SUCCESS: A MEASURE OF WHAT WE VALUE?

An exploration of the discursive construction of educational success in the public domain

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For my mother, who taught me that ‘to care’
is a verb that describes an action, not a state of mind.

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Abstract

In a time of rapid technological and social change, questions are being asked about whether current notions of education can adequately prepare students for a future that is often described as uncertain and complex. Public debates arising from these questions suggest that while education is generally highly valued, the ideals and purposes, or indeed, what is considered successful education, is neither clearly defined nor commonly understood. This is reflected in a public discourse that consists of fragmented issues, short-term solutions and apportioning blame. Based on the premise that language both reflects and constructs aspects of society, this thesis analyses a range of contemporary public discourses to examine the concept of success in education, at the school level. The data includes foundational educational documents from the Ministry of Education, press releases, and reported newspaper articles.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis, in the style of Fairclough, Wodak and van Dijk, I examine linguistic constructions associated with success in detail, and consider these in a wider social and historical context. My research reveals seemingly innocuous language features that undermine deeply held democratic views of education and reconstructs them to fit within managerial mechanisms of neoliberal ideology. I argue that the resulting conflicts between the social and economic values underlying educational discourses are reflected in the lack of coherence across the wide range of complex issues in the public discourse. Furthermore, this conflict contributes to diminishing engagement with these issues, a sense of confusion about what is desired for education, and increasing indifference to inequities in New Zealand education today. The conclusion I draw from this is that such conflict makes it impossible for key participants in educational debates to make progress towards a coherent and effective educational framework for the future.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education is often considered the single most important factor that contributes to a ‘successful’ life. As stated by Roulston (1986), “most New Zealanders still believed that ‘getting on’ was through education which was the gateway to success” (p.9). Education is considered so important that in most societies, primary or a basic education is compulsory and publicly provided. In New Zealand this was implemented through the 1877 Education Act, which provided for free and secular primary education and extended by legislation in 1914 to provide free secondary education. Such legislation, reinforced by an ideology of equality of opportunity developed by Clarence Beeby (Director-General of Education) and Peter Fraser (Minister of Education) in the first Labour government (Peters, 2000), contributed to a strongly held belief in the democratic value of a public education system. However, in a time of rapid social and technological change, and a climate of increasing economic focus and constraint, the way we ‘talk’ about education in public domains has come to be increasingly focused on the efficacy and efficiency of the system rather than it’s intrinsic value. Educational debates are often about whether or not the education system is successful; whether it meets the needs of today’s society, and whether or not it has the capacity to prepare students for the future; a future that is described by Guy Claxton (2008), a British educationalist, as “complicated and uncertain” (p.30). The uncertainty is reflected in contemporary educational discourses that lack a cohesive sense of purpose for education against which to judge success.

In this thesis I explore the ways in which the concept of success in education has been reconstructed in contemporary public discourse to fit within the managerial mechanisms of neoliberalism. I also argue that pervasiveness of this discourse has undermined social values in educational debate, and masked a conflict between deep-seated social values and newly dominant economic values. Rather than emerging as a critical debate about desired purposes and directions for successful education based on shared societal values, contemporary discourses appear as series of competing views that lack coherence across a wide range of complex educational and social issues. I suggest that such discourse not only reflects, but also contributes to, a public sense of confusion, and sometimes indifference about increasing inequities in New Zealand education today.
To explore the perspectives from which educational success is currently viewed, this thesis uses a linguistic approach. Theorists such as Habermas and Foucault argued that all concepts in society are mediated through language, and that language is not a neutral medium but is often vulnerable to the influences of power. I use Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as described by Fairclough (1992), Wodak (2011) and van Dijk (2001), to explore the influences of power on the construction of the concept of success in contemporary public educational discourses. This study builds on the work of a few, such as Woodside-Jiron (2004) who have examined language in the education domain, by explicitly identifying a range of assumptions and linguistic mechanisms that contribute to widespread acceptance and normalisation of an ideology that often contradicts deeply held beliefs in New Zealand education. Many authors, for example: Davies (2003, 2005); Court & O’Neill (2011); Giroux & McLaren (2011), Leane (2000); Watson, Hughes & Lauder (2003) have addressed the issue of neoliberal reforms and the pervasiveness of the language associated with neoliberal ideology, but exactly how this language has become so powerful and persuasive in the educational domain has not been widely studied. Some authors, such as Beeby (1986), Jones, Marshall, Morris-Matthews, Hingangaroa-Smith, & Tuhiai-Smith (1995), and Hopkins (2013), refer to ‘myths’ that have emerged in the education domain as a result of discrepancies between perceived truth and reality, and so point to the connection with language and beliefs, but few have made the connection explicit. An important part of understanding the effects of these linguistic mechanisms, and one of the principles of CDA, is to consider the findings within their wider context and I begin with a brief review of education as a social construct.

A functionalist view of education

According to Peters (2000) education has “come to be seen as performing a range of social as well as economic functions” (p.64) and is most often summarised as fulfilling two main responsibilities; preparation for work, and socialisation. These are accepted as a normal part of preparing young people for adult life, with almost all young people today going through this “compulsory experience” (Wylie, 2012, p.11). At a basic level, this involves preparing students with the skills needed for work, and

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1 “A functionalist explanation accounts for the existence of a phenomenon or the carrying out of an action in terms of its consequences – its contribution to maintaining a stable social whole” (Marshall, 1998, p.241).
increasingly, a process known as “credentialing” (Clark, 2005, p.144). The relationship between education and work is often perceived as relatively straightforward, benefitting both the individual and the nation by contributing to the social and economic well being of both. However, the relationship between education and society, of which work is only one aspect, is more complex and dynamic and is more dependent on the values people hold. These values include ideas ranging from basic socialisation of individual members, to the role of education in such issues as welfare, justice, and social class.

In socialisation, the public education system is responsible for transmitting societal norms and values that, in New Zealand, were historically “based upon an ideology of equality of opportunity” (Peters, 2000, p.64). Social norms, however, are always culturally constructed. They are often considered natural and unchangeable, though in reality are relative to generational changes and variability between countries. For example, Dale (1994) highlights different cultural norms in the pastoral care expectations of British and French schools. He states, “in the British tradition, in which I include New Zealand, schools take very seriously the fact that they are in loco parentis and the wider responsibilities that that implies” (p.70). He contrasts this with the French model in which schools take no responsibility for children outside school. It should be pointed out that Dale’s inclusion of New Zealand in the ‘British tradition’ assumes the dominance of Pākehā culture and overlooks deeply-rooted influences of Māori culture on New Zealand schools. The pastoral care, or the “custodial role” (Clark, 2005, p.141) of school, is increasingly significant in New Zealand, where economic factors are such that require both parents to work. While basic social theory points to the nuclear family as providing the foundation for socialisation, morals and values, MacGregor (1999) argues that it is no longer seen as the only or main source, and that education is seen as increasingly responsible for solving social problems. For example, the consequent problems of inadequate socialisation have been seen as a cause of deviance in which youth may be relegated to the justice system (see Cohen, 1955).

To complicate the relationship further, and returning to the ideology of equality of opportunity, education is considered both as a way of addressing inequities (despite supposed ideology of equality) as well as a mechanism through which inequalities in society are reproduced (Clark, 2005; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Individuals often embrace education as not only important for gaining access to work, but also as a mechanism for social mobility. Greater opportunities for social mobility, consumerism, and an emphasis on economic values, all bound in complex ways with desires for
educational success, has also allowed for a reconstructed understanding of individualism. Once understood as part of the diversity of a society that was “balanced with concern for the welfare of others and a desire for common good” (Beane, 1998, p.8), individualism is increasingly seen in terms of competition, which further undermine the concept of education as a ‘social good’.

**Changing views of education**

We are regularly reminded that we exist in a world of rapid change. Very often this is described as rapid technological change. In contrast to the earlier industrial age in which the dominant means of earning a living was in production, it is claimed that the majority of people now and in the future, will make their living through the creation, management and dissemination of information as “knowledge workers” (Drucker, 1993, p.8). This process is inevitably facilitated by developments in information and communication technology and there is a growing expectation that ‘knowledge’ and technological solutions are the key to social, economic and environmental problems. The education system is seen as responsible for preparing young people for this future, which holds apparently infinite challenges, and is described by Hargreaves (2003) as “characterised by growing social instability” (p.1).

Technology and technological change is now ubiquitous in educational environments with the most prevalent form information and communication technology (ICT). This is not only a common tool for disseminating information, and preparing and providing learning experiences; it is also increasingly used as the mechanism through which these processes are evaluated and thus serve as a mechanism of accountability. The widespread use of such technology is reflected in a discourse that appears to fit seamlessly into that of managerial effectiveness and accountability associated with neoliberalism. It has become normalised and accepted as a natural and inevitable consequence of progress, to the point where a generation of people cannot imagine ‘life before Google’.

One contemporary view that has emerged partly as a result of this technological change, maintains that the whole education system is out-dated, not fulfilling the needs of today’s learners and therefore, according to a familiar discourse, in need of major revision. For example, Robinson (2010), speaking from an international perspective, suggests ‘changing the paradigm’ from one that he claims is still largely based on an education system created for the industrial age, to one that integrates the needs of
society in the new technological age. ‘Future focused’ education now refers to considering how best to prepare students for the ‘knowledge age’. Rather than a traditional notion of ‘filling students with knowledge’ or the “mind as container metaphor” (Bereiter, 2002, p.12), researchers talk of ‘building or creating knowledge’ (Bereiter, 2002; Bigum, 2003; Bolstad & Gilbert, 2008). In New Zealand, Hattie (2009) argues for a new “metaphor” (p.63) and Gilbert (2005) refers to the need for a new “framework” (p102). These new ways of talking about education represent a conceptual, as well as linguistic, shift away from functional descriptions of education.

Gilbert (2005), while arguing for a profound change in the way we think about education and learning, urges that the wealth of educational knowledge, experience and research that already exists, must be incorporated into a new framework. She implicitly makes a distinction between cognitive and pedagogical processes, and the system or framework by which this is provided to society. Gilbert (2005) argues that this framework must also resonate with what society actually wants from education (p.16). Her requirements foreground a perspective not well represented in research; that is the acknowledgement of shared values and a sense of purpose for education by society or the wider public (defined here as those with an interest in education, either directly such as teachers, students and parents or researchers and policy makers, and indirectly as former students, tax payers and members of society). Bolstad, Gilbert, McDowall, Bull, Boyd and Hipkins (2012) confirm the importance of this group in a report to the Ministry of Education (MoE) when they state, “education and learning systems will not have traction to shift towards more 21st century approaches if this shift is not supported by the wider community” (Bolstad et al., 2012, p.5). This seems to reinforce the often-articulated belief that “public education is a collective good in which everyone has a stake” (ibid.). The ‘knowledge society’, however it is perceived, therefore clearly belongs to all of society, not just special interest groups, and as such should be treated as an integral part of a democracy.

Clark (2005), affirming the need for “educated citizens in a democratic society” (p.130), suggests the desire for change is a result of disillusionment with the modern shift to the neoliberal ideology of individual choice and the market as the means of progress. He claims that a shift to individualism has replaced an earlier ideology of ‘social equity’ (p.130) and believes a return to these values is required. Government discourses also advocate change to improve student achievement. However this perspective regularly positions education as a key factor in the country’s future
wellbeing, and implies an economic focus for future change. The economic focus of this discourse often conflicts with the social perspective of educationalists. Though separate, these discourses often appear the same, as the economic perspective deftly captures educationalists’ call for change, to serve neoliberal ends. Both argue for change, but the direction and mechanisms for change are neither clear, nor widely agreed.

**Future Directions**

Considering the future of education is not new, and not only reflects the changing nature of society, but requires some understanding of how we got to where we are (Beeby, 1983). Jack Shallcrass (1980, in Robinson & O’Rourke), posited two possible futures for New Zealand society; one based on economic principles of measurability and material reward; the second on humanitarianism, social cohesion, and traditions valuing variety and inclusiveness over competition. Shallcrass points to the redirection of education in this society, from being guided by democratic ideals, to being dominated by economic rationalism. Clearly, if the focus is now on using economic factors as a guide to systemic reform, then there must be a corresponding influence in what is considered a ‘good education’, or the purpose of education – in short, what is considered as success.

Shallcrass wrestled with this problem and stated that, “The purposes of education can never be defined absolutely; they will always be incomplete, multiple and sometimes contradictory, especially in times of rapid change” (Shallcrass, 1980, in Robinson & O’Rourke, p.301). Tony Wagner (1993), to some degree, explains the divergent views that business leaders and educators, parents and students have of the purpose of education, and what they think might be done to improve education. Though he explains this in terms of underlying values in society, not underlying values about education. Biesta (2009) points out that the purpose of education is not only undefined, but that it is far from being a commonly understood idea. He notes, there is “a remarkable absence of discussion about what is educationally desirable” (p.36) and, like Clark (2005), points to a disengagement from democratic values in education. Biesta (2009) also draws attention to the language used in these discussions, and that it has a significant effect on the way education is perceived. In saying this he re-emphasises the intrinsic link between society and language described by Fairclough (1992, 2001b).
Wodak & Meyer (2001), van Dijk (1994) and others, and notes that perceptions of education are socio-culturally constructed through discourse.

One of the predominant values that has seeped into educational discourse today has come from the economic and market terms that have become common and therefore ‘normal’ in traditionally non-economic domains such as education, health and welfare. Leane (2000) describes this as a type of ‘colonisation’ of the language of these domains. Lorenz (2012) more pointedly, claims that the economic discourse “parasitizes the everyday meanings of […] concepts” (p.600) in education. This language reconstructs students as ‘consumers’, educational achievement as ‘outcomes’, principals not as academic leaders but as ‘business managers’, teachers as ‘facilitators’, and schools and institutions as ‘providers’. Each reconstruction carries with it changed reality. For example, principals must spend time on managing funds rather than the curriculum, teachers are seen as less professional, and providers, now in a competitive market, but reliant on public funds, must be held accountable. This has meant increased implementation of strategic approaches used in private business sectors to improve productivity or service provision through the analysis of results, and is often referred to as **New Public Management (NPM)** (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p.243).

The focus on economic ideals, accountability and managerialism in essentially social domains, is referred to as **neoliberalism** – a term used to refer to both the ideology and a discourse. David Harvey (2007) states that, “neoliberalism has become a hegemonic discourse with pervasive effects on ways of thought, and of political-economic practices” (p.22). Harvey highlights the normalisation of this way of talking about all aspects of society when he says, “it is now part of the common sense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world” (p.22). We can recognise this when faced with our own economic rationalisations in our everyday life. Marnie Holborow (2007) on the other hand claims, “the ideology of neoliberalism cannot be adequately described as a discourse. Instead, it is an ideology with specific historical roots and which, as a dominant ideology, makes itself felt in language” (p.51). While there is clearly some disagreement about the definition of some of these terms, what is understood is that a neoliberal perspective promotes competition, the market and its ideals of individual choice above all else. It is seen (by its proponents) as the ideal mechanism through which “human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms” (Harvey, 2007, p.22).
In education, neoliberalism has colonised the important educational concept of *knowledge* in the terms, ‘knowledge economy’ and the ‘knowledge society’ . These terms are often used interchangeably, but Hargreaves (2003) explains that the knowledge *economy* is a type of capitalism that “primarily serves the private good” (p.1), whereas the knowledge *society* is one that “encompasses the public good” (p.1). Hargreaves points to the lack of visibility of the distinction between them, and the difficulties that schools face in successfully preparing young people for both.

The New Zealand government and many groups in society now see education through this neoliberal lens and genuinely believe that improvement must be informed by, and developed through, greater competition and striving for individual success. Holborow (2007) confirms that this perspective exists, but astutely notes that there are other requirements within the neoliberal agenda that result in contradictory outcomes. That is, the ideal of competition and individual choice is simultaneously promoted with mechanisms of standardisation (Vaughan, 1994). The arguments made for standardisation are to ensure accountability, which in turn can only be achieved through measurability. The paradox of course, is that making success criteria measurable and standardised contradicts, or at least inhibits, the ideals of individual excellence and innovation, on which a competitive system is based. A competitive system inherently involves winners and losers, success and failure.

**Discourses in Tension**

From the foregoing it can be seen that while the concept of success has several milieu in which it can be explored and understood, two strands seem to co-exist. One discourse is concerned with success within education, and the other foregrounds success of the education system. In other words, educational discourse relating to pedagogy seems to stand in contrast to educational discourse relating to implementation. These are separate discourses that co-exist in an environment of tension, but the distinction and the tensions between them, are masked by the dominance of the neoliberal discourse. The discourse of success *within* education is pedagogical and therefore more prevalent amongst educationalists, and is characterised not only by language associated with teaching and learning processes, but necessarily includes the humanistic language of the social contexts that affects teaching and learning. However the findings of pedagogical research, to have any credibility in the current political environment, are required to be reported in terms of measurable or statistical outcomes. This means that
success within education ends up being expressed in the same terms as success of the education system, and fits precisely with the discourses of economic rationality and accountability, which is the discourse associated with politicians and policy makers. An assumption of the latter discourse that further blurs the distinction between them is that success of the education system will of necessity lead to success of individuals in education. If this is the case, then it is argued that a coherent sense of success or some agreement amongst parties to these discourses about its common nature is made impossible.

This is currently happening in New Zealand, with the Government responding to economic pressure and social change by implementing specific policies to address particular issues in education. This form of policy-making means a multiplicity of issues are raised and articulated as separate matters. Consequently, media representations tend to fragment the overall complexity and inter-relatedness of these issues into ‘byte-sized’ segments, for quick and easy consumption. For example recent government policy issues reported in the media include: class sizes, teacher training, school closures and mergers, provision for students in low socio-economic school areas, or for students with special education needs, teacher performance, performance pay, and the ‘achievement gap’ or the underachievement of specific groups of students. While it is not the intention to pre-empt the data analysis here, it is nevertheless useful to consider how such issues are represented in the media. Not only are complex issues fragmented and simplified, but also constructed as a debate where only two perspectives are valid.

A half page feature in the 21 May 2012 Dominion Post headlined Head to Head: Should class sizes be increased? constructs a topical educational issue as a political confrontation. It frames the opinion of the Minister of Education in direct opposition to the NZEI president. Both proffer research and statistical data to support their respective claims, but it is their ideological stances that seem to be foregrounded. For example, the government minister’s language is peppered with phrases such as in these tough financial times, tight fiscal times, invest in better teaching, trade-offs between quantity and quality and slight adjustments to funding ratios. In contrast, the teachers’ union president directly addresses parents and connects to their ‘intuitive knowledge’; he refers to good quality research and vulnerable or struggling children. If one was to categorise these debates, the former operates within the rhetoric of fiscal constraint, and can be related to implementation, while the latter operates in the rhetoric of teaching
and learning. It is clear that the participants have very different perspectives of a particular issue, and might reasonably be expected to contribute valuable insights into a complex problem, but the issue itself has become lost in the public domain in the representation of it as a ‘them versus us’ dichotomy.

The point of this example is to understand how such public discourse works to construct this as a normal way of viewing important complex issues in society, and particularly in education. Analysis needs to consider the complex effects of such constructions, and the influences behind them, which may relate to the production, dissemination and reception of discourse. For example, the attitude of participants, such as the understated but commonly understood New Zealand cultural aversion to intellectualism and academia (Horrocks, 2007; Bridgman, 2007) will affect the way a discourse is interpreted. Given the potential complexity behind many such issues, it is understandable that the public accept the simplified debates presented in the media.

For the average person bringing up a family, both sides of such debates potentially make sense. We want our children to be successful, but we know full well the implication of not functioning within our budget, at least at a personal level. When such simplified debates are repeatedly presented in the public domain, the effect is that a correspondence between budgetary responsibility and good education is assumed. This is further reflected in public responses to this type of article through opinion columns and blogs, which show that the public tend to choose one side or another. Rather than engaging in critical debate, the issues are reduced to a choice between two possibilities, such as reduced class sizes and fiscal irresponsibility, or increased class sizes and fiscal responsibility. Roger Moses (2012), a high school principal, acknowledges this type of dichotomy when he states,

> From time immemorial, the world of education has been a crucible for polarised and acrimonious debate. More often than not, such debate has produced more heat than light, cleaving protagonists and antagonists into irreconcilable and bitterly warring factions (p.B1).

Constructive debate is left to those with knowledge and experience of educational processes and structures, but these discussions are often considered too complex and too lengthy for mainstream publication and are left for academic consumption in journals and conferences (Savage, 1989). Without exposure to the substance of these discussions, public responses remain overwhelmingly polarised.
Opposing perspectives in the public discourses often appear to have common goals, but this study shows that they do not share common values. This means that rather than actually communicating ideas about what they value in education, and working towards the goals aligned with these values, opposing perspectives in fact, talk past each other. Even worse, they confuse the understanding of important concepts such as success, and diffuse the energy that might go into collectively striving for it. The resulting tension goes some way to explaining why educationalists tend to react negatively to policy changes they feel do not enhance, or worse, hinder the pedagogical processes of their work. It also explains why researchers might be frustrated by current debates and favour a completely new ‘paradigm’ as a way to improve future education. One can also sympathise with the public and their confusion about education, given not only their own different values and ideals for education, but also the contradictory beliefs that are constructed as a result of the way education is presented. As part of a democratic process, improving the education system is, or at least should be, a precarious matter of trying to understand, balance and accommodate multiple factors, and finding ways of engaging in genuinely productive discussions.

Investigating the Discourses

One of the problems with investigating beliefs and values related to educational success is that these are articulated through language that is always contextually and socially constructed. Language is also subject to power inequities that are often taken-for-granted and go unnoticed. Furthermore, language is dynamic, with vocabulary often being used in new or specific ways, and transferred from one social context to another, consequently accruing connotations or specific meanings in the different contexts. As Biesta (2007) states, “language is always a limited and imperfect tool, but it is the best and only tool we have” (p.26).

This study emerged from discussions about education for the future (Gilbert, 2005, Bigum, 2003, Miller & Bentley, 2003) and the realisation of what Shallcrass in the 1970s, Wagner in the 1990s and Biesta in 2009 all noted; namely that it is not clear what the public of New Zealand perceive as successful education. To progress such discussions and research into future focussed education, I argue that it is critical that we understand how public perceptions of education are constructed and reinforced through the language that constitutes public discourse. CDA is the methodological approach chosen for this study, specifically for its intent to systematically get beyond the surface
of the language (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p.92). The linguistic approach is adopted as a way of furthering research and understanding some of the subtle, yet powerful, influences in the discipline of education. Using the concept of success as an indicator, this study examines the assumptions, power inequities, values and purposes that underlie educational discourses in the public domain, and considers these in the wider historical and socio-political context. The overarching research questions ask: How is the concept of success constructed in contemporary public discourses on education in New Zealand; and what do these constructions reveal about any common beliefs concerning the values and ideals of education which could contribute to greater cohesion and efficacy in planning future focussed education?

The structure of the thesis

Adopting a humanities approach, I use both primary and secondary literature throughout this thesis rather than in a specific literature review chapter. Primary literature constitutes the texts that are examined; that is, the data. Secondary literature supports, and is interwoven into the analysis and discussion of the data. The focus of the secondary literature is on the discipline of education, but literature that supports and explains the methodological approach and historical contextualisation of the data is also integrated into chapters two and three respectively. In most instances short extracts from the data are included to exemplify and explain the features found in the analysis. However, in a few cases, where the texts are relatively short, I have included an image of the original text to give the reader the opportunity to see the extracts in their original context.

Chapter two discusses the theoretical perspective, and describes the methodology used in this study. To work towards how we might productively discuss education of the future, it is necessary to review what education has meant in the past, and chapter three provides an important retrospective view for this study. This chapter also provides evidence of how discourses have shifted, or remained the same, over time. Chapters four to seven present selected samples of the data analysis, in four separate categories, based on their source or type. The analyses in these chapters provide the evidence of the conflicting underlying values that are argued in this thesis to inhibit progress towards coherent and effective educational framework for the future. The work of chapter eight is to summarise and draw together the linguistic features identified in
the data analyses, and to describe the relationship between the language and the
discourse of educational success.

The many complex and dynamic relationships that exist between education,
society and language cannot, of course, all be covered within the scope of this thesis.
Some topics, though apparent in the data, are not able to be explored to the depth they
undoubtedly deserve. Topical issues such as, charter schools, teacher performance,
achievement of Māori learners; and the language associated with topics such as,
information and communication technology, and the changing way we understand
concepts such as ‘knowledge’, ‘innovation’, or ‘diversity’ as they relate to education,
are all touched on in this thesis in their relation to the construction of success, but are
not intended to be the focus of the discussion. The focus of this thesis is how language
in the public domain constructs the concept of success in education.
Theoretical perspective - a linguistic approach

Discussions about how best to educate young people necessarily draw on a complex array of concepts and interconnected relationships between pedagogy and society. The multiple influences on education mean that this study draws on several fields of research in addition to education, including sociology, history, and media studies. Ideas from each of these fields are incorporated throughout this thesis, and while the research approach is linguistic, the central field of research is education.

Linguists have developed many methodological approaches to examining the language of spoken and written discourse, from the very close detailed studies using Conversation Analysis (CA), to a post-modernist view that ascribes the construction of identity and reality to discursive processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1979; Burr, 1995). Though the focus of such approaches varies, the underlying premise behind them is that language is not just a descriptive tool, but one that acts upon and constitutes aspects of society as well. One critical linguistic theory describes language as a “form of social practice” (Eagleton, 1991, p.193; Kress, 1988, p.80; Janks, 1997, p.329). These theorists argue that it is through language that societies reproduce what is thought of as ‘real’ or ‘normal’, and therefore taken-for-granted (Fairclough, 2001a).

It is helpful here to clarify the terms language and discourse as I use them in this thesis. While language is commonly thought of as the system for communicating meaning, discourse is described by Foucault and others as system by which meaning or knowledge is constructed; a “system of representation” (Hall, 1997 p.44). According to Hall (1997), “Foucault argues that since we can only have a knowledge of things if they have a meaning, it is discourse – not the things-in-themselves – which produces knowledge” (p.45).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that specifically examines underlying assumptions or norms that are overlooked in everyday discourse, and therefore what is thought of as ‘common knowledge’. Theorists, such as Foucault, claim that these assumptions constitute and mask inequality and abuse of power. CDA is defined as “fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language” (Habermas, 1967, p.259 cited in Wodak, 2011,
p.53). Wodak notes also that these relationships occur in context, and states that CDA is concerned with power and control in language and the “intertextuality and recontextualization of competing discourses in various public spaces and genres” (Wodak, 2011, p.52).

**Assumptions, reality and truth**

As one aspect of the social structure that is at the heart of both individuals’ and the country’s well-being, it seems important to ensure that education is one domain in which power relations remain transparent and equitable. Codd (1994b) points out that this cannot be assumed when he states, “what is at stake [...] is which discourse type is to be dominant within the social domain of education, and therefore which practices are to be ideologically maintained or strengthened” (p.44). In doing so he reaffirms the link between ideology and power (also noted by Foucault, 1971) and that this is critical in educational practices. The reciprocal relationship between ideology and discursive power in education, implied by Codd, is further explained by Holborow (2007) who describes ideology as, “a set of ideas that emerges from specific social relations and supports the interests of a particular social class. Thus, rather than being the expression of what is objectively true, ideologies are true according to particular standpoints” (p.52). Holborow is saying that ideologies define what is true for particular groups, or that what is perceived as ‘truth’ is influenced by power. It is this acknowledgement that truth is therefore variable, and because education is generally believed to be based on truth, or objective and unchangeable ‘reality’, which currently constitute the ‘knowledge’ that is core matter of school, that is important here.

However, truth, reality and knowledge are argued by others to be constructed through discourse (Coloma, 2011; Stahl, 2004). Ball (1993) states “we need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, as discourses” (p.14). In some cases reality or truth may be overtly constructed in discourse. A report by the Education Policy Response Group (EPRG) acknowledges this in the statement, “newspaper editorials have reported and generated public concern over allegedly falling academic standards in state schools” (my emphases) (2012, p.26). Similarly, Ranginui Walker (2005) in a discussion of Māori knowledge in education claims that the state is capable of “generating ‘truth’” (p.2) through research. Research can powerfully, but subtly reify ‘truths’ with empirical evidence, particularly statistical data. As Porter (1995) states,
“numbers create and can be compared with norms, which are among the gentlest and yet most pervasive forms of power in modern democracies” (p.45 cited in Lingard, 2011, p.360). It is clear from examples such as this, that consistent use in common discourse tends to ‘normalise’ newly constructed concepts, which are then accepted as the ‘truth’ by the public. This unobtrusive power, particularly when wielded by the state, has the capacity to undermine values, which New Zealanders have largely taken-for-granted.

Situating this study

As noted in the introduction, a wealth of literature exists about many of the concepts involved in this study. Yet it is only since the 1970s that theorists started to combine linguistic analysis with the scrutiny of social events such as, the women’s movement and the peace movement (Rogers et al., 2005). Openshaw (2009) commented on the increasing use of CDA at this time, and confirmed it as a useful framework with which to investigate education policy and discourse. A few educational researchers also deliberately began linking the micro-analysis of text with the wider social context of education, but tended to concentrate on descriptive analysis of classroom interactions (MacLure, 2003; Rogers et al., 2005). Few have used linguistic analysis to examine abstract concepts such as success in this domain and while many texts refer to success either directly or indirectly, very few attempt to define what they mean by it. This confirms that value-laden concepts are mostly “taken for granted… [and] … presented as a self-evident good” (Saarinen, 2007, p.61). Zepke, Leach and Butler (2011) explore student success at a tertiary level, and describe student success as “a complex construct” (p.227), and a combination of processes, criteria and goals. These include: “engagement, persistence, completion, graduation and entry to employment…” (Zepke et al, 2011, p.222). Given this complexity, they suggest that literature should be reviewed using “a number of lenses” (p.228). Seeking perspectives rather than ‘lenses’, I reviewed a wide range of education literature and studies to inform my research, with each contributing to some aspect of my understanding of the relationships between society, discourse, and education. Some of these are summarised here.

Many studies have explored the effects of neoliberalism on education, with several New Zealand studies focussing specifically on the 1989 education reforms known as ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ (Lange 1988) as part of the shift to a neoliberal ideology. Cathy Wylie (for example 2006, 2009, 2012) has produced many analyses
and critiques of the reforms since its implementation, while Vaughan (1994), offered a more discursive approach, adopting a Foucauldian analysis of the power relations associated with the reforms.

Two studies specifically looked at education and the media. In one, Roulston (2005) investigated shifts in educational discourse in New Zealand, and included a quantitative approach to support a qualitative analysis of newspaper articles on education over an eleven year period spanning the 1989 education reforms. Roulston categorised the articles according to a newspaper scale referred to as the ‘Budd’ scale; a scale devised to rate news articles according to a number of criteria such as column and headline size and position in the newspaper. Combining this scale with story content, Roulston’s analysis found that the substantive quality of reporting education matters declined markedly over the period, and suggested a marked shift in the values being reported and arguably perceived by the general public. In the other, Hammersley (2006) explored media bias in reporting social science research and looked specifically at how an educational review was reported to look for evidence of “systematic inaccuracies […] that reflect […] racism” (p.143). This provided an in-depth discussion of the media as both a filter and a lens through which educational issues are mediated.

Employing a linguistic approach, Mulderrig (2008) combines CDA with corpus linguistics, a method that utilises computer analysis of a data set taken from ‘real world’ texts. In this case the texts consisted of seventeen white papers that focus on the educational policies of successive governments in the UK over a period of three decades. Computer analysis made it possible to reveal and track prominence patterns of key terms over the time period. Mulderrig’s (2008) analysis found three key themes, and associated these with three key periods. She found that the discourses of Thatcher’s 1980s government constructed education as being in crisis and “focused principally on fears about falling standards and teachers’ performance” (p.166). In the 1990s under Major, the discursive focus shifted to competitiveness in the context of increased globalisation, with terms reflecting increased managerialism. Under the Blair government of the 2000s educational focus turned to the skills required for future economic and social policy implementation. Thus providing evidence of the shifting political focus.

Saarinen (2007) and Gillies (2011) examined educational policy documents and focused on the concept of quality. Gillies found that, across Europe, this concept had been reconstructed as a result of increased use of business-oriented language in the
delivery of education. He found that the shift in rhetoric correlated to a division between teaching and learning, and argued that an emphasis on the ‘delivery’ of teaching nullified the role and efforts of the learners in this essentially social process, thus changing the focus from the success of students, to the success of the system delivering education. Biesta (2009) similarly explores shifting values in society and education and examines how these are reflected in the discourse of education.

Rogers et al. (2005), in a comprehensive review covering the period between 1980 and 2003, provide a useful summary of studies that used CDA in an educational domain. Of the 46 studies reviewed by Rogers et al., three analysed written texts sourced from public documents. In one of these studies, Thomas (2002) examined the effect of public discourse on education policy, and argued that negative media coverage of a curriculum area “constructed a preferred discourse” (p.188) that privileged particular voices. Taylor (2004), another study adopting a CDA approach, published since Rogers et al.’s (2005) review, also examined educational policy discourse and claimed that such analyses illuminates marginalised and competing discourses.

The range of topics and the multiplicity of perspectives briefly reviewed here, all support various aspects of my study. Combining these aspects by using linguistic analyses of key articles across a range of genres, and situating them contextually, suggests that the approach taken in this study is well placed to investigate and contribute to understanding the construction of an important educational concept in the public domain.

**Informing the study**

Initial searches using the key indicators ‘success’ and closely related concepts, such as, ‘achievement/underachievement’, ‘purpose’ and ‘failure’ resulted in a considerable array of texts. These included a large number of advertisements for courses and institutions, related not only to academic education programmes, but also to work, business and personal development. Another theme that appeared frequently in these searches was an increasing focus on environmental issues and the importance of education for environmental awareness and sustainability. It became obvious that a rigorous process would be needed for assessing the relevance of this material and that clear, limiting criteria would need to be set. This had been anticipated for the data gathering stage, but was also necessary, to a more limited extent, for the literature review. Adding the words ‘school’ and ‘New Zealand’ to the search criteria both
clarified the study focus by distinguishing school from tertiary education, and reduced the number of resulting hits.

Library catalogue and internet searches provided both primary data for analysis, and secondary literature for informing the study, and this became the first criteria for organising the material. An initial literature review had identified five general categories for the literature that would inform the study. These focussed on, but were not limited to, schools in the New Zealand context and included:

1. Historical education discourses, particularly those incorporating the concepts of success, purpose and values
2. The 1989 New Zealand educational reforms
3. The language of new public management and neoliberalism in educational discourse
4. ‘Future-focused’ education
5. Theoretical framework and methodological approaches

Naturally, these topics diversified and expanded as I read more widely and the study progressed, but the categories nevertheless remained a useful guide.

**The data**

Key criteria for data selection were refined as a result of some trial analyses and include texts that are:

- in the public domain
- set in a New Zealand educational context
- specifically related to school (as opposed to tertiary or industry training)
- directly referred to or implied the key concepts of success, achievement and/or failure.
- published between 2010 and 2012

The two-year timeframe was selected in order to remain as up to date as possible and reflect the current situation in New Zealand. Given that there has been a great deal of public discourse about educational issues at the time of this study, the possibility of limiting the data to only a few months of 2012 was considered. However, the longer timeframe allowed some flexibility to include some important government documents, such as the 2011 Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Education, which provide a foundation on which the current education system is based and also represents a ‘snapshot’ of the government’s position on education at this time.
The data were initially expected to allow a comparison between discourses emanating from governmental sources such as policy documents, ministerial statements and press releases on the one hand, and mainstream media articles gathered from daily newspapers, and their online versions representing public perception or opinion. While the Ministry of Education documents were relatively unambiguous, categorising the representations of educational discourse in the media was problematic for two main reasons. Firstly, the dichotomy assumes two distinct groups of people; those who make up the government perspective, and ‘the public’. This fails to acknowledge that ‘the public’ includes many people with various degrees of involvement or interest in education, including parents, students, and people with no current direct link except as members of society. One significant group of people directly involved in educational discourses are teachers and principals, educational researchers, and the professional groups representing them, such as teachers’ and principals’ associations. I refer to these collectively as ‘educationalists’. These people are represented in the data in a variety of ways, for example, in press releases from professional associations, individually in newspaper opinion columns, and as the subject of journalistic reporting. The perspective of parents was not specifically sought, as this would have required a very different approach and methodology. Rather, the intent is to analyse how educational success is represented in the discourse that might influence public perceptions of educational success.

Secondly, public media articles addressing education and success vary in their purpose and authorship, but authorship does not guarantee which perspective is being represented. This is partly to do with the way the media acts as both a filter and a lens through which issues are selected and interpreted. It is also affected by the use of information technology and the subsequent ease with which news articles can be distributed to multiple publications, and the competitive environment, which encourages newspaper copy to be prepared in the most cost effective ways. One of the most common methods to achieve this is the widespread use of press releases. Such releases are commonly authored by various interest groups, such as the professional associations, but are especially common for announcing government policies and strategies. An observation made in this study, also noted by Bell (1991) is that minimally edited versions of these press releases are often published as journalistic reporting.

The documents that make up the data for this study were categorised into two
main sections for analysis and discussion. Chapter 4 examines and discusses six documents prepared by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Four of these underpin the structure of compulsory education in New Zealand today, and include the *Annual Report 2012* (MoE, 2012a) and the *Statement of Intent 2012* (MoE, 2012b). These are important documents in which the government’s goals and ideals of a successful education system are clearly represented. The *Briefing to the incoming Minister* (MoE, 2011) after the 2011 election is included as a representation of the current status of education in New Zealand and advice to the Minister. One document not technically within the timeframe for the data, but which is an important and current foundation of the education system, is the New Zealand Curriculum (2007) (NZC). Key ideas and examples from the analysis of this text contribute to an overall understanding of the government perspective of success in education and are included in the discussion. Also analysed in this section are two important strategy documents that outline strategies for promoting the success of students who have been identified as not reaching the same levels or types of achievement as the overall population. These include *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success* (MoE, 2009b), the Māori education strategy, and *Success for All - Every School, Every Child*. The latter is a set of information papers presented as a ‘*Fact Sheet*’ (MoE, 2010b) and ‘*Q&As*’ (MoE, 2010c) that have resulted from the *Review of Special Education* (MoE, 2010a). I refer to the first three as ‘foundational documents’, and the latter two as ‘strategies’ that propose how the intentions of the education system are to be enacted.

Texts sourced from New Zealand national and regional newspapers, both print and online versions, are examined next. These are further subdivided and discussed according to types of articles. The press releases examined in chapter 5 were submitted by the Government, the Act Party, and the Labour Party; two professional associations: the New Zealand Education Institution (NZEI) and New Zealand Principal’s Federation (NZPF); two tertiary institutions, Otago Polytechnic and Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT); and the Royal Society of New Zealand. A further eight news articles reporting educational events and attributed to a journalist or other news source constitute the analyses in chapter 6, and six articles that construct success in the negative, or as failure are discussed in chapter 7. These sections also comment on the relationships between press releases and news reporting.

One of the questions that arose in the preparation for this study is the importance of online news as a common source of topical information for many people. Therefore
articles from news sites such as the Herald Online and Stuff are included in the data. The electronic medium allows immediate public responses and discussion via blogs and so on, and has provided an opportunity to consider some examples of public opinion that are spontaneous and unsolicited without directly surveying or interviewing people, but is not a focus area for this study.

Though the selected documents appear to be of widely divergent types, they all adhere to the five selection criteria, and potentially offer a way of exploring the multiple perspectives that constitute a national view of educational success. This type of data has two advantages for this study, firstly as Saarinen (2008) points out, “texts provide a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social structures, relations and processes” (p.722) and secondly no specific ethics approval was required for this study as these documents are on the public record.

CDA as the Methodological Framework

The development of CDA has drawn on the work of theorists such as Foucault (1971), who made the relationship between discourse and power explicit, and Habermas’ who described the relationships between language and action (Fairclough, 2001). Fairclough (1992) integrated these social and political contextual approaches with detailed linguistic analysis, to pay closer attention to the relationship between the language, the texts and the context. These three aspects form the basis of Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional framework for the analysis employed in this study. Given the complexity of the relationships between education, society and language, I have chosen to use CDA for this study as it offers a framework that not only considers each dimension, but also examines the relationships between them. Codd (1994b) affirms that this as a useful framework in which to investigate education discourses.

Application of this framework however, is not as straightforward as following a set of instructions. Fairclough (2001a), as one of the founders of CDA, describes it not so much as a method of analysis, but as an “orientation to language study” (p.10). Van Dijk (2004) concurs that the term analysis in the name may in fact be misleading, as CDA is both a theoretical approach and a method (cited in Rogers et al., 2005, p.379). Analysts therefore suggest a variety of ‘tools’ can be applied to the analysis of discourse to investigate the relationship between language and society. The diversity of descriptions and applications by various analysts show that CDA is a methodologically eclectic approach (Mayr, 2008; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002; Flowerdew, 2008; Wodak
& Meyer, 2001). This study uses a range of CDA ‘tools’, which are explained below, to examine a selection of educational discourses in the form of publicly available written texts (in linguistic analysis convention it is also possible to have ‘spoken’ text).

**Analytical Method and process**

Fairclough’s (1992, p.73) three-dimensional analytical framework guides analysis of these texts at three levels:

1. At a textual level the concept of *success* and closely related concepts such as, *achievement, goals* and *failure* are identified and examined in finer linguistic detail. The linguistic detail examined at this level includes lexical, grammatical and syntactic structures, to find the relationship between the concepts and other items in the text; this is referred to in linguistic terms, as *cohesion* (Paltridge, 2006, p.131). This level of analysis aims to indicate inconsistencies in the text. Also considered is the graphic presentation of the text itself including aspects such as, illustrations, headlines, and prominence.

2. The second level of analysis asks questions about the discursive practice, or what the text ‘does’. In this study, this stage is guided by three key questions:
   a. Who and/or what is included in the discourse; including:
      i. Who is foregrounded?
      ii. How are agents constructed in relation to one another? For example, are the relationships hierarchical, in opposition to each other, are they individualised, or ‘othered’, is the language inclusive or does it signify collectivism?
      iii. Does the relationship show evidence of power inequity between subjects?
   b. How does this text construct *success*?
      i. What constitutes success; is it evident and acknowledged in the discourse or implied as a potential goal?
      ii. What metaphors are associated with success (or failure)?
   c. What is the reader being persuaded to do, think or believe? Or, what is the potential effect of this text on the public?

These questions are intended to highlight assumptions in the discourse, including about the people involved in or with the text, either as the writer(s) or the topic(s). They also consider the effects of the key features of the discourse, in the linguistic context.
This perspective is based on Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1969) assertions that language does not simply describe states of being in a positivist sense, but acts upon the interlocutors (Paltridge, 2006). Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), re-affirm that discourse, particularly political discourse, which constitutes a significant portion of the data in this study, is intended to persuade or encourage “particular ways of acting” (p1). Nye (2004) describes this as ‘soft power’ or “political power that aims to attract rather than coerce” (p.46).

3. At the third level, the details from the earlier steps are interpreted in the wider social, political and historical context. This level of analysis aims to reveal “ideological beliefs, suppositions, assumptions and power relations” (Gillies, 2011, p.228).

Fairclough defines three types of assumptions:
- Existential assumptions: assumptions about what exists
- Propositional assumptions: assumptions about what is or can be or will be the case
- Value assumptions: assumptions about what is good or desirable

(Fairclough, 2003, p.55)

Fairclough (2003) notes that assumptions, particularly the latter, tend to belong to particular discourses and argues that these are ideological. Threadgold (1989), in describing the relationship between language and ideology, stated that “texts are never ideology-free nor objective […] spoken and written genres are among the very processes by which dominant ideologies are reproduced” (p.107).

The analytical process is not a linear one progressing through the three levels, but is a recursive process. Each text was read many times, each time with a different focus. The concept of success is the key focus and the first reading aimed to identify specifically how success is referred to or implied in each text. Next it was useful to consider who was involved in each text. All the agents in a text were highlighted, and the most prominent identified. The prominence may be as the topic of the text and therefore mentioned most often, or foregrounded through positioning in the text or nonverbal graphic effects such as accompanying illustrations. Subsequent readings focused on the relationship and positioning between the agents in the text; key related issues were circled and connected visually to look for textual coherence, or to identify unarticulated connections; graphic details were noted; metaphors identified; and possible underlying assumptions considered.
Each reading could be influenced by something found in a previous reading or in another piece of data. For example, it was noted that very similar articles appeared in various forms or regional newspapers, and most often appeared with different headlines and sometimes slightly different content. Articles and especially opinion pieces were often in response to previous articles, so these needed to be considered in the context of an ongoing dialogue, and inter-textually. Integration of micro and macro views is important in the analysis of social structures through textual analysis (Flowerdew, 2008, p.195) and is one of the characteristics of CDA.

A reflexive note

A further characteristic of CDA is that it is not considered neutral – it is critical, and as Van Dijk (2001) states, “CDA is biased – and proud of it” (p.96). My own position stems from a recognition of the tensions felt within an organisation with a long history of independent and robust education research, but which needs to ensure its survival in a market economy, where the work often must fit within very tight budget and time constraints in order to remain competitive. Within this environment the researchers find themselves working extraordinarily hard to produce quality work to benefit students and schools, when the circumstances require ‘quick and gritty’ reports to satisfy a client’s agenda.

While I feel that quality research must include a strong sense of social responsibility, as a CDA analyst, I have not sought evidence to support a predetermined outcome. Rather, systematic readings of the data have “let ideologies emerge from the data, rather than imposing ideologies onto the data” (Rogers, 2004, p.253). Inclusion of some of the data articles in their entirety in this thesis enables readers to see the extracts in their original context. Readers may therefore form their own interpretation of the constructions discussed in my analyses. Qualitative analyses are of course always open to some interpretation, and I am confident that my reasoning is based on many examples in the data, and is supported by the findings of other analysts. This is one reason for including discussion of the literature with the data analysis.

One “central area of interest in Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis is the investigation of change” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.7) and for this reason a review of important historical stages in the development of education in New Zealand in chapter 3 prefaces the analysis of current discourses.
Chapter 3: A brief review of historical education-related discourse

...to have any influence at all on the future you have got to know, first, where you’ve been, and next, the direction you want to go. (Beeby, 1983, p. 17)

Following Beeby’s advice in the quote above, this chapter explores a selection of historical texts about education. This allows us to trace how educational success was constructed in historical texts, and in turn, to consider which discourses have disappeared, and which have been retained or reconstructed. The texts reviewed here in chronological order, include extracts from early newspaper items, reports presented to the House of Representatives, and academics’ commentaries; all of which focus on education and its role in New Zealand society. Each contributes to understanding how educational discourses have evolved in New Zealand.

The current New Zealand education system began in the 1800s and is largely based on the model brought here by British missionaries and settlers. Often overlooked in the literature however, is the fact that when Pākehā first arrived, the indigenous population had social structures that included educational processes. The values and attitudes that informed traditional Māori education have been long suppressed, but where they do exist they are in tension with the dominant culture. These values still influence and play a role in New Zealand today, despite assumptions of European educational superiority and the historic power inequities between settler society and indigenous peoples (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Bishop, 2005). The European view of education was and is dominant, and is reproduced in discourses, especially those that relate to measuring achievement and success of the education system. Success in this context is unquestioningly assessed on Pākehā values, and while beyond the scope of this thesis, it must be acknowledged that the traditional learning systems also have their intrinsic notions of success.

Considering a Māori perspective of success values in education

The fact that Māori did not have written language is a major factor contributing to the belief that education arrived with Pākehā settlers and much historical discourse reproduces this view to varying degrees by characterising the relationship between Māori and Pākehā as that between beneficent teacher and passive recipient (Jones & Jenkins, 2008). Some very early commentators such as Dieffenbach (1843), Barnicoat
(1842) and Stephens (1843) (quoted in Mitchell & Mitchell, 2004, p.329) noted Māori as intelligent and quick to learn and active, rather than entirely passive, in their engagement with the new learning. Mitchell and Mitchell (2004) also recount Crawford’s (1880) observation of the enthusiasm shown by groups of Māori as they gained the ability to write. Furthermore, when schools based on the British model were established, Māori were reported as readily attending and sending their children to these schools. However, these still construct Pākehā knowledge as superior and the learning as one way. Mitchell and Mitchell’s (2004) re-telling of the historical accounts (above) some 160 years later, in an era when Māori educational success is foregrounded as a major issue, was undoubtedly intended to highlight Māori enthusiasm and capacity to learn new things such as writing. The effect however, is that the re-telling of these Pākehā observations may reinforce a discourse that even now normalises the superiority of Pākehā knowledge.

However other authors, such as Jones and Jenkins (2008), point out that while Māori were clearly keen to learn from Pākehā, from the Māori perspective, this was assumed to be a reciprocal relationship, or one of mutual exchange, rather than merely active engagement with the new education opportunities. After all, from the indigenous perspective, there was much that the new settlers did not appear to know about the land and environment, and particularly about “basic spiritual, philosophical and social matters” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p.199). Establishment of the early European style schools therefore, was possible not only because of settler domination, but because of Māori enthusiasm for the additional knowledge offered, not necessarily ‘better’ knowledge (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p.188).

This more reciprocal notion of an educational relationship between Māori and Pākehā has only recently emerged in the discourse. For example, The Wānanga Capital Establishment Report (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999), as part of a Treaty of Waitangi claim, described Māori as “eager to participate in an exchange of knowledge with Pākehā on their arrival” (Sec 2.2, p.4) (author’s emphasis). Success in this regard therefore could be seen from both the perspective of the settler but also from that of Māori.

Despite support for both of the above interpretations and the wealth of ethnographies that describe the complexities of Māori life, there is little general understanding today of what constituted education and knowledge in pre-European times in New Zealand (Openshaw, Lee & Lee, 1993). Clearly the colonists’ objective of ‘civilising the native’ had to be achieved by replacing of any recognition of what
might constitute success for Māori in their indigenous state – that is an intensive learning process that had to prepare all for survival within a very short time frame. Māori educational success had to be replaced with what the colonizer defined as success.

**Reconstruction of Māori success values in education**

The first government-funded schools established in New Zealand were mission schools funded under the Education Ordinance of 1847, followed by the Native Schools Act in 1858. The latter set up a parallel system of schools whose main objective involved instilling “civilisation among the aboriginal native race” (Taylor 1862, p.35). The concept of ‘civilisation’ however, encompasses ideological ideals and carries more meaning and implications than merely offering an improved way of living. Judith Simon, who provided evidence for the claimants in Waitangi Treaty negotiations in 1999, is quoted as saying that the government saw the establishment of early New Zealand schools as part of an “assimilative agenda” (Waitangi Tribunal, 1999, p.5). This agenda implies the forcing of an indigenous group to adopt the values, attitudes and beliefs of the colonisers, and the process involved the discursive reconstruction of Māori values so they could be acceptable and recognisable to the dominant colonial powers. Success would therefore be recognisable to the non-native. This became explicitly constructed in official discourses that ignored or denigrated any educational processes and values that Māori already had and asserted the superiority of very specific Pākehā knowledge. The Native Schools Report (1862) disparaged the Māori language and ways of living, which are summarised in European concepts using words such as *filth, laziness, evil, failings, negative character*; all of which were deemed ‘obstacles to civilization’ (extract 1).

*Extract 1.*

*The Native language itself is also another obstacle in the way of civilization, Native habits of filth and laziness also impede the progress of civilization. This is an evil hard to be dealt with, inasmuch as it is rather of a negative character and so thoroughly ingrained in the Native. As a remedy, I would suggest that every School-room should be furnished with a clock, and that a proper time-table for work, study, and recreation should be devised, and most strictly adhered to: by such means we might, perhaps in time, overcome this Native failing.*

(Taylor, 1862, pp.35-36)
This official discourse ignored any values and attitudes that Māori had, and instead focused attention on habits and values considered crucial and measureable to the coloniser, whose success was already perceived as proven conqueror, coloniser and empire builder. Extract 1 exemplifies how one set of attitudes is condemned as failing, and is to be replaced by characteristics of success – the clock and timetable – the measurement and management of time.

In a further extract (2 below) from Taylor’s contribution to the Native Schools Report (1862) ‘civilisation’ is specifically equated with Pākehā attitudes to private property ownership, as opposed to prevalent collective ownership and use value. Māori tribal values are constructed as a ‘serious impediment’ and as destructive of personal ownership. Success was therefore predicated on individual activity that could be calculated, managed and compared to others - characterised by private ownership rather than lodged in a collective mentality.

Extract 2.

In carrying on the work of civilization among the aboriginal Native race, through the medium of schools, some impediments to progress, which may be gradually overcome by a diligent course of training in our schools deserve comment: and first and most serious of all, is that state of communism, in which all kinds of property are held amongst them. Their present social condition bears testimony to the ill-effects of such a system. Tribal rights destroy personal ownership, few among them can boast of owning an acre of land as absolutely and wholly his own. In the same way, stock, houses, farm produce, and even the very children, are held as the common property of the tribe, with the exception of horses, perhaps, few attempts have been made by the Natives to individualize property. (Taylor, 1862, p.35)

The fundamental solution explicit in extract 2 is the destruction of collectivity, or what is referred to as a state of communism. Native communal values are constructed as the reason for a present social condition that is judged as inferior and counterproductive to ‘civilisation’ - the goal of successful education. Such discursive denigration is a process referred to by Bishop (2005) as “pathologizing Māori social and political institutions” (p.55). Bishop (2005) points out that such discourses deliberately foregrounded representations of Māori deprivation (equated with failings), while ignoring successful farming and commercial ventures achieved within communal tribal structures. Bishop (2005) notes that this process clearly not only rationalised but
facilitated colonial appropriation of land (p.61) and importantly, laid the groundwork for individuality. Dennis McLean, in his 2011 biographical description of Dieffenbach, a scientist in New Zealand around 1843 notes the significance of this and writes:

*Extract 3.*

> With remarkable insight he [Dieffenbach] identified the 'ruling spirit of English colonization...absolute individuality' as at odds with the communal lifestyle and culture of the Māori. *(McLean, 2011)*

However there were limits to the degree of individual competitiveness that Māori were allowed. Henry Taylor’s 1862 school inspection report clearly also reflects the attitude that while education was meant to offer *high mental culture* (extract 4), this was not to be extended to Māori. Rather they were to be trained for manual and technical labour. This way the government was able to effectively create a class, rather than a racial division, that was both justified and reified through the separation of technical or vocational training from academic or ‘high’ education.

*Extract 4.*

> I do not advocate for the Natives under present circumstances a refined education or high mental culture: it would be inconsistent if we take into account of the position they are likely to hold for many years to come in the social scale, and inappropriate if we remember that they are better calculated by nature to get their living by manual rather than by mental labour. *(Taylor, 1862, p.38)*

Under the ‘assimilative agenda’, the coloniser could only comprehend limited competitive individual success, not genuine success for Māori. The colonisers had a range of tactics for limiting success while promoting assimilation, from legislative efforts such as the New Zealand Settlement Act of 1863, bloody wars in many provinces around the country, and forcibly confiscating vast tracts of land from Māori occupation, while at the same time promoting discursive and educational strategies to shift Māori attitudes.

**From assimilation to social control**

With racial dominance secured, European style education became a mechanism for social control. The native schools, though promoted as civilising influences, and appearing to offer Pākehā knowledge for the indigenous population, also worked to restrict the knowledge extended to Māori.
Some twenty years later attempts were made to subvert these policies, most notably by the Te Aute College principal who, in the 1880s, coached Māori students to pass matriculation exams and enter university. This resulted in a few Māori, such as Apirana Ngata, appearing to have ‘succeeded’ in Pākehā and upper class society. However, these were regarded as exceptional cases, not because of a lack of aptitude in the Māori population, as noted earlier, but to reduce the idea of assumed right of access to these types of education for Māori. As noted before, Māori had been constructed as a potential working class and this fact predetermined the education that would be required. According to Hogben, appointed Director General of Education from 1889-1913, it was not only Māori whose aspirations should be limited. The power of the upper class coloniser redefined and constructed the status of less desirable positions (for both Māori and Pākehā) effectively through phrases such as “the dignity of manual labour” (Hogben, 1906).

Educational success, in the era of colonisation and native schools had much to do with ‘civilising’ Māori children. This extended from “reducing the wild, dirty and naked children of a native village to some kind of order and cleanliness” (Gorst, 1862, p.10), to instruction in the spoken and written English language, and the creation of functioning workers capable of arriving at work on time, sticking to a timetable and being self-disciplined individuals. The purpose behind this was to ensure an effective workforce. One that, if not totally assimilated into Pākehā ways, was at least compliant. That of course, is a matter of power. As Bishop (2005) points out, while political power was achieved through institutions such as courts, churches and schools, the real power of colonial dominance was achieved through the discursive marginalisation or “pathologizing of Māori people’s lives” (p.58).

The dual discourses of education in the development of a nation

European historical education discourses naturally reflect the rugged physical and practical constraints of the era, and where “getting ahead was possible if you put in the work and effort” (Thorns & Sedgwick, 1997, p.159). By the late 1800s, with the Pākehā government well established, educational discourse had developed two main foci for successful education. Firstly the practical needs of the emerging nation, and secondly, promoting both utilitarian and ideological values in the successive generations of the new society. An 1889 newspaper article in the Auckland Star (extract 5) is an example of the type of discourse that seems to encompass both these foci. Advocating
the establishment of free schools for successful colonisation. This view seems at one level, to embrace the social value of free education, but in the context of depression with unemployment and industrial strife of the time, suggests the intent is a pragmatic solution for the social control.

Extract 5.

The education system set up in New Zealand was clearly seen as a mechanism that had contributed to the successful colonisation of the country. A public system of education however, required some criteria by which its efficacy could be assessed. Roulston (1986), in her analysis of 1901-1905 newspaper articles about education, noted just such a pragmatic measure. Success was “judged by those in the population who could read and write” (p.7). Here we see the emergence of the dual assessment processes of both the individual and the system, in which the numbers of students achieving these criteria contributed to an overall assessment of how well the system performed. The level of achievement of individuals was, much as it still is, assessed through series of tests or examinations.

Two decades later, with the expansion of the economy after WW1 and before the effect of the depression beginning in the 1920s, a sense of building nationhood and citizenship emerged in educational discourse, which often focused on the development of moral character and other human qualities. Mulgan and Mulgan (1925), writing about citizenship, state that education “benefits the individual by giving him knowledge and mental and moral training, which make him a more efficient unit of the community and generally a better citizen” (pp.70-72). The language used by Mulgan and Mulgan
(1925) acknowledges the individual and the collective benefits of education, and reflects the dual assessment criteria noted above. More importantly, though the text includes the phrase *an efficient unit* this is not in this case associated with an economic perspective, which emerges later, but rather reinforces the position of an individual within society. This is an important distinction from individualism as it is constructed in the modern world.

In addition to the utilitarian requirements of nation building, education was also expected to generate and foster the human qualities seen as desirable for the establishment and reproduction of a civil society. Mulgan and Mulgan go on to explain that education must also include “building up character”… and “…education of the body” (original italics) (Mulgan & Mulgan, Ca., 1925, p.73) (extract 6).

*Extract 6.*

The word education comes from the Latin word ‘educare’, ‘to draw or lead out’ and means the drawing out or development of the mind. By educating a person we mean, not merely teaching him a number of facts, but training him to think, to reason, to apply his knowledge to the best advantage. Education therefore means first the training of the mind.  

(Mulgan & Mulgan, 1925, p.73)

These contrasting perspectives on education, which variously favour values (academic) and/or purpose (vocational) as the crucial functions of education, continued to be threaded through educational discourses, with the focus shifting one way or another according to other influences.

During the early 1920s, the focus of public discourse was more concerned with managing the effects of depression in the economy. Many articles and notices in the papers simply reported on school expenditure. The discourse also reflected an increased emphasis on preparation for work, for both Māori and Pākehā, with many references to ‘technical’ and ‘agricultural’ education in particular, rather than commentaries on the value of academic pursuits (see extract 7).
As the country recovered from depression in the late 1930s, and the election of a Labour government in 1935, politically motivated education policies focused on building a cohesive and egalitarian society. In addition to vocational training, educational discourse included academic purposes and democratic values. Beeby, the Director of Education in 1937, emphasised equity and the value of an academic education as a means of social mobility. This strengthened belief in Peter Fraser’s (1939) oft quoted statement that education is the right of all citizens. In this statement Fraser reproduced Mulgan and Mulgan’s perspective by reaffirming education as both a social and an individual good. Consequently, the values underlying the two perspectives of educational success glimpsed earlier (see also Roulston’s judgement criteria, page 34), become more apparent here; success of education evaluated on the basis of its ability to support the underlying value of collectivism, and success in education, based on its ability to support the value of individualism. A correspondence between these perspectives of successful education as understood to be either an individual or collective good, are also threads that persist in contemporary discourse, and which it will be argued, have contributed to confused expectations and understandings of educational success. The plight that confronted Māori, denigrating their collectivism as unproductive to be supplanted by individualism and good management, now confronts us all.
Post-war educational discourse in New Zealand

The post WWII period saw the discourse of equity correspond to greater political commitment to the welfare state, even under National led governments from 1949. The vocational versus academic debate also persisted, and focused on which alternative provided a greater contribution to the wider society. The Thomas Report (Department of Education, 1944) acknowledges this debate, declaring on the one hand that “the aim of education was primarily a fully developed person” (Sutch, 1969, p.323), and on the other that there is a strong public expectation to include a vocational focus. The latter was to be accomplished by including a large number of practical subjects such as “shorthand [and] heat-engines” (ibid.) in the curriculum.

The end of WWII, through to the 1960s, were an economic boom-time for New Zealand. However, with declining exports to Britain from 1965, and Britain joining the EEC in 1973, the former dominion was forced to find its own markets in an increasingly competitive world. Education, which up until that time had been “regarded as a form of welfare, wedded to principles of universal provision” (Peters & Marshall, 1996, p.3), came to be increasingly influenced by competition. The 1967 “National government [showed] clear signs of moving away from a system of freer and better education for all, and toward emphasis on the few” (Sutch (1969) p.325). While in the past class played a large role in a person’s expected future vocation with little social movement between generations, the intervening years of increased social mobility meant there were rising expectations of the education system and from the credentials it offered.

According to Roulston (1986), by the 1970s, success in education was no longer measured by clear criteria such as literacy, but now related entirely to social mobility. Roulston (1986) uses the 1978 Yearbook statement as indicative of the criteria: “New Zealanders still believed that ‘getting on’ was through education, which was seen as the gateway to success” (p.8). ‘Getting on’, in this case, referred to social mobility rather than aiming for social equity as emphasised by Beeby and Fraser earlier in the century. Discourses now reflected a tendency towards emphasising individual competitiveness, rather than collective progress. Court and O’Neill (2011) claim that a move “away from traditional social democracy…” (p.122) became evident in the discourse. Changes in social attitudes were articulated through a new discourse which “rapidly gained traction” (ibid.) with the implementation of the Tomorrow’s Schools policy.
Neoliberalism and 1989 education reforms

The 1989 education reforms saw the implementation of the policy known as “Tomorrow’s Schools; Administering for Excellence” (Lange, 1988). The reforms generated much international and local interest, with a number of British and American researchers considering education reform in their own countries, including Apple (1995); Ladd (2010) and Levin (2010), and local educationalists such as Codd, (1994a, 1994b) Gordon & Whitty (1997) Harker (1990) and Wylie (2006) evaluating the effect in New Zealand. Wylie (2009) points out, however, that no other countries have emulated this structure.

Rather than outright dissatisfaction with the education that children were receiving at the time, the reforms aimed specifically to restructure the administrative system, which was described as “overcentralised, overly complex and in need of extensive change” (Department of Statistics, 1990, p.261). Restructuring also aimed to increase local community involvement, and remedy the perceived problem of ‘provider capture’; that is, a system that is supposedly totally controlled by bureaucrats and practitioners. ‘Provider capture’ was seen “as a threat to economic efficiency” (Thrupp, 1998, p.195), being identified both as a perceived collusion between schools and the inspectorate, and manifest in the growing power of teacher unions (Court & O’Neill, 2011). The former was addressed by separation of the audit and review function from advisory services, and the latter was accomplished by framing the unions as antagonistic to change in the education system, much as Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister, had accomplished in the 1980s. She constructed teachers’ unions “essentially as a conspiracy against the public interest” (Wolf, 1998, p.224). The important point here is that these top down reforms were made in the name of ‘public interest’, which itself had been reconstructed to be synonymous with desirable economic values.

It was assumed that more efficiently run schools, resulting from these reforms, would naturally lead to greater educational achievement and success (Hattie, 2009). However, subsequent studies have shown that while no one advocated a return to the previous system, they also claimed that little had changed in the way of educational achievement (Fiske & Ladd, 2003; Wylie, 2009). Such top-down approaches to improving schooling continued to attract criticism for their inherent lack of input from those most directly involved in the reality of education, especially teachers (Langley, 2009).
Clearly the intention of the reforms was to improve efficiency in the delivery side of the system, with an expectation that this would raise achievement. However, it seems that the reforms have instead reconstructed the concept of *success* as synonymous with efficiency, and moreover as the responsibility of individuals, and no longer attached to notions of equity or collectivism. The mindset behind this type of thinking seems to be more aligned with how we understand a factory model than one of social advancement, where productivity is evaluated against the profits of the company rather than the social well-being of the society in which the factory exists. Peters (2000) describes this as a shift from viewing education as “centrally related to welfare” (p.63) to “a sub-sector of the economy – perhaps even one of the leading sectors of the ‘knowledge economy’” (p.63). A feature of this new discourse is the assumption that individual economic advancement is necessarily beneficial to the whole society. Though increasing disparity between socioeconomic groups point to this as indefensible. Just as the colonial discourses constructed the indigenous population as a working class, neoliberal discourse of the 1980s set about reconstructing social values as economic values.

The 1989 reforms are clearly associated with the rise of economic and competitive values in education, but other less well-known events reinforced the systemic changes and influenced change within schools. For instance, the Minister of Education the Hon Lockwood Smith, in the foreword to the 1991 budget document titled *Investing in people: our greatest asset*, stated, “studies like the Porter Project, questioned the relevance of our current curriculum with its excessive focus on social issues and poor preparation for the competitive world” (Smith, 1991, p.1). Codd (2005a) claims that this statement and others like it at the time, show that the agenda was to replace “citizenship as the primary political purpose of public education” (p.196). In a similar vein, Brian Easton (1999), an economist who argued against neoliberalism, bluntly claimed that calls for greater efficiency and ‘commercialisation of education’ were to “stamp out broader values” (p.156).

It is now well documented that education has been hugely influenced by the language of neoliberalism or New Public Management, which is described as a strategic approach used in private business sectors to improve productivity or service provision through the analysis of results (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p.243). This approach and its

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2 The ‘Porter Project’ refers to a report from the Havard Business School titled “Upgrading New Zealand’s Competitive Advantage”.

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attendant discourse has been adopted by subsequent governments and applied across the public sector, including education, where it translated into an increasing emphasis on assessment, accountability and standardisation (Court & O’Neill, 2011; Fiske & Ladd, 2000; Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2011; Gilbert, 2005; Langley, 2009; Leane, 2000; Lingard, 2011; Wylie, 2006). This trend is criticised as ignoring the social values traditionally associated with success in education, and is reminiscent of the fate that befell Māori society in their encounters with the colonisers’ education values. Wolf (1998) points out that the imposed discourse is now so prevalent in education today, that “any other reference point strikes us as curious” (p.219). It has become a normal way of discussing education today. The question is, how has this discourse so effectively colonised the education sector? Why were deeply held social values that sustained an idea of education as a social good, able to be marginalised and replaced by a conception of education as a private good best reproduced by individual competitiveness? The following chapters explore samples of today’s discourses and discuss the extent of this ‘normalisation’, its effects, and how it has come to dominate.
Chapter 4: Educational success as constructed in Ministry of Education texts

This chapter explores a set of key documents that together offer an overall picture of how the concept of success is constructed from the government perspective. These documents include the Annual Report 2012 (MoE, 2012a); the Statement of Intent 2012 (MoE, 2012b); Briefing to the incoming Minister 2011 (MoE, 2011); New Zealand Curriculum (MoE, 2007) (NZC); Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success (MoE, 2009b); and Success for All - Every School, Every Child. The latter is a set of information papers presented as a ‘Fact Sheet’ (MoE, 2010b) and ‘Q&As’ (MoE, 2010c) that have resulted from the Review of Special Education (MoE, 2010a). These documents share some common features, as well as some variation in the way they are presented. Firstly, they are all produced and published by teams of people within the Ministry of Education and are foreworded or attributed to either the Minister of Education, the Secretary for Education or an Associate Minister of Education. Secondly, these are all published in standard official report formats, each with the Ministry of Education logo, title and date on the cover. The Statement of Intent and the Annual Report booklets have a Māori design subtly incorporated into the cover and use minimal colour to highlight titles, tables, charts and graphs. The only graphic is the use of jigsaw pieces to represent key priorities. The strategy documents, on the other hand are highly illustrated, colourful booklets with several photographs, some full page.

The purpose of the foundational texts is to fulfil the obligations of legislation regarding public service sector reporting. More significantly for this study, they outline the criteria against which success is assessed. The strategy documents construct guidelines for the actions set by the foundational texts. While focusing on the action, the colourful strategy documents are clearly constructed to persuade and reassure the public that the actions are valid and valuable. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) claim that all political discourse intends to persuade and evoke action, and these documents, particularly when considered together are a powerful example of that.

The New Zealand Curriculum is described in the foreword as a “clear statement of what we deem important in education” (MoE, 2007). Rather than prescribed teaching units, this curriculum outlines the ‘principles and values’ that underpin New Zealand education. ‘Learning areas’ and ‘key competencies’ are constructed as the skills necessary to achieve educational success. While the values stated in this text
include such things as, integrity, respect, ecological sustainability, and community and participation, these are framed alongside government ideals of ensuring the economic prosperity. Two key findings in the analysis of this text support this claim. Firstly, a process referred to by Bates (2012, p.42) as ‘objectification’ is evident in the grammatical reconstruction of human quality and skill in a plural form. The phrase, *key competencies*, effectively turns qualitative concepts into countable objects. This process is characteristic of neoliberal discourses that aim to make quality measurable. The second finding is the foregrounding of economic values over social values. This is not to say that assessing and measuring are not important. These form an integral part of good research; the point is that research should inform political decisions that incorporate and, most importantly, balance social and environmental and economic concerns. The analysis that follows shows some of the ways that repeated and authoritative use of such discursive constructions, by the MoE and government, has led to widespread reproduction, acceptance and normalisation of this discourse in the education domain.

**Power, Positioning and Pronouns**

The authoritative position of the Ministry of Education, as a government agency, legitimises the texts it produces. Legitimacy is considered a matter of knowledge or truth, but is intrinsically linked to power. Any construction of success within these documents therefore, is a powerful influence on how education is perceived in the public domain. One way of constructing power is through positioning, and the authoritative position of the MoE as authors of these texts, is constructed in a number of ways. It may be stated directly, for example, in the phrase *is the lead advisor* in extract 8, or less directly by reference to the actions it is authorised to carry out, as in extract 9.

*Extract 8.*

*The Ministry of Education is the lead advisor to the Government on the education system …*  
(MoE, 2012b, p.5)

*Extract 9.*

*We set the operating environment...*  
*The Ministry of Education will lead ...*  
*we will meet all the targets set in government plans*  
(MoE, 2012b)
Authority, or power can be reinforced in discourse by reference to a higher authority, such as Cabinet (extract 10). Further legitimacy is added to this text by the description of wider consultation with others, as highlighted below (extract 10).

Extract 10.

Cabinet agreed that the national curriculum should be revised. A widely representative reference group oversaw a development process that included trials in schools, collaborative working parties, online discussions, and an inquiry into relevant national and international research. This process led to the publication of The New Zealand Curriculum: Draft for Consultation 2006. The Ministry of Education received more than [10,000] submissions in response. These were collated and analysed and were taken into consideration when the document that you now have in your hands was being written.

(MoE, 2007, p.4)

In addition to authoritative positioning, government discourses increasingly use personalising pronouns as a subtle form of power. According to Mulderrig (2011) the use of pronouns such as we, us and our, as inclusive or deictic devices has the effect of “collapsing the distinction between the government and the people” (p.565) and in her analysis of policy documents over three successive UK governments, points to dramatic increases in the use of these pronouns to replace references to the government. In New Zealand, this is often explained as simply a matter of style, and the way that ‘ordinary New Zealanders’ talk; or indeed accepted as part of the myth of a classless society, a characteristic referred to with some pride by some New Zealanders (Belich & Wevers, 2008; Pearson, 1980). Similarly in Australia, Thomas (2009) used CDA to explore the relationship between government media and education policy, and points out the significance of the use of personal pronouns in political speeches on education, and claims that the use of we and our ‘invites’ the reader/listener to side with the speaker (p.217).

According to Fairclough (1992), such constructions can disguise real power inequities and hierarchical structures. This is partly related to the inherent ambiguity of English pronouns. For example in the Briefing to the Incoming Minister (MoE, 2011) (BIM) the pronoun we is used 15 times in the executive summary, and it is up to the

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3 Deictic or deixis: features of language which orientate our utterances in time, space and speaker’s standpoint; these include words such as here, there, this and that, as well as first-person pronouns (Finch, 2000).
reader to infer who is meant each time. To examine the intent behind such constructions, it is possible to analyse the text using “patterns of cohesion” (Paltridge, 2006, p.131). This technique derives from one of the four maxims of conversation that constitute Paul Grice’s (1975) co-operative principle, without which he argues that effective communication would not be possible. These maxims state that a conversation or discourse progresses on the basis that each contribution should be of sufficient ‘quality, quantity, relevance, and in a manner’ that allows the participants to interpret the meaning (Paltridge, 2006). Of course these maxims can, and often are ‘flouted’ and generally result in unintended misinterpretation or humour; the maxims are said to be ‘violated’ when there is an intention is to mislead.

Applying this technique to these texts it was found that in the Statement of Intent (MoE, 2012b), we refers exclusively to the MoE, but in the other documents, we and our is most often linked to ‘New Zealand’ or ‘New Zealanders’ through cataphoric reference4, as in the extracts below. Extract 11 shows that while intuitively the phrase our goal seems to represent the authors’ intention, this type of construction encompasses our with New Zealanders. This creates an impression of solidarity with not only the political readers of the report, but in fact, all New Zealanders. The MoE is deliberately aligned with the New Zealand public.

**Extract 11.**

> Our goal remains constant, to be a world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st-century.  

*(MoE, 2012a, Foreword)*

**Extract 12.**

> Although New Zealand’s education system has many strengths, with systematic under-achievement for Māori, Pasifika and other learners from poorer backgrounds, we are a considerable way from achieving that goal. New Zealand’s highest achieving learners compare with the best in the world, but those groups least well served by New Zealand’s education system achieve outcomes comparable with the lowest performing OECD countries. The social consequences of this are all too clear. The economic consequences are equally unacceptable.  

*(MoE, 2011, p.3)*

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4 “Cataphoric reference describes an item which refers forward to another word or phrase which is used later in the text” (Paltridge 2006, p.132). Whereas anaphoric reference refers back to an item mentioned earlier in the text.
Not only is the reader positioned in accord with the authors, but is consequently also constructed as sharing responsibility for the rest of what the document is about to say. Responsibility for the perceived failings is suggested by the use of *we* in the phrase *we are a considerable way from achieving that goal* and the final sentences reinforce the sense of shared responsibility by emotively constructing a threat of failure, both social and economic (extract 12).

It is possible to argue that these inclusive constructions of solidarity reflect educational values of citizenship and participation, as described in the historical discourses in chapter 3. However, if this is the case then the idea of inclusiveness and nation building has been readily co-opted and reinterpreted by modern economic discourse. For example in extract 13, *we* is used three times to neatly and powerfully encompass the *individual* in the sense of ‘hope in each one of us’; *nationalism* in reference to ‘generating jobs’; and *globalism* in ‘international competition’. If the language of these texts assumes that *we* refers to New Zealand as a nation, it also assumes that as one nation, the ideals and values portrayed in the text are shared by all. *We*, in this case, is an important “rhetorical device… [by which] consensus is assumed” (Mulderrig, 2011, p.569).

*Extract 13.*

_In the current economic and fiscal climate, New Zealand’s education system needs to waste not a single opportunity to generate knowledge, skills, creativity and confidence in its young people and its workforce. This is the way _we_ will keep hope alive, the way _we_ will generate new jobs and the way _we_ will compete on the world stage._  

*(MoE, 2011, p.3)*

This language seems innocuous and is almost always taken-for-granted, but it must be remembered that texts such as these are always carefully and deliberately written and edited. While the personal intention of the individual writers is unlikely to be social control, the inclusiveness and consensus are deliberate, and are in fact, expressions of power. The hierarchical structure of this power is revealed in extract 14 from the Annual Report below:

*Extract 14.*

_For the first time this year, _schools with learners in years 1 to 8_ were required to report on the progress and achievement of learners, particularly priority groups of learners, in their Annual Reports. Progress was measured against_
targets in their school charter, which had been set according to the National Standards. The Ministry monitors the quality of all school charters...

(MoE, 2012a, Foreword)

This example shows that learners’ success is assessed and therefore controlled by schools, which are in turn monitored and therefore controlled by the MoE, which through this document, is fulfilling its responsibility by reporting to the government, who set the criteria. Learners’ success is therefore defined and also controlled by the government. The responsibility for the success of individuals, however, is delegated to a local level, through this hierarchical structure, to schools and parent Boards of Trustees via the charter. This structure maintains control while simultaneously giving an impression of autonomy through delegation of responsibility. This text is an example of how the government reaffirms its authority to set the purposes for education and the criteria for success. It wields power through the MoE, both overtly through legislation and through persuasive discourse. This structure means that the MoE does not concern itself with the success of individual students, but rather with the success of the education system, as this is one of the criteria on which the government’s success will be assessed.

**Purpose, goals and values**

The purposes and goals of education are explicitly and succinctly defined in the Statement of Intent, Annual Report and the Briefing to the Minister (extracts 15,16,17). Such phrases are often ‘recycled’ in closely related documents and can easily be assumed to mean more or less the same thing. Indeed Fairclough (2001a, p.96) argues that such repetition reinforces the validity of a particular position. Careful comparison of the similar statements however, reveals subtle differences in grammatical construction, and different emerging values. Shifts in values are often thought of as a diachronic process, in that one set of values replaces a former set over time. These examples however, suggest that different underlying values can co-exist in a single discourse.

*Extract 15.*

*Our over-riding goal is a world-leading education system that equips all learners with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st Century. (MoE, 2011, p.3)*
Extract 16.
Our goal remains constant, to be a world-leading education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21st-century. (MoE, Foreword, 2012a)

Extract 17.
Our task, and the purpose of our education system, is to equip our learners with skills that allow them to succeed in the 21st century, with all the opportunities and challenges that presents. (MoE, 2012b, p.2)

There is subtle but important variation between the phrases to be successful citizens in the 21st-century (extracts 15 and 16) and to succeed in the 21st Century (extract 17), which reveals values associated with citizenship in the former two, but is linked to the expectation that the education system should fulfil the increasingly quantitatively focussed criteria of the government in the latter. The difference is in the use of the verb to be, which in extracts 15 and 16 construct students as active agents striving to be part of a community (citizenship); whereas in extract 17 knowledge and values are omitted and skills have been become ‘tools’ for surmounting the challenges of a competitive environment, to set them apart from the community.

Exclusive inclusion

The inherent contradiction, revealed in the latter examples, is straddled on a daily basis in government texts, which appear inclusive and yet simultaneously promote a competitive economic ideology. It is unsurprising then that social values are evident in these documents, but that they are backgrounded. For example values appear on the last of the introductory pages of the NZC (MoE, 2007).

Extract 18.
All the values listed above can be expanded into clusters of related values that collectively suggest their fuller meanings. For example, community and participation for the common good is associated with values and notions such as peace, citizenship, and manaakitanga. (MoE 2007, p.10)

It is perhaps significant that day-to-day care of people in the local community, and each other, is expressed in the Māori word, manaakitanga (extract 18). The question is whether this is an inclusive device, or an exclusive one. That is, has the Māori word been adopted and embraced as acknowledgement of a cultural value that has no
equivalent term in English, but which is intended to be a shared value for all New Zealanders. Or does the use of the Māori word construct a communal style of caring as ‘for the Māori community’ and therefore in effect distances Pākehā from this value, and therefore their obligation to act accordingly?

The taken-for-granted-ness of language means that people with different backgrounds and experience will interpret such discourse to fit with their experience and while it may not be a deliberate strategy to mislead, there is no doubt that texts are constructed with an awareness of how terms may be interpreted. For example phrases such as *ensures our education system is fully inclusive* in the foreword to the Annual Report (MoE, 2012a, paragraph 8) further connotes a cohesive ideal, encompassing a range of social diversity. In reality however, this phrase *in this context* has a specific meaning. Those with a shared understanding, or ‘inside knowledge’ of the sector know that the term ‘inclusive’ is a euphemism used to refer to the education of students with greater or different physical, intellectual or emotional needs from the majority of other students, formerly ‘special needs’.

Commonly referred to as ‘political correctness’, this is constructed as an endeavour to avoid ‘othering’ or offending people; or in politeness theory terms ‘to save face’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Morand (1996) however, reminds us that while politeness strategies accommodate to social hierarchies and distance, it can also play a role in reinforcing power hierarchies. Linguistic reconstruction of ‘polite’ forms has occurred throughout history and the current euphemism has replaced earlier terms such as ‘handicapped’ and ‘disabled’ common in the 1950s to 1980s. These in turn replaced earlier terms such as ‘backwards’ or ‘crippled’, which according to an historical overview compiled by CCS Disability Action Information Service (2010), were in common use around 1900. While the historical examples suggest movement towards more inclusive ideals for people with different education needs, the current term ‘inclusive’ can also be interpreted as obscuring real needs, and perhaps functions as a strategy for making language conform to current political ideology of standardisation.

Māori and Pacific Island students, on the other hand, are often referred to specifically as part of intervention strategies to address perceived issues. They are identified as a group who do not fit into the standardisation processes and who seem to require different approaches in order to be able to achieve the same type of educational success as Pākehā. The irony is that in trying to align the achievements of this group with the rest of the population they are in fact constructed as ‘not successful’ and are
being ‘othered’ in order to standardise them. In this respect little has changed since colonial efforts to assimilate Māori into a Pākehā society.

The two strategy documents in the data tread a fine line between othering by identifying, and identifying in order to include. Inclusion here however presumes a universal ideal or standard, and as Mason Durie (2006) points out, measuring success assumes universal indicators that are not necessarily “sensitive to population-specific perspectives” (p.2). Both strategy documents use the word success in their title: Success for All and Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success.

Success for All is the title of a New Zealand strategy resulting from a review of special needs education in 2010. This title has also been used for literacy strategies in the US and the UK (Hargreaves, 2003). This government initiative is described as a “plan of action to achieve a fully inclusive education system” (MoE, 2010b). The foreword of the review document opens with an emotive sentence that describes children and young people with special education needs as vulnerable members of society (extract 19, line 1). While this may be true to some degree in some cases, it is not necessarily true for all. The statement is based on underlying belief patterns, which assume that they are less able to contribute to society, and consequently implies they are a burden on the rest of society, instead of being part of a normally diverse society. Language that is intended to be inclusive and overtly promote a change of attitude, in fact reproduces their status as ‘a problem’. The foreword of this document does more to promote the status of the minister and the government than it does to address the situation of vulnerable people.

Extract 19.

1. Children and young people with special education needs are among the most vulnerable members of our society.
2. They and their parents and caregivers deserve the very best support we can provide so that they can participate and achieve – not just in education, but in society, and not just while they are at school, but for the rest of their lives.
3. I have had many parents, caregivers, sector groups and principals tell me things need fixing, there is more we should be doing and that there are attitudes that need to change. I have been moved and concerned over some of what I have heard and I am determined to find ways that we can do better. The Review of Special Education – and this document – is an important step in that direction.
4. The Government’s commitment to special education is demonstrated by the additional funding we have recently made available for expanding the support for students with high and very high needs and for special education school property. (MoE, 2010a, p.1)

The author of this text aims to construct a personal connection with the reader through the use of first person singular I (extract 19, line 3). She aligns herself with the community by sharing the concerns of parents, caregivers, sector groups and principals (3) and builds a sense of compassion through phrases such as deserve the very best support (2) and I have been moved (3). She identifies a problem in the phrase: ...things need fixing, there is more we should be doing... (3) and at the same time offers a solution and the sense of hope for change and betterment in the phrases: I am determined to find ways ... step in that direction (3); the government’s commitment ... expanding the support (4). The reader is drawn in to be part of the solution in paragraph 6 below in the request for responses to the document and again when the personal plea is made, I urge you to consider this document and provide your comments on its ideas (extract 20, line 5).

Extract 20.

5. Some of the most important proposals in this paper relate to ensuring that there is genuine choice about how students with special education needs are supported. Others relate to creating more flexibility in how funds are used and made available to support the needs of students. There are also proposals regarding how we can increase accountability for outcomes so that parents and caregivers and the Government have a better sense of what students are achieving and what further changes we need to make to the system. Your response to this discussion document will be given careful consideration and will contribute to the decisions that will be made.

6. I urge you to consider this document and provide your comments on its ideas. Together we can make changes that will ensure that all students receive the very best support possible so they can participate and achieve. (MoE, 2010a, p.1)

Despite the personal and appealing tenor of this foreword, it is nevertheless framed by economic and competitive, rather than social values. The phrases genuine choice; creating more flexibility in how funds are used; increase accountability for outcomes, (extract 20, line 5) reveal that its main concern is the success of the system,
rather than individuals, and that students are the objects of a system, rather than members of a society.

**Cultural ‘Inclusion’**

*Ka Hikitia: Managing for Success* (MoE, 2009) is another strategy that aims for ‘inclusiveness’ with a specific focus on addressing the problem of inequities in educational outcomes that correlate with ethnicity. The document that outlines this strategy is informed by a range of data and research that is referenced at the end of the document, unlike the *BIM*; and as an aside, it is interesting to consider that, in an age when evermore accountability is demanded, information for political decision makers is accepted without question or recourse to further explanation. The introductory section of this document includes a page by the Deputy Secretary for Māori Education, and a foreword each from the Minister of Education and the Secretary for Education. Comparison of these three perspectives reveals surprisingly different constructions of success.

The Deputy Secretary for Māori education, in a page entitled *Strategy and Success* (MoE, 2009, p.9) specifically identifies many groups of people, including: students, teachers, leaders, communities, young people, speakers of te reo Māori, Māori learners, self-directed learners, professional teachers, New Zealanders, global citizens, families, whanau, and organisations including early childhood education centre, kohanga reo, school, kura, wharekura, wananga, tertiary education providers, Māori organisations, industry and businesses, the education sector and iwi. As in Māori oral traditions, this acknowledges everyone; from the youngest children in early childcare centre (ECE) to everyone in the world (global citizens). The author conveys a cultural perspective in which agents are both identified as diverse individuals and are included in a collective (extract 21, lines 2-3). This perspective reflects Durie’s (2006) framework for assessment using a “Māori world-view” that encompasses three levels including the “individual, collectives and population” (p.2). Educational success, in this text, is strongly associated with the relationships between people, based on egalitarian values (extract 21, lines 4-5).

**Extract 21.**

1. *Success in 2012 is built on strong, respectful, culturally informed and responsive relationships.*
2. They share a common interest in our nation’s future, and are proud of who they are and their individual and collective education success.

3. ...Māori learners, a diverse group from a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds.

4. They are [...learners...] who attribute their learning success to their innate talents, heritage, whānau support, professional teachers and leaders, knowledge and skill holders who make up the wider learning communities of which they are actively a part.

5. We no longer fear or believe that when others are successful it must be at someone else’s expense. We can be, and are all, successful.

(MoE, 2009b, p.9)

In contrast to this conscientious egalitarian discourse however, Māori are also constructed as extrinsic to the nation (extract 22). The sentence that proclaims that Māori bring unique contribution to this country’s identity, reveals an underlying assumption that the country’s identity is not inherently Māori. Also, Māori and the ‘success of this nation’ are set apart, paradoxically, through the use of the phrase ‘inextricably linked’. The need to make this link explicit, and the contrast between inclusiveness and exclusive constructions suggests conflicting underlying values.

**Extract 22.**

*The rich and unique contribution Māori bring to the country’s identity, knowledge and economic prosperity is real and flourishing. In the minds of all, the success of our nation and that of Māori are inextricably linked.*

(MoE, 2009b, p.9)

This construction may be an enduring discourse stemming from the colonial past in which the indigenous population were treated as outsiders by the colonisers. Reclamation of a place in the education system that is now normalised in their native country, is made explicit in the phrase *cemented in place* (extract 23).

**Extract 23.**

*Māori learners, families and whānau have cemented a place in our education system…

…the much needed transformation – which began five years earlier – is now our norm.*
And as we look back on the last five years since the launch of Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success in 2008, we see it is time to **lengthen our stride**!

(MoE, 2009b, p.9)

The author acknowledges that changes have occurred over the previous five years and closes this section with a metaphor based on a translation of the strategy title. *Lengthen our stride* (extract 23) in this case assumes we have already been ‘striding’ or making progress, and contrasts with constructions in the forewords by the Minister and Secretary of Education, which construct an underlying impression that progress so far is insignificant and that change is imperative.

**Success and change**

The foreword by the Minister of Education (p.4) differs markedly from the Deputy Secretary’s section. This text is distinctly system-oriented, and contrasts with the people-oriented construction of the Secretary for Māori education. The people listed in this text are constructed as having the responsibility for the success of others (extract 24), rather than success being a result of strong social relationships within a wider learning community as in paragraph 4 of extract 21 earlier.

**Extract 24.**

*Learners, their families and whānau, early childhood centres, teachers, principals, schools, boards of trustees, tertiary institutions, the education sector agencies, through to me as Minister along with my colleagues, share responsibility for ensuring success.*

(MoE, 2009b, p.4)

While particular groups are listed (in extract 24) as responsible for ensuring success, the construction in extract 25 de-personalises *education success* by linking it to the system. Using Grice’s co-operative principles again, anaphoric referencing (Paltridge, 2006. See also page 40) links success to the action of transforming, and therefore the success in this text, is associated with the ‘performance of the system’. This construction leaves people, that is, Māori as a by-product of a successful system.

**Extract 25.**

*Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success gives us the opportunity to transform the system’s performance for and with Māori, so that Māori are able to enjoy education success as Māori.*

(MoE, 2009b, p.4)
The focus on the system, rather than people, makes it possible to talk about transformation or change, but there is nevertheless, an assumption in this text of the rectitude of the system. Change is represented in terms that describe movement; lifting and move away from (extract 26). That is, making adjustments within the current structures, rather than a fundamentally different way of looking at education.

Extract 26.

... lifting the performance of... and ...to move away from...(MoE, 2009b, p.4)

However, the focus on the system, and changes to that system, as a means of achieving success, means that change and success have in many cases, become indistinguishable (extract 27).

Extract 27.

Change will not come if we wait.... We are the change we seek. This government is committed to change ...

Success is our only option. (MoE, 2009b, p.4)

The conflation of change and success is even more prominent in a set of subtitles in a later section in this document, which include: Organisational Success, How things will Change and What will Change (MoE, 2009b, pp.26-27). With this focus on change, and the highest priority declared as ‘self review processes’ (extract 28), outcomes are not included in the success discourse. Instead, the implementation of a process or strategy becomes an indicator of success.

Extract 28.

...the Ministry of Education will review and adapt its investments, policies, practices and services to give Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success the highest priority. (MoE, 2009b, p.26)

Change is a prominent theme throughout all three forewords to this strategy document, with each writer constructing the need for change, and urgency associated with it, differently. In the third foreword, the Secretary for Education constructs change as a part of ongoing development, referring to previous reports and acknowledgement of change since their publication. She uses the words increasingly and gaining to indicate incremental shifts from a previous position, acknowledging previous success in the phrase...building on success... (MoE, 2009b, p.5). The Secretary for Education makes explicit the connection between the system and Māori learners through several iterations of the phrase for and with Māori (in paragraphs 2,3,4,9,11). This perspective fits neatly
between the highly system-oriented foreword from the Minister of Education, and the people-oriented introduction by the Deputy Secretary for Māori education. Nevertheless the Government and the Ministry of Education are foregrounded in this section, with an emphasis on their authority role in “leading change” in the system (MoE, 2009b, p.5).

The three different perspectives, along with an appealing presentation, show that considerable effort has gone into making the strategy acceptable to as wide a range of people as possible, in the education sectors, and the public in general. This document is to inform, but as pointed out earlier, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) remind us that a political discourse also ‘sells’ the government’s position. The need to engage readers and get them onside with this governmental strategy is a matter of positioning and power. While this document is intended to continue to redress the relative powerlessness of Māori people since colonisation, it is nevertheless based on underlying beliefs and values normalised in a dominant Pākehā culture. These values emerge as the focus on the system and economic rather than social values.

**Economic values**

The success of the education system is assessed by the achievements of all students as measured against a set of predetermined criteria. The Ministry of Education itself is not held to account for the success of the individuals; this responsibility was devolved to the local level as a result of the 1989 reforms. The Ministry is however, held to account for the overall performance of the education sector, and particularly for fiscal management. The latter is the key priority clearly foregrounded in both the Annual Report (extract 29) and the Statement of Intent (extract 30).

*Extract 29.*

*Future focus for education*

The Government set a number of priorities to shape and guide our activities over late 2011 and early 2012. Our work and the work of the wider education sector have been framed by the Government’s four priorities:

1. responsibly managing the Government’s finances
2. building a more competitive and productive economy
3. delivering better public services
4. rebuilding Christchurch.

*(MoE, 2012a, p.12)*
Government priorities

The Government has identified four key priorities for the next three years. They are:

1. responsibly managing government finances
2. delivering better public services
3. building a more competitive and productive economy
4. rebuilding Canterbury. (MoE, 2012b, p.9)

These priorities reflect the economic focus of educational discourse at a political level. This discourse is peppered with vocabulary once only associated with business, such as ‘invest’, ‘outcomes’, ‘monitoring’, ‘strategies’, ‘core business functions’ and ‘competitive’. Goals for student achievement within the key priorities, are framed as sets of percentage figures (extract 31), and are constructed as mechanisms for achieving wider political goals for the system (extracts 32-33), rather than as an inherent good for students.

Extract 31.

- In 2016, 98% of children starting school will have participated in quality early childhood education.
- 85% of 18-year-olds will have achieved NCEA Level 2 or an equivalent qualification in 2017.
- 55% of 25- to 34-year-olds will have a qualification at level 4 or above in 2017. (MoE, 2012a, p.12)

Extract 32.

The education system has a significant contribution to make to each of these priorities. (MoE, 2012b, p.9)

Extract 33.

Increase the contribution of the international education sector to New Zealand’s economy. (MoE, 2012a, p.15)

This discourse no longer constructs education as a public or social good for the betterment of individuals, so that they may contribute to society and the economy (see Peters, 2000), but demands that education directly contributes to the economy. The individual, and their role as a member of a society, has been by-passed in this discourse.
Education is quite blatantly constructed as a business that is expected to generate national income. The marketing of education for overseas students is a particularly salient example.

The examples above show that the MoE is clearly under the authority of the government, its documents conform to the government’s economic focus, and it reports information with the expected statistical, goal-oriented focus. It is important however to note that the Ministry of Education’s position also requires it to communicate and work with schools, students, parents and whanau. This means that the MoE often writes for two very different audiences and an example of this is evident in the moderated economic focus and foregrounding of students and learning, in the summary in the Annual Report (presumably the section most likely to be read by the public). Six MoE priorities are presented as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle (extract 34), a metaphorical representation meant to convey the interconnectedness of these statements, which include ‘children’ as the focus of educational strategies and priorities in addition to the economy priorities. The examples in this chapter show that the MoE is part of a hierarchical structure that obliges them to attend to both social and economic values, though not necessarily equally.

The concept of success, as it is constructed in these documents, is a powerful influence on how it is disseminated in the mainstream media, and therefore understood by the public. The following chapters examine the concept of success in two main genres in the mainstream media; press releases and selected newspaper reports.

Extract 34.
Chapter 5: Success in education as it is constructed in press releases.

This chapter examines media or press releases, a genre that has only relatively recently become common in modern mainstream media. Historical newspaper clippings show that educational reporting usually consisted of very short items, typically reporting the outcomes of a meeting or some achievement of note. Issues tended to be debated at public meetings, and the outcomes subsequently reported in newspapers. The examples below are typical of items identified in a search of Papers Past using education and success as key words. Public discourse of the time seemed to be mainly concerned with building a nation, and education was one part of that.

(Sourced from 'PapersPast' http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz)

The contemporary role and effects of the media

The media has become much more prolific since these articles were published, and now includes many media besides newspapers. Electronic media has allowed for quicker and more prolific production and reproduction of news. The public also now have much more immediate access to a variety of media, as well as the opportunity to contribute and respond. This presents a very wide range of perspectives of education that may be represented in the media, including reports on research findings, political issues, and the opinions of people associated with various interest groups. Analysing a concept that is largely contextually constructed is therefore a complex matter and it is necessary to firstly to consider the effects of the media to understand why some perspectives may be more dominant than others. The processes by which items are selected for reporting are not always obvious. As Bell (1991) points out, “a story which
is marginal in news terms, but written and available, may be selected ahead of a much more newsworthy story which has to be researched and written from the ground up” (p.59), which suggests a highly pragmatic approach to producing news copy. Bell also outlines a set of “news values” (p.155), which include, negativity, superlativeness, proximity, competition, unambiguity and unexpectedness, amongst others. These account for commonly recognised media phenomenon such as negative or sensational headlines, relevance to New Zealand, simplicity and novelty.

Roulston (2005), who also describes a level of pragmatism in news reporting, points out the conflict between the commercial role of providing easily assimilated, immediate news, and the ideals of public reporting, such as the social information analysis and advice as espoused by Habermas’s (1989) notion of ‘public sphere’. Roulston’s (2005) thesis offers some factors that influenced the media’s shift from social analysis to commercial superficiality. Her study of data from 1988 to 1999 covered not only the major educational reforms, but also changes in the structures underpinning the media itself. Neoliberal restructuring affected both institutions simultaneously. During this time the media, seen at the most basic level as a provider of societal information and news and an integral part of democratic society, had to adapt to the dominance of the international market (Roulston, 2005). New Zealand newspapers, increasingly under the control of overseas owners more interested in commercial profit than democratic watchfulness, needed to attract more readers to remain viable (Curran, 2000). In this new context, “sensational or human-interest” (Roulston, 2005, p.230) articles became more important than critical analysis and investigative journalism; the latter requiring more research and time (Bell, 1991). Fewer contentious issues were reported for fear of “offending readers” (Roulston, 2005, p.231). Not only did editors become sensitive to what might put readers off, but also tried to appeal to as broad a population as possible. As a result education reporting, already considered of low-status as far as newsworthiness, was subjected to further “dumbing down” (Roulston, 2005, p.62).

Critics such as Golding and Murdock (2000) and others (cited in Roulston, 2005) claimed that foreign ownership contributed to these pressures for the media to adapt. The role of the media became to simplify complex issues in minimal time. In Roulston’s words, “newspapers try to reduce the problems and issues of education to a level that is readily comprehensible to the ‘reader audience’ and with an immediacy that captures their attention” (Roulston, 2005, p.228).
Roulston concludes that the complexity of educational issues has resulted in an unwillingness to engage in critical debate about education and suggests Davis et al.’s (2000) ‘complexity theory’ as a way to explain this. Roulston closes her thesis with this statement:

At present, the reader audience, while being aware of some of the issues that were raised during the education reform years, can only be said to have had a narrow and superficial exposure to the complexity of such issues. A further loss of voice as expressed through the letters to the editor suggests that while the reader audiences were aware of educational issues, their responses, as measured in newspapers, was one of little interest. Therefore, Habermas’s ideal of having a communication system providing a dual role, which enables the public to form rational opinions and in turn become emancipated within a democratic society, has been severely compromised (Roulston, 2005, p.232).

Roulston’s conclusion provides an important insight for this current study, which argues that little has changed as far as public awareness. Furthermore that the lack of willingness to engage with the issues means that the education system, once valued as a public good, will continue to be reconstructed according to neoliberal economic ideals and become a private good to be competed for, rather than shared.

In this competitive economic environment, the way news is selected and where it comes from has changed. Hammersley (2006) states:

In studying media, there has been increasing recognition of the role that sources play. These once tended to be treated as passive, with journalists selecting from what they offered, the relationship has come to be seen as rather more dynamic, and indeed as sometimes conflictual. Some agencies that provide source material play an active role in seeking to manage the news so as to serve their own goals, and forms part of the burgeoning ‘public relations’ industry and the rise of ‘political spin’ (Hammersley, 2006, p.15).

Hammersley is referring in part to the increased use of press releases prepared by various interest groups, rather than journalists’ reporting of interviews, or interpretation of complex documents. Such releases constitute some of the most readily accessible discourse on education in the public domain. These are often produced by organisations themselves, and are specifically intended to report the organisations’ perspective and its actions to the public. The texts often appear directly on organisation websites, such as the Beehive website, and therefore bypass journalists and the traditional mainstream
media. In this context they are more properly, and henceforth, referred to as ‘releases’ rather than ‘press releases’. Their function is clearly intended to be persuasive, but will have varying degrees of impact depending on a number of factors, such as the standing of the organisation, the issue at hand, and the prominence given in the media, which will be based on the news values outlined by Bell earlier. It should also be noted that this impact might not be directly proportional to the level of public agreement. For instance, under the current MMP parliamentary system (Mixed Member Proportional representation), it is possible for minor political parties to influence political discourse and policy-making beyond that mandated by the number of their supporters. This can occur as a result of alliances supporting the governing party with motions of confidence and appropriation. While this is not immediately apparent in the foundational texts in section one, it is much more evident in mainstream media discourses which have an influence on the public.

The releases analysed and discussed here include those submitted by the Government; the Act Party, a coalition partner; the opposition Labour Party; two professional associations (the New Zealand Education Institution (NZEI), New Zealand Principal’s Federation (NZPF); two tertiary institutions (Otago Polytechnic, Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT); and the Royal Society of New Zealand.

**Government Releases - Constructing consensus through the media**

All government discourse is produced from a position of power, with information articulated from a top down position of authority. A release signalling the government’s plans for introducing charter schools, titled *Ministers announce framework for partnership schools* (NZ Government, 2012a), provides an example of this (extract 35).

**Extract 35.**

_The Education Minister ...and Associate Education Minister... today announced the framework for the New Zealand Model of Charter School._

(NZ Government, 2012a)

Announcements are known linguistically as ‘performatives’\(^5\). That is, the utterance itself achieves the activity that describes it – in this case, an *announcement* is made by *announcing* it. From a media perspective, this is valued as unambiguous. As Bell (1991) explains, “if someone with requisite authority says *I announce*, that is both

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\(^5\) From Austin’s 1969 speech act theory.
newsworthy and the saying itself constitutes an indisputable fact” (p.207).

Announcement may be supported by research data or consultation results to reinforce both the message and the authority of the agent making the announcement, and emotive devices are used to build persuasive arguments, or to justify decisions. Examples of both of these occur in this text and are illustrated in extracts 36 and 37 respectively. Authority is reinforced with the phrases:

**Extract 36.**

*international best practice*
*the [working] group consulted extensively*
*the wealth of international experience*

Emotive elements include:

**Extract 37.**

*The term partnership captures the essence of the concept*
*Partnership schools will be another option for parents, giving them more freedom*

*We want all students leaving school with skills they need to reach their potential*
*(NZ Government, 2012a)*

While the announcement is made from a position of power, justification and persuasive discourses help gain acceptance for what may be an unpopular policy in some quarters. Justification in this case is constructed by framing the initiative as an extension of a pre-existing state using the phrase *we already have...* (extract 38) and also as a response to the perceived need to *raise achievement* and address failings (extract 39).

**Extract 38.**

*We already have a number of different types of schools operating in New Zealand.*

**Extract 39.**

*...the Government is focused on raising achievement for all students, particularly for those groups who have historically been under-served by the current system.*

*(NZ Government, 2012a)*

Acceptance is further induced by deliberately replacing the contentious title of ‘charter’ schools, with a more ‘palatable’ concept of ‘partnership’ schools, and the Māori title *Kura Hourua* (extract 40). However in the phrase *will be known as*, this statement also
directly prescribes the beliefs expected as a result of the announcements, and frames the action as an unarguable good, thereby precluding debate and making reaction the only possible response (Roulston, 2005).

*Extract 40.*

The schools will be known as Partnership Schools or Kura Hourua.

(NZ Government, 2012a)

This release, like the official texts in the previous chapter, foregrounds success of the system. The assumption behind this discourse is that a successful system will necessarily benefit and ensure the success of individual children within the system, no matter how diverse their needs. Though rarely identified, this assumption creates a tension in the discourse precisely because it is based on contradictory values. That is, it overlooks the fact that there is a tension between success of individuals and system success, which are bound up in an incongruous model that simultaneously promotes competition and requires standardisation. This undoubtedly contributes to the confrontational nature of the discourses responding to educational issues, and goes some way to explaining why complex topics such as student achievement and success are fragmented into isolated issues such as charter schools, or national standards. Love (2004) suggests that educational issues have been fragmented to fit economic arguments of effectiveness, and refers to the “reductive character of the business ideal” (p19). He argues that the overall senses of value, purpose and success in education have been made inaccessible by such discourse.

The fragmentation of such issues sometimes gives rise to expedient multi-pronged solutions. An education amendment bill announced in a release entitled Bill will help improve education success for young New Zealanders (New Zealand Government, 2012b) claims to address a number of the fragmented issues in education. The text refers to partnerships schools; student engagement and achievement; early childhood education; expectations of Boards; and a ‘surrender and retention’ clause. It claims the bill will “provide more clarity” (NZ Government, 2012b) to schools or boards, but the release itself offers little clarity to the reader. The multiple amendments imply that success in education is reliant on many factors. These factors are presented as a list of problems to be addressed, rather than as intrinsically related parts of a whole social domain. Furthermore it could be argued that highlighting a number of contentious issues is a deliberate attempt to construct the perception of crisis, in order to authorise radical or contentious actions by the government. David Stuart (1997) notes
that in 1954 a similar situation of ‘rising moral panic’ led to a flurry of education amendments.

This text includes recycled statements from earlier releases and heralds a bricolage of legislative ‘fixes’ encompassing many of the controversial issues currently being debated in the media. Given the number of releases that emanate from the minister’s office, it is unsurprising that phrases and sentences are often repeated in releases. For example, the same lines from the August release (extracts 37 and 38 above) are repeated in the October release (extract 41).

*Extract 41.*

We already have a number of different types of schools operating in New Zealand

Partnership schools will be another option for parents, giving them more freedom. (New Zealand Government, 2012b)

This release is neither a comprehensive nor neutral summary of the bill it is announcing. Some aspects of the bill not included in the release are only brought to public attention by principals’ reactions and their responses to the bill published in the media. See for example the NZ Herald 26 October 2012 *School drug test ban ‘outrage’* and 31 October 2012 *Principals slam Govt drug changes*. Omissions from a text, while more difficult to detect, may reveal less obvious purposes of a release. In this case, rather than simply informing, the release constructs a positive view of the Government’s actions by withholding less positive features.

It is evident from this and many other examples, that government releases, while claiming to inform the public, are used to support and enhance their authoritative position on contentious issues, to promote social norms that are aligned with the government’s actions, and to construct consensus.

**NZEI and NZPF releases - Resisting Consensus and arguing for a democratic perspective**

The democratic system relies to a considerable extent on the media presenting each side of political debates. The releases examined in this section are responses to government announcements and are seen as part of reporting both sides of a debate. As already noted, one of the problems with this form of reporting, is that topical issues are presented as isolated statements, rather than part of a coherent wider public debate. Factors contributing to this include the commercial expectations of news reporting, as
noted by Roulston (2005) earlier, and Bell’s (1991) ‘news value’ of competition (see page 55). Simple sensational headlines are recognised faster and sell better than complex discussions, which are part of reasoned, constructive debates. Indeed the very word debate often carries negative connotations of disharmony and conflict, rather than a useful co-operative process for furthering understanding. Further to this, it is claimed that a culture of anti-intellectualism (Horricks, 2007) and a culture of blame (Elias, 2009) exist in New Zealand and presents an arid environment for real debate.

It is in this context that educational organisations produce media releases in response to government actions. The difficulty for educationalists is that they must acknowledge and explain the complexity of the issues they are responding to, while also keeping the arguments accessible to the public, and ‘pithy’ enough to be considered newsworthy. This is often achieved through emotive constructions to reach a non-academic audience. For example, an NZEI release titled Look at real reasons some children underachieve, (12 Jul 2012) foregrounds vulnerable children (extract 42) with 6 occurrences of this phrase in the 8 short paragraphs of text. The text stipulates that these are New Zealand children thereby fulfilling the ‘news value’ of proximity, and reinforces this by contextualising the issues in relation to world rankings. Children in this text are constructed as victims, not only through the emphasis on vulnerability, but also as victims of experimentation (extract 43).

Extract 42.
New Zealand children are amongst the most vulnerable in the OECD with our children having some of the worst outcomes in that group.  
(NZEI, 2012a)

Extract 43.
The Government needs to stop experimenting with league table, charter schools and National Standards which are all likely to increase inequity ...

(NZEI, 2012a)

The NZEI text in extract 44 includes social inequity as part of the complexity behind educational achievement or success, and this differentiates it from the language of government texts which strategically avoid terms such as poverty and abuse.

Extract 44.
The reason these children do not achieve educationally at school is complex. But it is clear that the ‘out of school’ reasons cited in this report, - such as the impacts of poverty, ill-health, and abuse - play a huge role in student success.

(NZEI, 2012a)
This type of response also illustrates the extent to which the economic language of
neoliberalism is entrenched in the discourse. While it aims to oppose the economic
focus of the government and foreground social equity issues, the NZEI release
nevertheless begins in the same way many government discourses do, with the now
ubiquitous economic notion of human capital constructed with the word *invest* (extract
45). Such economic terms have become unnoticed metaphors.

*Extract 45.*

...the Government needs to *invest* more in quality early childhood education

(NZEI, 12 July 2012)

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), building on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980)
theory that metaphors represent how people sees the world, suggest that metaphor is a
form of “persuasive definition” (p.171). Now common in headlines, the original
meaning of the words is usually overlooked once the metaphorical understanding is
perceived, but it is arguably the words themselves, that nevertheless attract attention.
For example in a release headlined, *The war on education* (NZEI, 2012c), the unlikely
combination of education and war emphasises, and arguably reifies, the conflictual
nature of the perspective offered. Confrontation and opposition implied by such
metaphors explains the need to ‘gather the troops’ or reinforce the discourse.

As seen in the examination of MoE documents, positioning and alignment adds
to the persuasiveness of a text. It is also used to resist or oppose a particular view or
construction, as illustrated in a release from the New Zealand Principal’s Federation
(NZPF) about the controversial introduction of National Standards and their potential
aligns two educationalist groups; principals and educational researchers (extract 46).

*Extract 46.*

*President of the New Zealand Principals’ Federation, [...] today applauded New
Zealand’s leading educational researchers for taking a public stand against
league tables. The Prime Minister has suggested that parents want league tables
so they can compare schools.*  

(NZPF, 2012)

In addition to the two groups of educationalists, this text includes parents and the media
itself, as opposing the position of the Prime Minister and the MoE. The last sentence in
extract 46 anticipates and resists the alignment of the PM with parents, and minimises
this alignment by constructing them as autonomous agents in the following line (extract 47).

**Extract 47.**

*Parents have always compared schools so that they can choose the most suitable match for their children...*  
(NZPF, 2012)

The text anticipates a further argument that could support the PM’s position (extract 48) and again counters it by positively reinforcing the good relationship between the NZPF and the media (extract 49).

**Extract 48.**

*The Ministry agrees that the data is immature and unreliable but argues that if published with caveats would be better than if the media published the data in league tables.*  
(NZPF, 2012)

The authors position themselves as a united group of principals aligned with the media, who are constructed as ‘truthful’ from the Principals’ perspective.

**Extract 49.**

*As principals we are well used to talking with media and in my experience journalists seek the truth.*  
(NZPF, 2012)

All these texts appear to address issues relating to educational achievement and success. The linguistic analysis however, points out that they are not in fact addressing the same issue. The Government discourse, as noted before, focuses on structural efficiencies and systemic changes to promote success and avoids complicating social factors, while educationalists focus on the social factors that contribute to the success of individual children and students. The problem is, that this disjuncture is difficult to recognize given that both sides appear, on the surface at least, to be talking about the same thing and because they often use very similar language. Rather than progressing a common issue, the discourse consists of opponents’ persuasion.

**Institutional Releases - Persuasion and advertising**

Releases perform the function of announcing, and do not always evoke controversy or debate. Many announce, report or celebrate successes, and may come from a variety of sources. The releases discussed in this section were prepared and submitted by, a political coalition partner, the ACT party; two technical institutes, Otago Polytechnic and the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT); and the Royal
Society of New Zealand. These texts serve a variety of purposes, for example, educational institutions, increasingly under financial pressure as a result of competition in the market model, prepare releases to convince the public of the worth of their institution, in short, a form of advertising. Original data searches for this study in fact, found a large number of ‘advertising features’ in magazines and newspapers for these and many other educational institutions. Many of these feature articles constructed visions of educational success, but those specifically intended as advertising were not included in this study.

Advertising is intended to persuade and elicit a desired action, and in this respect, is similar to persuasive political discourses as described by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012). An ACT party release (extract 50) appears to announce an event, but also paves the way for acceptance of a new policy. Dated before recent debates about charter schools began in the public domain, and despite being a minor party, its coalition with the government places this party in a position of considerable power and it is able to launch a ‘key step’ (paragraph 2) in policy making.

The vital message occurs in the last paragraph in which choice is identified as the key to ensuring achievement and success in education. The purpose of this text is to persuade the public that individual choice will benefit their children and that the market model of competition can provide success for young people from low-income families (paragraph 2). A serious contradiction in this text which remains largely unchallenged in public debate is between the oft quoted ideal of educational success for all, and the promotion of a scholarship for which recipients must compete. Competition is reinforced in paragraph 3 in which success is equated with performance at an international level, which like the select few who may benefit from such a scholarship, is likely to be achieved by relatively few. This construction of success reflects the NZ Curriculum document in which individual success is seen as an ingredient of the nation’s success at a global level, but does little to promote a cohesive society where all can achieve some sort of relative success.

Neoliberal discourse promotes the positive aspects of competition, often using potent persuasive devices. This text appropriates the cultural value that many New Zealanders place on competition in sport, and uses the sporting achievements of a professional rugby player as evidence of success that is attributed to this scholarship (extract 50, paragraph 4).
1 February 2012

Aspire Students Begin Next Leg Of Journey To Success

1. Associate Minister of Education Heather Roy will tomorrow meet students who have received assistance to attend an independent school under the Aspire Scholarship scheme she launched as part of ACT and National's broader initiative to widen school choice for young people and their families.

2. "A key step toward fulfilling ACT's pledge to increase educational opportunities for students, the Aspire Scholarships enable young people from low-income families to attend an independent school they otherwise would not have the opportunity to attend," Mrs Roy said.

3. "Four of the students I will meet have used their Aspire scholarships to attend Auckland's Corelli School of the Arts - two of whom will participate in a documentary that follows a number of students through the first six months of their journey toward becoming international performers.

4. "I opened applications for Aspire last year with professional rugby player Victor Vito, who previously received a similar scholarship that enabled him to attend Wellington's Scots College. He spoke of his experiences as a scholarship student and attributed much of his success to the opportunities his scholarship provided - opportunities like those made available under Aspire.

5. "Aspire recipients now attend independent schools around the country: ACG Parnell College, ACG Senior College, ACG Strathallan, Ambury Park Centre for Riding Therapy, Auckland International College, Chilton St James, Destiny School, Diocesan School for Girls, Hamilton Christian School, Huanui College, Kings College, Kristin School, Living Way Learning Centre, Pinehurst School, Pukekohe Christian School, Queen Margaret College, Rangitaiki Independent School, Samuel Marsden Whitby, Springbank School, St Andrews College Christchurch, St Dominic's College, St Cuthbert's College, St Kentigern College, St Margaret's College, St Paul's Collegiate, St Peter's School, Sunderland College, Corelli School, Tu Toa, Wanganui Collegiate and Wentworth College.

6. "Choice is the key to ensuring achievement and success in education and it is encouraging to see that Aspire has been so well-received by students and schools alike. I look forward to hearing of Aspire recipients' progress - and of those who will receive scholarships for the 2011 and 2012 school years," Mrs Roy said.

Heather Roy Education

Educational institutions, forced into the competitive market, also use releases and persuasive linguistic strategies to announce their successes and thus promote their institutions. For example the Otago Polytechnic (New graduate programme a success for students 30/11/2011) and the Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) (Innovative centre to improve student success 8/11/2010) releases announce innovations and new programmes which claim to improve student success. The latter uses perceived failures of the education system to frame their persuasive argument (extract 51).

Extract 51.

It's no secret that New Zealand has a high rate of student disengagement from education.
We have established the Centre for Studies in Multiple Pathways in order to continue to develop responses to the issues of students who are not responding in conventional settings. (MIT, 2010)

Having constructed the problem as student disengagement, and conventional settings, the text announces the solution as the creation of an innovative centre. Rather than define student success, it lists a series of processes assumed to lead to success (extract 52). Each process is constructed as a change from whatever impeded success before, again equating the notion of change with success through words such as created, increase, and re-engage, and is given some urgency in the phrase it’s imperative we act now (extract 52) and in extract 53, change is positively constructed as cause for excitement.

**Extract 52.**
Manukau Institute of Technology (MIT) has created an innovative centre designed to promote understanding around the issues of disengagement, to articulate a variety of pathways through school and tertiary education, and increase student participation which ultimately leads to better success in both training and employment.

Centre Director, Dr Stuart Middleton, says it’s imperative we act now to re-engage our young students. (MIT, 2010)

**Extract 53.**
I am excited at the general mood for change that is emerging in New Zealand around pathways for young people that can lead to success educationally and in terms of finding employment. (MIT, 2010)

The institution’s focus, like that of the Ministry of Education and the government, is on making systemic changes to address problems. The text reflects the dual process and systems foci of the NZ Curriculum and is articulated in the metaphorical pathways, which imply that by providing the right channels the system can ensure student success. For MIT, employment is one possible outcome of the pathway, but is constructed here as an adjunct that is syntactically separated from the object clause through the use of the conjunction and (extract 53). Employment may be, but is not necessarily, equated with educational success in this case.

The Otago Polytechnic release also depicts success in relation to a successful system or programme (extract 54). Once acknowledged however, the focus of this text
shifts to students and their activities. The examples of the students’ projects are each briefly described (extract 55), and convey a sense that individual success is diverse, relevant to each student and importantly, connected to the local community. This is a clear contrast to the exclusive, international performance of the MIT business model above.

**Extract 54.**

We are incredibly pleased with the success of the programme.

*(Otago Polytechnic, 2011)*

**Extract 55.**

He says the inaugural students loved the programme and have worked on some fascinating and highly beneficial projects.

Amelia Smith of Queenstown researched the barriers to participation in community and political projects.

Tim Ryan of Wanaka developed a local food accreditation system that is now ready for business ‘incubation’ to get it to market.

Auckland’s Isabel Hunt studied full time with a project that reviewed ‘Success Indicators’ for the Queenstown Lakes District. *(Otago Polytechnic, 2011)*

This analysis of these releases confirms the dominance of government-produced discourse. The dominance is constructed not only within these texts through linguistic devices, but also through strategic use of the media and selective information. The genre of a release itself is a neoliberal tool embraced by media as a way of economising input and maximising output. Consequently, any view of success gained from these texts will inevitably lean towards the dominant and most frequently reported perspective.

The common use of releases as a form of advertising fits seamlessly into the market model, in that these announcements provide ‘information’ to ‘facilitate’ consumer choice. The analysis shows that business and economic terms associated with the market model have also become common metaphors in releases, and reveals the extent of the normalisation of this way of thinking. These examples highlight some important features that further suggest there are two fundamentally different discourses of success; successful systems (process focus) and successful individuals (student focus). The next chapter considers if and how the tensions between these foci are apparent in other styles of public educational discourse.
Chapter 6: Success in education as constructed in selected newspaper reports

This chapter examines the concept of success as constructed in newspaper articles by journalists. The articles examined here include the reporting of a long-term research project, acknowledgement of personal and institutional successes, and narrative style articles and opinion columns that reflect and contribute to public perceptions of success in education. Some of these articles have little direct connection to topical issues and are reported as local ‘good news’ stories. Far from making these insignificant pieces of data, these may in fact, most accurately reflect common public perceptions of educational success. Close examination of such texts, that are not dominated by contentious issues and polarised debate, can reveal underlying assumptions, or what is taken-for-granted and accepted as normal in this society. This does not however mean that such texts do not influence debates. For instance, the inevitability of political elements in public discourse is illustrated in two of these articles in which success is reported as being recognised and acknowledged by the Prime Minister. Political purpose is also present in a reporter’s treatment of an opposition education spokesperson’s visit to local regional schools.

Themes noted in the more formal genres of educational discourse of the preceding chapters, become more clearly visible in this section. These include: simplification of complex issues; change as a component or indicator of success; emphasis on economic values and ‘the system’ and the pervasiveness of neoliberal language of measurability and accountability; persuasive linguistic constructions; selective omissions; and how hierarchy is taken-for-granted and constructed in the most unremarkable texts. The features associated with these themes are not necessarily discrete, with several features often intertwined within and between texts. Another theme that emerges in this section is the idea that success is attributable to a formula, which is sometimes ‘secret’.

Though described as ‘less contentious’, in that they do not necessarily directly debate topical issues, these articles are never neutral. Even the reporting of an independent research study is not neutral reporting, but is a media interpretation of an researcher’s findings, so it is important to acknowledge the influence of the media as a lens that affects perspective in each analysis. Also now typical of mass-produced media, is the reprinting of entire articles in multiple publications, with only minor changes to layout and headlines (this is discussed further in a section on intertextuality.
in the next chapter). Finally, headlining, as an important aspect of media presentation, is included in some analyses in this section. Headlines are constructed to grab attention and typically use emotive language and, as discussed further in chapter 7, are often constructed negatively (Bell, 1991, p.156).

**Simplification**

The first article discussed here (Binning, 2011) appeared in the NZ Herald on 30 September 2011 and was reprinted in the Otago Daily Times (ODT) three days later. The earlier publication was headlined: *Good can follow bad at school*. The later article, with the same content, appeared with the inverted headline: *Bad start need not prevent later school success: study*. The latter is an abridgment of the first sentence of the article (extract 56) and illustrates one strategy to produce news copy as efficiently as possible.

**Extract 56.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Sentence 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad start need not prevent later school success study</td>
<td>≈ Doing badly at primary school is not always a barrier to achieving good NCEA results, says a report from a study that has followed 500… (ODT, 2011)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research reported in this article was carried out by an independent research organisation, and the article itself is a selection of points presented in the report summary as provided on the Ministry of Education website (www.educationcounts.govt.nz). There is no critique of the research findings, and with little contextual information about the study, the purpose for reporting this study is not clear. It could be seen as a selective piece of reporting to support a political position, rather like texts that refer to the authority of independent research, but this time not directly attached to an issue. If so, we need to question whether the concept of success here is constructed in the same way as in political texts.

The analysis of the first sentence above suggests that it is. The phrase *later school success* is clearly linked to *achieving good NCEA results*. However, the study not only compares students’ early academic performance with their ultimate school attainment levels, but includes a post-school snapshot of their non-academic ‘social performance’ and qualities (extract 57). This part of the study’s findings highlights
these social skills as an integral part of the construction of educational success. These were not only identified by the researcher, but are acknowledged by the reporter as important and likely to resonate with readers in the wider public.

*Extract 57.*

It [the study] also found that students who gained Level 2 didn’t necessarily have *better arithmetical, reading, writing or problem-solving skills* at 14 than those who gained only Level 1.

*Instead, they had* "higher levels of perseverance, communication, social skills, curiosity and self-management".  

(*ODT, 3 October 2011*)

The article necessarily reports only some aspects of the original research report, but it is significant to note what is omitted. The original research report states that rather than an actual measure of success, NCEA achievement (in addition to its purpose as an employment credential) “indicates that young people have built the habits of learning that they need to make the most of the independence and choices that come with leaving school” (Wylie, 2011, p.3). Comparing this to the construction that appears in the newspaper article, it is possible to see the effect of the media as a lens that slightly distorts the original meaning and, in this case, reinforces a simplified notion that attainment of the NCEA qualification ensures, or even constitutes, success. Such simplification of complex educational processes and its role in society is a common finding in my study and is described by Lingard (2011) as a paradox, where in an increasingly complex society, education is constructed in simplified and quantifiable terms. Lingard refers to the prevalence of simplification through quantification as ‘reductive politics’ (p.357).

Simplification of complex concepts is achieved not only through quantification, but also through reduction of language to formulaic terms and phrases. Ironically, such reduction can also make meaning more obscure. Success is a subjective concept, often with high stakes, and when expressed through formulaic, reduced and opaque terms, can result in constantly shifting expectations. It is perhaps predictable that success therefore is often linked to change, and an associated focus on process rather than outcomes.
Change

Change is often said to be inevitable and may result from unavoidable or natural causes. The type of change discussed here is usually deliberately instigated and intended to bring about some type of improvement. Within education, change comes about from constant review and evaluation of theory and practice. Indeed it is argued that ‘good’ teaching involves constant adaptation to individual student needs. This type of change is adaptation that occurs within the larger structure of the education system. Adaptations of the system itself may result from increased understanding of educational processes, but very often from influences outside education. Political interest in education can bring about structural changes, which sometimes become the contentious issues that appear in the media.

An overview of the data suggests that the discourse of change in education is indeed ubiquitous, and largely taken-for-granted. Closer analysis of the data shows that the concept of change is often closely related to success (see also pages 49-51). If success is subject to constantly shifting expectations as suggested above, it is not surprising that any movement towards a suggested ideal may be constructed as success. An article entitled School success impresses (Ford, 2010) illustrates how success and change are co-constructed in relation to a school that was formerly seen as a ‘failing school’. 
1. The roll turnaround and subsequent successes at Makoura College has captured the attention of Prime Minister John Key.

2. At this year's senior school awards, held on Tuesday, principal Tom Hullena said among those taking a close interest in the school's rejuvenation were Mr Key and education minister Anne Tolley.

3. Mr Hullena said the school has grown in numbers and academic success in the past year.

4. As well as thanking staff, students, volunteers and the school's commissioner, Tim White, Mr Hullena praised the "flexible, creative and supportive approach" of the Education Ministry.

5. "Prime Minister John Key and the minister of education, Anne Tolley have both shown a keen interest in the school and its resurgence," Mr Hullena said.

6. Mr Hullena said early statistics showed the school "well above where it was at the same time last year", with a likely success rate of up to 80 per cent at NCEA levels 1 and 2.

7. The school population was at 270, up 20 per cent when numbers from the "feeder" schools were declining.

8. Truancy and school discipline incidents had decreased, and the school had a very positive ERO review.

9. Changes at the school have included a new motto and mission statements, and Mr Hullena said he believes a "philosophical base to work from is crucial to a school's climate".

10. Other changes were made to the structure of the junior school and to the school day.

Success in this text (extract 58) is announced by the headline and, in the first line, is directly linked to changes in a school. The main change is identified as a roll turnaround (line 1). However, the text relies on several assumptions. Firstly, it is assumed that the roll of a school is significant to the success of its students. In practical terms the roll is an important figure on which many decisions within a school are based, such as planning classes, buying resources, and employing teachers; but it is a figure – a statistical representation of a concrete ‘fact’.

As a statistic, the roll number is also used to make comparisons, and these can often involve value judgements, which in turn are also based on assumptions. For example, the number of children enrolled in a school may be viewed positively or negatively, but the article in extract 58 assumes that bigger is better. Note that words have subtle, but powerful, positive or negative connotations, which are usually taken-for-granted. For example the term turnaround connotes a positive change, as in: ‘there was a real turnaround in his behaviour’; as opposed to the very similar word turned, which
conjures up negative change as in: ‘then the weather turned’. The word *turnaround* in line 1 (extract 58) is further confirmed as positive by its conjunction with the phrase *and subsequent successes*. In this case, it is an important enough example of success to be reported as attracting the attention of the Prime Minister (line 1) and the Education Minister (line 2). The importance of the statistical change is reinforced in paraphrasing in line 3, *the school has grown in numbers*; and line 7 …*population was at 270, up 20 per cent* and further substantiated by comparison with previous years’ data (line 6); and by direct linking with other measures of success, such as *academic success* (lines 3) and reference to NCEA results (line 6).

Words that indicate change and simultaneously construct the reversal of the failing school status to successful, include: *rejuvenation* (line 2); *grown* (line 3); *resurgence* (line 5); and *change(s)* (lines 9-10). Other indicators of change and success in this text include the reduction of negative factors (line 8), and deliberate and visible rebranding through a new motto and mission statement (lines 9 and 10). Restructuring of the school day (line 10) is also a tangible break from past routines. While these may be argued to contribute to students’ success, the focus of this text remains largely to do with the *success of the system*.

**Success of people or systems**

With the structural aspects of the education system once again foregrounded in extract 58, questions remain about what role people play. The people thanked in this text for contributing to the school’s ‘turnaround’ include staff, students and volunteers (line 4). However their mention is minimal compared to the emphasis placed on the commissioner who is named, and even more so the Education Ministry (line 4). A notable omission from this list and, one that could reasonably have been expected to be mentioned, is parents. After all, according to the competitive model, parents are the ones who must choose to enrol their students in this school for the roll to increase. This suggests that despite years of rhetoric about parental involvement in schools, the qualitative relationship between parents, schools, and learning is disregarded. Instead, the text reflects a corporate view of the school, that values growth, and which is quantitatively assessed. The possibility of the social value of small schools, where staff and students and parents know each other well, is not evident in this text. Furthermore, an improvement in the quality of learning, according to this text, was not possible at this school without growth. *Success is equated with quantitative growth*. It is possible to
conclude from these assumptions therefore, that the values underlying the construction of this text are more aligned with business and economics, rather than social or educational values. This correlates to educational policies that Lingard (2011) claims are predominantly based on statistical data with little regard for long-term qualitative weighting.

To this end, quantifiable change is not only an indicator of success, it is also assumed to drive success. This argument claims that change will lead to success, but is predicated on the assumption that all change is ‘good’. It also ignores the discrepancy between systemic change and fundamental change, which requires a comprehensive understanding of the whole education system and how it functions within the wider social, political and economic systems. As the example in extract 58 shows, the types of change most commonly disseminated in the public media, at best, amount to “tinkering” (Bates, 2012, p.48).

Responsibility for the success of individual students within the system is delegated to teachers and this is reflected in headlines such as: *Teacher training must change if we want our kids to succeed* (Chapman, 14 May 2012, Dominion Post page B5). Teachers are expected to change their practice, but the changes can only be within the constraints of current institutional structures. Even when more fundamental change – the type advocated by educationalists such as Robinson (2010) and Gilbert (2005) – is desired, dominant institutional structures limit what is possible. More significantly the dominant discourse that emanates from this overarching structure, limits the capacity to think about and discuss what is possible. With social values elided out of the discourse, and therefore people’s consciousness, the only recourse is an emphasis on systemic change to solve perceived problems.

**Discursive normalisation of economic values**

The prominence of economic values, evident as business and managerial terminology, is well recognised in critiques of educational discourses (for example Court & O’Neill, 2011). Also acknowledged in research, but not so easily seen is the consequent backgrounding or marginalisation of social values (Neave, 1988). In an article responding to a change imposed by the MoE, *School roll count change impact being felt* (Lewis, 2011) social values are not only backgrounded but denigrated. This article reports on changes to the government’s funding system that aim to ‘reward’ schools for retaining students, even those ready to move on to other training or work
before the end of a school year (line 3, extract 59). The Minister of Education justifies the changes to the funding system by constructing them as more accurate (extract 59, line 1). The Minister’s message is intended to be persuasive and draws on emotive connotations of fairness. The ‘fairness’ however, is predicated on the assumption of individual responsibility, and the expectation that people are unwilling to support each other or a greater good, at least financially. It constructs schools as devious for retaining funding they were in fact originally entitled to and ignores other constraints that may be present for schools, such as contractual employment obligations (extract 59, line 2).

Extract 59.

1. Education Minister Anne Tolley said quarterly roll counts were introduced to ensure funding was more accurate, and directed to where it was needed.
2. I’m sure taxpayers will be astonished to find out that schools have previously received funding for students who are no longer attending.
3. This change provides an incentive for schools to retain students.

(Lewis, 2011)

Lewis also reports the contrary view of a principal. From this perspective the more accurate reduction of funding as students leave during the year is interpreted as penalising schools that are successful in accomplishing their role of preparing students for work before the end of the school year (extract 60).

Extract 60.

The irony of it is, you are penalised for being successful.

If we get pupils into a job, an apprenticeship or further training, we consider it a success.

Schools where pupils finish their year early to go into employment or further training courses will lose funding.

(Lewis, 2011)

Clearly the principal sees getting pupils into a job as success, but this does not mean this is the only type of success in this school. This article once again calls into question the purpose of education and the debate between vocational versus academic education. More importantly it illuminates the tension between the government perspective of building a successful system within an economically focused framework and schools’ social-values perspective of building opportunities for students to be successful in life. The relationship between government and schools is of course a hierarchical one, and
though the Lewis’ (2011) article foregrounds principals’ and schools’ perspective, the government holds the power in this relationship.

**Positioning and hierarchy**

Many hierarchical relationships in our society are accepted as normal and go unnoticed in public discourses. The subtle discursive means by which hierarchies are constructed and reinforced in an educational domain is revealed in the analysis of an article titled, *Science teacher’s formula for success* (Rapley, 2010). The article showcases a teacher who received a major teaching award, but the success being celebrated involves students’ achievements and the role of the school. The relationships described in this article seem to be nothing unusual, but it is in this unremarkable-ness that CDA looks for underlying assumptions and hierarchical power (Fairclough, 2001a).

The article shown in extract 61 is structured in three sections. The first section (lines 1-4) notes the rewards for success; including, earning praise, receiving an award and receiving money. The second section (lines 5-10) outlines what the teacher did to achieve this recognition. According to the text, this involved using more computer and information technology, encouraging thinking in the class, and reinforcing learning. The third section (lines 11-16) explains that effect of what the teacher did; that is, the students became more engaged and achieved better academic results. On the surface, the teacher’s actions also seem unremarkable, as this is what most teachers do, but like other assumptions, warrants closer scrutiny.
Science teacher's formula for success

KRISTINA RAPLEY  Last updated 05:00 17/12/2010

1. Getting students to think outside the square has earned a secondary teacher high praise.

2. Howick College science teacher Steve Martin is the proud recipient of New Zealand's top teaching prize, a 2010 Prime Minister's Science Teacher Award.

3. Mr Martin receives $50,000 and Howick College gets $100,000.

4. He began to get a lot of attention in academic circles after winning the Microsoft Distinguished Teacher award in 2009.

5. Mr Martin formed a virtual classroom with online lessons and instant messaging so students could access their work at any time.

6. Netbooks, laptops and mobile phones replace pen and paper and students can access resources, share information or post questions.

7. This work is based on a teaching and learning theory Mr Martin has researched about low, medium and high level thinking.

8. "Simply put," Mr Martin says, "we all have different levels of thinking and what I'm doing is trying to get students to from a low level of thinking to a high level of thinking."

9. Mr Martin says asking a student a low level question like "How was your day?" is likely to get a low level answer.

10. But by asking "What interesting things did you do today?" a higher level response is likely that could develop into conversation that will reinforce what they have learnt.

11. "The students are far more engaged, they are challenged and more excited."

12. Surveys of Mr Martin's students during the past three years show a huge increase in academic achievement, motivation and ability to think more creatively.

13. The number of students achieving excellence in their end-of-unit tests has increased from 3 percent to 53 percent.

14. "The sheer joy you get from watching students learn and grow and get excited about science is what keeps me going," he says.

15. "You can never predict what students are capable of – it's staggering sometimes."

16. The school's prize money will be going towards ICT equipment to support Mr Martin's ongoing projects.

- © Fairfax NZ News

The first sentence foregrounds the students, but associates them with the cliché ‘thinking outside the square’. This construction assumes that students do not normally do this, and that getting them to do so has made this particular teacher extraordinary. The students are therefore positioned as the objects of the teacher’s success and by
implication, lower than the teacher. The teacher’s success is recognised in the phrases *high praise,* and *the Prime Minister’s [...] Award,* which indicates a hierarchical structure where the praise comes from ‘higher up’. This positions the teacher below those making the judgement. There is nothing particularly striking about this, as it is commonly accepted that teachers are hierarchically above students, usually justified through age, experience, and qualifications, and that the teacher is governed by a system that includes a school department or faculty, principal, board, and government regulations and law. However, this is a clear example of the structure referred to on page 42 that maintains control, while simultaneously giving an impression of autonomy. In line 2 the structural hierarchy places the school first, then the subject area, and then the teacher’s name. The acknowledged success again seems to be more concerned with the promotion of a successful system, with the teacher held up as an example of what the government expects. While we expect to have a successful education system, what this shows is how much we take this hierarchical structure for granted, and suggests that our capacity to imagine any other structure or system is limited by this unquestioned, constantly reinforced normality.

In section two the reporter describes what Mr Martin did to attract the attention, praise and reward. Some school involvement is implied here in the provision of the equipment and resources that the students use (lines 5-6), and is differentiated from the teacher’s pedagogical skills in lines 8-10. An economic factor comes back into focus here, in that it is assumed all these students have access to the technological approach adopted for this class. Success in this case, while not contingent on technological capability, is subtly reaffirmed as accessible to those who can afford it.

The third section describes the effect of Mr Martin’s efforts. Students are foregrounded in this section as the beneficiaries of Mr Martin’s teaching theory that has been constructed as innovative. The benefits that students have received are first described qualitatively in line 11 with the words *engaged, challenged,* and *more excited,* and, consistent with managerial thinking that requires validation, line 12 refers to surveys as evidence of students’ increased achievement levels. Further authority is added in line 13 by expressing achievement data in quantifiable terms. The assumption here is that *engaged, challenged and excited* students, is not valid in this age of accountability, but when substantiated by percentages, the recognition and reward can be officially justified.
Two quotes from Mr Martin reveal the qualities that motivate him, and probably many other teachers, to look for better ways of teaching, challenging and engaging students. The emotive phrases *sheer joy of watching students learn and grow excited* (line 14), and in reference to students’ capability, *its staggering* (line 15), contrast significantly with the almost meaningless sterility of the preceding *students achieving excellence in their end-of-unit tests* (line 13). The latter is an example of the neoliberal language of accountability that aims to ‘prove’ or make change and progress visible (Strathern, 2000) and that it is seen as suitably rational and free of emotional content. This language is described by Watson (2003) as “unable to convey any human emotion, including the most basic ones such as happiness, sympathy, greed, envy, love or lust. You cannot tell a joke in this language, or write a poem, or sing a song. It is a language without human provenance or possibility” (p.15). Emotional language in public discourse may be overtly denigrated as less meaningful, yet it is used extensively to persuade.

The final line (16) of this article reaffirms a technological focus as more significant than the teacher-student relationship, and contributes to the prevalence of technological solutions to issues, rather than promoting human interaction to collectively solve problems. Acceptance of this perspective confounds critique of current educational frameworks. For example, if we consider what is omitted from this text, we find that there is no evidence or acknowledgement of collegial support, or the existence of any reciprocal relationship between Mr Martin, other teachers and the school. This absence constructs him as having acted alone and outside the normal expectations, and therefore, as extraordinary. Mr Martin’s exceptionality is equated with ‘success’ and resonates with other public celebrations of success in a competitive environment where one surpasses all others. Yet this celebration of the competitive model contradicts the government rhetoric of ‘success for all’.

This teacher’s achievement is likely to be seen as an example of practice that could be emulated in other schools – often referred to and encouraged by the Ministry of Education as sharing ‘best practice’; that is, taking such an example as a model and replicating it in other situations. The apparent logicality of this idea is made all the more seductive by the popular construction of success as a ‘formula’ as it is in the title of this article. Many advertisements proclaim to have a ‘secret formula’ guaranteeing success in whichever field you care to investigate. Yet in reality the capacity for others to emulate the example of this particular teacher is severely limited. Firstly the system
is structured to encourage competition, the very antithesis of sharing and collegiality, and it is increasingly burdened with accountability and standardisation. That this teacher received this recognition is very likely a reflection of his individual character. It is therefore unlikely to be sustainable (in the same form) by the school should this particular teacher leave, or emulated by teachers in other schools, particularly less affluent ones.

Though more easily articulated as a formula, success in this example is shown to be the result of a complex arrangement of talents, circumstances, opportunity and willingness. So although educational success clearly encompasses human qualities, as shown in the public discourse of success, these seem not to be valued by policy makers unless empirically substantiated. This reflects the rather grim warning from Biesta (2009) who contends that, “we end up valuing what is measured, rather than that we engage in measurement of what we value” (p43).

**Formulaic reduction and metaphors for success**

Success as a formula is illustrated in an article titled *Riding the seven waves of learning* (Helliwell, 2011) (extract 62) as part of a ‘the school of the week’ series in the Bay of Plenty Times. This article also focuses on an individual character, and change is again a key ingredient. This narrative style article foregrounds a school principal and highlights his attitude and personality as the driver of student success. Success that is constructed not only as a formula, but as a secret held by the school (line 1).
1. It’s a beautiful day in Papamoa. It’s the perfect day to visit Te Akaup Ki Papamoa school and explore the many secrets that lie beyond the driveway.
2. The tidy appearance of the room makes me half expect to hear elevator-music but as I wait for my appointment with principal Bruce Jepsen, my quiet thoughts are interrupted with the blaring beat and rhythmic tunes of Crazy Frog.
3. The chair I’m sitting in begins to shake.
4. Hundreds of feet stomp on the ground, scores of laughter and shouts of delight erupt from the adjoining room, the school hall.
5. Seconds later a teacher walks down the hallway to use the photocopier. He’s humming along to the tune.
6. “The kids love that song, they know all the words,” he tells me.
7. Inside the school hall over a hundred students are bopping, clapping and singing to a jump jam exercise.
8. “It looks like fun,” I say to Mr Jepsen, who emerges from his office and introduces himself.
9. In true principal style Mr Jepsen has been going 100 miles an hour, but instead of rushing, he calmly invites me to sit in his office.
10. Inside the sliding doors are open, making it a collaborative space for him and his deputy principal.
11. “Because what we do here is a collaborative effort ... and teamwork is what makes the children succeed,” he said.
12. “There’s not a lot one person can do but when you’ve got a lot of people behind you who are all gunning for the same cause, that’s when results happen.”
13. After a long career as a professional rugby player, Mr Jepsen shifted his focus to education and has spent many years perfecting the secret to success.
14. He’s been the head of Te Akaup Ki Papamoa for the past four years and in this time the school has undergone some major changes — inside and out. The school has developed a strong sense of culture and it shines through Mr Jepsen, the staff and every student at Te Akaup Ki Papamoa.
15. The students’ ride the seven waves of learning, which help them develop lifelong skills that will encourage them to succeed in life.
16. These seven waves are vision, think, learn, nurture, grow, communicate and shine. New entrant teacher Kim Batters said at no matter what age, students can take ownership of their learning and right from a young age they’re taught how to incorporate these seven values into their everyday lives.
17. The school places high expectation on the students and in his time at Te Akaup Ki Papamoa, Mr Jepsen has put an unwavering focus on numeracy and literacy. This has seen the students’ achievement rates skyrocket, he says.
18. “The children are wired differently these days and as well as numeracy and literacy, the children need excellent communication skills, they need to be able to competently use the tools of ICT to further their learning,” Mr Jepsen says.
19. At Te Akaup Ki Papamoa school the students learn in a range of environments, according to their need.
20. It is the only school in New Zealand with a dedicated boys’ class, and it also has a digital class, where the majority of work is done using digital technologies.
21. Mr Jepsen said having these options to suit the style of learning was advantageous and the key to success in education was encouraging individualised learning programmes.
Even before the principal himself is introduced in line 8, the effect of his personality is developed through the author’s description of the surroundings, an exchange with a teacher (lines 5-6), and the sound of happy and active students (line 7). The principal’s personality is further conveyed through metaphorical extension, *he has been going at 100 miles an hour* (line 9), and is supported by factual reporting, *he’s been head of... for the past four years...* (line 14). These constructions portray the principal as working hard or ‘travelling fast’, but calmly under control (line 9), and the phrase *in true principal style* constructs this personality as the ideal, or even stereotypical principal.

Collaborative practices are introduced with the description of *open sliding doors* (line 10) and then defined as *teamwork* (extract 63).

*Extract 63.*

*Because what we do here is a collaborative effort... and teamwork is what makes the children succeed," he said* (line 11).

The notion of collaboration as a key to success in education is deftly linked in line 12 to his previous career in rugby, which in the New Zealand context, is highly regarded. The text draws on the culturally constructed assumption that ‘team players’ are successful and that the skills he gained in professional rugby have translated into his capacity as an educational team leader.

*Extract 64.*

*After a long career as a professional rugby player, Mr Jepsen shifted his focus to education and has spent many years perfecting the secret to success.* (line 13)

The principal is linked to changes in the school, and like the previous article, reiterates the idea that change is a necessary ingredient of success. An institution or individual must be seen to have moved or changed from one state of being to another before it is reported as successful.

*Extract 65.*

*... and in this time the school has undergone some major changes - inside and out.* (line 14)

In this case the school is assumed to have lacked a sense of cultural identity, but change now apparent in the people at the school, is attributed to the principal. This is strongly expressed in the phrase *shines through*...(extract 66). The principal’s dynamic personality described in this text fits better with the ideal modern business leader, than with traditional views of an academic leader.
Extract 66.
The school has developed a strong sense of culture and it shines through Mr Jepsen, the staff and every student at Te Akau Ki Papamoa. (line 14)

In line with the current business minded society, in which complex processes are often reduced to formulaic solutions, line 13 promotes the notion of success as a secret to be discovered. The school is perceived as successful because of its innovative charismatic leader who has managed to ‘package’ learning into a formula. The formula offered here is a set of key words presented metaphorically as a set of waves that students are required to ride. The metaphor is powerful for a number of reasons; it resonates with popular notion of the ‘knowledge economy’ and ‘catching a knowledge wave’; it is contextually relevant as the local area is known as a surfing destination; and the formulaic construction recalls popular treatment of success in books such as Covey’s (1989) “Seven habits of highly effective people”.

Extract 67.
The students ride the seven waves of learning, which help them develop lifelong skills that will encourage them to succeed in life. (line 15)

One teacher refers to the key words as values, which more accurately constitute a list of actions (extract 68).

Extract 68.
These seven waves are vision, think, learn, nurture, grow, communicate and shine. New entrant teacher Kim Batters said at no matter what age, students can take ownership of their learning and right from a young age they're taught how to incorporate these seven values into their everyday lives. (line 16)

The surfing metaphor suggests that students will need to ‘catch’ these actions and surge along with them in order to make progress in life, but also by implication, that some will miss the opportunities along the way. The metaphor cleverly connotes, rather than overtly captures, notions of agency, responsibility and motivation.

At a more pragmatic level, the principal reports correlations between improved achievement levels and a focus on numeracy and literacy (line 17), but adds that today’s children also need excellent communication skills. This skill, once explained as proficiency in conversing and writing, seems now to be replaced by competent use of ICT, as suggested by the use of a comma instead of conjunction, which conflates rather than separates the two concepts (extract 69).
The metaphor *children are wired differently these days*, refers to the significant differences that children face in the current technological age compared to that of only a decade or two ago. In reality of course, children have not made rapid evolutionary changes, and as Tony Wagner (2008) notes, schools like children, have not changed, but it is the material world that they live and operate in that has. In addition to technological competence, this text identifies key components of success for individuals within the education system, including strong leadership, clear values, individualised programmes and supportive environments. Each of these represents multifaceted areas that have been, and continue to be studied and debated, but the reporting style necessarily, but effectively simplifies the issues surrounding education and what it takes to succeed in life. Success in this text therefore, is constructed more superficially as a matter of strong personality, popularity, and technology, in short, a formula.

Simplified, complex educational and social concepts become more accessible in public discourse, but at the same time are reduced to problems to be solved by pragmatic means, which involves the management of measureable elements. Also, when reported as a problem, with measured deficiencies, the response is all too often to blame someone or something.

**Reclaiming social values**

A very different style article titled, *Taking a look at the school system* (Kendon, 2012) uses an informal language to build rapport. Informal styles of reporting are used to engage readers with local news, and here it appears in a regional newspaper report about the visit of the opposition spokesperson for education to a number of local schools. The informality in this article is characterised by the use of first names, personalisation and colloquialisms (underlined in the extract 70). These are very often direct quotes of people interviewed, rather than the journalist’s own statements.

**Extract 70.**

1. “I will feed back this information to help form Labour’s education policy,” says Nanaia.
2. “If you applied that logic to my nephews you’d find ....”
3. Merivale Primary School principal Jan Tinetti says it was an *awesome* opportunity...

4. “It was *absolutely stunning* to have her ask questions about educational priorities. *It is always nice* to have input into how government policy is made,” says Jan. (Kendon, 2012)

This text reports a local event, which includes an opportunity for democratic input into policy (extract 70, line 4), and serves a further political purpose of conveying the opposition’s perspective of topical education issues (extract 71). The informal style of the report shows little evidence of power inequities, except where opposition to government actions is expressed. Here, the language of measurability and accountability is necessary to express the actions of the government (line 6).

**Extract 71.**

5. *Nanaia is critical of National’s education policy* saying the Government has put a lot of pressure on schools to *implement national standards*.

6. They have *set goals to increase performance with performance based pay*. *They set a strong target of 85 per cent achievement level of NCEA standards.*

   (Kendon, 2012)

The main focus of the article, however, is on expressing the affective factors that contribute to educational success, such as, *the love of learning and support for young parents* (extract 72). Education is constructed as a social value, and is explicitly mentioned in relation to Māori and Pacific Island children and families (line 8).

**Extract 72.**

7. *The love of learning starts in the home and support for young parents needs to be in our homes and in our society.*

8. *The reality is that many Māori and Pacific children are starting school well behind their age level. This is due to low participation in early childhood education. Many Māori parents are young and the value of education is not important to them. We need models for learning where parents value education.*

   (Kendon, 2012)

The lower achievement levels of Māori and Pacific Island children is constructed here as stemming from social issues, including parental age, attitudes to education, and though not specifically stated, poverty issues which could be inferred from *low participation in early childhood education* (extract 72).
The wider social and community issues acknowledged as integral to educational achievement in this text, contrasts with other texts that construct the underachievement of ethnic groups as a problem resulting from deficiencies in schools. A striking feature of these texts is that success is constructed in the negative, that is, the focus is on the lack of success or failure. The following chapter explores the discursive construction of failure in relation to education.
Chapter 7: Negative constructions of educational success: failure and blame

The search for examples of public discourse concerning success in education, in the early stages of this study, resulted in a large number of articles that focused instead on failure. In this chapter I examine a selection of these texts, and consider how they relate to constructions of success. As in the texts already analysed, these examples all involve elements of power and assumptions that have their roots in underlying values. They are also subject to the distortion that occurs as a result of the media lens. One of the reasons that this type of construction is so common is explained by the cliché, ‘bad news sells’ (Bell, 1991). That is, negative reporting and particularly negatively constructed headlines, are commonly understood to attract more attention than positive ones, which is important in the context of the competitive marketplace.

The selected texts involve two main topics. The most frequent topic in the period of this study was the performance of Māori students in schools, which often appeared in the data as ‘underachievement’, rather than ‘failure’. (Note that in other time periods the focus has variously been on boys’, girls’ or other specific groups’ underachievement.)

The second most frequent topic was the education system itself, which unlike people, was referred to using the terms ‘failure and ‘failing’, but also occurred as the phrase ‘not serving the needs’. Failure within the education system was variously associated with schools, teachers, parents and communities, funding and technology. The most salient feature of these texts however, is that failure tends to be associated with blame. The analysis that follows shows how discursive construction of crises, power and failure contribute to what Sian Elias (2009) refers to as ‘a culture of blame’.

Constructing urgency and crisis

Discourse related to education and ethnicity is not new. As shown in chapter three, concerns about the education of Māori students have been a matter of discussion since colonial days. Historically there was a deliberate intent to limit the types of education for the indigenous population as noted in Taylor’s (1862) statement, I do not advocate for the Natives under present circumstances a refined education or high mental culture (see extract 4 on page 29). What was previously deliberately constructed as class distinction is now constructed as a problem that must be resolved. The
prominence of this topic in recent public discourse implies that a resolution is urgent. The sense of urgency is conveyed not only through the frequency with which it is discussed, but also within the discussions. In official discourses, urgency and importance are constructed through words such as priority, and as a concern for everyone in the phrase, a matter of national interest (extract 73).

*Extract 73.*

*The success of Māori students at school is a matter of national interest and priority*  
*(ERO, 2010, p.1)*

*Supporting the goal of raising educational achievement for priority groups – particularly Māori and Pasifika learners*  
*(MoE, 2011, p.37)*

The sense of urgency or importance emerges more strongly in newspapers, where issues are often constructed as crises. Headlines are the most prevalent examples in which a sense of crisis is constructed. Some examples are shown in extract 74.

*Extract 74.*

- *Education system rates a D- for failing Māori. PI students.* *(Metiria Turei MP, Green Party release, 14/09/2003).*
- *Māori pupils' needs 'not met by system'.* *(Amanda Fisher, Dominion Post, 06/07/2011).*
- *Schools and prisons are failing Māori, says Waipareira chief.* *(Simon Collins, NZ Herald, 10/06/2012).*
- *Education Failing Māori.* *(Otago Daily Times, 02/07/2009)*

Current foregrounding of Māori student achievement may be for a number of reasons. The NZ Curriculum expresses a moral ideal in which all achieve a level of education that allows them to participate as equals in society, yet also points out that statistically, Māori students do less well in the education system than non-Māori students. The motivation likely to be assumed from this context can be expressed as a desire for equity of outcome. National demographic data expects the Māori population to treble between 2001 and 2021 *(Te Puni Kōkiri - Ministry of Māori Development, 2007).* Planning for this demographic shift is also likely to be an important motivation. However, the latter may also be viewed as a matter of political expedience, as this group potentially represent a far more significant proportion of the population, and therefore voting power, in the future. A more worrying motivation, is suggested by David Stuart (1997), who claims that crises have been deliberately constructed by governments, in
order to gain acceptance of radical intervention or reforms. All these explanations involve some form of political power and in the next section I consider how power relationships are constructed in articles related to ethnicity and a lack of educational success.

**Constructing power**

In June 2010 the Education Review Office (ERO) released a report titled *Promoting Success for Māori Students Schools' Progress 2010*. A flurry of newspaper articles reviewed and presented the findings of this report. Unlike the original report, the articles carry negative headlines like those listed above, and show how a strategy intended, on the surface to address inequity is reconstructed in the media in negative terms.
Extract 75.

Schools still failing Maori students
Data continues to show sustained under-achievement, says watchdog report
New Zealand Herald — A003 — 06 October 2010
by Yvonne Tahana Maori affairs reporter

1. Many schools are not demonstrating sufficient commitment to ensuring achievement of Maori students, warns a new report from the schools watchdog. And that failure of schools to improve will see them visited more often by the Education Review Office, says chief review officer Dr Graham Stoop.

2. Just under 167,000 students - 22 per cent of the student body - in New Zealand schools are Maori.

3. The report said there was some evidence that the quality of teaching for Maori students had improved since 2006; half of sample secondary schools achieved improved NCEA results as well as improvement in literacy and numeracy for a quarter of primary schools.

4. However, data continued to show sustained Maori under-achievement in education.

5. The report found that a substantial proportion of schools did not review their own performance in relation to Maori achievement, did not make effective use of data to improve programmes and didn't conduct research about students' learning.

6. Schools' engagement with the community had improved overall. However, a sizeable minority of schools' consultation with parents and whanau was limited. Further, Maori parents' engagement in their children's education was not valued.

7. "It is of concern that [the report] indicates that not all educators have yet recognised their professional responsibility to provide a learning environment that promotes success for Maori students."

8. Dr Stoop said schools needed to break down aggregate achievement data and set targets from there. If they did not, some may lose their "high performance" status meaning the ERO would visit more often.

9. "Schools increasingly need to see the urgency of this."

10. Maori Party co-leader Pita Sharples said the report revealed a "crisis of failure" in schools.

11. "The worst scandal is that there are programmes to help schools but the schools with a crisis are refusing the help available," Dr Sharples said.

12. New Zealand Principal's Federation president Ernie Buitveld said there might be some "understandable defensiveness" from schools in reaction to the report, however they needed to be honest in their self-assessment.

13. "You can spend a long time navel-gazing and blaming but ultimately it's the future we can do something about, not the past."

14. He believed that more Maori teachers in schools, as well as community leaders and kaumatua involvement would raise achievement levels.

The article entitled Schools still failing Māori Students (Tahana, 2010) (extract 75) provides an example of how power, and power inequity, is constructed and reinforced through discourse. At one level, a power differential in this text is perceptible between ethnic groups, and at another level between, institutional groups. Māori students, parents and kaumatua are constructed as the victims of uncaring schools, and the Chief Review Officer and the Principal’s Federation President portrayed as powerful agents to bring about change. In this article the report itself is
treated as an extension of the ERO, which is represented by the metaphor *watchdog* and constructed as a rather menacing presence whose role is to ensure compliance with the capacity and the power to:

- **warn / threaten**
  
  ... warns a new report from the schools watchdog. *And that failure of schools to improve will see them visited more often...* (line 1)
  
  ... may lose their "high performance" status... (line 9)

- **assess or judge**
  
  ... there was some evidence that the quality of teaching for Māori students had improved since 2006. (line 4)
  
  *However, data continued to show sustained Māori under-achievement in education.* (line 5)
  
  *Schools’ engagement with the community had improved overall. However...* (line 7)

- **criticise**
  
  ... indicates that not all educators have yet recognised their professional responsibility to ... (line 8)
  
  *they needed to be honest in their self-assessment* (line 13)

- **and recommend or command action.**
  
  *Dr Stoop said schools needed to break down aggregate achievement data and set targets from there* (line 9)
  
  *"Schools increasingly need to see the urgency of this."* (line 10)

  *(Tahana, 2010, lines from extract 75)*

With ERO as an authoritative power, the report is treated as an undisputable source of knowledge in the phrases, *the report said...* (line 4); *the report found...* (line 5); and *[the report] indicates...* (line 8) (extract 75). While the power of an institution such as ERO might be readily identified in such discourse, the subtle power and effects of the linguistic constructions are not as easily perceived. The article presents Māori underachievement as a failure of schools. However, I argue that the simplicity of this argument masks the insidious effects of linguistic construction, which in this case reinforces a culture of accountability based on values more closely aligned with economic values than social values; whereas the problem may actually have resulted from a lack of focus on social values.
The issue of the schools’ role in the success of particular groups of students is, or at least should be, a matter of complex and qualitative analysis, as well as a shared understanding of what constitutes success, but in this article is reduced to assessment against predetermined criteria. The knowledge, assumed to be presented in the ERO report is instead presented as data (lines 5, 6, 9). Two occurrences of data (lines 6 and 9) are associated with, and therefore act to substantiate schools’ deficiency. While data may be qualitative as well as quantitative, in this text ‘data’ coheres6 with NCEA results in line 4). This discussion is therefore not about the quality of what schools and students do, but about the measurable outputs of the system. The assumption that empirical data equates with success (or lack thereof) is part of wider tensions in education about the culture of measurability and is an issue because of the subjective nature of measuring as noted earlier (Biesta, 2009). This assumption, and the conflicting values that underlie it, goes unquestioned and so is rarely, if ever, raised in discussion about Māori underachievement, but instead leads to questions about accountability. The requirement for accountability means that someone is to blame for failure.

A complex weave of relationships between institutional, ethnic, social and political agents feature in this text, but the most striking relationship (which may, or may not, reflect the original ERO report), is the oppositional positioning of schools and Māori students. No one statement overtly reveals an adversarial relationship between schools and their students, but this opposition is gradually constructed over a series of statements, in which schools are constructed as ‘uncaring’ and Māori students as ‘victims’.

This text seems to echo aspects of historical discourses. In the historical text (extract 1, page 27) success was constructed as the ‘civilising of indigenous peoples’, and this was to be achieved through the imposition of measurement and control, in this case using clocks and timetables. In the contemporary text, success is constructed as ‘equity of measurable outcomes for Māori’, and the lack of success is blamed on schools’ failure to comply with required measurement and control; failure which is articulated in neoliberal the terms ‘performance review’ and ‘effective use of data’ (see extract 76).

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6 See page 41 for explanation of coherence in discourse analysis
Extract 76.
...schools did not review their own performance in relation to Māori achievement, did not make effective use of data to improve programmes and didn't conduct research about students' learning (line 6) (Tahana, 2010)

The message of blame, so blatantly expressed in this text, has been shifted from the “individual student’s lack of motivation, character defects… [and] … is replaced by blaming the education system at a structural or systemic level” (Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2005, p.5).

Such shifting of blame elicited a response from a school principal, which was published under the headline Not fair to blame schools for Māori Failure (Hueber, 2010). This article disputes the claims made in the ERO report and refers to a number of the wider issues involved in this debate and raises the issue with defining success (extract 77).

Extract 77.
Ngati Hine's education spokesman Te Kauimua Kaka said the determination of success for Māori students was Ministry-driven and iwi should have more input. Surely an iwi organisation such as a runanga should have some capacity in determining what success should look like. (Hueber, 2010)

This statement and its deeper implications are not unpacked in a medium that relies on shortened and simplified text, and therefore remains largely inaccessible to the majority of readers. Furthermore, this lone voice is outnumbered by the multiple versions of the blame perspective of this issue that predominate in the press.

Intertextuality

Usher and Edwards (2007) state, “…one cannot escape intertextuality, that no text exists without a relationship to other texts” (p.1). Investigating the relationship between such articles offers another perspective on the assumptions and values that underlie the discourse. Many media articles are reprinted under different headlines, as noted earlier in chapter 6, but in keeping with “news values” (Bell, 1991, p.155) few offer any greater depth than two opposing views of an issue or debate. News items, such as the one examined above, are often produced for a major news company such as NZPA, APN or Fairfax and edited slightly for publication in various local newspapers. Editing often only extends to different headlines and accompanying pictures. For
example in the NZ Herald print and online versions of this article the text is exactly the same, but the headlines differ:

*Schools still failing Māori Students (print headline)*

*Schools in gun over Māori Failure rate (website headline)*  
(Tahana, 2010)

An accompanying photo of Pita Sharples speaking into a microphone is captioned in the web news version as:

*Māori Party co-leader Pita Sharples said the report revealed a ‘crisis of failure’ in schools.*

Yet another version appears on the TV3 website and reports the issue with the headline:

*Many schools fail Māori students – Sharples.*  
(Sharples, 2010)

The text in this case is highly condensed and consists almost entirely of quotes from the Māori party co-leader. Interestingly, the picture on the TV3 website features the co-leader with a serious demeanour and holding two fingers to his face in a pose reminiscent of a ‘gun to the head’. The crossover between this picture and the gun metaphor on the Herald site suggests the close relationship between a single source and the multiple exposures.

The same topic is also reported in the Manawatu Standard under the headline *Schools failing Māori students, says ERO* (Hill, 2010). While the text in this article is different and attributed to a different author, it is sufficiently similar to suggest that each of these articles is a paraphrased version of a single source text. For example this author also includes a ‘gun’ metaphor: *Manawatu schools are likely to be in the firing line* (Hill, 2010).

These examples show the frequent and wide exposure of the public to a discourse that constructs a lack of success as a problem pertaining to a particular group, and as the responsibility of schools, some of which are constructed as deficient. Furthermore, this group of articles is expressly trying to address inequity linked to ethnicity, but which are shaped by the very language that constructs inequity. This shows firstly the capacity of discourse to influence society, and secondly, suggests underlying values that are inherently racist (Hammersley, 2006; van Dijk, 2000), but which go unquestioned and are accepted as normal. It is not surprising therefore, that there is little public appetite for confronting and rethinking the wider issues surrounding the problems of social inequality or conflicting underlying values as suggested by Te Kauimua Kaka in Hueber’s article (2010) (see extract 77). It is far easier to accept that variability in the quality of education, and therefore opportunities for success, is normal.
and that it is a matter of choosing a ‘good’ school for their children. Individual choice becomes the rational response to problems as they are constructed in media articles; problems which are attributed to deficiencies in education system and which must be remedied by the imposition of greater accountability.

The media is thus seen to play a role in facilitating the normalisation of both choice and individual responsibility (competitive model), and the seemingly contradictory standardisation processes necessary to ensure accountability. In these processes complex issues are fragmented so as to become measureable, and able to be ‘managed’ through a set of strategies. The analyses of these articles shows that the reduction of social issues to a set of ‘systems’ is now so ingrained in the language used to discuss them, it is almost impossible to recognise, and further explains why it is that the education system, rather than students, is the focus of much educational discourse.

**What is failing – the system or the people?**

The second most frequent focus of these negative constructions of educational success is the education system. This is often the topic of opinion pieces in the media. Two such articles analysed here are *Education failures are malignant* by Jim Doyle, 23 July 2012, Dominion Post (extract 78) and *Helping Elite to Shine* by Rosemary McLeod, 12 July 2012, Dominion Post.
The print version of the first article, as expected, has a powerful emotive headline that includes the word *failure*, while the online version of the same article has the much milder title *Our education system is not working*. The failure, very clearly refers to the education system that, according to this author, is expected to ‘prepare our young people for the workplace’ (line 7) (extract 79), which constructs a very pragmatic sense of purpose for education. This purpose is reinforced in the opening sentence by *education* and *training* being conjoined and treated as a single concept, as indicated by the use of the singular verb *is* in line 1 (extract 79) and in line 7, where schools, tertiary institutions, workplaces, industry and industry training are all conflated. Furthermore, there is no reference to education for developing well-rounded critical thinking citizens, and academic education is noted briefly as ‘top end’ in relation to the country’s performance (line 10).
Our education and training system is not working. While the failure is not ubiquitous, it is malignant and remorselessly embedded. (line 1)

...schools are not preparing young people for the workplace, far too many people are failing in our tertiary institutions, too many people are leaving tertiary education without the necessary ‘soft’ skills, tertiary institutions are not responsive to the needs of industry, the industry training system is not delivering, and so on. (line 7)

We perform very well at the top, academic, end but we also have a very long tail of relative failure at the other end. (line 10)

While the author may have a single-minded sense of purpose for education, that is preparation for work, it is not clear how he thinks the education system is failing to do this. While some pieces of ‘evidence’ are provided to support the claim of failure, such as statistics about the number of school leavers with no qualification, the sense of failure is constructed in emotive terms such as the use of the metaphor malignant (extract 80) which implies that there is an identifiable cause, or that failure is a ‘thing’ that can be excised, just as a tumour might.

Extract 80.

While the failure is not ubiquitous, it is malignant and remorselessly embedded. (line 2)

The concept of education as a system is indistinguishable in this text from the activity of education that people engage in (as teachers and students). This is evident in this text (extract 81) when the author alternatively constructs failure as that of ourselves (line 3), of people (line 7) of the system (line 8)

Extract 81.

we have failed to make any inroads (line 3)

Not only are these people failing at secondary level they are also failing under the system designed to rescue them. (line 7)

schools are failing our young people, schools are not preparing young people for the workplace, far too many people are failing in our tertiary institutions, too many people are leaving tertiary education without the necessary ‘soft’
skills, tertiary institutions are not responsive to the needs of industry, the industry training system is not delivering, and so on. (line 8)

This confusion reflects the often ad hoc analyses expressed in the public domain, and is even acknowledged by this author.

Extract 82.

One of the problems we have had in dealing with this failure may be that we have not adopted a ‘joined-up’ thinking approach to it. (line 14)

Without reconciling the purpose of education as anything other than preparation for work, the only recourse is to associate its success with an economic value – education must be a ‘sound investment’ and ‘value for money’. Any problems with the system are therefore seen as solvable by judicious expenditure, and this perspective sets the tenor for the rest of the article, which from line 17 onwards focuses entirely on the ‘costs’ for and of society. The use of the pronoun we is noticeably absent in this, less personal section of the text, and instead shifts to an economic discourse, incorporating persuasive and clichéd phrases such as the costs [...] too disturbing to contemplate (p17), cheap and nasty (19); new money (20). An economic solution is constructed in lines 21 and 22 and is characterised by the phrases such as, valued added and investing in the problem.

Rather than encourage critical analysis and debate about the reality and the complexity of the issues alluded to in the text, the effect is that dichotomous views are reinforced. While the majority of people who read the article are likely to have either nodded in agreement, or grumbled in disagreement, the online version allowed for immediate responses from those motivated enough to express their opinions. It should be noted that this author’s occupational position, as stated at the end of the article, may well be associated with a particular agenda and therefore expression of strong ideological beliefs. This may well account for responses that were personally critical of, or even hostile towards the author and/or other contributors. Nine of the 22 opinions offered (at the time of this study) from 16 different members of the public, were of this nature. The various notions of purpose, interpretations of what the problem is, who to blame for problems, and suggested solutions, expressed in the responses, all reflect the same confusion and lack of critical analysis of the issue, but all construct the presence of the problem as some ‘object’ that should be identified – and ‘fixed’. 
A culture of blame

Simplification and objectification of complex social problems means it is common to ascribe blame to someone or something. Many opinion pieces, and the readers’ comments responding to them, reflect Elias’ (2009) ‘culture of blame’. Opinion columns frequently include plenty of criticism that fuels issues in the media, but rarely include clear analyses of issues. Rather, critical analysis is often associated with intellectualism and is not popular in New Zealand. In a discussion about New Zealand’s anti-intellectual attitude Roger Horrocks (2007) describes the media as favouring “personalities who are champions of common sense and can vividly convey its classic sneer” (p.41).

One such ‘personality’ is a popular columnist Rosemary McLeod (2012) who, in a column about educational success, uses a narrative style to recount her own school experiences as a way of framing her opinion about the education system. She does not refer to any experience or knowledge of teaching, and presents a confusing perspective of educational success, yet expresses her opinions with a sense of authority. McLeod criticises schools’ attempts to help all children experience success, claiming this demeans ‘real’ achievement. She equates success with excelling, and describes this as an individual being able to shine (extract 83, line 1). This implies that success is not intended for everyone, yet she also criticises current approaches as creating elitism (extract 83, line 2). McLeod appears contemptuous of both ‘equality’ and ‘elitism’ simultaneously.

Extract 83.

1. Primary schools I’ve known have praised children lavishly for being ‘good helpers’ or ‘making good progress’ but never handed out accolades for academic achievement. The child who excelled at maths passed unnoticed by the peers; the child who produced outstanding art at home would be delegated to a group project where no individual could shine, and lost interest.

2. In other words, what set out to be a policy with the aim of organising some sort of nebulous equality will do the opposite: it will foster and fast-track an elite social class with all the money, and the best jobs. (MacLeod, 2012)

In addition to the achievement of academic excellence, success is implied to be the achievement of a profession such as a doctor or scientist (extract 84, line 4), and failure as a service occupation (line 5). In this extract (84), McLeod juxtaposes a number of
educational issues – streaming, cultural and class differences, Māori and Pasifika achievement (line 3), and blames the associated problems on educators (line 6).

Extract 84.
3. Much was expected of top streams, which was not a bad thing in itself. It should apply to all streams and all class actually, and where there are cultural differences to take into account there should be appropriate ways of teaching so every kid gets a chance to do well. But they don’t, as education statistics for Māori and Pacific children tell us, decade after decade, year after year.
4. What with the many under-educated Māori and Pasifika kids, who soon enough feel like failures because they understand reality all too well, and a rapid decline in the number of kids studying maths, calculus, physics and chemistry, our doctors and scientists of the future will all have to be foreigners.
5. Our grandchildren will be washing their knickers and carrying out their rubbish for a living.
6. And presumably that'll be OK with many educators because, hey they'll all be equal. (MacLeod, 2012)

While McLeod describes the education system as struggling in the opening sentence, the blame for this is clearly laid with teachers. Teachers, specifically state school teachers (extract 85), are described as following a flawed philosophy, or ‘a lie’, and as responsible for stifling real talent (extract 86). The writer portrays teachers as bored and unmotivated, with a negative attitude to children’s achievement, and therefore justifies blaming teachers for student underachievement.

Extract 85.
A teacher once told me that all children are talented, and right there is where we have a problem with the teaching philosophy in state schools. ‘We are all equal’ is a lie. We are all different, and some of us are cleverer than others.

Extract 86.
Anyone who works with kids year in, year out and sees them as an amorphous blob of sameness should be doing something more amusing with their life and get out of teaching. They're stifling real talent....
Of the public responses to this column those strongly agreeing with the writer’s views outweighed those who disagreed or criticised the logic of the discussion by eight to five. This suggests that this columnist’s opinion about what counts as success in education resonates with a considerable section of the public’s perception. The contradictions and inconsistencies in this column effectively illustrate the confused perspective that the public seems to have of issues related education.
Chapter 8: Linguistic detail in the bigger picture

In the preceding chapters many linguistic features and details, embedded and usually overlooked in the discourse, have been identified and analysed in relation to the concept of success. The significance of these features has been interpreted in the wider context, including the many layers of influence that have come from historical and cultural values and ideals, and the changing political, technological and economic environment of education today. A wide range of topics and analytic themes has emerged from the many details identified, all of which contribute in some way to a larger picture. The task in this chapter is to consider those details, to summarise the themes that have emerged from these linguistic features and to consider what conclusions might be drawn from the relationships between these concepts and the way success in education is perceived. This is not a simple process as all the details are contingent upon, and influence one another in various ways, and reflects the complexity of society.

Although taking a linguistic approach to identify values is an “imperfect tool” (Biesta, 2007, p.26), as noted in the introduction, one important finding from looking at what lies behind the language is that social ideals and values underlie contemporary educational discourse, but do so in tension with the more dominant economic values. While values are rarely explicitly expressed in the data of this study, they are nevertheless shown to shape the discourse with details that are overlooked precisely because they are taken-for-granted and assumed to be ‘normal’. This is important for education because, as Taylor suggests, “discursive and linguistic issues have implications for how policy texts are read, implemented, and how they may be used in emancipatory ways by teachers and policy activists” (Taylor 2004, p.14).

Conflicting values

The texts that form part of the public discourse about educational success examined in this study offer examples of how some assumptions about success do not match what people value about education. The discrepancies are evident as tensions or conflict in the discussion of educational issues. The issues are often addressed using language that is accepted as ‘normal’, but which includes the very language mechanisms that created the tensions. For example extract 45, which tries to foreground social values, but uses the term ‘investing’, which although commonly accepted as normal, nevertheless carries with it its economic intentions. Where strong or affective
language is deliberately chosen to state an opposition, it may be dismissed as ‘emotive’ and not empirical or ‘realistic’. As Watson (2003) reminds us, the language of neoliberalism does not recognise emotion, only rationalism. Therefore, any critique invariably ends up either reinforcing the status quo, or appearing as a form of radicalism, which accounts for sharply divided public responses to newspaper articles addressing educational issues. The problem remains that, while educational researchers continue to gain insight into educational processes, the public discourse consists of government rhetoric, oppositional responses and calls for change from all directions. Each claims to be pursuing more successful educational outcomes, but without deeper engagement about what success, or the changes to achieve it, should look like.

This study affirms both Roulston’s (2005) claim that there is a lack of public engagement with complex educational issues, and Jones et al.’s (1995) claim that the lack of clarity about issues, stems from contradictions between language and reality. My analysis shows the linguistic evidence of the contradictions between the deeply embedded democratic values such as equality, and the dominant discourse that constructs structural and economic imperatives, which claim to support the social values, but in effect, exacerbate inequality. This situation has emerged over time through many processes, including colonisation and merging cultures, meeting the practical needs of a newly established society, and more recently, technological and economic advancements which have offered multiple options for increased living standards, but also increased competition and more complex societal issues.

The small sample of historical constructions of educational ideals and success discussed in chapter 3 are plainly set in a very different technological and political context to the contemporary discourses that make up the data for this study. They do however, illustrate that language has been a powerful mechanism in at least two major shifts in values that underpin the concept of educational success. The first being the depositing of indigenous values of collectivism and spirituality, with the concomitant imposition of European structures considered intrinsic to success; and the second the marginalisation of democratic values with the imposition of neoliberal ideals and economic values. In both cases, success came to be assessed through the mechanisms of measurement and management and is reified through linguistic constructions of acceptable norms.

The historical discourses since colonial settlement, constructed an assumption of the rights of all citizens to education, but with rights came responsibilities. This was
understood as the responsibility to strive, as implied in Fraser’s (1939) “fullest extent of his power” and to become active citizens in improving society. Success is rarely explicitly referred to in these discourses, but is vigorously implied as a concept that is an integral part of social cohesion, and which requires individuals to participate in society and to contribute to its cohesion. This view has changed over time, but these underlying social values for education remain in some domains today, albeit under increasing tension with competing economic values. Shallcrass (1980) drew attention to this tension when he posited alternative futures based on either economic principles, or on social collectivism. He warned of the pending “decision by default” (p.290), given that people lack self-confidence, have safety-first attitudes and a suspicion of idealism, and that short-term ad hoc policies have “wider and more immediate appeal” (Shallcrass, 1980, p.290). Furthermore, the economic discourse uses language that maligns collectivism and promotes individual gain, and at the same time reproduces the lack of self-confidence predicted by Shallcrass through an emphasis on competition, which demands the existence and possibility of failure.

The contemporary constructions of success examined in this study, in contrast to the historical constructions, frequently feature the economic terms and concepts of business that are now dominant in wider educational discourses. These include increased emphasis on accountability, measurement and statistical analysis as avenues to success. Correspondingly there are fewer references to concepts such as cooperation, citizenship, public good and social cohesion. These contrasting constructions emphasise the subjectivity of the concept of success, which can be assessed against both a quantitative and qualitative bar, but which is increasingly assessed against the former.

Many studies suggest that increased assessment against quantitative measures has lead to fragmentation of complex issues in the discourse (for example, Lingard, 2011). Roulston’s (2005) New Zealand study showed that newspaper articles about education in the decade following the 1989 reforms reflect a trend towards simplification of the fragmented issues. The data in this current study reflects this trend, showing that issues tend to be reported separately and simply.

**Summarising constructions of educational success**

Any discussion about a value-laden concept naturally varies according to the participants. The data were categorised so that the analysis would lead to summaries about how different groups constructed success. However, this was not as
straightforward as simply identifying the source, because the data in most cases is presented through the intermediary lens of the public media, which itself is subject to the influences of societal norms constructed within political and economic structures. Nevertheless, two main perspectives have emerged; these are the perspective of the government on one hand, and educationalists and educational commentators on the other, though it is by no means a simple dichotomy.

*Educational success from the Government perspective*

Educational success, from the Government perspective, is largely constructed as **structural efficiency based on economic principles and focused on system outcomes**. The analysis shows that the government discourse is dominated by numerical or statistical terms, quantifiable units to facilitate measurement and comparison, and focuses on rationalism. The position of power that the Government holds in society means that this discourse is often prescriptive and sets achievement criteria, goals and targets. Goals relate to, and are specifically and overtly intended to contribute to national economic prosperity and global competitiveness. Education is seen as a means of achieving financial and economic success of the country, and is consequently subject to the same type of management as business and is systems focused. The criteria for educational success therefore, are intended to assess the success of the education system and its processes. It is assumed that successful processes will necessarily lead to successful outcomes for everyone, whatever they perceive as success. Success is thus standardised.

This level of the education system is not specifically concerned with the success or otherwise of individual students, and does not take into account what they bring to education as individuals. The linguistic evidence for this in the data is that children and students are backgrounded in the discourse and they are often only referred to in terms of statistics. Statistical analyses and reporting allows the system to bypass individuals, and identifies only groups who are perceived as failing according to the set criteria. The diversity of individuals is rarely acknowledged or explored in-depth in the public domain, but is instead presented as sets of problems. For example educational data using a number of variables, has allowed statistical analyses to identify socio-economic status or ethnicity as significant variables in the overall achievement levels of students. In response to such problems, groups are singled out for extra attention and the application of particular problem solving strategies. These strategies are disseminated
through appealing documents, which persuasively construct the benefits of the proposed actions, and construct agreement through inclusive features, especially deictic devices such as personal pronouns.

Problems that correlate with such variables, but isolated from their context, are reconstructed and reported in the media in byte-sized news segments. They are fragmented, simplified, and sensationalised for commercial viability, as shown in the headlines pronouncing failure and controversy. Constant public reiteration of such simplified fragments normalises this way of dealing with complex educational topics (see Roulston, 2005, p.227) and the normalisation is facilitated by its alignment with utilitarian managerial mechanisms believed to be efficient means of addressing problems.

Unsurprisingly, simplified constructions of complex problems are more readily accessible for the general public, and a reticence to engage with the wider social issues involved in the complexity reflects an individualistic attitude that unless personally disadvantaged, one need not concern oneself with educational (or social) issues. This highlights a conundrum in describing a system that does not concern itself with individuals, yet at the same time promotes individualistic responses to it. For instance, the education system is constructed as the mechanism for ‘success for all’, yet individual cases are reported as extraordinary and newsworthy events. Lorenz (2012) describes this as a dogmatic formula that equates competition and the free market, with optimum efficiency.

My analysis shows that extraordinary cases of success reported in the media are accepted as proof that the competitive model produces success, and failure therefore is a result of individual (or group) failure. In this model schools are constructed as service providers and the students and their parents are ‘customers’ with the individual freedom and power to choose. Such a construction means that people are unlikely to question powerlessness and failure can be reconstructed as poor choice. Where there is persistent evidence of failure, the competitive model system does not address or take responsibility for the problem, but assumes that the market should respond to a demand for whatever is seen to be required. The government’s role, therefore, is to facilitate enterprise and encourage innovation, to meet the demand. This explains the current rhetoric behind the decision to change legislation to allow private enterprise such as charter schools. Though the shift to an entirely competitive model of school provision
is incomplete in New Zealand, the examples of such reconstructions in the data are seen as “conspicuous features of neoliberal policy” (Lorenz, 2012, p.600).

The government discourse is now clearly shaped by such neoliberal ideology. Though evident in political discourse since the early 1970s, neoliberal rhetoric was not common in New Zealand educational discourses until the 1980s, when it gained tremendous momentum as a result of the 1989 education reforms. Wylie (2009), who has studied the impact of these reforms since the 1980s, noted the presence of “ongoing tensions, and misplaced assumptions” (p.4) in education over the two decades since the reforms. There is now an entire generation who have no experience and little knowledge of the New Zealand school system before the reforms and are therefore less aware of tensions. Nevertheless, tensions remain in educational discourse and, while the shifting values and influence of neoliberal policies are a major part of these tensions, they do not entirely account for current lack of cohesive planning for education in the future.

Tensions are often related to power and hierarchy. Under neoliberal ideals the government aims to make all public sector systems, including education, more efficient, ‘productive’ and accountable. It works on this from a hierarchical position of power by implementing policies and strategies through its various ministries and agencies such as the MoE. This would seem to imply a one way ‘chain of command’ from the government, which ultimately determines the structure and strategies for education, to the MoE, and then to the educationalists and practitioners who must implement those policies and strategies. In this hierarchy the MoE is positioned as the intermediary between the Government and schools. However the MoE is also in an advisory role to the government and must therefore also feed information ‘upwards’ from educational practitioners and researchers to inform government policy makers. Rather than an intermediary, the MoE acts as a conduit between government and educational practice and is therefore required to simultaneously fulfil the expectations of both.

The MoE’s need to straddle these expectations is frequently evident in the data, but most strikingly in the deliberate construction of multiple perspectives simultaneously through the inclusion of several forewords in the strategy documents. Ministry texts frequently interweave managerial terms and phrases with human and social value statements. Additionally, the Ministry is seen to be responding to educational research, as in the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) with the adoption of ‘competencies’, which are aimed at encouraging future-focused thinking. Yet these are
also constructed as quantifiable units to satisfy managerial and accountability requirements. While embracing a ‘new approach’ to learning and attempting to frame co-operative learning, the NZC is nevertheless constructed in neoliberal terms that commodify human skills and qualities. Any forward-thinking intention behind implementing a non-prescriptive curriculum is undone by the very language in which it is written. Furthermore the autonomy offered to schools and teachers by such a curriculum is offset by increased mechanisms for assessment, accountability and control, which forms a large part of the ‘successful system discourse’ that appears in the public domain. In this set-up, it is unsurprising that the accountability, and therefore the blame for failure, falls upon schools and especially teachers.

This finding resonates with a structural problem identified by Wylie (2012) and her recommendation for a genuine intermediary between the regulatory and the advisory functions of the MoE. Rather than “collapsing the distinction between government and people” (Mulderrig, 2011, p.565), this would allow a distance in which a critical view could be rekindled – a reinstatement of the critic and conscience for society, and ‘real’ democracy. This would also make room for revaluing teachers and allow for growth, and consequently trust in their professionalism; a concept Lorenz (2012) claims has been systematically marginalised and deconstructed through standardisation and managerialism in higher education, and which is equally relevant to education in general.

Educational success from an educationalist perspective

Educational success constructed from an educationalist perspective, for the most part focuses on the success of individuals within the system, and this success is assessed against a wide set of human values in addition to acquisition of awards, grades, or qualifications for pragmatic purposes such as employment. In stark contrast to the government discourse, these texts focus on pedagogical processes and the social and structural factors that influence these processes. These texts are characterised by references to learning and teaching, children and students, diversity, social and human values, and a relative absence of statistical references. The underlying values of co-operation, social cohesion and historical notions of citizenship and social responsibility are more apparent in this perspective. It is expressed through qualitative terms and language that expresses emotions such as joy, wonder or satisfaction, and may be recounted in narrative style. This discourse expresses the qualitative aspects of
student and teacher interaction and learning. However, despite these strongly held and partly articulated values, this perspective has been unable to resist the influence and dominance of the neoliberal discourse, and is often undermined by features of managerialist and market-oriented constructions being included in the same texts.

Superficially then, the contrast between these discourses could be described as the difference between a social perspective and an economic perspective and that this accounts for the tensions in educational planning and debates, in that the two most influential agents are, in fact, talking at cross-purposes. This has previously been identified and commented on by a number of researchers such as Nichols and Griffith (2009) who state, “the managerial and the child-centered discourses sit uneasily together” (p.248). Lawton and Cowen (2001) make an even starker observation and state that, “for 2000 or even 3000 years, educational discourse used the language of philosophy and religions and not of economics” (p.17). The more serious issue is that this disjuncture is not at all clear in the public domain. The public are expected to make informed decisions about education, whether it is for the democratic purpose of voting or more personal reasons such as seeking the best education for their children, from disparate discourses generated to a large extent by agents from two separate perspectives and with different values. These perspectives are disseminated through a media that has its own agenda, and therefore also influences on how the discourse is constructed, and which further contributes to the lack of clarity.

**Dominant discourses**

A major reason for the lack of clarity is that economic terms and managerial constructions of neoliberal discourses are so entrenched in normal conversation and thinking, that they are not distinguishable from terms that represent social aspects of education, such as the lack of distinction between ‘knowledge society’ and ‘knowledge economy’ as pointed out by Hargreaves (2003) (see page 8). Economic language when used to discuss social issues constructs people in terms of dollar values, and in doing so distance people’s conception of society as a social organisation, rather than an economic one. The notion of ‘investment’ in children or education, and terms such ‘human capital’ are now ubiquitous and widely accepted as normal in domains outside business. As Wolf (1998) points out, given today’s “obsessive concern with economic relevance” (p.219) it seems ‘common sense’ to say that schools need to be run efficiently, just as businesses do. Common-sense constructions become not only invisible in the discourse
but more significantly, unarguable. Claxton (2008), whose own writing advocates human qualities and social relationships as critical in education, shows the extent of the normalisation of economic thought (sic. values) in his critique of literacy in the UK as measured against benchmark criteria such as General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), when he falls into the common sense ‘language trap’ by comparing the failure of the school system to business. He states, “school is dramatically failing, even at this most basic of tasks. Any manufacturer who consistently produced over 50% of rejects would not stay in business for long” (Claxton, 2008, p.17).

The problem is that schools are not businesses. Schools are social organisations with unique community links. They were created as democratic institutions for the betterment of society, and that ideal remains in the public’s expectations of a public education system. Though learning and teaching have become systematised to cope with increased requirements of society and employment, the activity of learning remains a shared activity in which the learner is required to participate, and is not just the recipient of a service as in an economic transaction. Yet the neoliberal discourse continues to reconstruct a standardised transactional view of education as ever more ‘normal’, and is consequently repeated and accepted not only in the public domain, but even by the institutions themselves. Researchers and educationalists trying to progress educational thinking too, have become inured to this discourse. For example, in trying to re-imagine a future education system, Bolstad et al (2012) adopt the metaphor ‘unbundling’ (p.2) in an attempt to shift thinking about the structure of the education system. This metaphor may be intended to connote the dismantling of a monopoly, but is nevertheless borrowed from business discourses made salient in the media. Within schools themselves, concepts and values considered essential learning are ‘packaged’ into appealing and often formularised units, as in the Seven waves of learning article analysed in chapter 6, to align with a consumer society.

Evidence of an ‘essence’ in education

My analysis also shows however, that economic values have not entirely subsumed the educational discourse. Strongly held social values such as equality, and the ‘child-centred’ discourse referred to by Nichols and Griffith (2009) earlier, continue to be evident despite an everyday rhetoric that corresponds with neoliberal ideals. These discourses however, do not just ‘sit alongside each other’, as claimed by Nichols and
Griffiths. Rather, these discourses are entwined, with different values perceptible at different times, and it is this that makes analysis of the tensions so difficult.

Love (2004) refers to “an essence” (p.18) in education that exists beyond achievement and assessment of managerialism and the business model. The news articles about educational success that are not particularly topical and which could be described as a series of ‘good news’ stories, retain some of the ‘essence’ described by Love, and seem to sit in isolation from the oppositional debates appearing in the media, and appear neutral. My analysis suggests that education does indeed involve elements not accounted for by the ‘business paradigm’ as suggested by Love, and that it is the conflict in values underlying the discourses that has contributed to the lack of real progress between pedagogical and structural development of education.

The conflict is evident in these seemingly neutral articles. As Fowler (2000) warns, “a newspaper story […] should never be considered a neutral presentation of the facts. All communications result from an important process of selection and recontextualization that reflects, consciously or unconsciously, a stance on questions. Media helps set agendas” (p.156). In this case these articles seem to celebrate the ideals of education, but also exemplify the type of innovation within the education system that is exactly what the neoliberal model claims as proof of the success of the system. These innovations are held up as instances of ‘best practice’, and are often presented as the predictable outcomes of an effective system.

We can see from the arguments above that the relationships between discourse and society are a complex web involving not only different perspectives, but are constantly reconstructed and reinforced through discourses that are often further moulded by the media. Given that the media also has an agenda, and acts as an additional lens through which the public must interpret an already complex discourse, it is little wonder that the public are unwilling to engage in the deeper debates, and tend to side with perspectives that seems to best represent their own values. Without a desire for genuinely common goals based on common underlying values, different groups are able to use the same vocabulary, and go on constructing its meaning by interpreting them through their own lens or agenda. The only common goal that emerges from such discourse is change.
Change and success

In this study I have argued that the tension resulting from different underlying values and beliefs has generated calls for change from almost all quarters in education. One of the aspirations of this study was to glimpse what kind of change might be desired, from the exploration of educational discourses. The findings however, confirm not only Biesta’s (2009) remark about the “absence of discussion about what is educationally desirable” (p.36), but that there is little shared idea about what might be educationally desirable. Nevertheless the concept of change is ubiquitous in educational discourses. From the researchers’ and practitioners’ perspective change is desired to incorporate new understanding about learning and teaching as a “necessary response” (Wood & Sheehan, 2012, p.23) to rapid technological and social change. From political perspectives evidence of change is desired to inform and justify policy, management and control. Schools functioning in this environment increasingly seek change as evidence of continual improvement.

Change itself is not a remarkable phenomenon, as it is of course, inevitable and constant. What is remarkable is the increased sense of urgency associated with change, both as a reaction to social and technological change, and as pro-action to address perceived failure. This has meant that any perceptible change tends to be constructed as success. The two concepts are conflated in the discourse, as illustrated in the article titled School success impresses (chapter 6). With change reconstructed as a tangible or ‘measurable’ indicator of success, it becomes logical for problems in the education system to be addressed through the implementation of strategies to bring about change, no matter how ad hoc. By this reasoning, problems need not actually be resolved as long as some process is seen to be bringing about change. Rather than a means to an end, change itself becomes the end.

Paradoxically, as noted by Fairclough (2001b), the constant calls for changes to the education system and the corresponding ‘fixes’ offered by government and its advisors, continually reinforce the current structure, and precludes any deeper debate about the purposes and values of education which might lead to the more fundamental changes that Gilbert and others claim are essential. In short, as long as we accept constant change within the system to remedy known deficiencies as a positive characteristic of neoliberalism, rather than its failure, then we give ourselves no place to mount a sustained criticism. Furthermore, with language in the educational domain
successfully colonised by neoliberalism, we become complicit in reinforcing its ideals each time we attempt to critique aspects of education or changes related to it.

**Directions for future research**

Many discursive analysis studies analyse a single text, but in this study I have examined a relatively wide range of data. This approach made it possible to show how discursive construction influences public perceptions of educational success across a range of genres, and in a number of ways. It also means that some features emerged from the data, which offer areas and topics for further research to understand aspects of the education system or to broaden understanding of the relationship between language and education in society. For example, one public domain not covered in this thesis and one that is becoming an increasingly common forum in which people discuss issues, and from which many people receive information, is online environments, such as blogs, web forums and responses to other public media.

Topics such as achievement of particular groups of students, or IT in education, already the subjects of pedagogical research, could be explored using a linguistic approach. Linguistic phenomena such as metaphor or objectification; the foregrounding or marginalisation of synonyms such as collaboration replacing collective; or exploration of the discursive construction of concepts such as knowledge, diversity, and innovation, offer more ways to understand the values and purposes for education that society holds today. Knowledge in particular, would be a useful concept to explore; indeed it would be timely to do so. Traditionally believed to be the cornerstone of education, new ways of understanding this concept have emerged from research into future-focused education by researchers such as Gilbert (2005) and Scardamalia and Bereiter (2006), but have not been widely understood or accepted by others in education or the wider public. Finally of course, public perceptions of the concept of success in education has only been considered indirectly in this study, and a more direct investigation of public perceptions through surveys or interviews would be a logical and useful project to follow this study.

**Conclusion**

The analyses in the preceding chapters have identified many examples of language mechanisms that construct, encourage, or make possible, certain ways of thinking about success in education. These language mechanisms generally go
unnoticed in educational discourses but are the very mechanisms that construct and maintain social inequities. These are assumed to be normal and unchangeable, but they are also used to influence policy and to privilege certain sectors of the community (Thomas 2002). Without becoming aware of and confronting those assumptions, discussions about changing education to effectively meet the challenges of an increasingly complex social and technological world, will continue to consist of series of fragmented debates about seemingly disconnected issues. To work towards a more coherent idea of what success in education should look like, and to make meaningful changes so that this vision translates into something achievable that benefits all of society, I argue that the wider public need to engage with the discussions about education, rather than simply react to them, and reclaim language that acknowledges the values inherent in education. This may include reclaiming notions of collectivity, democratic ideals and social values, as well as resisting some of the ideologically driven implementation of ever increasing assessment and measurement, but the point is, it is not an either-or argument. People need to be able to critique and challenge reported issues, and to step outside the simplified views, which are constructed by everyday language, and accept that each situation or issue is part of a larger, complex and dynamic structure. Without an awareness that educational concepts, and the linguistic labels used to signify them (such as ‘knowledge building’), are vulnerable to the types of colonisation described in this thesis (and by others such as Leane, 2000 and Lorenz, 2012), discourse is likely to continue to serve the ends of the most powerful. This is a challenge for the education system, and for society. The problem for both is that critiquing deeply embedded educational concepts in order to move towards new ways of thinking, requires new ways of thinking, which I hope will come from new understandings about discourse and its effects in society and in education.
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