Governmentality through Intertextuality: Strategic Planning Discourse in the Administration of Tertiary Education

Derek Wallace
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

From the beginning of the present century, the discourse of strategic planning has entered the administration of the tertiary education sector in New Zealand. Consequently, educational organizations have been increasingly required to engage with central government through the exchange of written texts. The accumulation of texts has provided an opportunity to use discourse analysis – in particular, intertextual analysis as developed by Norman Fairclough – to trace the shifting interrelations among the institutions involved.

Intertextual analysis has tended, for understandable practical reasons, to centre on the textual relations emanating from or towards a single core text. What distinguishes the approach described in this presentation is that it is significantly extended both diachronically and synchronically across multiple series of documents. The presentation will focus on how a certain mode of rule – the advanced liberal governmentality identified by sociologists Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose – came to be enacted and modified through institutional interaction. Several interconnected textual chains have been analysed according to the relative presence and absence of explicit connections amongst them; and attention has been paid to characteristics of, and changes in, the compositional structure of identifiable genres.

Notable findings include a surprising dearth of explicit intertextual connections and an apparent concern among all parties that their texts exhibit institutional identity and autonomy. Further, from the perspective of governmentality studies, the analysis reveals a significant recent shift on the part of state representatives away from the ‘governing at a distance’ that had been proposed by Miller and Rose as characteristic of contemporary forms of rule. On the other hand, the required adoption of the discursive practices of strategic planning by universities has enabled for their own internal administration a move towards advanced liberal governing-at-a-distance which, compared with previous modes, represents a tightening of managerial control.

Keywords: strategic planning, governmentality, intertextuality.