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International Students as Lucrative Markets or Vulnerable Populations: A Critical Discourse Analysis of National and Institutional Events in Four Nations

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**International Students as Lucrative Markets or Vulnerable Populations:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of National and Institutional Events in Four Nations
Étudiants internationaux en tant que marché lucrative ou populations vulnérables : Une
analyse critique de discours des événements nationaux et institutionnels dans quatre pays.**

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Abstract

The migration of post-secondary students is an increasingly studied phenomenon as the number of students living outside of their home country has risen to more than three million in the past decade. Governments, regions and institutions have developed new structures and strategies to facilitate and benefit from this worldwide student movement. This research article uses Fairclough's (1993) notion of critical discourse analysis to explore the relationship between two distinct discourses on foreign students: national-level economic competitiveness and institutional-level student support. A comparative approach examines these discursive events in the four leading, Anglophone destination countries: Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States. The findings suggest that foreign students are objectified as tradable units in the market-driven discourse of economic development with student support literature providing a buffer that limits the critique of the economic discourse. At the same time, potential exists for current events to highlight the tension surrounding the two discourses and provide new opportunities for dialogue.

Résumé

La migration des étudiants post-secondaires est un phénomène de plus en plus étudié, vu que le nombre d'étudiants vivant en dehors de leur pays d'origine a augmenté à plus de trois millions au cours de la dernière décennie. Les gouvernements, régions et institutions ont développé de nouvelles structures et mis en place des stratégies afin de faciliter et de bénéficier de ce mouvement global d'étudiants. Cet article de recherche utilise la notion de Fairclough (1993) sur l'analyse critique de discours afin d'explorer la relation entre deux discours distincts sur les étudiants étrangers : compétitivité économique au niveau national et soutien aux étudiants au niveau institutionnel. Une approche comparée examine ces événements discursifs dans quatre principaux pays anglophones de destination : Australie, Grande Bretagne, Canada et les États-Unis. Les résultats suggèrent que les étudiants étrangers sont objectivés en tant qu'unités échangeables dans le discours axé sur le marché du développement économique, avec une littérature sur le support étudiant fournissant un tampon qui limite la critique sur le discours économique. En même temps, le potentiel existe pour les événements actuels de mettre en évidence la tension entourant ces deux discours et fournir de nouvelles opportunités de dialogue.

Keywords: foreign students, international student migration, discourse analysis

Mots-clés: étudiants étrangers; migration des étudiants internationaux; analyse de discours

Introduction

With each subsequent decade, the forces of globalization¹ are moving more and more individuals across borders for new opportunities in work and education. Governments, employers and educators are keenly aware of the benefits and challenges that exist when regulating and supporting these global talent flows. Many heated discussions are heard in the media and academic literature about how best to facilitate these migrant groups. Simultaneously, workers and students living outside their home country are developing new identities and organizations, using new technologies to link across borders. The resulting interactions between nations,

¹ Globalization in this paper refers to "the widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life," (Held et al. 1999).

communities and individuals are complex processes that generate significant conversation and debate as the volume of global migration continues to increase.

The migration of post-secondary students in particular has received growing attention as the number of students living outside of their home country has risen to more than three million in the past decade (Becker, 2009). Governments, regions and institutions have developed new structures and strategies to facilitate and benefit from this worldwide student movement. Some regional agreements such as ERASMUS facilitate student study in nearby countries with standardized degree agreements (ESN, 2012). Other countries in emerging economies set themselves up as higher education hubs, recruiting both foreign students and foreign providers as national development strategies (Knight, 2011). The growth of these new activities among new actors has put new pressure on the Western, Anglophone nations that have been the long-time destination for the bulk of the world's migrant students. The USA and Britain, along with others such as Australia and Canada, have put increased effort into foreign student recruitment in the past decade, pressured by the increase of nations competing for migrant students. This new imperative has led to structural shifts in these Anglophone countries. Where they traditionally had decentralized higher education systems, they are now seeing more involvement from governments to recruit and regulate the growing migrant student body. These changes have been accompanied by loud and complex conversations with diverse stakeholders in the news media, government policy and think-tank advising groups. Each group is advocating for more effective recruitment and retention or regulation of foreign students, all in the name of national economic competitiveness.

The final destination for foreign students, of course, is the individual post-secondary institutions that host them. In this context as well, the mounting presence of foreign students has had implications for academic and social policy at the institutional level. Campuses have created specialized student support offices, liaison positions and student community organizations. An extensive and growing body of research literature on the foreign student experience exists in all the Anglophone destination countries. This literature assesses students belonging and integration, tests support programs and locates international students in the greater conversations about campus community and environment.

Research Question

Both the student experience research and the national news or policy reports on staying competitive are the two main discourses surrounding the phenomenon of student migration. Each discourse appears to be grappling with how student migration processes can be more successful— for nations and individuals. But notions of success differ dramatically depending on which stakeholders and discourses are heard. Whether discussing the national-level issues of recruitment and visa regulations or the institution/student-level concerns of integration and culture shock, the public discussions on foreign students seem to occur in two separate and often contradictory spheres. Since both discourses concern the same, real-life individuals that form populations of migrant students, it seems important to understand the relationship between the national-level policies and the student services research. It is in this relationship between two distinct discursive events that the paradoxical approaches to, and constructions of, foreign students are illuminated.

This research article explores the relationship between the two distinct discourses on foreign students by asking the questions: What is the relationship between national and institutional-level discourses on foreign students in the major Anglophone destination countries?

The research approaches this question using Norman Fairclough's (1993; 1995) framework of critical discourse analysis to define the notions of discourse and orders of discourse. Fairclough's work also provides a methodological framework of investigation with which to examine the above relationship between the two predominant discourses on foreign students. In the following article, the competing discourses of national and institutional-level outlooks on foreign students are examined in four traditional destination countries: Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States. The findings suggest that foreign students are objectified as tradable units in the market-driven discourse of economic development with student support literature providing a buffer that limits the critique of the economic discourse. At the same time, potential exists for current events to highlight the tension surrounding the two discourses and provide new opportunities for dialogue.

The first section of this article provides a justification of the research questions by reviewing existing literature on two spheres of foreign student mobility: national-level and institutional-level discourse. The second section summarizes the work of Fairclough and the use of critical discourse analysis. A subsequent description of the study's methodology is found in the third section. The latter half of the article addresses the research findings: The fourth section considers each sample country, providing an overview of national policy toward foreign students and the themes of the student support literature. The fifth section highlights the similarities and differences between nations. In the final section, the sub-questions of this research study are considered, illuminating the tensions and contradictions that exist between the two genres.

Literature Review: Competing Discursive Orders

This research study highlights the vague relationship that exists between competing discourses on foreign students in major Anglophone destination countries. As such, this study is situated within and between two main areas of literature that comment on contemporary shifts in higher education generally and on the construction of foreign students in particular. The former explores the marketization and commercialization of higher education as a result of neo-liberal capitalism while the latter challenges the view of foreign students as solely revenue generators within the ascendancy of economic discourse.

The first literature area that informs the current study is the research that focuses on changes in higher education as influenced by the features of globalization, neo-liberalism and late capitalism. Within this body of literature, numerous critical scholars have decried the increasing market-orientation and managerialism of public universities (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Olssen & Peters, 2005) making the case that the ascendancy of global markets as primary regulators and economic decision makers is shifting the nature of universities away from being free spaces of intellectual enquiry. Rather, as governments decrease funding and require universities to diversify income strategies, a new entrepreneurial institution and academic ethos is emerging. This literature is particularly relevant in Britain and Australia where federal governments have restructured financial systems, decreasing direct payment to universities and encouraging institutions to seek alternative funding from sources such as foreign students (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Marginson, 2007).

Neo-liberal market policy is also seen to be altering public perception on the role of higher education as a public or private good (Tilak, 2008). As university attendance is increasingly viewed to be a benefit to individuals, more of the burden of financing is shifting to the individual. This shift results in viewing higher education as a private consumer good and thus something to be profited from.

In a similar vein to the current study, several authors use discourse analysis to link the spheres of national policy and social practice around international students (Devos, 2003; Li 2006, 2008; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). Li (2006; 2009) uses critical discourse analysis to investigate the language of immigration documents, specifically those that describe the financial requirements of international students applying to Australian institutions. These studies are an example of how critical discourse analysis highlights contradictions and inequalities in discursive events, in Li's case, illuminating discriminatory racial processes. Bolsmann & Miller (2008) also use an analysis of three main international student discourses (cultural, economic and development) to contextualize interviews with university administrators about their recruitment of foreign students. This study suggests that in Britain the economic discourse surrounding the recruitment and regulation of foreign students is the dominant discourse, trumping other ways of approaching this migrant population.

Focusing on the Australian context, Devos (2003) reviews public discourse surrounding fears of the growing commercialization of higher education. In the Australian context, dramatic decreases in government funding have led public institutions to prioritize the recruitment of full fee-paying international students to generate new income. Within this discourse international students are constructed as both a problem and solution to commercialization and Devos suggests this is a signal of the nation's ambivalence to foreign students.

The current research article builds on the critical discourse analyses cited above, using a similar approach to examine two dominant discourses on foreign students that have mainly existed in dichotomous realms. This study fills the need, not just to expose the assumptions of the main discourses, but to explore the relationship between them and search for power relations. In a sense, this research study attempts to force a conversation between two discursive events that have said little to one another, but have an implicit relationship as each provides a dominant discursive construction of immigrant students.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

Understanding the relationship between the two main discourses on student immigration requires both a theoretical and methodological framework that views language as a social practice and allows for understanding the multiple relationships that may exist as discourses interact. The former perspective on language, as a social practice, is explored by Fairclough who (1993) builds on the work of Foucault (1979) and Fraser (1989). These scholars develop conceptual analyses in which they describe written or spoken language as a discourse, or social practice to be explored. In this view, language "is socially shaped, but it is also socially shaping, or constitutive" (Fairclough, 1993, p. 134). Research that is based on the exploration of language use, such as the current study, allows for an understanding of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief – all of which shape and are shaped by language. Thus, an investigation of the main public conversations, or discourses, around foreign students, begins to shed light on the identities, relationships, and ideologies that are present when recruiting and regulating foreign students.

Fairclough (1993) offers some tangible ways to conceptualize the various manifestations of language use in social life. The first manifestation he terms "discursive events," particular cases where common trends in language can be observed. Next, he suggests exploring how distinct discursive events interact with others, the power relations and tensions that emerge, in what he terms the "orders of discourse" (p. 135). For the present study, the proliferation of national news media and policy research that writes about foreign students in light of national,

economic interests is a discursive event. Whereas the interaction between this discursive event and that of student support, offers a chance to examine two orders of discourse. Fairclough suggests, “the boundaries and insulations between and within the orders of discourse may be points of conflict and contestation,” (p. 135). Thus, an examination of the relationships between the national and institutional discourses on foreign students may illuminate complexities of the relationship that are presently hidden.

Essential in Fairclough’s approach to discourse analysis is the focus on power relationships and struggles over power – the “critical” element. Fairclough’s underlying purpose in his framework is to use critical discourse analysis “as a resource in struggles against exploitation and domination,” (p. 134). In the process of comparing and contrasting the orders of discourse, the researcher is encouraged to look for instances where discourses are in conflict, where certain groups seek to gain control and where unquestioned ideologies uphold dominant discourses. The present research project investigates the relationship between two separate discursive events on the topic of immigrant students. One sees international students as an economic market to be engaged with, while the other seeks to understand and support their day-to-day lived experience. At first glance it does not appear that there is room for such opposing discourses, yet they co-exist. There are few realms where these two discourses overlap, and even fewer discussions about the relationship between the two. Using Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis, the current article focuses its investigation on the “the opacity of the relationship” between these discourses, exploring the contradictions and tensions that emerge (p. 135).

In the design of this study, the above perspective of critical discourse analysis was operationalized by asking the following sub-questions: What overlaps are seen between the discourses? What power struggles exist between the discourses? Does one colonize or provide a buffer for the other? What current ideologies sustain each discourse? What current events/trends shed light on the relationship?

Methods: Anglophone Countries and Discursive Events

Before outlining the data collection methods used in this study, it is helpful to have a brief discussion of definitions. The terms “international student” or “foreign student” are widely contested and often used vaguely in news media and literature (Devos, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the terms “international student,” “foreign student,” “immigrant or migrant student,” are used interchangeably to describe similar populations: students who have left their home nation to pursue a full-degree in another country. However, these terms refer to a slightly narrower collective depending on which discourse is being examined. Within the national-level discourse that positions student recruitment as an economic benefit, “international student” or a similar term refers to “full, fee-paying” foreign students who migrate to one of the sample countries for their full degree (Marginson, 2007). When examining the literature on the support of international students, the population under reference is often broader than the full fee-paying foreign students, including those on scholarship, those on short term study and generally any student who finds themselves outside their culture of familiarity and is need of certain student support resources.

To collect data for this study, four nations were used as samples: Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States. These four nations are frequently combined in the literature on foreign student recruitment as the major, Anglophone destination countries that recruit the majority of migrant students. While Canada and Australia do not recruit the same volume of

students as Britain and the USA, Australia was included in the study because of its recent growth in recruitment efforts and the extent to which it is indicated as a major competitor in the British and American literature. Canada was chosen because of the unique provincial system which sparks internal and external competition for student recruitment. It was also chosen since it is the location of the author.

The texts analysed in this study were drawn from three areas or distinct discursive events on foreign students: news media, government/think-tank policy reports, and academic research on institutional student support or marketing. To amass a useful sample of data with which to approach the above questions, a minimum of four documents were collected for each of the four discursive events in each of the sample countries.

Findings

Polarized Discourses

A main finding of this study, illuminated by the first phase of research in which relevant texts were collected for analysis, was the dichotomous nature of the two main discourses on foreign students. This finding, alluded to above, became a strong imperative for conducting this research. The news media and policy reports that related to national, economic advancement through the recruitment of international students said almost nothing about the day-to-day concrete experiences of foreign students. Similarly, the student support research on foreign student adjustment and integration had little mention of the government policies that contributed to or alleviated foreign students' difficulties. This finding was a significant confirmation of the need to investigate the "opaque" relationship between these two discourses, as they involve a similar population but construct and regulate that population in completely contradictory ways. While there are other discursive events in the public conversations on foreign students, the two examined here are by far the largest. They are continually growing and their polarization makes them particularly ideal as a site for discursive analysis.

Economic, Nation-Building Discourse

The textual analysis of select news media and government policy reports from each nation identifies a similar perspective on foreign students in each of the each sample nations. This discourse uses the language of competition, laced with a sense of urgency and constructs the international student population as a market rather than stakeholders in the migration process. The role of government is also contested in this domain as to whether more or less government regulation is needed.

Language of Competition. In each of the sample nations, the national discourse adopted the discursive genre of competition to describe the nation's role in the recruitment and regulation of international students. First, there was a clear emphasis on winners and losers. Articles had titles such as, "Canada losing out for foreign students," (TroyMedia, 2012) and content that decried or applauded the nation's international standing in their recruitment efforts. Within Canada, certain provinces are said to be losing out on recruiting students, while others are "winning this lucrative competition," (Dehaas, 2012).

In the GAO forum (2007) on US international recruitment, the US is referred to as "disadvantaged" because it does not have a national strategy for foreign student recruitment, impressive pessimism from the country that is the world leader in foreign student recruitment. In Britain the decline of the pound after the financial collapse was seen as a competitive

“advantage” that would help with foreign student recruitment, (Morgan, 2009). In each of the national discourses on student recruitment, the process of bringing in foreign students was constructed in the language of competition with clear winners and losers.

Urgency of Action. The news media and think-tank reports consistently emphasize the imminent threat to national markets and need for immediate action on foreign student policies. The president of the British university organization Universities UK used the term “timely” to describe new government policy as the “global competitors are stepping up their international activities,” (Labi, 2006). In Canada, the provincial recruitment activities are referred to as “aggressive,” (Dehaas, 2012). In the USA, the president of the Institute for International Education (IIE) called for “urgent action” regarding the decrease in the numbers of foreign students (Bollag 2004). In each of the sample countries, the need for continuous recruitment efforts and revised policies is heard in the discourse with a clear sense of urgency.

Stakeholders. Despite foreign students being the main subject of this discourse, none of the news articles or reports constructs international students as stakeholders in the recruitment/migration process, but rather as a recruitable, marketable population. Occasionally, when the policy discussions stray toward visa requirements there is a hint that actual people need the visas but overall the main stakeholders are national governments and economies. This feature of the discourse can be read in the following sentence, reflective of several others: “Statistics from late last year show that South Korea sends the most international students to Canada, followed by China, Japan, the United States and France,” (Birchard, 2005, p. A39). The language in the article suggests that students are sent by their nation, and that nations are the main actors. Yet, institutions, foreign students and recruitment agencies are the most active participants in the student migration process with the national governments merely facilitating or regulating the process.

The exception to the exclusively national-stakeholder view is found in select Australian government literature that constructs supporting students as an essential component of making Australia an attractive place to study and thus staying competitive in global recruitment (Australian Government, 2010). These policy documents are one location where the two discourses meet although the support of students is somewhat appropriated by national recruitment goals. This provides a potential example of buffering discussed at the conclusion of this article.

Overall, the discourse of national, economic competitiveness, found in news media, government policy and think tanks, constructs the student migration process as a macro-level interaction between nations. Recruiting and regulating foreign students is a time-sensitive issue that will have distinct winners and losers. Foreign students themselves are not stakeholders in the process and there is urgency for governments to engage in this issue for the sake of the nation.

Student Services and Supports Discourse

As early as the 1960’s, research studies were being conducted on the adjustment of foreign students to their host countries (Duetch 1963; Klineberg & Hull; 1979; Morris 1960). Research over the past 50 years has been mainly concerned with the cultural support and academic success of foreign students. Much of the early research was focused on the United States but more recently there has been a steady growth of comparative literature on foreign student support as

well research from the all the major Anglophone destination countries as numbers of foreign students continue to grow. This research has become a distinct discourse that frames international students as individuals and communities to be cared for and supported. The language is that of accommodation and care while the students and institutions are seen as the main stakeholders. While a call for action exists in this literature, it is not a sense of urgency based around economic competition but a focus on policies and programming that allow students to successfully complete their academic program and feel a part of their campus community.

Language of Support and Stress. While the nation-states are competing to win the lucrative foreign-student market, student services offices and international centres on campuses in the four sample nations are researching how best to support international students. In the language of these articles, “support” is the number one word used to describe the efforts of institutions. Studies suggest that students need to be supported as they learn a new culture and language, engage in new pedagogical forms and make friends on campus.

The motive for supporting international students in many of the current articles is the acknowledgment that international students experience numerous manifestations of “stress” in their transition to a new academic and cultural environment. Students’ stress is linked to language barriers, lack of social community, self-confidence (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

The use of the term “stress” is particularly telling about the approach these articles are taking to frame student experience. The analyses tend to look beyond just the functional, instrumental concerns of higher education to the emotional impact that this has on students as it manifests in “stress.” Rather than just tackle the functional restrictions on students’ academic performance, the focus on stress seems to indicate that student support research is concerned about the individual, taking a holistic approach to support that includes their emotional and mental health.

Within this discourse the student is often constructed as the passive recipient of institutional support and care. In contrast the institution has the dual role of housing the risky environment in which so many international students experience stress as well as being the source of programming for student assistance. Support resources such as programs and individual counseling are often touted as the solutions for stressed students rather than government policy.

Stakeholders. In contrast to the national discourse of economic competitiveness in which national economies are the primary beneficiary of foreign student recruitment, the literature on student support points to the students as the main stakeholders in the migration and foreign study process with the institution or campus community being a distant runner up. The language of support is directly related to individuals and groups of students rather than national governments or even institutions.

Solutions. In the extensive literature on foreign student adjustment to Anglophone nations, the main focus is a praxis-oriented, solutions discourse. Numerous articles test intervention programs on foreign student populations and offer practical suggestions for improving student experience. More programming at the institutional level, new student support groups, new orientation techniques are just a few of the solutions explored in the student support literatures. What is clearly missing, however, is any appeal to governments to change policy in favour of foreign students. Within the limited sample used for this study there is no discussion about

whether the challenges faced by international students might be interlinked to government regulations and bureaucracy. Rather, the discourse of helping students is occurring entirely at an institutional level, attempting to solve foreign student problems while placing little responsibility on the government.

Implications and Discussion

While the two distinct discourses outlined above appear to have little overlap or relationships with one another, a critical discourse analysis helps to highlight the contradictions and tensions that exist, illuminating the often invisible relationship between the two. In the design of this study, Fairclough's framework was operationalized by asking the following sub-questions in order to make visible the invisible relationship: What power struggles exist between the discourses? Does one colonize or provide a buffer for the other? What current ideologies sustain each discourse? What current events/trends shed light on the relationship?

Power Struggles Between Markets and Humans

The principal power struggle that is seen in the discourses on foreign students concerns their national-level, media construction as non-human markets as compared with the student services discourse that affirms international students as vulnerable populations. The language used in the former is that of technical, economic market instrumentality, whereas the latter strives for community or individual support.

The power struggle between these discourses over how to conceptualize foreign students is symptomatic of the growing marketization of higher education. This reflects Apple's (2005) suggestion that all aspects of social life are being transformed and altered according to market relations. The first significant change that Apple refers to in the ascendancy of marketization, is that, "the services or goods that are to be focused upon must be reconfigured so that they can indeed be bought and sold," (p. 382). The unconscious re-definition of foreign students as "lucrative markets" is a clear example of what Apple is describing. The discourse of urgent, nation-level economics is sustained by, and sustaining, the notion that foreign students can be recruited and imported.

Power Struggle Over Government Involvement

There is also a tension in the literature regarding how involved the government should be. In the nation-level discourse, the government and national-economy are constructed as the main stakeholders of the foreign student migration process. In the American case in particular, there is a major tension around the role of government. Some stakeholders call for more government strategies to unify recruitment and regulation, while others suggest that the government needs to back off and have less regulation for students entering the country. The GAO forum mentioned above considers that the United States is losing the recruitment battle since it "lacks an integrated, strategic approach to recruiting and retaining international students," (GAO, 2007, 2). Yet, NAFSA, the major American network for student support professionals, has called decried the "gamut of government barriers" that foreign students face in forms of visa and financial regulations, (Bollag, 2004, A1).

Sustaining Ideologies

The language of competition and urgency is the sustaining ideology that upholds a national economic discourse and continues to construct students as markets to be won. This discourse

exists in the discursive genre of the news media with little contestation from other sources. Though some are critical of the growing commercialism and marketization of foreign student bodies, the discourse of urgency has not been challenged in any current discursive event that is publicly available (Marginson, 2007; Devos 2003). No public discourse has been heard suggesting that perhaps the United States and others will not cease to exist if they take the time to construct a holistic, metered approach to student recruitment, immigration and campus adjustment. This unquestioned discourse of “urgent action” and “aggressive recruitment efforts” is the sustaining ideology that allows the nation-level, economic market discourse to remain dominant.

Colonization and Buffers

In Fairclough’s (1993) description of critical discourse analysis he asks whether one discourse might be colonizing another or maintaining unquestioned hegemony. The language of colonization suggests that one discourse is using another to build its own place of power and dominance. The two leading discourses on foreign student migration are a clear example of competing discourses in which one can be seen to uphold the other. The example of Australian policy documents mentioned above indicates that government policy is being formed to support students, but that this is primarily motivated by a desire to keep Australia competitive in foreign recruitment. In this context the student support discourse can be seen as colonized by the focus on national competitiveness.

Beyond the colonization framework, it is helpful to conceptualize this paradoxical relationship between discourses of economic nationalism and student support by using Kivel’s (2007) notion of policy “buffer zones.” This analytical frame suggests that the activities of one policy arena may be preventing system change in another arena. The role of foreign student support programs and literature may be seen as deflecting attention from the inherent inequalities of foreign student recruitment and regulation at a national level where students are constructed as markets. The increasing volume of literature on foreign student support is indicative of a large problem, but it also indicates an unending search for fixes to the problem. When viewed as a “buffer zone” however, the student support literature can be seen as cloaking the marketized construction of international students and limiting national-level critique. There is a need for more critical research from the student support field to challenge the inequalities at all levels, exposing the relationships between the governments, institutions and students.

Contradictions in Current Events

Fairclough (1993) suggests that an analysis of current events in light of competing discourses can often illuminate the contradictory relationships and power struggles that exist. Indeed, a recent change in the UK government policy toward international students provides an illustration of how the student support arena acts as a buffer for the neo-liberal, national discourse of competition that is exploitative of foreign students. The UK government recently rescinded its position on Post-Study Work (PSW) visas that have allowed foreign students to remain in the UK and work after graduation. International students will no longer have access to these visas, and subsequently employment in the UK, after graduating from UK institutions. Recruitment agencies for international students have claimed that the policy change has decreased the number of incoming students by as much as 50 percent (Agnisheik, 2012). Articles written about this change have been very critical of the government. The direct implication for institutions is a

lack of the employment for the students they are responsible for equipping with higher education.

The British BSW visa issue is a clear example of where the two competing discourses are interlinked. Governments, not institutions, determine students' work abilities, yet institutions, not governments facilitate the transition of students through their university programs and out into the workforce. This situation provides a challenge to human capital, or investment paradigms of higher education. How are students able to maximize their investment, and seek gainful employment, when government regulation prevents them from working afterward?

At the same time, one could question whether this policy might counter the brain drain that is rampant in the developing world as Western nations poach foreign students. In answering that question, the notion of buffers becomes very important. The UK's history of policies toward international students has seen large barriers in the past, such as the deregulation of international student fees under the Thatcher government in the 1980's (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). Yet, the UK has still retained its position as the second largest foreign student destination in the world. Further research would be helpful in understanding the role of foreign student support initiatives in buffering the negative policies of the government and maintaining the large in-flow of students. Overall, the UK's PSW visa regulations provide a helpful current event that blurs the boundaries between the two discourses and exposes the contradictions of their ambiguous relationship.

Conclusion

International students bring enormous financial revenue to their host countries. For the major Anglophone, destination countries it is estimated that the international student service industry ranks among the top five economic generators (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008). At the institutional level, foreign students provide much needed financial income as well as increasing the diversity of campus and academic life. The importance of international students to both national and institutional advancement is evident in the expansive discourses that surround them. The two main discourses on international students – the national-level discourse of economic competitiveness and the student services discourse of support and care – have little to say to one another. This paper has used a critical discourse approach to explore the often invisible relationship between the two discourses. Though no official interaction is seen, the argument can be made that the discourse of foreign student support provides a buffer for the unequal government policies that treat foreign students as tradable commodities.

This research has raised several questions for further investigation. Though this study has highlighted the main features of both national/economic and institutional/student support discourses, these two discursive events are by no means static. Rather, stakeholders at various levels, as well as the changing nature of the discourses themselves, have agency to shape and re-frame these discourses. Further research is necessary to determine how stakeholders are challenging and re-inventing these discourses to address their priorities in relation to foreign student recruitment. Another area for further research is the potential of the students themselves and their capacity for organizing collectively and challenging dominant discourses. On a macro-level, the significance of the nation-state to these debates should be explored in light of the globalization theses that suggest the nation-state is decreasing in power. Is the current primacy of the nation-state in foreign student discourse evidence that the nation-state is alive and well, or an eleventh hour, urgent effort to save that which is struggling? And finally, there is room to relate this analysis to other current events including violence against foreign students and foreign

student enrollment choices. It is in these events that the inter-relatedness of multiple levels of student recruitment, regulation and retention becomes apparent.

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