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# Subjects of Western Education: Discursive Practices in Western Postgraduate Studies and the Construction of International Student Subjectivities

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on discursive practices of postgraduate research as a crucial element in constructs of international student subjectivities when they undertake postgraduate studies in Australian universities. As such, it focuses on a discursive field emerging within domains of internationalisation, globalisation, and resistance. It examines processes and protocols in a number of Australian universities' postgraduate divisions' practices in the conduct of postgraduate supervision, in the context of increasing pressures towards internationalisation within frameworks of globalising influences. It takes issue with Western custom and tradition as privileged within the field of supervision of postgraduate research studies and suggests a model of postgraduate research supervision as intentional and systematic intervention, based on literature deriving from research in postgraduate supervision which acknowledges the problematic natures of cultural relationships as to teaching and learning and knowledge production, and student resistances within these fields. In doing so, it examines issues of discursive practices and the problematic natures of power relationships in supervisor-supervisee protocols and possibilities suggested by alternative models of postgraduate supervision of international students.*

## Postgraduate Teaching and Supervision of International Students

The following is part of a press release (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs 2003):

Overseas student numbers in Australia are at their highest level ever. There has been a twelve percent increase in the number of overseas students entering Australia in the last financial year. Overseas students made a significant contribution to Australia both socially and economically, creating jobs and producing revenue. In total, my department granted 109,610 offshore student visas for the 2002-03 Program Year, compared with 97,650 offshore visas in the previous year (September 9).

Given this state of affairs, we argue that consideration of its implications for international higher degree by research students is an important one for Australian universities. This paper is premised on the notion that the discourses that shape the ways supervision of international students is viewed only partially draws on discourses of globalisation. Current thinking in the social sciences is consistent in its attitude to globalisation as contributing to the shaping of the contemporary world. In most accounts of globalisation there is an emphasis on economic imperatives, while those of scholars such as Lash and Urry (1994) and Harloe, Pickvance and Urry (1990) highlight the effects of globalisation on cultural practice. In this paper we take up understandings of globalisation of cultural practices as they pertain to supervisory practices of students studying for a research degree in a country that is not their country of citizenship.

These students are usually categorised as international students, and we have framed our discussion of the issues pertaining to these students in terms of poststructuralist theorising with conceptualisations of discursive practice, subjectivities, silences and resistance to inform our discussion (Foucault 1973, 1974, 1976, 1980a, 1980b). Poststructuralist theorising analyses power relations in terms of discursivity. This is based on an argument drawn from Foucault's (1980a) suggestion of 'regimes of truth', that is, that discourses organise our perceptions, our ways of knowing, making some things visible and others invisible, some things true and others false. Discourse as a *noun* refers to ways in which particular ways of speaking have been institutionalised and thus become constitutive of people and their actions (Davies and Harre 1991/92). *Subject* refers to ways people think about themselves and ways they act, and it refers to discourses and practices that pre-exist them, to which they are accountable.

Subjectivity, then, is a product of discourses and practises to which all people are subject.

Marginalisation can be understood as being a result of particular constructions of subjectivities through discursive practices, that is, normalisation. Normalisation is understood as suggested by Gane and Johnson (1993), 'the establishment or institutionalisation of those disciplines, knowledges and technologies that lay the ground for the emergence of the autonomous, self-regulating subject' (p. 9). If we accept that normalisation is a technique which gives rise to marginal groups taking up hegemonic discourses then it is possible to argue that these discourses are not imposed by authority-based restrictions, but that they seduce, manipulate and encourage normalisation (Barron 1993, 1995). A key focus of this paper is an examination of normalising processes that come about through tensions arising from discourses of research degrees that are central to them – including those who produce educational policy – and those who are marginal, in this case international research degree students.

Individuals, through learning the discursive practices of a society, consciously or unconsciously position themselves within those practices in multiple ways, and take up subjectivities both in concert with and in opposition to others. Thus, although a person's subjectivity is constructed for them, it *becomes* them as they actively take up subject positions, especially as they are only able to construct themselves within discourses that are made available to them. Since meaning is not fixed, though, the availability of subject positions is always in a state of flux. If society is perceived as being constantly created through discursive practices then it is possible to see the power of these practices, not only to create and sustain the social world but also to see how that world can be changed through the refusal of certain discourses and the emergence of new ones. Thus, through analysis of discourse, poststructuralists develop their understanding of the relations between persons and their social world (Davies 1989) which has important implications in conceptualising social change implemented through the generation of counter-hegemonic discourses.

## **Globalisation**

Metadiscourses framing policies of internationalisation are facilitated by shifts to techno-economic paradigms in commercial enterprise that many now recognise as globalisation. This in itself is a stimulus to current debate that positions the phenomenon in the most recent of events in world history and traces it back through to the beginning of recorded time as humankind has colonised the world. Increasing knowledge regarding the use of tools, and now especially electronically-based tools, has brought technological development a long way beyond the major impacts of the

development of the wheel. The list of such developments is strikingly long, too long to be enumerated here; suffice to say that they provided the basis for the Industrial Revolution, upon which rests achievements of the like of Henry Ford in designing his mass production processes, and the present condition of globalisation, the hallmark of which is the so-called Knowledge Age (Zeegers 1999).

As globalisation of research higher degree studies becomes the focus of universities around the world, discursive practices of supervision and the supervision of international students then can be understood as essential aspects of producing economically important commodities. This economic importance is exemplified by the notion that the design and advertising of this product called research higher degrees may attract considerable investment. We are not advocates of using the term *product* in relation to education, and in another space would be critical of such nomenclature. Here we are drawing on neoliberalist discourses that have emerged as governments have increasing influence on higher education systems, with the effect of framing education as a product.

Discourses of higher education have increasingly positioned the field within discourses of economics, of cost-effectiveness as to inputs and outputs, in an environment of declining government funding to universities. 1991 saw the total income from government grants to Australian universities at 61.7%; 2000 saw the amount at 45.2%, with forecast decline over the next two decades or more, so that increased income from increased international student enrolments presents itself as an attractive option to university decision makers, especially as domestic student populations in times of declining population growth show no foreseeable increase in numbers from this area (Böhm, Davis, Meares and Pierce 2002)<sup>1</sup>. In terms of the national economy, enrolments of international students is worth around \$4.2 billion to Australia (Arambewela 2003).

All of this occurs at the very time that discourses of globalisation become privileged in discursive formations of modern economics. The idea of globalisation carries with it a complexity, however, that is viewed by some not as any sort of homogeneous entity but rather as an umbrella term that covers a multitude of social, cultural, political and economic processes which are distributed across the globe, or not, according to prevailing and powerful political and economic forces (Rowan, Bartlett and Evans 1997). Others question whether it is even globalisation or more of a sort of heightened internationalisation of commercial and financial institutions and structures that have emerged in the wake of rapid advances in technology (Hirst and Thompson 1996). At another extreme there are warnings of the imminent demise of the nation-state as the basic political unit in the face of its increasing irrelevance in a changed world context (Luard 1990). When demand for Australian universities'

internationalisation is positioned within such discourses of globalisation, it impacts on positioning of international postgraduate experience as well in that these demands construct issues, as well as the subjectivities of the students themselves, in ways that are of no small import as far as the supervision of international postgraduate students are concerned. We consider the very words that frame discussions of globalisation, higher education domestic and international students generally and postgraduate students in particular, are most telling in the structuring of the experience of students.

The matter of correctly-labelled globalisation or hyper-internationalisation is itself worthy of some consideration. If it is indeed a matter of heightened internationalisation, then individual cultural markers have a significant role to play as to ways in which international research higher degree students are supervised. If it is a matter of nation-states being redundant within the phenomenon of globalisation, then discourses of cultural markers are backgrounded while privileged western discourses of postgraduate studies are foregrounded. There are, therefore, major changes in the possibilities for educational as well as commercial endeavour, and postgraduate study in western universities, a system of higher education in which Australia has a significant part to play, is a part of that.

A major change that is to be negotiated is that of 'the global redistribution of political power and cultural legitimation, the deterritorialisation and decentering of power in the West, the transformation in the nature of the forces of production, and the emergence of new forms of cultural criticism' (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991, p. 64). That deceptively simple term, *globalisation*, encompasses a complexity of social processes, shifts in spatial forms of organisation and activity with seemingly consistent transcontinental patterns. It involves a stretching and deepening of social relations by institutions across space and time, producing a connectedness between places separated by the entire globe. Integral to all of this, of course, is the World Wide Web. Yet discourses which employ the concept of *globe*, rather than *countries*, or *nations*, for example, serve to naturalise phenomena in ways which mask diversity, let alone differences. New developments in unprecedented flows of populations and electronic interconnectedness of families, of villages, of cities, of countries, all gathered under the umbrella term of *globalisation*, construct images of homogeneity. Realities of diversity within these populations across the globe exist as silences, rendered invisible as to important ontological and epistemological positions of millions of people in hundreds of countries in the world as discourses of heterogeneity are foregrounded.

Our universities are generally quite explicit as to what is expected of any research higher degree undertakings: original work, independence as to study; a maintenance of standards of postgraduate research work; a sense of research methodology; conventions for production of such work, and so on (Cryer 1997), all of which is to

be conducted in terms of discourses of supervision couched in reasonable, comfortable tones, such as evinced by Connell (1985). While these requirements are increasingly under question (Barron and Zeegers 2002, Grant and Graham 1994, Green and Lee 1999, Zeegers and Barron 2004), there is no real sense of alternative paradigms as anything other than suggestions positioned on the margins of privileged discourses. We suggest that a number of possibilities exist within present discourses that may be exploited for their timeliness and relevance to domestic as well as international research higher degree student supervision.

We are heartened by possibilities for disrupting or resisting particular subjectivities through discursive formation. The notion of *discursive formation* is suggested by Foucault (1973), who argues that the world is completely interwoven with discourses which, taken together, constitute a number of formations across a number of fields. One such discursive formation may be seen to be that of postgraduate study. Accepting this notion means that the possibilities of counter-hegemonic discourses need to be examined in terms of positionality within discourses and the ways in which others are positioned. The Australian push to frame education as a product which has value in the international market place can also be seen in other western countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. The discourses that mobilise notions of educational market economies can be understood as the same discourses that have been mobilised by neoliberalism and manifested in the political agendas of Thatcher in the UK, Reagan in the US (van der Wende and Westerheijden 2001) and later Howard in Australia through the then Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA 2000):

Throughout the world there has been a move to mass higher education associated with higher diversity of institutions and programmes and a large increase in the number and size of universities. This expansion of higher education promoted the rise of a variety of modes of course delivery...All these developments pose challenges for the efficacy of institutional quality controls...Australia's national policy environment encourages universities to seek greater commercial opportunities and align themselves more closely with industry needs (p. 6).

Hence, a discursive formation may be discerned as universities have appropriated discourses of commercialisation and commerce itself, which has come to be synonymous with private funding. Universities have as a result looked to what they perceive as untapped markets to sell their product. The new funding formula introduced to Australia in 2001, known as the Research Training Scheme (RTS) overtly encourages universities to draw on fee-paying international participation. The reward is a potential win from funding formulae based in part on completion of research

higher degrees, including those of international students. Hodson and Thomas (2001) report on the UK experience in this regard could also be read as the Australian experience. In both countries reduced government funding per student has been implemented at the same time as increases in quality assurance and assessment procedures. It is tempting to enter into a debate about the worthiness or otherwise of conservative modernisation, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, we raise the issue as framed by Apple (2001), who points out:

Conservative modernisation has radically reshaped the common sense of society. It has worked in every sphere – the economic, the political, and the cultural – to alter the basic categories we use to evaluate our institutions and our public and private lives. It has established new identities (p. 194).

### **Massification of Higher Education**

These new identities have been constructed in the context of the massification of higher education in Australia, identified by Moses (1997) and Skilbeck (1993). Massive increases in the total number of students, undergraduate and postgraduate, in higher education positioned universities as having moved from an elite to a mass higher education system. Skilbeck (1993) defines the point at which this transition occurs as being when the participation rate is in the range of 15% to 25% of the population of school leaving age (p. 19), and figures since 1993 have vindicated this perception. Hodson and Thomas (2001) report a similar experience in the UK. This massification has had the effect of squeezing the higher education funding purse with a net reduction in funding per student to the sector. Of some concern in relation to this is that the range of student backgrounds implied by such an assault on traditional elites of higher education would suggest the sorts of non-white, non-male, non-middle class populations among student postgraduate research cohorts that would give rise to a number of different positionings of students within postgraduate research activities. We also suggest that there is a consequent need for a range of postgraduate research pedagogies to be employed (Barron and Zeegers 2002).

Within the new framing of education as a product and the funding-squeezed environment, Australian universities have been prompted to seek collaborations with other universities in Australia and with international partners, in attracting fee paying students. Collaborations within Australia are limited in that this merely divides a limited recruitment pie in new ways. As this is a small country with declining population growth there is also a limit to any potential growth in a local fee paying higher degree population (Böhm et al. 2002). International collaboration and the



attraction of international fee paying students can thus be understood as the only real sources of additional income for universities. One major possible advantage of opening university doors to international students could have resulted in the valuing of diversity through the contribution of a wide range of perspectives. As Morey and Kitano (1997) state, 'A multicultural curriculum provides a more comprehensive, accurate, intellectually honest view of reality' (p. 1). However, as Hodson and Thomas (2001) point out, competition between the US, the UK and Australia operates in a climate of scarcity, so that the pressing need for funds means that universities are pushed to adapt their curriculum to fit the market. This in and of itself is neither good nor bad, in educative terms. The tension for institutions in the higher education sector arises out of where to position themselves in regard to short-term financial gain and long-term quality maintenance (Levine and White 1986). The challenge for educators then is to ensure that changes to curriculum and curriculum delivery remain imbued with educational imperatives rather than sacrificing education quality to the forces of the market.

The increase in quality assurance and assessment procedures has also meant that discursive productions of subjectivities have been framed within notions of surveillance, normalisation and disciplinary power. Here we draw on the notion that within Panoptical discourses (see Foucault 1980a, 1980b, Rabinow 1991) the individual who does not fit average profiles, and thus is in some way abnormal, feels that they may be, or are likely to be, under surveillance. That feeling regulates the self and its activity in that it works 'to induce in the [subject] a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the autonomous functioning of power' (Rabinow 1991, p. 201). Within research training (education) areas this has been manifested in ways of supervising that act to construct normative models of being and behaving for students and supervisors alike.

The resultant masks of homogeneity thus constructed apply no less to international research higher degree supervision, yet in some ways loom as a sort of Star Trek-type of *Last Frontier* in that discourses of international research higher degree supervision have constructed this as part of an inviolate academic tradition. Research higher degree pursuit in western universities then emerges as a discursive field in which it is by no means evident that western forms of knowledge production are in any way decentred, as suggested by Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) regarding the effects of globalisation. Research higher degree supervision has its own particular form of production and distribution of knowledge processes and protocols. International research higher degree students from non-western institutions arriving at Australian universities will not only find their situation at odds with assertions of decentring western forces; they will also find their situations marginalised within privileged traditions of research higher degree supervision that accord their prior learning and



academic achievements the status of inferior forms of knowledge production, if indeed there is any recognition of their having knowledge at all. They will find no space in which any sort of dialogic engagement with western and non-western postgraduate supervision traditions is possible.

### **Constraints on Constructs: The Forces of Postgraduate Studies**

Supervisory practices embedded in traditional discourses of homogenous elites have not been entirely relevant since the 1993 massification of higher education which has produced a flow-on to research higher degree student demographics, yet they continue as if that change had never occurred (Barron and Zeegers 2002). These have in effect structured ways in which supervisors of both domestic and international research higher degree students will engage in their own practices of supervision and dealings with subject disciplines and knowledge formations. Elsewhere we have questioned current domestic student supervisory traditions (Barron and Zeegers 2004, Zeegers and Barron 2000, Zeegers and Barron 2003).

As also argued elsewhere (Barron 1993, 1995), within poststructuralist theories the individual is constructed by the discourses that are available. The individual also resists certain discourses, but the effects of normalisation operate so that individuals will privilege particular constructions of their subjectivity. According to Foucault (1980a, 1980b), the power for current, hegemonic conservative discourses to be oppressive arises when one way of knowing is understood to be the 'truth', but this can be resisted by not taking up normalising discourses. Although we find this suggestion not to engage in normalising techniques appealing, we also see that international research higher degree students may not be able to identify what these are, let alone how resistance might be possible in practice. Although it may be in some utopian sense a good idea to avoid normalising practices, embeddedness in discursive practices of research higher degrees and its institutions will probably mean that this cannot in reality be achieved. The question then is not whether to avoid such forms of institutionalised behaviours. It is rather to educate international students and their supervisors to question taken for granted truths, so that normalised and normalising behaviours are critiqued for their effects in terms of hegemonies and the possibilities of resisting privileged discourses. Cherryholmes (1988) states that privileged discourses determine what counts as true, important, relevant and what gets spoken and who speaks. While it may be possible to identify a number of discourses that marginalise international research higher degree students, we examine one manifestation of this marginalisation: the issue of language proficiency and its attendant IELTS testing.

## Silences: The Literature of Postgraduate Studies

Friedenberg's (2002) argument in relation to international students in the US highlights the use of English proficiency as reflecting 'a larger system of higher education that maintains deeply rooted English-only attitudes' pointing to the 'mistaken beliefs that speakers of non-standard dialect simply speak bad English, and that non-English speakers are not qualified to pursue a college education...' (p. 12). One such force in this sort of *truth* production is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). The cost of acquisition of English language proficiency, coupled with the now virtually compulsory IELTS score for entry to Australian institutions is bought at a high price, and demand drives the price and the value upwards rather than otherwise. This 'truth' is sustained by an economic imperative that drives the price in value upwards, and this despite the tests being 'neither designed nor normed for non-native speakers of English' (Friedenberg 2002, p. 12). The economic imperative is further advanced by what is described as the next focus for marketing activities for the corporate sector (Dahringer 1994): on services, which account for 30% of world trade, in the form of telecommunications, business services, entertainment, banking, finance, insurance, tourism and *education*' (p. 146. Italics added). Indeed, the English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Student (ELICOS) industry in the financial year of 2000-2001 alone generated a turnover calculated as the exact amount of that financial year's national Budget surplus (Zeegers 2002). With the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) now redundant as far as most western universities are concerned, there is a general trend to the minimum level acceptable for entry to these universities set at Band 6 in at least one of the four macro skills of Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, and at least 6.5 overall. It is important to note that an international student does not need to be at this level in all of the areas in all universities. Some will accept a Band 6 score in Speaking or Listening, for example, as indicating a proficiency in the English language that can accommodate the demands of university study, in spite of the test not being designed to measure this sort of thing, or to act as a predictor of this sort of thing. There is research that deals with the issues raised via testing and privileging of English in western academic institutions as an instance of linguistic imperialism and cultural genocide see for example Ricinto and Hornberger 1997). These are not areas that we wish to pursue in this paper, but we do note that linguistic hegemony is embedded in western university policies and practices as they act as gatekeepers to the production of knowledge.

Discourses of language testing do not necessarily equate to discourses of academic research. Academic writing, whatever the language of its conduct, has its own situations, its own registers, and its own codes concepts in terms of descriptors (Halliday and Hassan 1985), each of which is to be negotiated via sophisticated linguistic conventions to satisfy stringent requirements for academic success. In

research higher degree studies, the sophistication reaches even higher levels, and these within the essentially private educational acts transacted between supervisor and student (Barron and Zeegers 2002). Research higher degree students' concerns lie in this area, not that of language acquisition, which may only be one of the steps along the way to the ultimate goal of a research higher degree being awarded. Given this, it is useful to examine IELTS proficiency descriptors. Table 1 is a set of descriptors for the various IELTS Bands (Farquhar 1999, p. 123):

**Table 1: IELTS bands descriptors of relevant English proficiency**

Band	Description
6. Competent user:	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations
7. Good user:	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
8. Very good user:	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
9. Expert user:	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding

Even a cursory glance at the Band 6 descriptors suggests the skills described as being hopelessly inadequate as a basis for the task of the international postgraduate in setting up a research project within Oxbridge conventions. The emphasis on 'familiar contexts' belies the need for the production of original work that will generate new knowledge, or even use existing knowledge in new ways. A Band 6 international student will have enough trouble accessing the scholarly works of leading researchers even to generate a review of the literature, let alone generate new literature in the form of an examinable thesis.

Thus is generated implicit faith in a single testing device by those not initiated to IELTS, constructing a major barrier to international students' research higher degree successes as application to and acceptance by a western university is not necessarily predicated on shared understandings of what the various Bands indicate about a candidate, nor about how ratings in one band coheres with ratings in others. It ignores concepts of threshold language levels that may heavily influence a non-native

English speaker's ability to respond to English language encountered, especially in unfamiliar settings (see for example Lin 2001). It generates a truth about the student, without any real questioning of how that *truth* has been constructed.

Nevertheless, at this point we have an accepted language test and an applicant who has gone through its requirements as part of entry to research higher degree candidature at a western university. The student can now rightly assume that they have a language proficiency that will see them successfully complete their research higher degree course of study. The university system, though, has assumed that this is far from the case; that a 6.5 IELTS score will not be enough to see them through the course. We have here a belief in the possibility of success set against a belief in a deficit in the student.

Is a simple solution to the problem then to raise the IELTS requirement to a score of 9? Even if it were possible to convince universities to lift the score in this way, it would mean that they would at the same time have to be willing to forego the income implied, for the bulk of international students simply do not achieve that score. Indeed, native home-grown speakers find it difficult to achieve that score. We also see this as a simplistic solution, for it does not grapple with concepts of colonisation of knowledge and knowledge production, and it looks to exclude and confine alternative ways of knowing that might otherwise contribute to the generation of important international perspectives at western universities. Is a simple solution to the problem to treat the international research higher degree student as one whose informed consent implies acceptance of their deficit positioning? We look to Aurbach (1999, cited in Friedenberg 2002) here: 'Consent is not necessarily the result of conscious choice, but rather unconscious acceptance of institutional practice, thereby legitimising and further strengthening the existing power relations' (p. 13). We therefore argue that neither apparently simple solution deals with the issues around supervising the international research higher degree candidate in western universities.

A combination of academic language conventions and a preferred system of testing language proficiencies constitute a major discursive apparatus underpinning discourses of international research higher degree students before they arrive at the western university that has enrolled them, embracing them as integral to the institution's internationalisation program within discourses of globalisation. Western universities' masking of language difficulties is a problem consistently identified within the literature. Even more telling, it is represented as a construction of problems that the students themselves have. It is not represented as a fault in the use of the preferred testing system as a predictor of academic success at the levels set, and generally comes under headings of *Lack of English Language Proficiency* in the literature on problematic aspects of supervising international research higher degree students. The student is constructed as deviant from the norm, or as lacking ability, or both, despite an

educational background (albeit a non-western one) that has produced this research higher degree candidate.

This then creates a sort of 'regime of truth' where these are constructed as problems that the students themselves need to address, albeit with the assistance of *English for Academic Purposes* courses designed and delivered by the relevant university. The most culturally sensitive writers in the field outline what they perceive as problems arising from a lack of English language proficiency, and recommend immediate attention to this deficiency in their students (Ballard 1995, Ballard and Clanchy 1991, Bartlett and Mercer 2001, Bruce and Bromeld 1999, Knight 1999, Sillitoe and Crosling 1999). Even where lack of language proficiency is acknowledged as more than matters of grammar, spelling and lexis, the argument still turns back onto students as needing some form of instruction in what are presented as the correct western forms.

A reading of the literature points up disorders of discourse (Wodak 1996) where ontological and epistemological factors as to what constitutes knowledge and the presentation of it in research higher degree endeavours simply do not mesh. We see an urgent need for genuine dialogic interaction with such material, which implies much more than an attempt to account for non-western constructs of knowledge. There is some important work to guide western academics in this, especially in terms of diverse forms of academic writing and scholarly works across cultures (Kaplan 1966). While critiques of such work suggests that such identified forms more properly belong to cultures than languages themselves (Clyne 1994), such perspectives present possibilities of resisting discourses of deficit as constructing subjects to be attended to in terms of making them More Like Us, if not Completely Like Us. Yet western academics still use benchmarks against which they are able to measure deficits, or deficiencies in people, that they may strive to fix, or remedy, or for which to compensate. Western responses to alternative discourse styles still marginalise the non-western with disparaging comments about the Other research higher degree students, such as 'learning at the feet of the Master', as if this is somehow anathema to authentic teaching and learning (see also Zeegers and Zhang 2005, and their analysis of texts used in Australian universities for the teaching of English as a Second Language to international students).

### **Alternative Models**

We take up discourses of equity in our considerations of alternative models, stressing that the language of equity has people treated according to their needs; it is not interchangeable with notions of sameness. Inclusive education policies presume the individual needs and abilities of individual students, even as they comprise cohorts at particular levels, in particular discipline areas, and particular expectations of outcomes. The supervision of any students requires consideration of any number of things,

including their race, their economic status, their sexuality and their gender, the level of their physical ability, and their nationality. The differentiation implied by all such considerations further implies a differentiation in supervisory practices and the pedagogies upon which these are based. The supervision of international research higher degree students similarly implies differentiation in their supervision. There is no implication that all students, in order to be treated equitably, will be treated the same. This is an important consideration in our discussion of alternative models.

Foucault (1973) sees three great systems of exclusion governing discourses. These are: firstly through the prohibition of the words that might be employed in conveying the knowledge themselves; secondly through fixing discourse limits within the confines of a recognised knowledge system; and finally through the imposition of rules as to who may employ the system, thereby denying access to everyone else. 'Not all areas of discourse are equally open and penetrable', he says, 'some are forbidden territory, and some are open to all' (Foucault 1973, p. 225).

The application of such conceptualisations opens up new fields for exploration in the supervision of international research higher degree students, for the multi-dimensional characteristics of such supervision suggest a multi-dimensional research supervision framework. Examining what really happens in this constructed world is more than what is stated and/or observed – who stated it and/or observed it? With what authority was it stated and/or observed? Why was it stated and/or observed? How did it come about? And why at this time? Examining these mechanisms and apparatus of power means treating the whole of these as the group of elements that constitute a particular discursive formation.

Therefore, following the description, it is possible to work on the principle that there are some things that are not said, for a discursive practice is of and by its nature selective in what is actually said, by whom it is said, and with what authority it is said. The resulting marginalisation effect that this sort of exclusion implies will necessarily result in a limited number of statements from which a group of conditions for the emergence of a field of knowledge is produced. It would enable supervisors and supervisees to examine just what is possible and what is impossible to think (Foucault 1973, p. xv), thereby opening up areas for examination, rather than closing them off with prescriptive methodologies that serve to limit rather than expand the field of operations concerned. That is, it enables supervisors to focus on the process of research education rather than on narrow descriptors.

Our critique of narrow descriptors centres around questions such as those posed by Foucault (1973). We suggest that unmasking the assumptions framing this aspect of the discursive formation of international research higher degree students is an important

starting point for exploring the construction of these students' subjectivities, which then leads on to further questioning. We have foregrounded these aspects of the supervision of international research higher degrees students in an attempt to explore the silences of the discourses concerned, for in posing the initial questions, we are able to generate possibilities for change.

We may extend our questioning at this point to the pedagogies that might be employed in different and differentiated teaching and learning environments for, by and with research higher degree candidates from different cultures. In doing so, new possibilities emerge and may include a new framing of supervisory practices away from established Oxbridge traditions and into educational teams, such as panels, academic language programs (and not just ESL programs) or adult learning teams drawing on the experience of student-centred seminars. While we are advocating the employment of new pedagogies, we are not, however, arguing for the elimination of Oxbridge models (who says that learning at the feet of the Master is an inferior form of learning?), rather we argue that they need to be opened up to more inclusive and varied forms of the generation and acquisition of specialist understandings.

Pedagogies may result from explorations of alternatives that throw up twists on traditional methods. For example a twist on the learning-at-the-feet-of-the-Master is Talking Circles, which is an increasingly visible and popular feature of international conferences such as the Literacy Education Research Network (LERN) conferences. Talking Circles positions an established and recognised expert in a given field in an informal situation, such as a coffee lounge or a garden context, where that person speaks informally to interested listeners, and enables informal professional conversations around burgeoning or emergent issues in the field under consideration. Another example of a variation on the learning-at-the-feet-of-the-Master approach is the Book Conference, which introduced Scenario Café sessions in 2004 and has decided to continue with them in its 2005 and 2006 conference (Papps 2005). Yet another is an approach adopted by the SOLAR Centre, initially at the University College of Northampton, which has made extensive use of the Café Chat format in its International Forums over the last five years (Zeegers 2001). What these sorts of activities suggest is that learning from masters is valued not only by students, but by academics who take on supervisory roles in universities. Indeed, supervisors take some pains themselves to position themselves at the feet of keynote speakers at the research conferences they themselves attend in order to learn in such ways. We argue that new pedagogies that draw on culturally sensitive teaching and learning practices as well as traditional practices provide relevant and constructive possibilities for supervisors to draw upon.



## Acting on the Possibilities

We have previously given some consideration to possible alternative models in the supervision of research higher degree students generally (Barron and Zeegers 2002, Zeegers and Barron 2004), and we argue that international research higher degree students are integral to the same discursive formation. However positioning them as included does not allow for differentiation as to their needs. It is a legal requirement for Primary and Secondary schools across Australia to ensure all children are to be educated within their local schools (McInerny and McInerny 2002). Continuing debates about inclusiveness in education (Slee 2000) have foregrounded issues that are becoming increasingly visible in policy and educational discourses. They have not yet impacted on international students enrolled in research higher degrees, however. We would argue that thoughtfully considered answers to the questions that we have posed above may go some way towards this, but we would also argue that there are mechanisms emerging that may serve as apparatus to enable supervisors to implement differentiated strategies in constructive ways to widen their scope of operations as far as their international students are concerned. Ramsden (2003) gives some consideration to the new Graduate Certificates and Diplomas of Education (Tertiary) that are being offered to academics within Australian universities, and which are becoming increasingly visible in provision of teaching qualifications for academic staff. As yet, they are largely confined to teaching of undergraduates, but there is scope for incorporating developing pedagogies for postgraduate teaching in general, and hence postgraduate teaching of international research higher degree students. Such incorporation would enable systematic and rigorous engagement with research higher degree pedagogies to open current discursive fields to wider considerations of appropriate processes of postgraduate studies.

## Endnote

- <sup>1</sup> While 2005 has seen a decline in the number of international student enrolments in undergraduate programs, this is not reflected in the postgraduate sector.

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