INTRODUCTION.

In this paper\(^1\) I will be discussing international education and international students through the conceptual and theoretical understandings of postmodern thought, particularly through understandings of discourses and discursive practices. Basic to these understandings is that discourses construct ways of talking about knowledge, social practices, subjectivity and power relations within ways of constructing knowledge. It also talks about the subject being in process, constituted through language. Much of the literature on international education and international students is descriptive, “how to” analysis, such as how to understand learning styles, how to deal with perceived deficits and so on. This paper will use another ‘lens’ to discuss international education. I will be looking at just one of the discourses about international education that position international education and international students in complex ways – the discourse of power and knowledge inside western academies. In the analysis of this discourse I will be weaving theoretical ways of talking together with studies about international education, international students’ insights, and ways of deconstructing concepts that are taken for granted. The insights of the students in the paper are from secondary sources as empirical work has not been completed, however they provide valuable insights about experiences of power in the Western academy. The experiences that the students talk about and the academic discourses

\(^{1}\) This is part of a larger doctoral study on the discourses and discursive practices constructing international education and the international student.
discussed are constructed in Western universities in Australia, the UK and U.S.A., as these are the universities have most international students. I will be attempting to answer the question: Are the discourses and discursive practices discussed for the ‘public good’, or are they limiting the possibilities for international students, and limiting what international education could be for the benefit of all students?

In this paper I will first look at ways of talking about discourses, and about the power relations within discourses that privilege some voices and marginalise others. Discourses also construct knowledge that becomes taken-for-granted ‘truth’. The paper will then look at ways power/ knowledge works within universities, especially how some voices become dominant, others are subsumed. The main discussion in the paper will look at how power/ knowledge discourses within the university work in relation to international education and international students. Finally the paper will briefly look at some different ways of talking about international education.

**DISCOURSE**

In post-modern ways of talking, the complexity of human interactions can be analysed by looking at the discourses in which the interaction is located. The thesis that human interactions are multiple, contradictory and changing as concepts and language change has been developed in the theories of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Foucault talks about discourse as a way of “constituting knowledge ... social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them” (Weendon, 1987: 108). Through his analysis of the history of discourses, Foucault shows that changes have been made to the way in which groups of people are understood by, and relate to society (Foucault, 1981). That discourses are historically produced means that individuals and groups may contest the discourse and develop new ways of constituting knowledge. Vidovich (2001), in a study of Commonwealth government policy about quality in Universities, noted “multiple and contradictory discourses both over time and at any one point in time in policy” (p.258). In particular, there were slippages between discourses about excellent standards, quality assurance and quality improvement. In relation to International education, Humfrey’s (1999) notices that, over time, “perceptions change and the change in terminology reflected the change in attitude. Those who were in the 1970s described as foreign students were the overseas students in the 1980s and the international students of the present decade” (p.154). Changes in discourse brings changes in language, and changes in language can provide a clue to “the discontinuities and thresholds that appear” in a discourse (Foucault 1972:41). A change in cultural discourse about colour, leads to culture shock for West Indian students in Britain. Ramchand (1965) explains that the West Indians have “a delicate perception of the variants of skin colour... Coming to Britain is like entering a land where the natives suffer from a curious form of colour blindness in the contemplation of human groups ... The West Indian consciousness is outraged by the crudity of the categorization”, which is that he is a black man (p. 28).

These examples show the complexity and changing nature of discourses, and their impact on individual subjects as discourses they have taken for granted are challenged. International education is constructed by a variety of discourses about what it is and how it is put into practice. One of these discourses is about power and knowledge within the institution of the university.

**KNOWLEDGE/POWER IN DISCOURSES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY**

To describe how discourses are produced and are changed, Foucault teases out the relationships between knowledge and power. “Every discourse is part of a discursive complex: it is locked in
an intricate web of practices, bearing in mind that every practice is discursive and material” (Kendall & Wickham 1999: 41). Foucault shows that “taken for granted reality, the things that we see being-in-the-world, is culturally specific”, which enables the “recognition that meanings are central to the constitution of social life as a complex set of petty and ignoble power relations” (Haugaard, 1997:43). Many of the underlying discourses of Western education are taken for granted, such as individual development, as are discursive practices like assessment practices. In “Discipline and Punish” Foucault argues that “modern power is so insidious because its power relations no longer operate openly … Instead disciplinary and confessional forms of power mask themselves as forms of truth and knowledge – as, for example, sanity or insanity, as delinquency or sexuality” (Haber, 1994:81). In universities disciplinary power is contained in ‘forms of truth and knowledge’ about what it involved in being a good student, truths which can vary from one university to another. Practices and beliefs that are assumed to be “normal”, from a “Foucaultian perspective … are far from natural; rather, they are the result of very specific historical conjuncture and a set of important, although ultimately contingent, cultural transformations” (Kendall & Wickham 1999:131). Historical conjectures have created discourses about the naturalness of globalisation, discourses that have impacted on universities and the way they operate, but these can be seen to be contingent, complex and often contradictory (Held et al 1999). Marginson (2002) argues that many aspects of international education are not being questioned but are taken-for-granted. For instance “if globalisation [is viewed] as relatively neutral … we reduce our capacity to analyse contemporary relations of global power in education” (p. 3), including the cultural imperialism of English language and “Anglo-American practice” (p. 14). When ways of acting, of constructing, and assessing knowledge are taken for granted then alternative ways of constructing knowledge are viewed as of less value, somehow ‘deficient, perhaps even subversive, and persons speaking this alternative knowledge may not be heard or given a voice.

Power relations in the silencing of alternative voices

Foucault was interested in the way power relations had silenced other points of view, other “voices”. It was “as if … we felt a particular repugnance of conceiving of difference, to describing separations and dispersions … As if we were afraid to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought” (Foucault 1972:12). He would argue that “we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks” (p.131). In the introduction to “Madness and Civilization” he wrote, “The constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue … and thrusts into oblivion all those who stammered imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between reason and madness was made. The monologue of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence. I have not tried to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence” (Boyne 1990: xi).

In his writing, Foucault gave madness a “voice”. This insight is of relevance to International students, who feel their voice has been silenced (Le Han Phan, 2001). Julia Kristeva (1991) understood this loss of her native language and the power of the dominant voice when she left Bulgaria and began studies as an international student in Paris. It is hard “to be of no account to others. No-one listens to you, you never have the floor, or else when you have the courage to seize it, your speech is quickly erased by the more garrulous and fully relaxed talk of the community” (p.279). A study of Spanish speaking children discusses the tension of loss of identity, as the more powerful voice of English speech becomes dominant. For the children “growing up seemed to mean becoming a speaker of English, which would allow [them] to join the world of powerful voices. … They will need to adopt the voice of the ‘other’ as part of their
own voice, finding some way to reconcile the power differential between those two voices. ... Alternatively ... by appropriating fully the voice of the more powerful other, negating the part of their identity that now seems to constitute their core selves” (Orellana 1999:105).

In educational studies and in the academic world alternative voices can be ignored or dismissed because they are seen as “other”. This may be because the voice is in another language, or not seen as able to produce worthwhile privileged knowledge because this knowledge is outside the power/knowledge grid, or on its boundaries. Harootunian (1988) is interested in the “intellectual experience of the other, in this case the Japanese before World War II” (p.112). “One of the regular complaints Japanese writers registered before World War II, concerning the domination of Western epistemological categories and disciplines of knowledge, was that historical narrative reconstructed only a story about European subjectivity, which by its very nature, excluded the entry of others like themselves, unless and until they assimilated forms of knowing which claimed universal application” (p. 112). LeTendre (1999) wonders why “the rich source of data” produced in Japan “that expand a general pool of theoretical and practical knowledge about education” (p. 39) is not being cited in the West. The main reason is that “researchers are either unaware of these studies or do not perceive these studies to be relevant” (p. 38). Japan is seen as “some rarified or exotic ‘other’”, and “highly stereotyped views of Japanese schools” (p. 39) as repressive and exam driven are prevalent in U.S. literature. Le Tendre uses a study by Fujita and Sano, where American and Japanese teachers studies videos of classrooms in the others countries. “Neither American nor Japanese educators find that the ‘other side’ is anything like their worst stereotype or their most romanticised ideal” (p. 43). The valuing and using of ‘outside’ or ‘other’ knowledge in this way enables one to look at assumptions and values about knowledge and practices from another perspective, and to analysing how culture has constructed ones own education system. Ignoring other knowledge and practices limits knowledges that are available, and are valued.

In the organisational and cultural setting of the academic world power/ knowledge restricts the ability of people to speak and be heard. Davies (1999) notes that “The researchers lived history, category membership, and positioning within the academy will influence what s/he wants to know and say, but also what s/he can be heard as knowing and saying” (p. 15). Preston (1997) gives an example of the way a valuable Papua New Guinean research assistant was silenced, because his English language skills were not “deemed appropriate for official reports. ...The neo-colonial tyranny of language and the report form combine to atrophy consummate descriptive and interpretative skills and reify those unobtainable to the local people” (p. 59). The researcher, whether part of the western academy, or outside it, is seen to lack appropriate knowledge or the forms to present it, and therefore lacks the power to speak and be heard. The status of the person speaking, the hierarchal nature of the university, and the dominance of popular epistemologies also limit who can speak and be heard.

The silencing of alternative voices is part of the socialisation of students as they begin University. A study of undergraduate essay writing looked “at the difficulties students face in cracking ‘codes’ relating to the presentation of the student ‘voice’, and the effects on presentation of the unequal power relationship between student and tutor” (Read, Francis & Robson 2001: 388). They see the academic style of writing as an “extremely demanding and complex style”, with some of the conventions such as referencing other people’s ideas “unproblematically seen as ‘commonsense’ knowledge” (p. 388). Again the knowledge, the ‘rules of the game’ is connected to power. The “use of power in the construction and legitimation of these situated discourses ... [is] seen to reflect and reproduce social inequalities of power such as those centred on class, gender or ethnicity” (p. 390). Many students in the study felt that essay writing was “‘finding out what the rules of the game are and then playing them to get a higher mark’ For Jo and a number
of others, this meant modifying or even stifling their own views” (p. 396). And so ‘voices’ are silenced, or in the case of International students, seen as ‘deficient’.

**KNOWLEDGE/POWER IN DISCOURSES WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION**

**The Power/ Knowledge Discourses of “deficiencies” of International students**

When Western learning styles are taken for granted and privileged, then other ways of learning are constructed as deficiencies that need to be remedied (Bradley and Bradley 1984; Ballard 1986; Berrell & Kachar 1997). These early studies positioned international students within a discourse of deficient learning styles, such as rote-learning or non-critical learning, and also as deficient personally – passive and quiet, non-contributing – the discourse impacting on the positioning of the subject. Simone Volet (1997) see this a negative stereotyping, and points out that there can be a great variety of learning styles within one country, such as China. To counter this negative view, teaching practice can be made more inclusive and culturally sensitive, and both academics and local students can be trained to be more skilled in cross-cultural communication, and made aware of areas of cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Academics, through empirical studies, have deconstructed much of this taken for granted knowledge. Renshaw and Volet (1995), in a study of participation of South-East Asian students in tutorials, found that the stereotype of the quiet passive student was incorrect, and that students participated as much as the Australian students. They conclude that “some of the adjustments will be unique to the particular circumstances of each individual student”, and that “we need to learn to recognise the resourcefulness of students in this process, rather than presume that their differences are deficiencies” (p.104). Chalmers and Volet (1997) found that some “deficits” could be strengths. For example, the perceived deficit that S.E. Asian students are rote learners who adopt a surface approach to learning, can be viewed as understanding through deep memorisation, which “reduces the memory load when students are learning in a language different from their first language (Kember and Gow, 1989)” (p.89). Kember (1996) adds a further layer of complexity to the picture of the critical Western academic style when he argues that “it seems all too common in both east and west that, contrary to stated goals, teaching practices and courses induce students to reproductive forms of learning” (p. 352). Assumptions made about the type of teaching and assessment in higher education, cannot be taken-for granted and essentialised as being practised across the university. In fact the paradox of the high achieving / rote learning passive international student points up ‘a disparity between public theory and theory-in-practice” (p.351). Chalmers and Volet feel that the “problem” may not be the students but the quality and assumptions of teaching. “South-East Asian students have been shown to be motivated, effective and strategic learners. They present us with an opportunity to learn from them. It is an opportunity that we should take advantage of for the benefit of all students and teachers” (p. 96). The earlier studies of overseas students had positioned them in a certain way, put them into a story line of “deficiency”, whereas the ‘deficiency’ may actually be in the taken for granted assumptions made about western pedagogical practices.

**Discursive practices of power/knowledge – Marginalizing the Voice of the International student**

This privileging of Western styles of learning and pedagogical practices can marginalise the “voice” of students. The silencing of their previous experiences and their ‘voice’ is discussed in a number of studies done by overseas students. Le Ha Phan (2001) interviewed four Vietnamese
post-graduate students to look at how culture affects written academic English. Most of the students had had previous experience with the Western style of essay writing and knew the expectations of that style, and so they questioned the stereotype that Asian students have problems writing Western academic essays (p.304). However, Phan and the students question the assumption that academic writing should exclude the voice of the students and their cultural values. “There are values that are shared in different cultures. ... This culture of kinship influences the way Vietnamese students approach knowledge, not critically and directly, but circularly and indirectly to show respect and tactfulness” (p. 305). This way of writing is “their voice, their confidence”, “they own their writing” (p. 306), and lecturers should value and welcome this voice. Phan sees value in academics having in-service regarding cross-cultural elements in writing. A female student from Thailand during an interview highlighted the complex nature of this issue. She discussed the difficulty of finding her voice in writing in a Western academic style. “The biggest problem for me is writing. In Thailand we go ... [making gestures of a spiral] surround, surround, and surround style – which is not what Western culture wants- its uncomfortable for me to go straight to the point” [Thailand, female, PhD, Monash]. However, the complexity of the issue is illustrated later in the interview, when she talked about what she valued about international education and said it was the ability to develop her own voice. “In Thailand we have a lot of respect for the teacher ... I do not have any voice ... I may want to have but I do not have any choice”.

Jagdish Gundara (1991), in writing about his education as an overseas student in the U.S.A., agrees with Phan. He feels that “the delegitimation of the knowledge of those who are oppressed remains a major problem of dominant and subordinate group relations. ...Years of association with the western academe does not demonstrate the ability, willingness or the humility on their part to create spaces, which can be used by ‘the other’ to articulate a voice” (p.35). This discursive practice where spaces are not created and other voices are not legitimised, reinforces the discourse that Western knowledge is paramount, and overseas students have to accept it and adjust to it. There is not a discourse of reciprocal engagement, but of assimilation into the western academy.

**Power Relations in the acculturation/ assimilation of international students.**

In a study with MBA students from India, Ninnes looks at the ways that three aspects of Foucault’s ‘disciplinary power’ - hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and the examination – are used to acculture international students into western academic norms, and so to maintain the power of western systems of knowledge. In particular he is interested in how this is achieved through “everyday, ordinary, taken-for-granted activities” (p. 75) such as lecturer’s instructions, descriptions in subject outlines and marker’s comments. He found that there was some resistance from students, especially when norms of what constituted a ‘good student’ were different for the student and the lecturer. However, the overwhelming result from the case studies in the research was that the three techniques of disciplinary power had been successful in maintaining the dominance of western knowledge systems.

“In the terms of relations of power and knowledge, acculturating international students in the ways identified in this project raises important questions about universities ..., and faculties and support services..., in maintaining hegemonic knowledge relations ... rather than acknowledging and exploring the contributions which students’ prior learning skills and knowledge can make to the learning process and ways these can be appropriately incorporated into the learning process in Australia. Thus, although the content of courses
may have an international focus, the processes of knowledge acquisition and evaluation which are rewarded are quite western rather than international in focus” (p. 99).

Gavin Sanderson (2000) analyses the concept of “assimilation” within the culture of the University where he works as an International Student Adviser. He concludes “that the academic and social environment into which international students have been immersed during their studies at Flinders has been dominated by our own culture and its inherent assumptions, expectations and values” (p.29). He talks about this as an assimilation model, where international students have “to ‘fit in’ with the status quo regarding the way things are taught, verbal and non-verbal communication, expectations of students, what teachers do and do not do, contextual mastery of the English language, attitudes to authority and so on” (p.30). He feels the adjustment should be reciprocal, with lecturers and University staff trained in the areas of cross-cultural communication and cultural information. Gray (1972) would agree that “it is a fact of university life that success depends on knowing and satisfying both the apparent and hidden requirements not only of a particular degree program, but also of university attitudes, values and standards” (p. 174). Overseas students who do not adjust to this culture may become dissatisfied, as Indian students in the study by Klineberg and Hull (1979). They complained, “that the faculty assumes ignorance in scholars from developing countries and consequently assumes exaggerated professional superiority”, they are “too patronising and this is difficult to take for the senior scholars from India” (p. 116). Western superiority is also seen in the attitude that overseas students must adjust quickly. Sunder Das (1972) feels “there is evidence of an enormous pressure, overt and also implicit, precipitating the Eastern student towards a position of rapid acculturation. There are various subtle overtones to this phenomenon. For one thing it seems to emphasise the adaptiveness and superiority of Western cultural patterns” (p.92). Marginson (2002) sees the dominance of English language as reinforcing the dominance of Western cultural patterns, where English is used “as a call to cultural superiority” (p.10).

Volet and Ang (1998) are also critical of the assimilation model. They agree with “Furnham and Bochner’s (1982) criticisms of the ethnocentric, pseudo-medical model focussing on adjustment, and their proposal to adopt a culture learning model where ... the key idea is that the major task facing a sojourner is not to adjust to the new culture, but learn its salient characteristics” (p.7). In particular they believe “it is critical for educators to ensure that educational and cultural objectives of ... internationalisation are included alongside economic and political agendas” (p. 5). As well, “the lack of spontaneous interactions between Australian and South-East Asian students during the course of their academic study, and Australian students’ tendency to prefer low levels of cross-cultural interactions, are of major concern for the future of the internationalisation of higher education in Australia” (p. 6). In a study of culturally mixed groups in a learning exercise, they found that although attitudes changed, students indicated that they would not seek to be in a culturally mixed group. They conclude that the study “highlights the two-way nature of the interaction process ... both parties share some responsibility for the lack of cultural mix” and “both parties have to be prepared to make it work” (p.18), rather that adjustment and assimilation being one-way.

However, cultural interaction and intercultural communication are complex processes, which require a willingness to ‘translate’, to reach understanding, to negotiate meaning, and a willingness to be open to new ways of constructing reality, new discourses. Even when international students are proficient in English and have knowledge of Western culture, cultural misunderstanding can easily occur. From experience, Chien (1989) explains that “the point is that people from the same culture unconsciously use a kind of shorthand in talking which the outsider has to learn” (p. 9). In relation to knowledge of Western culture, “the picture is incomplete, and
may be distorted” (p. 10). Young (1996) highlights the difficulties of creating an intercultural communication context. There are the problems of “reaching an understanding” (p. 183), which may involve “corrections or elaborations” (p. 185). Part of the process in intercultural communication is that of ‘translation’. Repetition is an integral part of ‘translation’, of constructing meaning and “reaching an understanding” (p. 183) but in this repetition new meanings and new ways of understanding can be created. Morley and Robins (1995) feel that “the responsibility of Translation means learning to listen to Others and learning to speak to rather than for or about Others” (p. 115). The result is that, “rather than rest within the enclosed spaces of one’s ‘mother tongue’, there is a movement between tongues” (Edwards and Usher 2000: 138). Kristeva is quoted by them as saying, that the “state of translation is the common thinking condition of all thinking beings” (p. 139). However, in intercultural communication this process may need to go further, “beliefs which could have once been taken-for-granted can no longer be. ... In order to understand, and to reach understanding, they must enter into a process of negotiation of new, shared definition of situation, roles, associated norms, and of the expression of the self” (p. 185). As well, problems related to power and agency can be magnified in intercultural communication. Young argues that “wherever there is an institutional difference in the power of speakers... the communicative problem becomes more difficult” (p. 186).

Sensitive intercultural communication and research can provide a new way of seeing and understanding for all those involved. “The pursuit of social understanding ... is a process of discovery; this process can be greatly enhanced by collaboration with a colleague whose perceptions of the familiar and the strange are so different from one’s own; for the outsider’s eyes readily see the strange, and the insider’s perceptions of the familiar are sharpened” (Crossley and Vulliamy 1997: 25). When he was doing collaborative research in India, Dyer (1997) was aware that “northern researchers ... need to be sensitive to cultural nuances” (p. 262). However, with sensitive collaborative communication, there is the possibility “to use a range of insider and outsider perspectives and to engage with the most influential and the most disempowered” (p. 267). Marginson and Mollis (2002) talk about this as reciprocity. They feel that “comparative education should encompass both hegemonic culture and alternative voices” (p. 602). “This approach to comparative education requires a capacity to engage with the identity of the other in a process of deep comparison ... [which] requires a capacity and willingness to open the self. ... One way to actualise this ‘deep comparative’ perspective is to use reciprocity” (p. 604). Reciprocity “implies give and take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power ... [the researcher moves] from the status of stranger to friend” (Lather 1991: 57).

International education is a space where intercultural communication can occur, and the pity is that it does not happen very often between local students and international students. Most of the students I have interviewed have told me that they mix with other international students but with few local students. This limits the possible benefits of international education locally - intercultural communication, a sharing and broadening of knowledges within the university. Rather than assuming cultural superiority about western knowledges, students should be encouraged to take advantage of the possibilities that that exist with the mix of students within the universities. “Globalisation, as it dissolves the barriers of distance, makes the encounter of colonial centre and colonised periphery immediate and intense” (Morley & Robins 1995: 108). Maybe the reason this intensity is not being exploited is that international students are positioned as ‘Other’ within discourses about international education.
Discursive Practice – Construction of the International student as stereotyped Other.

When students are expected to adjust and assimilate then there is a danger of dealing with students as racial groups, or worse, as an entity. McAdam (1971) in a study of first year students at Monash University, concluded that “It is likely that there are as many differences and cultural discontinuities within and between the national and cultural entities comprising the category ‘overseas students’ as there are between overseas students and Australian students” (p. 108). The reasons for this are that “overseas student is ... a convenient stereotype ... they are characterised by considerable heterogeneity. Not only do most overseas students come from plural societies, each of which embraces a wide range of cultures and religions, but, in addition each national and racial group diverges markedly in its customs, goals and values from every other” (McAdam 1972:97). If overseas students are often thought of a group or number of groups, then it is easy for their problems to be seen as group problems. Lakshmana (1979) found that “stereotyped images about the problems and difficulties of overseas students are often misleading” (p. 164) as his “study established beyond doubt that there is a significant difference between the problems perceived as important and the difficulties actually experienced by the respondents” (p. 85).

In studies where the student voice is clearly heard (Tajfel and Dawson, 1965; Volet and Pears, 1994), students complain about being treated as different, as the “Other”. Morris (1965), a West Indian student, observed about an English friend, that, “although he accepted me as a friend, he always regarded me as other, and, pretending to be so completely liberated ... he often made jokes about my colour” (p.14). Madoo (1965) encounters “the assumption that a man being coloured is different in a number of ways from anyone who is white ... the West Indian student hears the statement of difference reiterated over and over again. ... Together with this he learns of the English belief that all coloured people ... have a great deal in common with each other. In fact there is an accepted stereotype of the coloured person” (p.57). Joseph (2000) studied the complexity of identities of schoolgirls in Malaysia, particularly “the complex and contradictory relationship between personal biography and collective history” (p. 182). The girls were situated in contradictory locations and had to negotiate multiple subject positions – teenage girl, their ethnic roles, their religious roles, familial roles and that of student (p. 189). In a similar way each international student is involved in similar negotiations of multiple subject positions, including the new one of student in a western university. Students would like to be treated as individuals, as an African student, Nwariaku (1965), says, “individuals are no longer individual ... You are not disliked or resented because it is you ... but because you wear a particular type of skin” (p.84). In Volet and Pears study, students had similar concerns about being treated as individuals. Their statements were: “do not treat overseas students as foreigners” (p. 48), and, “what overseas students need is help: help that makes them fit into the Australian circle, not special treatment or separation dividing them as overseas students and Australian students” (p. 41). This dualism international/local, like all dualisms needs to be deconstructed, to be opened up into a multiplicity of ways of constructing students, who negotiate a variety of ways of being positioned every day – worker, student, friend, mother- the list is endless, as are the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all the students at the university. However, helping students to ‘fit into the Australian circle’ is narrowing the options. I wonder what assumptions are being made about this ‘Australian circle’, who is in the centre, on the periphery, who doesn’t fit in. It is very difficult to resist a discursive construction about who belongs and who doesn’t.
Difficulties resisting discursive constructions

With the rise of what have been called “politics of resentment” and ‘Hansonism’ in the late 1990’s in Australia, universities were confronted with the need to counter negative constructions of overseas people, particularly from Asia, including students. “Code words are used to give a selective and exclusionary meaning to notions of national identity, national spirit, citizenship and social and political values in order to disguise and justify efforts to marginalize” (Singh1998: 13). An example of this is the way the term “multiculturalism” was “used as a term of derision, but also as a racially coded word for Asians” (p. 13). A study by Matthews (1996) of Asian girls in high school found they “have little control over their identification as ‘Asian’” (p.152). Popular culture can be very powerful as racial identities are “invented and reinvented in the media”, often in “pseudo-events” (McCarthy and Dimitriadis 1998: 19). A recent study by Devos (2003), on the media coverage of so-called “soft marking” in 2001, looks at this kind of “invention”. “The cumulative impact of the coverage of the issue was to entrench a discourse which conflated internationalisation, and the international student, with a reduction of academic standards” p. 161. Devos shows that a “caricature of international students ... was constructed through the discourses” p. 165. So, ethnic minorities “have little control over the process of producing images about themselves” (Singh 1998: 15). Ultimately, this is a discourse of power, of exclusion, of maintaining dominance. McCarthy and Dimitriadis quote Nietzsche (p. 19): “In his On the Genealogy of Morals (1967). Friedrich Nietzsche conceptualised resentment as the specific practice of identity displacement in which the social actor consolidates his identity by complete disavowal of the merits and existence of his social other”.

In a similar way, stereotypes can be “invented and reinvented” in academic literature and institutions. “Such discourses ... become embedded in institutions and are constantly played and replayed through texts and conversations about these countries” (Pennycook 1994: 160). Pennycook gives examples of how Chinese students have been stereotyped as having “mighty resistance [to] informal class discussions”, as resembling a “sea of glued on smiles”, as a “wall” hard to break through, people who are “backward”, “lack independent thinking”, “intolerant” (p. 161-2). The norm is that of Western experience and practice, and the student is constructed in discourse and imagery that they have little control over. They cannot seem to escape being constructed as the “Other”.

OTHER WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS.

Different Ways of talking about “the Other”

The concept of the “other” is an important one both in postmodern theory and in feminist poststructuralist theory. De Nooy (1998), in looking at the theorising of Derrida and Kristeva, feels that “otherness – whether the other of language and philosophy, or the foreignness of what we call ourselves – has never ceased to be a major preoccupation, if not the major preoccupation of their work” (p. 4). In particular, Julia Kristeva describes being the “other” in her essay, “Strangers to Ourselves” (1991). Particularly difficult are the losses that a foreigner feels, “the loss of his or her mother, motherland, mother-tongue. Caught between two languages, the foreigner can be reduced to silence” (p. 226). As well, there are the cultural difficulties. “The difficulties the foreigner will necessarily encounter ... incomprehensible speech, inappropriate behaviour – wound him severely” (p. 268). Contact with the other has the possibilities of opening a fault-line, or marking a border to be crossed, which can bring change. “The face that is so other bears the mark of a crossed threshold ... a border” (p.266). “Confronting the foreigner whom I
reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries” (p. 286). Kristeva sees hope in the contact with the ‘other’, the foreigner. It can make people aware of the strangeness within themselves. “The foreigner is within me, hence we are all foreigners. If I am a foreigner, there are no foreigners” (p. 290). To put this into the context of international education, Scott (2001) feels that an important challenge for American students is “to understand the ‘other’, any ‘other’ or ‘stranger’ ... second, we educators must ensure that out students understand and appreciate that they are the ‘other’ to many in this world” (p. 176). In discursive practices within the culture of a school or campus, Giroux (1990) describes how being ‘the other’ can be made a problem. “A theory of border pedagogy needs to address the important question of how representations and practices that name, marginalise and define difference as the devalued Other are actively learned, internalised, challenged or transformed. ...Educators need to] critically interrogate how the colonising of differences by dominant groups is expressed and sustained through representations in which Others are seen as a deficit, in which the humanity of Others is either cynically posited as problematic or ruthlessly denied” (p. 43). Kristeva (1986) in her essay, “A new type of intellectual: the dissent” talks about her exile, as a woman, as an intellectual and as a foreigner, and agrees with the need to challenge difference. Lechte (1990) sums up the positive possibilities that Kristeva experiences from being a foreigner. “Exile thus means: to open up new possibilities, to be able to confront new challenges; but most of all it means coming to terms with ‘difference’ and the ‘other’ – not destroying them either by violence or indifference” (p.80). This can be applied in international education, with “a fundamentally different conception of internationalised curriculum, as founded on an ethic of difference which demands an openness of outlook, encouraging a freedom to move across borders and boundaries in an exploration of new senses of self and other” (Rivzi and Walsh 1998: 10).

Postmodern and poststructuralist ways of talking have developed a way of exploding the essentialism of the unified subject, of the stereotyped other, by developing understandings about the way people are positioned by discourses and how they position themselves in relation to them. This is another way of opening up fault-lines and spaces in discourses to construct new ways of talking about international education and international students.

Different ways of talking about international students: Multiple positionings/ new storylines, desire and contradictory storylines.

Discourses uncover ways in which reality is socially constructed through discursive practices, which are the way people order their world through storylines, myths and metaphors. These discursive practices “position” people as they construct themselves in relation to available discourses (Weedon 1987; Davies 1989; Davies and Harré 1990; Tong, 1989). Positions are made available as we speak ourselves and as we are spoken into existence. As positions are made available, we position ourselves in relation to them, or are positioned by others in relation to them. People are, “in an important sense, constituted anew in each new context, each new set of relations and positionings within discourses and storylines” (Davies, 1993: 4). The storylines that are part of discursive practices can be divided into lived and told narratives (Davies & Harré 1990; Davies 1989). Told narratives are stories told by an author in literature and through the media, and also stories that we tell about ourselves and others. They are usually complete episodes with a beginning and end. Lived narratives by contrast, use told narratives as the parameters to construct “who one takes oneself to be at any one time and what one takes oneself to be doing” (Davies & Harré 1990b: 2). When an individual locates herself within a storyline she has an emotional commitment to that storyline and she works to maintain it. “This sense of oneself as belonging in the world in a certain way ...entails an emotional commitment to specific category membership and storylines” (Davies 1989:3). It is difficult emotionally when a storyline
is challenged. Okorocha (1997) in an interview with a post-graduate female student was told that she felt “’left out and an outsider’ especially among home students in her department. She said she found this particularly disturbing because back in her home country she was a confident and secure person” (p.111). In a study of a student killing at Harvard, where a female Ethiopian student killed a Vietnamese room-mate and then herself, Shanti (2000) looks at the problem of international students maintaining a storyline about themselves. She believes that “If Sinedu could have participated in a ‘conversation of cultures’ at Harvard, she may have known about the ‘socialization and support’ that leads to a ‘continuity of self’, ... a stable core aspect of ... identity as an individual that runs ‘like a thread’ through people’s lives and gives those lives consistency and direction Instead she experiences alienation and anomie ..., self and social estrangement, and social isolation” (p. 44). She concludes that, “a person’s identity is ... to be found in ... the capacity to keep a particular narrative going ... continually [to] integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about self” (p. 48).

This emotional commitment or desire to achieve correct positioning is described in a study by Davies et al (2000). Through Haugh’s (1987) collective biography process, “the telling of stories, written and spoken, produces a web of experiences that are at once individual, interconnected, collective - and political” (p. 169). The “Memory work project takes us into the moments when we struggled to become as we ‘should be’, as schoolgirls. It lays bare the pattern of desire to become that schoolgirl. ... pleasure, even exhilaration when correct positioning was achieved or gaps exploited” (p.168). However the project described the ways in which the achievement of the category “good student” was tenuous, and could change quickly. “The subject position of good student is always provisional” (p. 175), and “There is a deep anger against the one who reveals that our mastery is incomplete” (p. 176). The teacher is the one who gives approval, and so power relations between teacher and student are revealed. In one example, “Both of these girls silently submitted to the (unreasonable) authority their teachers wielded. And they experienced strong and antagonistic emotions in the very same moment that they submitted to that authority” (p. 173). Ingleton and Cadman (2002) explore emotional and social factors that have contributed to international post-graduate students’ success in an Australian research university. In particular they look at the challenge these students had in retaining their positioning as “good students”. “They left their home countries with pride and confidence, with high expectations of future academic success. In the transition to research at an Australian university, however, their identities as successful students were severely challenged. They spoke of having to ‘prove themselves’ all over again, feeling they were unknown, unrecognised and without nearby family support. Gone were the frequent and familiar markers of success such as regular assignments, exam results and positive feedback. Instead there were unfamiliar topics and requirements, no feedback or negative feedback, and new ways of relating to supervisors, departmental staff and colleagues. Instead of feeling successful, they saw themselves collectively as isolated and uncertain, and after a semester, some reported they had as yet felt no success at all” (p.109).“The transition into a foreign post-graduate research culture posed a clear threat to these students’ self-identities as successful learners” (p.110). However, by repositioning themselves, or rejecting the new positioning students can gain autonomy, although Davies et al see this as only ever partially achieved.

Feminist poststructuralist writers, in particular, have developed methodologies that focus on identity - on the body, on agency and desire (Weedon, 1987; Davies et al, 2001; Lather, 1991). Narratives that we speak about ourselves, and storylines that we construct, or are constructed for us, are analysed. So, “who we take ourselves to be at any one point in time depends on the available storylines we have to make sense out of the ebb and flow of being-in-the-world, along with the legitimacy and status accorded to those storylines by the others with whom we make up our lives at any one point in time” (Davies 1993: 4). So, for instance, some international students
find themselves feeling “like a foreigner in even my own country” (France, B.Comm, Deakin), an unsettled place, “I think I’m just living in between. I think I would have to carry this sort of isolation through my life” (Korean, female, PhD, Ed, Monash). “In poststructuralist theory the focus is on the way each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence as if they were their own. Through these discourses they are made speaking subjects at the same time as they are subjected to the constitutive force of those discourses” (Davies 1993: 13). International students actively take up the discourses about the superiority of Anglo/ American education systems. “I have an assumption that American education system is much more innovative, dynamic, in terms of research, in terms of teaching, pedagogical methods. I think it’s biased. I think its not all perceptions. They are very – they’re the front edge, they’re the leaders, they lead the direction…. when they come up with something the whole world will follow, oh now we should concentrate on thinking, or now we should concentrate on project work, because they propose it. (Singapore, female, M.Ed., Melbourne) These storyline and narratives may be contradictory. “The discourses and practices through which we are constituted are also often in tension, one with another, providing the human subject with multiple layers of contradictory meanings that are inscribed in their bodies and in their conscious and unconscious minds” (Davies 1993, p.13). So, an international student can talk about being strong, “So we said we should push it. Because I saw that everyone was frustrated so we said it takes time, don’t lose your confidence, go and push”, but can also feel uncertain at the same time, “I began to doubt whether all my experiences, and my activities, is virtually worthless” (African, female, Masters Ed, Melbourne). It is this multiplicity and these contradictions that can provide a multi-layered story about international education and international students, a storyline with a plurality of voices.

SUMMARY

There are a variety of discourses that are used to provide a rationale for international education. These range historically from the earliest discourses that international education was important to provide understanding between cultures which might lead to world peace, to international education as a market place where outputs are measured, and economic theory drives policy (Marginson, 1993;Marginson 1999), to international education being important for the preparation of students for a globalised world through the development of intercultural competencies (Berrell, M & Kachar, K, 1997; Knight, J & de Wit, H, 1999; Fantini,A, Arias-Galicia, F & Guay, D). These are further discourses and discursive positionings to be discussed and analysed in the larger study that this paper is a part of. This paper has briefly discussed one discourse, the ways this discourse talks about international education and how this positions international students, and has begun to deconstruct some of the dualisms and taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in the discourse.

Discourses of power and knowledge within the western academy make assumptions about which knowledges are relevant and worthwhile, and the global power of the symbiosis between the western academy and western publishers enables this power/ knowledge to be maintained (Altbach and Kelly 1984). International students have been positioned within these discourses as needing help because they have ‘deficiencies’; as needing to adjust and adapt and be assimilated, resulting in the loss of their voice(s); being positioned as Other, and, in the worst cases, being stereotyped as ethnic groups. More recent empirical research has deconstructed many of the ‘deficiency’ discourses, and has questioned assumptions about western pedagogical practice. A focus on the positive and beneficial aspects of international education, intercultural communication, the exchange of experiences and ideas, the broadening of knowledge for all students, positions international students in a very different way, as individuals who have something to contribute to the university. An awareness that all people are “Other” to somebody,
that the self is not a coherent and stable essence, but that individuals position themselves within storylines about self in a multiplicity of ways helps to explodes stereotypes. Universities have constructed many “internationalisation” projects, organised staff development programs in intercultural communication, but the reciprocal engagement of all students in the exchange of ideas, in working together to create new knowledges and new identities is still to be achieved. Hopefully international education ultimately will be able to open up spaces in the western academy that will “highlight, support, celebrate polyphony, multiplicity, difference(s), the play of the Other ... [and] reconstruct ‘validity’ or ‘truth’ as many sided or multiply perspectival, as shifting and complex” (Scherurich 1997: 88). In the intersections, the fault-lines between these spaces new and more powerful ways of conceptualising or imagining international education can be developed, ways that are for the ‘public good’ and ultimately for the benefit of all students.

1 The following statement taken from an interview illustrates this difference.
- And I thought I had changed a lot, like when I was in China before, I was just so quiet ... but things just changed when I came here and I become a totally different person and started to talk about all sorts of things, and to communicate with the teacher. I remember when I was in primary school if the teacher told me to do something I would do it, no questions why I have to do it, or never argue, or if I have got some problem I would never, never, never speak to them about it, but here, but here it is different, I just communicate with them all the time
... I think when I am going back to China my teacher wouldn’t like me.
N: They wouldn’t like you
- No. I was so well, I was a good student, because I do, I do what everyone wants me to do
...Yeah, I didn’t question any thing they said..., but now I think I would question, I wouldn’t do it (China, female, B. Ed., Melbourne) [my emphasis]

ii Quotes from international students are taken from 25 semi-constructed interviews conducted at three Melbourne universities as part of the larger study that this paper comes from.

Bibliography
Bochner, S. and Wicks, P. (eds.) (1972) Overseas Students in Australia Randwick: UNSW Press
Knight, J and De Wit, H (eds.) (1999) *Quality and Internationalisation in Higher Education* OECD
Lakshmana Rao, G. (1979) *Brain Drain and Foreign Students* St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press

15
McAdam K. (1972) The Study Methods and Academic Results of Overseas Students in S Bochner and P. Wicks (eds.) Overseas Students in Australia Randwick: UNSW Press
Pe-Pua, Rogelia (1994) Being An Asian on Campus: A look into the Cross-cultural experiences of Overseas students at the University of Wollongong. Wollongong: The Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong
Sanderson, G. (2000) Promoting a culture of support at Australian Universities Aries Vol. 1, No. 2
Sunder Das (1972) The Psychological Problems of the Eastern Student in S. Bochner and P. Wicks, (eds.) Overseas Students in Australia Randwick: UNSW Press
Volet, S. and Pears, H. (1994) Past Students reflection on their TAFE experience and attitudes towards educational exchange between their country and Australia Perth: TAFE International