
How 'Edu-babble' Turns Pupils into 'Customers'

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ABSTRACT The Report of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 education, described by its Lead Director Professor Richard Pring of Oxford University in the last number of *FORUM* (Volume 51, Number 2 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/forum.2009.51.2.197>), highlights the increasing use of what can be described as 'edu-dabble' by sectors of the education establishment.

The report 'Education For All' points out that 'language matters – and so also do the metaphors we use'. Language shapes our thinking and it embodies how we see and experience the world. This is why it is so significant that so many government reports and speeches on education make use of a particular sort of 'management-speak', where the 'performance' of schools and colleges is described and evaluated in terms usually reserved for business organisations.

In the words of the Report: 'the Orwellian language of "performance management and control" has come to dominate educational deliberation and planning, namely: the language of "measurable inputs and outputs", of "performance indicators and audits", of "customers" and "deliverers", of "efficiency gains" and "bottom lines"'.

Why has this happened and why do we need all this new jargon, which, in the view of Mary Bousted, General Secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 'completely denudes education from being a human and social act'.

The Report's answer is that it is all part of the increasing central control of education where ministers feel the need to act like tough managers and employ the ghastly language of performance management – for example: 'levers and drivers of change' and 'public service agreements' as the basis of funding. The 'consumer', 'client' or 'customer' replaces the learner. The curriculum has to be 'delivered'. 'Stakeholders' shape the aims of schools and colleges; and these aims are spelt out in terms of 'targets'. 'Audits' (based on 'performance indicators')

measure 'success', which is defined in terms of 'hitting the targets'. Cuts in resources are euphemistically called 'efficiency gains'. Number Ten has its 'delivery unit' whose sacred management models for running education include that of 'command and control' – all of which can be summed up by the term 'deliverology'.

It is, of course, very unlikely that any government will take notice of the Report's criticisms. *The Times Educational Supplement* has recently cited the following example of the sort of thing we can expect from government statements: 'Performativity is forcing curriculum deliverers to focus on desired outputs among customers in managed learning environments' (9 June 2009). And Bill Rammell, a former education minister, recently told the House of Commons about the establishment of the Centre for Procurement Performance in the following terms: 'This Centre has worked proactively with the schools sector to embed principles and secure commitment from the front line by working with and through key stakeholders and engaging with the relevant procurement experts to deliver the necessary efficiency gains'.

Professor Richard Pring and his team argue that

there is a need to recall the essentially moral language of education,
as we try to help young people find value in what is worthwhile,
lead fulfilling lives, gain self-esteem, struggle to make sense of
experience and become responsible members of the community.
(p. 203)

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