Knowledge Management and Constraints: Researching International Education

Abstract

International Student Programs (ISPs) that include full fee paying overseas students attending Australian state (government) schools can be understood as a ‘small but integral part’ of the much larger International Education (export) industry. The economic aspects of these programs and their business-like characteristics have required significant and ongoing investment into the building and maintaining of a reputation that epitomizes quality and success. Ball (2010) argues that particular types of knowledge that are key facets to new governance and ongoing reform of public sector education are increasingly created and sold to governments by the private sector. Documentation about ISPs constitute a case in which knowledge about increasingly demonstrates the power to organise that which it describes (p. 128).

Data is this paper draws from a study that investigates available documentation of the inaugural fifteen years of the ISP phenomenon (Leve, 2011). Through a cultural studies framed textually based analysis that considers the construction and representations of these programs, the study finds that the majority of the literature available that directly concerns these programs is commissioned, produced and disseminated by government departments. I consider this particular mass of ‘grey’ or ‘advocatory’ literature as a distinctive type of text with certain attributes that make it an ‘in-between’ source of credible knowledge since it fulfils different purposes and uses different structures and modes to literature that takes a scholarly approach, or has been developed purely for promotional purposes. However, the continuing dearth of critical, independent research and difficulty in sourcing creditable documentation provokes an interest in and provides an indisputable warrant for the contention of this paper.

It is argued that the literature is limited and overwhelmingly advocacy in nature, and reiterates the need for more critically disinterested research into the phenomenon. The paper considers the barriers that exist in pursuing this aim and provides a critical overview of some of the sources and main types of information, as representational data that continue to frame the ways this program is understood and enacted by participants. The limited and carefully managed ‘ways of knowing’ the International Student Program as it has been and continues to be practiced in government schools can be seen to epitomize new modes of governance - of society, education and the economy (Ball, 2010).

Key Words

International Education, Government Schools, Knowledge Management

(SIG : Politics and Policy in Education)
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Introduction
This paper begins with an outline of the ways International Student Programs (ISPs) in Australian state government schools are situated within the much broader international education research framework. The dilemmas and challenges encountered during the undertaking of a long term research project are then considered, in order to determine the barriers that may exist that limit the amount of research available regarding these programs. A brief overview of currently available literature about ISPs is then provided, and certain limitations of this literature are exposed through an examination of a number of key text examples. Sources of production of this literature are outlined, and the key role of this ‘source of knowledge’ in managing and maintaining not only what can be said, but how it should be said, is presented.

Introducing and locating the study
The aim of my original study (Leve, 2011) was to collect and consider sources of available knowledge about International Student Programs (ISPs) and to analyse and discuss the construction and representations that continue to frame the different ways this program is understood and enacted by the various participants and stakeholders. Legislative changes during the 1990s enabled state run Australian government primary and secondary schools to join this lucrative international education market. The numbers of full fee paying
overseas students (*ffpos*) enrolled in government state schools over the last decade have remained relatively static in comparison to other education sectors (Appendix One) and small in terms of total international student numbers (Appendix Two) and thereby remain on the periphery of the international education field. This is made acutely obvious in research forums and literature searches in which the school sector is regularly acknowledged as interesting but not well researched.

In the process of gathering and organising information for my study, questions and dilemmas arose. How is it that particular texts (and not others) assume a status as authoritative, useful, informative and ‘true’, and therefore representative of the international education industry as a whole? What are the meaning-making strategies, or different ‘acts of persuasion’ that may vary according to particular intended audiences or consumers of those texts? What distinctions can be made about these different texts as sources of knowledge, and what are the implications of these to our understanding of international education? The key question for my study was how certain accessible and authoritative texts come to mean - how knowledge of international education and the ISPs may be constructed by, through and drawn from these texts.

These ISPs function as commodities, or commercial entities within public state schools. They are valued for their income earning capacity and ostensibly, their positive impacts on local students including increased diversity and the raising of academic standards (see Arber, 2007). There is an acknowledged gap in research conducted in schools hosting ISPs, but why? In 2010 there were literally thousands of public state schools around Australia registered to provide programs and a total of 24,047 *ffpos* overall, enrolled in the school sector. Other peripheral participants include teachers and other staff in the schools, local students, homestay families - there are inevitable impacts of the ISPs on policy and practices in these schools and their local communities. What do we know about these? My research suggests that overwhelmingly, we know what the ‘industry’ wants us to know.

International education is a generic term that is used in many discourses to refer to very different things. However, in terms of Australia’s programs for *ffpos*, their full fee paying status is primary to what is said and done in both theory and in practice. The now taken-for-granted commoditised status of Australia’s ISPs mean they are a phenomenon necessarily concerned with policy, governance, regulation, marketing and competition. As a part of the international education (export) industry, research about ISPs cannot be kept discreet from these concerns if they are to be theoretically and contextually located. The unavoidable meshing of economic, commercial and marketing concerns with education, government objectives and internationalisation is a crucial consideration that is regularly glossed over when collecting, utilising and disseminating information. Funding, support and interest for this research inevitably must come from

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1 All institutions must be registered with CRICOS - the Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students. However, state schools are administered under each state department of education which is registered alongside individually named private/independent providers.

2 Note this figure includes all school enrolments, public and private. Just over half of enrolments were with non-government providers however it is difficult to obtain exact figures. See [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/2010051801_pdf.pdf](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/2010051801_pdf.pdf) accessed 19 June 2011.
somewhere and the most likely supporters are those set to gain. With international education’s established identity as an economic boon, those investing in international education expect returns, require support, and depend greatly on establishing and maintaining a good reputation for the industry as a whole, as well as individual institutional entities. Any revelations of problems, questionable practices or discontent need to be managed so as to minimise any negative impacts for the industry’s reputation. This may be achieved in a number of different ways and by a range of interested parties, or stakeholders.

Research in the school sector is already fraught with challenges in obtaining ethical clearance, permissions by government departments, schools and participants, and the underage status of the students. In the case of ISPs, other issues arise relating to cultural, language and communication issues with students or parents, the protection of reputation and consequential sensitivity to critique, and access to certain information that may be considered ‘market intelligence’ or potentially detrimental to the school’s ‘market position’. The next section examines how certain texts may be differently located and representative of a certain type of ‘literature’ that fulfils different purposes, is intended for a range of particular audiences, and has different structures and modes from those that might be conventionally included in an academic literature review. All of these texts can be seen to constitute a particular discursive formation that provides certain knowledge about international education, prescribes certain ways of talking about it, subjects who personify it, and practices for dealing with it. That these texts are distinguished by their determined acts of persuasion and advocatory nature is asserted through my articulation but also denotes the common themes through which much of what we are able to know about international education and the ISPs gains its authority.

Managing Meaning Making

Many government and industry supported texts take as fact that Australia participates successfully and competitively in the International Education Marketplace in which education is understood as a marketable commodity. Public and privately run institutions provide education and other services to ffpos whose spending is considered ‘export income’ for the Australian economy. The Australian international education industry has experienced growth in terms of economics and overall numbers of students and providers but is vulnerable to local and global political and economic events and in need of protection and support.

Ways of talking about the international education industry tend to be kept quite distinct from ways of talking about the experience of working with international students and programs in schools. Texts which may be presented at conferences, seminars or published in academic journals, most often in the fields of education, business and marketing, also have a role in constituting knowledge. These will most generally aim to improve the product, achieve successful outcomes and/or improve the experience. Texts that address

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1 A well known example is of the ‘Indian student fiasco’ in 2009-10, impacts of which are still being felt in the industry. It is not within the scope of this paper but this widely broadcast phenomenon demanded public attention, debate and an urgent and serious response from all levels of the industry. Commentary such as Bob Birrell’s Cooks galore and Hairdressers aplenty (Birrell, Healy, & Kinnaird, 2007) and the role of the media was crucial in grabbing the attention of the public, building public awareness... whilst
teaching, pedagogy, classroom practices and pastoral support, and hence, advocating for students, teachers and other professionals rather than the industry itself, can be an excellent source of knowledge and attributes about the practices and experiences encompassed by the ISPs however my focus is on broader aspects constituting understandings of the ISP phenomenon as a commodity.

Sources of Information & Construction of Knowledge
The internet has become a major primary source of information and a way of locating related resources for many contemporary and emerging researchers. Using the internet in this way brings both benefits and challenges that are different from earlier moments of data and information sourcing. Searches using ‘key words’, a range of different search engines, links and other techniques can be used to locate a massive amount of information, and skills of determining validity and reliability, and of organising and prioritising material are essential. Researching international education necessarily crosses over between commercial, academic, personal and government sources - in fact the boundaries have become less and less clear and the categories are not at all mutually exclusive. Marketing principles dominate the ease of access to online material - domain names can be purchased, carefully chosen key words can be highlighted, courses can be taken on how to make your organisation, website, brand name, or simply your idea, prominent on the internet.

The notion of ‘grey (or gray) literature’ is significant in this deliberation. This type of literature commonly refers to publications produced and issued by government, academia, business, and industry, in both print and electronic formats and distributed free or through subscriptions, but not controlled by commercial publishing interests. In the case of this study, it could be seen as a type of text that lies somewhere in between promotional texts and conventionally published scholarly research. The advantages of this literature include quick access, flexibility, ease and speed of dissemination, multi-modality possibilities and ability to include considerable detail. It may be in the form of research summaries, reports and reviews, facts, statistics and a range of other data that ‘enlarges the framework of knowledge’ (Auger, 1998). Grey literature has taken on a pervasive and significant role in building and sharing public knowledges and understandings of a huge range of issues. As mentioned above, skills for assessing the quality and credibility of this literature are essential but not always held or adequately practised by the viewer/reader. Bibliographic challenges in determining basic information such as author, publication date or publishing body also make referencing a ‘hit and miss’ affair. Databases on international education often include a range of ‘grey sources’ including non-refereed conference proceedings, unpublished theses and government materials but they are rarely differentiated from other credible or scholarly sources.

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4 Sourced from a ‘grey’ location: [http://library.brook.lynuum.edu/access/greyliter.htm](http://library.brook.lynuum.edu/access/greyliter.htm) dated 5/8/2006 (accessed 28 July 10). This resource also references a number of (scholarly) references, reports, journals, conferences and a range of other internet resources on the topic of ‘grey literature’.

5 This applies to, and has been long recognised particularly in the areas of health sciences: [http://www.nyam.org/library/greywhat.shtml](http://www.nyam.org/library/greywhat.shtml) accessed 28 July 10.

6 For example, the Australian produced IDP supported and Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) maintained Database of Research in International Education [http://www.idp.com/idp-today/research-database.aspx](http://www.idp.com/idp-today/research-database.aspx) which is a useful source of up-to-date research and data, particularly of locally produced materials.
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The texts examined in this section are all provided and accessible through government Webpages. Most have been produced or commissioned by government departments, and in the process, commissioned researchers are given broad access to source material not available in the public domain, and respondents and discussants working within the industry, client organisations and government departments. Government departments themselves become clients when they commission research work to be undertaken by commercial enterprises whose motivation is profit and concomitantly, raising their own profile and reputation. There seems to have been a rise in the number of companies advertising their research services and expertise – notably in the international arena, as well as increasingly murky distinctions between ‘independent’, ‘disinterested’ and those with certain interests, ‘market intelligence’, ‘market research’, ‘public opinion’ and ‘social research’, all of which contribute to the obscuring of the market transaction having taken place in its development and the persuasive intention behind its production (see Ball, 2009, 2010).

For example, IDP is still generally known as an independent government funded body whose policy is determined by a standing committee of the Australian Vice-Chancellors. However, IDP Education Pty Ltd is now an organisation with “three major business arms – recruitment of international students, English language testing, and management of international aid projects. […] IDP partners clients to promote and market their institutions, courses, programs, and services and to facilitate the placement of appropriate students”. Client services include “an extensive range of high-end services related to the development of marketing, positioning and branding strategies to suit individual client needs” (ibid). IDP Education Pty Ltd hosts the single major Australian International Education annual Conference (AEIC), has commissioned the production of a number of significant research projects covering aspects of the industry and its participants (Banks & Olsen, 2008; Cook, 2008; Lawrence, 2009) and are known as major ‘industry stakeholders’. Other noted industry stakeholders that produce and/or commission their own research include each of the State and Territory government departments, sector representative organisations, providers and various peak bodies, each of which has particular interests, both commercial and not-for-profit, to protect.

Commissioned consultants and companies describe themselves and their work variously, most often with some reference to markets and effective advertising and promotion. For example, Rob Lawrence, the author of IDP’s International student perceptions today (Lawrence, 2009) promotes his own research company, whose work includes “education destination and institutional brand development, market analysis, investigative research, offshore and onshore market development plans, market feasibility studies, performance audits and, marketing and communications strategies” (Lawrence, 2009, p.41). Other companies conducting research in international education include Ipsos Australia, “one of the world’s leading

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7 Notably AEI - Australian Education International, the international arm of DEEWR – the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations at the time of writing.
survey-based marketing research firms\(^9\) which has joined forces with Hugh Mackay, a noted Australian social researcher and commentator, who is credited in their webpage as having developed a ‘unique and rigorous’ qualitative group discussion methodology. This company “know[s] brands, how to develop them and how to build them. We assess market potential and interpret market trends. We help our clients build long-term relationships with their customers. We test advertising and study audience responses to various media. We measure public opinion around the globe” (ibid). Research, marketing, analysis and publication are all commercial enterprises in this realm that contribute to what is known about international education in Australia.

It is difficult to assess the independence of, neutrality, and motivation behind much of this particular body of research about international education. It is not peer reviewed and is often re-formulated by the commissioning department and republished in different forms from the original work, often with attention to the ways it will appeal to particular intended audiences or consumers within the marketplace. Scholarly authority that may be achieved through peer review, being situated within particular discourses or with established scholarly reputations, and publication by respected publishers or in respectable journals is what distinguishes much of the critical work that is considered valuable in academia. The seemingly inescapable commercial identity of the international education industry today, its advocates and its sensitivities have been shown to put certain limitations on openness, ‘transparency’, debate and critique.

In terms of a study that involves texts from a broad range of sources, the differences in tone or ‘shades of grey’ are not always clear. ‘Grey’ denotes an ‘in-between’ measure, not black or white but grey, somewhere in between good/bad, reliable/undependable, clear/obscured – in the case of my study, it is a type of text that lies somewhere in between promotional texts and conventionally published scholarly research, a distinction which demands attention. Alternatively, in a cultural studies framework that highlights the meaning-making potential of any form of text, the credibility of these sources could be seen as less important than the exposure and ‘work’ they undertake in constructing and mediating understandings of the phenomenon in question.

During the period of time my study was undertaken (2005-2010), the main source of information and data about international education in Australia was the Australian Education International (AEI) website\(^10\). The AEI site and its contents are ‘badged’ with the Commonwealth crest which establishes credibility and trustworthiness. It uses direct business-like language and presents in a straightforward print form, with no images but providing built-in links to a range of documents and information sources within and from outside the site.

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\(^10\) www.aei.gov.au However, it is important to note that AEI’s responsibilities have since undergone a period of change and devolution, with responsibility for the international promotion and marketing of Australian education being taken over by the Australian Trade Commission < http://www.austrade.gov.au> in 2009-2010. AEI still retains its links to research and collects data for Austrade, who administer and regularly update the Market Information Packages (MIPs) for up-to-date information.
The AEI site has a section entitled *Publications and research* which includes research and market data snapshot (summaries) series, information from the *AEI International Student Data series* and local insights of the AEI international network, AEI research papers, and publications and reports commissioned by AEI. All of these documents are freely accessible to the general public, mostly in an attractive PDF format that enables professional looking hard copies to be easily produced. The majority of these publications concern statistics, indicators and trends presented in ways that aid the growth and information base on which the industry increasingly depends upon whilst concurrently maintaining a business oriented market based conceptualisation of international education as a whole.

(a) *Research Snapshots*

These one or two page succinct summaries use efficient methods to (re)present the information that stakeholders and any other interested parties might use to describe the situation of international education in Australia. Each one will make use of clearly readable and reproducible graphs and tables to present information over particular periods of time, in particular increments, depending on the overall point to be illustrated. For example, *International Student Enrolments in Schools in 2009* (March 2010) shows two graphs and three tables. It can immediately be seen at a glance that there has been a gradual increase in total numbers of school students between 2005 and 2009, and that out of the states, NSW and Victoria have the majority of students, with Queensland coming a distant third. Taking a closer look at the tables, exact figures are given in a form that compares student numbers across sectors, across states, and by nationality. The far right hand column of each table gives a % Growth 2009 on 2008 with declining numbers highlighted in red, but still within the same column entitled ‘Growth’. Of nationalities, China (12,593) and Republic of Korea (4,505) have the largest numbers. Overall, it can be seen that the school sector has declined in numbers (-2.9%) whilst every other sector has grown over this period of time (VET the largest growth at 33.3%), that NSW has suffered the biggest drop (-10.2%) and Japan is the nationality with the largest ‘negative growth’ (-16.9%). These figures are explained in the accompanying text which also informs us that the numbers of students in the school sector have ‘remained relatively steady for some years’, showing ‘some volatility since 2002’ but in general, the proportionate figures across the states have remained consistent. A recurrent feature of these texts is to retain a language of ‘growth’ and positivity, even when describing actual drops in numbers.

Each of these snapshots refer (through footnotes) to their sources of data, usually cross referenced with other AEI publications such as those referred to below, and often defines certain terms as they are used in these publications. This cross referencing and continual (re)defining of appropriate terminology plays a significant role in determining how International education in Australia should be talked about and the knowledge and attributes of the industry that should be used to do this. For stakeholders, this information aids the preparedness that is “[…] the key to successful marketing. Sourcing information on your target markets is
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Vitaly important before you venture offshore” (Australian Education International & Department of Education, 2004, p. 10). But for the purposes of my study, what it provides are illustrations of which aspects of international education (schools) are significant, how to articulate oneself when entering and working the ‘marketplace’, where this place exists in its most lucrative terms and what function each international location has in this place.

(b) Research Papers

The 2008/2 issue entitled International School Student Movement Post-School Education looks specifically at the pathways followed by ffpos school students after completing their high school studies. This paper has the potential to provide a better understanding of students and their family’s intentions, desires, academic success and chosen career pathways, as well as to examine and compare the ‘success’ of students from different countries, language and cultural backgrounds, who arrived at different ages and stages of their secondary education, and who attended different schools in the public/private domains, rural/urban locations, or with larger or smaller proportions of student peers with common backgrounds. However, this form of research paper is another ‘quick bite version’, intended to ‘highlight broad trends’ rather than specific detail, and incorporating techniques of standardisation to allow for easier comparability:

For robustness and consistency in analysis (comparison between the different cohort years), unless stated otherwise, details of the students’ further education are taken as their first enrolment in the higher education, VET or ‘Other’ sectors immediately after their last enrolment period in the Schools sector. (Australian Education International, 2008, p. 1)

The data used for this paper is sourced from PRISMS11 and the student cohorts only include those individuals that actually enrol in some form of further study within Australia after they cease their school enrolment. Therefore there is no information in this paper regarding whether or not those excluded students completed their senior secondary certificate satisfactorily, at what point in their studies they left and of course why they left and where they went. This also enables the 59% of students that did continue their further education in Australia to be described in terms of the 100% of students included in this study. Of this 100%, under ‘key findings’, we are informed that “over 80% went to study in the higher education sector in Australia, either immediately or via a pathway” (ibid p.2) – creating a nice excerpted snippet, based on statistical evidence, clearly demonstrating the ‘success’ achieved by ffpos school students. What is less clear is that a certain number of these students had to take ‘alternative pathways’, through other sectors, to get into university. This may include paying (full fees again) to attend additional English language, certificate or foundation courses before the student is proficient enough to enter university12.

11 PRISMS – the Provider Registration and International Student Management System is the source of AEI International Student Data. All CRICOS registered institutions must upload details of new enrolments as part of the ESOS regulations which enables DIAC to process their student visa.
12 Anecdotally, there are also students whose progress through school is slow and who are advised to spread their final year or two over an extra year, thereby paying an extra year of fees whilst still in the school sector.
The detail of this paper is, as its title indicates, a broad indication of where continuing students go after leaving schools. The highlighted ‘pathway’ followed and examined is the one most lucrative to the Australian economy and information on the nationalities of those that continue is a useful piece of ‘market intelligence’. Unfortunately there is none of the potential content mentioned above, in fact the only information we know is that the included students spent some time in an Australian High School (public or private) as a full fee paying student. However, in perusing this six page document and looking for opportunities to tap the market, the purpose and intention of this ‘research paper’ is far clearer. It does not provide information that will assist students, parents, teachers, support staff or providers to improve the ISP experience, nor is it intended to improve the education provided. What it and much of the ‘research’ offerings accessed through this site does offer are key findings that will enhance and inform competitive practices and entrepreneurial activities to harness and manage the fee paying ‘pathways’ of international students through the Australian system.

(c) Publications and Reports: Free Publications

Free publications are described as ‘a source of information about the education industry’ and include international student surveys and follow-ups, ‘strategic frameworks’ for different sectors, and various other useful market information, ‘intelligence’ and reports. One of these is the 2006 International Student Survey (SCHOOLS) - Final Year Secondary School Students Summary Report (2007). This report comes from a large scale survey (International Student Survey - ISS) commissioned by AEI in late 2005 to ‘assess the overall satisfaction of international students’ (AEI webpage) across all sectors of study in Australia – or as articulated in the report itself, “to obtain a comprehensive, up-to-date measure of the experiences of international students in Australia and to ascertain their future career or study plans and aspirations” (Australian Education International, 2007, p. 2).

The research was conducted by Ipsos Australia Pty Ltd, a public opinion, market and social research firm and has since resulted in nine subsequent publications that target particular interests such as sectors, pathways, industry. The main topics to be explored were based on earlier, less detailed survey reports conducted by Roy Morgan Research, another independent market research and public opinion survey company, across all sectors in 1992 and 1997. The school specific summary report is a 78 page document that includes background, objectives and method of research along with detailed survey results, graphs, tables and summaries. This survey was followed up in 2008 for the larger, more dynamic and most lucrative VET and HE sectors, but not repeated for the smaller and (at that time) less dynamic school and ELICOS sectors.

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The main research objectives, which are used to organise the data included in the survey, are: to obtain information about international students’ experiences before arriving in Australia with respect to their choices to study in Australia; to measure international students’ level of satisfaction with education, pastoral and support services, social integration and overall satisfaction with their stay in Australia; and to ascertain the future career plans and aspirations of international students subsequent to completion of the studies (Australian Education International, 2007, p. 3). Each of these objectives seems significant and relevant to the impetus for my own study. This type of information seems to incorporate the many personal, social, emotional and experiential dimensions of the ISPs (schools) that would provide background and some explanation for the elements that might need attention to make that experience the best that it could be. However, this is not necessarily the outcome and the reasons for this seem to be located within the structures, intentions and ethos of this type of text.

The study included both a qualitative and quantitative phase, the former used to guide the design of the questionnaire for the latter. The stated purpose of the initial phase was to provide an in-depth understanding of the attitudes and experiences of international students in Australia and their ongoing support needs. Focus groups were comprised of 6-8 students in four groups, two from Sydney, two from Melbourne. In total, 749 final year secondary school (private and public) students nationwide\(^\text{14}\) completed surveys. The results of this large scale survey are published in a simple report form and illustrated with a range of graphs and other representative forms of data presentation, with scatterings of focus group ‘quotes’ highlighted in blue text, boxed objectives and summary findings clearly expressed in simple language.

For example, Section 5, *Living in Australia*, conducted with the objective to measure schools students’ level of satisfaction with social integration and overall satisfaction with their stay in Australia, is illustrated by simple figurative representations of highlighted aspects of the data as follows. Small paragraphs of text summarise certain findings such as “[t]he majority (82%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their living experiences in Australia, while only 2% were very dissatisfied” (p.19). These summaries use quantifiers derived from surveys and only certain information to denote the preferred interpretation: that most school students “had a high level of overall satisfaction with their experience in Australia” (ibid). However, an apparently incongruous addendum points out that Asian respondents generally expressed more dissatisfaction in a number of categories, than respondents from other countries, adding some credibility (or fuel) to anecdotal evidence to that effect.

\(^{14}\) Except for the two Territories, NT & ACT
The three forms of representation utilised in the figures above provide a condensed version of a large amount of information. Figure 1 gives us ‘first impressions of Australia’, whereas the actual question asked included ‘as a place to study’ – that is, not as a place to live, to work or to experience. We can express the table in a number of ways - that 73% of respondents thought it was good or very good, or perhaps that 28% thought it was between poor and average. This could also be an indicator that ‘most people’ gave an affirmative
response therefore this is not a problem that needs addressing, or that ‘a number of respondents’ had a low impression on arrival and therefore something needs to be done to address this problem. Would the responses have been different if the question referred to a place to live or holiday? Clearly each of the data representations can be interpreted in similar ways - with a ‘the majority are positive’ or ‘some negative responses indicate that ...’ but these particular graphical representations are intended to ‘objectively’ summarise and present a large amount of information, primarily positive but with room for improvement.

The groups of people included in Figure 3 are classified into six generic ‘types’ – the international student respondents themselves, other international students, teachers, other school staff, local community and Australian students. These pre-determined ‘types’ obviously generalise certain characteristics and disavow diversity, which may contribute to the ‘fixing’ of disproportionately negative or positive qualities to a particular group, a risk with any large scale survey of this type.

In summary, the majority of respondents found Australia a good place to live and study. In general they had positive experiences with members of the community, even though many respondents felt they were treated with more respect by people inside the classroom than outside in the community.

Students felt welcomed by home-stay families although improvements could be made by the families becoming more involved in showing the students around, providing more opportunities to speak English and introducing them to other friends.

A high proportion of respondents indicated that they would like to have more Australians as friends.

Around a quarter of students worked while studying, providing them with some extra income as well as social opportunities outside of school.

Figure 4: Summary to Chapter 5 ISS (Schools) p.27

What does all of this data and summarised findings tell us about ISPs, and about how AEI contributes to certain discursive formulations? The summarised findings are expressed in a way that can easily be excerpted as evidence for the ongoing maintenance of a successful program. Each short paragraph begins with a positive assertion to cushion the effect of any less positive findings, and all of these less positive findings are presented in a constructive fashion that summarily suggests how they might be addressed. The statements that students are asked to rate (see figures 2 and 3), designated as “the key drivers of satisfaction” (p.44) go a long way in framing the topic, possible responses and ways of thinking about the issue at hand.

“It’s hard to get an Australian friend. When you come into Year 11, they already have their friends. Plus your English is bad. They will talk to you but you can’t really join in.”

“We have our world, they have theirs.”

However, the published quotations – although having no attributions to particular speakers – seem to offer some insight into the ways the student focus groups understood, related to and attributed the quantitative statistics to particular experiences during their ISP experience. Unfortunately very few of these are included which makes one wonder, with all of AEI’s transparency and willingness to share information, where can a
full range, or at least a more balanced range of statements be found so that a reader might be able to make their own analytical and instrumental choices? Interestingly, this report seems to incorporate a range of different techniques for illustrating findings in different sections, demonstrated by the range of graphic representations above and the predictable eschewing of complexity. Another representative example can be found in Figure 5 which shows what appears to be a student quotation, but is introduced as “if one were to verbalise the findings of the regression analysis from the school respondent’s perspective, it is likely they would say: ...” (p.34).

Figure 5: ISS (Schools) p.34

In this way, invented words, or mythical statements are ‘put into the mouths of speakers’, based on the findings of the survey. These mythical statements seem to closely resemble many of the statements attributed to students in a range of other explicitly promotional texts. Large amounts of money, time and research expertise supports the veracity of such statements as being representative of student expressions and experiences. These statements also inform the reader of which aspects of the ISPs are most important to students, which issues demand attention by providers, what information and assistance should be provided to students, how the broader community is implicated, and the potentially vulnerable humanistic viewpoint of the ffpos student consumer.

Figure 6: Final Summary ISS (Schools) p.45

Again, it can be read into the final summary (Figure 6) what is to be considered important in the results of this expensive and well presented survey of final year international school students. Connections are made between the ‘key drivers’, incorporating a progression from supported attainment of goals during their study, leading to a good overall perception of Australia, to being the medium and spreaders of the good word about ISPs and Australia itself. Word-of-mouth is already a known source of recruiting new international students to join the throngs so this articulated progression from ffpos at a local school to important ambassador for the Australian education export industry concludes the findings from this study.
Knowledge Management and Constraints: Researching International Education

Some of the information I was seeking that would add to what is documented and known about the many personal, social, emotional and experiential dimensions of ISPs (schools) and equip participants with necessary understandings to better deal with deficiencies and frustrations of the program is available through the ISS study and related documentation. The document itself represents some of the efforts of AEI to consider the smallest and least researched international education sector, schools, as significant in itself, and to produce research findings that propose some strategies and issues requiring attention, as well as a large amount of visually attractive cut/paste material that maintains certain discursive regularity to how the ISP (schools) is to be known. However, the concluding summary of this research (Figure 6) positions it within a discourse of trade benefit – that improving the experience of international students in schools is important to the reputation and future recruitment of more fee-paying students to benefit the industry as a whole.

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Other key AEI publications relating specifically to the school sector do contribute a large and comprehensive overview of Australia’s school sector engagement with international education, including information and analysis not available elsewhere. Some of the history and policy background, particularities, problems and challenges, practices in the areas of marketing, management, recruitment, professional development, and comparative overviews of overseas markets and providers in the school/pre-tertiary sector are available. Other issues are broached in these publications. The one-way flow of students and lack of reciprocity, concern over Australia’s over-emphasis on economic benefits, factors precluding the school sector’s growth and development mirroring that of other sectors, the importance of Australia’s internationalisation participation beyond the ‘most visible’ aspect of fee paying students in the ISP and the inherent characteristics of the schools sector that differentiates it from other ‘players in international education’ are all significant themes.

However, I contend that the source(s) and intention(s) behind these research reports and discussion papers demand consideration. AEI and related government departments commission a number of different agencies, groups and individuals to produce their large scale reports and reviews which goes some way to explain the range of research approaches, language and forms of presentation and representation they use. Clearly a large amount of money is allocated for this through government budgets. Each of the publications – particularly over the last decade, displays enhanced presentation, detail and ease of access and printing, as well as a propensity for the authoritative snippets of information and provision of useful graphical representations. Changes in the early 2000s to the sources and methods for compiling and measuring particular data have enabled far larger scale cross sectoral and national comparisons of a greater sophistication, and apparent improved validity and reliability compared to earlier research\(^{15}\). Each text is

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\(^{15}\) AEI have produced large numbers of ‘explanatory notes’ for their data collection and are available at: [http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm](http://aei.gov.au/AEI/PublicationsAndResearch/Snapshots/Default.htm)
also continually and explicitly self-referential – all gaps and sources are ostensibly filled by providing links to other AEI documents or Federal government produced sources. This indicates another role of AEI texts, to establish AEI’s collection, collation and presentation of data related to the Study in Australia industry as the preeminent source of information for and about Australia’s provision of international education.

AEI’s practices of generic promotion for all of Australia’s education services as one system encompassing all education levels, fields and sectors appear to be a source of some dissatisfaction and resistance among states, sectors, stakeholders and individual providers. As a highly competitive industry, each of the above are in contention as competitors against each other – in recruitment for students, status, reputation, quality assurance, safety and pastoral care, price and quality of services, subject offerings – the list goes on.

State and Territory governments also conduct their own market research, generally cross sectoral which has limited distribution within the department or to subscribers within the state. A more cooperative and coordinated approach across governments on school sector research would reduce duplication of effort and better identify research areas of benefit to the sector as a whole.

(Department of Education, Science and Training., 2006, p. 10)

The reference to ‘limited distribution’ is also an important factor that has certainly made this study more challenging, in that ‘publicly accessible’ documentation about international education in state government schools is certainly limited, and school based research is anecdotally extremely difficult to arrange. Government and commercial interests also become ‘in confidence’ and kept out of the public view. State and Territory international education bodies are privy to a large amount of information about the ISPs for young ffpos that is not available for public scrutiny or discussion and there are many aspects of these programs that are not known beyond anecdote. A generic overview may be provided but commercial concerns (market intelligence) is privy information and this notion is significant particularly when it involves public amenities such as education.

It can be seen that trying to locate information about international education in the states and schools is challenging due to competitive practices and what seems to amount to all roads leading to information for and about students and what is on offer, rather than any kind of research reports or documentation about how the program is actually functioning. Therefore it is understood as a ‘product’ that is represented as appealing and successful by the states that oversee and are responsible for the government school component of the ISPs.

**Conclusion: Marketing, Mediating & Maintaining – the Work of Advocatory Texts**

Through examining examples of a particular type of easily accessible, up-to-date and informative texts with government approved and maintained authority, this paper has provided a critical overview of how knowledge about ISPs and international education in Australia requires critical consideration. Texts that have been produced and/or commissioned by government agencies to review, provide information and
Knowledge Management and Constraints: Researching International Education

support the international education industry may also fulfil the purpose of building, improving and maintaining a quality product, its market position and profitable identity, as well as demonstrating the professed transparency into the workings of the industry. They fulfil an enhanced advocatory role for the international education industry, attempting to illuminate current market conditions and opportunities, mediate the behaviours within this market, and focus attention on the most positive attributes of the continuing and lucrative provision of international education in Australia. The potential advocatory effect of any text marks the importance of persuasive strategies that must appeal to a range of potential audiences, particularly industry stakeholders that are present in the various markets, both in Australia and of course, across the globe.

Together, these texts have played an increasingly significant role in constructing how the phenomenon this study aims to elucidate, the ISPs (schools), is accepted as a normal, well functioning, soundly maintained program, beneficial along the lines of international engagement and Australia’s successful participation as a global player in the international education market. The school sector is referred to as a ‘small but integral player’ in the much larger international education playing field. ISPs are understood as providing a source of income to schools, a step on the pathway to higher education achievement for overseas full fee paying students, and a key component in the processes of internationalising Australian schools and education. Findings of detailed empirical studies and data analysis update and validate the success of the industry. The value the government places on ensuring this continued success is evidenced through its strict regulatory framework and the provision of certain information where it is deemed most necessary.

However, the authoritative sources of information explored in this paper and made available by the government that regulates and organises knowledge and ways of talking about the international student industry have become the grand instrument that relentlessly constructs, mediates and authorises the primary preferred discourses of this industry. There is no space in this tightly managed field for debate or a maintained critique of the dominance of market ideology, the all-consuming commodification of every aspect of international education, or any sustained alternative vision of international engagement across our school system. The marketing imperative and competitive practices at all levels, from providers (schools) through State and Territory governments and federal government departments requires all those concerned at every level understand and concentrate their practice within this realm. Industry advocates demand support and recognition as an indispensible provider of export income to Australia and these demands inevitably impact on what is known about ISPs, and how it has come to be known in that way. This has clear resonances for researchers, practitioners and policy makers who must rely on more than advocatory sources of data that manage and maintain not only what can be said, but how it needs to be said.

References
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Lawrence, R. (2009). International student perceptions today, Insights derived from a study conducted with over 6,000 prospective, current and recently-graduated international students (pp. 42). Sydney: IDP Education Pty Ltd.

APPENDIX ONE

Australian International Student Enrolments (All Sectors) 1994-2009

![Graph showing international student enrolments in Australia, 1994-2009. The graph is color-coded to represent different sectors: Higher Education, EUCOS, Vocational Education, School Education, Other.](image-url)

Note: There is a break in series between 2001 and 2002.
APPENDIX TWO

Schools Sector Enrolments Australia, November 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>Share 09</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>9,408</td>
<td>9,329</td>
<td>10,568</td>
<td>11,498</td>
<td>12,645</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>15,651</td>
<td>15,105</td>
<td>16,175</td>
<td>16,791</td>
<td>15,000</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25,059</td>
<td>24,434</td>
<td>26,743</td>
<td>28,289</td>
<td>27,645</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

Source: www.aei.gov.au