

Abstract

The aim of this research study is to analyse the nature of undergraduate media studies in England, necessarily from the inside, and document the social practices that constitute the subject in the light of its historic and contemporary challenges and the influence of changing public higher education discourses over the period of the fieldwork, 2012-2013.

Conceptually, media studies is regarded as socially constructed and enacted through discursive practices that reveal the nature of the power relationships that are the basis of the ways 'things get done'. This approach is based on Foucault's (1984, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) conception of power and discourse and dovetails with a substantial part of the sociology of higher education.

The fieldwork consisted of a series of semi-structured face-to-face interviews with a range of participants drawn from media studies lecturers, other university professionals, media studies graduates and a secondary school headteacher with experience of advising university applicants. This provided examples of discursive practices from both 'inside' and 'outside' media.

The thematic analyses of the data show a complex set of interacting oppositional discourses that are skilfully managed by these professional practitioners to maintain a balance of Foucauldian power. This ensures that public policy changes are assimilated and '*delivered*' whilst sometimes also mitigating their impact and maintaining a prevailing rationale for media studies.

The study concludes by contrasting the findings with the emerging discourses of *Critical University Studies* (CUS). With a declared position (Williams, 2012a) in opposition to higher education public policy reforms, CUS is considered as a set of academic discursive practices that are distinct from the more nuanced balance of oppositional discourses evidenced through the participant responses here.