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**Jones, P.D. (2008 forthcoming) in Fairclough, N.,
Jessop, B. and Wodak, R. (eds.), *Education and the
Knowledge Based Economy in Europe*, Netherlands:
Sense Publications.**

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'REQUISITE IRONY' AND 'THE KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY'

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Drafting of Education Policy in the
European Union*

INTRODUCTION

This chapter makes a case for combining the critical analysis of discourse with an embrace of 'self-reflexive irony' (Jessop, 2002, 2004a) in the investigation of the articulations between the Knowledge Based Economy (KBE) and education policy in the European Union (EU). Irony is embraced as a topic within the study of EU governance of education policy in so far as it contributes to an analysis of the activities of supranational and national actors within complex multi-scalar political structures. In addition, the implications of self-reflexive irony are considered so as to suggest a series of clarifications for the process of analysing policy texts within a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework (Fairclough, 1989, 1996, 1999). In essence, the chapter does two things. It interrogates the contradictory strategies and sources of conflict in the production of EU scale education policy texts and questions both the significance and the stability of the articulation of education reform with KBE discourses. At the same time, the chapter argues that the production of such texts contingently but incrementally contributes to the

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production of a relatively stable governance framework for EU scale education policy and that it is to the significance of this that a critical discourse analysis leads.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the period from November 2003 to March 2004 when the European Commission and the Council of Ministers produced a Joint Report, an EU scale evaluation of progress in the reform of national education systems as part of the Lisbon Strategy's articulation of education and the KBE. The report first emerged as a European Commission *Communication* (European Union, 2003a)¹, before being subjected to the scrutiny of the Education Committee within the Council of Ministers. It was subsequently drafted and redrafted over a series of meetings before finally emerging as a joint text which both the Commission and the Council of Ministers 'authored' and 'authorised' in March 2004. The analysis of shifts in content, language and form of the successive drafts is based on a modified CDA framework within an ironic governance perspective, the combination of which, it is argued, produces a way to begin to see the relations between KBE discourses of education, EU scale policy texts and strategies within EU institutions, each of which is a separate 'moment' (Harvey, 1996) in the developing EU social process of constructing the scales for the governance of education policy.

'REQUISITE IRONY' AND GOVERNANCE IN THE EU

In identifying irony as a productive starting point for consideration of EU education policy it is probably best to emphasise that the intention is not to gesture towards an epistemic relativism (Rorty, 1989), nor to legitimise a distance from the importance of understanding the structural causes and material and social consequences of re-articulations of education systems in scalar or economic terms within the EU. Rather the intention is to gain analytical purchase on the production of education policy within the EU and in what ways the processes of production are significant. Jessop (2002, 2004a) sees 'self-reflexive irony' as an important component of the social ontology of the actors within governance practices as they grapple with the 'distinctive modalities of success, failure, tension, crisis, reflexivity and crisis management' (Jessop, 2004a, p. 73) For Jessop, a multi-scalar ensemble of institutions and social relations such as the EU needs to be seen as necessarily involved in an unstable, restless, and reflexive search for articulations of regimes and modes of government/governance in the face of continual market, state and governance failures (Jessop, 2004a, p.49).² Irony in this sense is a mode of behaviour and the analysis of practices and discourses within the EU needs to be sensitive to the possibility that the instability of context and the uncertainty of outcome will produce provisional and contingent institutional and discursive modifications. The analysis of such modifications needs to take place within a framework which embraces instability, frames the instability adequately in terms of

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temporality and relative durability and sees modification as the result of actors self-reflexive and strategically selective choices.

Since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU has been involved in a series of self-reflexive modifications of its sense of governance. The European Commission produced a Governance White Paper in 2001, only a year after the naming of the Open Method of Coordination as the preferred mode of policy development, which wanted to have it both ways, endorsing the Open Method of Coordination³ but holding on to the structures of the Community Method for social policy development (European Union, 2001).⁴ In 2005, only five years into the Lisbon Strategy's ten year programme of policy reform, the European Commission called for a comprehensive overhaul of the OMC and a fundamental rearticulation of the discourses of the Lisbon Strategy itself (European Union, 2005). The Lisbon Strategy launched the OMC but it has gradually assumed different forms in each policy area (Borras and Jacobsson, 2004; New Gov, 2005; Zeitlin et al, 2005). In terms of OMC and governance then, since 2000 the EU appears to have been engaged in hyper-active reflexivity which seeks to redefine its governance aims and practices even before they have established themselves as knowable entities. This certainly chimes with the Jessop focus on social relations 'in need of continuing social repair' (2004b, p. 160). The ironic mode of behaviour can then be seen as an essential component of the institutions and their practices on at least two levels: firstly because of the provisional nature of the articulations between EU scale institutions and the practices of education policy development and secondly, in a way which perhaps gives an additional dimension to this form of instability, because of the need to forge a link between existing social policy and the KBE discourse.

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Analysis of the ironic mode of behaviour within the EU is even more essential because of the instability of the KBE discourse itself and the contingent nature of its application to the imagination of the economy/economies in Europe. The KBE is in fact only one of a number of contemporary 'growth regimes' each of which comes with attendant 'institutional forms' and each of which carries a range of implied reform packages (Boyer, 2002). Boyer conceptualises the KBE as related to particular forms of wage/labour, competition, monetary, state/society and division of labour relations and emphasises that these are identifiably different from other available regimes. He identifies the other regimes as 'Toyota-ism', 'Service-Led Growth', 'ICT Market Domination', 'Competition Led', 'Export Led' and 'Finance Led Growth'. In EU terms, the separate economies of the Member States and the EU economy as a whole, can be seen as containing variations of these regimes which are mutually dependent, co-existing, and constituted by and constitutive of diverse contradictions within and between local, national and EU

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wide economic spaces. The elevation of the KBE as *the* EU growth regime is then a choice involving inevitable contradictions. This certainly chimes with Rosamond's (2002) argument in relation to the construction of a European economic space of competition and his insistence that 'there are several rival (economic) 'Europes' at large and that the playing out of these discursive contests is an important political question.' (Rosamond, 2002, p. 173) The KBE discourse within the EU can be seen as implicated in political contestation and contradiction and the dimensions of the stability and modifications of the discourse can then be expected to be a resource for politics and strategy as well as the outcome of ironic behaviour in response to politics and strategy.

A further invitation to be sensitive to ironic institutional behaviour is provided by the genealogy of the KBE within strategic and knowledgeable sites of policy production such as the OECD. Godin (2006) places the KBE discourse within the world of 'buzzwords' and the intellectual commodities of the knowledge brokers of international policy networks. Drawing on Beniger (1986) he places the KBE within a field of socio-economic paradigms which have been promoted since the 1960s. The following is a selection of what Godin calls 'umbrella' concepts, with an identified year of coinage, : 'postmaturity economy'(1960), 'computer revolution'(1962), 'technological society'(1964), 'technetronic era'(1970), 'post-industrial society ' (1971), 'communications age'(1975), 'information economy'(1977), 'network nation'(1978), 'information society'(1981), 'second industrial divide'(1984). Conceptualisations of 'new' socio-economic paradigms clearly have a long history. Indeed Godin identifies the naming of the 'Knowledge Economy' as a discourse as early as 1962. A number of points are in order here. On the one hand, it is clear that there have been successive attempts to identify the essence, causes and necessary responses to economic change, in particular since the generalised crisis of the 1970s (Brenner, 2006). On the other hand, the extent to which 'umbrella' concepts have tried to package analysis and policy response needs to be linked to the institutions which have tried to promote both the analysis and the policy response. For Godin, the institutions like the OECD are in the business of influencing governments. They have rhetorical strategies and KBE discourses can be seen as the latest in a long line of uses of the strategic repertoire to 'turn readily available academic fads into keywords (or buzzwords), then into slogans in order to catch the attention of policy makers. Buzzwords and slogans help sell ideas: they are short, simple and easy to remember.' (Godin, 2006, p. 24) The extent to which EU institutions, and in particular the European Commission, call upon, promote, amplify and modify the KBE as part of a strategic repertoire for structuring a range of policy domains, needs to be a part of the analytical stance for consideration of particular applications of the KBE.

The modifications to the Lisbon Strategy since 2000 provides a good example of the contingency of the KBE for the EU. In Lisbon, the Portuguese Presidency Conclusions (European Union, 2000), embraced the KBE discourse and set out to

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make a reality of an economic and social imaginary. Ironically though, within five years, the EU significantly modified the KBE approach and called into question the salience of the KBE for the EU economy/economies. The first indication of a modification came with the publication of the Kok Report in 2004.⁵ The report contextualised the Lisbon Strategy as the product of a time of heady optimism from which the EU needs to distance itself. Given that the report was produced only four years after the Portuguese Presidency it comes as something of a shock to read about how 'scepticism mounted about the potential of the knowledge economy' (European Union, 2004b, p. 9). The Kok Report reconfigures the Lisbon Strategy within a broader sense of growth regimes in line with Boyer's perspective (see above):

The Lisbon strategy is sometimes criticised for being a creature of the heady optimism of the late 1990s about the then trendy knowledge economy, neglecting the importance of the traditional industrial strengths of the European economy. To the extent that Lisbon has been interpreted as undervaluing industry, this is a fair criticism. It is vital that Europe retains a strong industrial and manufacturing base as a crucial component of a balanced approach to economic growth. Indeed industrial growth and productivity since industrialisation have always been underpinned by advances in technologies and sectors, and Lisbon is based on this longstanding truth. Conversely, a vigorous knowledge economy necessarily needs a strong high-tech manufacturing sector making high-tech goods at the frontier of science and technology.

(European Union, 2004b, p. 10)⁶

The Kok Report with its distance from the 'trendy' KBE discourse, was embraced by the European Commission and used to address Member States with a call to recast the Lisbon Strategy's balance of KBE discourses in terms of Growth and Jobs and a new start for the Lisbon Strategy (European Union, 2005).

If it is accepted that the KBE within the EU is, at least in part, a resource for strategy as well as a strategy itself, then it becomes important to begin to identify the ways in which shifts in the KBE discourse within the EU can be mapped on to competing strategies which might be the sources of the shifts in discourse. One way of approaching this might be to think of the KBE in the EU as a resource for policy development which is always unstably articulated with two strategies. One is to construct an imagined economy in terms of *knowledge* and the other is to construct an imagined economy in terms of *Europe*. The extent to which the KBE discourse is able to contribute to each of these imaginaries as strategic resource needs to be based on the understanding that the KBE like other 'umbrella' concepts or 'buzzwords' is one of a series of 'simplifying models and practices, which reduce the complexity of the world but are still congruent with real world processes

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and relevant to actors' objectives.' (Jessop, 2002, p. 3) The limits and dimensions of the congruence can be expected to be the subject of reformulation, adaptation and negotiation (Straehle et al, 1999). The ways in which the KBE discourses gain and lose organisational ascendancy can be studied by embracing the ironic stance which draws upon Jessop's work as well as by putting it to work with the framework for critical discourse analysis which wants to see KBE discourses as spurious universals which have a strategic function as a potential resource in social conflicts (Idema and Wodak, 1999; Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND THE DRAFTING OF POLICY⁷

The texts which provide the empirical basis for the argument in this chapter were produced through the interactions of European Commission structures and those of the Council of Ministers. While the Commission *Communication* (European Union, 2003a) and the *final* version of the Joint Report (European Union, 2004a) are publicly available documents, the analysis in this chapter also draws on the texts which were produced as part of the drafting and manufacture of consensus within the structures of the Council of Ministers. My access to these texts was facilitated by a five month attachment with the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture in 2005. The opportunity to engage with the drafting of education policy texts calls for the clarification of some methodological stances within an approach which is broadly that of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

The first implication of an engagement with drafting of policy is the need to question notions of text hierarchy and the will to closure implied by the trajectory from initial communicative acts, through iterative re-contextualisation to the production of a 'final' draft. The significance of the last instance in a temporally defined sequence needs to be problematised. Furthermore, the production of policy text by particular actors over an extended period of time, open the way for consideration of the positional interpretation and understanding of text by actors as conditioned by the contexts of textual production. In line with this chapter's sense of the knowingness of discourse production and reproduction, its artfulness and its availability as strategic resource at later stages of a policy trajectory, the analysis of drafts becomes a way to identify the strategic orientation towards text production and interpretation by actors in the policy process at particular points in time.⁸ The stages of the drafting can be seen as indexical of the ways in which strategy and contestation within a particular context, guide the reflection in texts of social practices which take place outside them. In Wodak and Fairclough's (1997) terms, 'every instance of language use makes its own small contribution to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations.' (Wodak and Fairclough, 1997, p. 273) The drafts then become a site for the ongoing (re)production and repair of particular social relations.

In terms of changes in the wording of successive drafts, two points are in order, Firstly, that struggles over differences in wording entail differences in understanding, interpretation and meaning which are then the subject of social negotiation (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999). Secondly that 'changes in texts matter to the extent that they go hand in hand with important re-placings or reframings of the text in the political field' (Blommaert, 2005, p. 185). The analysis of drafts becomes a way of situating text trajectories within the field of discursive practices which constitute texts as well as being constituted by them and furthermore, that identification of the dynamics of such mutual constitution becomes an important analytical objective. In sum then, the analysis of drafts provides an opportunity to see what participants read into the texts, what forms of interpretation and explanation formed part of the context of the drafting process and what kinds of participant response were both enabled and constrained by the relational moments of textual production and change (Slembrouck, 2001).

Perhaps the most significant opportunity provided by the analysis of the drafting process is the window it provides onto the processes of the 'technologization of discourse' (Fairclough, 1999). The production and interpretation of EU policy drafts are conditioned by the highly trained and politically and institutionally acute work of the drafters who become implicated in issues of knowledge, authorship, authority, audience and action in complex ways. The agents bring particular resources to bear on the texts which are themselves part of the manifestation and modification of particular configurations of political resources and power. The analysis of these drafts is then focused on the analysis of this nexus between knowledge and power within the institutional practices of textual production and reproduction at the EU scale.

THE JOINT REPORT: 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010: THE SUCCESS OF THE LISBON STRATEGY HINGES ON URGENT REFORMS'

In November 2003, the European Commission presented a *Communication* to the Council of Ministers as the initial communicative act in the process of producing a joint European Commission and Council of Ministers report for the attention of the European Council as part of the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy (European Union, 2003a). These drafts exemplify the struggle within the field and what counts as important, how to classify and provide hierarchies of knowledge, the boundaries between fields, the implications of who gets to decide and in which ways this will be expressed

There are differences in tone as signalled by the Commission's metaphorical assertion that 'many warning lights are still on red' which is modified by the Joint Report: 'many warning lights are still on.' In essence, the Commission Communication seeks to emphasise the urgency required from Member States and

sees their efforts thus far as worryingly or alarmingly short of what is required. The Joint Report certainly sees the need for increased efforts but prefers to see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty; it is rather more forward looking too, by concentrating on what needs to be done rather than what has not been done. Comparison of the two texts can produce an interpretation which focuses on how much of the activity is just talk and how much is about achieving results (See Table 1).

Table 1. Assessment of Progress.

Commission	Joint Commission/Council
Insufficient headway	Progress has been made
Too few	First steps
Inadequate	Need to increase
The Union as a whole is currently underperforming	For the Union to perform better
If reform proceeds at the current rate, the Union will be unable to attain its objective	If education and training objectives are to be attained, the pace of reforms should be accelerated
Much more needs to be done	An extra effort is required
There are no real strategies	Only certain Member States have clearly defined strategies
Do not have the minimum competence required	Only achieved the lowest levels of proficiency
There can be no Europe of knowledge without a Europe of higher education	Higher Education is central to the Europe of knowledge
Still far from	Still has a long way to go
Still well short	Much remains to be done
Many warning lights are still on red	Many warning lights are still on
This observation is all the more worrying	This observation is all the more relevant
Major deficits have to be made good.	Deficits have to be addressed.
This alarming situation	This situation

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The Joint Report consistently modifies the Commission’s attempts to identify funding issues for the Member States to address. Specific spending commitments relating to the provision of ‘free’ in-service training of teachers become more generalised commitments to working within national practices to ‘consolidate’ training. Whereas the Commission Communication sees the contribution of private sector funding for Member State education systems as being ‘indispensable’, the Joint Report sees private sector funding as something to ‘be encouraged’ and based on a sense of shared responsibility for the training of the workforce (See Table 2).

The national positions of Member States are repeatedly emphasised in the Joint Report. What seems to be important for the Council of Ministers is the defence of Member State autonomy in deciding on action, and the implications of their agreement to take EU policy into account when deciding on changes to their national systems.

Table 2. Funding Implications

Commission Communication	Joint Report
Each country should by 2005 put in place an action plan on continuing training for educational staff...this training should be free, organised during working time (as in many other professions) and have a positive impact on career progression	Member States should, according to national legislation and practices, further consolidate continuing training for educational staff.
In those areas where public authorities must preserve their role, the private sector contribution is nevertheless indispensable.	In those areas where public authorities must preserve their role, particularly in terms of ensuring equitable access to quality education and training, the private sector contribution should be encouraged.
	Private investment should reflect the shared responsibility between employers and employees for the development of competences.

In contrast, the Commission Communication rarely includes the strictures about Member State competence but rather seeks to emphasise the importance of coordinating Member State action with EU policy as a ‘central element’ in policy formulation (See Table 3). The differences may appear to be ones of nuance but the sense that the Commission is seeking in its draft to emphasise its centralising role

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within the Lisbon Strategy while the Council of Ministers emphasises the cooperative function of the OMC is certainly evident. What the comparison of the two texts provides evidence of is contestation of the ways in which actors are called into being, hailed into action and constructed in their relations. The process of producing the Joint Report seems to have been part of the process of constructing policy identities and calling upon particular identities to be performed (Blommaert, 2005).

The OMC is *inter alia*, an attempt to work towards the further integration of Member State education and training systems with EU objectives, while allowing for diversity within systems to be an opportunity for mutual learning. The tension between the recognition of difference and the tendency towards harmonization,

Table 3. Addressing the Member States

Commission Communication	Joint Report
	National situations
	Member State competences
Member states have set about, albeit from starting points and at a pace which differ substantially, adjusting their systems to the challenges of the knowledge-driven society and economy	It must be borne in mind that (current and future) Member States have different starting points and that the reforms undertaken reflect their different national realities and priorities.
	European benchmarks do not define national targets nor prescribe decisions to be taken by national governments.
National strategies must be rooted in the European context.	The development of common European references and principles can usefully support national policies.
It is vital that ‘Education and Training 2010’ becomes a central element in the formulation of national policies.	‘Education and Training 2010’ should be duly taken into account in the formulation of national policies.
	It is the responsibility of the Member States to identify the areas most in need of action according to their national situations and in view of the common objectives
In step with the European context	Taking the European context into account.

means that the OMC is itself an arena for competing definitions and emphases. The Commission *Communication* seems to be pushing at the limits of the OMC by emphasising the need to 'exploit' it 'to the full', by pushing for hard targets and by making the Commission the body to which Member States report their progress. In contrast, the Joint Report emphasises the rather more reflective sense that the OMC needs to be adapted to the reality of Member State interests in their education and training systems, that targets are desirable but should not be seen as prescriptive and that Member States relations with the Commission will be cooperative and based on the 'priorities' which are specific to each country. (See Table 4) Given that all social practice is embedded in networks of power relation (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), it would seem that the OMC as a social practice is struggled over within the power field of Member State and Commission competence in education policy. The Commission *Communication* can be seen as an attempt to redraw the power field which the Joint Report contests by reemphasising the power dynamics as established by the Lisbon Strategy in 2000.

Table 4. Managing the OMC for Education and Training 2010

Commission Communication	Joint Report
Exploit the open method of coordination to the full in order to maximise its effectiveness	Make the best use of the open method of coordination adapted to the fields of education and training in order to maximise its effectiveness.
In 2005 by the latest, all countries should have defined a strategy	It would be desirable if such strategies were in place by 2006
The Commission proposes that the Member States submit to it each year as from 2004 a consolidated report on all the action they take on education and training which can contribute to the Lisbon strategy in view of the objectives set and results achieved.	Member States will provide the Commission with the necessary information on actions taken and progress made at national level towards the common objectives. Such information from Member States should reflect the priorities guiding reforms and actions at national level depending on the situation specific to each country.

THE JOINT REPORT AND THE KBE DISCOURSES OF EDUCATION

The differences between the two documents should not obscure the fact that many passages are included in the Joint Report without any changes (See Table 5). In essence, the Lisbon Strategy analysis of the objectives for education and training

systems remains intact. Globalisation and the needs of the knowledge-driven economy are seen as placing a premium on increased investment in human capital through reformed education systems. Sustained, coherent and cooperative efforts are needed by Member States working together through the OMC to achieve the KBE objectives for education. Education at all levels is to play a key role in the success of the European economy and society, the promotion of social inclusion and the increasing identification of EU citizens with the process of European integration. The EU is presented as being engaged in a competitive struggle with the USA and Japan to produce innovative research and development and more highly educated and skilled workforces. Education and training systems are to be reformed so as to contribute to the need for mobility and life-long learning and so as to be more attractive for teachers, researchers, foreign students and for disadvantaged groups within Member States.

The face value assumption would be that the KBE discourse and its lack of modification in the Joint Report is indexical of the shared values, assumptions and rationalities of the participants in the drafting process. This reading would be based on a sense of KBE discourses as hegemonic and normalised. However, as Chouliarakis and Fairclough say 'words can be 'mere' words and 'empty' words, and changes in discourse which appear to constitute changes in social practices can be no such thing.' (Chouliarakis and Fairclough, 1999, p. 23) The lack of modifications to KBE discourses in these texts could reflect the rules of the particular discourse practices within the Lisbon Strategy, the OMC and 'Education and Training 2010'. Processes at the EU scale, processes at the Member State level and complex interplays vertically, horizontally and transversally within the 'self-reflexive irony' of the governance mode in this field of education policy may explain why the KBE remains untouched by rearticulation practices. In this sense, it may well be that the KBE discourses serve as a resource for sustaining a policy discussion at the European scale while being constrained in their significance for reforming education systems at Member State level by other dynamics which have more to do with the point in the policy cycle at EU and Member State levels. The extent to which the drafts are allowed to make imperative links between the KBE discourses and policy reform at this point in the policy cycle is the major point at issue. The KBE discourses may well be part of a temporal-discursive fix which enables larger, longer, slower social processes to play themselves out (Rampton, 2001). The focus on *these* texts, *these* discursive practices can colour an attention to the potential significances viewed from different temporal perspectives. In this regard, the significance of the KBE elements within the two texts is ambiguous. Of course, they are present, barely altered and subject to very limited contestation but for the reason outlined here and further explored below, their position within the orders of discourse needs very careful attention.

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Table 5. Knowledge Based Economy Discourses of Education

	Knowledge Based Economy Discourses And Education
Globalization, KBE and Education Reform	<p>The European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy EU to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion</p> <p>Need for a challenging programme for the modernisation of social welfare and education systems</p>
Education and International Competition	<p>The European Union as a whole lags behind the United States and Japan as regards the level of investment although certain Member States have levels which are comparable or better than those two countries</p> <p>There are now twice as many European students in the United States as coming to Europe for their studies</p>
KBE and Human Capital	<p>Human resources are the Union's main asset and it is now acknowledged that investment in this area is a determining factor of growth and productivity</p> <p>The development of human capital is a prerequisite for the promotion of growth in the EU</p>
KBE and Social Cohesion	<p>Knowledge society generates new needs in terms of social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment, and the answer to this lies solely in education and training</p> <p>One of the fundamental challenges will be to increase the awareness of the disadvantages groups of the advantages of education and training and to make the systems more attractive, more accessible and tailored more closely to their needs</p>
KBE and Investment	<p>The European Union as a whole lags behind the United States and Japan as regards the level of investment</p> <p>The Union is suffering from under-investment from the private sector, particularly in higher education</p> <p>The case for a 'substantial increase' in investment in human resources remains stronger than ever, particularly as it conditions future growth.</p> <p>Targeted increases in public investment can be achieved within current budgetary constraints....by reducing pockets of inefficiency and by re-channelling towards education and training</p>
KBE and Higher Education	<p>The role of the universities covers areas as diverse and as vital as the training of teachers and that of future researchers; their mobility within the Union; the place of culture, science and European values in the world; an outward-looking approach to the business sector, the regions and society in general; the incorporation of the social and citizen-focused dimension in courses</p>
KBE and Lifelong-learning	<p>A vision overly concerned with the requirements of employability or an over-exclusive emphasis on rescuing those who slipped through the initial education nets. This is perfectly justifiable, but does not on its own constitute a lifelong learning strategy which is genuinely integrated, coherent and accessible to everyone</p> <p>In a knowledge-based society people must update and improve their competences and qualifications</p>

‘REQUISITE IRONY’ AND THE KBE
THE JOINT REPORT AND THE DRAFTING PROCESS

Contextualising the Drafting Process

The drafting of the Joint Report took place within a particular context and some sense of the dynamics within the context is clearly important for arriving at an understanding of the production and reproduction of KBE discourses of education.

In November 2003 the Council of Ministers was working on Council Conclusions on ‘Development of human capital for social cohesion and competitiveness in the knowledge society’ (European Union, 2003c). The text which was published on the 25th of November and therefore after the submission of the Commission Communication as part of the Joint Report process, emphasised that:

The objectives set in education and training policy should, whilst taking into account the harmonious development of young people into self-reliant, responsible and cultivated citizens as one of its main aims, increasingly complement those of economic and labour policy in order to combine social cohesion and competitiveness.

(European Union 2003c, p. 9)

The reference to the broader significance of education for people’s development as citizens is noticeable here and particularly significant given that the Joint Report makes almost no attempt to engage with discourses other than the KBE for education: human capital, education spending as an investment and an emphasis on efficiency.⁹ At the same time as these Council Conclusions, the Council agreed a Resolution on ‘Making school an open learning environment to prevent and combat early school leaving and disaffection among young people and to encourage their social inclusion.’ (European Union, 2003d) The broader social significance of education and training policy is present in EU level texts and it would be wrong to see the drafting of the Joint Report in isolation from the repertoire of discourses and policy positions. Rather it becomes important to explain why the Joint Report establishes a particular order of discourse.

The meetings of the Education Council meetings throughout 2003 provide another way of thinking about the context of the Joint Report drafting process. Minutes of these meetings are not made publicly available. However, the Presidency does issue a Press release after Council meetings which summarises decisions reached and issues discussed.

The meeting of the 6th of February (European Union, 2003e), discussed the comparability and reliability of indicators, the diversity of education and training

systems and the 'consequent need for flexibility when considering the application of benchmarks in this field...and the importance of avoiding these benchmarks being viewed as binding recommendation for action at nation level' (p. 9). Importantly, the Council discussed the importance of increased investment in education and training but it was not proposed that there should be a benchmark for this. The issues which became important in the drafting of the Joint Report were flagged as being problematic almost a year before the Commission produced its Joint Report Communication. The meeting of the 5 and 6 May 2003 (European Union, 2003f) discussed the financing of education in relation to the Commission Communication 'Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe' (European Union, 2003c). The Press Release says that The Council is looking forward to the outcome of ongoing work before deciding on further action.' (page 9). The item is clearly fixed on the agenda but the outcomes remain a source of potential conflict.

The positions within the Council of Ministers must be seen as a known factor in the strategic calculations which are embedded in the Commission Communication. Yet the issues remained on the agenda even though the Commission must have known that the Member State positions would remain the same. What needs to be recognised is that the drafting process itself is as important as the final outcome. The production and reproduction of texts is part and parcel of the production, reproduction and potential modification of policy preferences and positions. In this regard the texts are performances of policy preference formation where what remains important is the maintenance of the cooperative field within which preferences can shift.

The Drafting Process

The drafting process itself was managed under the Irish Presidency which ran for the first semester of 2004.¹⁰ Fundamentally, the job of the Presidency, working with a Presidency secretariat within the Council of Ministers, is to produce texts which can achieve consensus positions, taking into account the range of views canvassed in formal and off-the-record meetings.

The meeting of the Education Committee of the 7th of January looked at a draft which included a new summary to be 'redrafted as a political statement.' The summary moved the KBE discourse and the Lisbon Strategy to the forefront in a way which the Commission draft had not. And it did so as an explicitly political act. This raises the question of the strategic function of the KBE discourse. Why did the Commission Communication do so little in terms of framing its Communication within the Lisbon Strategy and its KBE discourse whose political

legitimacy is established by the European Council of Heads of State and Government? One possible factor is the notion of the audiences for the Communication and the Joint Report. The Communication is addressed to Member States who have not done enough. The Joint Report is addressed from the education sector to the Heads of Government. What can perhaps be said then is that the audience for the Commission *Communication* was the Education Committee itself whose members could be relied upon to make expected responses but whose responses always had to be performed and negotiated with the Commission. In this sense it is possible to see the drafting of the texts as being as much about the process of establishing and re-establishing the terms of the debate as about achieving any particular shifts in understanding at least at this point in the policy cycle.

The sense of the broader policy field is also perhaps a part of the other shifts which the 7th of January draft displays. There is a greater focus on vocational education and training, social cohesion and mobility, all of course, areas where there is a clearer mandate for EU level competence. A start is made on the reintroduction on strictures to do with Member State situations and competences. The Commission proposal for a High Level Group, a new body to monitor the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme is flagged as being opposed by one large Member State. Two countries oppose the introduction of action plans for the training of educational staff. Two countries oppose the production of materials and instruments in support of an EU set of reference knowledges and competences to be acquired by pupils. The missing area for substantial changes at this point is the idea of how Member States will be asked to report and frame their education reform activities within the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. The ideas of one, two or three year reporting cycles appears to be at issue rather than the question of whether to report or not.

The 14th of January draft is the first one to delete the idea of warning lights being red. What moves to the centre of attention is tone, the recognition of progress made, Member State competences and the avoidance of defining national targets. So for example, it is at this point that specific spending commitments, for the funding of teacher training for example, are systematically stripped out of the text.

The draft discussed at the 30th January meeting draws attention to the implications of the Kok Report. The en-textualisation of Kok re-emphasises the focus on 'investing more and more efficiently in human capital'. This is a significant development since it serves as a reminder that the Commission is not a passive observer of the drafting process but continues to use its resources to modify the agenda and reintroduce and reemphasise elements of the co-textual context. An unsuccessful attempt is made here by one of the large EU countries to delete the reference to encouraging a bigger contribution from the private sector particularly in higher education. This reference makes its way unchanged into the Joint Report. The issue of an EU determined set of key competences is contested by one of the

same Member States who challenged it in the previous draft and here the objection is not only to the definition of key competences but also to the suggestion that these competences 'should' be acquired. The Presidency recalls that the list is taken from the agreed Work Programme (European Union, 2002) but the next draft does replace 'should' with 'could'. This is a good example of the way that previous decisions produce a sense of lock-in to the process. Whatever the sense of repeated opposition, the logic of decision making and legitimacy of previous policy discussion rounds tends to trump national opposition. However, the subject of the reporting cycle is a different matter. At this point, one large country did not want a report at all. Other large countries wanted a three year cycle but could accept a two year cycle. Only three countries wanted a two year cycle. The compromise of a two year cycle which eventually appeared in the Joint Report would appear to have been far from the balance of views. This issue eventually became the most problematic of all and was only finally resolved through recourse to the Committee of Permanent Representatives at a meeting on the 11th February. The issue was resolved as follows:

The Council and the Commission will submit, every two years a joint report to the Spring European Council on the implementation of the work programme ("Education and Training 2010") on the objectives of education and training systems (i.e. in 2006, 2008 and 2010). In this context, Member States will provide the Commission *with the necessary information* on actions taken and progress made at national level towards the common objectives. *Where possible*, this should be articulated with the reporting process of the European employment and social inclusion policies. Such *information* from Member States should *reflect the priorities guiding reforms and actions at national level depending on the situation specific to each country.*' (My italics)

The final draft now constructs 'report' as something that the Council and Commission do to the European Council. In addition though, it establishes the Joint Report as a regular feature of the OMC for education and training, a procedure with its own iterative rationale, audience and purpose. In governmentality terms, it establishes the Joint Report as a technique of governance. However, the compromise form of words avoids the sense of Member States reporting to the Commission, rather they will provide information. In keeping with the drafting process as a whole, it gives plenty of space for national situations and national decisions about what is and what is not appropriate for their own policy processes. In addition, it helps to mark off the Education and Training 2010 OMC as relatively autonomous from the employment and social inclusion OMC, at least at this stage of EU education policy development.

CONCLUSION

The framing of the analysis of EU education policy and its articulation with the KBE in terms of self-reflexive irony and critical discourse analysis draws attention both to the ways in which discourses, institutions and policies are in contingent articulation and to how they gain relative solidity within a relatively stable discursive and institutional field.

The drafting of the Joint Report clearly displays oppositional behaviour but the opposition is not pursued to the point of derailing the process as a whole. The Commission and the Member States construct the institutional and ideological field of education policy within a KBE discursive framework rather than pushing it to a crisis. This is how the space for the rationalization, explanation and reporting of education reform becomes a structured field within which particular kinds of opposition and oppositional identities are performed within a set of textual practices (Chilton and Schäffner, 1997).

What the awareness of the context of EU policy texts helps to emphasise is that in the process of drafting, the strategic functions of text as draft need to be part of the explanation. In Chilton and Schäffner's (1997) sense, the Commission Communication is a political text which calls for the performance of particular responses to communication roles, agenda setting, positioning and control. The Commission draft can then be seen as a performance of a particular kind of policy identity by the Commission; in the successive drafts, the identities of the Member States are called into action, caused to contextualise themselves and in so doing they potentially become (re)defined.

The KBE discourse has a strategic function in this. It is both a discursive structuring device and a strategic tool. It operates with its own generative capacity for action as well as interacting with other strategic capacities. In EU terms, the moves between conflict and consensus and the role of discourse in enabling and constraining this move becomes an important focus for enquiry (Muntigl et al, 2000). The sense of the production of a fictional consensus (Straehle et al, 1999) is crucial here since if the moments of closure are recognised as partial and process orientated, one can reemphasise the sense that texts provide an indexical unit of analysis – they orientate the search for understanding and explanation onto the terrain of the plays of power and strategy which produce them and away from a sense of the discourse having reached a point of fixity and durability.

An important aspect of the analysis of this drafting has been an engagement with questions of how far the discursive practices manifest strategy and calculation as opposed to misjudgement and error. Within the drafts what is being done is to (re)organise, (re)modulate and (re)construct the messages by a particular set of actors with particular projects and strategies which can be identified. However,

given that the inevitability of failure within ironic governance practices was my starting point above, the sense of communicative failure, misjudging the indexicality of communicative acts, misrepresenting and misunderstanding policy identities has to be part of the explanation of the drafting process as analysed here. Hence the place of the KBE discourses, the relations between the Commission and Member States in terms of education policy competence, all of which are contested in the drafting process, achieve a consensus position in the agreed Joint Report. A relatively stable position is achieved here and how far it is a fictional consensus with a generative capacity must remain an open question given that the Joint Report is only one aspect of a much bigger set of policy making dynamics at the EU scale. And the central destabilizing element within the fictional consensus is that the success of EU scale policy processes always depends on what happens at other scales (Jessop 2002). What the notion of fictional (in my terms *ironic*) consensus enables is the admission of relative success for the actors concerned. And part of what this enables is the recognition that EU KBE policy texts are in the business of keeping options open, delaying the making of decisions and maintaining the possibility of making decisions at later points in the policy trajectory. In this sense the policy texts discussed here are in the business of ironic maintenance and repair of contradictory social relations at the EU scale which are in some sense a manifestation of the contradictory social relations of the KBE and its discourses for education.

NOTES

- ¹ An important aspect of study of European Union documents as texts is to place them adequately within the field of textual genre. The Community Method, involving different kinds of legislative force from 'hard law' to 'soft law', produces a range of texts running from Regulations to Directives, Decisions, Recommendations, Opinions and Conclusions. The Commission produces a range of texts as part of its participation in the Community Method but also as the centring organisation within policy discussion it produces Green Papers, White Papers, Working Papers, Reports, and in partnership with the Council of Ministers, Proposals and Resolutions which then feed into the Community method text types. In subsidiarity-conscious education policy work within the OMC, the 'strongest' text type is the Recommendation although where policy falls within areas defined by Treaty as within the competence of the EU, such as recognition of qualifications, mobility of students or Research Framework funding, the Community Method texts are a part of the policy work. The policy trajectory goes hand in hand with the field of textual genre and strategic selectivities within the genre regime become important areas for textual analysis as part of the analysis of policy.
- ² Jessop emphasises 'the sense that participants must recognize the likelihood of failure but proceed as if success were possible.' (Jessop, 2002, p. 7)

³ The Lisbon Strategy (European Union, 2000) launched the OMC, conceived of as a set of techniques for implementing the Lisbon Strategy by:

- fixing guidelines with specific timetables for achieving goals
- establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world as a means of comparing best practice
- translating European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures
- conducting periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes

⁴ The European Union (2001) White Paper on 'European Governance' says: 'The use of the open method of co-ordination must not dilute the achievement of common objectives in the Treaty or the political responsibility of the Institutions. It should not be used when legislative action under the Community method is possible.' (p. 22)

⁵ The Kok Report (European Union, 2004b) was produced by a High Level Group led by the ex-Prime Minister of the Netherlands. On an invitation from the European Council, the Commission established the group headed by Mr. Wim Kok with a view to conducting a review of necessary measures to achieve success in the Lisbon Strategy.

⁶ The rearticulation of economic perspectives within a KBE discourse here is a clear signal that we should be alert to the continuing salience of the on-going tensions within the EU in terms of economic programmes in line with mercantilist, social-democratic and neo-liberal responses to and construction of globalisation and the European Union. (Gill, 2003, Van Apeldoorn, 2003)

⁷ This chapter follows Codd (1988) in seeing policy making as a process which articulates the relations between goals, values and resources within a strategically selective field of political power where language is used to legitimate the process.

⁸ Fairclough's sense is that 'discourse strategies or moves on the part of one organisation (government, churches, other governments, etc.) provoke responses from others' (Fairclough, 1999, p. 197). An analysis of discourse moves and responses then, enables perspective on political strategies more generally.

⁹ The Joint Report articulates discourses of citizenship with discourses of knowledge, competence and discourses of Europe: 'All education systems should ensure that their pupils have by the end of secondary education the knowledge and competences they need to prepare them for their role as a future citizen in Europe.' (European Union, 2004a, p. 30)

¹⁰ The issue of the importance of the Presidency function is not addressed here although it is perhaps significant that the Italian Presidency was not tasked with detailed drafting work. The Irish representatives working in English, with a strong profile in terms of KBE education reform within an EU context and with a potential advantage as brokers between Anglo-Saxon and European social models, could perhaps be seen as important in terms of brokering agreement.

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