

JANE MULDERIG

7. USING KEYWORDS ANALYSIS IN CDA: EVOLVING DISCOURSES OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY IN EDUCATION

This chapter explores changes in educational discourse in the United Kingdom during three decades of crisis and radical change in British capitalism.¹ Combining critical discourse analysis with corpus linguistic tools, it examines a corpus of seventeen White Papers spanning five Prime Ministers from Edward Heath to Tony Blair who, between them, led four alternating periods of Conservative and Labour rule. By linking social theory with corpus linguistic ‘keywords’ tools, the analysis identifies three successive educational policy concerns: a technocratic focus on educational outputs under Thatcher’s neo-liberal government; a visionary discourse of competitiveness under Major’s caretaker government; and a strategic policy aimed at building an internationally competitive, skills-based, economy under Blair’s New Labour Government. As well as discussing the implications of these textual findings for education’s role in economic policy, the chapter notes the contribution of this methodology to a systematic interdisciplinary investigation of public discourse.

The dominant view that underpins recent social and economic strategies in advanced capitalist economies is that we now live in the ‘age of human capital’ – in which the wealth of nations and success of individuals depend upon the ‘imagination, creativity, skills and talents of all our people’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2003: 2). At the heart of the post-industrial economy is the ‘knowledge worker’ because growth now depends increasingly on the production and application of knowledge (Bell, 1973; Castells, 1998). This shift in primacy from physical to intellectual labour is linked to an increase in the perceived importance of education: ‘not only is education seen to hold the key to a competitive economy but it is also seen to be the foundation of social justice and social cohesion’ (Brown and Lauder, 2006). In effect, investment in learning is now seen as a key political mechanism for achieving economic growth and social cohesion. This growing stress on ‘productive social policy’ is especially clear in joint policy strategies developed at the European level, where Europe’s economic competitiveness is closely tied to a (lifelong) learning and entrepreneurial vision of citizenship (Dale and Robertson, 2006). In particular, the Lisbon Agenda (2000) set a clear ambition for the European Union to become, by 2010, ‘the most dynamic, competitive, knowledge-based economy in the world, with sustainable growth, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion’. Importantly, this is an economic vision played out on a global scale with the aim of defending Europe’s

competitiveness. Indeed, based on these mutually reinforcing economic imaginaries², competitiveness acquires the status of a ‘master discourse’ (Dale and Robertson, 2006: 24). At the heart of the European strategy for competitiveness is the lifelong learning citizen, whose responsibility is to safeguard her future ‘employability’ through the accumulation of skills (Brine, 2006). This chapter critically examines how this overarching strategy for building a competitive, skills-based, knowledge economy and learning society has been changed over 30 years of UK education policy discourse.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: EDUCATION POLICY IN BRITAIN AND BEYOND

The strategy of the ‘learning society’ can be related to the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist accumulation regime and related changes in the welfare state³ (Jessop, 1992, 2002; Hay, 1996, 1999). The growing crisis in the UK economy in the early to mid-1970s made it harder for the British welfare state to provide adequate welfare services and prompted calls for significant change in the economic and social policies of the post-war Keynesian welfare state. Particularly important were demands for privatisation and marketisation and welfare retrenchment. In education, this period saw structural and ideological pressures to align education more closely with its redefined economic function. Indeed, the ‘vocabularies of motives’ (the discourses that articulate the goals and values of education) were changed, redefining the nature and purposes of education (Dale 1989). This discursive shift prepared the way for further ‘modernisation’ programmes by a reinvented Labour party that put economic competitiveness at the centre of its political agenda. From the late 1970s through to the 1980s there was a substantive shift in schools policy rhetoric towards greater economic responsiveness, and ultimately a new educational settlement marked by the 1988 Education Reform Act (Ainley, 1999; Ball, 1990; Dale, 1989; Tomlinson, 2001; Trowler, 2003). A key theme running through education reforms since this time has been its central function in economic competitiveness, manifested in the proliferation of educational strategies aimed at producing a better skilled workforce, and in an escalating rhetoric about the links between schooling and economic productivity.

These trends in education policy are not limited to Britain. Indeed, a general focus on building a ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘learning society’ is part of a global discourse linking education to economic competitiveness (Ozga and Lingard, 2006). Influential voices behind this emerging policy agenda include international organisations like the OECD, European Round Table and World Bank, all of which stress the centrality of education and training strategies in shaping public policy for a knowledge economy (Stiglitz, 1999). Indeed, recent research has shown growing international convergence in education policy. In the European Union, for example, this takes the form of an overarching strategy to create a ‘European Space for Education’ (Dale and Robertson, 2006) in order to achieve economic as well as social policy goals. In the context of policy convergence and services trading (for example under GATS), education has become a powerful tool in the spread and

normalisation of neoliberal politico-economic strategies on a global scale. A common theme here is the inexorability of globalisation, presented as an abstract challenge to be met rather than as agent-driven processes of capitalist development. Policies are represented as simply meeting contemporary challenges, thus serving general interests, rather than as contributing to capitalism's ongoing globalised construction, and thus serving particular interests.

Alongside the emergence of these shared policy agendas, legitimated in terms of an insistent 'call to competitiveness', there is an attenuation of the ideological cleavages around which democratic debate might occur. In a 'crisis of democracy' (Castells, 2000), a pragmatic politics of 'what works' is legitimated in terms of 'hollowed out' values of efficiency, excellence, entrepreneurship and measurable outcomes (Ozga and Lingard, 2006). This chapter also explores this aspect of education policy along with the textual strategies that legitimate this instrumental approach.

DATA AND METHODS

This chapter examines the trajectory of the most textually prominent discourses in UK education policy in an historically constant genre, namely, a corpus of eighteen education policy consultation documents (known as 'White Papers') dating from 1972 to 2005 and amounting to around half a million words. For the purposes of comparison, they were grouped into four blocks representing data for the Heath-Callaghan, Major, Thatcher and Blair governments respectively. This corpus was analysed through a combination of critical discourse analysis, with its commitment to sociologically grounded textual analysis, and corpus linguistic computer software tools (Scott, 1997). This approach can reveal patterns of textual prominence in the data (such as collocations of certain words or especially frequent 'keywords'⁴) that are amenable to qualitative analysis. Moreover, because corpus analysis permits critical textual analysis of large bodies of data, historical analyses of the variation, selection, and retention of keywords in political discourses over extended periods can be made.

The tables below show the results of a comparative keyword search across each of the four blocks, identifying discursively prominent and relatively enduring themes in education policy. The analysis excluded those keywords that figure prominently in one phase of policy-making, but then recede again. For example, under Blair in the keywords list for its first publication *Excellence in Schools*, there is a high incidence of managerial terms like *targets*, *effective*, *rais(ing)* (collocating with *standards*, which ranks fourth after *schools*, *school*, *pupils*), *inspection*, *framework*, and *improve*. These patterns suggest a rather more prominent managerial discourse of school improvement for this first policy publication than in the subsequent documents, in which greater attention to economic policy concerns is suggested by terms like *enterprise*, *innovation*, *growth*, *technolog(ies)*, *research*, *flexibility*, and *employability*.

Table 7.1 lists words that entered policy discourse with a high keyness ranking (among the top 50) in a given block and remained key in later periods; and Table 2

lists those keywords that did not remain key. Thus those words listed under Thatcher are key compared with Block A, but not when compared with either of the subsequent periods. Only those keywords that remain key compared with Block A under both Major and Blair are included, in order to indicate words that gained prominence in education policy discourse under Thatcher and remained so. They are listed in order of keyness. While these results do not track in detail the fate of particular words throughout the data set, they do generate an overall picture of the variation, selection and retention of keywords (and thus, potentially, particular discourses) over this thirty-year period. Block A is the baseline for this particular historical comparison; its keywords are not therefore listed. The underlined examples for Major are those keywords that remain key for Blair in some, but not all of the documents.

Table 7.1 Keywords emerging (under B, C, or D) and retained

Thatcher (Block B)	Major (Block C)	Blair (Block D)
Curriculum, Performance, Needs, Standards,	<u>UK</u> , Business(es), Sector, Funding, <u>Quality</u> , <u>Innovation</u> , <u>Investment</u> , <u>Partnership</u> , Opportunities,	We, Support, Young People, Want, Develop, Ensure, Our, National, Achieve, Key, Providers, ICT, Learners, LSC, Programme, Regional

Table 7.2 Keywords dropped

Thatcher (Block B) *recurs and increases in keyness under Blair	Major (Block C)
*Skills, *Employers, *Vocational, Initial, *Qualifications, *Learning, *Strategy, Professional, State, Examinations, Level, Objectives, *Work, *Mathematics	Competitiveness, DTI, Market(s), Private, World, Improve, Chart ⁵ , Firms

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Table 7.2 reveals that several themes introduced under Thatcher disappear during the Major period and then return, more prominently, under Blair. This suggests a ‘renewed interest’ in certain educational themes, some of which are commensurate with an economic view of schooling, which emphasises not only work-related content (*vocational*), but also values credentials (Ainley, 2000) and generic competencies (*qualifications, skills*). The closer link thus forged between the

worlds of schooling and of work is also evident in the increase of *employers* as key social actors in the data.

The keywords for Thatcher indicate a managerialist concern with centralising controls over the outputs of education. In particular, the prominence of *standards* as a keyword (re-adopted under Blair) fits with a ‘narration of a crisis’ in state education that has been associated more generally with this phase of Thatcherism (Hay, 1996). As Trowler (2003) observes, a notable feature of this was blaming the unchecked practices of teachers for falling standards in schools. *Curriculum* similarly fits with preparation for the more radical reforms of the 1988 Education Reform Act. An important aspect of this legislation was the introduction of a National Curriculum, giving unprecedented government control over pedagogical content. This control has not been relinquished since that time, which is perhaps reflected in the retention of *curriculum* as a keyword throughout the corpus. Another keyword retained in subsequent data is *needs*⁶, possibly indicating the shift from a ‘producer-led’ (i.e. teachers) to ‘consumer-led’ model for education (Dale, 1989). I consider the significance of *performance* below.

Under Major we see a proliferation of keywords, although not all survive under Blair. Those that do, construe a broadly economic discourse, suggesting the increasing relevance to education of the economic sector. The increased presence of such keywords is largely explicable because of the preponderance of economic policy content in the Competitiveness White Papers. But we should note that the prominence this construes for business as an educational stakeholder survives under Blair. Similarly, the government’s facilitator role in creating *opportunities* is suggested in the keywords for this period and retained under Blair. By contrast, the high-ranking keyword *competitiveness* and those more explicitly indicating economic policy interests (*DTI*, *private*, *markets*, *firms*) do not survive as keywords beyond this period.

In the findings for Blair the keyness of *we* and *our* confirm the marked personalisation of representational style that is distinctive feature New Labour discourse (Mulderigg, 2006). In this block of the corpus *want* is used to modalise the actions represented for *we*, thereby distancing the government from full commitment to them. Moreover, this verb is also frequently used to manage the actions of others through causative structures like ‘*we want schools to draw up plans...*’. These two functions combine to make *want* a particularly prominent verb in this period. *Achieve* also ranks among the keywords and is most frequently textured with *pupils*, *schools*, and *young people*. This suggests not simply an orientation to progress, but also an increased focus on the actions of individuals and institutions in getting there. In other words, the Thatcherite emphasis on monitoring outputs in the form of *qualifications*, *examinations* and *standards*, has been overlaid⁷ with a more personalised attention to the activities involved in producing them. Among the agents of such activities are *young people* who become a key category of social actor under Blair. This accords with New Labour’s active labour market subordination of education to economic policy, in which this social group (mainly referring to 14 to 19 year olds) represents a crucial object of intervention in blurring the separation between education and work. In the

findings for managed actions, this category of actor was most frequently the object of *ensure*, their activities concerned with acquiring skills and qualifications. Moreover, an earlier study of New Labour education policy discourse (Muldergig 2007) found they are textured most frequently with a discourse of social inclusion, through such processes as *motivate, include, raise expectations, meet individual needs and aspirations, prepare young people to be responsible citizens*, and provided with *opportunities* to engage in work-related activities. New Labour thus interweaves a discourse of social inclusion and labour market participation.

Another important category in the workfare knowledge-based economy is the *learner*, which ranks among the keywords for this period, potentially acting as a substitute social group for the *unemployed* in a lifelong learning society of people actively engaged in work or work preparation (Rose, 1999). I see this as a significant entry in the New Labour keywords lists. The importance of the *learning* agenda was first introduced under Thatcher, where it entered the keywords rankings. The data for Blair ‘rediscover’ this as a keyword, alongside the word *learner*. The choice of this term to represent a potentially diverse group of actors is significant. Van Leeuwen’s seminal ‘social semiotic’ approach to the representation of social action and social actors (1995; 1996) highlights the potential sociocultural significance of the textual patterns by which social actors and actions are represented. Here, the social actor is represented in functional terms by nominalising the verb *learn*. Drawing on Van Leeuwen’s typology, we can characterise *learners* as a ‘deactivating descriptivisation’, whereby the activity is represented as a more or less permanent characteristic of these actors. The potential effect is to legitimate learning activity by giving it the permanence of a category of social actor. Essentially, as a learner, just as with a worker, you are what you do. In turn, this helps socially embed, reify and reproduce the (lifelong?) process of learning. Finally, the acronym *ICT* indicates the prominent role played by information technologies in building a knowledge-based economy (Thrift, 2001), and the keywords *national* and *regional* point to the negotiation and enactment of rescaling processes in contemporary governance (Jessop, 2002; Fairclough and Wodak, this volume).

As stated at the outset, this is a comparative analysis of the keywords for each block. This means that words like *education, schools, teachers* and *training* do not figure in my analysis because they are keywords throughout the entire period. Nevertheless, it is illuminating to compare the top five keywords for each period:

Heath/Callaghan: *Education, Board, Government, Schools, Will*
 Thatcher: *Training, Schools, Teachers, Education, Pupils*
 Major: *Schools, Government, UK, Business, Firms*
 Blair: *Skills, Schools, Will, Learning, We*

In the first period the government and its future policy commitments (extrapolating from the keyness of *will*) with regard to schools is the most prominent representation. The governmental educational apparatus was at this time

called the *Board of Education*, which accounts for the first two keywords. Under Thatcher we see the vocationalist agenda rise to the fore, alongside attention to individual actors in education. Under Major the newly prominent actors are from the economic sector, which would accord with the wide-ranging and broadly economic policy agenda of the two Competitiveness papers. Finally, under Blair, activities are foregrounded both as continual process (lifelong) *learning* and as product *skills*.

In the next sections I highlight particular keywords from the findings in order to periodise prominent ideological themes under each government.

THATCHER: THE DISCOURSE OF *PERFORMANCE*

Those keywords introduced under Thatcher that were subsequently retained accord thematically with the narration of a crisis of standards in education and with the broader ideological and structural reforms of the period. An important aspect of contemporary political diagnosis of educational problems was the perceived need to check teachers' excessive autonomy. Control over professional practice was therefore centralised in what Dale (1989) terms a 'proletarianisation' of teaching, involving an intensified codification and regulation of teachers' working practices. For Ball (1990) this is part of a wider redefinition of the meaning of education's autonomy. He states that under the old (post-war) educational settlement, as embodied in the 1944 Education Act, education was relatively autonomous from the production sphere but has now been subordinated to the logic of commodity circulation, giving rise to a new definition of autonomy for individual schools within the sphere of production. Thus, through inter-school competition for funding and pupils, tighter controls over teaching (or 'delivery') practices, and a more outcome-oriented curriculum, the (economic) functional role of education has penetrated the content and form of schooling. This output-oriented, managerial model for education is moreover discursively enacted and legitimated in the policy discourse, through keywords and their collocative patterns, which help crystallise particular configurations of meaning, redefining the practices and participant relations in education.

I focus here on the keyword *performance*, and its implications for educational practices. Stemming from a management discourse, the keyness of *performance* (compared with, for example, *professional expertise*) suggests an increased concern with the surveillance, control and measurement of others' activities. Its main collocates⁸ are *assessment* (collocating to the right; that is *performance assessment*), *appraisal* (also to the right), and *standards* which, along with the less frequent *measurement*, represents the practice of calibrating and comparing actors' performance. Examples thus include proposals for *systematic arrangements for the appraisal of teacher performance; require LEAs regularly to appraise the performance of their teachers; the Government proposes the following action in relation to teaching quality and pupil performance*. As these examples illustrate, those whose performance is measured are principally pupils

(26 of 60 instances) and teachers (22). In fact, where the latter's own performance is represented, they are explicitly worded as *teachers* only three times.

Thus, when their professional activities are monitored and measured, teachers are rarely represented in a 'personalised' way by reference to the social function they perform (Van Leeuwen, 1996). Far more often they are 'hidden' or represented obliquely through the measurable output of their action (most frequently worded as *professional performance*, or *classroom performance*). That is, following Van Leeuwen (1999), the representational strategy of 'instrumentalisation' represents teachers impersonally through their institutional practices. This representational strategy of removing the (complex and unpredictable) 'human being' element from the process of teaching, simplifying and homogenising this social practice so that it is more amenable to measurement. In short, part of management practice in this phase of education policy is to remove the [+human] element from the social practice to be measured. The dominant pattern in this block reduces *performance* to the measurable outputs of specific actions performed by particular social actors, or, in two cases, to the institution created to audit them (The Assessment of Performance Unit). A single exception is *economic performance*, in the following passage:

the National Economic Development Council pointed to the strong correlation between the greater investment in vocational education and training of our major competitors and their superior economic performance. The report underlines the Government's view that vocational education and training are not marginal activities, but are central to our economic growth and prosperity. (Cm 9482, 1985)

This extract illustrates the vocationalist orthodoxy that became prominent in education policy in the 1980s to deal with rising youth unemployment (the key problem for this policy document). Based upon a rediscovery of human capital theory (Schultz, 1961), it is justified in terms of investing in training now to gain economic dividends later. In the year following this publication, qualifications were rationalised in order that employers would recognise them, by setting up the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. 'NVQ' holders would bring to prospective employers a 'record of achievement' that listed their industry-approved skills and competencies. In turn, this illustrates the close link between a supply side economic strategy underlying policy moves to strengthen the relationship between education and the economy, and the sort of managerialist mode of systemic-institutional organisation pointed to in a discourse of performance. That is, a policy ideology that views education primarily in terms of its material payoffs is premised on the logic of maximisation. Despite acknowledging that 'it is difficult to measure the performance of the school system' (Cm 9469), this entails rendering diverse educational practices amenable to calculation, comparison, and competition as a condition of progress.

This logical complementarity between a particular (supply side) strategy for capital accumulation and a broadly managerial mode of institutional governance is significant for emergent discourses in education policy. Assuming a tendential

correlation between the keyword patterns outlined in the tables above, and the variation, selection and retention of dominant discourses in this social context, a notable feature of the results here is that the organisational discourse (very broadly, performance management) emerges before the macro economic discourse (very broadly, a supply-side strategy for economic growth articulated in the Major data).

A possible explanation for this is that, as argued earlier, Thatcherism was able to narrate a crisis of the state that required radical change in how the internal organisation of the state and its articulation with the economy. Thus, having diagnosed the economic crisis of the mid-70s partly in terms of problems arising from the rigid bureau-professional model of state organisation, an opening was created for a new mode of public management inspired by commercial practices. The Thatcherite reforms therefore centrally involve the re-organisation and thus re-conceptualisation of public sector working practices and social roles. In the field of education, the realignment of educational inputs and economic outputs requires a considerable and unprecedented external scrutiny into practices at the expense of traditional professional autonomy in the classroom (Dale, 1989). In short, if education is to be subordinated to economic imperatives, *performance* is critical.

Finally, several Thatcherite keywords disappear under Major and reappear under Blair. These broadly concern educational discourse but indicate significant changes in areas of governmental concern. The prominence of *curriculum* is not surprising when the government began to take unprecedented interest in educational content (most notably with the establishment of a National Curriculum). Similarly, those keywords 'rediscovered' under Blair indicate a closer policy concern with the core message systems of schooling (Bernstein, 2000): curriculum (*curriculum*, *Mathematics* - later shortened to *maths* under Blair), assessment (*qualifications*), and pedagogy, which is increasingly subjected to a strategic and measurable competence model (*skills*, *strategy*, *competence*, *learning*) (Ainley, 1999; Bernstein, 2000; Trowler, 2003).

MAJOR: THE DISCOURSE OF *COMPETITIVENESS*

The most striking feature of the Major data is the term *competitiveness*.⁹ Used 254 times, this ranks 8 among the keywords. An example appears in the Foreword of Cm 3300, where the Prime Minister asserts:

Competitiveness is not just a challenge for Government and for business. It requires a change in behaviour by all of us; an openness to new ideas and, above all, a willingness to compare ourselves with the best in the world; to face up to how well we are doing and, if the answer is not favourable, to do something about it.

The first sentence frames the *competitiveness* agenda through an existential claim: *competitiveness* is the goal of activities in both the state and the market. This formulation exploits the positive semantic prosody (or connotations) of the word *challenge* in the textual context of an economic discourse. Indeed, for the first time in the corpus, it is used sufficiently frequently in this document to rank among the

top 100 keywords. Of course, the presence of an economic discourse in the Foreword is not in itself remarkable in the case of a White Paper whose remit is a set of cross-departmental strategies for achieving economic growth¹⁰. Of particular interest, however, is the preferred model of economic growth and its implications for the model of governance (and hence government) and for education's role in society.

While this example does not fully specify the economic imaginary underpinning policy, it does indicate a particular neoliberal vision of late twentieth century society, of an uncertain, constantly changing and competitive world, which frames arguments about education policy. This world is, of course, created through the activities of certain powerful economic and political actors. In the opening sentence, however, a nominalisation serves to distil the diverse, agent-driven processes and social relations of the global trading practices of contemporary capitalism into the abstract condition *competitiveness*. Through a particular grammatical process of identification, this then becomes a goal to be attained: in systemic functional terms, *competitiveness* is the Token and *challenge* the Value in this relational process. Thus textured in a relation of equivalence with *challenge*, conditions favourable to capitalist competition acquire a self-propagating hortatory quality. This is essentially a discursive process of hegemonic generalisation, whereby responsibility for fostering social conditions conducive to continued accumulation in the current phase of capitalism is spread to *all of us*, in the form of a set of imperatives - to reinvent ourselves as flexible and competitive beings.

An Emergent Economic Discourse

This vision of a state and society actively adjusting to the ephemeral and unstable phenomena of contemporary capitalism is partly informed by theoretical and policy paradigms that rest on the importance of international economic competitiveness (see Jessop, this volume). Of course, one cannot simply 'read off' economic theory from government policy discourse; its interdiscursive resources are far more diverse (Lemke, 1995), and subject to transformation when recontextualised as policy. Nevertheless, the social weight carried by 'serious' theoretical treatments of a 'new economy' and their articulation of strategies oriented towards endogenous growth, helped bring that economy into being; partly by securing responsive strategic policy action on the part of Western governments (Thrift, 2001). Indeed, as part of the 'cultural circuit of capital', academic producers of economic knowledge helps not only reinforce the legitimacy of new economic practices through their social capital but also expand the interdiscursive resources of government policy (cf. Thrift, 2001).

By the early 1990s a series of reports from governments and inter-governmental organisations like the EC and OECD¹¹ contributed to the effort to conceptually define and operationalise the 'new economy' as a basis for developing new policies, policy-making practices, and modes of governance for this economy. These organisations' role in defining a new paradigm of governance and policy-making not only (re)produces a new economic and social regime, but in turn gives

them a continued legitimacy as they set global strategies to be implemented by national governments. These strategies are heavily informed by the logic and needs of business, as articulated by the producers of business knowledge - whether academic or commercial (an increasingly blurred distinction) - and influential stakeholders like the members of the famously secretive and very influential European Round Table (Dale, 2005)¹² or the Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum (termed by some the 'Parliament of Managers'¹³).

The Lisbon Agenda, quoted above, is a telling illustration of this and the priority it attributes to the ever-present threat from competitors, creating the need for constant newness, fluidity and dynamism in the new global economy. Thus the Lisbon Agenda with its use of 'economy' in the singular form, also points to the macro-economic goal of creating a cohesive pan-European economic block, capable of competing with globally powerful economies. In order to achieve such cohesion, of course, extensive policy harmonisation across member states becomes necessary. Moreover, given the naturalised landscape of global competition among macro-regional economies, this serves to justify supra-national layers of governance.

Policy Origins: the European Union

Through structural reforms and expansion of its policy-making capacities, the EC thus sets strategic targets for member states, and creates task forces to benchmark progress towards them. This is part of a more general economic and political challenge to the formal sovereignty and autonomy of national states and is associated with the rise of significant supra- and trans-national levels of decision-making. Thus, in articulating and policing collective strategic goals for different nation states, inter-governmental organisations not only legitimate managerial models of organisation in the context of an emergent KBE, but also replicate them in their modes of governance, helping to secure their spread to national governments and public institutions.

At the level of EC policy making, competitiveness has been a key theme running through policy discourses (Muntigl et al., 2000) as part of a strategy to construct a specifically European response to globalisation (Weiss and Wodak, 2000). An important frontrunner in this policy strategy was the 1993 European Commission White Paper 'Growth, Competitiveness, Employment', which emphasised the role of education in an active labour market policy, and inaugurated a series of EC summits designed to refine the indicators and targets of competitiveness for various nation states to adopt. Wodak and Van Leeuwen observe that 'the White Paper represented the mixture of globalisation, competitiveness, and flexibility discourse typical of the neoliberal commonsense economic theories of the early 1990s' (2002: 347). These policy processes, with their dominant discourses, help frame policy and legislation at the European level, as well as influencing member states' policies. In this respect, we can trace the origins of the Major government's Competitiveness policy 'trilogy' in the mid-90s to the policy-making processes of the European Commission. However, European

policies are not simply ‘moved’ or ‘translated’ to national contexts. Rather, they are recontextualised and thus shaped in distinctive ways to fit the widely different sociohistorical contexts of individual nation states (e.g., Wodak and Van Leeuwen, 2002; Fairclough and Wodak, this volume). A question in the analysis thus becomes how competitiveness is recontextualised in the UK policy data.

HOW IT IS REPRESENTED: IN SEARCH OF A MEANING

The following (necessarily schematic) account of how competitiveness has been recontextualised in UK policy draws on the cluster patterns and concordance findings for the 254 instances of *competitiveness* in the data for Major. Unsurprisingly, 253 of these occur in the two Competitiveness White Papers issued in 1995 and 1996. However, as early as 1992 the single example of this term illustrates its supply-side emphasis on education: *education provides our future work-force and the foundation for the economic development and competitiveness of this country* (Cm 2021). So education is construed as a vital factor in competitiveness. Less clear, however, is what competitiveness entails. The term collocates with *is* just eleven times in the data, in most cases texturing an evaluative statement about the importance of competitiveness rather than an explicit definition. Indeed, we are told more often what it is not: *competitiveness is not about driving down living standards* and in a statement legitimating it by a neoliberal discourse that assigns inexorable agency to a reified ‘global economy’, *competitiveness is not imposed by government, but by changes in the world economy*. Indeed, the patterns by which *competitiveness* is textured in the data indicate its polyvalence.

The single most frequent pattern of usage, in 91 cases, is where the word *competitiveness* forms part of a nominal group like the title of the White Paper (this term collocates 30 times), a section heading (for example ‘*Competitiveness: creating the enterprise centre of Europe*’) or some other title like the *Competitiveness Challenge* or *Competitiveness Fund*. In the remaining examples, where *competitiveness* forms part of a proposition, its most frequent collocates in L1 position¹⁴ are *improv(ing)*, *national*, *its* and *their* (the last two refer most frequently to the UK and businesses respectively).

The last three collocates suggest this is pre-eminently an economic strategy (assuming that references to ‘national/UK’ competitiveness mean its *economic* competitiveness), although other examples refer to the *Government’s competitiveness*, as well as the competitiveness of *the legal service sector* and *the public sector*. Indeed, this is worded explicitly: *competitiveness is not just a matter for the private sector*, the presupposition here indicating that the concept originates in the economic sphere. Elsewhere the government contradicts itself when it comes to determining which social actors should be concerned with this strategy. Despite its assertion that *competitiveness is not just a challenge for Government and for business*, when it comes to construing agency over this phenomenon, we have: *improving competitiveness is largely a matter for business and for individuals*.

In three cases competitiveness is itself the agent of actions, its verbal collocates the relatively coercive (and inexorable) *require*. Thus *Competitiveness also requires firms to be alert to the interests of their employees, consumers and suppliers; requires continuous change to improve performance across a range of factors; and requires continuous improvement in education*. These examples also illustrate the range of responses 'required' by competitiveness, including very abstract 'improvement' in different activities, and thereby implicitly evaluating *competitiveness* as a good thing because it is seen to generate 'improvement' in different areas. In these examples so far we have seen the term construed as a quality to be improved and an agent of processes. It is also itself a process: *the competitiveness process continues*. Indeed, its second most frequent R1 collocate is the similarly processual term '*project*'. Along with verbal collocates like *improve*, *help* and *enhance*, this helps represent *competitiveness* as an unfinished project of continual improvement. Similarly, continuous change and innovation are among the factors construed as *a key component of competitiveness*.

In fact, many of the examples (38) concern the factors determining innovation, their scope and variety, suggesting that *competitiveness* as a political project largely concerns discovering exactly how to measure it and achieve it. Possible factors range from organisational and monetary factors (*an effective public sector, value for money, effectiveness, macroeconomic stability, performance management*, and rather at odds with these output-oriented managerial models, *innovation, continuous change*) to investment - human capital or otherwise - (*Higher Education research, government departmental research, education, training and skills, science, engineering and technology, transport infrastructure*). The references to knowledge and skills-based investment here suggest strategies oriented towards a knowledge- and ICT-based economic imaginary, although it is not explicitly worded thus¹⁵. The tension between neoliberal deregulation and supply-side intervention is apparent in the following example: *the international provision of adequate intellectual property protection is extremely important to competitiveness, but difficult to enforce*, thus anticipating a key challenge in regulating a knowledge-based global economy. Rather tautologically, *competition* is also represented as a factor in *competitiveness*. The UK recontextualisation of *competitiveness* is, in places, also explicitly neoliberal in its calls for *free and open markets* and assertion that *deregulation is vital to competitiveness*.

The high modal value encoded in the adjective *vital* illustrates a feature running through the representations of *competitiveness*, namely its urgency and necessity. In turn, this is legitimated on the basis of the values it is seen to bring. The hortatory aspect of *competitiveness* is partly conveyed by representing it as a *challenge*, its most frequent R1 collocate, as well as through modality (*must*) and evaluative language (in which competitiveness is *top of our agenda* and strategies identified for achieving it are *vital, essential, important*). The necessity of this wide-ranging strategic project and goal is construed on the basis of the benefits it is seen to bring, for example: *improving competitiveness is central to raising the underlying rate of growth of the economy and enhancing living standards*.

Competitiveness is similarly conjoined with a range of mostly economic benefits: *employment, value for money, develop workforce skills, export performance, and quality of life*. The wide range of collocative patterns for *competitiveness* in the data points not only to its incompleteness as a strategy, but also its capacity to represent itself as a self-propagatory universal good. This is significant because of the positive evaluation it triggers for strategies designed to achieve it. Indeed, such positive effects arising from *competitiveness* are made explicit in this extract: *Competitiveness must remain a priority for all of us. Success will give us the higher standard of living we seek*.

Finally, the UK's neoliberal recontextualisation of *competitiveness* is also paradoxically anti-EU. Citing the report of the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, it points to the *damaging effect on competitiveness of the cumulative burden of European legislation*. This illustrates the neoliberal logic underlying the project of building a (European) economy capable of competing globally: the UK policy represents itself as being in competition not only globally but also with (EU) member states (to achieve the best results, the best qualified workforce, lowest unemployment rates and so on). As we have seen, this is encouraged by the EC, which acts as the overseer, encouraging member states to compare themselves with each other. It thus sets targets to be achieved and benchmarks progress, while ensuring conformity to common standards. The idea is to use competition within Europe to drive up EU standards and thus enhance its competitiveness as an economic bloc. While such constant manoeuvring for competitive advantage *over* one's fellow member states necessarily produces losers and thus social divisions, the neoliberal argument would be that these are temporary; in the long run the bloc's international competitiveness would lift the bloc as whole. I would suggest that a possible effect of this is to create (or rather exacerbate) social inequalities on a more global scale.

To summarise, under Major we see an emergent discourse of *competitiveness* as a 'catch-all' and 'cure-all' concept, whose definition and measurement is an ongoing project. At its heart is the goal of economic growth.

BLAIR: THE DISCOURSE OF *SKILLS*

The data for Major indicate a preoccupation with economic goals. Under Blair, strategies for achieving them begin to be formulated in the shape of particular activities and dispositions. Thus in the representation of managed actions, we saw some evidence of 'filling in' the hollowed out state through the creation of a wide range of networks and institutions of joined up governance, and the allocation to them of specific responsibilities for building the new skills and technology based economy. Similarly, where young people were enjoined to participate and be included, they were primarily represented as engaged in the acquisition of vocational skills. As illustrated in the table above, *skills* first made an appearance as a keyword in policy under Thatcher¹⁶, where it ranked 17 (used 163 times, 0.2% of the total word count). Its most frequent collocates are *occupational, knowledge and, and professional*, suggesting skills are functionally specific and distinct from

knowledge. Moreover, their most frequent verbal collocate *acquire* expresses a relation of possession. In the data for Major there are 135 instances of *skills*, although this does not rank as a keyword in this period and represents a much smaller percentage of the total word count (0.09%). Where it is used, it is textured with a much more managerial discourse, collocating with (L1) *management* and (R1) *audit*.

SKILLS AS FUNCTIONAL COMMODITIES

It was observed above that several keywords introduced under Thatcher decline in textual prominence under Major and are then ‘rediscovered’ under Blair, where their keyness also increases. This is most true of *skills* whose usage increases nine-fold to 1473, becoming the highest-ranking keyword, textured in various ways that help construct an instrumental and commodified view of learning. For example many of its collocates help represent skills in terms of their functional utility. This applies to a number of different domains, ranging from quite specific areas of knowledge (*literacy, numeracy, e-skills, for business*) to their function in socialisation (*skills for life, adult basic skills*). The most frequent collocates in L1 position indicate an instrumental approach to knowledge-management. Thus *skills*, represented as perishable commodities (*new* pre-modifies *skills* 41 times), are classified in hierarchical, functional and evaluative terms (*basic, level¹⁷, key, foundation, functional, advanced, low, right, generic, particular, practical, effective, transferable, necessary, essential*).

A wide range of social actors is represented as engaged in the process of continual skills-acquisition, especially in the joint publication *21st Century Skills: realising our potential*, whose subtitle ‘Individuals, employers, nation’ indicates the breadth of relevance this document constructs for skills acquisition. In the first publication of the Blair block, *skills* are most frequently used to hierarchise teachers, notably with its introduction of a new *advanced skills teacher* grade. Although they themselves are helped (by government initiatives and heads) to develop their own *teaching, instructional* and *professional* skills, they are also represented as managers of their pupils’ learning. Suggesting a return to more self-directed learning associated with the progressive methods denigrated under the Thatcherite reforms (Trowler, 2003), rather than *teaching* pupils, teachers help their *pupils* to *develop, improve* and *acquire* a range of *skills*.

This represents a pattern throughout the data in which acquiring skills is very much an individualised and instrumental activity. Compared with *learning*, acquiring skills is a process far more amenable to modularisation into discrete and (importantly, in managerial terms) measurable elements. *Skills* can thus be seen as a reification of learning, a description of its output or end product. Whereas *learn* is a process, *skills* is an entity, itself governed by a process of some kind. Moreover, commensurate with a workfare individualisation of responsibility (versus its collectivisation in the welfare state), the accumulation of these skills can be individualised and accumulated in personal portfolios. Learning is embedded in a network of interdependent social relations. Individualism removes it from that

social context, and the commodification of knowledge that is entailed by modularised skills isolates learning even further from its social context and prevents the learner from making the sort of abstract connections that are the key to higher-level understanding (Bernstein, 2000). Throughout the Blair data, the verbal collocates of *skills* underscore this reification of learning, frequently expressing it as the object of improvement (*develop, improve*) or expressing a relation of possession (*invest in deliver, acquire, equip, and give*).

This process has implications for *pupils'* relationship to knowledge, as indicated in the following extract on proposals for the science curriculum: '*This will engage pupils with contemporary scientific issues and focus on their role as users and consumers of science*'. Science is actually a diverse set of practices designed to further our understanding of the world and our relationship with it. Yet here it is being constructed as a commodity to be used or bought. The potential effect of the proposed science curriculum is thus to alienate pupils from the intrinsic value of their own and others' learning, and thereby view others as obstacles or co-entrepreneurs, rather than the means, to their intellectual development.

'Overcoming the Skills Divide': Workfarism¹⁸

Around two-thirds of the entries for *skills* occur in the 2003 White Paper, and represent a wide range of types, including skills for *tourism, logistics, health food management, project management, business, e-skills, tech skills, service skills, and personal skills*. In fact, a supply-side logic pervades the representation of *skills* throughout the period; *employability* occurs 40 times, as well as collocates like *business, workplace, work-related, and vocational*. Among the most frequent (42 times; 27 in L1 position) is *ICT*, a qualifier that reveals assumptions about the infrastructural base of a knowledge economy, and therefore the type of skills most at a premium. Other frequent collocates represent skills that are less technical than dispositional, inflecting this work-preparedness with a managerial flavour through terms like *enterprise* and *leadership*. An important step in the workfare conflation of social justice with an active labour market economic policy is to create the right sort of willing subjects and social identities. The latter two examples suggest the 'ideal' identity construed by New Labour is that of the manager, which would be consistent with its own predominantly managerial governmental identity.

Creating the willing subjects of a workfare regime requires a fundamental change of culture founded on self-reliance, enterprise, and lifelong learning. Social rewards are to be achieved through individual endeavour, and the education system will act as a facilitator by providing a market tailored to individual needs, talents and aspirations (the three nouns most frequently modified by 'individual' in the corpus). Apple (1993) argues that the redefinition of educational equality as guaranteeing individual choice under free market conditions has the effect of individualising not only success but also failure, laying responsibility for it not at the door of social policy, but the individual. Thus when Blair talks of 'social advance and individual endeavour'¹⁹ as the spirit of the post-welfare society, he is

in fact following the creed of Adam Smith, for whom the pursuit of individual self-interest was the surest way to advance the well-being of the entire society. In effect, egoism and responsibility to secure one's own interests are transformed into a social good through a market-based logic.

Education policy forms part of a wider social policy aimed at creating the 'learning society', in which education and training are subsumed under 'learning', which is 'lifelong'. The ongoing accumulation, credentialising and upgrading of skills supports the progressive development of the knowledge economy and its managerial infrastructure. Moreover the textual representation of educational roles and relations in policy, linking success (and by implication, failure) with individual commitment and aspirations, potentially acts as a powerful form of social control. Not only does it establish a practice of lifelong learning and individual adaptability with which to occupy and appease the unemployed, but it constitutes a form of self-regulation in which the individual is responsible for and invests, through learning, in her own success. The coercive force comes not from the government, which is constructed as a facilitator, but from the implicit laws of the market.

Among the social actors highlighted in the lifelong acquisition of skills to secure employability and social cohesion are *employers* and *schools* (who must help others acquire skills), *teachers*, *heads*, *pupils*, *people*, and *students* who must acquire them. However, the most textually prominent are *young people*, who are frequently *encouraged* and *helped* to acquire not only skills, but also the right *attitudes*, *confidence*, *values*, and *motivation*.

Both the functional and socialising roles of education in preparing young people for a skills-based lifelong learning workfare society are seen in the following text:

[education must] meet the needs and aspirations of all young people, so that they are motivated to make a commitment to lifelong learning and to become socially responsible citizens and workers; broaden the skills acquired by all young people to improve their employability, bridge the skills gap identified by employers, and overcome social exclusion.

This statement textures together particular interdependencies and equivalencies: between citizenship and working; between individual responsibility and work; between effort (commitment) and reward (employability and qualifications); between education and the needs of employers; and between social inclusion and education. In effect, this places education at the forefront of constructing the post-welfare society, in which individuals are afforded rights in the shape of education and training, in return for their commitment, effort and responsibility to others.

It also illustrates a shifting view of citizenship forged in practices of consumption, and oriented to what Rose (1999) calls the 'enterprise of the self'. Within this paradigm, education functions as a form of strategic investment in one's own future capital. This is a necessarily commodifying move, and one at odds with education as part of the intellectual commons, wherein the more knowledge is freely shared, the more is produced. Just the opposite is true of an educational market, where the value of a commodity lies in its scarcity, its

unavailability. Viewed thus, widening access in the spirit of social inclusion and recasting education as an investment become tension-riven educational strategies for constructing the inclusive workfare society.

‘FILLING IN?’ A WORD ON INSTITUTIONS

In the analysis of managed actions I observed that the government’s leader role frequently manages actors who are represented in terms of their organisational properties or functional remit. For example middle-tier governmental and non-governmental organisations, partnerships and other more-or-less abstract networks of actors. *Skills* is a term recurrently used in the representation of such institutions. Moreover, the important role of skills is signalled by the name change in 2001 from the Department for Education and Employment (a title inherited from Major), to the Department for Education and Skills. This name change perhaps indicates a strategic policy orientation under Blair that reflects the shift in the government’s commitment from full employment to full employability.

The wide variety of institutions, partnerships and strategies textured with *skills* include: *National Skills Taskforce*, *Basic Skills Agency*, *Skills for Life Programme*, *Learning and Skills Council*, *Skills Action Plans*, *Skills Investment Fund*, *Skills Strategy* (Cm 6476), *Sector Skills Council(s)*, *National Skills Strategy*, *Sector Skills Development Agency*, *Skills for Business Network*, *Skills Alliance*, *The Skills Station Hereford*, *Skills Academies*, *Vocational Skills Centre*, and finally the *Employability Skills Enhancement Team*. I interpret this proliferation of functionally specific managerial tiers as New Labour’s institutional embedding of a skills-based growth strategy. Thus a networked governance model helps facilitate a ‘joined-up’ approach to both (KBE) supply-side investment and social policy strategies teaching individuals the right skills to steer a self-reliant and employable path through the uncertainties of the modern world.

CONCLUSION: FROM PROBLEM TO VISION TO PLAN

The emergence under Thatcher of keywords that became ‘entrenched’ in the subsequent periods can be interpreted in terms of the narration of a crisis in education, prior to the radical restructuring of the late 1980s. A key element of this restructuring programme was an unprecedented centralisation of control over the curriculum, which explains its presence as a keyword. Equally, the narration of a crisis focussed principally on fears about falling standards and teachers’ performance. Based on these contextual factors the keywords findings suggest there was a managerial discourse emphasising the ‘here and now’ of education, what’s wrong with current practices, and their lack of accountability. In effect, this ideological groundwork helped to secure consent for later radical changes and a significant centralisation of power.

Under Major a more future-oriented economic discourse was articulated around the keyword *competitiveness*, albeit in very vague and polyvalent terms. The prominence of this keyword in the data for Major is interpreted in terms of the

UK recontextualisation of a European strategic policy response to globalisation (Wodak and Van Leeuwen, 2002)²⁰. In the data its necessity, widespread relevance, and universal benefits are frequently represented, although exactly how to achieve it is unclear. Indeed, a notable feature of the 'project' of *competitiveness* appears to be the strategic use of managerial instruments in an attempt to define its determining factors.

The Blair data indicate that the answer to the question is *skills*. The relevant policy texts take up the supply-side agenda set by Major and articulate it around the keyword *skills*. This skills-based active labour market discourse is equally future-oriented, but has more operational specificity. In essence, it enacts competitive strategies. It is institutionally embedded through strategic governance networks and the managerial distribution of responsibilities. This discourse of *skills* also helps operationalise a workfarist regime by representing the acquisition of skills as essential to both economic growth and social inclusion.

Taking the corpus as a whole, then, we can identify a progressive refinement of macro policy strategy. This involves a gradual move from preoccupations under the Thatcher government with the 'here and now' problems of educational governance following a perceived crisis towards a more future oriented neoliberal vision of economic success with the 'macro discourse' of competitiveness under Major. Thus by the early 1990s education's role in securing economic success appears firmly established. The final stage under Blair is its concretisation in a macro policy 'plan': furnish everyone with skills and you kill your economic and social policy birds with one strategic stone.

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Jane Mulderrig
Linguistics and English Language
Lancaster University

NOTES

¹ This doctoral research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council

- ² Following Jessop (2002), ‘imaginaries’ refers to particular understandings of the politico-economic conditions and possibilities of action at a particular historical moment. Cf. Thrift (2001) on the role of dominant and resonant ideas in the ‘cultural circuit of capital’ in shaping economies.
- ³ Mulderrig (2006) provides a fuller discussion of the political economy of education and education policy discourse in late 20th century Britain.
- ⁴ In corpus linguistics, ‘keyness’ refers to the statistical significance of a word’s frequency relative to some norm. It is generated by comparing the wordlist of each policy document with a comparison corpus. In corpus linguistics, ‘keyness’ has primarily statistical, not socio-cultural, significance –the relative keyness of any given word in a corpus measures how much more frequently it occurs than in an ‘average text’. Common grammatical items like prepositions, articles and pronouns are therefore least likely to rank highly for keyness. On the other hand, highly specialised register-specific terms - if used with sufficient frequency - tend to rank highly. These general tendencies are particularly relevant for this study. Later I will show that statistical keyness may have socio-cultural significance too.
- ⁵ This is due to the large number of charts and graphs used in the two Competitiveness White Papers.
- ⁶ My commentary refers to cases where needs is a plural noun rather than a modal auxiliary.
- ⁷ Overlaid, not replaced, since this instrumental orientation is retained (standards, performance, and qualifications).
- ⁸ In corpus linguistics, ‘collocates’ refers to those words that frequently co-occur with a given search-word. They are interesting because of the ‘semantic colouring’ they give to the word in question.
- ⁹ The keyword competitiveness is the highest ranking keyword to drop entirely out of use in the next period (although competitive) is retained. This is a significant concept on two levels. First, strategies for achieving competitiveness are a central element in the new growth theories (Coates, 2000) that are so influential in contemporary policy-making arenas; and, second, achieving competitiveness is the object of three policy consultation documents issued under this government.
- ¹⁰ This is the case for the Competitiveness ‘trilogy’.
- ¹¹ The idea of the competition state was already established in the 1980s through, for example, OECD documents on the importance of structural competitiveness for government policy (Jessop, 2002).
- ¹² Personal communication.
- ¹³ Cited in Thrift (2001).
- ¹⁴ In corpus linguistic terms L1 refers to the word immediately to the left of the search word, R1 to its right. L2 refers to the word to the left of L1 and so on.
- ¹⁵ Although there are three examples of the information society collocating with skills.
- ¹⁶ There are 9 cases of its use in the previous block, where it collocates with knowledge and, or with a qualifier professional, human, practical.
- ¹⁷ Here a further adjective like advanced and basic occupies L2 position.
- ¹⁸ Cm 6476 (2005) The Skills Strategy
- ¹⁹ From Fabian Society Tract ‘Socialism’, cited in Ellison (1997: 53)
- ²⁰ The UK’s position as an Anglo-American advocate of neoliberalism in the EU might suggest that this discourse originates in the UK. But the competitiveness agenda was set in the EU in a White Paper Growth, Competitiveness and Employment, whose publication in 1983 pre-dates these policy documents. Overall, this White Paper ‘represented the mixture of globalisation, competitiveness and flexibility discourse typical of the neoliberal commonsense economic theories of the early 1990s (Wodak and Van Leeuwen, 2002: 347). Of course, it is possible that this White Paper reproduced an Anglo-American economic agenda, either through the influence of the UK (Major’s reputation as a Europhile might indicate particular channels of influence available to the UK government), or through influential neoliberal advocates like the members of the European Round Table.