A Critical Discourse Analysis of the WorkChoices Legislation from an Occupational Perspective

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Summary of the research

Occupational therapy is based upon a belief in the dynamic relationship between occupation, health, and wellbeing. Of central concern are the dimensions of agency, and choice and control in and over patterns of occupational engagement. Occupational therapy has also historically been predicated upon an orientation towards the achievement of equity and justice in occupational participation for all persons.

Given this disciplinary orientation, the recent, radical reform of Australia’s industrial relations system should be of central concern. The WorkChoices legislation represents a significant diminution of workers rights in the form of choice and control over numerous aspects of working life. Since coming into effect in March 1996, the legislation has been found to have had a negative impact on the most marginalized groups of workers in Australian society, including women and migrant workers, in terms of income generation and conditions and security of employment.

In this dissertation, a critical discourse analysis is used to examine a WorkChoices newspaper advertisement in order to highlight the discursive construction and hegemonic intent of the reform agenda. Findings of the analysis are presented and the implications are discussed relative to occupational therapy research, practice, professional political action, and education.