CHAPTER FOUR
Educational Definitions of Culture: Looking at the Literature

Omitted: Opening remarks about the connection of this chapter and the distinction drawn in the first chapter between formal and informal definitions.

Over the last two decades many sensitive treatments of culture have been written by social theorists talking to other social theorists. However, most of the educational literature, especially teacher preparation books and articles about multicultural education, have continued to treat culture in cruder terms. For this reason the present chapter consists in a serious, plainspoken content analysis review of multicultural education literature. In it I review a number of definitions featured in textbooks and other preservice and inservice materials over the last three decades, in the hope that sorting out their differences and implications will help those who use these resources appreciate distinctions and nuances that might not be apparent at first sight.

The Fine Art of Content Analysis

Readers already familiar with the qualitative research techniques of social science will recognize that what follows is a type of content analysis roughly similar to qualitative narrative analysis.[1] Using selected quotations and summaries of the contexts within which they appear, I "interrogate" several multicultural education authors to show how (and whether) their conceptions of culture align with nine major definitional categories developed in the classical and contemporary social theories surveyed in Chapters 2 and 3. In doing so I focus (with varying degrees of emphasis for each author) on the core questions of content analysis, which the political sociologist Harold Lasswell (1948) famously summarized as: "Who says what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect?"

To this end I employ two types of qualitative content analysis, namely *categorical* and *holistic* analysis. (1) In the first approach I identify the formal and informal definitions of culture in play in a number of representative books and articles about multicultural education. Here I follow the general rule of categorical content analysis, which applies to non-narrative works as well as narrative ones: first a specific topic is identified and then definitional categories are defined and applied. Separate texts – sometimes single sentences, sometimes full paragraphs, in a few cases careful paraphrases of longer sections of text – that purport to define the topic at hand are extracted from representative statements made by recognized authorities. These texts, which in the present chapter are parsed into what I have been calling formal and informal definitions, are then classified according to the previously established definitional categories, accompanied by explanations and commentaries as needed in order to justify the investigator's treatment of ambiguous cases. (2) The second approach, holistic analysis, deals with context, which includes the author's implicit or explicit suppositions about the nature and goals of multicultural education, the intended audience of the publication (which may be a textbook for undergraduate education majors, scholarly study, review of the literature, etc.), and ultimately the pedagogical

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[1] Those not familiar with this sort of analysis might wish to consult Neuendorf (2002).

and philosophical soundness of the work itself. In what follows my categorical content analysis of each definitions of culture is much more structured than the corresponding holistic analysis, since my primary purpose is to show readers how to identify, compare, and contrast the seemingly disorganized array of culture definitions found in the multicultural literature. The holistic analysis serves my secondary purpose, which is to bring to the surface a few of the instructional agendas, correlations with specific anthropological and sociological traditions, philosophical implications or nuances, and other important but not always obvious ideas associated with those definitions.

Omitted: Other details about the two types of content analysis used in this chapter

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The Definitional Modes: From Tylor to the Present

As the early cultural pluralist educators moved beyond ethnic studies programs to more properly multicultural agendas, their conceptions of culture sharpened and their debts — usually unacknowledged — to the social sciences increased. Considering that Tylor's definition of culture as "that complex whole" continues to appear in virtually every introductory anthropology textbook, it is not surprising that it has also surfaced in many articles, textbooks, and monographs on multicultural education. What is a little surprising, though, is the absence in most of that literature (but see Gollnick and Chinn, 1994, p. 3) of any explicit dissent from Tylor's hierarchical, undeniably ethnocentric view of culture as the equivalent of civilization, according to which "its various grades may be regarded as stages of development or evolution" (Tylor, 1873/1958, p. 1). Also surprising — though perhaps less so, considering the eclectic tendency of most of those who write about education — is the fact that one seldom if ever finds a multicultural education text complaining about the unwieldy, laundry list character of Tylor's first, most famous sentence, which as we saw in Chapter 2 (FD2.1) was:

> Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

His panorama of cultural traits included ideational, behavioral, institutional, and material or artifactual features, as well as "any other" human capabilities save those inherited biologically. Though breathtakingly wide it offered no suggestion of any hierarchy among these features, even though Tylor did not hesitate just a few lines later to rank entire ways of life against each other. We saw in the previous chapters that subsequent generations of anthropologists and sociologists on both sides of the Atlantic strove to develop more systematic lists of cultural features. However, we also saw that whereas the complex whole that Tylor had in mind was the totality of human culture (generically, "civilization"), twentieth-century anthropologists and other social theorists influenced by them localized the notion of culture so that each people was seen to have its own complexity and unity. With this shift, cultural complexity became a theme in its own right, and although it had different nuances from one theorist to the next depending on how they understood the dynamics of cultural evolution and

diffusion, by mid-century there was universal agreement among anthropologists and sociologists that to the ingredients of culture such as those listed by Tylor there should be added meta-level features such as the patterning, integration, purpose, and functioning of those ingredients.

Of course none of these revisions took place formally, as though on some afternoon in the 1920s or 30s a resolution were passed at an international congress of social scientists declaring that culture would no longer be understood as a thing of "shreds and patches"[2] but henceforth as a set of features that were somehow clustered and patterned, purposive and rank ordered. Even so, it is correct to say that when Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952/1963) famous inventory of definitions of culture appeared it was well received and immediately became the standard source for scholars probing the supposed "essential core" (ibid., p. 357) of the concept of culture. As we saw in Chapter 2, Kroeber and Kluckhohn distilled from 164 definitions a common denominator, which they proposed to their scholarly colleagues and the world at large as the definitive descriptive and prescriptive definition of culture on which future anthropological research should be based:

> Culture consists of *patterns*, explicit and implicit, of and for *behavior* acquired and transmitted by *symbols*, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in *artifacts*; the essential core of culture consists of *traditional* (i.e., historically derived and selected) *ideas* and especially their attached *values*; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (Ibid., italics added)

In this definition artifacts are mentioned, but only incidentally as embodiments of the essential core of culture, which consists in ideas and values that bear the pedigree of historical tradition. In fact the entire phenomenal side of culture — its products, symbols, and of course observable behaviors — is subordinated to the ideational side, which includes not only ideas and values but also the patterns and purposes discernable among these features. Most importantly, culture is understood as something real, capable of being a cause as well as an effect of human action.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn found patterns not only in culture but also among its many definitions, and assembled an extensive, complicated list of ways that scholars since Tylor had defined culture. Their list was later streamlined by John Bodley (1994) and revised slightly to include later developments in anthropology and sociology. I have revised it further (Table 4.1) in order to provide a framework for sorting out the various ways of defining culture that one finds in the literature of multicultural education. In what follows I call these ways "definitional modes" and show how they shape the formal and informal components of those definitions that I have selected from the theoretical and applied literature of multicultural education.

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[2]This frequently cited phrase was borrowed from Gilbert and Sullivan by anthropologist Robert H. Lowrie.

TABLE 4.1: Nine Ways of Defining Culture (Definitional Modes)	
1. Topical	Culture consists of everything on a list of topics or general categories ("ingredients," "cultural traits," "attributes").
2. Structural	Culture is an integrated pattern of ideas and/or behaviors.
3. Functional	Culture is the way individuals or societies solve problems of adapting to the environment and/or living together.
4. Historical	Culture is a group's shared heritage.
5. Normative	Culture is a group's ideals, values, or rules for living.
6. Behavioral	Culture is shared, learned human behavior, a publicly observable way of life.
7. Cognitive	Culture is a complex of ideas and attitudes that inhibit impulses, establish shared meanings and goals, and enable people to live in a social system.
8. Symbolic	Culture is a set of shared, socially constructed representations and meanings.
9. Critical	Culture is the symbols and symbol-making activities that typically reflect and promote a society's current power relationships.

This table is, of course, only a brief snapshot of how scholars have understood culture since Tylor. I hope it is obvious that there is no reason to believe the nine ways of defining culture shown in Table 4.1 are the only possible definitional modes,even though they suffice for our purposes. Much of the more recent work on culture also fits into these categories, but during the postmodern period of the late 20th century many anthropologists and other social scientists began to move from critiques of the uses to which the concept of culture is put by those in power to a more radical questioning of the notion of culture altogether, as explained at the end of Chapter 2. Like postmodern critics from cultural studies departments and other academic disciplines they have found it difficult to make their case without using the very concepts they mean to expose. Their "writing against culture" is often paradoxical and larded with elusive tropes and jargon (such as the word "trope"). To put it mildly, most postmodernist studies of culture, including those written by hardheaded anthropologists and sociologists, are not exactly straightforward or immediately useful to classroom teachers or other school personnel. For this and other reasons, the tendency of many social scientists to critique or deconstruct the very idea of culture has not had much influence on the theory or practice of multicultural education, except in the case of critical multiculturalists, whose own influence in educational circles is now very much on the rise. Accordingly, I have included the "critical mode" in the list of definitional modes shown above, and will also argue in the next chapter that the anti-cultural perspective ought to be taken very seriously by multicultural educators.

Some (for the Most Part) Textbook Cases

I have already indicated my belief in the importance of thematic content analysis. Readers have a right to see the textual evidence for second-level claims about themes supposedly running though any body of literature, especially one as extensive and amorphous as the literature of multicultural education. I also believe that analyzing a few selected examples of each definitional mode will help professors of education and their students, as well as teachers already in the field

and others who read that literature, to navigate through what might otherwise seem to be either a wasteland or a jungle. The match between the nine definitional modes listed in Table 4.1 and the texts examined in this chapter is often imperfect, since the authors of those texts did not write their definitions so that they would fit into one or another box on that table. It is my hope, nonetheless, that even the imperfect matches discussed below can reveal the logical geography of contemporary multicultural scholarship, especially in its uses and abuses of the concept of culture.

As in all geographies, the mappings that follow are sharper and simpler on paper than in real life. By now it should be abundantly clear that the contrast between formal and informal definitions is descriptive, not prescriptive, which is to say that the distinction itself is only a heuristic device designed to help the reader rather than a rule authors are expected to follow. However, the formal/informal contrast can be rather complex, as we will see in the pages that follow. For instance, the analysis begins with a prominent multiculturalist's definition of culture that combines two definitional modes, such that the mode of its formal component is topical and the mode of its informal component is structural. Combinations like this are not uncommon, as we will see, but they are usually easy to identify.

One more general comment is in order before we set out on our journey through the confusing literature of multicultural education. The expression "way of defining X" has two meanings, one substantive and the other procedural. In the first case, the way one defines X simply *is* the definition of X, that is, it is the meaning or content of the definition. In the second case, it is the *definitional mode itself,* i.e., the method or approach that one uses to define X. The subject of the present chapter is the second of these two senses.

1. Topical Definitions

The first way to define culture that we will consider is the topical list, which combines the defining-by-ingredients method mentioned in Chapter 1 with the idea of cultural traits introduced in Chapter 2. Like the eight other definitional modes to be considered in this chapter, this mode can be used to construct part or all of either a formal definition (e.g., Bank's FD4.1) or an informal definition (e.g., Lum's ID4.3). Furthermore, it can be mixed with other definitional modes, so that an author might open with a formal definition of culture that consists of a topical list (I will call this the definitional mode of the formal component) followed by an informal definition that refers to historical tradition (the definitional mode of the informal component), or vice versa. Alternatively, the informal definition could take a structural approach, as when Banks characterizes cultures as "unique wholes" in ID4.1. And so on.

Thus the definitional modes of the three topical definitions considered in this section can be charted as follows. (I will begin each of the following sections with this sort of chart.)

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Banks (4.1)	Topical	Structural
Spring (4.2)	Topical	Cognitive
Lum (4.3)	Topical	Topical and cognitive

Our first example of a primarily topical approach to culture is the often-cited formal definition that James Banks first offered in a short but influential paper presented at several

multicultural education conferences in the late 1970s and then published as the lead article in a special issue of *The Journal of Negro Education* devoted to "Multicultural Education in the International Year of the Child" (Banks, 1979a).[3]

FD4.1 Culture consists of the behavior patterns, symbols, institutions, values and other human-made components of society. (Ibid., p. 238)

Unlike Kroeber and Kluckhohn's otherwise very similar list, the wording of Banks's 1979 definition implies that his list is complete rather than merely illustrative. However, except for this probably unintended difference, FD4.1 simply repackages Kroeber and Kluckhohn's mid-century conception of culture. A more significant difference appears in the accompanying informal definition (ID4.1), where Banks fits his conception of culture into a quasi-assimilationist structural account of American pluralism as a "macro culture":

ID4.1 It [culture] is the unique achievement of a human group which distinguishes it from other human groups. While cultures are in many ways similar, a particular culture constitutes a unique whole. Thus culture is a generic concept with wide boundaries. Consequently, we can describe the United States [as having a] macro culture as well as the micro cultures within it. … These cultures may be social class cultures, regional cultures, religious cultures, and national cultures (e.g., the national culture of Japan). Another appropriate goal of multicultural education is to reform the total school environment so that students from diverse cultural groups will be able to experience equal educational opportunities. (Ibid., pp. 238-39)

Over the last three decades Banks has described the American sociocultural scene in many ways, not all of which treat social subgroups as holistic "micro cultures." For instance, he later expanded his conception of multicultural education "to mean a total school reform effort" directed toward educational equity (Banks, 2004, p. 7).[4] But what he said back in 1979 was an accurate expression of the Boasian view of culture that was still alive and well in those early days of cultural pluralism. Ethnicity had come into its own in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, and forward-looking sociologists, educators, and social commentators shared the conviction that minority groups have their own distinct cultures (the "unique wholes" mentioned in ID4.1), the proper interaction of which was expected to usher in a new era of social justice.

A very different sort of topical list appears in another popular teacher preparation text, Joel Spring's *The Intersection of Cultures* (2008). Here the news is not so good. On the very first page Spring serves up a virtually useless pro forma definition of culture, reeling off a short list of cultural traits that appears to be his official definition of the term:

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[3] The page references here are to this article. For its previous history, see Banks, 1979b.

[4] This comment is relatively recent but it reiterates Banks's original follow-up to the passage that I have represented as ID4.1: "Since culture is the root of 'multicultural,' multicultural education suggests a type of education that is related in some way to a range of cultural groups. The concept itself implies little more than education related to many cultures. A major aim of multicultural education should be to educate students so that they will acquire knowledge about a range of cultural groups and develop the attitudes, skills, and abilities needed to function at some level of competency within many different cultural environments" (Banks, 1979, p. 239).

FD4.2 "Culture" here refers to socially transmitted behavior patterns, ways of thinking and perceiving the world, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought. (Ibid., p. 3)

It is hard to tell what led Spring to include these but not other equally prominent ingredients of culture such as language and ritual, and even harder to see just what constraints if any this loose list puts on his subsequent analysis of and prescriptions for multicultural education.[5] What we can learn from this example, though, is that in the literature of multicultural education, especially its preservice textbooks, not all definitions of culture are equal, and that some are mere window dressing. In other words, what looks like a definition of culture is not always a useful introduction to an author's substantive views about culture and the cultural issues involved in multicultural education. However, in fairness to Spring we should note that later in his book he does get down to brass tacks, drawing from cognitive anthropology and cultural psychology the important psychological concept of "cultural frames of reference.[6] This idea turns out to be the unifying theme for Spring's book and in the present context it serves as a good informal definition of culture. In contrast to the window-dressing formal definition of culture with which his book opens, Spring later provides the following relatively sharp-edged cognitive conception of culture as a series of filters or lenses through which one sees the world, adding that a person can employ more than one cultural frame:

ID4.2 Cultural frames of reference [include] ways of seeing, knowing, and interrelating with the world. . . . In a multicultural society such as the United States, there can be frequent switching of cultural frames, creating the phenomenon of biculturalism or the multicultural mind. A person growing up in a multicultural society might learn to live in two different cultures. However, some people in multicultural societies are socialized for a single culture, and they filter their information through the lens of that single culture. This is referred to as *monoculturalism*. To a certain extent, all people learn to function in different cultural contexts. (Ibid., pp. 199-120)

Spring uses a simplified version of the cognitive frame theory described in Chapter 2 to develop his own view that a single person can embody several cultures. He argues that in our contemporary society thoroughly monocultural individuals are increasingly rare. Given that a cultural perspective is an individual's unique combination of lenses that selectively reveal the social world, one person could interpret the world through a cultural frame whose filters are female, upper-class, bicultural, and shaped by a particular understanding of history. Another person with different filters might be monocultural with a different understanding of history, and so on. "The sharing of perspectives," Spring concludes, "can give a person a group identity. On

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[5] In the first edition of this book Spring provided an even more generous omnibus definition: "In this book, within the term *culture* I am including literature, the music, religion, and modes of social interaction such as family organization, child rearing practices, social status, gender roles, and manners. In addition, I am including attitudes about property, morality, work, crime, leisure, government, and authority (1997, p. 4). One can only guess as to why he shortened his list.

[6] See Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martínez (2000) and Kim (2001), who are cited by Spring in his discussion of cultural frames.

the other hand, the unique combination of lenses can create an individual identity" (pp. 138-139). The possibilities seem endless.

> **Omitted: My analysis of the third topical definition (by Doman Lum) and my summarizing discussion of when topical definitions can be useful**

2. Structural Definitions

Not all of the topical definitions of culture one finds in the multicultural education literature are mere lists. Many not only identify cultural traits but also show how they fit together as a "way of life," in which case it may be hard to determine whether the definitional is topical or structural.[7] To put it gently, the structural definitions of culture found in the literature of multicultural education have varying levels of organization and determinateness. Some formulations stress organizational features such as pattern and coherence more than others do, but there is no sharp dividing line between topical and holistic definitions of culture. As I see it, the most we can say is that topical definitions like those cited in the previous section do not *emphasize* structure and pattern, and hence are not holistic in their general mode of presentation even though they may contain hints of structural unity (e.g., Banks's characterization of cultures as "unique wholes" in ID4.1). In short, holism admits of degrees.

What Kroeber and Kluckhohn said in 1952 about anthropologists of their day also applies to contemporary mainstream multicultural educators: "There are probably few contemporary anthropologists who would reject completely the proposition 'A culture is the distinct way of life of a people,' though many would regard it as incomplete" (1952, pp. 98-99). When Tylor called culture "that complex whole" he meant only that culture is complicated, not that its components are integrated into an organic structure or system. In contrast, Boas and his followers argued that cultures are distinct, internally coherent and externally incommensurable unities, each having its own pattern, design, organization, and so on. (Recall from Chapter 2 the contrast in Benedict's aptly titled *Patterns of Culture* of the Apollonian culture of the Zuni Pueblos and the Dionysian culture of the surrounding Plains Indians, as well as Herskovits's various accounts of African cultures.) Although by 1970 anthropology had gone well beyond the Boasians' strong incommensurability view of cultural difference, their influence on the early cultural pluralists was profound, especially though by no means exclusively their influence on black and native American educators of the 1970s and 80s. From the premise that cultures could not be ranked against each other, cultural pluralists concluded that all cultures are equally deserving of respect and, most important of all, that every group of people who share a culture — and by extension, every person in those groups — is equally worthy of respect and equally entitled to an adequate education and other public goods.

As in the previous section, the definitions I have selected to illustrate the structural approach include a variety of definitional modes. At the risk of gross oversimplification I have charted them as follows, though I have no idea of how their authors would feel about this scheme:

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[7]It may also be hard to see why an overworked on-the-line teacher would ever need to make such a fine-grained determination, but that's a different point. Here the task at hand is learning to cope with the professional literature of multicultural education, not its classroom challenges.

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Adler (4.4)	Structural	Structural
Shade et al. (4.5)	Structural	Cognitive
Cartledge & Feng (4.6)	Structural and topical	Structural

During the 1970s the idea of specifically *cultural* equality also began to circulate among educators who had no personal stake in the black struggle for equity and who did not identify themselves as cultural pluralists. Becoming what Peter Adler once called "a multicultural man" – later revised as "a multicultural person" – came to be seen as a matter of personal growth as well as social justice. In a frequently reprinted essay originally written for communication scholars as well as professional educators, Adler (2007) combines the classical anthropological idea of culture as structure with an account of psychosocial development (Singer, 1971) in order to explain just what is involved in becoming a multicultural person. His essay includes a formal definition of culture that runs as follows:

FD4.4 Culture, the mass of life patterns that human beings in a given society learn from their elders and pass on to the younger generation, is imprinted in the individual as a pattern of perceptions that is accepted and expected by others in a society. (Adler, 2007, p. 230)

After a short discussion of cultural identity as the ongoing experience of incorporating the worldview and other elements of a given culture, Adler makes it clear that the mass of life patterns mentioned in FD4.4 has its own logic and structure. In what adds up to an informal definition of culture, he summarizes its logical, moral, and psychological implications in three basic postulates about culture that should be internalized and reflected in the thinking and behavior of any "multicultural person," including any student whose cross-cultural experience includes a properly delivered multicultural education. They are, he tells us, "fundamental to success in cross-cultural adaptation." In brief, his three postulates are as follows:

ID4.4   1. Every culture has its own internal coherence, integrity, and logic….
        2. No one culture is inherently better or worse than another….
        3. All persons are, to some extent, culturally bound. (Ibid., p. 236)

These postulates are clear in themselves, but in the literature and policies of multicultural education they have been applied in different ways and with different agendas. Consider, for instance, Margaret Gibson's definition of multicultural education, which appeared in her important review of the concepts and assumptions in play during those early years of the multicultural education movement (Gibson, 1976, revised version 1984). The five approaches to multicultural education that she discusses, including her own approach, entitled "Multicultural Education as the Normal Human Experience," understand culture holistically. However, they are aimed at a variety of outcomes, namely equity in education, respect of others' rights to be different, increased group power, bicultural competency, and — in her own approach — *cultural transmission* (Spindler, 1974, cited by Gibson, 1984, p. 112).[8]

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[8] For purposes of exposition she discusses these approaches as distinct alternatives, but it will come as no

A more extensive example of the structuralist approach is provided by Barbara Shade and her co-authors Cynthia Kelly and Mary Oberg (1997), who answer their own question "What is culture?" with a freewheeling survey that conflates not only the usually distinct ideas of culture and social system but also the structural and cognitive modes. They conclude with an image of culture as a systematized pattern of thought that serves as a collective selection mechanism or filter.[9]

FD4.5 Culture is a *social system* that represents an accumulation of beliefs, attitudes, habits, values, and practices that serve as a filter through which a group of people view and respond to the world in which they live. (Ibid, p. 18, italics added)

As the authors immediately explain, they have based their definition on the work of cognitive sociologists for whom culture is a set of invisible patterns that have become normal ways of acting, feeling, and being (Maehr, 1974), or as one of their sources puts it, "a group's preferred way of perceiving, judging, and organizing the things they encounter in their daily lives" (Hall, 1989).[10] Following this path Shade and her colleagues proceed to amplify their structuralist formal definition (FD4.5) of culture as a social system with an informal definition in the cognitive mode (ID4.5). There they introduce a set of cognitive categories that they will eventually deploy in an extensive cross-cultural comparison of culture-specific styles of student-school communication and other sorts of social interaction:

ID4.5 Thus, culture represents a collective consciousness or a group state of mind. If people in a group share situations and problems…they develop a common way of speaking, acting, thinking, and believing. As the behavior is institutionalized through intergenerational transmission, it becomes culture. (Shade, Kelly, and Oberg, p. 18)

It is worth noting that their structuralist conception of culture involves no suggestion of any sort of primordial reality or group essence. For Shade, Kelly, and Oberg, what binds a group together is the simple fact that its members "share situations and problems." Admittedly, some multicultural educators who understand culture holistically unapologetically represent culture in essentialist terms. A case in point is the *Portland Readers* project, especially the Afrocentric materials prepared under the direction of Asa Hillard, where discussions of ethnicity and race blithely refer to primordial qualities such as "Blackness." However, we must not forget that structure and essence are independent concepts. Culture can be understood as a structure that is not an essence (i.e., as a constructed system) or vice versa as an essence that is not a structure (i.e., as a primordial but indeterminate quality).[11] However, this is not the place to lament such

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surprise to readers that they overlap very much in practice.

[9] The systematizing role of Shade's notion of culture as filter is more explicit in an earlier essay, where she declares, "Culture is, in part, an aggregation of beliefs, attitudes, habits, values, and practices that form a view of reality. *This systemized pattern of thought serves as a filter* through which a group of individuals view and respond to the demands of the environment…" (Shade & New, 1993, p. 317, italics added).

[10] In this connection they acknowledge M.L. Maehr (1974), E.T. Hall (1989), and R.A. LeVine (1991, as well as – in a later section – several others who have worked in specific areas of cross-cultural psychology.

[11] A cautionary note: Although holistic definitions are not *necessarily* essentialist in the pejorative sense of that term, there is a tendency among multiculturalists who define culture holistically to posit a primordial, vaguely

naïveté. What is important in the present context is the fact that even if most contemporary multicultural educators are probably too sophisticated to fall into the trap of thinking that cultural differences are due to some mysterious X-ness, many understand culture as in some sense a single thing that is greater than the sum of its parts, the proper understanding of which requires a knowledge of how its component features are related to each other as well as what they are in themselves. We have already considered Adler's neo-Boasian claim that each culture has its own internal coherence, integrity, and logic. Gwendolyn Cartledge and Hua Feng have a similar view, which as they explain was derived from structuralist anthropologists who

FD4.6 define culture as the way of life of a particular group of people, including such dimensions as their traditions, language, religion, marital and family life, values, and organization of the economic system. (Cartledge & Feng, 1996, pp. 13-14)

The anthropologists whom Cartledge and Feng have in mind include Peoples and Bailey (1991). whose structuralist conception of culture as a "webbed system" they borrow in the course of filling out the way-of-life conception of culture proposed in FD4.7. As they go on to explain,

ID4.6 Culture is integrated. It is like a webbed system, in which various aspects of life are interconnected. The various components of culture are not discrete but interactive. Kinship, economic, and religious subsystems, for example, all affect one another and cannot be understood in isolation. (Cartledge & Feng, p. 14).

Discussion: At this point one might ask just how the structuralist definitions reviewed here correlate with educational agendas. For the authors of the structuralist definitions just cited, the main answer to this question is roughly the same: they want to develop general cultural knowledge across the student population and thereby increase the self-esteem of minority students. This is the agenda Adler proposes under the rubic of the "multicultural personality." A related agenda popular in the 1970s and 80s was to promote social justice by simply increasing children's cross-cultural competence, but it was later criticized for its lack of any serious critique of existing social structures. Obviously it is difficult — sometimes even misleading — to completely disentangle these very interdependent goals. Cartledge and Feng's book is a case in point. Their discussion of culture constitutes the first part of a chapter entitled "The Relationship of Culture and Social Behavior," the central idea of which is that as a society becomes more diverse, cultural background becomes increasingly important as a means for interpreting and addressing behavioral differences among students. However, the rest of their book deals with the quite different issue of the link between cultural identity and self-perception. The hidden curriculum of our schools, they insist, "affects the way students view themselves, relate to peers, and deal with academic learning" (p. 40). By the end of the chapter the authors have come a long way from their introductory, relatively abstract and idealized conception of culture as an integrated, webbed system. They finish with concrete proposals for assessing culturally specific social skills among fifth-graders and corresponding intervention strategies. Even so, they have

metaphysical reality that causes cultures to have the shapes that they do (see Lawrence Hirschfeld's excellent psychological analysis of this tendency in his *Race in the Making* (1998). I will return to this issue in the next chapter.

remained within the structuralist paradigm of classical anthropology according to which, as Boas argued so vigorously, each culture has its own unity and hence its own criteria for social competence and moral excellence.

In the abstract, none of these educational goals is objectionable, though of course educators have significantly different views on how they should be prioritized, combined, or pursued. However, two basic epistemological assumptions should be identified. The first is that within a structuralist conception cultures are stable, either because they are essentially static ("this is our way") or because when change does occur it comes from within. In the latter case, change is either a matter of retrieval ("going back to our roots") or evolution (the emergence of the "new American" in the melting pot model), or minor adjustment (culture as a self-correcting, homeostatic system). In short, a strong structuralist model of culture has little room for novelty and even less room for hybridity in any serious sense of that term. In the eyes of structuralists, changes caused by external events, such as population shifts, technological advances, or economic pressures, are ruptures not progress. As Ramon said to Ruth Benedict, "Our cup is broken now." For the moment it is enough to identify this assumption, but I will challenge it in the next chapter.

The second, equally questionable assumption is that cultures can be equated with an ethnic or any other type of human group, for example Hispanic culture with Hispanics. This is a category mistake that goes beyond the empirical fact that a wide variety of national cultures are represented by words such as "Hispanic" as well as an equally wide variety of ways in which, say, people from various Spanish-speaking regions identify themselves as Hispanics (when they do). This commonsense observation raises new questions about educational agendas based on the assumption that cultural backgrounds are decisive influences on the behavioral differences between the so-called mainstream and minority students. The danger is that well-meaning educators might overlook the simple fact, mentioned at the beginning of the present chapter, that *cultures are not people or groups of people,* but rather constructions made by theorists (including ordinary lay observers as well as professional scholars, teachers, and fieldworkers) to account in a tidy and interesting way for differences between more or less (usually less) easily circumscribed groups. To say otherwise would be to commit what philosophers sometimes call the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Although the term "culture" can be used in many ways, it is extremely misleading and counterproductive to identify culture with real people or with groups of people who share a culture or even a subset of cultural traits. Nor should culture be thought of as a free-standing reality analogous to the so-called cultural objects that anthropologists love to study, i.e., pots, rituals, sacred texts, and so on. So put, my point may seem boringly straightforward, but multicultural educators who use the term "culture" in their work as scholars or teachers seem to face an enduring temptation to reify it. The temptation is especially strong, I think, when culture is understood as an integrated structure, as is the case in many books and articles that focus on the education of ethnic minority children. Even Gibson's claim that "the members of any given ethnic group will represent a range of cultures" (1984, p. 108) seems to assume that cultures are really "out there," notwithstanding her acknowledgment that cultures are distributed in a much more complex way than the early cultural pluralists thought. Clearly, the special needs (and strengths) of minority children are always matters of great complexity and delicacy, but especially when cultures are represented as closed structures rather than open-textured symbol systems.

3. Functional Definitions

The concept of structure is closely allied to the concept of *function*. We saw this in the last section as well as in the earlier discussions of the anthropological theories of Malinowski and Radcliff-Brown and the structural functionalism of mid-century sociologists such as Parsons. In all these cases culture was understood functionally, though with different understandings of just *what* function a culture is supposed to fill. Malinowski understood culture as the way practices and institutions shape and satisfy the basic human needs of individuals, but he did not attend to the structural relationships that exist among those needs or among the cultural elements that satisfy them. For Radcliff-Brown and Parsons, on the other hand, culture was the way social systems preserve themselves, and each component or subsystem — marriage, religion, kinship system, etc. — was itself an institutional structure that functions in its own way to keep the society in equilibrium. However, the distinction between the two sorts of functionalism is not so sharp in the definitions of culture provided by multicultural educators.

Here again I begin with a rough and ready chart of the mix of definitional modes used in the functionalist definitions that I have selected:

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Bullivant/Banks (4.7)	Functional	Functional
Hoopes & Pusch (4.8)	Structural	Topical and Functional
Mitschell & Sainsbury (4.9)	Structural	Functional

In the literature of multicultural education the most prominent functional definition of culture is probably still the one proposed by the influential Australian educator and anthropologist Brian Bullivant. Most of his books and articles are about multiculturalism in his own country, but in 1989 he published an essay on the meaning of culture that appeared in the United States in the highly regarded anthology *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Banks and Banks, 1993 [1989]; page numbers are to the later edition). His definition, which James Banks adopted in his own contribution to the same volume (Banks, 1993, p. 8) and which is repeated elsewhere (e.g., Shapiro, Sewell, and DuCette, 1995, p. 29), is an interesting blend of British and American anthropological traditions. Like Radcliff-Brown and other social anthropologists, Bullivant regards culture as an abstract "design" rather than a group of flesh and blood human beings. "We cannot emphasize the correct usage enough," he cautions his readers. "People belong to, live in, or are members of social groups; they are not members of cultures" (1993, p. 30).[12] On the first page of his influential essay, he offers a concise formal definition that is unambiguously functional since it specifies what cultures *do* for us. Culture, he tells us, is simply

FD4.7 a social group's design for surviving in and adapting to its environment. (Ibid., p. 29)

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[12]Bullivant takes this claim very seriously. At this point in his exposition he further underscores the abstract nature of culture by quoting Louis Schneider's (1973, p. 119) remark that "Putting people into culture is a sad maneuver into which social scientists slip time and time again."

The rest of Bullivant's essay is an extended informal definition, explaining the three environment types he has in mind and the relationship of culture to knowledge, ideas, behaviors, and artifacts. It can be summarized as follows:

ID4.7 Culture is a shared survival plan whereby a group adapts to (1) the geographical environment, or physical habitat; (2) the social environment, which includes the customs and rules that enable various scales of human interaction to be carried on smoothly; and (3) the metaphysical environment, which is dealt with by religious beliefs and institutions. Since culture is a "shared survival plan," it should not be identified with either the group or its behaviors and artifacts, which for all their importance are nevertheless only the *expressions* of culture. This is not to minimize the importance of behaviors and artifacts for the ethnologist, for whom they along with the more abstract survival plan or "cultural form" are the material out of which the "thick descriptions" examined by Geertz are to be constructed. (Cf. ibid., pp. 30-35)

> *Omitted: The analysis of the other two functional definitions cited above (by Hoopes & Pusch and by Mitschell & Sainsbury), as well as the "Discussion" component for this section.*

4. Historical Definitions

Design-for-survival definitions of culture, including those just discussed, often carry an unannounced assumption that a group's "shared survival plan" constitutes its cultural heritage. That similar assumptions about the importance of a group's history operate in other multicultural education approaches is hardly surprising. Although authors of multicultural education books and articles approach culture from many angles and with many definitional modes, most would agree that for a culture to endure, the story of this sharing must be told and retold across generations. This obvious point is thematized in different ways throughout the multicultural education literature, varying according to the authors' views of the role of the school as well as their own social agendas. Some authors, such as R. Webb and R. Sherman (1989), offer definitions of culture that explicitly reference the history and heritage of a people. More commonly, though, the essentially historical character of a given author's notion of culture is a more or less visible subtext rather than an announced theme or selfstanding definition.

In what follows we will consider three historical conceptions of culture, beginning with two diametrically opposing approaches: Dinesh D'Souza's conservative model of multicultural education and Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux's critical multiculturalist view of culture as a subtle but powerful type of power struggle. These statements along with Web and Sherman's definition illustrate in different ways the connection between the norms, structure, and/or function of a culture and its history, as the following chart shows:

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
D'Souza (4.10)	Historical	Normative
Aronowitz & Giroux (4.11)	Historical	Historical and critical
Webb & Sherman (4.12)	Functional	Historical and structural

Omitted: The rest of this section.

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5. *Normative Definitions*

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952, p. 98) once distinguished four senses in which the word "way" is used in anthropological definitions of culture as a way of life.[13] Two of them correspond to the structural and functionalist approaches just discussed. The other two senses correspond to the next approaches we will consider, namely the normative approach and, in the following section, the behavioral approach. In the present section I discuss three authors whose conception of culture is primarily normative but mixed with other definitional modes as follows:

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Timm (4.13)	Normative	Normative and functional
Ramsey (4.14)	Normative	Normative and structural
Tyler et al. (4.15)	Normative	Normative and cognitive

The sharp distinction that Parsonian sociologists drew between values and norms was important for their homeostatic model of the social system. According to that model personal dispositions and attitudes (values) shape and are shaped by public rules or standards of conduct (norms) that hold the system in equilibrium. The distinction between values and norms is not prominent in the multicultural education literature though, probably because the very idea of social equilibrium seems monocultural, suggesting as it does that cultural diversity is at best a way station on the road to conflict resolution and assimilation and at worst a potentially destructive form of social deviance. For obvious reasons, multiculturalists have tended — consciously or unconsciously — to subscribe to the alternative sociological model, i.e., conflict theory, which as we saw in Chapter 3 eschews the melting pot theory and instead thematizes social conflict in terms of toleration of difference, respect for diversity, and acceptance of the purposive conflict associated with identity politics and other by-products of cultural pluralism. What it does not favor, apparently, includes a firm and explicit distinction between personal values and public norms. Whether this blurring of the Parsonian distinction is a good thing remains to be seen, but it important for readers to realize that in the literature of multicultural education the normative order goes well beyond personal rules of conduct.

Omitted: The rest of this section

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[13]"The word 'mode' or 'way' can imply (a) common or shared patterns; (b) sanctions for failure to follow the rules; (c) a manner, a 'how' of behaving; (d) social 'blueprints' for action. One or more of these implications is made perfectly explicit in many ... definitions."

6. Behavioral Definitions

The anthropologists, sociologists, and multicultural educators who construct behavior-oriented definitions of culture have generally avoided the reductionist approach associated with B. F. Skinner and other radical behaviorists. Instead they take their cues from such cognitive anthropologists as Harry Triandis (1972), who understood culture as having an overt dimension consisting of observable actions and a covert dimension consisting of cognitive elements of action such as ideas, beliefs, personal values, and moral principles. Some behavioral definitions of culture draw this distinction tacitly and others do so explicitly, but in either case they focus on the overt dimension, allowing a little overlap so that action-oriented thoughts and dispositions can be included in behavioral definitions of culture. However, as we will see in the definitions featured in this section, sometimes the overt-covert distinction lies very far in the background of these definitions.

The formal components of the definitions I have selected are clearly behavioral in this modified, nonradical sense of that term, even though their informal components are quite different. My analysis of these components is summarized in the chart below, though here as elsewhere in this review of the literature readers are encouraged to read the tea leaves for themselves. In the first case (King et al.) the informal definition is essentially structural and behavioral, whereas in the other two cases it is a mix of either the behavioral and symbolic modes (Locke and Parker) or the behavioral and cognitive modes (Kendall).

Authors	*Mode of Formal Component*	*Mode of Informal component*
King et al. (4.16)	Behavioral	Structural and functional
Locke (4.17)	Behavioral	Behavioral and symbolic
Kendall (4.18)	Behavioral	Behavioral and cognitive

Behavior and its patterns are often mentioned in passing even in thoroughly non-behavioral definitions of culture.[14] However, some definitions clearly privilege the dimension of behavior or behavioral patterns. Consider the relatively detailed definition provided by King, Chipman, and Cruz-Jansen in their *Educating Young Children in a Diverse Society* (1995). They open their chapter "The Concept of Culture" with a formal definition drawn from an anthropology textbook written by a prominent functionalist anthropologist of the 1960s, Walter Goldschmidt (1962 [1971], p. 14). King and her colleagues start the discussion of culture as follows:

FD4.16 What does the concept of culture signify? What are the elements of culture? According to Goldschmidt, culture is: "Learned behavior acquired by each organism in the process of growing up; shared behavior characteristic of a population; based upon customs. Culture is not merely a bag of customs; *it is an orientation to life.*" (King, Chipman, and Cruz-Jansen, 1995, p. 115).

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[14] For instance, Gwendolyn Baker (1994, p. 5 and/or pp. 20-21) adopts Corrine Brown's historically oriented conception of culture as including "all the accepted ways of behavior of a given people" (Brown, 1963, p. x).

Although this quotation may suggest to the casual reader that Goldschmidt has reduced culture to its behavioral dimension, his view of the behavioral dimension was actually much more complex and interesting. The remark that culture is more than a bag of customs is particularly revealing. In his own published work Goldschmidt made no secret of his sympathy for the structural-functional style of anthropology promoted by Radcliffe-Brown and other so-called "social anthropologists," and it is fair to assume that King and her co-authors share his view of the relationship between culture and society. For Boas and his fellow cultural anthropologists, it was enough to study the way a people's customs had developed either by chance or by some inner evolutionary dynamic. In other words, for the classic cultural anthropologist, it was enough to study the people's *history.* In contrast, social anthropologists held that any given society has the customs that it does simply because its customs (and by extension, its entire set of social institutions) keep the society going. Here as in the Boasian view, customs are treated as causal forces, but with one crucial difference. In social anthropology customs derive their causal efficacy not from their intellectual excellence or historical venerability but rather from their character as observable, well-established patterns of behavior — by which I mean real patterns of real behavior of real human beings who live together in a real society. It is precisely because they are expressed as concrete behaviors that all cultural traits, be they long-standing practices and myths or recently fabricated artifacts and rituals, are causally effective. Even more to the point, though, these patterns are themselves shaped by their function, which is to enable people to live together in a coherent and self-sustaining social system. For those who understand culture in this way — the list includes Goldschmidt and by extension King and her coauthors[15] — it is this functionality, not their historical lineage, that makes customs or "traditional ways of life" the defining feature of the concept of culture.

The metatheoretical debate over whether cultures give life meaning (Goldschmidt's "orientation to life") because they articulate our histories or because they meet our present-day social requirements no longer dominates social science, probably because Tylor's maxim that cultures are "complex wholes" is no longer the point of departure for either anthropology or sociology. However, it is clear that the definitional mode of FD4.16 is behavioral in the sense just described. This interpretation is borne out by the informal definition that King et al. offer as a gloss on their Goldschmidt citation. In it they emphasize not only the functional role of culture-specific behavior but also its inherently *structural* character (patterned, a configuration, internally consistent, etc.):

ID4.16 Culture is made up of configurations. It is patterned and has an internal consistency. Therefore (sic), the behavior of a group of people reflects the fundamental attitudes and beliefs of their culture. Anthropologists use the classic example of the acquisition of the horse by the Plains Indians to illustrate what is meant by a cultural configuration. The Plains Indians developed their culture around horsemanship. They created mores and folkways related to the use of the horse in their daily lives. Techniques for hunting, for waging war, for exchange and trade, and for estimating economic standards of wealth all revolved around the horse. (Ibid.)

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[15] Edith King, who is the first author of the book under discussion, is no naïf regarding the culture-society relationship. As the back cover explains, she is a highly regarded Professor of Education who "specializes in the foundations of education with an emphasis on the sociological and anthropological disciplines."

It is clear from this passage that the authors have done serious anthropological homework, but their sources are surprisingly dated for a book published in 1994. The reference to the Plains Indians is drawn from Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1932), and they elsewhere cite Tylor (1871), Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), White (1959), Mead (1964), Kneller (1965), and Barth (1969) in order to establish the place of symbols, language, and other "covert" features of culture. In the course of laying out concrete recommendations for teaching children about other cultures, the authors employ the structural functionalist notion of culture that was generally accepted in the 1950s and 60s.

> **Omitted: Analysis of the second and third behavioral definitions**

Discussion: Each of the three definitions of culture examined in this section is developed from a different perspective on cultural behavior, although all are explained with regard to the schoolroom context. King, Chipman, and Cruz-Janzen treat cultural behaviors as system-maintaining customs. Locke understands them as patterns that have been transmitted from one generation to the next by means of culturally established symbols. Kendall focuses on cognitive behaviors, including those involving learning, that are the internal (covert) correlates of external (overt) behaviors.

It would be a mistake to ask which of these three conceptual approaches is correct, since as we saw in Chapter 1 sometimes a theoretical concept should be understood in terms of its use as well as the teory that produced it. Here the uses are expressly pedagogical. King and her co-authors use the behavioral conception of culture as an entrée into a larger-scaled discussion of how teachers should prepare their students to fit into a diverse but nonetheless relatively stable society, with the concept of diversity having its own diversity: diversities of culture, ethnicity, gender, social class, physical and cognitive abilities, and so on—including the diversity of learning styles that is the central issue of her book.[16] As they see it, "fitting in" takes place on a two-way street. Students must learn to deal with diversity, but so must society and its institutions (especially the school). If this is done a new and richer social equilibrium will be achieved, one that seems to combine the best of the sociological paradigms of conflict theory and structural functionalism.

> **Omitted: The rest of this "Discussion" component**

7. Cognitive Definitions

We saw above that during the post-Parsonian period of the 1960s and 70s a number of psychologists and anthropologists tried to steer a middle path through the two extremes of

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[16] "In this book it is our intention to provide information, strategies, techniques, innovative ideas, and most importantly, encouragement for teachers, administrators, educators, and parents in implementing this fresh and essential *diversity perspective* into programs for young children" (King at al., 1995, p. 3).

treating culture as an abstract semiotic system and limiting it to overt behaviors and material artifacts. Their solution was to focus on the way culture conditions psychological processes and vice-versa. Although these processes operate "inside the heads" of individual persons, they are cultural as well as intrapsychic because of the way they are acquired and sustained. They are interpersonally shared methods of organizing the world and, taken collectively, constitute a common way of creating order among the various "inputs" from the social and material environment.

This cognitive approach to culture is characteristic of much recent work in the social sciences as well as in psychology. It also appears in the multicultural education literature, often in books and articles written by theorists who have specialized in educational psychology. Regardless of their scholarly backgrounds, these authors are typically practioners at heart: they investigate the cognitive dimension of the culture process not (at least not primarily) in order to develop a more adequate anthropological or sociological theory of culture but rather to help those working in the field realize certain large-scale social and educational goals. These authors — one might call them cognitive multiculturalists — sometimes construct distinctly cognitive formal definitions of culture, but they more frequently approach the issue indirectly: either they embed an explicit reference to the cognitive dimension of culture within an easily recognizable informal definition or they leave it to the reader to infer from other things they say about multicultural education that they have a tacit conception of culture as a set of cognitions or cognitive schemas.

Regardless of whether (and how) they carve out crisp and explicit definitions of culture, though, cognitive multiculturalists usually focus sooner or later on some aspect of culturally responsive teaching, understood in a broad sense as addressing issues of cognitive processing, learning style, cultural frames, beliefs and values, and the whole idea of a worldview. Given this wide range of issues, it follows that there can be many different cognitive definitions of culture. The ones that appear most often in the multicultural education literature are definitions that focus on *cognitive processes* (including learning styles and cultural frames) and *ideational contents* (beliefs, values, and world views). As the chart indicates, the first two examples I have selected for this section include one definition from each category, and the third is more generic.

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Robinson (4.19)	Cognitive (process)	Cognitive
García & Guerra (4.20)	Cognitive (contents)	Cognitive
Cushner et al. (4.21)	Cognitive and topical	Cognitive

The first example of the cognitive approach is a model of clear and distinct definition-making, in which the formal and informal components are both unambiguously cognitive. In her masterful *Crosscultural Understanding* (1988), Gail Robinson draws on the work of George Spindler and other early cognitive anthropologists[17] in order to construct the following formal definition of culture as a process:

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[17] She cites Goodenough, 1964, Triandis, 1972 , and Spindler, 1974, 1979, 1980, 1982.

FD4.19 According to cognitive approaches, culture is not a material phenomenon. "Culture does not consist of things, people, behavior or emotions. It is the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them." The cognitive approach emphasizes the mechanism of organizing inputs. That is, *culture itself is a process* through which experience is mapped out, categorized and interpreted. (Ibid., p. 10; the internal quotation is from Goodenough, 1964, italics added)

Robinson uses the metaphors of computer programs and maps to illustrate FD4.1, in the process providing her readers with a short but useful informal definition of culture:

ID4.19 From this perspective, culture is like a computer program. The program differs from culture to culture. The program refers to cognitive maps. Unlike the somewhat fixed notion of world view suggested by Sapir and Whorf [1973], the program is subject to modification. (Ibid)

For Robinson the heart of multicultural education is culturally responsive pedagogy or, as the title of her book declares, crosscultural understanding. Pedagogical applications of her cognitive process conception of culture are found in the classrooms and literature of anthropology itself, she adds, where aspiring anthropologists are taught the ins and outs of ethnography. As we saw in Chapter 2, ethnography is a method of "writing culture" from the perspective of the people within the culture under study. The ethnographer tries to understand and portray to others (especially other anthropologists) the way members of a particular culture typically process the inputs from their encounters with the natural and social world, or as Robinson puts it, the way they "categorize and interpret their experience" (ibid.). However, she goes on to say, ethnography is an imperfect paradigm for multicultural education for at least two reasons. First of all, ethnographers do not usually attend to affective and other sorts of non-analytical inputs, even though these are important features in the day-to-day communication of people who share a culture as well as in their communications with outsiders. Secondly, ethnography is not usually concerned with the cognitive processes of the ethnographers themselves. This latter feature makes ethnography a poor model for culturally responsive pedagogy, which assumes that teachers must be aware of their own cognitive styles and cultural biases as well as those of their students. (Robinson develops this point more extensively later in her book, in the context of selective perception and information processing.)

Omitted: Analaysis of the second and third cognitive definitions

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Discussion: Each of the pedagogical issues discussed in this section revolves around a set of cultural traits thought to have great importance for teachers as well as for their students, and each issue is the subject of extensive research and controversy. This is especially true in the case of learning styles, which are a special subset of cognitive styles (see Timm, 1999. The idea that children have not only different levels of intelligence (whatever *that* means) but also different cognitive styles and hence different learning needs goes back to Piaget, but he saw these differences as stages of a hierarchical process of cognitive development that is itself universal. In

the 1950s and 60s educational psychologists such as H. A. Witken (1962, 1967) broke away from the hierarchical developmental model and posited that cognitive style is basically a matter of individual differences that have little or nothing to do with developmental stages. The conversation about cognitive style changed in the next decade, when educators attuned to the new themes of cultural pluralism began to shift their attention from individual differences among children to supposed cognitive differences among cultural groups. Unlike cognitive developmentalists for whom the child is an active participant in small-scale interactions that push him or her to increasingly higher cognitive levels, the early cultural-difference theorists not only emphasized the role of culture in a child's cognitive formation but also used basically the same model of reciprocal influence that others would invoke later in the 1990's. Anticipating Robinson's comparison of culture to a computer program (ID4.19), the comparative education scholar Ted Ward declared in 1973 in an article on African cognitive styles that thanks to language, culture is virtually a program of the mind such that "the individual as a learner is both bounded and shaped according to the world-and-life view and the mental-process styles to his culture" (Ward, 1973, p. 2).[18]

      Admittedly, the whole idea of culture-specific learning styles is still controversial, largely because of confusions surrounding the notions of culture that show up in that literature. For instance, Craig Frisbee (1993a, 1993b), no friend of Afrocentric education in general, regards the existence of Black Cultural Learning Styles (BCLS) as a myth based on "pseudoscientific theories that promise a perception of African-Americans as having a mysterious culture which can be 'truly' understood only by a handful of 'experts'"(1993b, p. 569). In contrast, Afrocentric educator Janice Hale (1993, p. 559; see also Hale, 1982) insists that African and African-American culture has a deep structure of which one of the most important surface manifestations is the existence of BCLS. Many other authors have weighed in on this delicate issue. Some like Hale have invoked a structural conception of culture drawn from Boas and post-Boasians such as Melvin Herskovits ([1941] 1958); others such as Thomas Kochman (1981, p. 14) have acknowledged the rather different, more sociological point (also made by Herskovits ([1941] 1958, p. xxvi) that distinctively "black" cultural styles tend to be more prevalent among African Americans at a lower socio-economic level, at least in the United States. Over the last two decades research on learning styles in general as well as culture-specific learning styles has come a long way, but this is not the place to review that literature in detail (but see Wren and Wren, 2003).

Omitted: Rest of the "Discussion" component

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8. *Symbolic Definitions.*

In Chapter 2 we saw that in the aftermath of Parson's grand synthesis anthropologists such as Geertz and Schneider developed an abstract conception of culture as a public semiotic system.

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[18] In 1973 Ward wrote in the *Comparative Education Review,* "Our comprehension of the meaning and implications of cultural differences among learners is at a stage roughly equivalent to the awareness of individual differences in the early 1950's: we are surely coming to accept the phenomenon, but we have little knowledge of what we might do to relate educational resources to the needs of those who are different" (p. 10).

Geertz famously defined culture as "an ordered system of meaning and symbols" that individuals use to philosophically construct and define their worlds, and concluded that culture is a "text" in need of interpretation, not a group of people or a set of traits and behaviors to be observed and catalogued. Over the next decades other anthropologists and culture theorists followed this approach as they tried to rehabilitate Max Weber's thesis that ideas have a causal role in human affairs, a role which ideas supposedly play at the group level as well as between and within individuals. Considering the enthusiasm with which scholars and the general public greeted Geertz's *Interpretation of Culture* in the mid-1970s, one might have expected that it would shape the multiculturalist discourse emerging in educational circles at roughly the same time. Surprisingly, this did not happen. True, the semiotic dimension of culture is often acknowledged in the literature of multicultural education, but for some reason – perhaps it does not seem to provide a useful key to understanding practical problems of cultural diversity—few multiculturalists have explicitly adopted the interpretative approach associated with it. However, there are exceptions, including the three approaches shown on the following grid.

Authors	*Mode of Formal Component*	*Mode of Informal component*
Banks (4.22)	Cognitive and Semiotic	Semiotic and Cognitive
Page (4.23	Semiotic	Semiotic
Yon (4.24)	Semiotic	Semiotic

The best known of these authors is of course James Banks. In his introduction to an influential collection of essays by himself and other educators (Banks, 2004), he offers a hybrid definition of culture as a mix of cognitive and semantic categories that jointly make up "the meaning of culture." This overarching meaning is itself a collection of more specific meanings, so that culture itself is the

FD4.22 knowledge, concepts, and values shared by group members though systems of communication. Culture also consists of the shared beliefs, symbols, and interpretations within a human group. (Ibid. p. 8)

He then goes on to support this definition by citing what he now considers the prevailing social science view of culture "as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies," and concludes with an informal definition that leaves no doubt as to his own new-found commitment to the interpretative approach:

ID4.22 The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meanings of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways. (Ibid.)

As in the literature of interpretive anthropology, Banks sees society as having an inner core of more or less philosophical ideas, expressed in more or less aesthetic symbols, and

enacted in more or less explicitly religious rituals, all of which give meaning to a people's shared world in the same way that a story or written text gives meaning to a set of otherwise incomprehensible events. In simpler words, culture is the text expressed in a group's symbols and rituals, which may but need not have explicitly economic and political dimensions.

A similar use of the semiotic conception shows up in Reba Neukom Page's (1991, pp. 13-15) account of where culture fits into the school curriculum. After repeating Geertz's oft-cited definition of culture as the "webs of significance [in which] man is suspended [and which] he himself has spun" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5; cited in Page, p. 13) and then recalling George Spindler's general definition of cultural knowledge as what people know that makes what they do sensible (Spindler, 1982), Page condenses their ideas into a four-word formal definition according to which culture is

FD4.23 a symbolic, social process. (Page, p. 14)

Expanding on this minimalist definition, she then declares:

ID4.23 Thus, like language, culture simultaneously differentiates and integrates. It is a process of carving the inchoate world into distinctive domains while also integrating the domains in a system of relationships. (Ibid.)

From there Page shows how the idea of culture as a symbol system can explain the ambivalence regarding individualism and community that she believes pervades American politics in general and educational policy in particular.

Although the explicit endorsements and use of the semiotic conception of culture by Banks and Page are unusual in the literature of multicultural education (but see also the work of Hervé Varenne, e.g. his *Symbolizing America* [1986]), echoes can be heard in various definitions of culture already cited in this chapter, such as Bullivant's stress on religious beliefs in ID4.5, and the central place that Hoopes and Pusch give in ID4.6 to values, beliefs, aesthetic standards, linguistic expression, patterns of thinking, behavioral norms, and styles of communication. Similar sensibilities to the semiotic function of culture can be found in the normative and culture-as-heritage definitions. It would therefore be a mistake to think that because most educational multiculturalists do not dwell on the nature or importance of the symbols, beliefs, myths, rituals, or other features of culture so important to Geertz and his fellow interpretative anthropologists, they are oblivious to the meaning-making function of culture.

The final example of a semiotic or symbol-oriented definition of culture is much different. It comes from Daniel Yon's curiously titled book *Elusive Culture* (2000), which uses a discourse model of contemporary culture theory to analyze data collected in a year-long study of an inner-city Toronto high school. In the course of delineating the theoretical frame within which he examines the students' and teachers' discourse about culture, race, and identity, Yon sketches three stages in the history of cultural anthropology, according to which culture was first understood empirically as a collection of observable "attributes" (from Tylor to Parsons), then hermeneutically as "webs of meaning" (Geertz and his followers), and finally post-structurally as "elusive culture" (ibid., p. 9). His definition of this third stage retains Geertz's interpretive approach to "representations and the complex relationships that individuals take up in relation to

them," but adds a new emphasis on relationships that are unique to discourse situations. Yon agrees with Geertz and those who share Geertz's hermeneutical, semiotic conception of culture according to which texts are chains of symbols and

FD4.24 culture [is] an open-ended text. Thinking about culture as text allows for multiple meanings and, as Geertz put it, insists upon the refinement of debates rather than the closure of consensus. (Ibid., pp. 8-9)

However, what Yon does with this symbolic/semiotic definition of culture goes beyond Geertz in many ways.[20] It can be generally characterized as relocating the interpretive activity of ethnographers – and by extension that of teachers engaged in multicultural education – from the storyteller's bench to the fora of discourse.[21] Monologues are only special moments of dialogue, and the very nature of ethnography is transformed from third person descriptions to first and second person scripts. Yon explains his refinement of the Geertzian conception of culture a few lines later, where he not only summarizes anthropology's historical shift from holistic explanations to situation-specific "partial truths" but also intimates that the interpretive conception of culture is itself an interpretation, keyed to the ambivalence and internal contradictions of our everyday lives:

ID4.24 The monologic voice of the ethnographer gave way to an engagement with multiple voices that are competing and contradictory. Far from being a stable and knowable set of attributes, culture has now become a matter of debate about representations and the complex relationships that individuals take up in relation to them. (Ibid., p. 9)

In the next chapter I will pick up on these themes, which in my view constitute the most adequate way of understanding culture in general and the best way to bring the concept into the classroom without falling into the extremes of either essentializing it (culture as a thing or set of things one has) or else trivializing it (culture as food fairs, etc.). For now, suffice it to say that what Yon calls "elusive culture" is not so much a repudiation of earlier theories of culture as a new, heavily situational and dialogical incorporation of those earlier theories.

In other words, when people – including the high school students whom Yon interviewed – talk to each other about culture and cultural identity they are not writing books for an anonymous and timeless audience, but rather trying to make themselves understood to other concrete individuals for reasons that can vary from one day, place, or interlocutor to the next. When someone speaks passionately about his or her cultural heritage at zoning commission hearing the meaning of culture will be different than when the same person talks about cultural identity to a buddy, lover, or bully, to a therapist, lawyer, or fellow devotee of some musical genre. On St. Patrick's Day I may be full of intense "recreational ethnicity," to use Kenneth Appiah's delicious phrase, whereas at a union meeting I make common cause with my fellow workers without a thought of cultural heritages. And so on.

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[20] "It is impossible to adequately survey the range of positions that mark this phase of critique except to note that among the influences are neo-Marxism, structuralism and post-structuralism, psychoanalytic theory, discourse theory, postmodernism, feminist theory, and post-colonial theory" (ibid., p. 9).

[21] In his Foreword to Yon's book Stuart Hall (2000, p. xi) observes that the high school Yon studied appears "less as an institutional site with structural properties and more as a 'discursive space'."

I said a moment ago that Yon's elusive culture was a "deontological incorporation" of prevailing anthropological views. To that I would now add that the setting within which the dialogues take place need not be academic. Indeed, academic debates about culture are only a small part of a larger phenomenon of people talking about culture. As in other discourse situations, participants in a dialogue about culture shape their comments and responses to what (they think) is in the minds of their interlocutors, as symbolic interactionist sociology has shown. What makes culture "elusive" is the simple fact that every interlocutor and therefore every discourse situation is different. From these differences it follows that the use (and hence the meaning) of the word "culture" and its symbolic forms will vary from one dialog to the next, often in profoundly different ways. To say as Yon does that culture is elusive is, to put it mildly, not at all the same thing as saying it is meaningless.

> ***Omitted: The "Discussion" component of this section***

9. Critical theory definitions

The symbolic definitions of culture discussed in the previous section rested on the notion of cultures as networks of symbols that when interpreted as a kind of literary text reveal worldviews rich in metaphysical, social, normative, and other sorts of Weberian "meaning of life" implications. In that interpretative process the symbols themselves – rituals, legends, honorific titles, etc. – are seen as directing people's lives largely because of their long-standing historical cachet, even though members of the culture often differ on just how the symbols should be interpreted. The present section exhibits a very different semiotics of culture, in which the symbols under discussion have little to do with metaphysics and the meaning of life and everything to do with power and social control. This is the approach taken in the educational literature that calls itself "critical multiculturalism."

Unfortunately, the more basic concept, *culture,* is virtually never spelled out in this literature, which is concerned with exposing the political uses of culture and not with distinguishing it from related categories such as society, ethnicity, race, or gender. Its contributors do not draw their inspiration directly from anthropology or sociology but rather from the interdisciplinary culture studies movement discussed at the end of Chapter 3 as well as from the predominantly European literatures of postmodernism, poststructuralism, and critical theory. As we will see, their multicultural educationist representatives—most of whom are as American as apple pie—have adopted a writing style that is often needlessly ornate but nonetheless rich in implications, irony, and arresting metaphors or turns of phrase. Of the few texts that do present definitions of culture I will review three, taken from Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), Antonia Darder (1995), and Carmen Montecinos (1995). The definitional modes are not always clear, especially in the authors' respective formal definitions, but the following chart shows how I have parsed the rather elliptical statements showcased in this section:

Authors	Mode of Formal Component	Mode of Informal component
Aronowitz & Giroux (4.25)	Historical	Critical
Darder (4.26)	Symbolic	Critical
Montecinos x (4.27)	Critical-Symbolic	Critical

That multicultural education has an irreducible political dimension is hardly news. The idea surfaced regularly in the early literature of cultural pluralism and was thematized by Sleeter and Grant as the most comprehensive of their classic five approaches to multicultual education, namely "Education that is Multicultural and Social Reconstructionist." What *was* new, though, was the merger of multicultural education and the critical pedagogy movement originally associated with the "pedagogy of the oppressed" advocated by Latin American liberation theorists, most famously Paulo Freire (1968). This "precipitous theoretical and political convergence" (Sleeter and McLaren, 1995, p. 8) moved the social reconstructionist agenda further to the political left as well as squarely within the methodological and rhetorical style of postmodernism and poststructuralism.[23]

One of the earliest combinations of critical pedagogy and multicultural education is a work we have already considered because its formal definition of culture (FD4.11) is in the historical mode. It is Aronowitz and Giroux's *Postmodern Education* (1991), which bears the ambitious subtitle *Politics, Culture, and Social Criticism.* Writing in reaction to conservative authors of the 1980s such as Alan Bloom (1987) and (especially) E. D. Hirsch (1987), they resist their opponents' reductionist (sic) assumption "that ideas are the determining factor in shaping history, somehow unfolding in linear fashion from one generation to the next" with no sense of the shifting relationships between ideologies, material conditions, social struggles, political changes, and developments in other areas such as communication and technology (Aronowitz and Giroux, p. 46). From this critique of conservative views of the way history works the authors' own primarily historical conception of culture emerge, which as we saw above was

FD4.25 [=FD4.11] a definition of culture as a set of activities by which different groups produce collective memories, knowledge, social relations, and values within historically constituted relations of power. (Ibid., p. 50)

Proceeding from this formal definition of culture, Aronowitz and Giroux go on to demonstrate the need for a critical understanding of the linkage of culture and schooling. Their description of this critical understanding is both historical and critical. The historical part was presented above as ID4.11. For analytical purposes the critical part is shown here as a second informal definition (ID4.25), which may obscure the fact that the two ideas are actually very closely linked. The authors have a historical conception of culture but they resist the conservatives' tendency to depoliticize it, declaring that

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[23] Since these two terms are often used interchangeably in discussions of multicultural education, it would be misleading to draw a hard and fast distinction between them here. Suffice it to say that the dominant theme of postmodernism is its rejection of the master narratives characteristic of modern intellectuals (from Descartes onwards), whereas poststructuralism is dominated by its rejection of the capitalist model of social structure in which culture simply replaces religion as the opiate of the people.

ID4.25 Culture is about the production and legitimation of particular ways of life, and schools often transmit a culture that is specific to class, gender, and race. (Ibid.)

Aronowitz and Giroux's treatment of culture is a welcome exception to my generalization that in the literature of critical multiculturalism the concept of culture is usually invisible, that when it does appear the authors offer no new conceptions of culture as such, and that the formal definitions they supply do little or no work.[24] In short, for most critical multiculturalists the importance of their approach usually lies in what they go on to say about the barely visible but powerfully oppressive *uses* of culture. However, Aronowitz and Henry Giroux are not the only exceptions to this curious neglect of the culture concept. Antonia Darder (1995) provides a fairly straightforward definition and explanation of culture in her introduction to *Culture and Difference* (1995), a collection of critical multiculturalist essays about bicultural identity (of its fourteen essays only Darden's introduction identifies the author's underlying conception of culture). Her account of culture is derived in large part from the work of critical theorist Iris Marion Young, for whom group meanings are encased in symbols or "cultural forms" that the members know are theirs, either because they were shaped by them or forced upon them, or both.[25] However, this merger of symbols, group meanings, and personal identities is not a fixed, once-and-for all relationship, as Darder explains in her formal definition of what she appropriately calls "a foundational understanding of culture." Culture, she tells us, is

FD4.26 an epistemological [i.e., symbol-making] process that is shaped by a complex dialectical relationship of social systems of beliefs and practices which constantly moves members between the dynamic tension of cultural preservation and cultural change. (Darder, 1995, p. 6)

Notwithstanding its reference to social systems, FD4.26 seems to fall under the general category "symbolic definition of culture" discussed in the previous section. However, Darder's critical-theoretic orientation shows up in the very next sentence (ID4.26) which explains the dialectical relationship featured in the formal definition. There she lays the groundwork for her subsequent critique of the unexamined assumption that in any society, especially in ours, the mainstream culture is an "absolute entity" in terms of which non-mainstream cultures should be understood. Her argument is post-structural and symbolic interactionist in its concepts and its scholarly references though not in its prose style, which is mercifully straightforward:

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[24] For instance, Alicia Gaspar de Alba's discussion of "chicano/a popular culture" includes the Webster Dictionary's formal definition of culture as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (Gaspar de Alba, 1995, p. 106). However, this definition has nothing to do with her poststructuralist thesis that "cultural production" consists in a multitude of voices and conflicting meanings of individual signs. The Webster definition seems to be pure window dressing, irrelevant to the genuinely interesting ideas she has to offer in a book whose subtitle begins with the words "Critical Perspectives."

[25] "Group meanings partially constitute people's identities in terms of the cultural forms, social situations, and history that group members know as theirs. … Groups are real not as substances, but as forms of social relations. … A person's sense of history, affinity, and separateness, even the person's mode of reasoning, evaluation, and expressing feelings, are constituted partly by her or his group affinities" (Young, 1990, pp. 44-45).

ID4.26 This is to say that no culture (particularly within the Western postmodern context of advanced capitalism) exists as a fixed, static, or absolute entity, since culture, and hence cultural identity, is a relationally constituted phenomenon, activated and produced through constant social negotiation between others and one's own integration in the daily life and history of the community." (Ibid.)

Darder's view of culture as inherently "subject to the play of history and the play of difference" (cited by Darder from Hall, 1990, p. 15; cf. the symbolic interactionist sociologists discussed in Chapter 3), is the perspective from which she then goes on to draw sharp political conclusions concerning such issues as the politics of identity, resistance, self-determination, and cultural nationalism in the United States and across the world. For instance, she claims that biculturalism—which is the main subject of the volume within which these remarks appear—should be understood in terms of the realities that shape the struggle for survival by non-dominant persons and groups who have been stigmatized as unfit to enter the mainstream.

A third, even more explicitly symbolic interactionist as well as critical conception of culture is offered by Carmen Montecinos (1995), who relates Ronaldo Rosaldo's postmodernist cultural anthropology (discussed in Chapter 2) to Sleeter and Grant's social reconstructionist stage of multicultural education. In Montecinos's view,

FD 4.27 Culture in multicultural societies cannot … be understood as a self-contained whole. Instead, it must be understood as a "porous array of intersections where distinct processes criss-cross from within and beyond its borders." (Montecinos, pp. 294-95; the internal quotation is from Rosaldo, 1989, p. 20)

The "distinct processes" that both authors have in mind include both large scale institutional (i.e., socioeconomic and political) exchanges and small scale interpersonal symbolic interactions. Expanding on Rosaldo's remark, Montecino clarifies the importance of FD4.27 by explaining that

ID4.27 This definition of culture shifts the focus of multicultural knowledge away from knowing about within-group patterns towards knowing about the patterns of social relations between groups. (Ibid.)

I have called Montecinos's view of culture "open-ended" not because it is vague or indeterminate in the fashion of, say, the topical definitions discussed at the beginning of this chapter, but because she believes the details of any culture are determined by the *social relations* within which its members live their lives and understand them. As she goes on to explain at length, this emphasis on the strongly relational character of culture produces a much more adequate conception of culture but, paradoxically, it poses new problems for the multicultural educators who adopt it. They must find ways to represent a plurality of cultural groups non-hierarchically and from the inside. That is, they must as far as possible represent to their students each cultural group as it is understood by its own members, at the same time making it clear to the students that cultural groups overlap in various ways and that most of their members live in cultural "borderlands."

It is precisely this challenge that makes Montecinos's view of culture a paradigmatic instance of *critical* multiculturalism. The stress on the self-representations of "minority" groups entails a dethroning of the "majority" group, using these two terms to denote a difference in political power, not a simple numerical difference. Individuals may vary in the degree to which they identify with established cultural groups, but in all cases the maxim holds that cultural identities are defined in terms of relationships and maintained by social instiutions.

Discussion. Even when they do bother to define the concept of culture, critical multiculturalists are mainly interested in going beyond it, focusing their critique on the basically flawed socioeconomic and political orders and, correlatively, on the support that cultural symbols give to these flawed orders. Their educational agenda is based on the primary premise that cultural identities and differences are relationally defined and institutionally maintained, as well as on the secondary premise that the intergroup relations and socioeconomic institutions in question need not be forms of oppression by or complicity with "the powers that be."

This is not to say that critical multiculturalists reject the other agendas and goals associated with multicultural education, such as cultural knowledge and related sorts of competence on the part of students, culturally competent pedagogy and respect for diversity on the part of teachers, antibias education, and so on. However, critical multiculturalists tend to view such goals with suspicion, on the grounds that they often divert attention from the deeper problems in our society.

Conclusion

Although the present chapter has not proceeded in the explicitly chronological fashion of the two knowledge base chapters that laid out the culture paradigms found in anthropology (Chapter 2) and sociology (Chapter 3), there is a rough temporal order in its review of ways in which multicultural educators have defined culture. The first set of approaches we considered (topical, structural, functional) were the ones taken by the cultural pluralist educators who wrote in the early days of multicultural education. The second three approaches (historical, normative, and behavioral) came into their own in the late 1980s although they have appeared throughout the lifespan of multicultural education. The last three (cognitive, semantic, and critical) came onto the scene relatively late, for the most part in or after the mid-1990s. With the critical approach we have arrived at what many now consider the cutting edge of multicultural education theory, though in the next chapter I will describe a more thoroughly constructivist approach that I believe is now coming into its own — or at least should be.

The late Donald Campbell, a prominent psychologist whom I was privileged to know, once complained to me that *Time* magazine had "overclarified" an important address he had given as president of the American Psychological Association. I hope that I have not committed the same offense, that my attempts to identify and chart the many ways in which multicultural educators have understood culture have not overclarified either their work or the concept itself. Even if I did, though, this chapter will have succeeded if it shows its readers how to go about looking for the faces in the bushes, that is, how to recognize the implicit conceptions of culture that are in play in the important but often unkempt professional literature of multicultural education.