

'It's a wonder they engage with learning at all!' An exploration of the HE student as silenced stakeholder in the UK Government e-learning strategy'

Tom Burns*
SL Learning Development
t.burns@londonmet.ac.uk

Debbie Holley
SL BSSM
London Metropolitan University
d.holley@londonmet.ac.uk

Sandra Sinfield
Learning Area Coordinator: learnhigher.ac.uk
SL Learning Development
London Metropolitan University
s.sinfield@londonmet.ac.uk

Abstract

The 'new' global business for UK PLC is Higher Education, and nowhere is this more evident than in Governmental policy initiatives with respect to Information and Communications Technology and e-learning. Our analysis of government policy starts with a speech made by David Blunkett, when Secretary of State for Education at Greenwich University in 2000, where he firmly positions e-learning and needs of the 'UK PLC' within a globalised economy. Our argument is that this ideological emphasis leads directly to the silencing of the student as a marginalised stakeholder in the business of HE.

Insights will be offered by a critical analysis of a key government text that maps the interests of dominant stakeholders, namely Government and Business, to outline UK educational policy towards e-learning. Critical textual analysis will draw upon the work of Macherey (1990) and others to expose the continued silencing of student as stakeholder, where the voices that are not repressed are those with economic and institutional power. These interests are represented through the social practice of language and we explore how the language of the documentation embodies an underlying ideology towards e-learning, student (learner), education and society.

The paper concludes by suggesting that the student is either positioned as silent or deficit and arguing that rather than a discourse of transformation, 'regulation not education' (Lillis 2001), is the real goal of the dominant stakeholders.

Keywords: E-learning, stakeholders, students, government e-learning strategy