

Neoliberalism in Christian Schools: Tensions and Justifications

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All schools engage with neoliberal requirements like generating self-authored descriptions on My School and school websites. How do Christian Schools negotiate and prioritise their values in these public facing sites? This presentation highlights three different ways that Independent Christian or themelic schools wrestled with or accommodated Neoliberal Discourses that are promoted by governments in setting Australia's education agenda and that provide some of the main discursive choices available to schools.

The study was a three stage Discourse analysis. First a list of independent Christian schools was generated from the My School database using criteria drawn from a Christian school Discourse. Gee's D/discourse tools (2014) which identify large D Discourse (commonly broadly understood Discourses) and small d discourses (day-to-day discourses) were then used to interrogate the neoliberal Discourse and themelic Christian D/discourses on the school descriptions from the My School site. Finally some purposively selected sample school websites were analysed to provide evidence of how schools negotiate, prioritise and represent their educational values and purposes as they draw on multiple Discourses as they self-author public facing descriptions of their schools. The Orders of Worth framework developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) provided the theoretical frame through which the smaller textual moves of discourse seemed to come together into bigger "D" Discourses with their accompanying value sets. The study proposed that instead of the intersection of values being an overt conflict of values requiring themelic Christian schools to 'wrestle' with conflicting values, importantly there are some key values that were intersections in the neoliberal and themelic Discourses.

When undertaking the analysis of the websites it was apparent that the representations through words in the My School profiles were consistent with the representations of words and images on the school websites. The consistency of D/discourse across the two different self-authored web texts demonstrated an internal coherency in the way that the school present themselves to a wider audience. In three three key values where there was potential tension between neoliberal and themelic Christian values. There was evidence that either consciously or unconsciously in the school discourses these tensions were resolved consistently and in line with the Orders of Worth being drawn upon.

Understanding how schools represent themselves in public facing websites, and in these texts, how they resolve tensions between educational purpose and policy needs is one way we can imagine how education might look in a post COVID context.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On justification: economies of worth*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.2189/asqu.53.4.762>

Gee, J. P. (2014). *How to do discourse analysis: a toolkit* (Second edition. ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315819662>