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Values and discipline in the Catholic school: the discourse of pre-service teachers

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The Catholic school is currently facing new challenges that demand an urgent re-evaluation of its social role, its internal functioning, and its educational model. This study aimed to delve into the way in which *values* and *discipline* are conceived in this type of educational institution, based on the testimonies of 22 students from the Master's degree in Teaching at the University of Seville (Spain). The application of critical discourse analysis to a corpus consisting of practice reports prepared by these pre-service teachers would highlight a great versatility in both signifiers, being linked to numerous sub-discourses marked by the tradition-modernity dialectic.

Keywords: Catholic school; school discipline; educational values; pre-service teachers

Introduction

(…) words such as education, quality, awareness, and values are imbued with such disparate connotations that we may not only be expressing different ideas but also conveying contradictory notions when employing the same terms (Santos Guerra 2010, 296).

Traditionally, Catholic schools have asserted the teaching of values as one of their main hallmarks. Where this schooling model exists, it is considered as the primary agent of youth evangelisation, encouraging educators to become Catholic teachers: 'intimately linked in charity to one another and to their students and endowed with an apostolic spirit, may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher' (Pope Paul VI 1965). In this manner, Catholic schools present themselves as 'an alternative to the vague humanism of public schools, as they provide young people with a strong identity and uphold responsibility and social service' (Hallinan 2000, 218).

Indeed, numerous reports emanating from national ecclesiastical hierarchies or the Vatican itself express this sentiment (Baum and Javierre 1988; Congregation for Catholic Education 2014; Grocholewski and Zani 2013; Versaldi and Zani 2017; 2022). Such documents consistently underscore how Catholic schools constitute an essential component of the Church's evangelising and salvific mission, particularly in the face of 'cultural counter-values that threaten human dignity' (Baum and Javierre 1988). In doing so, this educational model ensures the preservation of a

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distinct identity in a world dominated by economic materialism and global capitalism (Aristimuño 2020; McCormack et al. 2019).

The educational values purportedly promoted by Catholic schools are diverse and ecumenical, as they can be found in various geographical contexts. These values include reconciliation, justice, social cohesion, and inclusion, as well as the advocacy for pluralism, diversity, and human dignity (The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland 2001). In addition to these principles, freedom, love, justice, mercy, and the comprehensive development of individuals have also been emphasised (Flaherty 2019; Gleeson and O'Flaherty 2016; Meehan 2023). In some countries, beyond humanistic values, there are other values of a political and nationalist nature, such as assisting in integration and national development, exhibiting a certain unity of the civic and the religious (Ocampo 2004).

In the Latin American context, various national churches have advocated for the role of Catholic education in promoting democratic coexistence and in providing instruction on rights, duties, and democratic and civic values, as well as fostering critical and reflective thinking (Cuautle Quechol 2021; Meza-Rueda et al. 2015). However, in other documents, we observe that the values education in Catholic schools is defined strictly in religious terms, as part of God's salvific plan or prophetic action (Consudec 2015). Specifically, the graduation masses for students, liturgies in the local church, or visits from the bishop are emphasised. Neary, Gray, and O'Sullivan (2018) argue that, in these contexts, 'Catholicism remains deeply rooted and operates largely as an unquestionable norm through cultural traditions' (440).

In contrast, numerous studies have pointed out that confessional schools are inadequate for cultivating civic virtues such as tolerance and respect for others, and for developing the ability to impartially reason about matters of common interest (Go 2018; Sen 2022; Viktorahadi et al. 2020; Vincent 2018). This includes the potential harm of religious indoctrination and threats to personal autonomy and freedom of expression, as well as the prejudice and stigmatisation that children belonging to minority groups may face (Mason and Wareham 2018). In fact, Wodon (2020) has found that Catholic schools tend to focus more on children from affluent households than those from impoverished ones.

On the other hand, some authors (Grace 2002; Keefe 2021) have pointed out how market-driven and managerial agendas, based on competition between schools and academic achievement (Ozal et al. 2019), have come into contradiction with the values and integrity of the mission of Catholic schools, as well as their spiritual, moral, and social justice commitments. In many cases, this has led to the modification of *ethos* or distinctive identities to attract the attention of families (Bragg and Manchester 2011).

Another contradiction arising from the aggiornamento of confessional schools in their efforts to meet the demands of parent-consumers is the incorporation of educational innovation (Fuller y Sada 2022; Guest 2021). The dynamic and playful component of this new set of discourses and practices, and the change in relationships that its teaching strategies induce, can conflict with the authoritarian nature of discipline, hierarchy, and the rules and principles inherent in confessional schools (Oviedo and Wildemeersch 2008).

Despite the prevailing opinion in many countries regarding confessional schools, certain research has warned of an increase in discipline problems, including violence, bullying, inadequate parental support, as well as teacher complaints about their salaries and working conditions (Burau and Romano 2023; Hallman 2022; Lewyckyj

2021; Luna et al. 2022; Nkengne et al. 2021). A report from the National Center for Education Statistics in the USA on discipline in public and private schools (Robers et al. 2014) revealed that both are similar in terms of student misbehaviour, including both lack of respect and behaviours that interfere with teaching. In addition, due to the control exerted by parents over the school and the inclination towards privilege, private schools may report fewer disciplinary problems (Finefter-Rosenbluh 2022).

As part of a broader investigation (Pineda-Alfonso and Luna 2024), this study aimed to delve into how values and discipline are conceived in Catholic schools from the perspective of discursive construction. This approach itself represents a novelty compared to the studies mentioned earlier, where the meanings handled by educational communities occupy a very secondary place in relation to the practices they generate or condition. On this occasion, the chosen object of study is the discourses constructed by pre-service teachers during their practicum in Catholic schools. Such narratives were conceived as privileged sources of information to understand the predominant *ethos* in Catholic schools. Specifically, the following research problems were posed:

(1) What conceptions related to values and discipline are integrated into the identity discourses of Catholic schools where this study was contextualized?
(2) What correspondence exists between these institutional conceptions and the classroom reality described by the pre-service teacher?
(3) What utility does critical discourse analysis offer in addressing the previous questions and understanding how values and discipline are currently conceived in Catholic schools?

Materials and methods

The primary source of information for this study was a documentary corpus consisting of 22 practicum reports, totalling 856 pages. These reports detail the formative experiences of 22 authors, all of whom were pre-service secondary school teachers enrolled in the Master's in Teaching (MAES) programme at the University of Seville, Spain. The authors prepared their reports under the guidance of both professional mentors and seven academic mentors, the latter being members of the Department of Experimental and Social Sciences Teaching at the aforementioned university.

During their practicum period, pre-service teachers have the opportunity to reproduce, reaffirm, reconstruct, or reframe their beliefs about the teaching profession and all its associated conceptions (such as views on students, teaching objectives and content, methodology, classroom management, etc.). These beliefs and conceptions are influenced by various discursive strategies and semiotic resources, as well as by the relationships established with: on one hand, their professional mentor, the experienced teacher who acts as a direct reference; and on the other, their academic university tutor, who typically represents the official pedagogical discourse and whose evaluation impacts the trainee's formative experience.

The contexts in which the pre-service teachers conducted their practicum were a set of affiliated educational centres ($n = 22$) in the province of Seville, Spain. All these centres identified as confessional Catholic, whether private ($n = 2$) or semi-private ($n = 20$), and were either managed by a religious congregation ($n = 14$) or owned by private individuals or entities ($n = 8$). According to Spanish legislation, the purpose of semi-private education is to ensure the provision of free education at compulsory

levels where public school places are insufficient and to 'facilitate families' freedom to choose an educational institution other than those established by public authorities' (Organic Law 2/2006 of May 3). This is where the controversial concept of 'distinctive carácter' comes into play, to which semi-private centres are entitled provided they respect the freedom of conscience established in the Spanish Constitution.

The chosen method to address the sources of information was critical discourse analysis. Within this theoretical and methodological framework, verbal language is conceived as the primary means of interaction and construction of the reality of different educational agents and their specific intentions (Fairclough 2003; Wodak and Meyer 2009). Based on the proposal by Pardo Abril (2013), with some adjustments (Pineda-Alfonso and Luna 2024), a specific analytical procedure was adopted, organised into four phases: (1) pre-analysis; (2) lexicometric analysis; (3) content analysis; and (4) linguistic analysis. The decision to employ these four approaches stems from the complexity of both the corpus and the research issues at hand, for which sufficient triangulation and complementarity mechanisms needed to be deployed to ensure interpretative rigour. The results presented below specifically originate from the two central phases of this procedure (lexicometric and content analysis).

Results of the lexicometric analysis

Firstly, the lexicometric relevance of the identified topics during the preliminary analysis was verified. All these topics were related to the educational values addressed in Catholic schools. In this regard, we chose to calculate the degree of singularity or tendency that the core terms explicitly representing these topics possessed, compared to their frequency in a reference corpus – in this case, the Corpus de Referencia del Español Actual (CREA). To achieve this, the Keyword List functionality provided by the AntConc tool was employed, utilising the Log Likelihood statistical measure. The significance values of this measure are as follows (see Table 1).

The terms tracked in the corpus consistently have a keyness value well above 53.17, confirming the significance of all of them as keywords. Below is a selection of these terms grouped together (see Table 2), according to the sum of frequencies of those that share the same lexeme.

After confirming the uniqueness of the key terms in the corpus, we proceeded with the identification and representation of associations using the Sketch Engine (SE) software. This technique is particularly useful for understanding the lexical elements that form and accompany the most significant discursive units according to the research objectives. The following typology of elements was considered as associations:

Table 1. Log Likelihood significance values.

Percentile	Percentage	*P*-value	Critical value
95	5%	<0,05	3,84
99	1%	<0,01	6,63
99,9	0,1%	<0,001	10,83
99,99	0,01%	<0,0001	15,13

Source: https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html.

Table 2. Keywords of the corpus.

| Range	Word	Frequency	Keyness	Range	Word	Frequency	Keyness
1	Coexistence	269	1076,9	9	Principles	45	172,9
2	Values	149	591,81	10	Church	41	156,88
3	Religious	113	430,64	11	Control	43	114,56
	Religion	22	89,1		(To) control	15	35,21
4	Pastoral	117	462,65	12	Silence	37	140,88
	Pastorals	17	61,41	13	Christian	27	95,42
5	Character	80	324,02		Christians	13	45,73
6	Behaviour	54	300	14	Punishment	15	53,55
7	Discipline	61	237,1		Punishments	10	34,08
	Disciplinary	8	26,4		Punished	13	45,73
8	Catholic	43	174,15	15	Philosophy	35	132,89
	Catholics	13	52,65	16	Ideology	28	106,3
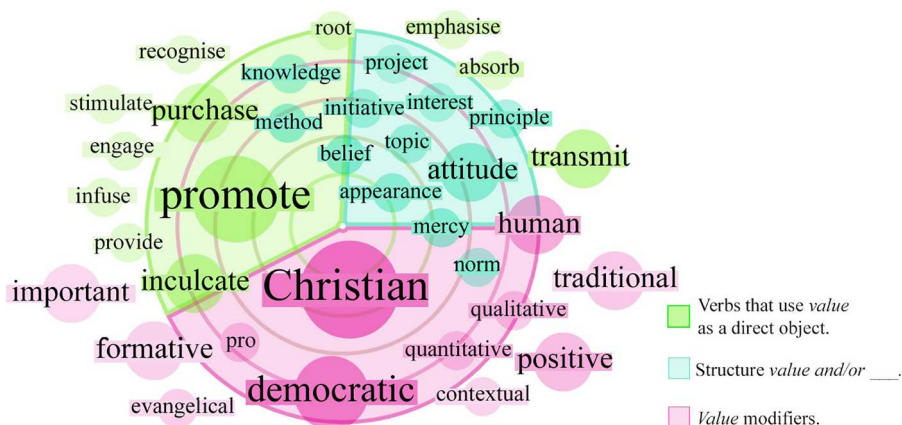
Figure 1. Examples of collocations of the lexical unit *value*.

- *Collocations*: grammatical structures in which the key lexical units identified during the analysis are included (see Figure 1). The frequency and exclusivity with which each lexical unit appears in these collocations are represented by the size and position of its circle, respectively.
- *Combinations*: variants formed from the same lexemes present in the key lexical units. In the example below (see Table 3), key combinations (with respect to the reference corpus) derived from the term 'coexistence' have been sought. For this, the N-Grams functionality of SE has been used, selecting a range of 2–4 components.
- *Concordances*: the sums of the preceding and following co-texts that accompany each key lexical unit. To extract these fragments (see Table 4), the specific functionality (Concordance) offered by SE in this regard has been used.
- *Co-occurrences*: terms highlighted for their high frequency of appearance in concordances (see Table 5). In this regard, the Collocations option was selected within the Concordance functionality of SE, establishing a search range of 3 words before and 3 after and using statistical measures such as Log Likelihood, previously used, and also LogDice. The latter indicates the typicality of

Table 3. Main combinations containing the lexical unit *coexistence*.

Range	Combination	Frequency	Score
1	Coexistence room	14	1119,85
2	Coexistence rules	17	1099,56
3	Coexistence in the centre	6	461,01
4	Coexistence plan	5	386,39
5	Coexistence model	4	296,08
6	For coexistence	5	294,37
7	Harmful to coexistence	3	240,14
8	Coexistence problems	3	210,18
9	School coexistence	3	205,93
10	To improve coexistence	2	153,78

Table 4. Selection of concordances of the key term *educational philosophy*.

Previous co-text	Term	Subsequent co-text	Location
The distinctive nature or	educational philosophy	is the document in which the Foundation defines its identity and establishes an anthropological, ethical, and religious model that will serve as the foundation for the educational, pedagogical, administrative, legal, and pastoral approaches of the institutions it comprises.	S13MP
The adherence to the school's rules, the adherence to its	educational philosophy,	and the sharing of common interests and activities are reasons that integrate students into their daily life in the classroom, with serious disciplinary issues being infrequent.	S14MP
In relation to the	educational philosophy	of the school and its responsible department, the Pastoral Plan has as general objectives to educate the students through prayer, religious education, sacramental life, and the practice of charity, while knowing and deepening in human and Christian values.	S14MP
All these activities, designed for all levels, bring students closer to the	educational philosophy	of the school and prepare them to receive the Holy Sacraments, from Communion to Confirmation, thanks to the extensive and specific catechesis plan.	S14MP
Of course, it is a sine qua non duty for the student to adhere to and respect the rules and the	educational philosophy	of the school since they freely choose to enrol here.	S22MP
The school aims for its teachers to be at the forefront. Since its	educational philosophy	is based on excellence in all aspects, they seek to maintain their good results by relying on the pedagogical cutting edge of the moment, such as emotional intelligence.	S22MP
The selection of students is carried out through a numerical and objective scoring system, and it is essential to sign a contract, with a marked Catholic character, in which the	educational philosophy	and educational project of the school are accepted.	S67MP

Table 5. Main co-occurrences (lemmas) of the key term *discipline*.

Range	Word	Log Likelihood	LogDice
1	Order	29,52	9,87
2	Connection	21,39	9,85
3	Strict	20,86	9,83
4	Lack	22,50	9,71
5	Serious	17,61	9,64
6	Mark	17,19	9,61
7	Punishment	16,47	9,54
8	Control	15,08	9,39
9	Measure	13,89	9,22
10	Capital	15,18	9,00

collocations formed from the identified co-occurrences, relating the frequencies of the searched unit (in Table 5, *discipline*) and the entire collocation of which it is a part.

Results of content analysis

From the lexicometric analysis, a series of semantic fields were inferred and distilled into one main category and two subcategories of analysis (see Table 6).

The allusion to 'firm values, principles, and ideals' (VAPRI-S2MP) is frequent in the institutional discourse of Catholic schools represented in the research corpus. This topic is wielded as an identity and differentiating element that marks the uniqueness and distinction of these types of institutions. To this end, there is the implementation of 'numerous activities to reinforce these attitudes' (VAPRI-S11MP), which determines the fact that the term 'values' constitutes a versatile signifier, being used even as a synonym for social practices or rituals, and in the context of different semantic fields. For example:Principio del formulario.

> We had the opportunity to participate in the school festivities, held between Holy Week and the April Fair, and we could see in them a series of principles present in the school, such as the communal mass, sports and artistic competitiveness, and the latent sense of identity in the majority of the students at the centre, which is clearly expressed when singing the school anthem. (VAPRI-S70MP)

Table 7 compiles a selection of excerpts that concretely exemplify the diversity of semantic fields linked to educational values in the corpus.

As can be observed, traditional Catholic and nationalist values coexist seamlessly with constant appeals, not only to effort, excellence, or meritocracy but

Table 6. Category and subcategories of analysis focus in this article.

Category	Subcategories
The management of coexistence (MACO)	Values and principles (VAPRI)
	Discipline and control (DISCON)

Table 7. Semantic fields linked to the signifier *values* in the corpus.

Semantic field	Examples
Spanish nationalism	Traditional values with a clear ideological component are conveyed throughout the school. The entire centre is adorned with images of El Cid Campeador, Blas de Lezo, or San Fernando, along with graduation pictures of former students and the school motto, 'Honour, Homeland, Glory', embedded in a Spanish flag … (VAPRI-S18MP).
Pedagogy	We can say that institutionalist Krausism permeates the spirit of the school's action programme. Its educational proposal is designed to extract excellence from each student. (VAPRI-S22MP).
	Invocations to emblematic schools and figures such as Giner de los Ríos or Father Manjón (VAPRI-S10).
	There are second, third, fourth, and fifth chances, and effort is rewarded. It is a unique institution where a lot of work is put in, where teachers are involved, and where day-to-day operations require significant efforts (VAPRI-S2MP).
Sports activities	Sports are understood as character builders and tools to develop spirit, confidence, and a competitive spirit – distinctive elements that emanate from the soul of the school (VAPRI-S38MP)

also to innovative principles dependent on a kind of cult to authentic *secular pedagogical apostolate.* In this interdiscursive interplay, one cannot ignore those signifiers from the semantic field of democratic values and human rights:Principio del formulario.

> Our values include critical thinking, solidarity, and the care of nature, as well as love for the homeland, as perfect examples of the prototype of values defended by the institution. (VAPRI-S20MP)
>
> The educational purpose is to provide students with content while shaping them into individuals who integrate appropriately into our society, who have role models, and acquire suitable behavioural patterns. (VAPRI-S66MP)
>
> … to educate in democratic values through the culture of individual freedom, tolerance, and respect for diversity, good manners and solidarity, the peaceful and non-violent resolution of conflicts, encourage students' participation in extracurricular activities, and the consolidation of civic sensitivity and responsible civic awareness … but without forgetting human and cultural education so that they have a civic and critical consciousness of the issues we live in. (VAPRI-S18MP)

As emphasised in some texts, all these educational aspects are interpreted 'under the principle of religion, which emanates from the centre's own character' (VAPRI-S18MP). Indeed, alongside the objectives of values education common to all educational centres in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, there are others specific to the Pastoral Plan of the centres; for example: 'Offer students the possibility of considering their own lives according to the Gospel, promoting coherence between faith, the progress of science, and sociocultural changes from the charisma of the congregation of the College' (VAPRI-S15MP). Both organisational and curricular documents and the declarative discourse of various stakeholders, including the practicing teachers, echo the 'intense pastoral activity' (VAPRI-S14MP) characteristic of these centres.

This phenomenon is manifested through events such as the mandatory religious education class (VAPRI-S67MP), the donation of food to charitable institutions (VAPRI-S11MP), or, in general, all kinds of practices linked to Catholic worship (prayer at the beginning of class, masses during school hours, pastoral meetings, catechesis classes, pilgrimages, spiritual retreats, visits to the centre's chapel and churches, preparation of Holy Week processions, etc.) (VAPRI-S3MP). The following excerpt perfectly describes how these elements are articulated in everyday school life: Principio del formulario.

> The weight of Catholicism is very strong; it is present, and it is surprising how the chapel is used daily. Just when recess ends (12pm), all students must attend to listen to the 'reflection of the day'. It serves as an assembly hall, and students are in Mass listening to moralizing or civic speeches, also addressing issues in education, although they generally refer to reprimands from teachers to students for misbehaviour, grades, etc. I have also witnessed the religious space being used to announce the new exam schedule. However, it always concludes with the Lord's Prayer. (VAPRI-S10MP)

In one of the schools, they have the 'Solidarity Friday', which aims to instil attitudes of solidarity by making donations to the Food Bank and other charitable institutions. From a critical standpoint, the practicing teacher describes this act as 'Christian charity':

> It is about shaping a subject that does not differ from one another. Christian charity with food collection campaigns, but there is no discussion of the tremendous social inequalities faced by the country. There is insistence on respect for democratic values and tolerance, but in practice, there is a system of constant repression in the face of the slightest dissenting comment from a student (…). (VAPRI-S10MP)

On the other hand, teachers in Catholic schools, who 'belong to a middle-upper-class, adhere to the same Catholic ideals and reinforce them to a great extent' (VAPRI-S11MP). However, from the statements of some of the pre-service teachers, it is evident that this identification is not always voluntary because 'it is essential to sign some type of contract, with a marked Catholic character, in which the ideology and educational project of the school are accepted' (VAPRI-S22MP). In fact, one of the novice teachers describes the case of a teacher who claimed to have been dismissed due to his sexual orientation, and instead of supporting him, his colleagues rallied behind a statement from the administration asserting that the accusation was false:

> Analysing the attitudes that many teachers have in private, I have serious doubts about the sincerity of said statement, where I believe that the tangible reality of the teachers, parents, and mothers aged between 40–60 is more accurately reflected. They strive to defend their jobs, knowing the tremendous difficulties they would face if they were dismissed or if their employment contracts were not renewed. (DISCON-S10MP)

In any case, values also appear in the texts alongside behaviours and external signs related to discipline: 'for these teachers, education must be linked to teaching values and cultural aspects, as well as the application of discipline based on respect for authority' (DISCON-S10MP). In fact, discipline is described as 'non-negotiable' (DISCON-S10MP), and even in one of these centres, the password for the computers is literally the word 'discipline', 'which is a clear statement of intent' (DISCON-S20MP). Thus, as a sub-discourse intimately linked to that of principles and

values, albeit with its own entity, discipline also represents a pivotal element of the ethos of Catholic schools. This is evident in various considerations about discipline found in the internship reports, which, like the term 'values', encompass different semantic fields (see Table 8).

Given the information above, it should come as no surprise that when student teachers describe the behaviour of the professional tutor in the classroom, they do so by emphasising their role as monitors and maintainers of order. Their practical knowledge is highlighted, as well as their ability to manage the class and keep the students quiet. For example:

> It is quite common to be in one classroom and hear the shouts of a teacher from another one calling for order. The relationships between teachers and students revolve around order and discipline. While official plans may advocate for understanding the student, experienced teachers do not tolerate any defiance. In conclusion, teacher-student relationships are cordial, especially with teachers who are considered 'softer' in terms of discipline, as shouting does not come naturally to them … (DISCON-S22MP)

The behaviour expected inside the classroom appears to be very strict, imposing absolute silence, although some of the teachers in training mention difficulties in maintaining pressure within the classroom, with one of them adding: 'but this is more difficult to achieve, as they are talkative' (DISCON-S15MP). In this way, discipline is understood as surveillance and control of the young people, as well as an attempt to restrict the movements and interactions of the students. However, alongside the severity of discipline, there is also an atmosphere of coexistence marked by paternalism and a family-like approach:

> The majority of the teaching staff exhibits a familiar attitude towards the school, even going so far as to enrol their own children in it. (DISCON-S10MP)
> The relationships are mostly vertical in most cases, but there are times when the teacher unintentionally abandons this system to be more cordial and paternal, allowing students to address them informally. (DISCON-S22MP)
> The relationships between teachers and students are characterized by the discipline within the classroom, but also by the closeness and proximity that corresponds to the charisma … displays of affection are frequent. (DISCON-S22MP)

In this same line, the practicum reports depict, in general, a relationship between the educational institution and families characterised by close collaboration. However, the term 'collaboration' seems to have a particular meaning in this context, as what is described is a constant surveillance of students by teachers and ongoing communication with parents in pursuit of disciplining the youth: 'they report any incidents related to their children, provide information about grades and behaviour' (DISCON-S21).

Thus, the metaphor of the 'school as a family' corresponds to paternal relationships and subordination of students. Indeed, it is common for both professional tutors and practicum teachers to refer to students as children who need to be governed: 'the methodology of the professional tutor is described as mixing notes, dictating them, with the explanation of content so that the children understand it' (DISCON-S1MP). Finally, collaboration also extends to the 'student delegate', who actually assists the teacher in disciplining their peers, as they are responsible for keeping a book noting daily punishments, as well as maintaining order and silence when the teacher is absent (DISCON-S11MP).

Table 8. Semantic fields related to the term *discipline* in the corpus.

Semantic fields	Examples
Politeness and good manners	To have a good appearance and behave appropriately (DISCON-S2MP).
	It is necessary to keep our classroom clean and organised, stand up when the teacher enters (DISCON-S10MP).
	Respect the teacher, do not speak unless the teacher gives you permission (DISCON-S12MP).
	When the teachers enter the classroom, the students must stand up and show respect, addressing them as 'you' ['usted', a polite formula] and always referring to them as professor or teacher, using titles such as 'Mr' or 'Mrs'. They should look into the eyes when they speak, maintain silence in class, adopt a correct posture, and not be laid on the table or bent over when writing … even in the chapel, they are reminded to follow proper behaviour (DISCON-S18MP).
Prohibitions and restrictions	The need to wear the uniform properly, with boys wearing pants and girls wearing skirts, both with sweaters featuring the school's logo. This is important because 'uniformity mistakes' lead to punishments (DISCON-S16MP).
	No chewing gum, no use of mobile phones or bracelets/necklaces, no display of affection between boys and girls, no makeup or painted nails, the use of water bottles or tissue packages, which implies that female students have to ask for permission to use the bathroom if necessary (DISCON-S20MP).
Rituals of order	Discipline, referred to as coexistence, is usually very strict. Students go up and down the classrooms in a single file, in absolute silence, and are directed by a teacher (DISCON-S3MP).
	(…) one of the aspects to which more time is devoted is controlling and maintaining silence in both classes and the chapel and corridors. Teachers usually ensure that silence is maintained. It is also very important to maintain order during exits. Students must leave the classrooms in a single file to go to any space in the school, as well as the chapel and the gym. They must stand up every time an adult enters the class, raise their hand for any intervention in the classroom, and address any teacher as 'professor' or 'teacher' to ask something (DISCON-S10MP).
	During recess, no student stays alone in the classroom, and they are not allowed to go upstairs during recess, as the classrooms are locked with a key. The students' descent is by class, supervised by the teacher from the previous hour and reviewed by the head of studies. During recess, each teacher is assigned an area of supervision, as established in a schedule posted on the tutor's notice board (DISCON-S18MP).

However, if teachers are responsible for disciplining students, they, in turn, are subject to discipline by the school's administration, as they are subjected to strict surveillance and control:

In some cases, the principal gives instructions to teachers to examine students on specific content that he considers necessary and to check if some content from previous courses is remembered. In the event that a teacher wants to test their students, they must notify the management team beforehand, and the team reviews the exams and gives their approval before the students take them. (DISCON-S10MP)

Some student teachers mention that the strictness of the rules and continuous supervision by the administration limit the academic freedom and autonomy of the teachers. They describe specific situations and rules, such as 'the obligation to teach with the doors open to allow control by the head of studies' (DISCON-S2MP). In case of non-compliance, the teacher receives a reprimand from the administration, and if it happens again, they could be dismissed.

It has been observed and investigated through interviews with teachers in the Department that all instructions and teaching strategies must align with a specific approach. This includes minimizing explanations in class, having classes follow the textbook and the outlines provided by the school, and engaging in activities outlined in special booklets that students are required to purchase. (DISCON-S10MP)

We could say that, for teachers, there is also a discipline that runs parallel to that of the students and stems from the school's corporate nature. Alongside this, hierarchy also governs among teachers, as it depends on seniority in the school, which is considered a proof of identification with its principles.

(…) those [teachers] who have been in the school longer, and more fully share its ideals and methods, have more influence in decision-making and are closer to the management team. In return, they receive some rewards; for example, they have more teaching hours in high school and do not participate in extracurricular activities outside regular hours. (DISCON-S11MP)

Although statements regarding identification with the school by teachers are numerous, in some cases, a conflict arises between the identity as an educator and the identity as an employee:

(…) from what I have observed, the majority of teachers seem to agree, which does not hide the fact that many educators disagree with the school's policies, the labor exploitation they are subjected to, and the excessive alignment with the school's values that is indirectly demanded to maintain employment. Evidence of this is the constant private complaints, but at the same time, everything is complied with without any formal opposition. (DISCON-S10MP)

Another noteworthy point is that they have an unstable schedule and work numerous overtime hours for which they receive no financial compensation, causing strong frustration for some, coupled with the pressure they face from the directives of the management team. (DISCON-S15MP)

Students and their families are perceived as clients who need to be kept satisfied, and this sometimes contradicts certain sacred principles of the institution: the unquestionable authority of the teacher and discipline. The challenge lies in reconciling traditional ideological foundations with modern managerial and economic principles. For instance, 'teachers are influenced by economic considerations, as they are being forced to pass students who shouldn't pass to avoid the closure of classes, which could lead, among other things, to job losses' (DISCON-S66MP). All of this

creates tension between maintaining strict discipline and authority and the principle of customer satisfaction, as there have been occasional complaints from parents: 'the rules have been relaxing and adapting, and now some things are allowed, or at least not punished' (DISCON-S2MP).

Discussion

The results obtained through the analysis of the teacher trainees' practicum reports provide insights into the conception and practice of educational values in Catholic schools. This information challenges the self-attribution of human values and their education that Catholic schools have been claiming for decades (Hallinan 2000; Meehan 2023; Ocampo 2004; The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland 2001). Studies like this suggest that the presumed 'cultural counter-values' (Baum and Javierre 1988) against which the Catholic school articulates its discourse are nothing more than principles unrelated to any religious dogmatism (Consudec 2015).

Addressing the first of the assumed research problems, it is noteworthy how the semantic versatility of the term 'values', similar to other educational terms (Santos Guerra 2010), is employed in the discussed contexts. This allows its presence in various practices that shape everyday school life, as other authors have highlighted (Fuller and Sada 2022; Guest 2021), ranging from patriotic decoration of educational spaces to the implementation of specific pedagogical, pastoral, and sports activities. This reveals an organisation of the discursive field into 'predominant forms of coexistence', in this case, related to the discourse of *tradition* versus the discourse of *modernity* (Fairclough 2003).

Paradoxically, the breadth and vagueness of this understanding of values in education (which never contradicts conventional democratic and civic principles) are the features guaranteeing the existence of a supposed unique identity ('own character') compared to the identities of other educational institutions. Herein lies the appeal for certain families to entrust the education of their children to Catholic schools. This aspect aligns with the idea of offering values and academic outcomes only to those who can afford it (Grace 2002; Keefe 2021; Oviedo and Wildemeersch 2008), overlooking the poorer and minority sectors of the population (Mason and Wareham 2018; Wodon 2020).

In practice, the values education promoted by Catholic schools in their institutional discourses generates a series of contradictions, as echoed by the teacher trainees. These contradictions revolve around the practice of charity, the degree of religious commitment among the community, or the perpetuation of students' minority status, among other aspects. Particularly striking is the convergence, in these institutions, of the metaphors of the *strict father* and the *protective father* (Lakoff 2008). This invites a nuanced understanding of the moralising functions assumed by teachers in Catholic schools (Gleeson and O'Flaherty 2016; McCormack et al. 2019). These aspects are often overlooked or intentionally omitted in scientific literature that simply extols the virtues of Catholic education (Aristimuño 2020; Cuautle Quechol 2021; Flaherty 2019; Ozal et al. 2019).

According to the analysed information, addressing the second research problem, the most pronounced tensions between discourses and practices are related to discipline management. The strict, central, and pluralistic manner in which this phenomenon unfolds – through subdiscourses not only about prohibitions and punishments but also about civility, manners, order rituals, etc. – should be understood as a form

of values education in itself. Thus, disciplining emerges as a complex *dispositif* with unintended consequences, affecting not only students but also teachers and even the staff. All end up adhering to the dictates of parent-consumers, as reported by teacher trainees who highlight the monitoring of teachers' autonomy with the complicity of school directors. This is consistent with findings reported in several recent studies on the working conditions of teachers in Catholic educational institutions (Burau and Romano 2023; Keefe 2021; Lewyckyj 2021; Luna et al. 2022; Nkengne et al. 2021).

Ultimately, these tensions between discourses and practices necessitate distinguishing between politically and pedagogically correct values present in official documents and what Díez Gutiérrez (2006) terms 'operative values', which truly drive and animate the functioning of an organisation, aligning with basic presumptions or implicit ideologies. In this sense, we can affirm that critical discourse analysis serves as a particularly useful theoretical and methodological framework to delve into the contentious realm of meanings shaping the ethos of Catholic schools. Notably, the contributions of lexicometric analysis stand out in guiding the construction of emergent categories based on the quantitative significance of key signifiers in the research, as well as verifying the associations woven between these and other concepts.

Finally, there is a need for further exploration into the understanding of the internal functioning of Catholic schools from a discursive and critical perspective. This is also an opportune moment to broaden the focus to other aspects already present in the work presented, such as the trainee teacher's positioning regarding the institutional discourse of the receiving school. These aspects have emerged as new elements of great interest from both a research and formative standpoint.

Disclosure statement

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