

studies of education. A heterogeneous collection of disciplinary-based studies of education (history, philosophy, psychology and sociology, as well as ‘educational studies’), each defining its object of study and procedures of enquiry differently. Bhaskar argued that, alongside the laboratory, the classroom is one of the most under-analysed ‘sites’ of science (*RS2*: 247) and CR, by maintaining the possibility of a social science, offers the possibility of a science of education. However, while a large body of work tacitly operates in accordance with CR principles, studies explicitly working from a CR perspective remain limited in number.

Explicit CR has served two main functions in education studies. First, it offers critiques of dominant positivist and ‘critical’ paradigms. Positivism, underpinning calls for ‘evidence-based’ policy and practice based on systematic review and randomised controlled trials, reduces education to the empirically measurable. ‘Critical’ or ‘radical’ (including marxist, feminist and multicultural) approaches emphasise the effects of wider social relations of power and, under the influence of postmodernism and standpoint theories, have tended towards idealism and relativism, reducing education to the experiences of knowers. Explicit CR critiques their shared empiricism and advocates instead a non-reductionist analysis of the underlying relations between real learning environments, educational knowledge, social structure and the interior world of the learner. Examples include Corson’s pioneering series of CR critiques of such thinkers as Dewey, Popper and Quine (1990, 1991a, 1991b); Scott (2000) on educational approaches generally; and Clegg’s critique (2005) of systematic review as a basis for evidence-based policies.

CR’s second function has been to offer a sense of mission for educational practitioners and researchers. Though CR emphasises the need to explore underlying structures and generative mechanisms, its purpose in doing so is to effect emancipation, a mission made more explicit with the emergence of DCR and one attractive to many in the education profession. Both these roles have been as an underlabourer. Thus far, CR offers few empirically applicable tools for educational research – though studies are using Archer’s morphogenetic theory (1995) to analyse structure-agency relations in educational change (e.g., Willmott 2002) and Archer’s analysis of the emergence of educational systems (1979) offers an early example of research based on CR principles – and how its emancipatory potential would be enacted in classrooms remains unclear.

There is, however, a large body of work tacitly based on CR assumptions. In sociology of education, for example, the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein arguably offer theoretical and methodological means for enacting the imperatives of CR’s social ontology in empirical research (see Moore 2004). Their theories construct education as an irreducible, emergent and relational social structure and operate with a depth-ontology to explore the underlying structuring principles and generative mechanisms shaping knowledge and pedagogy. In addition, such work shares CR’s emancipatory mission and has done much to explore the role of education in social inequality. Thinkers such as Roy Nash (2002, 2004) are exploring the relations of these approaches to CR though, as yet, relations to DCR and PMR remain unexamined.

Bridging the present gap between explicit CR engagements and CR-compatible research is one key to linking CR’s underlabouring role to empirical research and unlocking its emancipatory potential. Tacit CR offers a wealth of conceptual tools for analysing what kinds of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment are emancipatory for which pupils and under what conditions. Conversely, while they remain ontologically and epistemologically agnostic, these approaches

can offer little critique of or defence against neo-conservative and postmodernist positions or empiricist applications of their frameworks. The future for CR in education studies lies in making connections between its rich philosophical basis and the wealth of research unaware of its CR compatibility.

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