Burns, Sinfield & Holley (2009) 'A journey into silence': students, stakeholders and the impact of a strategic governmental policy document in the UK
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Abstract
For our analysis we draw upon Macherey's essay 'The text says what is does not say' (in Walder 1990) where he argues for the legitimacy of interrogating a text for 'what it tacitly implies, what it does not say … for in order to say anything there are things *which must not be said'* (Ibid 217, his italics). As with society, all works have their margins – the incompleteness that reveals their birth and production … ' *What is important in the work is what it does not say … what the work cannot say … because there the elaboration of the utterances is acted out in a sort of journey to silence'* (Ibid 218).

Our critical analysis of the Government e-learning strategy (2005) reveals that rather than harnessing technology to empower the typically disenfranchised within the educational debate, it is those very stakeholders at the margins who are silenced whilst the interests of those with institutional and economic power are given voice.

Our analysis will show that rather than creating a stakeholder society, Government through its policy documents positions the already disempowered as either silent or deficit and our conclusions suggest 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
'A journey into silence': a textual analysis of the government's 'Harnessing Technology' document – exploring the relationship between policy, pedagogy and the student experience

Introduction
Higher Education (HE) is the new global business, and the positioning of its various stakeholders – society, the business community, management, staff or students – makes this not only uncharted but contested ground. This paper maps the new terrain with a focus on, and analysis of, one key government policy document. The 'Harnessing Technology' (2005) document is explored in relation to its impact on prime stakeholders within the new context of HE today. Government policy, and e-learning policy, has a pervasive impact on all levels of education and it is therefore an issue of concern that so little attention is paid to what is arguably the main stakeholder group – the student - that will be the first to navigate and negotiate the new e-Environment.

'Post-structuralists treat regimes of truth as real, material, cultural

artefacts, which are sustained in discourse and as such can be explored' (Crowther & Mraovic 2005; 80).

In 'Network Semiology: a vehicle to explore organisational culture' Crowther and Mraovic (Ibid.) use various critical analytical tools to explore the myth of 'truth' generated by organisational accounting documents. In this paper we explore the government strategy document: 'Harnessing Technology: transforming Learning and Children's Services' (DfES 2005); that reveals key policy approaches to ICT in education in the United Kingdom (UK). As accounting documents can be argued to propagate a myth of one 'end point truth', we posit that a government education strategy document can be explored to reveal the government's 'start point truth'; critical analysis is valuable in that it can reveal the underpinning ideology that ultimately controls the context, the resources and the evaluation of services that affect crucial aspects of citizens' lives.

As well as dictating the numbers of students entering the Higher Education (HE) classroom, successive UK Government education policies, including through the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) funding and monitoring processes, have had a significant impact on the pedagogies employed with those students. A current focus of innovation has been the emphasis on the development of e-learning[1] as part of the pedagogical repertoire employed by HE practitioners. This paper provides analyses of a key government e-learning document in an attempt to unpick Government attitudes towards e-learning, the student (learner) and ultimately towards education (and society) itself.

A brief history of the evolution of e-learning strategies within the UK will be followed by a justification for the analysis of a single policy text to gain insights into the interests of dominant stakeholders, namely Government and Business, with respect to e-learning. Our analysis includes reference to a speech made by David Blunkett, when Secretary of State for Education at Greenwich University in 2000, where he firmly positions e-learning and the needs of the 'UK PLC' within a globalised economy. Critical analysis of the Government e-learning strategy (2005) will draw upon the work of Macherey (1990) and others to expose the continued silencing of the student as stakeholder, where the voices that are not repressed are those with economic and institutional power. Our analysis will show the student is constructed as either silent or deficit and our conclusions suggest that rather than a discourse of transformation, 'regulation not education' (Lillis 2001), is the real goal of the dominant educational stakeholders.

[1] E-learning refers to electronic learning and indicates any learning situation that employs computer-based resources or tools to take that learning forward.

Technology as a Central Force in Economic Competitiveness

> 'The powerhouses of the new global economy are innovation and ideas, skills and knowledge. These are now the tools for success and prosperity as much as natural resources and physical labour power were in the past century. Higher education is at the centre of these developments. Across the world, its shape, structure and purposes are undergoing transformation because of globalisation. At the same time, it provides research and innovation, scholarship and teaching which equip individuals and businesses to respond to global change. World class higher education ensures that countries can grow and sustain high-skill businesses, and attract and retain the most highly-skilled people. It endows people with creative and moral capacities, thinking skills and depth knowledge that underpin our economic competitiveness and our wider quality of life. It is therefore at the heart of the productive capacity of the new economy and the prosperity of our democracy.' David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education, Speech at Greenwich University, 15th February 2000 (http://cms1.gre.ac.uk).

The increasing political intervention into Higher Education is justified from Governmental perspectives as meeting the needs of a global 'knowledge economy' (Hodge 2002) enabling the UK to compete within the international trading environment. Writers such as White & Davis (2002) set the context of technology as breaking down international barriers to education. Computer–mediated learning environments make possible whole new ways of learning. They create global learning communities of student and professor practitioners. They

> 'connect people across cultures, learning styles, and industries, and they enable global conversations about issues and ideas that matter. They have extraordinary power to stitch together practical experience, academic theory, personal reflection and deep emotion' (White & Davis 2002:233).

Staples (1995), however, offers a strong critique of Resource Based Learning (RBL). His argument starts with the massification of HE in Australia, where, he argues, universities are now performing a mass custodial task, warehousing young people from the job market. Institutions are becoming

> 'less places where any teaching, or exchange or development of knowledge can take place, and more shops for degrees, open to haggling… RBL which dispenses with physical documents, using instead digital technology, may seem the solution, both pedagogically as a more effective way of teaching the new student, and economically, as way of cutting costs' (Staples 1995:2).

Resource based learning is posed by the authors as an alternative solution for dealing with increased student numbers.

In the UK, the use of central funding to promote a competitive and expansionist market in Further and Higher Education has already radically altered the culture in many institutions where governmental policies that were intended to enhance the quality of Higher Education have added to a process of centralisation initiated by Margaret Thatcher from 1979 (see Sinfield et al 2004, Burns & Sinfield 2004):

> 'During the 1980s the dominant ideology, especially in Reagan's USA and Thatcher's UK, became free market economics, also referred to as laissez-faire or neo-liberalism. The main thrust was towards 'rolling back the frontiers of the state'. State intervention was to be reduced, nationalised industries were to be sold off to the private sector, private industry was to be given a free reign with the economy. As private industry and its capitalist owners became richer, the rest of us would also benefit, as wealth gained at the top 'trickled down' through the system to the rest of us'
> *http://www.cultsock.ndirect.co.uk/MUHome/cshtml/media/eu.html*

In particular, pedagogy, once purely the concern of the academics directly involved in course delivery, has now become an issue for strategy, where HEFCE has linked elements of University funding to the creation and implementation of teaching and learning strategies – and e-learning strategies.

Technology as a Change Agent

Resource based learning is now bruited as a means of dealing with a move towards a mass higher education system. Conole, White & Beetham (2006) suggest the most important policy report of this phase of e-learning development was the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997). The Dearing report sets the main macro-policy context within which further government policies are situated; it was the culmination of a systematic review into Higher Education, and made a series of recommendations that have influenced the focus and direction of many ICT projects. Brown and Gibbs (1996), writing shortly before the report working party was set up, outlined a number of arguments for employing resource based learning:

- Libraries cannot cope
- Students are not buying their own books
- Students are more diverse
- Large lectures do not work well
- Courses have become more complex
- Tutorial support cannot be afforded
- Supervision cannot be afforded
- Students need better information gathering skills.

These premises were taken on board in the framing of the report, which was economically rather than pedagogically based and was predicated upon the

Higher Education Sector being subsidised from the public purse. The report included an appendix examining new approaches to teaching, and the associated cost structure of teaching methods. This document is significant as it explores a rationale for enhancing the student experience by the use of resource based learning, set within the framework of the unit cost per student – as student numbers increase, the cost per student falls and the total cost stays within the public spending constraints (Appendix 2). The economic model of unit costs takes pedagogy and what Eisner (1985) terms to be an 'educational judgement' away from the expert tutor, the subject specialist, and places it firmly in the hands of management. Another assumption made by Dearing is that the economic model includes both student time and staff development time, and this time is valued. The authors all seem of the view that the 'radical' changes they propose will be positive.

A key strategic outcome of Dearing has been that HEFCE now requires all Higher Education Institutions to have a clear and demonstrable learning and teaching strategy as a condition of funding, along with institutional information strategies. McNaught and Kennedy (2000) suggest that these strategies together are an attempt to embed ICT into the institution, set into a series of nation wide policy initiatives. Smith (2002:104) suggests these policy developments mark a fundamental shift away from the individual innovator towards a 'systematic and politically driven model of online education'. Interestingly, Noble (2002) points out that in the American context this shift is resisted in both high status universities and African American pressure groups where students demand their contact with academics.

Analytical tools

Crowther and Mraovic (op cit) offer a paradigmatic model with respect to the application of the critical and analytical tools of literary theory to organisational documents. In their text the authors provide an informed overview of the theoretical field alongside a discussion of the 'myths', 'truth' and ideological signs of organisational documentation. Citing Levi-Strauss (1980) and Leach (1982, 1983) they argue that 'to decode the message embodied in the myth as a whole [one] must search for the structural pattern underlying the entire series of metaphors' (Crowther op cit; 77) where language is the ideological sign … [offering] concrete not abstract views of the world … inseparable from the social praxis and class struggle' (Ibid; 93). An additional relevance with respect to our own analysis is that they include reference to the relationship between stakeholder voices and institutions; arguing that 'an organisation's functions should be mandated by its whole stakeholder community' (Ibid; 74) and that these functions can be determined by an 'interactive dialogue … with individual members of the stakeholder community' (Ibid; 75) with 'discourse [as] the central axis of the post-modern re-positioning of organisations (Ibid; 98/99).

We will argue that the government text does indeed offer a series of metaphors that construct myths around education and that de facto silence

the student stakeholder in the pursuit of e-learning strategies. For our analysis we will draw upon Macherey's essay 'The text says what it does not say' (in Walder 1990) where he argues that it is 'useful and legitimate to ask of every production what it tacitly implies, what it does not say ... for in order to say anything there are things *which must not be said* (Ibid; 217) (his italics). All works have their 'margins' - the incompleteness that reveals their birth and production… What is important in the work is what it does not say… what the work *cannot say* … because there the elaboration of the utterances is acted out, in a sort of journey to silence' (Ibid; 218). Macherey himself posits the use of Nietzsche's key questions when exploring any text – and indeed these are questions that can be applied most tellingly to the document we investigate:

- What is it meant to conceal?
- What is it meant to draw our attention from?
- What prejudice does it seek to raise?

(Ibid - and drawn from Nietzsche ***The Dawn of the Day***, section 523).
For Nietzsche shows that texts cannot do anything but lie. Therefore to judge the truthfulness of a text it has to be treated as a lie. Our government document both conforms to and extends the Nietzschian doctrine - dictating imperially from on high and embodying the rationale that if all statements offer fragments and lie, then this will constitute a big lie, atomised into as many parts as possible: the citizenry can only pay homage to that which would exclude them. The aesthetics of the text can further illuminate this (Eagleton 1986) and expose the flawed and failed ideology of the project, what Noble describes as fragments that cannot constitute a whole. However, as Macherey points out, all texts are incomplete, but they can offer a sense of the whole. 'Harnessing Technology', as with any corporate document, sets forth a future that is going to improve, where the shortcomings of the past are superseded by technological and management utopianism: where 'things can only get better.

Towards an e-strategy

The 'Harnessing Technology' (2005) document is brief constituting just 73 pages including Secretary of State's foreword (she is very excited) and glossary. Most disturbing are the lack of any vision of education, the emphasis on skills and on the continued reference to learners rather than students. This use of the language of student-centeredness (see Rogers 1902-1987) gives us an experience of what Lash (Giddens, Beck and Lash 1996) calls hermeneutics and its double. The hermeneutic allocated to the student is not one that engages thinking, reflecting and then acting; that embraces the modern and that acknowledges contingency and risk via expert systems (Ibid). Instead we are given a perverted hermeneutic and its double, not one of education but skills and its double, training. Not 'education, education, education', but training and skills. This constant hermeneutic and its double undermines the achievement of those (Widening Participation) students that have grasped the HE challenge and echoes hollowly around the global

modernisation project: further marginalising those already marginalised, further dismembering the subject student.

Training and skills replaces Gidden's reflexive agent and reduces the student to automaton (Noble op cit). Skills' training becomes the expert system, and the text means the opposite of what it says. Where previously the term 'learner' has been used to indicate that learning was an interactive, social and constructivist process – here the term is used to atomise the individual away from its community and the strength that that might confer. Further, in using the term 'learner', the student is excised from the debate – or reduced to a lack; again we see the paradox of the document: on the one hand it mystifies its ideological project but in the process it reduces itself to hysteria; citing that for which there is no evidence. The project the document offers could be one that embraces the reflexive modern, instead it is reduced to a Freudian construct, hysterical, bipolar, unable to let go, to move on. Whilst to be modern means moving on, this document peers at the future as it resurrects the past; acknowledging the student only as some 19th century construct requiring training and skills for a mechanical universe that Dickens' Gradgrind would recognise. This failure to let go is not a healthy mourning of the past (Atkinson 2006) but a blindness that damns us to endlessly repeat it again and again.

To compound this reductionist view of the learner (as needy, deficit and atomised – classless – dislocated and dismembered), we also have a reductionist view of education per se, for, as indicated, what is strikingly absent from this document is any aspirational definition of the term education – we have truly arrived at the Department of education and **SKILLS**. This is apparent from an analysis of both the condensed text of the Executive Summary (pp 4-7) and of the expanded text of the Report proper and accords with Noble's (op cit) assertion that e-learning is inextricably bound up with the denaturing and de-professionalizing of higher education. Noble argues that whilst e-learning is akin to training, which is purely for the benefit of others and where any assertion of the self would become a subversive activity, 'education' involves the integration of knowledge with the self – where knowledge is defined by and helps to define the self. He stresses that whilst typically the push for e-learning is predicated upon a belief in cost cutting, staff reduction and so forth; education relies on the quality of interpersonal relationships offered – and that to date educational research has at least demonstrated that good education requires a labour intensive, personal relationship between students and quality academics. In the 'Harnessing Technology' document, as there is no mention of education research – neither is there reference to previous research or projects bound up with promoting e-learning; instead there is a relentless percussive reiteration of the 'skills' refrain, where ICT skills are to service the needs not of the individual – but of industry. This documentation is indeed Noble's vision manifest in government text – silencing, disassembling and de-skilling the academic professional alongside the new 'learner'.

Not students, but needy learners

To open our analysis of 'Harnessing Technology' we begin with the first paragraph of that Executive Summary:

'The Technology context

Digital technology is already changing how we do business and live our lives. Most schools – and every university and college – now have broadband access. Teachers increasingly use information and communications technology (ICT) to improve their own skills and knowledge – and bring their lessons to life. People working with children, families, young people, and adults are testing out new and better ways to deliver services, with common processes supported by technology. The technology is making many administrative and assessment tasks easier. (p.4)

Or to re-emphasise:

Technology changes how we **do business**; teachers use this **to increase their skills**, others **to deliver services** and the technology is **making many administrative and assessment tasks...**

Once we re-emphasise, this becomes a fundamentally accurate opening statement – ICT is indeed about servicing business; everybody must increase their skills (whither knowledge, transformation, transcendence?); and rather than rounded subjects (Crowther op cit) we are instead reduced to recipients of services: learners are constructed here – and throughout the text – as needy and in need of support VIA ANY MECHANISM BAR A TUTOR. Finally, strategic approaches – as generated by government and business - have increased administration and assessment exponentially – without increasing resources, time or e-administration.

'Freedom' is mentioned in the third paragraph, not in reference to academic freedom or freedom to research or the freedom to discover meaningful curricula with which to engage the disenfranchised (rather than the individually needy), but in terms of the haphazard way that incompatible systems have been purchased by institutions because they had the 'freedom to buy [their] own system and support services' (p.4). Hence the need for 'A strategic approach to ICT' which entitles the fourth paragraph wherein are laid out the goals for e-learning which are to:

- Transform teaching, learning and help to improve **outcomes** for children and young people, through shared ideas, more exciting lessons and **online help** for professionals
- Engage **'hard to reach'** learners, with **special needs support**, more motivating ways of learning, and more **choice** about **how** and **where** to learn
- Build an open and accessible system, with more **information and services** online for parents and carers…and more cross-organisation collaboration to improve **personalised support** and choice
- Achieve greater **efficiency and effectiveness**, with online research, access to shared ideas and lesson plans, improved systems and

processes … shared procurement and easier administration (p.4)' (our emphases).

Where the individual learner is constructed only in the deficit, having individual needs requiring individual support, hiding/denying that whole groups and classes of people are typically excluded from education because of their class or group position – not because of individual flaws or lack of aspiration.

Special needs stakeholders

Again we can see the emphasis on 'help', 'support', 'information and services' – but interestingly we also get the elision of hard to reach learners (surely an oxymoron then?) with special education needs. This particular elision or cathexis runs throughout the document and serves to mask the real alienation of those who do not consider themselves to be stakeholders in Blair's new model labour Britain. See also p.19': …but those that need the services most … least likely to use them… [must] make them accessible to all including people with disabilities'. For with ICT it is possible to (p.20) 'customise … especially valuable for people with motor, visual or hearing difficulties' and p.27: 'New technology can transform the experience of learning for all, but has particular impact for those who might otherwise be excluded or even unwilling to access learning. Learners with special cognitive disabilities…' and p28: 'for learners with special needs, these aids can take them from total disengagement to eager participation' and p44: 'games technology could help motivate many pupils, including those with special needs who are turned off traditional lessons'. However, there is little evidence that these are effective, nor that those groups familiar with IT games show more inclination to engage with ICT for educational purposes than previously experience pedagogical devices.

Not only does this language of neediness and support set up a Foucauldian medical model discourse of education with the 'learner' as the special needs patient, it also fundamentally inscribes the 'learner' as an object, the passive recipient of courses and support that have been devised by the un-named and the unidentified, superior 'other'. ICT is bruited because it is 'engaging', by this the document means interactive – where we have the sense that the physical interactivity of the computer-game-like skills package is offered instead or in place of intellectual engagement, of engagement with academics, of engagement with other students – or even the engagement in haptic or kinaesthetic activities relevant to one's subject – the dissection required by the student doctor or the laboratory experiment by the engineer.

Learning, it is flagged up here, is to be opened up through e- and distance learning packages so that we can choose *how* and *where* to learn, and even *when* we learn, but nowhere is there to be choice or discussion about *what* and *why* we learn. The sole solution to all our skills – not education - problems is pedagogical innovation, the development of 'new kinds of pedagogy … to succeed in innovating and transforming teaching and learning'

(p.28). Indeed, the document records an intent to (p.5): 'transform the experience of learning', through p.6 'flexible learning packages … [that meet] learners' needs' with 'richer curriculum materials' - rather than a richer curriculum. Flexibility is reified as a good in and of itself. Flexibility means that courses can be wholly or partly online (pp 6, 26, 27) – such that students will not need to queue to register (p.9) – as institutions re-think their boundaries (p.10) and the government expects 'the technology to transform the way we engage and involve children, parents, learners, and the wider community' (p.18) – *engage* in what or for what purpose is unclear, for the goal seems not to be expressed till page 27 where the document avows that: 'Learners and employers want us to help improve their skills … making it easier for them to solve problems, manage information across networks, and understand how to use and apply ICT to their circumstances'. If a definition of education is to be inferred here it must be that education = technology – and that e-learning is the problem free solution to all our skills' ills, especially when 'education and industry working together, through shared e-learning resources and support, will contribute to the aims of our Skills Strategy to improve basic and higher level skills, across the workforce, throughout life (p.6)'.

A semblance of an heteroglossic approach is contained in the document, one that has not only been corralled but one that completely misses the point of language and the dialogic. Instead of using language as the touchstone of knowledge, a social construct that contains rich diverse voices and the sum total of all knowledge, with language being the mechanism of its transmission, a few case studies are rounded up, with voices that are de-contextualised and disembodied. With respect to the e-Delivery of courses, no evidence base is drawn upon other than the example of an English GCSE that moved on-line with the assurance that enrolment and pass rates improved. No mention is made of the resources that must go into designing an on-line course – nor those that are required to run and maintain such a course – especially where detailed formative feedback is required by students. This silencing is necessary to further deny the role that e-learning plays in enabling the marketisation of education as a global commodity (Noble op cit) and the de-professionalising of the academic in the new university reality where for (non-traditional) students, already dismembered by the discourses of derision prevalent in the wider community – and the deficit discourse about learners, e-learning and education set up in the 'Harnessing Technology' document - university is no longer a place to dally after a lecture or seminar, to visit the library, to discuss big ideas in the canteen or to join extra-curricular societies for present interest and long-term networking and career opportunities.

And what does e-learning offer (our) university students? Well of course it can 'support learners' (p.56) with 'appropriate business models for sharing resources' (ibid). Indeed 'Schools, colleges, universities can work more closely together to meet the needs of individual students who want something other than the traditional campus-only experience (ibid)'. Thus the mass are to be offered resources and e-learning opportunities rather than what the policy

writers would recognise as an educational or a higher educational experience. Proof if more proof were needed that silencing the student stakeholder and denying their dreams does indeed impede the function of the educational organisation. How would the members of the Russell Group of universities relate to this as defining the goals of their institutions (p.57): 'Partnerships between universities and industry will help develop courses that better equip graduates with the skills appropriate for a wide range of IT careers'?

Discussion

With pedagogic choice becoming a matter of strategy, rather than tactics, the choice of teaching techniques is becoming what Noble (2002:3) argues is the increasing commodification of education; offering educational experience that has been disintegrated and distilled into 'discrete, reified, and ultimately saleable things or packages of things'. The first step in this process is the assemblance of the course into packages: learning outcomes, syllabi, lessons, and exams. These commodities are subsequently removed from their producers, the teachers, so they are given an independent existence apart from the creator. This constitutes the alienation of ownership as control of the course material is surrendered. The final step is the assembled course sale, in the market place, for a profit, thus teachers become producers, students become consumers and their relationship takes on not 'education, but a shadow of education, an assemblance of pieces without a whole' (Noble 2002:4).

ICT, e-learning, has moved from being associated with peripheral innovations and developments to affecting all aspects of learning and teaching. Disempowering strategies such as those outlined in 'Harnessing Technology' represent for Conole, Smith & White (2006; 12) 'knee-jerk policy which does not take account of evidence emerging from research' but which have a huge impact on students who already come into University with low self-efficacy, and can add to the struggles identified by writers such as Anie (2001) and Leathwood (2003) faced by widening participation students in 'this new cold climate' (Sinfield, Burns & Holley 2004:143). Conole et al (op cit) suggest that the implementation of ICT within education requires 'measured and reflective' approaches that include the human aspects of implementing e-learning; they critique the government document as 'naïve'; however, our analysis of that document would argue for a more sinister reading. E-learning is inscribed in this text in such a way as to silence students, to de-professionalize the academic and to reduce education to skills. The human, rather than needy, learner and his/her learning wishes, do not enter the debate at Governmental level. No wonder 'that resistance regularly occurs …' Akerland & Trevitt (1999:97).

Conclusions

The dismembered student and a dismembered practice emerge from dismembered discourse via this documentation. The student is moved to the periphery or centred to be damned. The policy and the practice it is designed to engender are stilted and afraid, halted by a double hermeneutic that will

not embrace risk or dynamic (curriculum and student): an aesthetic that crumples and can not hold its own project together. The report breaks down into banal sentimentality and relies on dismembered voices that mask and neutralise not only those in the text, but all those stakeholders whose voices need to be heard.

The government strategy document can be seen as a script determining the interactions between participants and an instrument to diagnose their power relations (Crowther op cit; 93). The authors position themselves implicitly and explicitly as decision makers and, utilising the masks of heteroglossia, their monologic document reinforces the position that their 'knowledge enable[d] them to make decisions on behalf of other stakeholders' (Ibid; 84). The culminating statement of the text in its mindless vacuity attempts to prove that 'the past has no place in determining the future … instead, the future is all that matters' (Ibid; 89); whilst being condemned to repeating that very, mechanical past.

If we return to Nietzsche's questions: What is it meant to conceal? What is it meant to draw our attention from? What prejudice does it seek to raise? We can see that whilst Blunkett did at least state that:

> 'World class higher education ensures that countries can grow and sustain high-skill businesses, and attract and retain the most highly-skilled people. It endows people with creative and moral capacities, thinking skills and depth knowledge that underpin our economic competitiveness and our wider quality of life' (Blunkett op cit).

'Harnessing Technology' conceals any iteration that education might work towards developing 'creative and moral capacities' or 'depth knowledge'. By appearing to be learner-centred our attention is drawn away from the fact that that learner is dismembered, dislocated, atomised and silenced. Whilst the prejudice raised is that such a fractured and pathologised object deserves no voice and is fortunate to access on-line training in the Skills necessary to service Business.

This paper has explored how the rhetoric, structure and aesthetic of government policy documents have rendered the student peripheral, absent, passive, problematised and silent; with ICT being offered as a panacea, thereby further dismembering the student. The skills process offers a Utopian future where 'learners' can be handed piecemeal to various agencies to be fixed. These agencies, also dismembered entities, will run the gauntlet of quality assurance and, of course, their services will be available and traded on-line, further rendering the on-lookers neutralised, passive and, instead of the second coming, waiting for a Pop Up or special offer to inform pedagogic practice.

'Harnessing Technology' has an aesthetic that suits its purpose – to fracture the 'learner' (student) such that the fragmented and decontextualised 'education' facilitated by a de-natured and safe ICT can be accepted. The monologic document offers only a semblance of heteroglossic voices, voices

that have themselves been dismembered, rather than drawing on voices containing the characteristics of human discourse present in the 21st century: voices that embrace risk and contingency, that are fighting passionately to embrace agency. These are the students that are contributing to the government's 50% target for HE participation, it is they who carry the greater risk, it is they who embrace modernity, it is they that should be supported – and it is they that are silenced. Where silencing the student as stakeholder in HE works to de-nature HE itself.

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