategic and I think in terms of LOs and the language that's associated with it… when I heard that language first I was appalled that education was going to be described in that way and I suppose

over time you see it coming in and you think 'ah what's the point?' but then

you think well actually there's opportunity here. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

It is interesting to hear a senior person advocate and use the term 'strategic' as it often has connotations of being self-serving. Also being 'strategic' may be interpreted as a soft form of resistance. This is also interesting as Eileen was very positive about the potential of LOs in her interview and yet she was also critical of them as agents of National Frameworks of Qualification which she views as limiting learning. We see an internal tension in Eileen between positive conceptions of OBE and negative comments around their prescriptiveness in boxing students into one level of learning. In this instance she creates a positive understanding of being 'strategic' as we understand that teachers are clever and know how to adapt changes to suit conditions.

There is an implication here that LOs are an opportunity for education and learning to gain prominence and become a real preoccupation for institutions of higher education. This seems to be a common idea across the university faculty interviewed here (perhaps with the exception of Maura (Uni-Mgr/L), who is in fact primarily employed via a service agreement between the university and a TV production company). One can say that 'making things work for you' is not to be viewed only as selfish but that 'making things work for you' makes things work, and in that way the efficacy of LOs is possibly enhanced. Again, this throws a light on the complexity of teaching as a process and how difficult it is to reify this multifaceted process through a mechanism like the learning outcome statements.

Strategy: Retro-fitting

One particular way that teachers make things work for them is by a strategy referred to as 'retro-fitting.' The term 'retro-fit' was first raised by senior manager Brian (Uni-Mgr), but as the data gathering progressed I could see that this activity was prevalent. The idea of retro fitting means to teach what you want and assess as you see fit and then try to make all you have done fit in with the LOs and assessment criteria. This is the opposite of the outcomes model of education which begins with the end in mind (Butler, 2004) and constructs everything else on the basis of this final

vision and with a constant eye on the criteria set to produce the desired outcome. It would seem that retro-fitting and working from the content as your base, is common in higher education in the three sites visited:

> I know you're meant to start with the module outcomes and work back from there to the module design but I still think somehow we start maybe with the content (laughs) even still, and we kind of work back and say okay now what assessment will I give them. (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

This experience was echoed by Alison (IoT- L). The preference for content over outcomes has been documented here previously and it appears to be in part a resistance to LOs but also an intuitive act by people who have experienced education in that manner and perhaps, in the case of this study, it is partly to do with the fact that many of the lecturers interviewed are industry or ex-industry personnel who are committed to the conventions of their industry. By this I refer back to comments about non-industry authored outcomes that were deemed inadequate and even 'irrelevant' (Barbara, IoT-L). Those who voiced this concern were teaching the content they considered important and then endeavoured to link this material to a learning outcome at a later date.

> …evaluating the quality of short films or documentaries or any of the other creative work they do it is tricky. So in a way you kind of you meet the LOs but you sort of I suppose not bend them but you make them fit in a way don't you? I think it's the way that I feel about them. (Alison, IoT-L)

Again this may show a deficit of understanding of teaching and learning best practice or the valuing of teaching and learning as an expertise teachers might develop. The quote is teacher rather than student focused and eschews the LOs model of staring with the end in mind (Spady, 1994). Studies have shown that the retro fitting of marks to satisfy criteria is something that happens in education (Sadler, 2008). This means that as teachers we make holistic decisions about an assignment's mark and then we work backwards checking our mark against the criteria (Grainger et al 2008; Bloxham et al, 2011). Part of the justification of retrofitting within this study has been the specific nature of media studies. Its significant creative component causes

issues with description and with assessment as concepts like creativity are difficult to measure. According to Shepherd and Mullane (2008, p. 29) 'It is a daunting task to objectively and fairly evaluate artistic and multimedia projects.' Two subjects cited this as a reason they had to meddle with the LOs;

> Now because what I'm teaching as well is very subjective, right? And because it's documentary, it's film making. It's creative. It can't be read, it's like kind of trying to beat (it) into within the educational kind of format. It's just trying to beat into some sort of structure where you can grade it. (Paul, Private-L)

The discourse around retro-fitting is peppered with physically strenuous phrases; getting things to 'fit', perhaps against their will; 'cram' was another word used and above we have 'beat.' This discourse indicates a struggle with LOs which is happening in the two places where they enjoy the highest profile; the IoT and the private college where applied learning and jobs are the focus. It also evidence that LOs have different currency in different sites. The less strident language of the university is in keeping with the profile of LOs in that institution where they are not referred to much: 'They get referred to disparagingly but that's pretty much it' asserted Gina (Uni-L). The practice of retro-fitting is more apparent in the non-university settings and more of an issue for teachers who use tough language to characterise their experiences and where the culture of the institution is one of preparing graduates for the workplace and having them 'shovel-ready' as one manager remarked. If one couples this institutional focus on jobs with practitioner/teachers who gravitate to content driven syllabi one will find that LOs might have a high profile but a poor roll out given these conflicting approaches.

Managers too have experience of retro-fitting but in a setting outside the classroom. This level of retro-fitting happens in the macro and meso-levels where managers are satisfying the needs of external examiners and even the European model of higher education as promoted by the European Commission whose reforms such as modularisation, quality assurance and the Frameworks all seem to become platforms for LOs. According to manager Brian (Uni-Mgr):

> …the modularisation was done before the LOs so the university decided as part of the Bologna process to introduce LOs and academic departments were asked to retrofit LOs onto their programmes. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

This account tallies with the accounts of others who experienced the LOs model as it arrived in their institutions almost 'overnight.' And still this sense of making things fit and retro fitting continues as something that must happen:

> They simply have to fit within pre-described notions of knowledge breath, knowledge kind and knowledge insight and knowledge competence and all those areas which are very difficult to grasp but nevertheless you write your outcomes and then you try and fit them within those boxes. (Lorcan, Private-Mgr)

'Fitting' is not portrayed here by the more intense language of the teachers but at the same time the constraints of being obliged to take on LOs and make them work within the system is apparent. The language and sentiments expressed here engender an association with stress and pressure and it could be construed that the use of LOs and the OBE model do involve stress and pressure for both teachers and managers and the discourse around LOs would seem to support this assertion.

5.6 Summary

To sum up this chapter, there are a lot of tensions associated with the adoption of LOs and OBE particularly in places where applied education is highly valued and OBE is promoted. In this research it was most interesting to note the strains around the potential and tensions associated with this approach. Managers and teacher differed in their conceptions of LOs and there was tension surrounding criticism of LOs by teachers which managers strongly defended. In saying this some manager participants also voiced doubts and words of caution which could be interpreted as a kind of internal tension and/or a measured view regarding correctness of this approach to learning. There were also differences across sites regarding how LOs

were accepted and observed and this seemed to show differences in culture and institutional outlook. These findings were facilitated in part by the use of a Sociological Intervention where participants were presented with vignettes from other participants who had contrary views. This method was very useful in uncovering tensions between individuals and groups fulfilling different roles within higher education.

Chapter 6: LOs: neoliberal discourse or a conception of democracy?

6.1 Introduction

Intrigue around the history and use of LOs is what initially prompted this research. This interest was succeeded by a wish to examine the academic conversations relating to LOs and how they characterise the meaning and purpose of higher education. The literature showed a connection between LOs and neoliberal thought. Despite this proffered relationship between LOs and neoliberalism (through the related concepts of 'managerialism' and 'new public management') I did not use these concepts when interviewing the participants for this study as I wanted a more naturalistic approach to see if the theme and language of neoliberalism would arise organically with interviewees. Within the talk and the subsequent management of the data in the computer aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) programme NVivo 10 it became apparent that participants, by their use of the language, revealed a strain of neoliberal marking regarding LOs, but there were also conceptions of LOs that supported them as being one kind of notion of democracy that engendered fairness and transparency and hence improves students' chances of success. Both of these perceptions of LOs are studied and analysed in this chapter.

The chapter can be broken down into 3 main areas: firstly I will present and analyse the findings relating to the on-going debate about 'managerialism' which takes up a large part of this section; following this I will examine the role the quality movement via LOs and then I will continue the discussion of LOs as possibly opening up opportunities for success and measure this view against some contesting opinions found in the academic literature. My aim is to give a grounded view on how neoliberal conceptions of learning and teaching can aid HE.

Here you find the initial model generated by NVivo on this theme showing the various concepts that emerged from the data:

Figure 11: NVivo Model of Neoliberal Discourse in the research
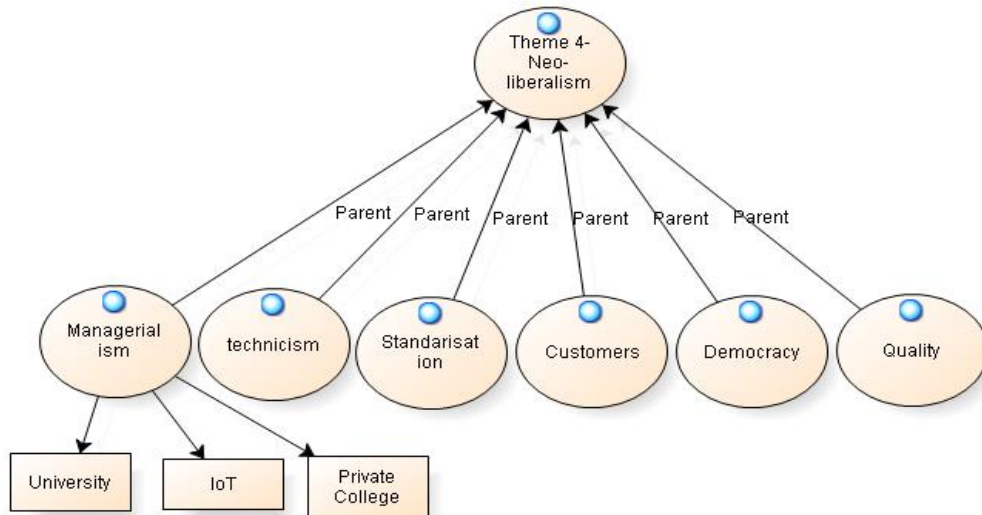
6.2 Managerialism

Managerialism is a concept closely tied to the notion of neoliberalism.

> *Management is a theoretical and practical technology of rationality geared to efficiency, practicality and control. It is a means to an end and its participants are also a means. It represents the bureaucratization of the structure of control…and it embodies a clear empiricist-rationalist epistemology.*

> (Ball, 1990, p. 157)

Managerialism was a reoccurring theme in the education discourse surrounding LOs in this research. Differences in the level of discourse and its place in the education firmament became apparent across sites. For this reason my analysis will look at managerialism in Irish media education on a site by site basis.

Managerialism: Private College

Patricia (Private-L), a lecturer in a private college offering practical media degrees was concerned about the language of LOs which she described as 'the language of the market.' Her colleague Kate (Private-L) concurred with the comment:

> …the language that's used is very much, it's middle management speak. It's commercial language that's used. It's like you're trying to sell something to somebody. (Kate, Private-L)

This concurs with Radice's (2013) view of the move from 'bureau-professional' to 'consumer-managerial' within the public service, although it is happening in a private business here. Kate's (Private-L) comments put the market at the forefront of the private college's conception of HE and the commodification of education which has been criticised by the likes of Ball (2012) who have offered a strong defence of education. Kate (Private-L), for her part, viewed this market-driven language as being unsuitable to describe the complexity of the education process and the students at the centre, a point that is also made in the literature (Karseth, 2008). Patricia (Private-L), who describes herself as 'an outsider' went further in her criticism:

> I think it's (LOs) a product of globalisation. Education is a commodity now and it's a transferable commodity like money, banking, whatever and I think it's a formula of words and it's a template. (Patricia, Private-L)

Her comments on the commodification are strongly supported by the work of Brancaleone and O'Brien (2011a; 2011b) and Ball (2012) who in particular rejects the kind of global view which sees university brands being exported to remote campuses across the world. Patricia (Private-L) goes on to say:

> …the outcome- based thing, if you were to follow it by the letter, you're exploited. You've a robot at the end. (Patricia, Private-L)

The image of a 'robot' is damning and reduces humans to the inanimate, removing all humanness. This is an open attack on LOs and their perceived managerial/neoliberal underpinnings. This danger of creating robots, one of which is

indistinguishable from another is echoed somewhat by a manager in the same privately run institution:

> …we can have minimum standards but that does not necessarily imply uniformity but there is a danger in looking for standard, managerial standardisation… And it's something I've always felt in relation to LOs since they first came in that there is that possibility. (Lorcan, Private-Mgr)

While Dermot's previously seen quote seems to show how one can enthuse about the managerial possibilities of the outcomes approach:

> I think that pure laser vision of a learning outcome that says: at the end of this course he will be able to increase the Google hit rates on his website, why? Because it will help the profile of the company. Why? Because it will increase sales. Why? It will increase profitability. Ah! OK. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

While Dermot's (Private-Mgr) comments support Werquin's (2012) claims to clarity and transparency, in response to this Ball (1990, p. 157) might say that 'as a discourse, a system of a possibility for knowledge, it (management) eschews or marginalizes the problems, concerns, difficulties, and fears of the 'subject'- the managed' this marginalization of problems can be done by following a logical trail from the LOs to the monetary advantage of using them. If we could say the process of education is mess-free then this view would be logical but education would appear to be a very complex process rather than a linear journey.

It seems most likely that these different conceptions of LOs, expressed by participants, are part of a personal stance interacting with organisational culture. The private college is a business and its primary mission is to make money (Paul, Private-L) which the staff accept and are not, in the main, seen to complain about. Dermot (Private-Mgr) is an executive of that business: a businessman and a pedagogue. It would only be natural that the managerial approach is appropriate and helpful to him in the conduct of his business where the educational model of this college is 'excellence in applied knowledge' (Dermot, Private-Mgr).

The teacher view of managerialism as an education value

Teachers do not speak as positively as managers and T&L influencers about the managerial aspect of LOs. Why might this be? This may happen because of the teacher's own values, some of which were revealed when asked what the goal of their work was. Some lecturers answered the 'goals' question with a conception of high ideals; to help students 'to believe in what they're doing', 'to be confident', and 'to develop.' These were included alongside the core wish to see students develop their media applied skills.

The teachers in the private college site were working in a business environment with excellence in applied education as a core value and they were aiming for this goal, using the system, and going beyond its mechanics to create something transformative for their students. They were unknowingly intoning Barnett (1994, p. 191) who maintained; 'The challenge on the educator is to provide an experience in which the student can be released into herself.'

Patricia (Private-L) was a latecomer to HE and Kate (Private-L) was brought up in a DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) area. She commented:

> …and for me myself just coming from where I come from, from my background, education got me out of a situation that I was in that I didn't want to be in. It is the key. (Kate, Private-L)
>
> So you're aligned to the ethos? (Interviewer)
>
> If that is the ethos of the place (the private college) but just in myself it just motivates me completely that if you give somebody that skill, they can go places. (Kate, Private-L)

Both Kate (Private-L) and Patricia (Private-L) value education highly as a social good and allude to its societal function of providing opportunity (expanded on later in this chapter). This is at odds with education as 'a product' but both teachers are able to satisfy their values, to a great extent, within the business model of the college, part

of which is the outcomes model of education which is central to certification and the creation of new programmes and the widening of the 'customer' base. The issue of customers and LOs will be addressed in greater depth further on in this chapter. I add here that the part- time teaching staff in this site (only one was full-time) worked extra hours with no extra pay, and under took mandatory teaching and learning certification in their own time without in-built study arrangements.

Managerialism: Institute of Technology (IoT)

Alison and Darragh (IoT-L) were the two teachers in this site who made references to the managerial traits of LOs. Alison (IoT-L) speaks about how writing LOs became more important than the job they were designed to do:

> It became more about almost a bureaucratic process given that I've worked in big institutions anyway where there is a way of communicating and a way, there's always a kind of rigidity around these things or policy. (Alison, IoT-L)

She describes outcomes as a 'bureaucratic process' and associates it with 'rigidity' which has negative associations in most settings. Bureaucracy is something we associate with government administration and other large administrative settings where leadership styles involve strict middle management. Jones (1990, p. 81) believed that new educational practices have had 'a central role in the increasing professionalization and bureaucratization of western society' in the Weberian sense; where bureaucracy is seen as a positive way to organise humans and maintain productivity. But the conceptualisation of bureaucracy in this study is one of time-wasting meaningless tasks where formality and conformity are more important than the content and reasons for doing something. In this reading of the concept, bureaucracy is used to invigilate and surveil; to ensure that process are followed and that there is evidence of events having occurred. It carries a pejorative overtone. Like the terms 'rigidity' or 'neoliberal' which reoccur in this study, it is rare to hear the term 'bureaucracy' referred to in a positive light. It also leads us to think of something that is a waste of time and resources. So in this instance the interviewee is characterising LOs, or part of it, as a managerial function of little value. Conversely

her colleague Darragh (IoT-L) is accepting of the outcomes model and its managerial conception. He compares it directly to business:

> There has to be a central, as with businesses and companies I suppose, there has to be a sense of ethos or guidelines to follow and that can be understood… (Darragh, IoT-L)

There is no pejorative meaning here, merely an acceptance of control by a 'central' entity who works in terms of guidelines. Darragh's (IoT-L) attitude is common among the interviewees and in the literature. There is no applause for LOs and yet there is a common thread that one cannot leave education in a structure-less vacuum. As Burham (2011, p. 56) says 'LOs cannot simply abandoned' and although they sometimes represent bad-value for teachers, both teachers and managers recognise the need for a structure or document to lean on as part of the organisation of their work. Prior to LOs focus in HE the curricula were content driven and expressed as aims and objectives which were teacher-focused rather than learner-focused (www.learninginstitute.qmul.ac.uk). The deficiency here being that as education moved in the last decade to put the student at the centre of all activities there was a need to represent this shift in terms of articulating what education was trying to achieve in programme and modular documents.

Managers in the IoT embraced LOs and senior manager Mark (IoT-Mgr) called LOs 'completely managerial' in their language and as a manager he sees it as important to be part of the bigger structures of HE in the wider Europe:

> I'm not against the idea of LOs. I'm not against the Bologna Process. I think it's good to have uniformity. That's my military background coming out but I think it's a good thing. Again maybe people say that maybe that is managerial in outlook. It is. You know, I like the system. (Mark, IoT-L)

Lomas (2007) tells us that managerialism leads to 'the development of a formal organisational structure with central control' and Mark's (IoT-Mgr) tone reflects the 'common sense' economic theory that works for all (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2002) and

which is associated with the neoliberal discourse at the heart of managerialism. Mark (IoT-Mgr) is aware that his background in engineering and the military is influencing his approval of outcomes. At times he refers to his being 'an engineer' and how this might be a reason for enjoying the structure that LOs bring. Background would seem to impact one's reception of the outcomes model and its managerial connections. Also it might be that managers' preference for the LO model could be attributed also to the fact that LOs are framed by a language that makes teaching and learning more understandable to the management group. If curricula are to be content driven then this might allow the esoteric language of the discipline to exclude the manager class and make them less able to manage that which is not familiar or perspicuous to them.

Managerialism: University

Yet again the university differed to the other two sites, this time, in terms of the managerial discourse.

There was debate about the managerial attributes of LOs. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) was very concerned about the rise of bureaucracy around LOs. As someone who was pro-LOs she had concerns that 'if we build these bureaucracies around education we're going to kill it.' She saw the language of LOs as part of the 'corporatisation of education.' Eileen's (Uni-T&L/Mgr) comments resonate with that of Hussey and Smith (2008) who believe that LOs have been hijacked by managers, that they have 'mutated from a useful tool to a bureaucratic burden' (p. 107).

Gina (Uni-L), who previously worked in HE in Australia, agreed that the language of LOs was corporate in nature and that this was evidence of a 'lack of trust of the professionalism of the academic staff', (tying in with Sherman's (2009) vision of the academic as feeling 'unloved' in the new LOs regime), but this allegation was refuted by senior manager Brian (Uni-Mgr) who said:

> …it's not clear to me that they allow management to police the university in
>
> anyway different from simply having modules and assessments and I know in

this institution we don't look at the outcomes as a mechanism for regulating what staff do. I mean in general university management doesn't really police what staff teach. We're concerned about the quality of the teaching and that it is done and that student work is assessed properly and the right standards are used but we're not really involved in policing the detail of courses. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

This view was supported by Nadia (Uni-L). Nadia (Uni-L) had previously taught in an IoT and reported that 'those management structures that impact IoTs just don't exist here.' But there are two issues here; firstly, LOs as a tool of managerialism, and secondly, the culture of managerialism in the institution. LOs are a tool of management as they organise and bring structure and have elements of business orientated discourse. The issue is whether the university embraces managerialism as a culture as posited by Lynch (2006) and Headley (2010), who charge neoliberalism as being the dominant discourse in Irish universities. If the university uses LOs and they are an instrument of managerialism and conceived of a neoliberal ideology, then the university has accepted, at least, this one aspect of managerialism. Gina (Uni-L) says:

> Some of this stuff about LOs in a way externalises our practice and in very fraught way I've always struggled with (it) and because it's just so tied up with that new managerialism that Australian universities are just riddled with. (Gina, Uni-L)

But she goes on to state that the university where she now works in Ireland is 'like the least neoliberal place in the world', although she does caution that 'it's creeping in.' Her comments are somewhat at odds with the current literature which shows an acceleration in neoliberal activity in Irish universities (Collins, 2007) but it may be that Irish universities have further yet to go in order to reach the neoliberal level of activity of Australian universities.

It would appear that like all higher education institutions in Ireland the university has taken on LOs which are part of a managerial mechanism but it is managerialism that is less invasive (than other territories); a brand of managerialism which allows

teachers scope to vary their modules while working with the language required but where autonomy is retained, for now.

To sum up this section; nearly all contributors who spoke on this topic accepted or described connections between LOs and aspects of managerialism. Some people spoke of this in strong terms and were wary of a managerial agenda. Some were not concerned and some positively embraced this aspect of LOs. Brian (Uni-Mgr), interestingly, said that they are part of a 'bureaucracy', the rationalisation of human organisations, but not managerialist, which might mean that he has an understanding of the positive concept of the bureau-professional previously drawn. What mediated peoples' opinions seemed to be a complex mixture of their own experiences and backgrounds and roles within the institution which anchored them to various stances.

6.3 Quality

This next major theme in the chapter is concerned with conceptions of 'quality' and 'quality enhancement' via LOs and moves away from a site-by-site analysis and back to an across-site approach.

LOs are seen as an instrument of quality (Adam, 2008b). Morley (2003, p. 170) calls 'quality' 'polysemic and multidimensional.' Martin and Stella (2007, p. 34) define it in educational terms as: as 'the monitoring, evaluation or review of higher education in order to establish stakeholder confidence that it fulfils expectations or meets minimum requirements.' Although more associated with the factory floor, 'quality' is now embedded in education as a part of the Bologna Process (Keeling, 2006). This section investigates the neoliberal discourse surrounding 'quality' as a scion of LOs.

Comments around quality enhancement in HE were varied. There were positive, negative and qualified views regarding the issue of quality. Positive experiences were reported by Nadia (Uni-L) who saw the quality review within the department as 'helpful.' Kate (Private-L) reported a similar experience and added that 'if you leave everything kind of fluid…then if we don't have a QA practice or policies I might just

be a really lazy person and I think it's enough to cover the bare minimum.' Gerry (IoT-Mgr) and Mark (IoT-Mgr) saw LOs as an instrument of 'quality' and necessary. Dermot (Private-Mgr) moves away from the idea of 'quality' as maintaining standards and equates it with student satisfaction and the exchangeable value of education in a private college reliant on student fees:

> Ultimately it's about delivering long-term value to the learner. It's a simple as that, particularly a private college, like if they don't like the experience, if they don't get long-term value for it, they won't tell their friends and nobody else will come. So you have to decide what the objectives are after all you are spending their money, you're taking a lot of money from a lot of people and putting it in a pool and trying to spend it as best as possible so they get a return and that you can afford to pay staff and the various things that provide the service. (Dermot, Private-Mgr)

Interestingly, Dermot's (Private-Mgr) presentation of the student 'experience' here seems to transform the experience into a commodity; characterised as something that is out there for the student to sample. 'long-term value'; 'money'; 'return'; 'pay'; this quote shows a view that puts education firmly in the realm of business and the market, a prominent goal of the neoliberal agenda (Ayres and Corleone, 2007; Marginson, 1997; 2000) or perhaps it is the case that these terms reflect the foundations of private education which has been in existence for decades. The interviewee uses the discourse of the market to make his point that if the product is not of a high standard, or quality, then the customer will not return. I will revisit the idea of the customer later in the chapter.

Dermot (Private-Mgr) is aware that he is running a business as he reminds us that his institution is a private college and one might say he monetizes education by describing it as a transaction within the student in realm of his institution/business.

Eileen, (Uni-T&L/Mgr), Maura (Uni-Mgr/L) and in a qualified way, Brian (Uni-Mgr) are the three participants who question the quality agenda. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr), who despite declaring herself a supporter of LOs in other parts of her interview, once again voices strong concerns about a managerial aspect of LOs:

I think it's a bit like LOs and 'quality', that there's an industry, a quality industry developing, that's building a bureaucracy that we're all going to have to go to and I think it's going to take up a lot of academic's time in the future sorting out all this bureaucracy and if we have that bureaucracy it will shut-down creativity, because people won't want to engage in development of new programmes. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

Her contention regarding the 'quality industry' has been supported in literature by Huisman and Westerheijden (2010) who detailed the rolling proliferation of quality agencies popping up at European, national and local levels. She goes on to give this insight:

The quality mark is not in the document that outlines the LOs. That's not the quality. The quality is what happens in the classroom. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

It is interesting to note that although Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) has declared 'I think in principle they're good', she has had many issues with the operation of the outcomes model and the dangers she sees as inherent. Allais (2012) sees LOs as instruments that aid managers and are agents of the quality programme rather than student-centred processes that result in authentic learning. It would appear that his view is supported by the contributions of the interviewees in this section.

Quality: Technicism

The term 'technicist' in this study refers to the use and design of LOs in a technical manner with an over-reliance on the instrumental aspects of LOs rather than the desired outcome of the LOs as that which affords clarity and transparency that facilitate student learning. Technicism can be associated with the neoliberal discourse in education (Giroux, 2011) as it has its origins in the technical and notions of the 'robotic' as previously alluded to by Patricia (Private-L.). The evidence presented below would indicate that LOs can be associated with technicism

according to the experience of some lecturers and there is concern about technicism in the discourse surrounding LOs across sites.

Quality: 'Tick-box'

A phrase that came up regularly in the course of interviews was the idea of 'ticking boxes' in the vein of Orr's (2007) worry about technicism in education management. Several interviewees were concerned about ticking boxes or were themselves involved in the practice ticking boxes:

> I think that you can still teach whatever you want; you just have to tick those boxes. I don't put all that much emphasis on LOs myself. I tick the boxes for the sake of the externals and for the sake of covering myself but if I want to teach them critical thinking which I think is important then I'll teach them that. (Barbara, IoT-L)

Barbara (IoT-L) views working with LOs as a technical activity and intimates that there is no learning outcome available for critical thinking. This is disputed by Una (IoT-T&L) and Susan (Private-T&L) who contend that LOs are not limited in this manner. Nevertheless, Adam (2008b) identifies this view as a fear that LOs will 'dumb down education and constrict academic studies by reducing them to mere 'tick box' training and rote learning' (p. 15). He blames this conception on poorly conceived and badly implemented LOs rather than any inherent weakness in the conception of LOs themselves.

The terms 'formula' and 'template' also arise indicating that technicism is an action associated LOs when in the form of modular outcomes and assessment criteria. Teachers report having to use templates and having to make subjective assessment into objective assessment through marking and measurement, something that Maura (Uni-L) cautions against. While teachers don't seem to balk at the technical aspects of these activities, they do voice concerns about the ramifications for the students:

I feel it's a template by which we teach in a particular way and the danger is that if we teach to a formula, we get formulae students and formulae outcomes. (Patricia, Private-L)

For the planning part they (the students) often do really well because they've ticked a lot of the boxes but then they're actual finished work in terms of the practical work isn't often the best. (Paul, Private-L)

In both the private college and IoT managers describing academic staff as 'having to' use the templates provided for LOs, so the authorship of the LOs has definite technical overtones in line with a neoliberal discourse espoused by Giroux (2011) who in his treatise on the neoliberal attack on higher education describes 'the shift to an instrumentalist education that is decidedly technicist in nature' (www.figuroa.usc.es). The quotes above also remind us of Ball's (1990, p. 157) conception of managerialism as a 'technology of rationality geared to efficiency, practicality and control' added to the element of power being exercised by those in charge.

Quality: Instrumentalism

In the university setting both Eileen (Uni- T&L/Mgr) and Maura (Uni-Mgr/L) are very wary of the possibility of instrumentalism with LOs and its effect on teaching and learning. Authors have claimed that 'instrumentalism lacks moral texture' (Gibbs and Iacovidou, 2004, p. 116) which I understand to mean that it is deficient in the kind of public values that advance society and engender goodness. Rather, instrumentalism is concerned with a narrow focus of detailed technical endeavour which involves short term and narrow gain. Without calling LOs instrumentalist outright the teachers here see opportunities for instrumentalisation to happen:

…you can never measure the learning or you shouldn't be able to. If you are able to measure the learning, well then maybe they're not learning very much. That's I guess my bottom line on it. (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

> …the technicist approach of the Framework (NFQ), I think… the credit weightings have become obsessions of some people and they see all of education fitting into this matrix of levels, frameworks, credits, LOs, not in a good way but LOs in terms of its technicist approach to LOs and I think all of it assumes a hierarchy of knowledge. (Eileen, Uni-T&L/Mgr)

As outlined in the literature review, LOs are often linked with instrumental reasoning (Biggs, 2003; Rust et al, 2003) are inextricably linked to the National Frameworks of Qualifications (NFQs) being used across the globe to set an illuminated pathway or ladder that the student can climb on her academic journey. It is this ladder that Eileen feels can be a constraint on the student's learning and achievement. Eileen's (Uni-T&L/Mgr) thoughts are interesting (especially as she is an otherwise enthusiastic supporter of LOs), and they are very much at odds with senior executive Dermot (Private-Mgr) from the private college who is enthusiastic about the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which he feels affords clarity. This view is endorsed by Werquin (2012) and Souto-Otero (2012) in the literature. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) is not a supporter of the framework approach as presented by the NFQ and refers to it several times couched in negative terms such as an 'obsession', and later referring to the hierarchy of knowledge propounded by the Framework as 'rubbish.' It would seem that Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) rejects the notion of threshold in its pragmatic sense and the connection of LOs to mastery learning (Malan, 2000) which tells us that we finish one level before we can pass to another. For her learning is much more complex and muddy in terms of what students are achieving regardless of what level the course or programme is pitched at. She tells the story of a disparate group in the regions studying local history at level 5 (NFQ), some of whom were exhibiting the behaviours and thoughts which were associated with level 9 masters outcomes. Hussey and Smith (2008) captured something of this as they worried about the lack of recognition of unintended LOs. Eileen challenges the pigeon-holing that happens with the use of the framework where people believe themselves to be level 5 and stuck there, but really capable of more. This reveals to us the complex

nature of learning and LOs and reminds us how it is difficult to create certainty or axioms around such a complex event as learning.

Perhaps individual backgrounds and prior experience is the reason for the divergent views of the NFQ described above: Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) comes from the social sciences and community work and Mark (IoT-Mgr) comes from what he terms 'hard maths.' It could be construed that the technicism of the NFQ would naturally appeal more to an engineer like Mark (IoT-Mgr) who likes the surety of the transparent pathway offered by OBE in the guise of National Frameworks (Souto-Otero, 2012) than to a social scientist more used to the complex and nuanced milieu of human relations associated with her field.

Quality: Standardisation

The previous notion of 'technicism' elicited contrary views among participants and the cognate idea of 'standardisation' also drew opposing views between and within groups. Again echoing the images of industry, standardisation is related to the reliability of the product and the idea that you can depend on the standard of a group of products having the same properties. Being 'of a standard', and 'accountability and predictability through standardisation have become essential elements in the managerialist approach' (Lomas, 2007, p. 406). There are also negative connotations associated with the idea of standardisation; a lack of uniqueness; mass production and a propensity toward the bland:

> … If we were creating a uniform system where did that leave the individual? You had to conform so at the end of the day we are producing a kind of formulae system of education… and I think we do see it in our students. We do see the fear to be different. (Patricia, Private-L)

These experiences are reflected in the literature where student risk-taking is threatened by the possibility of a poor mark (Walker and Gleaves, 2008; Balchin, 2006). To minimise the possibility of a poor mark students would rather meet criteria, foregoing novelty in order to gain a high mark. In this case education

becomes more about certification than learning and the certificate is what is desired rather than the knowledge (Brancalone and O'Brien, 2010).

While managers tend to be more supportive of LOs generally and Mark (IoT-Mgr), as previously cited, said 'I like uniformity', not everyone would agree wholeheartedly. Lorcan (Private-Mgr) is suspicious of what he calls 'a creeping standardisation' aided by LOs. This uniformity stands in opposition to the claims of 'flexibility' previously discussed and points to LOs as an instrument of policy rather than a flexible tool (Allais, 2012).

The use of the word 'creeping', usually associated with something cunning and dangerous leads us to understand that he regards the incidence of standardisation in media education as a dangerous prospect for higher education generally:

> …because we can have minimum standards but that does not necessarily imply uniformity but there is a danger in looking for standard, managerial standardisation….And it's something I've always felt in relation to LOs since they first came in that there is that possibility. (Lorcan, Private-Mgr)

Barbara (IoT-L) probably characterises the conundrum well with her insightful perspective on the standardisation through LOs issue:

> A LOs based approach I think can be both positive and negative. The positives being that they give a lecturer a focus and keep everybody on the same page. The negatives being that they keep everybody on the same page. [Laughs]. (Barbara, IoT-L)

Quality: Customers

During my research some interviewees referred to the students as customers and I found this a very interesting discourse around the commodification of the education process. As a result I asked others if they viewed students as customers and received diverse replies. Spanbauer (1995, p. 524) says 'education is a service with customers

and those customers express satisfaction about the institution's services and instruction on offer.' The customer is a key person in a transaction, usually involving money; the student as customer is probably the most obvious connector of this study to the neoliberal philosophy of the marketization of education. Gerry (IoT-Mgr) and Dermot (Private- Mgr) both spoke of the customer but with different focus. Dermot (Private-Mgr) opined, 'we have got to make it what the customer wants', and in this he was referring to students and parents. In the private system parents are paying large amounts of money for a 'product' (Lorcan, Private-Mgr). Saunders (2011) is concerned that this legitimisation of the 'student as customer' is creating generations of selfish individuals for whom the possibilities of good citizenship are irrelevant. If true, this outcome would have serious and negative consequences for society.

Gerry (IoT-Mgr) saw the student as a customer but also identified another customer that is also present in the literature:

> We have two customers. We have industry as a customer because we have to supply them with the graduate but also the client is the student who comes in and said look I wish to be educated or I wish to have skills in that and sometimes we overemphasise one or the other, but we can never forget it's a dual role and our mission is, to satisfy both of them in the way I've just described. (Gerry, IoT-Mgr)

There are concerns that higher education has become a factory for industry. De Jager and Nieuwenhuis (2007, p. 257) refer to Olivier's (1998) view when they say that the 're-engineering of learning system towards an outcomes approach is a major attempt to ensure graduates have the skills to meet the needs of industry.' The authors view this as a positive development in the 'total quality management' of education. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) differs saying that at times if the corporate world 'had its way we might become a job centre.' And Patricia (Private-L) berates the market for treating the students like 'widgets' which is what is happening as HE becomes commodified across the globe and graduates become the instrument of economic recovery (Avis, 2010). To refer to a human being as a 'widget' is

dehumanising and Patricia (Private-L) in using this hard language is showing us that she feels that industry is using educational institutions and their students to satisfy a base desire for intellectual man-power and then regarding that power in a reductive way. Patricia (Private-L) maintains that she and her colleagues do not treat students as customers but indicates that her institution does but that this is not always a bad thing:

> You hear very quickly if, now I mean the one thing that is interesting is they take students' complaints very seriously. So students equal customers and that's the thing… (Patricia, Private-L)

Interestingly, and despite Patricia's (Private-L) real concern for the hearts and minds of the students, the concern for students expressed by the private institution does not seem to stem from a concern about social justice or student rights but seems rather to come from a neoliberal conception of the student as customer. Naidoo (2013) refers to the problematic duality of roles that higher education plays at the moment, something that is reflected here; while HE still wants to promote citizenship and development of the student as an asset to society, there is the other conception of HE as a commodity to be sold by universities 'to people who can afford it'. That commodification of education creates customers and results in the transformation of education into a transaction rather than a process in which students and teachers and managers work together for the benefit of all.

Maura, a manager/lecturer from the university (via a private company providing media services to the university) is insistent that the idea of the student customer is 'dreadful' and inimical to learning but that her company may see the students as a revenue source as it is a limited company offering applied TV production modules to the greater university campus. Gibbs and Iacovidou (2004, p. 114) also reject the idea of a 'customer' in education; they characterise it as a 'pedagogy of confinement' and Harvey and McKnight (1966, p. 7) contended that 'education is not a service for a customer (much less a product to be consumed) but an on-going process of transformation of the participant.' Giroux and Giroux (2004) view the calling of students 'customers' as a kind of surrogate for learning and questions its

appropriateness, and Slaughter and Rhodes (2004) contests the customer analogy as in HE the phrase 'the customer is always right' patently cannot apply. Although the teacher may find the student/customer moniker distasteful many find themselves having to do so within a neoliberal system which commodifies education but for which there are few or no alternatives and so the trade between the student and the HEI becomes the defining meeting point between the two (Saunders, 2010).

6.4 The emancipating potential of LOs

This final element in this section of neoliberal discourses is somewhat separate from the rest. Here I present the alternative anti-neoliberal stance which portrays LOs as the conduit to the democratisation of education. The literature shows that there is a tension between authors who believe that LOs are an instrument of neoliberalism which almost enslave students and teachers in a capitalist agenda and are anti-democratisation. Others believe the opposite: that LOs free people and are instruments of democratic approaches to education, indeed Susan (Private-T&L) calls them 'liberating.' Hargreaves and Moore (2000, p. 30) state that 'LOs...possess great potential to disestablish the academic, elitist subject-based curriculum of secondary schooling which has been and continues to be one of the greatest sources of educational and social inequality in the developed world.' I wanted to investigate this tension between the sides claiming the democratic high ground in my research to see if there was a particular answer to this stand-off in this context and for the individuals interviewed.

Nine of the participants discussed LOs in terms that can be related to democracy. I understand the democratisation of education to encompass the sharing of power between interested parties involved in education and the application of fairness and freedom in a way that helps improve students' chances to take part and succeed in HE. In this last section of the findings and analysis chapter I look at how claims of democratisation are declared by those promoting LOs and wary of LOs.

Senior manager in the university site, Brian (Uni-Mgr), gives his synopsis of the pro and anti- democratic arguments as he saw them:

The LOs are an attempt to clarify what's in the module and the reason why we publish them on our website is so that any student choosing the module can look at the module descriptor and the LOs in advance and know if they sign up for that module what exactly its aiming for. So that's the democratisation argument that it is making it absolutely transparent what you're selecting. The anti-democratic argument is the argument that says that it is regulation of teaching. It does remove some of the spontaneity because it means that you have to predict what you're going to teach before you start the module but I don't think that it is regulation of teaching in the sense that, if you're an academic here and you run a module, you can change the module descriptor and the module LOs each year. So you're not being restricted from changing what you teach. All you're being asked to do is plan ahead and make the students aware of that in advance. So I don't see that as being overly restrictive. (Brian, Uni-Mgr)

Brian (Uni-Mgr) has highlighted the tension between the ideals of transparency and the regulation of teaching (yellow section above). He has made a compelling argument by being able to identify the potential interference with professional autonomy and almost dismiss this danger it with reasoned argument. By outlining the negatives he is able to take ownership of them and almost say 'alright it is a bit rigid but that this is not much to ask given what you get back.' And what we get back for this loss of spontaneity is clarity and clarity is the one recurring theme that is used by participants in this study to endorse LOs as an instrument of democracy. Clarity in terms of LOs and assessment is exercising fairness or justice for the student and teacher alike and Werquin (2012) believes that LOs offer excellent clarity to the student regarding their academic career:

It's not particularly fair if you're getting students to submit something but they don't know what the rules are. (Susan, Private- T&L)

So for most students I think they have brought an element of clarity to the endeavour that they're about. And that it's clear to them what they're

expected to achieve and also I think it makes it clear to staff what are you about here in covering this content. Is it covering the text or is it related to what will the student be able to know after I've done this? (Una, IoT-T&L)

Indeed managers viewed implementing the use of LOs as 'a duty' and 'a responsibility' during the Sociological Intervention phase of data gathering when a teach referred to them as an 'ass-covering' exercise. This rebuff shows a high level of civic duty toward the learner by the manager class and one that can be interpreted as an ethical and democratic view of the outcomes approach that puts the student at the centre of the education process. Mark (IoT-Mgr) made a very interesting argument on the pro-democratic side in terms of how LOs might be viewed as an equalising force for good. He maintained that 'it (LOs) stops the preoccupation with capability on entry…I think that is a positive' and his view is supported by Hargreaves and Moore (2000). What this means in the IoT sector, where students are coming in to third level education on lower points than those going to university, is that students are not disadvantaged by that low entry level and they start their course in the IoT with a green sheet and if they fulfil the LOs over the years, eventually they will get their degree in the same way as a person in the higher-status university sector does. This gives people a chance to achieve whatever their background and is a corner stone of democracy. From a system's perspective it means that LOs would have the potential to reduce stratification and students may enter third level with low points but they can still achieve a degree, although the value of degrees from different institutions may differ in the eyes of the public and employers.

Spady believed that LOs embodied democratic ideals in that it did away with the Bell Curve and insisted that all can achieve if they meet the LOs (Tucker, 2008). Avis (2010) supports Mark's (IoT-Mgr) standpoint from a different but cognate angle in that he believes that the transparency offered by OBE 'will enable learners from non-traditional backgrounds to compete on the same terrain as the privileged' (p. 42). In an OBE world it is said that anyone can achieve their degree, if they achieve the desired outcomes, no matter what their background.

Another interesting endorsement of the social equity function of LOs is Una's (IoT-T&L) idea of power sharing or as she puts it:

> …it's a sharing the responsibility and a partnership of teaching and learning with students. So if students… it's made clear to students what would be expected they would be able to know or do or whatever at the end of a session. In some way that is sharing that responsibility in terms of and a more co-operative approach I think to learning. (Una, IoT-T&L)

Una (IoT-T&L) makes a strong case with the use of language such as 'responsibility' and 'partnership' that have democratic ideals imbued in them. However, evidence in this study shows across the board that students do not engage with LOs with one teacher calling them 'completely invisible' to the students. This invisibility is undesirable according to managers and T & L experts but it is real. Brian (Uni-Mgr) felt that students were more attuned to the module descriptors rather than the LOs. Data showed that teachers tended not to use outcomes (except perhaps at the beginning of a course of study) and this lack of transparency may weaken the LOs possibility of being an instrument of democracy, seeing as they are unknown and apparently an irrelevance to students.

In the same vein of 'power-sharing' or responsibility sharing, Maura (Uni- Mgr/L) is ambivalent about the democratic nature of LOs. On one hand she finds them 'top down' in their construction and that ideally the student should be involved in the design if 'you want a truly democratic education', this echoes Avis' (2010) advice that we create 'writerly' LOs that include the users in the writing of the LOs. At the same time she can see that the student might be protected from what she characterises as a 'power megalomaniac who decides their way or the high way' she goes on to say:

> …the correction criteria serve as guide rails to keep us all somewhat on the same page between being creative in how and what we allow the students to do and facilitate them in doing and not becoming so subjective that we actually become unreasonable in what we look for and in how we mark or so arrogant in thinking well if I say it's a fail, it's a fail. That's not actually good enough. (Maura, Uni-Mgr/L)

These feelings of ambivalence are typical of the internal struggles that most of the participants voiced during interviews regarding the many contrasting issues involved in the discourse around LOs.

A last word goes to Kate (Private-L) who worried about what she termed the 'discrimination' inherent in some LOs. She felt that the different language used at the different levels (e.g. level 7 ordinary degrees versus level 8 honours degrees) had the effect of 'capping' learning. Eileen (Uni-T&L/Mgr) made the same point at length in her interview. This harks back to mastery learning where an apprentice had to approach their apprenticeship in strict stages (Malan, 2000) and also is a criticism of the 'threshold concepts' used in conjunction with LOs where again one has reached the threshold when is one is transformed by engaging with a core concept of the discipline. Kate (Private-L) regarded this as limiting and represented a lack of opportunity for those at the lower levels where learning is capped. Her sentiments and use of the concept of discrimination leads us to conclude that she sees the possibility of viewing learning outcomes as anti-democratising and inimical to Barnett's (1994) emancipatory conception of higher education. In this construction some can benefit from an emancipatory education reserved to elite settings and then there are those who will be getting the sort of HE which some regard as vocational in essence and therefore less valued.

6.5 Summary

In sum, in this chapter, according to the data gathered, views on LOs are personally and contextually situated. Those in the university setting enjoyed more flexibility with LOs and their lower profile made them less of an issue in institutions where the teacher felt she had autonomy. In the private and IoT setting LOs were central to teaching and learning. The discourse surrounding them had stronger neoliberal overtones. Neoliberalism was the chief discourse associated with LOs and permeated all themes to some degree. Teachers in all sites were strategic in how they worked with LOs and those with a key teaching and learning mentor felt more comfortable with the authorship of the LOs. Managers promoted LOs most and teachers were not

as loyal to the outcomes model of education or its underpinnings but everyone worked within the hegemonic educational practice of outcomes-based education to a high degree. LOs are a contested area of study: whether they are democratic in nature (Hargreaves and Moore, 2000) or inimical to democracy (Smyth and Dow, 1998) or whether they promote learning or are a tool of management is a matter vigorous debate. Despite much negative comment surrounding the use of LOs no alternative system was promoted by participants in this study and it would appear that although LOs can be characterised as creating a 'polarising debate' (Ecclestone, 1999) they are being used, at times strategically, by faculty to do what needs to be done.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

Learning outcomes have been prominent in Irish HE for over a decade and this study has tried, at this temporal juncture, to understand their place in a developing system which endeavours to enhance learning and teaching while managing the education landscape. This study has focused on the overarching question of the tensions and potentials associated with LOs as a means of understanding how LOs reveal the meaning and purpose of higher education in Ireland, a small European democracy on the edge of Europe. This chapter endeavours to bring together all that has been learned in a reflective and synthesised manner.

In order to ensure full investigation of the overarching research question (RQ), five sub questions were posed. RQ 3 is addressed in the following section 7.1. RQ 2 regarding the potentials offered by LOs is looked at in section 7.2, and the other RQs 1 and 4 dealing with engagement and attitudes to LOs are dealt with in section 7.3.

7.1 The tensions associated with LOs

Tensions and potentials characterise this study and in this section we look at the answers to RQ 3 regarding the tensions associated with using LOs in media HE in Ireland. In many ways the literature associated with LOs and the outcomes approach to education was top heavy with 'tensions' and outright criticisms of LOs and there was, and is, a dearth of academics exploring the potentials of LOs. Perhaps this is because conflict and criticism make for more interesting reading than the 'surrendering' to ministerial and manager sponsored changes, like the move to the 'outcomes' approach in HE. LOs have fundamentally changed the way we look at and organise teaching and learning and this change has encountered a lot of resistance and hostility especially within teaching circles (Jervis and Jervis, 2005; Berlach, 2004). This study showed that there were negative conceptions of LOs with the media teachers group, but not to the extent that one would expect after consulting the literature. Many of the media teachers' criticisms of LOs were aligned to their dealings with outside auditors and managerialism generally; as Gina says 'some of this stuff about LOs in a way externalises our practice and in a very fraught way I've

always struggled with (it) because it is so tied up with that new managerialism…'. The annoyance of having to jump through bureaucratic hoops (Radice, 2013) by having to write LOs in the required arcane language was by different turns called 'formal', 'confusing', 'rigid' and even 'bollocks' by various contributors here. This added to the need to adhere strictly to LOs (Kennedy, 2011), contributed to negative conceptions of LOs which could be construed as capping learning (Tam, 2013) rather than encouraging it; this 'capping' concern was particularly echoed by two of the interviewees. This leads me to conclude that the work associated with navigating LOs and their possible aberrant readings can lead to restricted learning and should be a concern for those involved in HE.

Leading on from the shortcomings of LO statements there were also tensions around quality enhancement as offered by LOs. Quality was not deemed to be assured by the simple presence of LOs. Indeed even managers were quick to say that LOs only enhance quality if the LOs themselves were 'good outcomes and secondly if the assessment is aligned with the outcomes' (Brian, Uni-Mgr) The issue of what good outcomes are will be addressed in section 7.4. Quality was often defined by the imprimatur of invigilating outsiders who sought out LOs as the yardstick for judging programmes. For teachers this seems very distant from learning and teaching; 'it's kind of like the formal educational part' (Alan, Private-L), can seem reductive and far removed from the 'real' work of the classroom. Of course this view is more the preserve of teachers: managers and teaching and learning staff can see tensions ('they can be restrictive') but also see the possibilities in LOs ('you have some sort of benchmark or some sort of parameters to work against) and the kind of oversight that external bodies offer in enhancing the learning and teaching that an institution can afford students in. This sometimes polarised perception of LOs in terms of auditing and use is characteristic of the tensions LOs propagate (Ecclestone, 2001). We see it here between roles where teachers and managers, while both displaying a sincere concern with the best interests of the students, have fundamentally different approaches to LOs. Teachers have, as one would expect, a preoccupation with learning and teaching in terms of their classroom and student behaviours and regards LOs through that lens: Barbara chooses to dismiss LOs as they do not fit in

with her class plan; 'I can get the students to a higher level and so I'm not going to be restricted by them'. Managers think in a more removed way about LOs; also as an enhancement to student achievement but equally as a helpful aid to organising education across institutions in line with national policies ('the university decided as part of the Bologna Process to introduce LOs', Brian, Uni-Mgr). Broad ideas about organising education are necessary but teachers are more concerned with the detail of their own work with the students. I think this natural concern with one's own role is part of the reason we have tensions arising around LOs: it is not always about how reductive or democratising they are but it is always about various factions interpreting LOs from their own perspective.

The multiple interpretations and focus of the individuals and roles researched here shows that there is always an opportunity to use instruments like LOs to one's own end (Sadler, 2008). Teachers were often intuitively or purposefully drawn to work from the content: 'I still think somehow we start maybe with the content…and we kind of work back' Maura, Uni-Mgr/L. Teachers in this research admitted to making things 'fit' the required LOs after the fact or beating them into 'the educational kind of format'. Teachers sometimes use LOs in a strategic fashion to include their preferred content and/or because they feel they can do better for the students as evidenced by Barbara's comment in the previous paragraph. Even in their manipulation of the LOs they are sometimes showing that one purpose of education is to give the student the best chance possible by teaching preferred content which they feel is superior to the outcomes laid out or a more intuitive way to work. Managers and teaching and learning staff also look to create a 'best chance' but feel that this 'best chance' is afforded by using the LOs as prescribed. Their belief and support of the LOs model of learning is very strong, though not always unequivocal, as seen by the managers' caution in accepting LOs as self-evident quality enhancers. In a way their ability to highlight possible weaknesses in the LOs approach shows us that it is not a case of 'blind faith' versus outright rejection by opposing parties, rather we are looking at the outcomes-focused approach to education as an on-going ambivalent proposition.

7.2 The potentials associated with LOs

Somewhat contrary to the weight of literature complaining about LOs I found indications that learning outcomes are contributing to learning and teaching policy which is at the forefront of the development of HE in Ireland. In this section I address RQ 2 which examines the potential offered by LOs in media HE.

Interviewees in this research who spoke about quality recognised that LOs could help enhance quality in HE in terms of creating structures (Werquin, 2012) that help teachers teach ('I do understand that there needs to be a framework there that we work to') and students learn and this is considered important by those involved in teaching and the management of HE. In this way, the discourse around LOs is one that highlights the purpose of teachers and managers to make education better. This in turn allows us to see the LOs project as one that reveals the staff's understanding of HE as a process (Harvey and McKnight, 1996) that puts the student at the centre of its activities by offering clarity ('for most students they have brought an element of clarity to the endeavour' (Una, IoT-T&L) and transparency. Clarity also in terms of students enjoying a clear pathway to follow in their academic careers (Werquin, 2012) and transparency in terms of the LOs statements telling them, in advance, what is expected of them: 'sharing the responsibility' according to Una (IoT- T&L). Dermot (Private-Mgr) expresses the promise of LOs by saying that 'the role of LOs is to help structure a programme to provide an overall cohesive development opportunity for the learners.'

Another, little acknowledged way, in which LOs can help the development of HE is the manner in which the language of LOs can make knowledge and learning communicable to diverse audiences. Before LOs became popular the content-driven syllabus was common (and still difficult to shake off) but this model encouraged the exclusivity of the experts who understood the discipline and often left others who did not understand the content in the dark (see p. 43-46 and the perceived elite nature of HE). Granted, the issue of the language of LOs is one of the chief tensions uncovered in this research (Hussey and Smith, 2003; Berlach, 2004): the tendency

toward management-speak or 'verbiage' as described by Darragh (IoT-L) is much criticised, but it is also noted that LOs have developed a common language that can make learning understandable to the initiated and the uninitiated and thus make it accessible to individuals and groups from different jurisdictions (Adam, 2008b): this was evident even in the discourse in data gathering phase of this research. Alison (IoT-L) notes that, in her industry and HE experience, this common language is a feature of large organisations, generally, not just HEIs. The use of commonly understood reference points means that prospective students, students, managers and colleagues can now (theoretically at least) participate in the discourse of education because LOs have made the aims of programmes clear and the purpose of education explicit. This is a positive development which is often forgotten amid the criticism of LOs.

7.3 How LOs reveal different purposes of education across sites

The meaning and purpose of education in the different HEIs studied can be interpreted from attitudes to and engagement with LOs. In this section RQs 1, 4 and 5 which address engagement, attitudes and underlying neoliberal discourses (arising from attitudes to and engagement with LOs) are answered.

Apart from being short statements describing what a student should know, LOs also reflect the wishes and policy goals of education ministers across Europe and the work of the European Commission through the Bologna Process to create a common HE area across the zone (Keeling, 2006) (see also **Figure 1.** p.19), so understanding levels of engagement and attitudes gives us a window onto this world.

Engagement at with LOs at managerial level can be interpreted as reflecting the wish of policy makers to use HE to advance the development of the global economy by supplying graduates that employers need (De Jager and Nieuwenhuis, 2007), and presumably giving graduates the chance to make a living. Engagement with LOs by teachers was not an everyday or frequent event across the institutions studied and LOs had different profiles in different colleges. The institutions I studied where LOs had a high profile, such as the IoT ('they are king of the castle'), and private college

('very important'), mirror a preoccupation with forming graduates who are ready for the workplace, who can get jobs and who can contribute to an employer's business as evidenced by Dermot's (Private-Mgr) direct tracking of the learning outcome from HE learning tool to a profit outcome for the employer (p. 148); something we can interpret as a neoliberal tenet in the market focus of HE education (Levin, 2005). The university stood out from the other HEIs in that interviewee talk did not associate the jobs market as a purpose of their HE model and thus the university was more removed from the neoliberal agenda. Gina (Uni-L) declared her university the 'least neoliberal place ever' after years working in HE Australia.

The policies promoted by HEI managers and their implementation by teachers may diverge at times but teachers are good at bridging these gaps to satisfy both cohorts interpretations of the purpose of education. In the IoT and private college a neoliberal view of education, where the market was always in mind, was detected and managers and teachers did refer to students in terms of 'customers' although individual teachers did not necessarily endorse this views themselves. These teachers, in the IoT and private college, naturally wanted their students to get jobs and there were economic considerations in terms of teaching material that was relevant to the jobs market, but they also wanted the students to develop creatively through learning: as Barbara (IoT-L) pronounces; she will tick the boxes for the 'externals and for the sake of covering myself but if I want to teach them critical thinking, which I think is important, then I'll teach them that'. The approach to teaching and learning in these environments was strongly associated with the alignment model which seems to be embedded as an acknowledged 'ethos' in the vocational/applied model of education available at the private college and IoT studied. Sometimes teachers were frustrated by outcomes-based constraints; according to Alison (IoT-L) 'if the assessment matches the LOs that's good enough, whether or not we have actually taught it successfully or they have learned it properly'. This contrasts with the traditional university in which the outcomes model has been adopted (including built- in flexibility according to Nadia (Uni-L)), with more 'confidence' about its proper place in the educational framework and less managerial zeal.

In terms of institutional policy, the IoT and private college share closeness to the European reform agenda, through their adhesion to the LOs model, advocating the outcomes approach through the Bologna Process (Stocktaking Report, 2007). I see this following of the reform agenda as reflecting these institutions eagerness, and indeed a national eagerness, to keep up with the development of HE across Europe and be 'good' Europeans. The university I studied also followed The Bologna Process (see Brian's comment on p. 171), and used and understood LOs without them being a preoccupation. The individuals at this established institution, which is researched focused rather than vocationally focused, displayed a keen understanding of LOs in terms of pedagogic benefit and flexibility of use. Teachers and managers took a very broad and flexible approach which reflected the self-assuredness and autonomy which comes with being a well-regarded old university with a broad outlook. Managers were not interested in surveillance: 'management doesn't really police what staff teach' I was told, and there was an acute awareness of the limitations of reading too much into LOs: 'The quality mark is not in the document that outlines the LOs…The quality is what happens in the classroom' (Eileen, Uni-T&L). It is not that managers in other institutions would disagree with these assertions but the point is that these managers sought to articulate these ideas as indicative of their institution's, what I would term, 'balanced' attitude to LOs and learning.

Managerialism is evident in HE according to this study. Managerialism has led to a kind of instrumentalism and bureaucracy that has LOs as its 'poster boy'. Teachers are not keen on managerialism (Deem, 2004) and the need to manage and be managed increases tension between managers and teachers as teachers are concerned about changes in practices and workloads. 'You just have to tick those boxes' says Barbara (IoT-L) and Brian (Uni-Mgr) concedes that many teachers see LOs 'stupid bureaucracy'. With the further development of business and management practices through the use of 'outcomes' there are valid concerns that we are perhaps adding layers to the process of education which bring little return and instead drives teachers further away from the core teaching and learning that happens in the class toward office-bound 'paper exercises,' as one interviewee termed it, that satisfy the 'quality' agenda but do little to enhance learning.

7.4 How LOs can succeed

This section will look at how we might create 'good' outcomes and develop real engagement in HE with these 'good' outcomes.

It is apparent from this research that the success of LOs and the outcomes approach in HE hinges on teachers, managers and teaching and learning staff working together to use 'good' LOs in a meaningful way to help students learn. This would reflect an agreement on the meaning and purpose of education which might be understood as; the enhancement of learning to help the student achieve and take control of their own learning (Avis et al, 2002); to give chances to students to achieve and to help develop citizens who advance the world socially and economically. I think that there is broad agreement on this already, from what I have seen, but that different institutions and individuals might arrange them in a different order, depending on their interpretation of the goals of HE.

This research and the literature associated with LOs indicate that LOs also succeed or fail on the quality of the LOs, and by the level of real engagement (not just having a high profile within an institution) with them by all parties. The mere existence of LOs does not enhance learning in HE. Brian (Uni-Mgr) refers to 'good outcomes' as being the cornerstone of quality. What are these 'good outcomes 'and how can they be achieved? Firstly, well written LOs which are broad and flexible are essential (Tucker, 2009; Ecclestone, 2001). In the university setting we saw Nadia (Uni-L), who previously worked in an IoT; identify the benefits of greater flexibility around LOs allowing teachers to take ownership of their LOs and adapt them easily to enhance learning. Poorly written LOs; whether they are too vague ('confusing') or too esoteric ('verbiage'), or written by those who do not know the field and characterised here as 'irrelevant or quite basic' (Barbara, IoT-L), will fail as they lead to confusion and frustration on the part of teachers, and a misaligned teaching and learning experience for the student. The literature promotes broad outcomes (Kennedy, 2011) and indeed this was the approach advocated by Spady in his original 1994 work on outcomes.

This research tells us that 'good' LOs should enable learning and not cap it. Manager 'Eileen' and teacher 'Kate' (p. 168) were both concerned about this danger, which manifests itself when LOs are ill-conceived, inflexible and narrow. To achieve effective broad outcomes, which teachers and managers can work with, I believe it is essential to help the writers of LOs find their 'LO voice' through training, education and support. Teaching and learning centres and teaching and learning advocates are best placed to help writers of learning outcomes by running workshops and providing on-going support. This research showed that colleagues are important too: people like Gina (Uni-L) was able to help her colleague Nadia (Uni-L) create well- crafted broad LOs that captured even higher order learning well because 'she has an understanding and background from that area, education, teaching and learning' and also because they had a good collegial relationship. Teachers in the private college studied also indicated that a good relationship with a teaching and learning expert was helpful in helping them value LOs.

To go one level deeper than the writing of LOs, I conclude that it would be very helpful for writers and users of LOs to know the various meanings and purposes of LOs in HE as expressed in section **2.1**; this in turn would help in the writing of 'good outcomes' and also would also encourage teachers to engage more meaningfully with LOs. It is the precise reputation of LOs as mere tools in education management which has led to them being overlooked and sometimes scorned. LOs need to be engaged with rather than left to languish between semesters. Typically most teachers in this study used LOs only at pressure points in the year. Alison's (IoT, L) comment; 'they don't really enter into my everyday teaching', choosing rather to address them at the end of the year, would be indicative of the teacher attitude, though this is not to say that LOs were viewed as unimportant. How might meaningful engagement be promoted? Again I feel there is an important role to be played by teaching and learning advocates: this study showed that a good relationship with teaching and learning experts leads to enhanced understanding and engagement with LOs. Alan (Private-L) maintained that taking up teaching and learning training and education opportunities helped him engage with LOs as his attendance at LOs workshops helped him 'understand now what is needed and what

LOs are and why they're there.' It could be therefore said that teaching and learning support, in whatever form, be it a colleague-advocate, a recognised expert or teaching and learning opportunities within HEIs, are one of the most effective routes to 1) helping writers of LOs write good outcomes and 2) and ensuring that LOs are used to make a meaningful contribution to improving learning in media HE in Ireland through a deeper understanding of their uses and purposes.

7.5 Limitations of this research

There is never enough time or word count available for all one might want to say in a project such as this. I would like to have delved more into the personal experiences and values of the contributors to see how these might have impacted their attitudes to LOs, above and beyond the influences of their institutions or the roles they held. Unfortunately this would have been too large an undertaking to include here.

This study revealed the tensions and potentials of LOs in media education in a way that is generalizable across the field but media education in Ireland is a small world and ideally representations from all media broadcast courses would have been included for a more complete picture. This would have meant a move to a more quantitative design and perhaps inclusion of a survey method, but again, time and word count did not permit this approach. The topic examined was relatively unexplored and a more quantitative approach would not have allowed these tensions and contradictions to emerge. Having said this, it is possible to reach out to all teachers in the sector which would have perhaps enhanced the validity of the work in a positivist way and allowed it to appeal to a wider audience. This kind of study could be embarked on at a later date.

A third limitation involves my choice of sites to study. I worked in three sites which represented three different types of higher education in Ireland: an IoT, an old university and a private college. The most high profile media education school in Ireland was not included. In any future work it might be advisable to include this repertoire as it is the most established media school in the country. My reason for eschewing this site, although I had consent from teachers to take part, was that it

was a new university; it is fairly unique and did not represent as broad a scope as the chosen sites. Also, I did not have the time or space for four sites and I made a judgement that the other sites better represented the disparate views of a number of like-minded institutions and educators, which enhanced the desired generalizability of the conclusions as described by Yin (2009). Nevertheless, it might be a good idea to gather data from the most prestigious media school as this might have an influential role in Media Education in Ireland in relation to curriculum models and choices in the country sometime in the future.

7.6 Implications of this study

LOs are far from perfect; the language is distancing and remote (to many in the creative fields) (Karseth, 2008), they have come to be too connected with management (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011b) rather than teaching and learning and they are often forgotten by teachers and never known by students. I reject the view of students as customers and education as a product and rather conceive it as a process engaged in by lots of different, interested parties; realistically, education has to be managed, whether we like it or not and often structures like LOs can bring much needed light to complex situations. I see teaching as complex and nuanced and a creative endeavour. LOs fail to capture this totally but the outcomes approach can enhance learning by making us think deeply about teaching and learning and if engaged with it helps us organise our work and makes the goals of learning clearer; all of which benefits our students. LOs are not the learning but a representation of learning (ibid.) which can help us enhance the student's experience through an imagining of achievement and assessment of student work to meet outcomes. But this all depends on engagement with well-conceived LOs in a reflective and optimistic way.

Engagement is the key to achievement with LOs. I see a teaching and learning approach to OBE as central to any success and possible good use of LOs. Teaching and learning is at the core of HE and once one connects LOs to the goals of teaching and learning they cease to be just a function of manageralism and they come to

represent the potential for a better learning experience for the student driven by clarity and structure. The potential for LOs to enhance learning when they are understood, used broadly and flexibly is significant.

Finally, despite all the criticism of OBE and LOs, they have survived almost two decades on the international HE firmament and doubtless this is what we will work with until the next big idea in education comes along to succeed. Given this, I think it is important that teachers and managers work together to try and make this paradigm one which helps enhance the quality of education in HE.

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Appendices

Appendix i

The

School

Of

Education.

Irene McCormick
EdD Higher Education

Head of School
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies
388 GLearning Outcomessop Road
Sheffield
S10 2JA

09 July 2012

Telephone: +44 (0)114 222 8096
Email: edd@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Irene
ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER
Tertiary media educaptors in Ireland and outcomes-based
education in Ireland: conceptions, attitudes and
engagement
Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am
writing to confirm that your application has now been
approved, and you can proceed with your research.
This letter is evidence that your application has been
approved and should be included as an Appendix in your
final submission.

Good luck with your research.
Yours sincerely

S. A. Warral

Appendix ii

Ethical Review 2: Request to amend and widen interview base

24/04/13

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to inform you about my wish to make some changes to the research I am conducting as part of my Ed.D studies with the University of Sheffield. This will require a re-focus and further ethical review.

In my research I am investigating attitudes to outcomes-based education in tertiary media education in Ireland. Originally my focus was on the views of media educators exclusively, and how they thought of and worked with the outcomes model of education. After my pilot interviews with media lecturers I could see that more 'actors' were involved in deciding how an institution offering media education might conceive the outcomes approach currently en vogue in Ireland. I now propose to look at how selected institutions offering media degrees conceive of and engage with outcomes based education and I aim to do this with an expanded interview and document analysis base. Instead of confining myself to speaking with media lecturers, I wish to base my investigation on the following contributors:

1. Media lecturers (for their conceptions and engagement with outcomes)
2. Managers of media programmes (for the institutional view and its implementation)
3. Higher managers with influence in this area (e.g. registrar who drives policy in this area)
4. Teaching and learning coordinator (as a key promoter of learning outcomes in certain institutions)

This group represents a broad range of academic participants with teaching and management responsibilities and will enrich my research considerably. As with my initially proposed group of lecturers, the topic remains an exploration of an area of professional practice without any sensitive aspect attached to it. All views, either in favour or against OBE will be respected and an attitude of active listening will be adopted. The same conditions of anonymity, confidentiality and right to withdrawal will apply to all participants.

I request that the review committee pass these changes.

Regards,

Irene McCormick

Appendix iii

Ethical Approval 2 for amendments to research (by email)
<center>***</center>
Please find attached approval
Jayne

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: Re: [Fwd: For attention of Prof Daniel Goodley]
Date: Thu, 25 Apr 2013 09:31:20 +0100
From: Daniel Goodley <d.goodley@sheffield.ac.uk>
To: Jayne Elizabeth Rushton <J.Rushton@sheffield.ac.uk>

Hi Jayne

I am happy to accept these minor changes and thank the student for
their openness.

Dan

Sent from my iPhone

Professor Dan Goodley
University of Sheffield
School of Education
388 Glossop Road
Sheffield S10 2TA

-------- Original Message --------
Subject: For attention of Prof Daniel Goodley
Date: Wed, 24 Apr 2013 16:36:35 +0100
From: Irene McCormick <edp09im@sheffield.ac.uk>
To: j.rushton@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Jane,
I wish to widen my interview base for my Ed.D and would like the panel to
review my request. I attach my review letter, the original ethics application and
the letter of approval for a full view of my research. Can you kindly pass on
this material to Prof Goodley on my behalf. Regards, Irene McCormick
Ed.D student (2009 cohort)

Appendix iv

Doctoral Research Participant Information Sheet

Researcher: Irene McCormick- B.A., M.A.

Lecturer: media studies IT Carlow

e-mail: irene.mccormick@itcarlow.ie

phone: 086 8283681

Research Project Title:

'Tertiary media educators in Ireland and outcomes-based education: conceptions, attitudes and engagement'

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project focused around media educators' conceptions, attitudes and engagment with the instruments of outcomes-based education (e.g. programme outcomes, Learning Outcomes, assessment criteria, and marking criteria). I am doing this study as part of an Ed.D programme with the Sheffield University. My research is partly supported by the Institute of Technology Carlow. Please take time to read the following information. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please contact me at the number/mail above. Thank you for reading this.

Please note: *You do not have to be an 'expert' in outcomes-based education or have thought deeply about this issue to be a valuable participant in this research.*

What is the project's purpose?

This research project aims to investigate media educators' conceptions of, attitudes towards and engagement with the area of Learning Outcomes and criterion-based assessment which are the basis of outcomes-based education.

Why bother?

Outcomes-based education (OBE) is an educational movement that is being promoted in the European context and is growing in strength in the third level firmament in Ireland. OBE impacts educators' work in the form of programme outcomes, Learning Outcomes and assessment criteria. Some educators like OBE, some actively dislike OBE and some are ambivalent.

This project is important because by its nature media education is unusual in that it combines competencies which traditionally fit well with notion of defined outcomes, but it also has a strong creative bent which often resists being measured by the OBE model. I aim to find out what media educators think about this educational tool which claims to guide students to certain success.

This research will give a voice to media educators about the use of Learning Outcomes in their profession and assess their appropriateness for the enhancement of teaching and learning in media education practice.

Data will be gathered in the form of interviews and focus groups over the next 12 months. It is envisaged that we will meet once but I may come back to you at a later date if new themes arise or I wish to clarify some issues. Each interview will last up to an hour.

It is hoped that we can meet in a venue convenient to you. Should you incur any travel expenses by facilitating this research these will be covered by me.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate in this research because you form part of a group of educators who teach media theory and practice to post-secondary students.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

Research Methods

This research will be conducted through interviews and a focus group. All participants and their institutions will retain anonymity.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If for some reason this study stops earlier than planned you will be informed immediately and the reason(s) why the study has halted will be explained to you.

What if something goes wrong?

Please contact me in the first instance to discuss any concerns you may have. If you feel that your concern has not been addressed appropriately, my supervisor will be at your disposal to discuuss the matter. Her contact details are:

Dr Vassiliki Papatsiba at v.papatsiba@sheffield.co.uk. If you feel that the issue has not been handled to your satisfaction you may contact the University of Sheffield's Registrar and Secretary on 0044 114 222 1100 and registrar@sheffield.ac.uk .

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All interviewees and participants are afforded anonymity in the research documents. Participants will be identified using a pseudonym. All the information that I collect during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and securely stored. You will not be able to be identified in any reports, presentations or publications.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your interview(s) and/or focus group made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures (in text format). No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. The recordings will be destroyed after publication of the thesis.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

It is anticipated that the results of this project will be published in 2014. A copy will be kept in the University of Sheffield library. Some material may appear in published articles in suitable academic journals and be disseminated at appropriated conferences. You will not be identified in any report, presentation or publication. The data collected during this study may be used for additional or subsequent research, or if otherwise required.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically reviewed via Sheffield University's education department's ethics review procedure.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

Many and sincere thanks for taking the time to read this information sheet and for your valued and valuable contribution to this project.

Doctoral Research Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: 'Tertiary media education and outcomes-based education in Ireland: attitudes and engagement'

Name of Researcher: Irene McCormick

Participant Identification Number for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet/letter (delete as applicable) dated *[insert date]* for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. *Insert contact number here of lead researcher/member of research team (as appropriate).*

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis.
   I give permission for members of the research team to have access
   to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

_____   _____

_____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____
_____

Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

(*if different from lead researcher*)

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Irene McCormick

_____   _____
_____

 Lead Researcher   Date   Signature

To be signed and dated in presence of the participant

Table 1: Interviewee profiles

Site X = University

Site Y = Institute of Technology

Site Z = Private College

Name	site	age	Role	Field of interest	Pre-academy	Role in study
Gina	X	30s	Lecturer	Communications and media	N/A	Lecturer
Nadia	X	30s	Lecturer/ Co-ordinator	Digital media	Digital media Industry	Lecturer
Maura	X	40s	Lecturer/ Manager	Social Science & media	Media Production (on-going)	Lecturer and manager
Brian	X	50s	Mgr	Education	N/A	Manager
Eileen	X	50s	T&L/Mgr	Social science & Education	Community Work	Teaching and learning Expert and manager
Darragh	Y	30s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry	Lecturer
Alison	Y	40s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Barbara	Y	20s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Gerry	Y	60s	Mgr	Engineering	N/A	Manager
Mark	Y	40s	Mgr	Engineering	Armed forces	Manager
Una	Y	50s	T&L	Social science	Social work	Teaching and learning expert
Kate	Z	30s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Paul	Z	30s	Lecturer	Digital media	Digital media Industry	Lecturer
Patricia	Z	50s	Lecturer	Media	Media Industry (on-going)	Lecturer
Lorcan	Z	50s	Mgr	Media	Media	Manager
Dermot	Z	50s	Mgr	Maths	N/A	Manager
Susan	Z	40s	T & L	Business & education	Business	Teaching and learning expert

Appendix vii

Irene McCormick, Ed.D student 2009 cohort

Interview Questions

Title: 'Tertiary media educators in Ireland and outcomes-based education: conceptions, attitudes and engagement'

Question		
I begin with a few words explaining the term 'outcomes- based education' as understood in this study and gratitude for taking part.	Rationale for asking this question	Research Question this helps answer
1. Could you begin by telling me your name, where you work and outlining your teaching role in this institution?	This biographical question will ease us into the interview and give valuable contextual information.	2
2. How would you describe the course you teach?	This question, apart from giving me basic information, may also reveal the teacher's feelings of emphasis: what she feels is most important in her work, the part of her work that she values. Also, how long one has been teaching may impact one's attitude to OBE. When I compare answers to this question I might find a correlation between length of service and engagement with OBE.	4
3. And your media production work with the students, what does that consist of?	Again this gives context. The research is targeting screen industry lecturers but each course teaches this to different levels which in itself might impact on the results. This is a follow-on question which delves deeper into the detail of the practice element of the teacher's work. This is interesting because it reveals the	4

emphasis of the applied component. I am interested in how OBE services the higher order skills and here I might find out to what extent the teacher is interested in fostering these skills or whether the teacher is more interested in technical skill being developed.

4. What would you call the goals of your work with the students?	This question unveils what teachers regard as the core element of their work reveals and what their philosophy is. If they want the student to be technically proficient this is very different to wanting them to create narratives or behave democratically through their work. This question might uncover underpinnings that the teacher is unaware of. This may correlate with other views that show a certain attitude to OBE. Technicists tend to like and embrace OBE.	4
5. What skills are you trying to develop in your students, be they practical industry skills or the kind of 'thinking' skills that students can use throughout their careers?	This question is asked to elicit the motivations of the teacher. It will reveal what the teacher values in media education; whether they have the EU project at their heart (to help the student find a job) or whether there are more Humboltian ideals at play (develop good, thinking citizens). Perhaps both goals will apply. I deliberately ask for the singular 'goal' so that the teacher can choose what they feel is top of the hierarchy of goals with their work.	4
6. Can you tell me about your career in HE to date?	This is part of a series of questions aimed at teasing out the possible role of the educator's previous career/life in the formation of her attitude towards and the use of OBE in her work. It is a context-giver so that we are aware of	2

	what the teacher teaches and to what level of responsibility. This might reveal something in the results such as teachers who are longer in academic life are more predisposed to the OBE culture due to their exposure to it. It would be very interesting to find out that previous lives impact on how we view OBE. This is about our values, how and where we have been formed in our stances.	
7. How would you characterise the college you teach in? What kind of a HE institution is it? Do you feel aligned with its mission?	Teachers usually have a good sense of the place they work in and the culture of the institution. They are very well placed to disseminate this information. It is important to see if teachers from particular cultures are more interested in OBE and this might be a way of revealing this. Often educators are very astute at characterising the pervading personality of their own institution which may reveal something of the underlying power of these sites of HE to promote or discard OBE. Even if a lecturer doesn't get this completely right perhaps it is the teacher's perception of what the HEI stands for is what is important. If the teacher feels that the culture is one that promotes the instrumentalist position congruent with OBE that might influence their stance on OBE. The teacher's relationship with the HEI is also important. Happy faculty may adopt the mores of the employer more readily than the disgruntled.	3
8. Could we retreat a bit to talk about your background, your work before coming into the academy? Was there an	This question is of great interest to me as I, like many media educators, have had a career in industry prior to joining the academy. I feel that this has had an	2

outcomes-based experience for you in that world?	impact on my view of OBE. The culture of the media industries is very different to education. Education is much 'managed' and this might be an issue for those that were used to a freer flowing atmosphere. Might this duality of experience affect how the teacher sees OBE which is so technicist in its procedures? Conversely if your whole career is in education you might not question OBE but regard it as a legitimate function of management. This is one of the key answers that will be compared to the contributors' views on OBE. Is there a correlation between the lecturers' pre-academy experience and his/her adoption of OBE?	
9. How would you characterise the college you teach in? What kind of a HE institution is it? Do you feel aligned with its mission?	Teachers usually have a good sense of the place they work in and the culture of the institution. They are very well placed to disseminate this information. It is important to see if teachers from particular cultures are more interested in OBE and this might be a way of revealing this. Often educators are very astute at characterising the pervading personality of their own institution which may reveal something of the underlying power of these sites of HE to promote or discard OBE. Even if a lecturer doesn't get this completely right perhaps it is the teacher's perception of what the HEI stands for is what is important. If the teacher feels that the culture is one that promotes the instrumentalist position congruent with OBE that might influence their stance on OBE. The teacher's relationship with the HEI is also important. Happy faculty may adopt the mores of the employer more readily than the disgruntled.	3

10. How would you characterise yourself : Do you see yourself as a teacher or a media professional? Are there any inherent tensions between the two jobs/careers? Would you consider going back to industry?	This will tell me a lot about how the educator leans in terms of seeing herself as an industry person or as a teacher and whether this shows a trend in any direction when compared to the answers given to direct questions about attitudes and engagement with learning outcomes. It would be fascinating to see if those with an industry background show a proclivity towards or against OBE instruments. I am always trying to see if the teachers' practice is related to their previous working life.	2
11. I am interested to know more about LOs in your teaching and ways of viewing learning. How familiar are you with this approach to learning?	I haven't yet explored what the lecturer understands by OBE. Here I am looking to see if the educator has an awareness of the back story of learning outcomes. Do they have any sense of the epistemology of OBE or its provenance? And does an awareness or lack of awareness impact on their view or use of learning outcomes. If one has engaged with the culture of OBE since the 2000s as more experienced faculty have there may be a greater understanding of what OBE is trying to achieve, or there may just be acceptance. 'This is the way things are'. It is hard to predict what the outcome of this. Regarding the institutional attitude to OBE, this might have a powerful influence on the teacher. Even if you hold OBE in low esteem you may well be forced to work with it if your employer insists on it. An interesting conflict may arise here for some. I will have characterised OBE at the beginning of the conversation but it would be valuable to know if the teacher has	2 + 3

	thought much about OBE. If they haven't they are unlikely to have a stance either way. This might reveal OBE as lacking importance in the lecturer's working life.	
12. To what level do you engage with learning outcomes, from the syllabus document to learning outcomes in the form of assessment criteria?	This question will answer research question 5 and link directly back to the substance of the title, which looks at educators' engagement with LOs.	1 + 5
13. What drives this engagement or lack of engagement?	This is a follow-on from the previous question but looking at the deeper issues which affect the educators' engagement with OBE. I'm not sure what the outcome of this may be but it may throw up institutional issues.	1 + 5
14. What is the profile of learning outcomes including criteria driven assessment in your institution?	Regarding the institutional attitude to OBE, this might have a powerful influence on the teacher. Even if you hold OBE in low esteem you may well be forced to work with it if your employer insists on it. An interesting conflict may arise here for some. The teacher can give an insider view of how important OBE is in their HEI. This would be an insight into the culture of the institution and give us an opportunity to investigate whether participants are influenced by the culture of their own working environment.	3
15. What is your opinion of the outcomes based approach as you understand it?	I thought I might ask this as a straight question. Perhaps it's too late to ask it here and perhaps this question has been answered already, but I feel I have skirted the issue and may need to ask a	1

direct question at some time.

16. What are the strengths and limitations of using the outcomes approach to assess media education students?	I need to be mindful of the fact that outcomes-based education has been adopted and verified by eminent educationalist and that it has a place in tertiary education. This question will help me understand the place of OBE in media education by those who use the model. Certainly, the outcomes model is helpful when assessing the part of media education that most resembles training. This could be verified here.	1 +2 + 3
17. There have been criticisms that OBE does not promote the development of higher order skills like critical thinking, autonomy and creativity. Given that you teach creative media, how does the current culture of learning outcomes, in your experience, impact on student creativity, say, for example, when criteria are use to set and evaluate projects?	I don't know what this question will reveal. I'm very interested in the assessment of creativity and would like this study to shed light on what teachers feel about OBE and its suitability for promoting creativity. Part of the study should look at the strongest proposition against OBE, namely that it does not support higher order thinking especially when used to assess. This question leans on the work of Mantz Yorke.	1 + 2 + 5
18. What is your opinion of the way learning outcomes are written, specifically the language used? What, if any, is the impact of the language used to describe outcomes?	Another criticism identified in the literature is how LOs are written in 'corporate-speak'. This has driven the arts community away from OBE to some extent. When I read this criticism it seemed to embody the essence of what made me feel alienated from OBE. I wonder do other media educators feel the same. I might, when writing my recommendations, suggest that LOs might be made more relevant to media education if LOs are written in the vernacular of the field in which they are used. Currently LOs are written in the	1+ 2 + 5

	arcane language of managerialism rather than a lexicon appropriate to the discipline being described.	224
19. How relevant is outcomes-based education to media practice education?	This is a last over arching question that makes the interviewee think deeply about the concept of 'relevance'. OBE may be relevant, meaning appropriate or to the purpose of media education but not essential to media education. Or it may be viewed as relevant because of its enhanced role over the last decade, but not *material* to a successful media practice education.	**1**

Vignette Material

(Compiled from teacher interviews)

'I mean from a teaching standpoint and what you expect of the learner, hmm, from the employer side of it to look in and it's a nice concise document for them to say 'well we're thinking of taking this guy on or girl on, they should have competence in this.'

▪▪

'It encourages the minimum type of behaviour'.

▪▪

'They are king of the castle. They're spoon-fed because it's, pardon my French, it's ass-covering…that's what it is. It's learning outcomes; this is what they're supposed to know. They know it: boom!

'There is too much emphasis on them.'

▪▪

'But the media degrees then usually when they're first launched we usually don't have the expertise in house, so I find they're badly written because they're written by someone who doesn't really know what the hell media studies is and then there's usually a second review by the people they've hired in at the point…'

<u>and</u>

'The learning outcomes for this course some of them, some of the learning outcomes for the course that I'm teaching here have been drawn up by people who haven't worked in the industry and so I find them quite irrelevant or quite basic, you know, I mean I know that I can get the students to a higher level and so I'm not going to be restricted by them.

▪▪

'They are guidelines. You've got to follow them … but there's, especially with a creative business like we're in, hmm, you know, free rein, there has to be that'.

▪▪

'You can't teach initiative. There is no learning outcome for that.'

'I think they offer great quality assurance because they give you that sense of; yes those outcomes have been assessed so yes I'm confident that the learner has achieved them.'

∎∎∎

'At the end of the day it is a business. Bums on seats, you know fees, and parents want answers.'

∎∎∎

'It has to be (visually and orally appealing) otherwise it's not going to sell or it's not going to be successful and we just cut to brass tacks. We just, we've no time for this jargonistic world (of LOs). It annoys me frankly.'

∎∎∎

'I don't put all that much emphasis on learning outcomes myself. I tick the boxes for the sake of the externals and for the sake of covering myself but if I want to teach them critical thinking which I think is important then I'll teach them that.'

∎∎∎

'I think they are less relevant for our business, in a media context, to tell you the truth. You can't write them as efficiently for this as you can for accountancy.'

∎∎∎

'I find them an important anchor.'

∎∎∎

'I find the learning outcomes more useful than the content, less prescriptive.'

'So if you write them correctly QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) will give you a thumbs up and go; 'that's it, you've hit the nail on the head.' The LOs match up with the assessment, well done. Okay. You can go and teach that and then we're gone and you can do whatever you want after that.'

▪▪

'It's not particularly fair if you are getting the students to submit something but they don't know what the rules are.'

▪▪

'You know I just have to use these words but I do understand that there needs to be a framework there that we work to and I do understand the difference and different levels that you are more, you know, at a higher level there's more of the critical analysis and at lower level there's more of the retention of information.'

▪▪

'Yeah I check off the learning outcomes, hmm, yeah as a defense. I feel like I'm covering myself somehow although it will be interesting when the externals come in January that I've ignored the ones (28:59) completely. [Laughs]. I haven't mentioned that to anyone yet. [Laughs].'

Appendix ix

Open coding using NVivo	Sources	References
Authorship	15	54
Language	17	51
Managerialism	15	48
Opinion	16	46
Alignment	10	42
Engagement	14	39
Resistance	13	38
Education	17	34
Mission	14	33
technicism	11	32
Flexibility	13	31
Creativity	14	31
Visibility	12	30
Training	11	27
Threshold issue	10	24
Profile of Learning Outcomes	13	23
External audiences	8	23
Level	8	21
Goals	9	21
Assessment	11	21
Strategic use of Learning Outcomes	9	21
Structure	12	20
Quality	10	19
IoT, University	8	18
Retro-fit	8	17
Best practice	9	16

Professional identity	8	12
Customers	6	12
Defence	8	11
Clarity	7	10
Standarisation	5	10
Theory, Practice	4	9
Democracy	6	8
Graduate attributes	4	7
'It encourages the minimum level'	4	6
Higher order, transferable skills	5	6
'I want them to create'	4	5
Conniseurship	4	5
'Ass-covering'	5	5
'useful for external probes'	3	4
'Can't teach initiative'	4	4
'It's a business, bums on seats'	2	4
'Invisible'	4	4
'I tick the boxes'	2	2
objectives, aims	2	2
'Free rein'	2	2
'Jargonistic world'	2	2
'more useful than content'	1	1

Appendix x

Developing themes in NVivo	Sources	References
Theme 1- LO design	17	169
Alignment	10	42
Flexibility	13	31
Language	17	51
Authorship	15	54
'Jargonistic world'	2	2
Level	8	21
Threshold issue	10	24
'It encourages the minimum level'	4	6
Theme 2- Lecturer experience	17	217
Customers	6	12
Defence	8	11
'Ass-covering'	5	5
Engagement	14	39
'Free rein'	2	2
'It encourages the minimum level'	4	6
Language	17	51
Lecturers- individual aspects	0	0
Goals	9	21
Professional identity	8	12
Resistance	13	38
Retro-fitting	8	17
Strategic use of Learning Outcomes	9	21
Structure	12	20
Theme 3- Student stakeholder	14	44
'Invisible'	4	4

Standarisation	5	10
Visibility	12	30
Theme 4- Neo-liberalism	17	145
Customers	6	12
Defence	8	11
Democracy	6	8
'I tick the boxes'	2	2
'It's a business, bums on seats'	2	4
Managerialism	15	47
Quality	10	19
Standarisation	5	10
technicism	11	32