

PROPOSITIONS

ATTACHED TO THE THESIS

CRITICAL REALISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF POOR SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA. THE DIFFERENCE IT MAKES

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1. Dominant research paradigms in school effectiveness research, particularly positivism, overlook human agency as the *only efficient cause* in social life. Archer's morphogenetic approach allows studying reflexive action without falling in the extremes of relativism (reducing social structures to the perception of human beings) (*This thesis*).
2. A fruitful path to make progress in the understanding of complex educational phenomena consists in building *middle-range theories* to help researchers navigate across activities of theorisation and empirical verification, which are essential to accumulate knowledge about society (*This thesis*).
3. Structural pressures, both material and ideational, strongly limit agential forces that seek change in Colombia's education policy. Forces leaning to forms of structural morphostasis in primary and secondary education have become stronger, particularly since the expedition of the new education law in 2001 (*This thesis*).
4. While Colombia's Constitution sets a mandate in favour of political decentralisation, decisions about education have become more centralised in recent decades. One consequence of that is that education, as a public service, is irrelevant for many inhabitants of Northern Colombian, at least according to the expectations placed on the role of education in society by representatives of the national government (*This thesis*).
5. Scholars that want to understand the challenges of education must take qualitative research seriously. Parallel to that, the study of topics such as the history of the emergence of education policies is necessary to allow academics and practitioners to escape from the analytic straitjacket represented by the human capital approach in educational research (*This thesis*).
6. Without explicit efforts to study complexity, social research makes little contributions to human knowledge.
7. Without notions of truth or reality, life would make no sense (and neither research).
8. Your philosophy of research cannot go in complete opposition of your philosophy of life.
9. Determinism in social research is like religion; fixed ideas represent a big threat to knowledge.
10. "Society is that which nobody wants, in the form in which they encounter it, for it is an unintended consequence (...). To recognize the unique kind of reality with which we are dealing in this 'vexatious fact of society' is to acknowledge the difficulty of the theoretical enterprise but also the impossibility of taking analogical short-cuts" (*Archer, 1995*).
11. "Social theory has to be useful and usable: it is not an end in itself. The vexatious fact of society has to be tackled *in* theory and/or practice. These two tasks cannot be separated, for were practical utility to be the sole criterion we would commit ourselves to instrumentalism (...) a purely theoretical taming of the vexing beast may give a warm inner glow of ontological rectitude but is cold comfort to practical social analysts" (*Archer, 1995*).