

Understanding Teacher Education Through a Critical Realist Lens: A Comparative Case Study of Culture, Structure, and Teacher-Educator Agency

Abstract

This dissertation explores the interplay among culture, structure, and teacher-educator agency in pre-service teacher education through a Critical Realist (CR) lens. It addresses the question: *How can CR help explain the complexity and contingency of teacher education?* Integrating CR with content analysis, this comparative case study develops a conceptual framework and applies it to two international cases to identify context-dependent causal mechanisms. The findings demonstrate that structure functions as both an institutional setting and a construction shaped by cultural meanings and educator agency. Culture acts as both a contextual background and an active influence, while agency mediates and transforms its structural and cultural conditions. These complex, contingent interactions are both hierarchical and transcending, revealing varied patterns of enabling and constraining conditions in specific contexts. This dissertation offers a CR-informed framework that bridges previously fragmented research on structure, culture, and mental activity, providing new theoretical and methodological contributions and practical insights for understanding and improving teacher education in diverse settings.

Keywords: Critical Realism, comparative research, teacher education, agency, culture, structure