Chapter 4 Structure and Agency

The dualism of structure and agency is like other dualisms, one that critical realism seeks to collapse. It does this by ascribing new meanings to the two concepts via models of social transformation, the agent's position within the social system, social interaction, and the multi-scaled nature of social reality. These models are outlined before further examination of social and cultural structures leads to consideration of the role of discourse in social transformation and critical realist approaches to critical discourse analysis. Such analysis has been used to explore discourses of sustainability and the literature of sustainable global citizenship. This had led Granados-Sánchez to outline the dimensions of such citizenship and their implications for global citizenship education. The chapter concludes by revisiting Critical School Geography *and its coverage of such citizenship in the light of Mouffe's 2022 text proposing a green democratic revolution.*

The issues that we teach about in school geography, issues relating to nature, place and space, inevitably require explanations and theories that explicitly or implicitly take a stand on the relative importance of structure and agency. Teaching about global heating or climate change, as explored in chapter one, for example, inevitably involves deciding whether the causes are to be found in the choices of **agents** or actors (individuals and collectives of people such as corporations, states, inter-governmental organisations, NGOs) or in the **structural context** (e.g. neoliberal global capitalism, liberal democracy, cyberspace) in which they are situated, or in some combination of the two. The agency-structure question revolves around human freedom. To what extent are we able to decide our own path through life? Is our destiny shaped by social structures and forces beyond our control? Helping students to address these questions is inevitably part of the geography teacher's role.

In critical realist theory, **agents are individuals and collectives of people** who have the capacity to act within and influence social structures. These agents are positioned within pre-existing social structures but possess the agency to reproduce or transform them over time through their coordinated or uncoordinated actions. Agency involves **material transactions** with nature and social interactions between humans, social structures, and people's embodied personalities. Hence agency can change nature (environment), social organisation

(political economy), spatial relations, places, and people themselves (personality).

Structure / agency dualism

We met dualisms in previous chapters (e.g. nature/society, fact/value, theory/practice) where critical realism's attempt to transcend these modern dualisms by taking a holistic approach, was outlined. By adopting a both/and, rather than an either/or perspective critical realism contrasts with both reductionism and deconstructionism. **Reductionism** give priority to one or other pole of the dualism while **deconstructionism** seeks to smooth or erase the binary scheme of the dualism by ascribing new meaning to well established concepts in a dualism or by replacing them with new concepts.

Reductionism results in the philosophies of **structuralism** [1] **a**nd **individualism.** Structuralism privileges structures over agency while individualism privileges agency over structure and considers structures as the intentional product of human agents. Individualism continues to shape much mainstream social theory and policy including mainstream economics and rational choice theory. Structuralism can be considered **downward conflation** of structure and agency as it focuses on the deeper level of structures while individualism can be considered **upward conflation** as it suggests reality consists of nothing but individuals and their activities. Structuration theory seeks a mutual unification of structure and agency while critical realism seeks an analytical separation of structure and agency with structural preconditioning being changed by human agency (it is people that make things happen). Clearly individualists, structuralists and critical realists will have different accounts of such events as the rise of neoliberalism, the climate crisis, or the reconfiguration of geopolitics.

Marxism is a social theory that had attracted criticism for being too structuralist or failing to transcend structure/agency dualism. The response to this criticism has been led by deconstructionists, including **post-structuralists** and **post-Marxists**, who argue that concepts like structure and agency are inadequate, imprecise or misleading, and should be re-defined or replaced with new concepts. My ebook, *Critical School Geography*, is partly based on theory provided by the post-Marxist Chantal Mouffe, an advocate of left populism, agonism and radical democracy. Her approach to discourse and counter-hegemony will be consider later in this chapter. Other influential deconstructionists include Giddens (see his

structuration theory [2]) and Bourdieu (see his concepts of field, habitus and capital [3]).

Critical realism's approach to structure / agency

For critical realists, human agents are entities with emergent properties and causal powers and BOTH human agency AND social structures can be causally important in explaining and understanding social events. These have multiple interacting causes and are not the result of a single force be it structural or agential. Events are due to the interaction of both structural and agential powers which may include the causal powers of non-social (bio-physical) objects. Changes in the environment, be it rural or urban, thus result from the interplay of structural and agential powers.

Critical realism's approach draws attention to the interplay between agents and structures over time and reflects Marx's famous observation [4] that people make our own history, 'but they do not make it just as they please, they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directed encountered, given and transmitted from the past'

Bhakar's transformational model of social activity (TMSA)

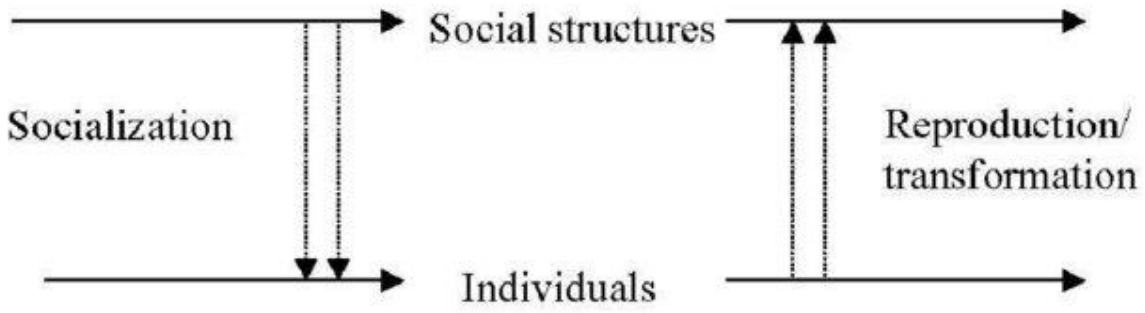

Figure 4.1 [5] **The transformational model of social structure/person connection (Bhaskar 1979)**

Bhaskar's model of the relationship between social structures and human agents (individuals) resembles Marx's notion of praxis or reflection and action. Socialised individuals (with evolving standpoints, page 30) live their lives in constant, ongoing two-way (dialectical) interaction with social structures. Through their actions, and ongoing reflection and modification of those actions, society is reproduced and/or transformed. Agents and structures are held to belong to different strata, possess emergent properties, and are not reducible to one another. Structures emerge from the interactions of agents but have properties

that no agent possesses. Conversely agents acquire properties and capabilities by virtue of social structures, capabilities that no structure can be said to possess. Geographers are interested in the interplay of agency and structures over time, for example how the ongoing crisis of global capitalism reshapes the theory and practice of global citizenship. In the past decade, geographical educators have focussed on human capabilities and debated what philosophy of knowledge when applied to curriculum development best enable students to develop such capabilities as those relating to global citizenship.

The position-practice system PPS

Bhaskar understood the continuous reproduction or transformation of social structures through a system of mediating concepts that describe the point of contact between human agency and social structures. Such a point of contact, which links action to the structure, must be sustained and directly occupied by individuals. He termed this system the 'position-practice system' and it is at this nexus that agential activity to bring about change (e.g. towards sustainability, radical democracy and global citizenship) arises.

It is the previous, immediate or future orientated actions or practices of human agents in and around social structures that determine whether the social structures consisting of environmental and social relations and 'positions', will be reproduced (maintained) or transformed (modified or changed). **Positions** are to be understood in terms of places, functions, rules, tasks. duties, rights, etc. occupied by individuals. **Practices** are activities, etc, in which, in virtue of their occupancy of these positions they engage in. In a study of the mainstreaming of education for sustainable development among university educators in Africa, Agbedahin and Lotz-Sisteka visualised the relevant PPS, depicting the interconnections and hierarchy of posts, operations, and sphere of influence of different human agents (Figure 4.2, page 90). You might try to visualise the PPS in which you are embedded as a secondary school geography teacher.

Several critical theorists have developed Bhaskar's TMSA, and Archer [6] is the most significant of these. To explain why social structures have powers in their own right, despite depending for those powers on people, Archer views social reproduction and social transformation in terms of the **morphogenic cycle.** This maintains that social structures (power relations between people and the rest of nature, people and people, people and social organisations, and between these organisations / institutions) pre-exist social events and shape agents' decision

making. They are aware of at least some of these structures, the ways in which they constrain or facilitate their actions, and the ways in which they can be either reproduced or transformed. Repeated actions cause them to reflect on and review their understandings of structures in a sequence of cycles that will be familiar to practitioners of critical pedagogy and critical action research. Earlier chapters termed such cycles emancipatory spirals and linked them to struggles for a counter-hegemony.

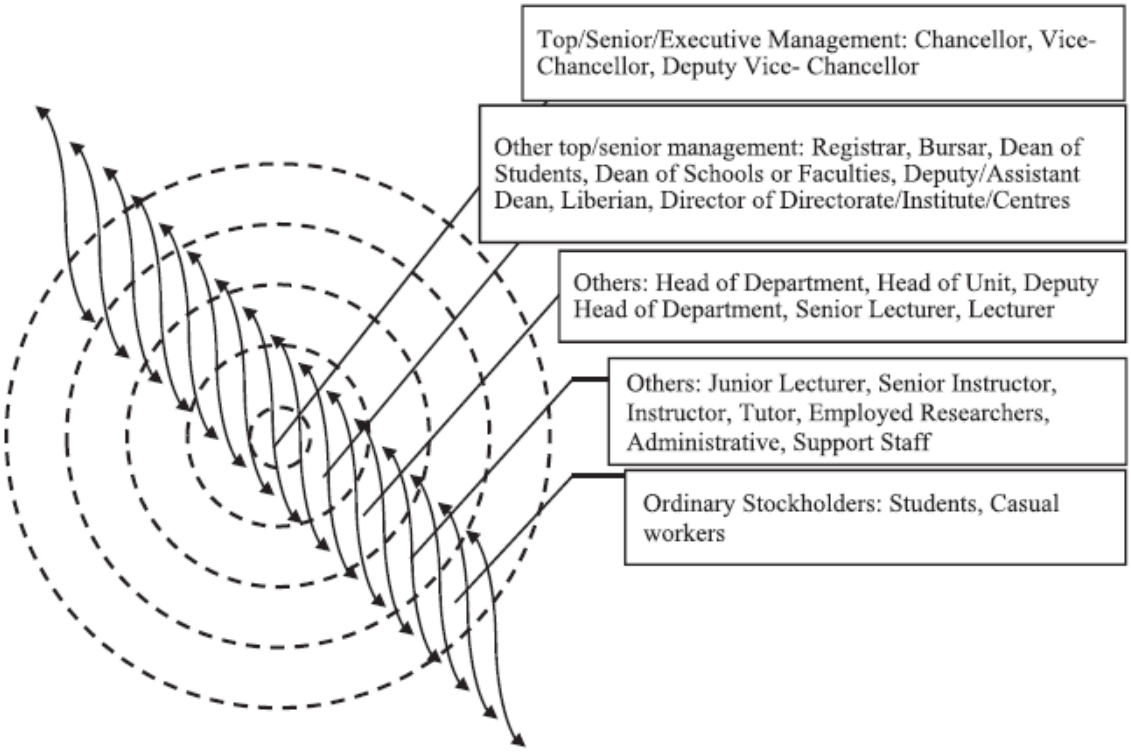

Figure 4.2 Visual representation of the position-practice system depicting the sphere of influence of professionals and individuals in HE (Agbedahin & Lotz-Sisteka, 2019 [7])

Archer's social theory

For Archer, social structures are material sedimented products of past action that continue to have influence in the present and so are able to interact with individual humans, She opposes those who suggest that structure and agency are merely two aspects of the same things and is supported by Eider-Vass who suggests we view social structures as entities composed of people and often other material parts that have emergent casual powers in the manner introduced in chapter one. A school for example, is an organisation [8] composed (at any given time) of a set of people and things related to each other in ways that depend on their roles. The result of

them acting in accordance with their roles is that the whole school has causal powers that are dependent upon the roles and power relations amongst its staff.

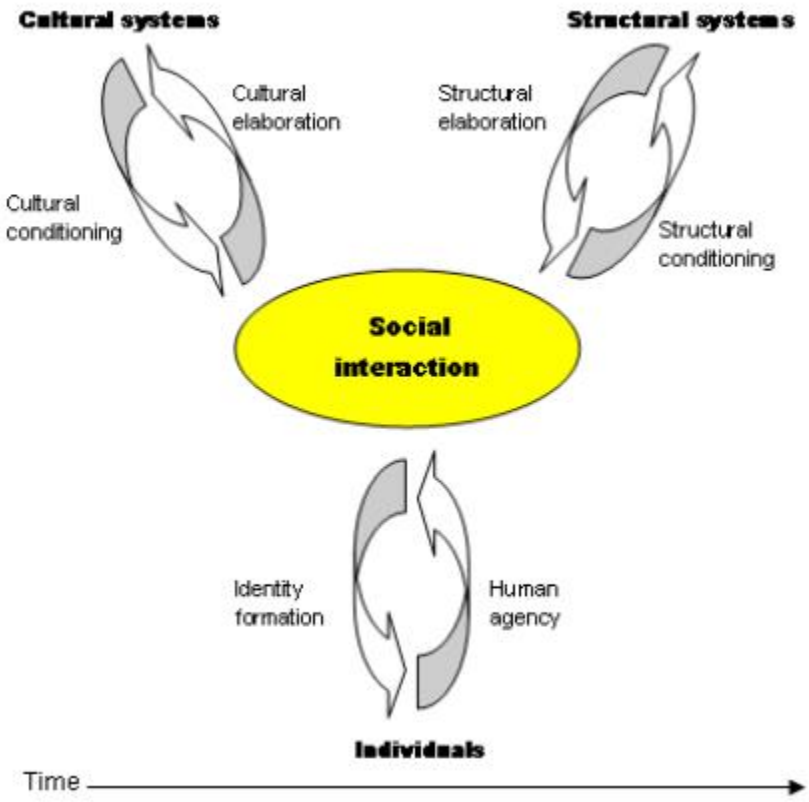

Figure 4.3 Archer's social theory (Priestly, 2011 [9])

Figure 4.3's illustration of Archer's ideas sees social interactions shaped by structural and cultural systems and individuals. The systems condition individuals and are elaborated by ongoing interactions. Meanwhile individuals' identities are shaped by their ongoing interaction with these systems. Notice that like other critical realists, Archer distinguishes between social structures (structural systems) and cultural structures (systems). The former are understood as objectively existing social and environmental relations, while the latter are understood as objectively existing relations between ideas.

More about social structures and structural development

We first met social structures in chapter one where we contrasted them with bio-physical structures, examined the extent to which critical realism offered a unifying philosophy for the natural and social sciences (physical and human geography), and introduced Marx's model of political economy (pages 9 -12). We also met them in chapter three where we considered how relations of class and race shape such structures.

Social structures, for example those of neoliberal capitalism confront individuals as objective phenomena that affect them in ways that are independent of how they interpret or perceive the structures. They pre-exist individual activity and are the product of past and present activity and only exist by virtue of that activity. Porpora [10] draws attention to material or power relations suggesting that social structures consist of the material relations between people (social relations) and between people and the rest of nature (environmental relations). These relations shape the economic base of society, its state, and its social institutions (Figure 4, p. 11). The cultural system consists of social ideas and political ideology.

Material relations exist among social positions inhabited by agents (e.g. employer and employee, teacher and head teacher, consumer and worker on a sugar plantation). These are positions in objective networks of power and exist regardless of how their occupants view them. Social structures, as we saw in chapter one, also consist of material relations between people, their social objects (e.g. the economy, the state, civil society) and the rest of nature. The power of an agent to change material social and environmental relations depends on the social position they occupy and the resources it commands. Social positions never force or determine action but they exert an objective influence by shaping situations and conditioning action patterns. They are variously facilitating, motivating, and inhibiting as you will see if you consider your own position as a teacher and your ability to bring about curriculum change.

Social interaction (Figure 4.3, page 91) results in the reproduction or transformation of a pre-existing social structure. Those seeking transformation, including those seeking a counter-hegemony (chapter two). confront not one but a network of inter-related structures (environmental, economic, political, etc.) and intentional activity may result in unintended outcomes or structural developments. The literature on socialism, for example Perryman's edited collection, [11] is much occupied by strategy and how a more radical democracy can be established in the present conjuncture.

The seven-scale laminated system SSLS

Agency takes place at a range of scales and are hence more or less encompassing or impactful. The SSLS (Figure 4.4 page 93) allows the critical realist to view the emergence of agency and patterns of dependency and interdependency of social realities at different levels and scales. Different constituents are found at each of the following levels:

1. The sub-individual psychological level is concerned with the intrinsic personality of the individual studied
2. The individual or biographical level describes the person that is studied
3. The micro-level looks at the studied population or small group analysis
4. The meso-level is focussed on relations between functional roles
5. The macro-level is orientated towards the functioning of whole societies
6. The mega-level is the analysis of whole traditions and civilisations
7. The planetary or cosmological level is concerned with the planet or cosmos as a whole.

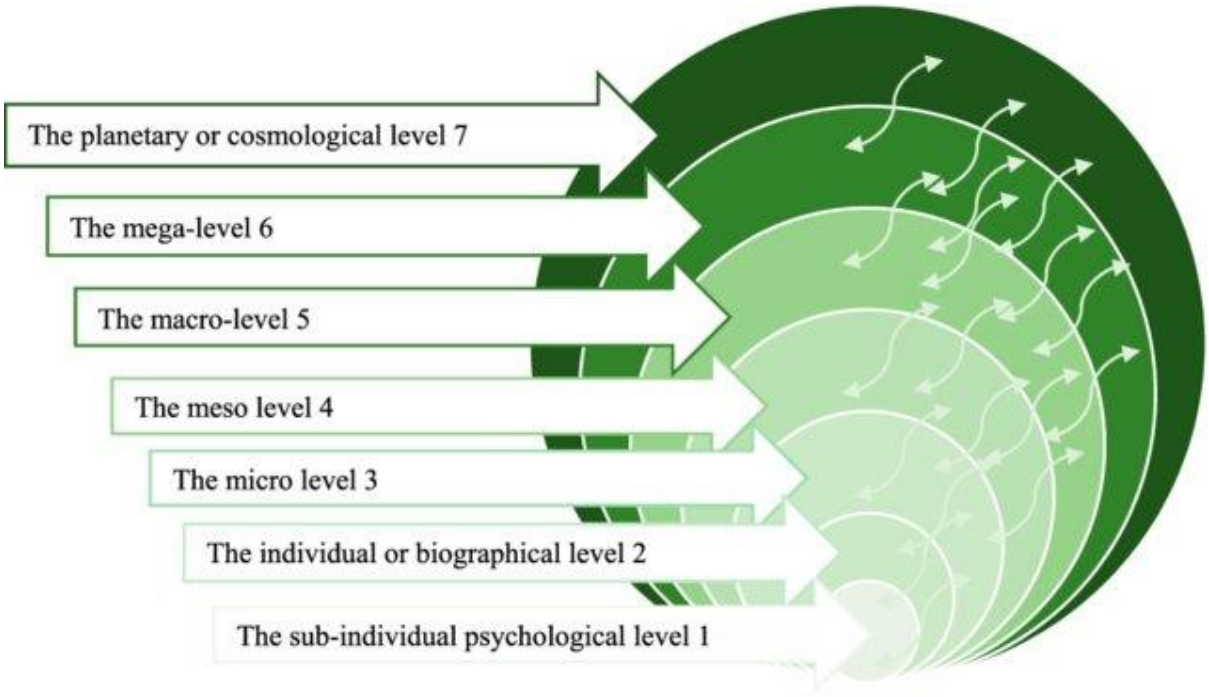

Figure 4.4 The seven-scalar laminated system with arrows showing the patterns of emergence relations between layers. (Lotz Sisteka [12])

The PPS can be considered at each of these levels with the school or university requiring analysis at levels three and four and the national curriculum, analysis at level five. The transition to sustainability and global citizenship requires analysis at all levels but especially levels five to seven. More on that below.

The cultural system and cultural structure

Archer regards culture, structure and agency as distinct and irreducible to one another. All three have emergent properties and culture [13] refers to 'all items

that have a meaningful content, that meant something to whoever produced it.' It includes media of all kinds and of particular interest to critical realists are cultural items that claim to make a claim to truth or falsity, and which can therefore contradict or be consistent with one another (see for example Figure 2.3 the promise and reality of neoliberalism, page 35). Archer terms such items, that include propositions, political ideologies, discourses, and social theories, as the **cultural system**. This has an objective existence, is not reducible to what is stored in human minds, and shows autonomous relations between its components (theories, beliefs, discourses, and individual propositions), Hence the cultural system consists of knowledge that is independent of knowing subjects and how they view the world (a realist view of knowledge),

The **cultural structure** consists of the relations between ideas in the cultural system. These ideas may be logically conflicting (e.g. democracy and authoritarianism) or complementary (e.g. sustainability and radical democracy) and are objective in the sense that they exist whether they are noticed or not. Building on her social theory (Figure 4.3, page 91), Archer was much interested in whether late modernity was giving way to a 'morphogenic society' [14] or a social formation in which change driving social mechanisms dominate over stability-enhancing mechanisms. An explosion of diverse ideas, skills, products and lifestyles would then allow new opportunities for developing human capabilities and human flourishing.

Geography and geographical education are clearly part of the cultural system and show their own cultural structure or relations between ideas (see Puttick & Cullinane, page 57). Whether or not a new idea (e.g. powerful disciplinary knowledge, Geocapabilities) becomes socially influential amongst geography teachers, depends on the extent to which it challenges pre-existing ideas, who is promoting it, how well they do it, and the opposition they meet, and the PPSs of different agents. Support or opposition largely depends on whether the new idea supports or opposes the prevailing hegemony.

Preistley [15] views schooling through the lens of critical realism noting that its concept of emergence can be applied to individual teachers, school structures, and policies on such matters as the curriculum. Innovation relates to a new set of cultural forms migrating into the school setting where they will be subject to social interaction and the causal influences of existing social structures, cultural forms and individual capacities. Drawing on Archer, he predicts three possible outcomes: the new idea supplants the old, the old is maintained and the new

rejected, or more commonly elements of the old and new merge with varying amounts of consensus and conflict remaining. Similar reasoning can be applied to change within a subject association, an examination board, the editorial office of a textbook publisher, or a government department overseeing the national curriculum.

Internal conversations

Humans are reflective and decision-making agents who ponder their options in **internal conversations** (George Herbert Mead [16]). Such conversations involve both beliefs and emotions (values, affects) and weight decisions against deep concerns in a process whereby we continually define and re-define our personal and social identities. Identity commitments then feed back into decision-making via further internal conversations shaped by beliefs and emotions modified by further lived experience. Internal conversations take different forms: **communicative reflexives** tend to consult people they are close to and take account of their inputs, **autonomous reflexives** tend to be more independent and more focussed on their own benefits, and **meta-reflexives** tend to be self-critical and reflect on the wider implications of their choices. Other critical realists suggest Archer's focus on conscious deliberations needs to be blended with the ways in which socialisation can shape our subconscious dispositions and orientations. Sayer and Eider-Vass have both argued that Bourdieu's concept of **habitus** should be combined with Archer's theory to produce an account of human agency that recognises that subconscious decisions influenced by social forces shape the kind of people we are. Archer sees Bourdieu's habitus as the collapsing of structure into the individual.

Discourse as part of the cultural system

Early in this chapter we noted that deconstructionism seeks novel ways of collapsing the dualism between structure and agency. One influential strand of such post-structuralist and post-Marxist theory is critical discourse analysis with some proponents drawing on critical realism.

Discourses are invisible webs of meaning that permeate media and culture, underpin economic institutions, organisations and technological systems, and shape our individual sense of identity and our relationships. (Riedy, 2020:100 [17]),

As part of the cultural system, discourses help us make sense of reality, offer a shared language and a basis for mutual understanding and practice, can impose limits on imagination, and can promote interests, goals and values that enlarge or diminish equity, democracy and sustainability. Indeed, discourses are the means whereby different visions of political concepts and ideas are articulated and constitute a key battleground on which the struggle for a counter-hegemony is waged. The capability to articulate such concepts as sustainability and global citizenship across discourses is key to active and critical global citizenship as is that to engage in agonistic debate as to which discourse, or combination of discourses best offer a counter-hegemony and a means of overcoming the global crisis.

As suggested in chapters one and two, critical realists view knowledge as a complex interplay between its discursive (human-created) and intransitive (reflecting reality's independent nature) dimensions, arguing that while discourse structures how we understand the world, it does not create reality itself. Discourse is seen as an imperfect, human-generated representation of a real world that exists independently and can, in principle, be known through critical inquiry and analysis of the underlying bio-physical and social structures. Objective reality is what really matters (counts the most) and this 'differs fundamentally from – and can be in direct conflict with – discourses, narratives, awareness and opinions' (Buch-Hansen & Nielsen, 2020, p. 102 [18]). As regards such social goals as realising sustainability and global citizenship, critical realism seeks to cut through the discursive noise to gain (fallible but powerful) knowledge of what reality is really like and how such gaols can be realised. As we have seen this is likely to involve immanent and explanatory critique (page 27).

Critical discourse analysis and critical realism

Fairclough [19]is a critical realist who regards reality as consisting of discursive and non-discursive elements. Discourses are selective and simplified representations of specific parts or aspects of reality but never neutral reflections of that reality. As outlined above, they are the semiotic elements (consisting of written and spoken language, non-verbal communication, and images) of cultural systems that shape social practice and should be viewed in relation to economic and political interests that determine whether they are marginalised, mainstreamed, or become hegemonic. Jessop [20] offers cultural political

economy as a way of combining cultural discourse analysis with political economy.

Fairclough offers a three-dimensional model for analysing discourse:

1. **Text**. The surface level analysis of language, focussing on word choice, grammar and composition to understand the explicit and implicit meanings and values conveyed (textual analysis).
2. **Discursive practices.** The 'how' of the text, examining how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted within specific social contexts. This involves looking at the process of creation and reception of text (processing analysis).
3. **Sociocultural practices**. The broad social, political and economic contexts that shape and are shaped by discourse. This level considers how power relations and social structures influence and are reinforced or challenged by language (social analysis).

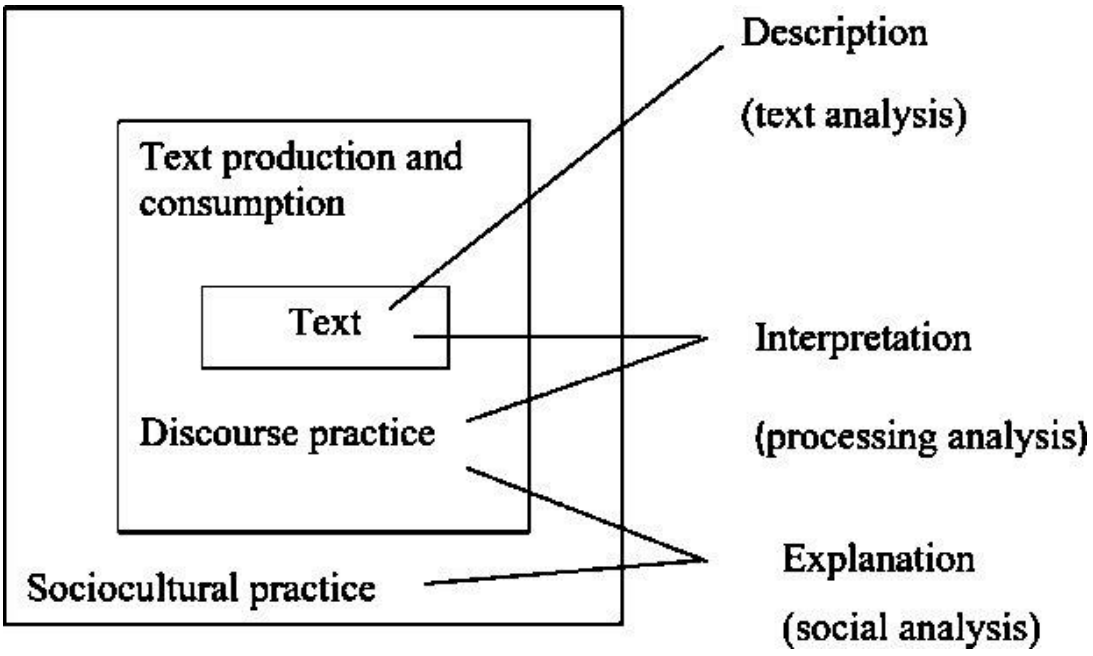

Figure 4.5 Fairclough's 3D model of critical discourse analysis (inner, middle and outer layers) Ahmed Su & Ahmed, 2017 [21]

By offering three dimensions or layers of analysis (equivalent to the empirical, actual and real), Fairclough enables researchers and teachers to:

- **Understand Causality**: Identify the hidden causes (structures) and effects (discourse) within social phenomena, such as how specific social structures generate particular discourses that sustain certain beliefs or power dynamics.
- **Analyse Power**: Examine how language is used as a tool by powerful individuals and institutions to maintain or transform social relations.
- **Model Social Change**: Understand how language contributes to social reproduction and change, bridging the gap between deep-level social structures, everyday discursive practices, and concrete textual evidence.

An example of critical discourse analysis: Riedy [22] on sustainability

In the field of critical discourse analysis, sustainability, like democracy or citizenship, is regarded as a floating signifier [23], an ambiguous concept without fixed meaning that takes on meaning as agents articulate their understandings and work towards shared meanings that express their interests and identities and serve to reinforce or contest the prevailing hegemony or 'common sense'.

Riedy (2020) analyses ninety scholarly articles on sustainability, published between 2017 and 2019 with titles that 'focus on transformations of environmental discourse' (Riedy, 2020, p.101) using the concepts of discourse, discourse coalitions, narrative, story, and meme These concepts are nested within one another with memes referring to the language and ideas that form the building blocks for all the others. **Memes** are core elements of culture and replicate and spread when people use them to think, communicate, learn, and teach. **Stories** describes 'a sequence of events with a recognisable beginning, middle and end' that include 'characters or actors (heroes, villains, victims and bystanders, a setting in which the story takes place and a plot' (Riedy, 2020, p. 101).

Riedy's analysis of texts finds neoliberalism to be the dominant or hegemonic discourse that gives meaning to sustainability and reveals a spectrum of contesting reformist and transformative discourses. Table 4.1 (page 99) contains neoliberalism's story as told by Monbiot, the memes in that story, and the means in the reformist story of sustainability (often termed the 'greening of capitalism').

Neoliberalism's story	Memes in neoliberalism's story	Memes in the reformist sustainability story
'Disorder afflicts the land! Caused by the powerful and nefarious forces of the overmighty state, whose collectivist tendencies crush freedom and individualism and opportunity. But the hero of the story, the entrepreneur, will fight those powerful forces, roll back the state, and through creating wealth and opportunity, restore harmony to the land' Monbiot (2019)	Capitalism, economic growth, gross domestic product, individualism, freedom, opportunity, entrepreneurship, competition, small government, privatisation, deregulation, globalization, financialisation, digitisation, free trade, austerity, separation, duality	Sustainable development, ecological modernisation, green growth, green consumerism, social justice, human wellbeing, ecological integrity

Table 4.1 The story and memes of neoliberalism together with the memes of the reformist sustainability story (Huckle 2023 [24] based on Riedy, 2020)

Riedy finds areas of agreement and disagreement amongst transformative stories of sustainability (see Table 4.2, pages 99 & 100). You are likely to recognise overlaps between the reformist and transformative stories of sustainability revealed by Riedy's analysis, the outline of 21st century socialism offered by Fraser (page 48), and the and the transformative knowledges listed in Table 2.8 (page 50). The key challenge for teachers is how to introduce the memes and stories of sustainability into the curriculum in ways that prompt debate between dominant, reformist and transformative stories and link them to stories of global citizenship.

Areas of agreement in the transformative story of sustainability	Contributory memes	Areas of disagreement
Ontological commitment to a world made up of complex nested systems and networks.	Complex nested systems, connected networks, holism, social-ecological systems, emergence, circular economy, limits, collapse, systems evolution/adaptation, global connections, peer-to-peer exchange	The universalising ontology of the global North. The need to consider decolonial theory and Southern, indigenous, and post-developmental ontologies.
A normative relationship with nature that is at least sustainable, probably regenerative, and	Sustainability, ecological integrity, carrying capacity, limits, living with less, circular flows, balance. Regenerative/restorative economy, abundance, planet centred, nonduality,	The extent to which the human relationship with nature needs rehabilitation for a transformed future. The

potentially ecocentric / planetcentric.	people are nature, values all life, balance and harmony, evolutionary potential	extent to which we need to adopt ecocentric values.
Recognition of our cooperative, interbeing and entanglement with each other.	Cooperation, lives entangled and dependent on others, interbeing, collaborate, co-create, share, soft skills, relational goods, respect, care, global commons, diverse cultural life.	The best way to deliver human wellbeing. Degrowth or abundance.
Goals of human dignity and wellbeing, social and economic justice, and plurality	Human dignity, prosperity and wellbeing, human rights, quality of life, social and economic justice, fairness, equality, redistribution, plurality, intercultural dialogue, agonism.	Whether sufficiency or abundance are appropriate economic goals
Agreement that participatory governance, a new economic system, prioritization of different human values and participatory knowledge practices are enablers of transformation.	Participatory governance, free and equal democratic participation, participatory and dialogic processes, mobilize from the grassroots, a new economic system, reduce physical inputs and outputs, reduction in material consumption, collaborative, commons	Whether transformation is possible within a capitalist framework or requires a post-capitalist economy. Orderly, deliberative change vs non-violent revolutionary resistance. Who should lead: government, business or civil society. Localisation vs global governance vs glocalisation

Table 4.2 **Areas of agreement and disagreement between counter-hegemonic discourses of sustainability (Huckle, 2023 [25] based on Riedy, 2020)**

Green new deals, degrowth, no growth

Proposed green new deals [26] have served to focus debate over the transition to sustainability during the past decade. Jessop (2015 [27]) points out that there are many meanings (discourses) of such a deal and links transformative meanings to a 'no-growth' economy with 'quantitative restraints on growth, a transformation in the quality of growth, and geographic, social and intergenerational redistribution of growth (especially across the global North-global South divide)' (p. 10 & 11). Buch-Hansen & Nielsen (2020, pp. 98-101) echo Riedy and Jessop when outlining three projects for responding to global heating: the status quo project (neoliberal), the green-growth project (green neoliberalism or green capitalism), and the post-capitalist degrowth project. Advocates of degrowth form part of the bloc arguing and campaigning for a counter-hegemony and structural

change based on such elements as socially useful production, universal basic income and services, localisation, co-operation, community wealth building, community currencies, and a new international economic order. The bloc draws on designs for 21st century socialism, a plurality of reformist and transformative knowledges, and notions of sustainability, global justice, and global democracy that respect planetary limits and the needs of the poor while recognising that the needs of the majority cannot be realised whist a minority continue to rule the world in its interests.

Global democracy, global governance, and global citizenship

> *Principle 13 Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels, and provide transparency and accountability in governance, inclusive participation in decision making the access to justice.* Earth Charter [28]

The counter-hegemony associated with the populist left requires all global actors to respect such principles as those contained in the Earth Charter and support transitions to sustainability underpinned by new forms of local, national and regional government and new forms of global governance that allow these principles to be realised. Key to the transition to a sustainable and just world order is the extension of democracy (popular control by citizens) to all spheres of social organisation (economic, political and cultural) at all scales from the lobal to the global. All global actors (individual citizens, corporations, local and national states, NGOs, institutions of global governance) should exercise care and responsibility for others (including others distant in space and time and other species) in return for enjoying universal rights that include rights to justice and universal basic services.

Critical School Geography adopted Uneco guidance on education for sustainable development and global citizenship and radicalised this by applying the kind of critical theorising outlined above. It linked global citizenship education (GCE), to Mouffe's ideas on left populism, agonistic politics and radical democracy, Ruttenburg's notion of radical GCE, and Snir's formulation of agonistic pedagogy (Huckle, 2020 [29], chapter nine). GCE requires students to have a basic level of social and political literacy that allows such concepts of political-economy, hegemony, populism, discourse, and sustainability to be explored. The Association for Citizenship Teaching [30] and Open Democracy [31] are two sources for guidance on political literacy while Science Direct [32] and the Global

Challenges Foundation [33] offer explanations and outlines of global governance.

A critical realist approach to sustainable global citizenship (SGC)

Granados-Sánchez [34] reports on a theoretical reflection on how critical realist concepts, methods and explanatory models can enrich our understanding, practice, and education of SGC with a special focus on agency and structure. He carries out a literature review to define and conceptualise SGC (discourse analysis), outlines key principles and concepts of critical realism that can bring realism to such citizenship, and focuses on five dualisms that should be the focus of pedagogy that allows students to articulate their positions by drawing on their understanding of the TMSA, PPS, and SSLS.

After reviewing theories of citizenship (liberal and republican, environmental and ecological, and sustainability citizenship) Granádos-Sanchez claims that at the heart of SGC are five opposing sets of contradictory ideas or dualisms that constitute its five dimensions and were revealed by his literature review of such texts as those of Dobson [35] Kurian et al, and Nelson [36]. Citizens gravitate to one or other pole of each dimension / dualism and each raises key questions. How can a citizen be:

- BOTH a citizen of a state of territory (territorial) AND a citizen of the world (non-territorial) Where is the locus of governance?
- BOTH a bearer of individual rights and responsibilities AND a bearer of collective rights and responsibilities What is my status as a citizen?
- BOTH a passive citizen AND an active citizen. Should I be shaped by the socio-ecological system both / and attempt to shape it?
- BOTH a private, individualistic citizen AND a public, community-orientated citizen. Do I have a social conscience?
- BOTH a citizen who expects incentives and rewards (having mode [37]) AND a citizen who acts in accordance with concepts of virtue and justice (being mode). To what extent and how should I get engaged?

Citizens and those learning to be citizens should be able to reconcile these dimensions / dualisms prompted by critical realism's notion of both/and rather than either/or. Table 4.3 shows the threshold concepts associated with each dimension and Table 4.4 contains my summary of Granados-Sanchez's outline of the dimensions and their implications for GCE. Pedagogy should focus on the

relationships, interactions and dynamics between the two poles of each dualism / dimension and its relations with other dualisms / dimensions while maintaining a focus on structure and agency and how the TMSA, PPS and SSLS models enable students to understand their location within systems of government and global governance.

Dimensions	Threshold Concepts and Dichotomies	
Governance	Sovereignty, state sovereignty, national governments, legality, power, statal authority. Territoriality.	Global governance, international relations, multi-level politics, cosmopolitanism, planetarity, diffusion of authority. Non-territoriality, aterritoriality.
Status	Responsibilities, duties, obligations. Belonging, membership, identity.	Rights, guarantees. Exclusion, multiple identities.
Social-ecological systems	Individual. Personal. One. Public. Society, social processes.	Group(s), communities, collective/collectivity. The other, otherness. Private. Nature, ecosystems, natural processes.
Social conscience	Agency ("agencies"). Self-consciousness, self-efficacy, locus of control.	Structures (social, political, economic), culture. Unconsciousness. Social innovation.
Engagement	Commitment. Participation, empowerment, action, activism. Self-determination, codetermination.	Inhibition. Inaction, passivity. Hesitance.

Table 4.3 Key dimensions and threshold concepts of sustainable global citizenship from a critical realist interpretation (Granados-Sánchez, 2023, Table 3, p.8)

Key dimension of SGC	Understandings that should shape GCE
Governance National citizenship (maintaining the political sovereignty of citizens of the nation-state and their role in the election and control of government) combined with global citizenship that partakes of global governance. This is characterised by a diffusion of authority and power, where non-state actors, such as global corporations	The nation state does not determine the entire space of citizen participation. There are other territories and communities in which SGCs should participate in a political, social, cultural, moral and economic way on a global and regional scale. SGCs needs to engage in both government and governance through participation in politics and in social innovation initiatives. This involves them in to monitoring and controlling policies and acting as a counterpower. A critical realistic vision of citizenship integrates its economic, political, social and cultural variables in situations of territorial sovereignty (nation states) in global governance (through multi-level politics in different territorial scales and situations) as well as in other non-territorial life spheres. State/global dualism can be analysed via **seven-scalar laminated system model** (Figure 4.4). The state and its government are at meso and macro scales (levels 4 and 5), the global constitutes the planetary scale (level 7), individuals and group agencies of citizens (levels 2 and 3) are affected by the sub-individual psychological scale (level 1) . Agency is of a different nature depending on the

and social movements, engage in processes of decision-making.	levels where action is taken or affected. As we move vertically or horizontally within levels, we pass from state to global realities and from sovereignty to social innovation.
Status Political communities confer citizenship status that grants benefits / rights and ascribes duties. Civil, political and environmental rights. Should they be socially or privately based? Should they be a combination of individual and community rights? How to combine universality with special rights for minorities?	GC is stratified and asymmetrical. Individuals, groups, and states should assume differential responsibility towards the global according to their impact. This is related to the global positions they occupy over time. At the same time big efforts should be made to achieve symmetry in the status of all people. Global citizens are both objects and subjects of responsibility. Objects include ourselves, other members of the global community, and future generations. Also the Earth and all forms of life. Responsibility assigned to individuals, groups and collectives as subjects. Related to sense of belonging and perception of interconnection with others that leads to obligation to act and is associated with values of solidarity, security and sustainability. Obligation related to impact / footprint. Reduce this but extend to social, political and moral aspects. Asymmetric obligations extend to groups, corporations and nations – based on an inherited global order = levels of historical obligation. Deliberation between rights and responsibilities key to sustainability as a collective undertaking. Deliberating ideas of sufficiency, sustaining nature, fulfilling obligations to present and future generations.
Socio-ecological systems Refers to the relationships between nature and society. Used to describe, analyse, and model human-nature interactions. Are hybrid and emergent systems resulting from interactions of various social and natural components over space and time. Key components are ecosystem functions and social actors. Ecosystems provide	SGC is based on the principle of socio-ecological obligations and global dialogue. GCs consider themselves to be part of social-ecological systems both as individuals and as part of groups or collectives. Social-ecological systems have distinctive characteristics and threats according to scale and context. Need to include the group as a key category in citizenship and thus transcend the individual/collective dualism. Individuals and groups have emergent properties including development of identities linked to group membership and influence of group on agency. Groups can generate oppositional action, novel ideas, problem-solving, new kinds of knowledge. The group, the collective and the universal (universal values) can be linked. Importance of scale interactions i.e. global, regional and local processes. Another tension is individualised, profit-seeking self -interest promoted by current hegemonic neoliberalism VS global common good. The dualism between private and public interests. SGC recognises that the public and private spheres are interrelated – Democracy (and sustainability) must begin at home and be built on face-to-face interactions and co-operation. Group and collective engagement depend on such democracy and on transdisciplinary and transformative competence.

services and goods or disservices and harm.	Public/private, individual/group, personal/political cannot be separated. How to satisfy our needs and desires in collective ways? How to satisfy our needs and desires in simple ways and move from 'having' and 'pretence and appearance' to 'being'?
Social conscience Social conscience is the knowledge that a person possesses that is imbued with value judgements about things. It allows us to know reality and our role in it at any moment. Having social conscience allows us to know the position we occupy in the system and the power and possibilities that this gives us to be able to act and transform reality. Compels us to insist on moral action from the wider institutions of society and to seek the transformation of social structures that cause suffering.	Reality and social outcomes are related to the ways in which agency, structure, and culture are intertwined. Social conscience enables citizens to have real power over their agency. Social conscience composed of three interrelated elements: **Agency**, the ability of individuals to decide and act independently or in agreement with others. Implies a sense of free will, choice, or autonomy – the sense of personal power, it constitutes personal responsibility. Conditioned cognitively by emotional and affective aspects, character traits, contextual frame of mind, self-efficacy, and performativity. Importance of the unconscious and habits VS reflexivity and intention. Agencies because of group and collective actions that are not just individual. **Structures**, abstract entities of economic, political, social, and juridical / legal origin that organise the life of the community. Context dependent and human activity dependent in time and space, they facilitate and motivate agency while at the same time limiting and constraining it. Relation between structure and agency is recursive and transformational. Society and its structures are the existing material conditions for praxis that can reproduce or transform them. The activities of agents are conditioned both by social structures and a cultural system. Structures create a system with hierarchies with people and groups occupying different places in this stratified reality and having differential access to resources and facilities. As people engage with others, they can generate new ideas and transform structures through collective agency. Social innovation is a process that allows social emancipation and sustainability and puts the citizen, not the state, at the centre. **Culture** The existing relations between ideas. The confrontation of ideas takes place in sociocultural interactions and constitutes another ontological dimension. Agents are conditioned both by social structures and a cultural system.
Engagement Manifested through commitment, participation and action. Degrees of commitment from inhibition to transformative citizenship. A renaissance of democratic participation	There are many factors that determine civic engagement and participation. Citizens should be aware of them so that they can decide how to act as autonomous and conscious individuals at all times and thus avoid social apathy and frustration. These factors include action competence, self-efficacy (belief in one's own abilities to succeed in a particular situation), locus of control (the degree of control a person thinks s/he has over what happens in their life), horizontal and bottom up forms of shared governance as well as top-down opportunities for civic participation in spaces, programmes and structures in which social groups can visualize, materialize and learn sustainability.

motivated by desire for self realisation.	

Table 4.4 The author's summary of Granados-Sánchez's outline of the five dimensions of SGC and the related understandings that should shape GCE

Granados Sánchez concludes by insisting that 'agency-structure dualism requires more comprehensive approaches that intervene in the autonomous decision to act and that include personal capacities, the desire and motivation to get engaged, and the real possibility of participating determined by the social context and personal situation. It is also necessary to increase the number of types of agencies especially with the recognition of groups as a key entity' (Granados-Sánchez, p, 1).

Discursive and non-discursive factors, Chantel Mouffe's green democratic revolution

The cultural turn in the social sciences, including geography, features in *Critical School Geography* (pp. 54 & 55). Mouffe, whose ideas shaped that text, is sometimes accused of reducing everything to culture and discourse and thereby neglecting the economic base of society (Figure 1.4, p. 11). As a post-Marxist who follows a path set by Gramsci, she rejects class as the primary foundation of political identity arguing that such identities are constructed in struggles over hegemony and that such issues as gender, ethnicity, and the environment, that pre-occupy social movements can also channel social power. In what she terms radical democracy, hegemony is contested in everyday struggles over a multiplicity of issues involving a multiplicity of agents. Whether or not such a view collapses the distinction between economic base and cultural superstructure and absorbs everything into discourse can perhaps be decided by reference to her 2022 text *Towards a Green Democratic Revolution* which is the subject of her interview for Democracy in Action [38].

Mouffe clearly identifies the challenge posed by the crisis of neoliberalism, its transition to a new authoritarian form, and the need for a new form of political economy that offers protection and security and counters disaster nationalism (page 47). She suggests that left populism can mobilise a counter-hegemonic coalition to campaign for a green democratic revolution that breaks with financialised capitalism and its version of a green new deal. Central to such a

revolution is the constitution of 'a people' whose passions or affects demand radical systemic change linked to a narrative or story of hope whereby relations between people and between people and the rest of nature are set on a new path. Developing themes revealed in Reidy's analysis of counter-hegemonic discourses of sustainability (Table 4.2) and Granados-Sanchez's dimensions of SGC (Table 4.3 & 4.4) she argues that democratic ideals should be rescued from the constraints of capitalism and modernity in ways that break with the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of mainstream social theory to embrace critical theory and ecocentrism. This would allow a variety of worldviews, knowledges, philosophies to take root and lead to the establishment of green democratic states and forms of democratic global governance.

School geography and a green democratic revolution

While Mouffe focuses on discourse, she is well aware of the economic base of the current crisis and the role of digital technology in reinforcing the prevailing hegemony. The democratic revolution she advocates can be compared with Fraser's 21stC socialism (Table 2.7, page 48) and the foundational economy (Table 2.10, page 52) and is the subject of many of the transformative knowledges listed in Table 2.8 (page 50). It can be considered knowledge of the powerless and should feature in the curriculum alongside knowledge of the powerful.

If school geography is to contribute to such a revolution, teachers and students should be able to reflect and act on their roles as agents within global structures in ways that the ideas, models and prescriptions outlined in this chapter suggest. They reinforce ideas about radical global citizenship education and agonistic pedagogy explored in chapter nine of *Critical School Geography* and extend our understanding of what is involved in developing global citizens capable of realising just and democratic transitions towards sustainability. We have yet to touch on students' affects, their passions, values and emotions. They are the subject of the next and concluding chapter.

Further reading

The study of electoral geography allows teachers to explore students' understanding of structure and agency and develop their political literacy. On the Election 2024 website Sloan [39] analyses the 'youthquake' that saw young voters turn to the progressive left while Hennig [40] provides cartographic perspectives on the results. How should geography teachers use such material to examine voting behaviour or the actions of agents within political structures?

The UK planning system is a topic that allows teachers to introduce the theories models outlined in this chapter (TMSA, PPS, Archer's social theory, SSLS). The Council for the Protection of Rural England has a guide to planning [41] and in 2025 the Built Environment Committee published a report [42] on proposed new towns.

In 2026 there was a wave of unrest as young people in Madagascar, Nepal, Peru, the Philippines and Morocco protested about lack of opportunity and sought to topple governments and oust leaders. Savage and Rahenintsoa [43] focus on Madagascar, the fifth poorest country in the world. It ranks 140 out of 180 in Transparency International's 2024 corruption perception index and only 5% of the population has a formal salaried job. Gen Z Madagascar, who ousted the president with the aid of military, took inspiration from other Gen Z groups around the world and their use of social media to gain support. How can case studies of youthful protest be used to teach such models as those of the TMSA, the PPS and social interaction?

Read Morgan's 2025 article Geography Teaching in the present conjuncture (or what kind of school geography for what type of society? [44] that turns a spotlight on the Geographical Association's 2024 publication *Geography for all our futures*. Can the article be considered an example of critical discourse analysis?

Global Citizenship Education Otherwise [45] is a booklet that outlines a form of GCE based on decolonial theory. It argues that students should be taught to reflect and act on knowledges that go beyond the epistemological and ontological hegemonies of modern thought to embrace such critical and holistic knowledges listed as transformative in Figure 2.8 (page 50). I have applied such thinking to the integrated Curriculum for Wales suggesting that while it has potential to develop SGC it lacks a philosophy of knowledge that critical realism can provide. Read my argument [46] paying particular attention to the knowledge (discourse of sustainability) offered by Welsh Druidry.

González-Valencia, Sabater & Fernández [47] report on a study of 16 year old students in Catalonia and their 'understanding of the dimensions of critical global citizenship education. First, they review the literature and outline the different contributions of the social sciences: history, geography, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and ethics (see Figure 4.X). Geography 'helps us to understand the interdependence between the different territorial scales and to defend sustainability throughout the planet' ibid, p. 4.

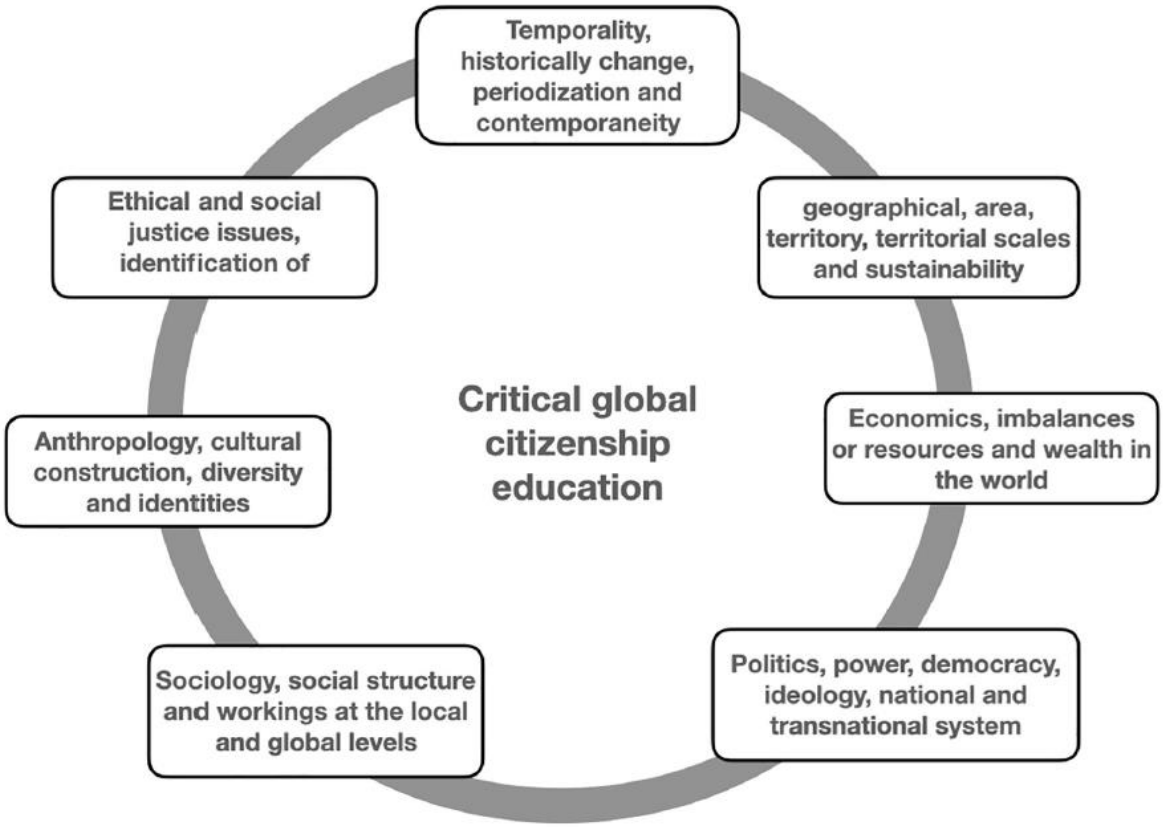

Figure 4.6 Social sciences contributions to critical global citizenship education González-Valencia, Sabater & Fernández. [48] p. 5

Students answered a questionnaire that elicitied responses to a series of cases relating to the dimensions of CGCE including a photo of a G20 meeting. Their responses were evaluated by reference to the dimensions: temporality, territories, politics / democracy / ideology, economies, social structures, cultural practices, ethics and social justice. The results showed that 'students did not have the tools necessary for critical interpretation of social facts and problems, they are still less able to formulate arguments or make decisions relating to actions within the parameters of social justice' (ibid, abstract). Around 60% of answers were judged

descriptive (only mentioning 1 or 2 codes), 35% interpretive with a certain social commitment (3 or 4 codes), and less that 2% were critical (offering proposals for action).

The article raises questions as to whether geography can develop critical global citizens without the support of other social subjects / sciences that are lacking in the English national curriculum. It suggests that developing the critical dimension of CGCE requires appropriate curriculum development and reminds us that pictures can be used to reveal students' political understanding. See for example the Development Compass Rose [49].

In their text *Critical Realism, Basics and Beyond*, Buch-Hansen & Nielsen consider degrowth as a core concept that implies 'material wealth should be balanced by other values, such as sustainability, democracy, wellbeing and autonomy'. They suggest that degrowth as dissent is an example of critical realism in action manifesting itself not primarility as a political project promoted by social forces but as a myriad of uncoordinated actions that undermine, delegitimise and corrupt the institutions, identities and perfomance of advanced capitalism (pp. 102 & 103). My 2024 article [50] 'Revisioning the Geocapabilities project through the lens of critical realism with a focus on sustainable global citizen' draws on Buch-Hansen & Nielsen and suggests degrowth may be one key to forms of society and education that allow all to develop their capabilities as global citizens. Should degrowth feature more strongly in the school geography curriculum?

Discussion

To what extent can the theory and models outined in this chapter be made accesssible to students of different ages and abilities?

Can students only learn by doing? Does teaching about structure and agency require students of geography to take real or simulated action on issues of nature, place and space? What limits should be imposed on such action?

On what scales within the SSLS should school geography focus? How should it deal with interaction / interdependence between scales? What determines such interaction / interdependence?

Over forty years ago Rob Gilbert's text *The Impotent Image: Reflections of Ideology in the Secondary Curriculum* (1984) included a chapter on human and economic geography that argued that like other social subjects, the image of

society it presented was incompatible with the emancipatory and egalitarian ethos by which the subject was justified. What if anything has changed since?

To what extent is critical discourse analysis a key component of critical pedagogy? In what wasy does such pedagogy foster the kinds of internal conversations outlined on page 95.

Is critical global citizenship education best taught via a subject based, interdisciplinary, or integrated curriculum? As a geography teacher what would be your reaction to being asked to teach within an integrated framework such as the humanities component of the Curriculum for Wales?

Which of the dimensions of SGC (Table 4.4) are most / least likely to feature in school geography? What challenges do they pose? Should the subject do more to accommodate these dimensions?

Have you investigated your students' understanding of sustainability and global citizenship? What methods have you used? What results surprised you?

How can a green democratic revolution, such as that proposed by Mouffe, be featured in the school geography curriculum in ways that seek political literacy and global citizenship rather than political indoctrination?

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PPS and SSLS are concepts/models in CR that have helped in the analysis of key dimensions of SGC and how they relate to structure-agency dualism

The new Curriculum for Wales seeks to develop young people who are ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world and committed to the sustainability of the planet. While the curriculum requires the integration of subject knowledge, the associated guidance fails to suggest a philosophy of knowledge to inform such integration. Having linked sustainability to political economy and regimes of truth, rule and accumulation, this article draws on the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Collective's typology of social reform spaces to consider spaces of sustainability politics in Wales. It then argues that the curriculum should enable students to articulate and contest sustainability within and across these spaces, a form of radical global citizenship education. Critical realism can guide curriculum delivery as it provides insights into inter-disciplinary enquiry, the role of critical pedagogy and the development of learners as non-dual beings who are at one with themselves and other human and non-human beings and thereby prepared to act as global citizens seeking sustainability

https://john.huckle.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/huckle2022.pdf

Mouffe's advocacy of a green democratic revolution, shaped by a blend of eco-socialist, post-developmental and decolonial thought, suggests what a critical EfS should cover and why it should be linked to radical global citizenship education. Neoliberal, socially democratic and eco-socialist discourses of sustainability and a green transition should feature in the curriculum and agonistic pedagogy should be employed to enable students to reflect and act on these and so develop their political literacy. The Curriculum for Wales can accommodate such pedagogy and an incoming Labour government in Westminster can learn from its example.

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