

Learning to labour: the discursive construction of social actors in New Labour's education policy

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ABSTRACT. This article critically assesses the social identities, relations and practices of participants in education under New Labour. It combines sociological critique of education policy reform and analysis of the discourse representation of *government*, *teachers*, and *pupils* in two policy texts. Education is theoretically positioned in terms of its relationship with the economy and broader state policy. It is postulated that an instrumental rationality underlies education policy discourse, manifested in the pervasive rhetoric and values of the market in the representation of educational participants and practices. This is theorised as an indicator of a general shift towards the commodification of education and the concomitant consumerisation of social actors. Further, it is argued that discourse plays a significant role in constructing and legitimising post-welfare learning policy as a key aspect of the ongoing project of globalization.

Introduction

'Education, education, education'. With this now famous electoral slogan, New Labour placed education at the vanguard of social and political change. Addressing primary education first, most notably with its National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, the government then moved on to secondary education, the subject of the policies examined in this article. In its own words, its mission is "Opening secondary education to a new era of engagement with the worlds of enterprise, higher education and civic responsibility"¹. This article examines the reform proposals set out in two consultation documents from the beginning of New Labour's second term in office. Drawing on recent education policy research, these are theorised in terms of their role in late capitalist social policy. In a study combining corpus analytical tools and critical discourse methods, the representation of key social actors in education was analysed. The findings are discussed in relation to their implications for the identities, roles and relations of social actors in education, the status of knowledge, and the place of education in contemporary social policy. It is argued that the critical analysis of discourse can add to education policy research by uncovering the processes by which educational reforms are both enacted and legitimised.

The texts analysed in this paper are the 2001 White Paper *Schools: Achieving Success*, and the 2002 Green Paper *14-19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards*. They were digitised to form a mini corpus of 58,739 words. I refer to this as the NL (New Labour) corpus. In order to yield a more accurate picture of the spread and distribution of participants in the texts, *Wordsmith Tools* (Scott, 1997) were used to generate wordlists for the corpus. In order to assess the keyness² of particular words, comparison was made with the FLOB corpus, containing approximately 1 million words taken from various types of text ranging from press, general prose, learned writing and fiction.

Three key participants in the corpus - government, teachers and students - were analysed in terms of their main collocates³ and their functional distribution in the sentence and clause. In order to examine their grammatical function, concordances were therefore expanded to five lines to display their textual environments. Although not a diachronic study of education policy discourse, occasional comparison was made with the 1958 White Paper *Secondary Education for All: A New Drive*, published under Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's conservative government (1957-1963). This paper was also digitised and compared with the FLOB corpus. The results of keyword and concordance analyses are therefore the basis of any comparisons made with this document. The purpose of comparison was twofold: firstly, to yield a picture of continuity or change in the role of social actors in education; and secondly, to eliminate the possibility that apparent statistical significance of certain findings was indicative simply of the genre of policy texts. The 1958 paper was chosen because, like the NL corpus, it deals with secondary education, and because it falls within the epoch of education policy still broadly aligned with the post-war educational settlement (Ainley, 1999; Dale, 1989).

1. Theoretical Connections

This paper seeks to understand government education policy discourse in its sociopolitical context, and its role in the (re)production and legitimation of capitalism. This approach is premised on the view that the origins and social effectivity of discourse can only be understood by examining the range of social practices and human relations with which it shares a dialectical relation. It is this social embeddedness of discourse which determines which Discourses⁴ will be taken up in a given policy text, and which are likely to become naturalised and accepted in various contexts. Thus, for instance, if we are to understand the postulated increase in education policy texts of commercial values and Discourses, we must also recognise the changes in governance structures that allow representatives from the commercial sector an unprecedented voice in policy-making procedures, through a burgeoning of advisory and interventionist powers. Equally however, sociological analyses of education policy that ignore discourse, risk overlooking its important role in shaping, enacting and legitimising that policy. As Ball (1990) puts it, both control and content of policy are significant; both the structural mechanisms and the discourse.

In a Gramscian analysis of the relationship between the State and capitalism, Dale (1989) identifies three core 'problems' for the State that stem from the intrinsic inability of the capitalist market to sustain itself. These are: supporting the capitalist accumulation process; guaranteeing a context for its continued expansion; and legitimising capitalism and the State's role in it. Applying these problems to the education system, viewed as an apparatus of the State, it is seen as serving contradictory functions in supporting capitalism. For instance, it supports the accumulation process by producing an elitist system, which fosters talents and encourages instrumental competition. But this poses a problem for its legitimation function, wherein it sits alongside the welfare system in demonstrating capitalism's ability to provide equality of opportunity and civil rights. Thus education policy embodies these contradictory tensions that arise from its relationship with the economy.

Following the rapid rise in oil prices in the early 1970s and the subsequent downturn in the UK economy, the state was less able to legitimise capitalism though what Habermas terms delivery of 'value', that is the provision of adequate welfare services. There was from this period a substantive shift in schools policy rhetoric towards greater economic responsiveness, and ultimately a new post-

welfare educational settlement marked by the 1988 Education Reform Act (Ainley, 1999; Aldrich, 1996; Apple, 1993; Ball, 1990; Dale, 1989; Hill, 1999; Tomlinson, 2001). A key theme running through reforms in education 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. Reproduction (of the conditions and skills necessary to the economy) and legitimation of those practices go hand-in-hand. Therefore an analysis of policy texts which aims to understand the role of discourse in changing the education system must recognise this duality. Moreover reproduction not only involves changing the curriculum and the methods of its delivery, but in the context of a post-welfare state, involves many more complex and subtle processes in which discourse plays a key role. As welfare ceases to be a state-run economic system, the education system arguably begins to play a more important role, since what Jessop (1994) calls the 'Schumpeterian workfare state' partly involves changing people's behaviour and values in order to create a new self-reliant, risk-prepared, enterprise culture. Government discourse becomes a central tool in legitimising and enacting this transition; in a supply-side economic system, where the government no longer makes guarantees of financial support, 'welfare' must be cast in a negative evaluative frame, where receiving it becomes 'dependency' and removing the need for it becomes 'empowerment'. Social services themselves moreover, are reorganised (or 'modernised') according to market models, in which internal competition is used to improve standards of delivery for users of that service who are recast as its 'consumers'. Such 'modernisation' of public services, including education, entails a reconceptualisation of social practices and relations following the model of the commercial sector and its logic of exchange-value. I would therefore argue that a focus on the role of discourse can enrich our understanding of social policy, by capturing not only the processes of inculcation and hegemonic control intrinsic to the reforms, but also the contradictions inherent in the rhetoric which constitute the interstices around which counter-hegemonic struggle may coalesce.

2. New Labour in Context

In its electoral campaign of 1997, New Labour placed 'modernising' education at the top of its policy priorities. In practice this has involved a further entrenchment of the Thatcherite policies of privatization and marketization it inherited from the Conservative government. Yet is New Labour's approach simply a continuation of Thatcherism? In order to understand New Labour's education policy, it must be analysed in relation to its context of ongoing changes in both global capitalism and the role of the nation state. Undoubtedly Thatcherite education policies created the context for New Labour to effect structural and ideological transformations that align education more closely with its economic function. As Dale (1989) has it, it was during this period that the 'vocabularies of motives' were changed - that is the Discourses that articulate the goals and values of education - thereby redefining what education is, and what it is for. This discursive shift in the educational debate towards its economic function was a necessary legitimacy tool in the concomitant structural changes that entailed funding cuts and new forms of organization and regimes of evaluation. In effect it paved the way for further 'modernisation' programmes by a reinvented Labour party that placed economic competitiveness at the centre of its political agenda. Hill (1999; 2001) argues that New Labour education policy is in consonance with its overall political ideology. This self-termed Third Way ideology can be seen as Neo Liberalism with a Discourse of social justice (Fairclough, 2000). In essence, it entails opening up education to business values, interests, principles, methods of management, and funding.

While it is possible to identify the general business-oriented thrust of New Labour education policy and its consonance with Third Way ideology, the policy should perhaps also be understood as an aspect of the government's relationship to more global political and economic forces. Globalisation sits in a complex relationship with the 'modernisation' of public services; it is simultaneously the set of political and economic processes which 'modernisation' helps construct, and the Discourse by which it is legitimised. The theme of globalization and the imperative for economic competitiveness is the core rationale running through New Labour's educational initiatives. Recent education policy research has identified the increasingly international convergence in education policy. Hatcher & Hirtt (1999) argue that this is in fact a response to explicit calls from influential economic and political organisations (OECD; EC; ERT) for rapid educational reform to meet the needs of the new globalised, knowledge-based economy. However, to call education policy solely a *response* seems to endorse the government's own legitimatory rhetoric, which constructs globalization as an inexorable force of change to which nations and individuals must be prepared to adapt; it obfuscates the realities of the capitalist system whose intrinsic instability demands adaptability and flexibility from its workforce. The power of the rhetoric of globalization lies precisely in its self-representation as an abstract challenge to be met, rather than the agent-driven processes of capitalist development. Policies are represented as simply meeting the challenges of a contemporary world, thus serving general interests, rather than as contributing to capitalism's ongoing globalised construction and thus in fact serving particular interests.

3. Political and Economic Agendas in Education Policy

The education policy imperatives that arise out of this increasingly internationalised process are manifold and subject to adaptation within each nation state. However, in the case of Britain, they come under three broad and interrelated projects, each of which can be understood in terms of its relationship to the development of capitalism. They are: creating a business agenda in and for education; making education a principal agent in the construction of the workfare state; and creating the lifelong learning society.

Creating a business agenda in and for education involves a complex of structural and content-based transformations. The structural aspects entail processes termed marketization (that is, creating an educational market through inter-schools competition) and managerialisation (modelling the administration and running of schools on techniques employed in commercial organisations). Creating a business agenda in terms of educational content can be seen in moves towards a more vocationally relevant curriculum, in particular the skills and dispositions appropriate to the continuance of a technologically-driven knowledge economy. Ball (1990) theorises these processes in terms of a redefinition of the meaning of education's autonomy. He states that under the post-war educational settlement, education was relatively autonomous from the sphere of production, 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 functional role of education has penetrated the content and form of schooling. One consequence of the new managerial logic in educational organization is an intensified codification and regulation of teachers' working practices, alongside an increased emphasis on standards, targets, quality and delivery. Dale (1989) sees this as a removal of teachers' professional autonomy, or judgement. This means moreover, a significant role for discourse in

inculcating the right attitudes and values; the hegemonic construction of a new consensus on the nature of teaching and education.

Clearly the processes of managerialisation outlined above are closely linked to the marketization of schools; both are symptoms of dissolving education's independence from the field of production. The market works on the basis of competition between alternatives. Success or failure rests on consumer choice. Therefore creating a market in education, means diversification in the types of schools available in the State sector⁵ and opening their services up to competition for enrolments through various marketing techniques and performance league tables, and attaching funding to enrolment figures, thereby turning pupils into economically measurable commodities. Contrary to the political rhetoric about raising standards and opportunities for all, this instrumental system further entrenches existing social inequalities. Yet within the market Discourse which infuses New Labour education policy is the mechanism for its own legitimation and reproduction. It feeds off recognisable patterns of consumption and desire which pervade everyday practices in contemporary social life, simply extending this logic to the practice of education and strengthening it further through one of the most powerful mechanisms of socialisation, schooling.

The business agenda for educational content calls for greater functional correspondence between the form and content of the curriculum and the requirements of the knowledge economy in terms of the skills, dispositions and knowledge of its workforce. This agenda is explicitly stated in a 1996 European Commission paper on education and training⁶, according to which schools “must educate for the jobs most in demand [...] [and] provide the key transferable competencies which enable change, increase the level of technological understanding, and provide the basics of interculturality which will allow them [students] to move in an international environment.” (cited in Hatcher & Hirtt, 1999: 15). If one examines the assumptions in this statement, one sees education being defined in terms of its subordination to the mechanisms of global capitalism: education is *for jobs, to enable change, increase understanding of technology, to allow them to move internationally*. At every level it is the function of education to provide the conditions for the continued development of the technology- and communications-based global economy.

The two broad agendas for education of creating the lifelong learning society and constructing the post-welfare State are closely interrelated. Education plays a newly significant role in an integrated social policy aimed at supporting the economy and reducing the welfare burden on the government. The move from Keynesian policies means that welfare is no longer a state-run economic system, but a set of practices designed to bring about a fundamental change of culture founded on self-reliance, enterprise, and lifelong learning. Changing attitudes and conceptions of citizenship and equality are thus central to the workfare system. In Blair's ‘stakeholder society’, the emphasis is placed on individual endeavour and responsibility, in which the government is cast as an ‘enabler’ rather than a guarantor of citizens' rights. This entails redefining fundamental concepts on which social conformity and consensus depend. Citizenship rights, like the right to welfare, are linked to individual responsibilities and the personal investment of hard work (Ellison, 1997). This in turn means redefining rights, from ‘person rights’ premised on citizenship, community, and reciprocal behaviour, to ‘property rights’ premised on ownership and instrumental behaviour (Apple, 1993). Indeed, the economic metaphors of ‘stakeholding’ and ‘investment’ illustrate the instrumental, exchange-value logic that underpins the mechanisms to achieve New Labour's goal of social justice.

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, which is constructed as one of the key objectives for both pupils and teachers in New Labour education policy, supports the progressive development of the knowledge economy and its managerial infrastructure. Moreover, the textual representations 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. The lifelong learning policy is often described as a response to the instability in the labour market and the demands of the economy for rapid technological development, by creating a highly skilled, motivated and adaptive learning society. However, rather than being a ‘response’ to the globalised economic system, I would argue that this learning policy constitutes a key ideological mechanism in actively constructing and legitimising globalization and our roles in it.

4. Social Actors, their Roles, Relations and Practices in the Corpus

The main participants in both corpora were, as one might expect, the main social actors in education. Namely schools, students, their teachers and parents, and the government. However, there are two striking differences between the two corpora. Unlike the 1958 text, in which *government* is the third main participant, after *school(s)* and *children*, in the New Labour corpus the term is used only 19 times (0.03% of the total word count for the NL corpus). This would at first suggest that the institution of government is barely present in New Labour policy texts. However, the second most significant grammatical participant (also ranked second in terms of keyness against the FLOB corpus), is the pronoun *we*. While not used once in W58, it occurs 905 times (1.5% of the total word count⁷) in the NL text. Thus not only is the government far more ‘present’ in NL policy discourse than in W58, but its identity has been subtly changed, through the use of *we*, from an institution with a name to a collective. The use of this pronoun rather than *the government* may signal what Fairclough (1992) terms a process of ‘democratization’ of discourse, of which one aspect is a tendency towards more informal language and the removal of explicit textual markers of power asymmetries. Thus *the Government*, with its authoritarian tone, may have been removed in favour of *we* in order to create a discourse more consonant with New Labour’s claims to ‘participatory democracy’. However, as Fairclough observes, democratised discourse can in fact be simply a means of disguising these power asymmetries, rather than removing them.

4.1 Government

In order to investigate the social identity and role constructed for the government in the text, the use of the pronoun *we* and its collocative environments were examined in detail. It is possible to distinguish two usages of the first person plural pronoun, termed ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’. The former includes the addressees of the text; the latter refers only to the speaker(s) and group to which they belong. Which form is being used may be quite explicit in the text, for instance ‘we, the nation’ or ‘we, the government’; other times it can be ambivalent, the correct interpretation of its referents

difficult to determine. In the corpus the vast majority of occurrences (90%) are used in the 'exclusive' sense, and refer to the government's past or intended actions, or to its opinions. For clarity, the exclusive form of 'we' will be capitalised thus: *We*. The key collocate of *We* is the auxiliary *will* (243 instances, so that the majority of processes of which the pronoun is an agent refer to future actions in the form of strategies, initiatives, consultation and legislation. In order of frequency, the main finite verbs expressing them are *make*, *support*, *ensure*, *continue (to)*, *develop*, *ask*, *encourage*, *legislate*, *consider*, *provide*, and *introduce*. Other key verbal collocates of *We*, again in order of frequency, realise mental processes: *want* (the second most frequent), *propose*, *intend*, *believe*, *recognise*, *expect*. In around two thirds of cases *We* is the sentence Subject; in most of the remaining instances it is clause Subject, and in over half (481), it is in Thematic position which Halliday (1994: 37) describes as "the element which serves as the point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned". This stands in notable contrast with the other participants (social actors) examined in the corpus, which are far less frequently the Theme, or the Subject of a sentence. The stylistic effect of these general transitivity patterns in the NL corpus is thus a predominantly government-centred text, where it is the principal grammatical actor, acting upon processes (mainly structural and organisational changes) and people (mainly by facilitating their actions).

The main Goals or Beneficiaries of the processes where *We* is the agent are schools and their administration, the provision of funding, increased educational standards, plans and targets, teachers and young people, and improved teaching and learning. In fact the government is grammatically the most agentive⁸ social actor in policy texts, acting as the agent of material processes of building, creating, and establishing strategies, and providing funding. These are realised either as actions planned or already achieved. This creates a picture of a dynamic and committed government, actively engaged in its mission of 'modernising' education. Its role in this process is multiplex: it sets targets and creates strategies; it facilitates collaboration and partnership between different participants; it involves people in consultation and planning; it monitors standards and intervenes in failure; and it enables and supports the improvement of learning and teaching practices. As we shall see, other participants in the texts are primarily the Beneficiaries of processes like *enable* or *support*. They figure primarily in the texts as 'oblique' or 'indirect' participants (Halliday, 1994: 144), acting as implicit agents of embedded processes, and are thereby stylistically backgrounded. By contrast, the government is foregrounded as the principal social actor who directly or indirectly (through its policies) makes others' actions possible. A concordance of the verb *enable* (which occurs 40 times in the corpus; it is not used in W58) reveals its role in constructing two key agendas in education: a competitive market and 'fast-tracking' the most successful, alongside the generalised principles of individual responsibility, autonomy and self-governance that help create the post-welfare society. The most frequent Beneficiaries are schools, teachers and pupils. Schools are *enabled* to raise standards through innovation, specialisation, sharing *best practice* between schools, partnership with other educational *providers* to extend *opportunity* and *tailoring* educational programmes to *individual needs*. Schools are thus encouraged to diversify and operate according to the principles of expertise-sharing, partnership, and market competition that lead to success in the commercial sector. An illustration would be: *We also want to enable successful and popular schools to expand more easily. [...] Within this framework, we want to deregulate to increase flexibility where possible, to reduce burdens, enable schools to innovate and find new ways to raise standards. Raising standards and opportunity for all* (ranked 13 and 37 respectively among the keywords, together totalling 263 occurrences) are presented throughout the corpus as the main objectives for all participants in education. They draw respectively on a traditional right-wing Discourse, in which a Thematic focus

on standards in education is articulated within a complex of nationalist Discourses (Stubbs, 1996), and a broadly social democratic Discourse of *equality of opportunity*. They simultaneously evoke popular fears about failure, and moral concerns with social justice. This weaving together of apparently contradictory right and left-wing views illustrates the way in which New Labour rhetoric redefines social justice as the widening of opportunity to enter into competition - as Ainley (1999) puts it, creating 'opportunities to fail'. Equality and justice have been redefined as the right to succeed in an open competition; it ignores the fact that in any competition there must be losers as well as winners, moreover the social, economic and cultural advantage of some mean that the competition can never be absolutely 'fair'.

Returning to the government as participant, one final point concerns the use of the inclusive *we* in the texts. Including ambivalent cases, these account for around 10% of the total occurrences. 24 unambivalent examples were found, including in their reference either the nation as a whole, or the range of participants in education. The emphasis in the latter case is on the collaborative nature of the project. In the case of the nation, the text claims a consensus on the desirability of equipping our children with the skills and dispositions necessary *if we are to participate successfully in the global economy*. Note the presupposition here that what is at issue is not our participation in it, but whether we win; the inevitability of our taking an active role in global capitalism, is thus constructed discursively through a presupposition. Moreover, this *reality of the world we live in* poses not a threat to the social and intellectual integrity of the education system, but rather *challenges* to redefine education and pupils in human capital terms: *if young people are to fulfil their economic and social potential*. The juxtaposition as equal modifiers in this noun phrase constructs a parity of worth between *economic* and *social*. Moreover, this phrase draws on a familiar Discourse of parenting as well as educational psychology, in which the ideal is to allow a child to reach his or her 'potential'. This usually means allowing them the freedom to discover their personal interests and talents. Here, the scope for that discovery is being confined within economic parameters. And finally, this economic rationality is legitimised by drawing yet another equivalence between competitive success and social morality: [...] *the challenges that our country must address if we are to guarantee economic prosperity and social justice*. Not only our national economy, but social justice depends upon tailoring education to the needs of the economy.

Finally, the ambivalent instances of *we* (64 in total) collocate more frequently than any other usage of the pronoun with deontic modals: *must*, *need to*, *have to*, or finite clauses preceded by an obligation: *we can only - if we - , it is important that we - , we cannot - unless we -*. The propositions expressed in these clauses all convey some imperative to improve the education system, put inevitable pressure on teachers, raise standards, or address a deficit. Thus where the subject *we* makes demands or criticisms - committing (FTAs) face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1978) - rather than softening the FTA through the modality system, the blame for the act is 'absorbed' into a vague linguistic agent who could be the government or the nation as a whole. Very often it is the co-text which creates this ambiguity; ambivalent instances tend to be closely preceded by an unambivalent inclusive *we*. For instance, *But as we, quite rightly, become a society that seeks an ever higher level of achievement* shortly precedes *Sometimes those who work in our schools think that we ask too much of them*, thus apparently acknowledging the rising dissatisfaction among teachers with the unrealistic workloads placed on them, yet deflecting criticism of the government by implying the impetus for this increased workload lies in some vague 'national will'. Similarly, the government constructs itself as but one of the collaborators in the joint project of education, called for by an ambivalent *we*: *We must harness to the full the commitment of teachers,*

parents, employers, the voluntary sector, and government - national and local - for our educational mission. Surely this must actually be the government's mission? Yet the government itself is not an agent of this process, but rather one of the actors whose commitment is to be harnessed. The rationale for this imperative is stated in the previous two sentences: *To prosper in the 21st century competitive global economy, Britain must transform the knowledge and skills of its population. Every child, whatever their circumstances, requires an education that equips them for work and prepares them to succeed in the wider economy and society.* Thus the government becomes just another hapless witness to a changing world, obliged to rise to its challenges. This argument is based on a nested set of premises: 1) the competitive global economy is the inexorable and determining context of our social policy; not an ongoing project that that policy helps construct; 2) that this economic context should and does determine the nature of educational practice and content; 3) that an economically tailored education system is the right of each child, since each child wishes to succeed in the knowledge economy (rather than perhaps challenge it); 4) that success in the economy and in society are interdependent; 4) that consequently, an indeterminate 'we' has a clear economic mission for educational reform; and 5) that achieving this mission requires a greater amount of collaboration and commitment from the stated participants than exists now.

To summarise the text's representation of the government as social actor, there emerges a picture of what looks like the perfect applicant for a senior manager post. It is a committed, collaborative strategy-planner and target-setter; encourager and facilitator of others' dedication; and monitor and evaluator of progress. It asserts its authority where necessary to prevent failure and maintain quality-assurance, yet keeps it inclusive and implicit. Moreover the ethos constructed in the discourse roles and actions of the government is one of collaboration, responsibility, commitment and facilitation - all central to the construction of the workfare state: "the stress is squarely on individual achievement underscored by a state whose enabling role masks a certain coercive dimension." (Tomlinson, 2001:55). It would seem however, that not only the government's enabling role, but also its self-identification as a collective, inclusive, and sometimes ambivalent 'we', serves discursively to mask this coercive dimension.

4.2 Teachers

It was observed that an important aspect to the last few decades of educational reform in Britain has been the removal of teachers' professional autonomy and a concomitant emphasis on accountability. The analysis of *teachers* in the corpus initially appears to confirm this trend in respect of grammatical agency. In the NL corpus, of the 252 instances of the lemma, only 53 are linguistic agents of processes, while in the remaining cases, it either forms part of a clause fragment like a prepositional phrase (e.g. *with the help of teachers*), or is the Beneficiary (108 instances). However, comparison with W58 reveals that there, *teachers* are not agents in any of the ten occurrences. In fact it is perhaps unsurprising that in this document, published at a time when the problem of post-war teacher shortages had not fully been resolved, most references to teachers express the need to recruit more of them. By contrast, in the NL corpus, the more pressing need seems to be to retain existing teachers, and to involve them in new partnerships. In 20% of instances, *teachers* co-occur with other individual or institutional participants, like *parents, schools, governors, students, heads, support staff*, and *other providers*, in binary or triadic nominal groups. These groups are usually the recipients of support or guidance, or the object of the government's past or future consultation procedures.

The use of the term *providers* merits some comment here. A term most commonly associated with customer servicing in the commercial sector, it occurs 49 times in the NL corpus, of which 27 occurrences are defined, usually with the pre-modifier *service* (specified as health, social, and counselling services), or *training*. The latter possibly indicates moves towards establishing more integral links with the workplace in education. More interesting however, are the 22 ambivalent cases of *providers*, where they are worked into nominal clusters in such a way as to permit the interpretation that teachers should be seen as one of a diverse group of providers in education. Indeed, this goal is stated quite explicitly: *Creating a diverse range of partners and providers. We think that developing new partnerships and allowing new providers to work with schools can raise standards further.* While in the case of further education (FE) colleges, its teachers are explicitly referred to as *FE providers*, references to school teachers as *providers* remains vague and implicit (e.g. *all providers of 13-19 education; childcare and early years providers, we need to raise standards across all providers, including work-based learning providers*). Yet these patterns of co-occurrence facilitate, through the slippage of associations, the construction of teachers as *providers*. This may seem a minor issue of terminology, however it has potentially serious implications. Not only does it smooth the infiltration of private companies into public education, with their biased interests in profit, but it also has the potential to reconstitute teachers' practices according to an instrumental market logic concerned with monitoring production output in order to meet consumer demand.

The top verbal collocates with *teachers* (discounting auxiliaries) are *support, training, make sure that, provide* and *enable*. Thus when *teachers* are Beneficiaries they are facilitated by government strategies, technology, and businesses to perform their activities. The key collocates that indicate these activities are *professional (skills/development)*, and *standards*. 'Professional development' for teachers involves *training; updating their skills;* and receiving advice from expert teachers on *best practice*. This appears to conform to the logic of the lifelong learning agenda and the knowledge economy; knowledge is seen as a 'perishable product', therefore constant upgrading and adaptability are imperative. The continual updating of skills is represented as forming an important part of teachers' careers, co-occurring 44 times with *teachers*. It is most frequently worded as *professional development*, and is linked to a commitment to raise standards, as well as to collaboration with other teachers in reaching targets and sharing expertise. Teachers' own views and desires are used to build a consensus that this commitment to self-improvement comes as much from the teachers themselves as the government. For example: *teachers know that they can learn from each other and want to take these opportunities because they share a wider responsibility or when asked what they would like more time to do, professional development was the activity teachers mentioned most often.* Grammatically *teachers* are agents of these processes; one of the few occurrences of *teachers* as agents in main rather than embedded processes, the only other examples being those teachers who are hierarchically classified with modifiers like *expert, Advanced Skills, outstanding, Fast Track,* and *excellent*. In fact these are the only instances where *teachers* are the agents of material processes. These processes very often entail their involvement in the training of other teachers, in which they share their expertise and specialism. Thus it would seem that the practice of teaching is being reorganised to be more in accordance with the generalised reliance on expert systems identified as a prominent feature of contemporary social life (Giddens, 1994). The representation in the texts of teachers' attitudes towards *professional development* serves to construct a social identity for all teachers, and can be seen as serving both a legitimatory and regulatory function. The legitimation stems from the implicit consensus among teachers that helps represent policy as

meeting strongly felt needs (Fairclough, 2000), rather than enforcing new constraints on practice. The regulatory function stems from the networking of a set of new practices and roles, represented in the texts, of which *professional development* forms one part. It intersects with other practices in forming an implicit web of responsibility and accountability. These practices include meeting *targets* and *standards* (for both pupils and teachers themselves) (18 times) and linking pay and promotion to performance. Added to this is the creation of a hierarchy of expertise within the profession, discussed above, which illustrates the core rationality of the market increasingly present in manifold aspects of education policy, in which competition is used to drive up standards. Herein lies a core contradiction in policy: a competitive market among teachers undermines the teamwork and collaboration that is represented as forming an essential part of teachers' practice (there are 16 references to forms of collaboration with colleagues). By creating a breed of expert teachers to advise others, this effectively removes the *trust in teachers' professional judgement* the government claims it is committed to. Poulson (1996) argues that accountability is both a keyword and an important disciplinary tool in recent educational reform, and relies on a set of self-regulatory practices and networks of responsibility that are largely discursively enacted. However, while the structures of accountability are undoubtedly in place in education (e.g. inspections and teacher performance grading), in the corpus *accountability* in fact appears only eight times, mostly collocating with the somewhat vague *frameworks of*. Only once is it explicitly assigned to teachers: *heads, governors and teachers accept accountability for performance*. Even here, it is something shared with other social actors and is represented as a general disposition or sense of responsibility that can be assumed, rather than a disciplinary procedure to be enforced. Thus when one looks for the 'regulated autonomy' or 'deprofessionalisation' of teachers in policy texts (Ainley, 1999; Ball, 1990; Dale, 1989), it is not to be found in explicitly authoritative discourse. Rather, it lies in the articulation of a familiar Discourse of collaboration (which has always figured strongly in teachers' practices) within a newer framework of targets, standards and expertise modelled on the Total Quality Management structures of profit-driven organisations.

Thus through a Discourse of teacher professionalism in the NL corpus, a model of the contemporary teacher and teaching is constructed. The ideal *teacher* is committed to meeting the needs of individual students and raising standards, involved in collaborative work, self-regulating, and is continually engaged in upgrading his or her professional skills through development programmes. The most ambitious and talented teachers however, will be fast-tracked, turned into Expert Teachers and share their specialist expertise with others.

4.3 Students

There is a fundamental contradiction of values running through the NL corpus, embodied in a tension between strategic, competitive self-advancement and cooperation, inclusion, and responsibility. This contradiction is perhaps most clearly manifest in the textual representation of students. Taking together the various classificatory labels used, students are the second key participant in the corpus, after the government, occurring 821 times in total. In order of frequency and including all lemmas, they are represented as *young people*, *pupils*, *child(ren)*, *students*, and *learners*. Instances of the first two categories significantly outnumber the latter (137, 91 and 14 respectively), so that school students in the corpus are most frequently represented as *young people* (286) and *pupils* (253). In order to assess the difference, if any, between these two representational labels, a collocational analysis was performed on each. The results do suggest a tendency to

construct *pupils* and *young people* as discrete participant types, with subtly different roles, responsibilities, activities, and identities.

As with the other social actors examined in the corpus, *pupils* rarely act as agents of grammatical processes - in only 6 cases are they agents of a sentence. Where they are (15%), the majority of processes express some progress in their school careers: *progress, achieve, reach, study, take, continue, opt, gain*, while a smaller number express their failure to do so: *disrupt, fail, do not achieve*. Excepting sentence fragments like section headings, *pupils* are thus primarily Beneficiaries of facilitating processes (the top collocates being *help, support, make sure that*), Goals of material processes, or part of the circumstance (in prepositional or adverbial groups). They are Thematized only three times. Therefore grammatically speaking, *pupils* are somewhat backgrounded secondary actors in the corpus. *Pupils* are frequently classified in terms of number (33 times: *nationally 49.2% of pupils achieve 5 GCSEs*), age, ethnography (*pupils for whom English is not their first language, ethnic minority pupils*), the subjects they study, and ability (*talented and gifted pupils*, - each of these adjectives collocate 6 times with pupils - *more/less able pupils*). Classification according to ability occurs 25 times, of which 17 refer to the need for special provision for the most able pupils. Compared with *young people*, *pupils* collocate far more frequently with *individual* (14 versus 1), as premodifying either *pupils* or *needs*. These results suggest that *pupils* are susceptible to forms of classification, by which they are grouped according to talents, abilities and needs for individualised programmes of learning. Moreover they are implicitly used, through their test scores, as measures of the efficacy of schools in raising national standards. This points to a tension present in the text between competitive, individualised forms of learning through a flexible curriculum (*curriculum* is the word most frequently modified by *flexible*), and the imposition of attainment targets to be compared with national standards. The government expresses this with a business metaphor: *It is important that we know how pupils and schools are progressing against national standards, but it is also important to know the value each school adds to its pupils' results*. The activities *pupils* are engaged in are: making *progress; achieving; taking qualifications; exercising choice about their individual paths of learning; meeting standards; and setting personal targets*. These constitute a web of involvement, mechanisms to encourage ambition, competition and self-monitoring. As was cited earlier, the most talented and gifted should be *fast-tracked*, taking tests in order to *measure their performance against the best in the world*. Quality is to be assured through regulatory mechanisms and goals for all participants: *The rigorous use of target-setting has led to high standards*, and potential threats to this quality are tackled through a scientific rationality in which disaffection becomes a disease - and thus particular to the individual: *provide early diagnosis and intervention for pupils who face particular challenges*. This medical metaphor reveals much about the instrumental rationality running through the texts. *Diagnosis* means identifying a problem, the cause of deviation from normal performance. In this case the deviation is a child's inability to add value to the system - for it is not only schools who must add value to their pupils' results, but within the exchange logic of an educational market, the most able and talented pupils will inevitably add the most value to the school. Moreover the actual causes of this inability to perform normally, which may cover a wide range of educational, cultural, linguistic and demographic issues, are sanitised and removed from the text with the term *challenges*. In fact, with the occasional exception (*from ethnic minorities; from disadvantaged backgrounds*) such 'problem' students (as will be discussed, they are more often *young people*) are simply *challenged*. This is of course well known as a somewhat risible 'politically correct' euphemism. However, when used by people elected to deal with those 'challenges', it holds more serious implications. By obfuscating the socio-economic conditions that give rise to these inequities, it constitutes a rhetorical manoeuvre in shirking responsibility for

dealing with them. Indeed, it is conceivable that *challenge* constitutes a keyword in the Discourse of welfare reform. Common collocates of *challenge* in everyday language use - something we *relish* and *rise to* - help create at least a partial positive semantic prosody⁹. This can potentially play a role in reshaping attitudes towards social justice, so that poverty, inequality and difference become the responsibility of the individual; challenges to which one can rise and overcome.

A further aspect to the broadly market-oriented, instrumental approach to education being constructed in the corpus, is the commodification of knowledge itself, and the concomitant roles and relations of consumption among social actors. As they progress along their individualised path through the assessed, hierarchised stages of education, pupils accrue a portfolio of qualifications that demonstrate their *skills* and *achievements*. *Skills* are modularised and classified through the modifying collocates *key*, *basic*, *advanced*, and *wider*. Thus the logic of skills-accumulation and display is established for *pupils*. Moreover, *pupils* are frequently grouped in binary and triadic clusters with *attitudes*, *confidence*, *values*, and *motivation*, rendering more salient the socialising function of education. The verbs preceding *skills* express a relation of possession: *acquire*, *equip*, *develop*, *give*, *deliver* and *invest in*. The nature of the relationship to knowledge being constructed for *pupils* is illustrated in the following extract concerning 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 science curriculum is thus being reconstructed in such a way as to alienate pupils from the intrinsic value of their own and others' learning, and orient them towards an extrinsic-value, instrumental rationality.

Unlike *pupils*, *young people* does not have a specifically scholastic meaning - it is a generational category rather than an occupational one - which explains why it occurs more frequently in the 2002 policy text on 16-19 education, where the emphasis is on retaining more people in education for longer. Whereas *pupils* are constructed as competitive, achieving and regulated individuals, with *young people* the emphasis is on inclusion, motivation and (implicitly) socialisation. *Young people* are less frequently categorised than *pupils*. Where they are, it is either numerically: *all*, *many*, *some*; or in terms of social problems: *vulnerable*, *at risk*, *from disadvantaged backgrounds*, *facing particular problems/challenges*. Like *pupils*, they are secondary actors in terms of transitivity, primarily acting as Beneficiaries: *for* is the top L1¹⁰ collocate. However, textually they are rather more salient, occurring in Theme position 23 times. They are also the Subject of sentences more frequently than *pupils*. This textual organization complements the more pastoral and caring tone of ascriptions and processes surrounding *young people*: *Between 14 and 19 young people are striving to develop their personal and social identities: they are assertive yet lacking self-confidence*; as well as their rights as young citizens to collaborate in decision-making processes, through *focus groups* and *young people's councils*. They are thus textually foregrounded as participants, though primarily as secondary actors; Beneficiaries of processes in which they are supported and given opportunities to participate, encouraged and motivated to stay on in education, made aware of their options and given guidance in selecting them.

The activities in which *young people* are supported are somewhat different from those of *pupils* (who achieve, progress, take forms of assessment). They are encouraged to *participate* in *learning* and the wider community, acquiring *skills* necessary for adult life and work. Where skills and learning co-occur with *young people*, they are more specifically defined than for *pupils*, and most

often in functional terms: *vocational, work-related, wider, or needed for, required by, necessary to*. The skills required are wide-ranging, including not just technical competencies, but also dispositions: [...] *skills necessary for employment, such as leadership, team-working, and problem-solving; These skills include the ability to be self-critical; to take on new challenges; to take risks; and to make informed choices*. These skills are consonant with those outlined by the EC and OECD, and help prepare young people not only for the organisational structures of many contemporary workplaces, but also for a working life of uncertainty in which risk and responsibility for one's own welfare and security must be accepted. The rationality that economic competitiveness depends heavily on the education system is most clearly articulated in the 2002 document: *We must reap the skills benefits of an education system that matches the needs of the knowledge economy*. The nature of learning is thus being redefined in the texts, towards greater economic relevance, supporting Ball's (1990) argument that education has moved further into the sphere of production; the intrinsic value of education subordinated to its extrinsic value for the economy. He argues that one aspect of this is a renewed emphasis on vocational education. References to vocational training, experience and work-related skills co-occur with *young people* 51 times. However, the most statistically significant type of textual environment for *young people* (187) is that which helps construct Discourses of lifelong learning, and of social inclusion. The project of the learning society requires strategies that inculcate in individuals a commitment to continual learning and self-improvement. Social inclusion policies complement this by ensuring wider access to educational opportunities, underpinned by financial assistance and incentives for those at greatest risk of 'disaffection'. The texts thus represent an education system that must *motivate, include, raise expectations, meet individual needs and aspirations*, as well as preparing *young people* to be *responsible citizens*. Both the functional and socialising role of education are most clearly encapsulated in the following statement: [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 in its juxtapositions and presuppositions: 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 justice 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 (Tomlinson, 2001).

The textual representations of *pupils* and *young people* in the corpus thus construct subtly different social activities, relationships, roles and identities for these two participant types. Both are largely passive, secondary actors receiving support and direction from the government, policies, teachers and schools. However, *pupils* are somewhat more dynamic and ambitious participants in a stringently regulated and outcome-oriented system. The emphasis is squarely on their performance; they are encouraged to compete for ever better levels of attainment; to develop their particular talents; and to meet learning targets set for them as they progress through levels of achievement. The system thus fosters early the right dispositions for success in the competitive labour market of a knowledge economy, and *pupils* learn the exchange-value of their knowledge and talents. *Young people* on the other hand, are somewhat older; they have reached an age in which they begin to make important life choices, and should be guided in doing so. They must be inculcated with positive attitudes towards learning and prevented from straying into disaffection with it; taught

about the ‘realities’ of the contemporary world and their responsibilities within it; and equipped with skills that will make them employable.

Conclusion

From the time it was first elected in 1997, educational reform has been at the centre of New Labour’s policy objectives. I have suggested that at the heart of these reforms are three key agendas for education: aligning the organization and content of education more closely with the practices and requirements of the commercial sector; building the learning society; and making education play a significant role in the post-welfare State. It was argued that education policy Discourse plays an important role, not only in bringing about these reforms, but also in legitimising and enacting the ongoing project of globalization and concomitant changes in the relationship between the State and the economy. Central to this work is creating a hegemonic consensus on the inevitability of it all; suggesting that our educational practices and relationships must necessarily be shaped to meet the ‘challenges’ posed by this rapidly changing and competitive world. If the reforms are to be successful, the government must therefore win the hearts and minds of those involved. It must redefine what it is to educate and be educated, as well as the nature and function of knowledge itself. In a context of increasing harmonisation of social policy across Europe, an important role for the government is to represent its policy reforms as being both necessary for Britain’s economic survival, in the interests of everyone involved, and socially just. In the corpus, the government is cast in the role of enabler, and a mediator of the imperatives for reform that stem from the economic realities of the 21st century and a collective will to succeed in it. Exploiting the referential ambivalence of ‘we’, the government claims a consensus on the need for change, thereby obfuscating an acceptance of education’s subordination to the unstable trajectories of global capitalism upon which its arguments are premised.

Considerable research attention has been given over the last two decades to the de-professionalisation of teachers. Ironically, the removal of their professional autonomy is legitimised and partly enacted through a Discourse of professionalism, which constructs them as committed to self-improvement and skills-upgrading, ambitious, collaborative, and strategically oriented to the effectiveness of their work. This Discourse institutes a mentality of self-regulation by which the teachers themselves become the mechanism for legitimising the surveillance, marketisation and codification of their work practices. The third group of participants examined in this paper are students. It is postulated that their discursive representation plays a key role in socialising them into individualistic practices of competitive survival and self-responsibility. There is an instrumental rationality underpinning the representation of these participants and their practices, that infuses the discourse with the exchange-value logic of the market, thereby redefining the meaning and function of education. As Tomlinson (2001) states, the project of constructing the post-welfare state entails giving an unprecedented salience to the role of education, and relies heavily on shaping people’s values and social identities. I would argue therefore that a critical analysis of education policy must necessarily be enriched by a focus on the role of discourse in enacting and legitimising it. By uncovering the assumptions, omissions, and contradictions upon which policy discourse is built, one can open up spaces for contestation and struggle.

¹ Department for Education and Skills: *Schools. Achieving Success*. London, 2001, p.2

² ‘Keyness’ measures the statistical significance of a word’s frequency by comparison with a corpus of general English usage. Thus a keyword is a word whose frequency is unusually high in comparison with some norm.

³ ‘Collocates’ are those words which frequently co-occur in a text. A ‘concordance’ is a computer-generated list of all occurrences of a word in the corpus, in which the search-word is printed in the centre with (usually half a line) of context on either side.

⁴ I am using the term ‘discourse’ in its most general sense of textual and visual forms of semiosis. This is to be distinguished from the capitalised and plural form ‘Discourses’, refers to a constellation of meanings that together constitute a representation of some aspect of the world from a particular point of view. When used in this sense, the term is either in plural form, or it is qualified by an expression classifying the Discourse-type in question. For example ‘managerial Discourse’ or ‘the Discourse of globalization’.

⁵ Indeed, there has been an explosion under New Labour, of the classification of schools: Beacon Schools, Specialist Schools, City Academies, Faith Schools, and Schools in Special Measures (i.e. in danger of being classified as ‘Failing’), to name but a few.

⁶ European Commission (EC): *‘Accomplir l’Europe par l’Education et la Formation’*. Rapport du Groupe de Reflexion sur l’Education et la Formation, resumé et recommandations, December 1996

⁷ Because keywords are derived from comparisons with a corpus of diverse types of English, grammatical items tend not to be ranked very high in keyword lists. For instance, a high frequency of *the* or *to* would not usually be sufficiently unusual for them to be high-ranking keywords. However in this case, although a pronoun, *we* is sufficiently frequent to be ranked the second most ‘key’ word in the corpus.

⁸ In contrast to Halliday’s grammatical ‘Agent’ which refers only to material processes, I use the term ‘agent’, written in lower case, in a wider sense to refer to the Initiator -the person or entity responsible for- any process, thus including for instance mental or verbal processes.

⁹ Semantic prosody is ‘a feature which extends over [...] a span of words’ (Stubbs, 1996:173); the ‘spread’ of positive or negative associations with a word that arise from its most common collocative environments.

¹⁰ The collocative position immediately to the left of the search-word.

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