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13.

Changing Conceptions of Culture and Ethnographic Methodology: Recent Thematic Shifts and Their Implications for Research on Teaching

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When anthropologist Frederick Erickson wrote the first-ever chapter about qualitative methods for the third edition of *The Handbook of Research on Teaching* (Erickson, 1986), he officially introduced teacher researchers to interpretive scholarship, ethnographic methodology, and their potential for educational research. Relying on interpretive theory from the social sciences and philosophy, Erickson built the case for a new approach to classroom research—an approach that would begin by investigating what actually happens between teachers and students in classrooms, would proceed by developing an interpretation of what actions in the classroom mean for participants, and would end with an argument suggesting how these actions and meanings relate to large-scale patterns of social action and structure, an approach that would be a worthy alternative to the positivistic approach and experimental and survey designs so prevalent in classroom research at the time. Now, little more than 10 years later, research on teaching is replete with studies informed in some way by interpretive scholarship and ethnographic methodology. Erickson's article was part of a sea change in educational research, a change so pervasive that today we can scarcely imagine research on teaching without the interpretive perspective or ethnographic procedures of data collection and analysis.

What has often been missed is that Erickson was also writing about a new emphasis in studies of "culture." A decade before Erickson's article, interpretive scholarship had washed like a wave over cultural anthropology, reorganizing the way many prominent anthropologists thought about culture. Older views of culture as a group's distinct pattern of behaviors, or coherent "way-of-life," lost ground to an interpretive view of culture as "webs of significance," or meanings partially shared and manipulated by those who knew them. About this, Clifford Geertz (after Max Weber) wrote: "I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law [to explain behavior] but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz, 1973b, p. 5).

More recently, new perspectives developed by feminist, ethnic, postmodern, and cultural studies scholars have produced other thematic shifts or "turns" in the definition of culture. In fact, during the past 10 years, several conceptions of culture have been in simultaneous use among anthropologists and others who study and write about education. Yet, many educational researchers seem unaware of these variations and shifts or their implications for research.

Research on teaching, for example, has been unevenly influenced by changing conceptions of culture. In teacher education and literacy education research, newer feminist and postmodern ideas about culture seem to have affected some (but certainly not all) research (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 1991; Florio-Ruane, 1991a, 1991b); in teacher research on bilingual and multicultural education, older ideas about culture (exemplified in part by language) continue to be used as do newer, updated ideas (e.g., González, 1995; González, Moll, Floyd-Tenery, Rivera, Rendón, Gonzales, & Amanti, 1995); in other areas, such as mathematics and science education research, culture is rarely conceptualized, and ideas about it—old or new—do not seem

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to have affected the direction of reform. The recent history of changing conceptions of culture and the implications for ethnography and educational research are the subjects of this chapter.

In the first section of the chapter, I take up thematic shifts in the conceptions of culture that have been salient in the work of educational anthropologists and sociologists during the past 3 decades. This section culminates with some new directions for the next decade of research on teaching. In the course of the discussion, I mean to stress that each conception has important uses. Newer conceptions focus on features of contemporary life not captured in older versions, but for some research and political purposes older versions remain appropriate and valuable. My purpose is not to build an argument for one fixed or definitive conception of culture, nor is it to imply a linear evolutionary process in which older forms die out when new ones appear. Rather, I hope to reveal the versatility of "culture," the ways it has been reformulated over time, and the potential in pursuing new formulations.

In the second section, I argue that ethnographers (be they educational researchers or not) have been slow to take up some important challenges posed by changing conceptions of culture. Ethnographic methods, such as face-to-face participant observation and ethnographic interviewing, were originally developed as the means to study "culture," defined as the lifestyle of a social group with clear boundaries and distinctive behaviors and beliefs. Today, many ethnographers reject this definition as too simple to capture "culture" in contemporary life, yet they continue to use research methods that presuppose the old definition. Newer conceptions of culture have roused interest in a few new methodological concerns—namely the relationship between researcher and researched and the conventions for writing up research findings—but little has been done to reconceptualize strategies for data collection or analysis. I will suggest some ways this work might proceed.

Changing Conceptions of Culture

Culture as a Way-of-Life that Is an Adaptation to External Conditions

Throughout most of the history of anthropology as well as in public discourse, "culture" has been generally defined as patterns in a way of life characteristic of a bounded social group and passed down from one generation to the next.[1] Whether one's interests were in language use, family life, beliefs and values, cognitive models, school achievement, or classroom climate, anthropologists have searched for and written about culture as evidenced by patterns in the collective behaviors and central orientations of socially distinguishable groups. Social groups identified from the outset by country, region, ethnicity, religion, skin color, social position, first language, or gender have been and continue to be the most likely subjects of culturally oriented studies in education and beyond. When I reviewed 2 years (1994–1996) of the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, Educational Researcher,* and the *American Educational Research Journal,* I found that roughly 90% of the articles about "culture" focused on these groups. In these studies, one or more socially salient group is assumed to have a distinct culture, and the research is designed to identify its characteristic features. Questions about intragroup cultural variation or cultural similarities across groups are rarely addressed.

Among anthropologists, this conception of "culture" had clear advantages over its conceptual predecessor, "race," because culture removed difference from the realm of the natural or innate. Rather than something that springs from physical differences among groups, culture (way-of-life) was understood to be a successful adaptation to relatively stable environmental (economic, social, and political) conditions, "a ready-made set of solutions for human problems so that individuals don't have to begin all over again each generation" (Lewis, 1973, p. 239). As such, culture provides a group with a way to live in and make sense of their world, although the culture may arise in conditions of deprivation or oppression. Unless environmental conditions change, culture will remain stable over time. It will be transmitted as a coherent whole to the next generation through the organization of child rearing. From the 1920s through the 1970s, this general conception of culture was used to attack arguments of racial or genetic inferiority applied to many groups, including Native Americans, Irish Americans, Jewish Americans, African Americans, and Mexican Americans (Hicks & Handler, 1978; Stocking, 1979).

Cultural Difference Theory: A Corollary

In this view of culture, cultural similarities are expected when social, economic, and historical conditions are similar; cultural differences are expected when these conditions differ. When members of groups with legacies of adaptation to different external conditions come into contact with each other, their cultural differences are likely to be a cause of miscommunication and misunderstanding, unless sensitive cultural brokers are available to anticipate, explain, and overcome the effects of difference.[2]

This theory of cultural difference has profoundly affected thinking about education in the United States and elsewhere since the 1950s. It is the basis for the now-large body of research that has examined mismatches between the "culture of the school" and the "culture of the home." Using this theory, mismatches are understood in the following way: To the extent that the culture of the school reflects only one home culture—the adaptation of White, privileged-class Americans, then the behaviors and attitudes expected in school are likely to be unfamiliar to students raised in other environments. Without special efforts to teach "culturally different" students the unfa-

[1] Although debate about the proper definition of culture has been ongoing in anthropology since the discipline developed, this general definition has been recognized by both those who accept it (e.g., Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952) and those who do not (e.g., Keesing, 1974) as the most salient and widely held view. See Brightman (1995) for a recent discussion of various definitions and critiques of them.

[2] It is important to recognize that this conception of culture makes it considerably more consequential for individuals and more resistant to change than many educational researchers have accepted. In educational research, it has been common to conceive of culture as one of several variables the consequences of which can be identified quickly, and, if necessary, overcome by minor changes or short-term interventions.

miliar school culture, these students will, from the first day and through no fault of their own, have difficulty understanding what is expected of them in school. Study after study have demonstrated that, although all children approach school culture as a kind of "second culture" (after the home and neighborhood), White, class-privileged children and their parents find school culture considerably more familiar than do others.

Shirley Brice Heath's book, *Ways with Words* (1983), makes this point compellingly. Heath presents detailed accounts of how children's lives are organized, talked about, and nurtured in three distinct but geographically proximate communities—one Black working class; one White working class; and one Black and White middle class. She illustrates how the children's experiences of using language, time, and space differed in each community and how, in the two working-class communities (but not in the middle-class one), children's use of language, time, and space differed substantially from the uses expected at school. When children from the working-class communities went to school, they behaved in ways consistent with their background experiences at home. These behaviors were misunderstood or unappreciated by middle class-oriented teachers, who characterized the children as "behavior problems" or "slow." Neither teachers nor students knew how to make actions and expectations that were familiar to one group familiar to the other.

The general ideas about culture and cultural difference that are illustrated in Heath's work have inspired 3 decades of research and classroom interventions by all of the leading figures in educational anthropology (for collections of this work, see Jacob & Jordan, 1993; Spindler, 1982; Spindler & Spindler, 1994; Trueba, Rodriguez, Zou, & Cintron, 1993) and by many in other branches of education (see Bruner, 1996 and Cole, 1996 for traces of these ideas in their current work, and the collection by Noblit & Pink, 1987). The authors represented in these works do not all concentrate on the same features of culture—some, like Heath, focus on sociolinguistic patterns; others focus on conceptual categories, "cultural models" of success, valued identities, or "household funds of knowledge." But they share a commitment to the idea that group differences in culture—defined as patterned ways of behaving, thinking, or feeling, formed over time as an adaptation to specific environmental conditions, and learned through socialization in the home community—set the stage for later success and difficulties in school.

This approach to culture and cultural difference has been and continues to be theoretically, practically, and politically powerful. It has successfully accounted for the difficulties of many non-White, non-class-privileged children in mainstream U.S. schools (Miller, 1995), and it has provided direction for the development of instructional and curricular changes that, at least in the short-run, improved these children's success in schools (Gartrell, 1991; Heath, 1983; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993). For many years, this view of cultural difference has been a compelling argument in the struggle to gain more equal educational opportunities for nonmainstream students. In various contexts, liberals, progressives, and civil rights advocates have argued successfully that cultural difference is not a legitimate reason to limit or deny educational opportunities (for recent examples focused on immigration issues in California, see the Theme issue of the *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 1996, edited by Jose Macías,) and that the persistence of school outcome differences by cultural group is an important reason for recommitting to affirmative action (Howe, 1997).

Challenges to the Widespread View of Culture and Cultural Difference

For years, there have been challengers to this dominant approach, and the chorus is getting louder. John Ogbu (1978) was one of the first to point out that not all culturally different children do poorly in mainstream schools. Recently immigrated groups, for example, often do well in U.S. schools, while minority groups often do not. The success of some culturally different students is not accounted for by cultural difference theory. Ogbu's insight has led him to develop and test increasingly complex models of the relationship between external conditions, a "cultural frame of reference" (a group's accepted set of ideas about how to behave), and student achievement. In recent formulations (1995a, 1995b), Ogbu has argued that a group's history (e.g., recent immigration versus long-time subordination) will cause them to respond differently, that is, to develop different cultural frames of reference, to similar (immediate) external conditions. When a cultural frame of reference includes a positive assessment of schooling (the case for many immigrant minorities), cultural differences between home and school will be rather easily overcome; when the cultural frame of reference about schooling is negative (as for many subordinate minorities), cultural differences will be hard to overcome. Many others have used, expanded, or modified Ogbu's theory as a means of understanding the school performance of various minority groups (Deyhle, 1992; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gibson, 1993; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Suárez-Orozco, 1993).

Other critics of cultural difference theory have demonstrated that group differences in orientations toward school are not always or only linked to differences in home communities. Taken-for-granted views of such things as readiness for school, performance in reading, and participation in extracurricular activities, as well as ideas about popularity, romance, or plans for the future, are sometimes shared by groups composed of individuals who do not share a social history or home community (Eckert, 1989; Eisenhart & Graue, 1993; Foley, 1990; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Willis, 1977). These various orientations seem to develop as small groups or individuals work out their relationships and identities in relation to the school. Meanings brought to school can be reconfigured, as students and parents respond to what they find there. Drawing on meanings available in various settings but actively appropriated and modified to fit an unfolding context at school, groups of parents, students, and teachers from diverse backgrounds may come to share an orientation to school.

This view of culture, in which the focus shifts toward meanings actively appropriated, constructed, and manipulated in specific contexts and away from ideas about culture as a given "way of life," gained momentum as part of cultural anthropology's shift toward interpretivism. The substance of this shift is described in detail in Erickson's chapter for the third edition of *The Handbook of Research on Teaching* (1986).

In educational anthropology and sociology, the "interpretive turn" did not, however, lead researchers completely away from

the effects of external conditions or social structure. Rather, they worked to find new ways of conceptualizing the relationship between actively constructed meaning systems (cultures) and externally imposed conditions (structures). One group particularly active in this work during the late 1970s and early 1980s was the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham in Birmingham, England. In his book, *Learning to Labor* (1977), the British sociologist and ethnographer Paul Willis, a member of CCCS working in the tradition of social reproduction theory, exemplifies this work and its contribution to another conception of culture.

Social Reproduction Theory

Following a Marxist interpretation of society, social reproductionists argue that communities and families in capitalist societies are defined and organized primarily by social class position, that is, by their relation to the means of production.[3] A relation to the means of production is lived out in the daily activities (especially the productive activities of making a living) of families and is interpreted through the history and experience of the family and groups of similarly situated families. The interpretation of this "living out" of a class relation is a collective class ideology or "culture," that is, a set of symbolic and conceptual forms by which a group's social class circumstances are made to seem reasonable and "natural." As the basic pattern of daily (labor) activities is repeated from one generation to the next, class-based "culture" is reproduced in successive generations, and the class-based, economic status quo is maintained. Thus, in this view, culture takes on an ambivalence that is not part of the cultural difference tradition or the early interpretive turn. Culture becomes a set of ideas and beliefs for living (a positive, enabling dimension) that camouflages or "mystifies" the social inequities of class-based societies (a negative, disabling dimension) (e.g., Willis, 1977).

In early social reproductionist work in education, the school was seen as a key site for learning one's place in a class society and thus one's class culture (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1979; Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Numerous studies documented that schools put students to work (i.e., grouped, treated, and taught them) according to the social class position they came from and that they were expected to assume as adults (e.g., Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1985). Students from working class backgrounds were more likely than their middle-class peers to spend their school days learning procedures, following rules, modifying their behavior, and covering simplified academic material. Middle- and upper-class kids were given greater freedom of movement and expression, as well as more exciting and demanding curricula.

Early social reproductionists argued that schools are engaged in an elaborate process to "mystify" students about the true (i.e., economic) basis for their different activities. This mystification is achieved through the culture of the school, which mediates the relationship between school activities and student success. Specifically, schools define the meaning of "good" work and behavior in ways that suggest that success in life depends on individual academic success. In the school culture, academic success and thus success in life are defined as a reflection of individual intelligence and personal effort (which they are not, after Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) rather than a set of tasks that privilege the labor of one social class group, the middle class (which they are). For schools to succeed at this mystification, they must convince students and others that academic achievement is independent of social class background (or race, gender, nationality, etc.). Schools work at this mystification by promoting a particular idea of exchange: Teachers give out knowledge in exchange for students' compliant behavior. Teachers then calculate (grade) student achievement based on how well students meet the terms of this exchange, thereby creating student "academic" groupings and rankings. Students who accept and conform to the exchange are rewarded with good grades, receive the "symbolic capital" of being a good student, and are promised a school credential and a good job later. Students who do not or cannot conform are punished with low grades, receive little or none of the school's symbolic capital, and are threatened with no credential and no good job later. The argument will then be made that these students are not prepared for, nor do they deserve, "good," that is, middle-class, jobs because they did not achieve academically. In this way, the school contributes to reproducing occupational dispositions (beliefs that certain kinds of people are suited for certain kinds of jobs) on which a capitalist society depends.

Willis, sensitive to the research of symbolic interactionists on classroom microdynamics, thought the school's role had to be more complicated than that. In the opening to his ethnography, *Learning to Labor* (1977), Willis wondered: Why would working-class kids (for example), no doubt aware that their status in a capitalist society is low and many of the tasks required of them in school trivial, allow themselves to be treated so poorly by the school? Why didn't these students demand or get better treatment so they would be prepared to move into the middle class?

Willis's answer derived from an argument about culture. Culture in school, he wrote, was not only a symbolic working-out of a given social class position conveyed through the organization of school and the actions of teachers, but it could also be actively and creatively constructed or "produced" by students as they resisted the imposition of the school's organization and ideology.

> Structural determinations act, not by direct mechanical effect, but by mediation through the cultural level where their own relationships become subject to forms of exposure and explanation. . . . Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a partial penetration of those structures. (Willis, 1977, pp. 173–175)

Willis's book describes how a small group of White working-class high school boys in England, the "lads," produced a

[3] For a more detailed treatment of the history and development of the ideas discussed in this section, see Levinson & Holland (1996). Although their review does not focus so directly on "culture," it is an excellent review of similar currents in U.S. educational anthropology and British ethnography of education.

counterculture to a school ideology they did not accept. The lads, who did not do well in school, renounced the school's system of rewards, status, and prestige. They looked elsewhere to find ways of acting that would bring them some rewards and status and help them to make positive sense of their lives. In looking around, they found the elements of more rewarding situations among their friends, in popular culture, and, most importantly, in the shop floor culture of their working-class parents. Under these conditions, groups of students who were not rewarded by the school developed their own group logic or "cultural productions," that is, ways of thinking about themselves, others, and the world, fashioned from the cultural (meaning-laden) resources they found outside of school. Later, Willis defined cultural productions as "discourses, meanings, materials, practices, and group processes [used by groups] to explore, understand, and creatively occupy particular positions in sets of general material possibilities" (1981, p. 59).

Sometimes these cultural productions cast the school as irrelevant, sometimes as a target. Sometimes these cultural productions led students to legitimate activities, sometimes to illegitimate or illegal ones.[4] In the lads' case, their cultural production of status and prestige had ironic consequences: It led them to resist the school, which denigrated them. Yet, in resisting what the school had to offer, the lads cut themselves off from access to the knowledge and the credentials they would need to move up in society. The lads ended up reproducing their lower status in society, despite their production of a culture that opposed (in some flamboyant and immediate ways) that status as it was constructed in school.

But Willis did not believe such an outcome was inevitable. Because the cultural level is actively constructed and sometimes opposes the status quo, the outcome is continually in doubt. It could happen that culture disrupts (rather than transmits) the status quo.

Thus, culture, in this view, becomes a set of symbolic and material forms, affected but not determined by history and structure, actively appropriated or "produced" in groups to bring order and satisfaction to experiences. In consequence, culture includes both enabling and disabling dimensions, both reproductive and transformative possibilities, for those who produce and live by it. This perspective and the studies it has inspired constituted another major shift in the conception of culture and might be referred to as a "productions turn" in studies of culture and education. I will come back to the shift toward "cultural productions" after a discussion of some more recent challenges.

More Recent Challenges to Conceptions of Culture: Ethnic, Feminist, and Postmodern Views

As the shift toward cultural productions was taking place in some circles, new ideas also were coming from other sources. From within anthropology as well as from literary criticism, feminist studies, ethnic studies, and postmodern studies, increasing numbers of scholars were pointing to contemporary phenomena that seemed to defy explanation in conventional cultural terms. From the gathering momentum of their challenges, together with (and not unrelated to) those of interpretivists and social reproductionists, the poststructural critique of culture in the 1990s has taken shape. The meaning of this critique for culture has been to emphasize further the need to decouple "culture" from "social group," and to turn toward "identity."

Recent challenges to old ideas about culture have their origins in empirical evidence from contemporary global events, new social movements, and changing demographics. New modes of transportation, communication, and migration have created mixed or mixed-up social relationships by traditional anthropological standards. The spaces, times, relationships, tasks, and tools that seemed to constitute collectively organized society in the past, took their meanings from culture, and served as the focal points of anthropological research have been transformed with the changing conditions of contemporary life. Today, for example, it is not surprising to hear of a researcher traveling half way around the world to visit a key informant—say, a Hindu priest in India—only to find that he has moved to serve parishioners in Houston (Appadurai, 1991). Similarly, we hear about "a medicine man who at one time feels a deep respect for Mother Earth and at another plans a radical real estate subdivision" (Clifford, 1988, p. 338). It is not uncommon to listen to political or educational debates in which members of the same ethnic or racial group take different sides. It is not unexpected to find homes, neighborhoods, or schools where people speak more than one language in the same conversation. It is not unusual to find children and adults spending hours each day communicating via computer technologies, video games, or popular music that connect them to people, values, and economic networks far removed from home or school. Paul Willis, discussing the increasing allure of popular culture among young people, writes:

> Many of the traditional resources of, and inherited bases for, social meaning, membership, security, and psychic certainty have lost their legitimacy for a large proportion of young people. There is no longer a sense of a "whole culture" with allocated places and a shared, universal value system. . . . [There is no longer a supply of] ready values and models of duty and meaning to help structure the passage into settled adulthood. (Willis, 1990, p. 13)

Today, varied social settings—for child care, education, leisure, and work—take the place of, or function together with, homes and communities to socialize large numbers of children and young people. Widespread access to transportation, the mass media, and computer technology opens avenues of communication far wider and more diverse than in previous generations (Nespor, 1994).

For reasons like these, it is no longer straightforward for anthropologists to plan to study "cultural groups," that is, designated groups of people with coherent, shared value systems,

[4] See Jay MacLeod's (1987) *Ain't No Makin' It: Leveled Aspirations in a Low-Income Neighborhood* for a similar account of cultural productions in two American high school-aged peer groups—one Black and one White. MacLeod found that the culture produced in the Black group was considerably more proschool than that of the White group.

households or communities with clearly defined boundaries, or shared funds of knowledge transmitted primarily from adults to their children. Conventional assumptions of culture as coherent and coterminous with social background, language use, region, religion, or ethnicity have become impossible to sustain. Certainly, such changes have been occurring for much longer than the past 10 years, but in anthropology critics from feminist studies, ethnic studies, and postmodern studies have been the ones to drive the point home.[5]

Ethnic, Feminist, and Postmodern Challenges

Ethnic scholars have challenged conventional ideas about culture on the grounds that old ideas freeze group characteristics and ignore issues of power. Ethnic scholars, not recognizing themselves or people like them in older anthropological accounts of their group, have complained about the essentializing and stereotyping of cultural categorization. They object to the way conventional ideas about culture solidify group characteristics, ignore within-group variations, and leave little room for individual creativity, agency, or change (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Hemmings, 1996; Rodriguez, 1982).

Radical ethnic and feminist scholars also have charged that conventional ideas about culture are too indebted to cultural relativism and liberal politics. They argue that the conventional discourse of culture and cultural differences, though intended to correct racist beliefs and serve a progressive politics, has nonetheless contributed to (or been co-opted to) perpetuating racism and sexism. In the United States, for example, African Americans, Mexican Americans, or women are not just another colorful, exotic, or different group; they live within and must somehow deal with structures of racial or gender inequality and cultural dominance. Critics complain that cultural difference theory—with its commitment to consider all cultural adaptations as equally reasonable or successful for those who live within them—tends to divert attention from enduring inequities of power (e.g., James, 1997). Although relations of power continue to block opportunities for some groups regardless of qualification and deny legitimate roles in society for those who differ from or criticize the dominant group, power remains hidden or in the background of most conventional accounts of culture or cultural difference.

Feminists have further protested that the tendency to celebrate culture-as-reasonable-adaptation obscures the ways traditional cultural groups oppress women (Friedman, 1987; Kondo, 1990; McRobbie, 1980), as well as the variation among women. Ethnic, feminist, and gay and lesbian scholarship has made clear that not all people of color, all women, all men, or all people socially identified as members of any group have the same histories, experience the world in the same way, face the same problems, or construct the same meanings.

Particularly during the past decade, increasing numbers of scholars have challenged the idea that individual behaviors, attitudes, or self-identities derive from a coherent and given cultural tradition acquired in the family during childhood. Postmodern scholarship is developing the idea that knowledge (including categories, beliefs, and values that filter or screen ways of seeing the world, i.e., culture) emanates from ongoing shifting and emerging relationships among people in different social positions and with different experiences of the world who come into contact—literally or figuratively—with each other. In this view, culture is not one primordial or coherent thing, fixed in time and space—as many older discussions and much popular theorizing imply—but rather a dynamic, continually emerging set of struggles among people trying to identify themselves in relation to others (Clifford, 1986). In this view, contemporary U.S. culture can be seen as composed of, for example, all of the competing ways in which Black people are constructed as "other" to White people, women are constructed as "other" to men, illegal aliens as "other" to real Americans, and so forth. Culture becomes the set of conflicting, continually changing, often incoherent understandings of self and others that take form among people who regularly communicate with or about each other (Clifford, 1986; Mascia-Lees, Sharpe & Cohen, 1989).

In this context, individuals who live *between* social groups—those of mixed ancestry whom Abu-Lughod (1991) calls "halfies"; those such as South Texans or homosexuals of color who live in the "borderlands" of historically separate groups (Anzaldúa, 1987; Rosaldo, 1989)—have become a central focus of attention. Living at the junctures of different traditions, these individuals must make sense of their lives by crossing, blending, negotiating, or transcending the boundaries of tradition. They are portrayed as the "usual" person-type in contemporary heterogeneous societies (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cohen, 1993; Davidson, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1995; Hemmings, 1996). Research among such individuals suggests that they develop behaviors and attitudes in practice that deal directly with the challenges of being "mixed," "different," or simply, oneself. These individuals are not choosing between one home and one school culture, or between assimilation to the mainstream or maintenance of a coherent ethnic identity; nor is it the case that they necessarily form oppositional cultures (although this is common) or that oppositional cultures are always associated with academic difficulties or restricted future opportunities. About this, Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

> Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders. . . . Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent, but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision. (1987, p. 78)

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[5] Often dated in the United States from the appearance of James Clifford and George Marcus's (1986) edited volume, *Writing Culture;* Marcus and Michael Fischer's (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique;* and Clifford's (1988)*The Predicament of Culture* postmodern criticism in anthropology has deeper and broader roots. They can be found in earlier works by feminist anthropologists (e.g., diLeonardo, 1984; Rosaldo & Lamphere, 1974), interpretive theorists (e.g., Geertz, 1973b), social reproduction and cultural theorists (e.g., Willis, 1977, and others at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, England), practice theorists (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977), and philosophers of science (e.g., Foucault, 1980).

In response, individuals fashion meaningful ways of being in the world (identities) from the various material and symbolic resources that are available to them in different settings, with diverse people, and for different purposes. About this, Dorinne Kondo writes: "[People] forge their lives in the midst of ambivalences and contradictions, using the idioms at their disposal" (1990, p. 302); Ann Davidson describes it as a situation in which "identity is constantly recreated, coming forward or retreating to the background in response to the politics and relations that characterize changing social situations" (1996, p. 4).

This body of scholarship suggests that cultures (ways of acting or understanding) are less stable (more situational and ephemeral), more actively constructed (less dependent on transmission), more creative (less given), and more contested (less coherent) than the conventional definition of culture-as-given-adaptation can accommodate. In this view, culture recedes into the conceptual background, while identity moves center stage. The struggle to define and heal a self fractured by competing cultural traditions becomes the focus of attention (Anzaldúa, 1987; Kondo, 1990):

> Culture, from this standpoint, is no reified thing or system, but a meaningful way of being in the world, inseparable from the "deepest" aspects of one's "self." . . . Selves, in this view, can be seen as rhetorical figures and performative assertions enacted in specific situations within fields of power, history, and culture. (Kondo, 1990, pp. 300, 304)

> The struggle is inner . . . played out in the outer terrains. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 87)

This approach points toward investigations of identity that trace the ways individuals construct and use meanings of self within historically specific contexts. Thus, interest shifts to identity struggles and the construction of self against the backdrop of cultural tradition. Culture remains important for the traditional orientations and resources it offers, but not as the form in which new possibilities arise. For writers such as Anzaldúa, the possibilities for transcending cultural differences and cultural violence lie, literally and metaphorically, in the mestiza's experience of trying to heal the disjunctures of her life at the intersection of numerous cultural traditions.

In this context, some have suggested abandoning the concept of culture altogether. Lila Abu-Lughod writes that "culture" is the linchpin of an anthropological discourse that "enforce[s] separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy" (1991, p. 138). She continues:

> Anthropology's avowed goal may be "the study of man" . . . [but it] has been and continues to be primarily the study of the non-Western [culturally different] other by the Western [culturally mainstream] self, even if in its new guise it seeks explicitly to give voice to the Other, either textually or through an explication of the fieldwork encounter (1991, p. 139). . . . Culture is the essential tool for making other. As a professional discourse that elaborates on the meaning of culture in order to account for, explain, and understand cultural difference, anthropology also helps construct, produce, and maintain it. Anthropological discourse gives cultural difference . . . the air of the self-evident. (p. 143)

In fact, Abu-Lughod argues, the relationship between the culturally different and the mainstream has been constituted by mainstream domination and projects of assimilation, supported by conventional conceptions of culture and cultural difference.

Abu-Lughod's remedy is to write "*against* culture" by focusing on particular individuals. In her view, this remedy would

> necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness. Individuals are confronted with choices, struggle with others, make conflicting statements, argue about points of view on the same events, undergo ups and downs in various relationships and changes in their circumstances and desires, face new pressures, and fail to predict what will happen to them in the future. So . . . it becomes difficult to think that the term "Bedouin culture" makes sense when one tries to piece together and convey what life is like for one old Bedouin matriarch. (1991, p. 154)

Abu-Lughod argues that a focus on individual particulars will reveal how similar people are across social groups and thus serve to diminish the worst features of cultural categorization.

Is It Time to Abandon Culture?

In contrast to Abu-Lughod, I am not so sanguine about the value of abandoning culture. I see no good reason to assume that focusing on similarities across individuals will necessarily reduce the tendency to create social hierarchies. On the one hand, there are real social, economic, and power differences that separate people and their experiences; ignoring these differences (as has often been the case in psychology, for example) will not make the hierarchies disappear. On the other hand, as Abu-Lughod makes clear, an exclusive focus on differences leaves out too much of the variety in human life.

I for one am not ready to give up on culture. To do so is to deny that patterned behaviors or intersubjective meanings are significant features of our ability to understand human experience. It is careless to suggest that such things as patterns in conversational turn-taking, rationales for school success and failure, or constructions of student or teacher identity categories are comprehensible in individual terms. The patterns and meanings that people take up and manipulate in particular places and with particular other people are consequential for them. They affect the way people interpret (or "filter") their experiences, the concerns people feel, the preferences they have, the choices they make, and the identities they seek (Kimball, 1976; D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996). Individuals are not free to choose for themselves any view of the world, any way of acting in class, any definition of success, or any identity. In practice, such choices are constrained by intersubjective understandings of what is possible, appropriate, legitimate, properly radical, and so forth. That is, they are constrained by culture and the enduring social structures that culture mediates. I agree with Sherry Ortner who writes:

> However much we now recognize that cultures are riddled with inequality, differential understanding, and differential advantage, . . . nonetheless they remain for the people who live within them sources of value, meaning, and ways of understanding—and resisting—the world. . . . [Thus the] ethnography of meaningful cultural worlds is [still] a significant enterprise. (Ortner, 1991, p. 187)

These meaningful worlds are not things that educational researchers or policymakers can afford to abandon or neglect.

The way forward, in Ortner's view, is to tread the line between attending to the significance of culture as resource—in the sense of what it provides in the way of order, salience, and value, while at the same time attending to how it is both constituted by and contributes to the reproduction of enduring structures (Ortner, 1991, p. 167; see also diLeonardo, 1984). Ortner cites as good examples of this approach Willis's *Learning to Labor* (1977) and Penny Eckert's *Jocks and Burnouts* (1989), an ethnographic account of how two cultural categories—being a "jock" and being a "burnout"—define a meaningful world for the high school students she studied and simultaneously construct their relationship to larger structures of corporate America.[6] This direction is, I think, especially fruitful for anthropologists and other ethnographers of education. It is a direction currently being developed by scholars who are extending Willis's concept of cultural production with reference to developments in the emerging field of "cultural studies."

Cultural Studies

The field of cultural studies is generally concerned with the subcultures (such as the lads' counterculture) created or used by groups on the margins of society in contemporary U.S. and British society (Hall, 1980; Johnson, 1986–87).[7] In cultural studies,

> Culture is not *a* practice; nor is it simply the descriptive sum of the "mores and folkways" of societies—as it tended to become in certain kinds of anthropology. . . . The "culture" is those patterns of organization, those characteristic forms of human energy which can be discovered as revealing themselves . . . within or underlying *all* social practices. . . . The purpose of the analysis [of culture] is to grasp how the interactions between all these practices and patterns are lived and experienced as a whole, in any particular [historical] period. (Hall, 1980, p. 60)

The "characteristic forms of human energy" that interest cultural studies researchers are "popular" forms of expression, especially the artistic, literary, and musical products of members of subordinate social groups. These researchers rely primarily on tools of literary criticism to analyze these forms of expression and to relate them in patterns. Their goal is to understand how various media forms or "texts"—especially those that members of subordinate groups produce in the concrete situations of their everyday lives—mediate (i.e., organize and make meaningful) a relationship with a dominant group.

Reminiscent of social reproductionist as well as ethnic and feminist scholarship, there is also a critical dimension to cultural studies. In cultural studies, researchers try to understand the way representations both enable creative expression and conceal oppressive social and power relations.

In writing about the contribution of cultural studies to educational research, Levinson and Holland (1996) suggest that by joining ideas from cultural studies with those of cultural production, "culture" becomes the set of meaningful forms that grow out of actual social relations between groups that become dominant or subordinate in a particular context, such as between students who become "jocks" and "burnouts" or "lads" and conformists in a school; forms that are expressed in the texts, discourses (including those of identity), technologies, artifacts, and actions the various groups take up in relation to each other. From the idea of "cultural productions," their view recognizes the significance of collective pattern and meaning, acknowledges the association of culture and social relations (social structure), and allows the possibility of change or transformation arising from the active, creative expressions of groups in communication with each other. From the idea of culture in cultural studies, their view stretches out to accommodate the cultural possibilities in such phenomena as mass communication, global consumerism, economic restructuring, and computer technologies that are the media of so much contemporary life and that have so mixed up older ideas about culture. Better understandings of such phenomena, hold, for me, special promise for culture-oriented studies of education in the near future.

Cultural Productions and the Study of Education

Discussing this promise with respect to studies of education, Levinson and Holland say:

> [T]he larger question is now one of how historical persons are formed in practice, within and against larger societal forces and structures which instantiate themselves in schools and other institutions. Cultural production [informed by cultural studies] is one vision of this process. . . . Through the production of cultural forms, created within the structural constraints of sites such as schools, subjectivities [identities] form and agency develops. . . . [Focusing on cultural production] is a way to show how people creatively occupy the space of education and schooling. This creative practice generates understandings and strategies which may in fact move well beyond the school, transforming aspirations, household relations, local knowledges, and structures of power. (Levinson & Holland, 1996, p. 14)

This expanded view of cultural productions directs anthropologists of education and other educational researchers to investigations of how groups in school organize subjectivities (identities) and the possibilities for individual agency in the expressive forms the groups take up and develop in the activities in which they regularly engage. This approach contrasts with much previous educational research that has focused on "cultural" topics such as preexisting beliefs, attitudes, and values. In previous research, for example, students' (or parents') beliefs about appropriate teacher behavior (e.g., the meaning of direct eye contact, the meaning of being an authority) have been viewed as preexisting cultural features that can either facilitate or block learn-

[6] See also Holland & Eisenhart (1990) for an illustration of how the "culture of romance" defines and constructs the lives of some college women; and Fordham (1996) for how the meanings of "being Black" and "acting White" construct the lives of some African-American high school students.

[7] Although it is possible to distinguish people and places primarily associated with "cultural studies" from those primarily associated with ethnic, feminist studies, and postmodern studies, these different arenas of scholarship have heavily influenced each other. See also Levinson & Holland (1996) and Turner (1993) for discussions of the contribution of cultural studies to anthropological perspectives on education.

ing in school. Similarly, teachers' preexisting beliefs about such things as "teacher-as-researcher," "mathematics," or "whole language," are thought to seriously affect teachers' responses to new programs. Beliefs before, during, and after the introduction of an educational reform are often investigated, as an indicator of whether changes associated with new educational practices have taken hold with students or teachers.

A focus on cultural productions suggests looking at student or teacher "beliefs" in a different way. The ongoing expressions of identity and purpose that particular groups of students or teachers produce as "group logics" in their everyday interactions would be the central concern and would be viewed as the means of staying in, growing, or changing in school. These expressions would not be considered reflections of a fixed state-of-mind or enduring beliefs, but a response to past experiences that is simultaneously a commitment to future experiences. They would be investigated not only for how they continue some legacy from the past, but also how they launch individuals into the future. They would be identified, not by individual statements of belief, but by patterns in the ways participants act in classrooms, label their own efforts, and describe themselves to others with whom they normally and regularly interact over time. Additionally, these expressions would not be associated primarily with background factors (e.g., home environment, previous socialization) but with individuals' positions in the ongoing social relations in which they participate, both inside and outside of school.

The cultural production approach provides a more complicated picture of how "beliefs" come to be formed in educational practice, how they give meaning to actions and organize identity, and how and why they contribute to maintaining, and possibly changing, the educational status quo. This is no small project, but the work already accomplished by researchers like Bradley Levinson, Aurolyn Luykx, and Jan Nespor provides fascinating illustrations of how we might begin (see also other articles in Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996; Davidson, 1996).

Levinson (1996), for example, traced the discourses (language and interactional forms) used by students in a Mexican secondary school to construct identities for themselves and others. He found the students forming their understanding of selves and others in a field of highly contradictory cultural discourses. Some were dominant or official discourses, for example, the school's discourse of equality; some were not. Students came to think of themselves and others "within and against" these discourses. Levinson's method was to follow the messages about the meaning of school, social success, and individual identity into and through the spaces where members of small groups of students spent their time. After identifying various messages, he then traced their associations or connections to wider scale national discursive forms (see also Weis, 1990; Wexler, 1992). He found, for example, that as students appropriated the school's discourse of equality, they learned to see (or deal with a view of) themselves and others within their particular school as equals, but this sense of equality was achieved, in part, by defining themselves against others—specifically, those who no longer attended secondary school—who were identified as lower status, "unequal." Thus, by appropriating the school's discourse of equality to build relationships within the school, the students were simultaneously constructing a discourse that divided them from many of their friends, relatives, and peers who would not have the advantage of secondary school. They came to differentiate peers and family members in ways they had not previously differentiated them.

> The "fact" of a general secundaria education . . . gets elaborated into a series of cultural distinctions which signify the value of being properly schooled. This process magnifies the *difference* between schooled and unschooled. . . . [It] is the sense of self as educated person [i.e., someone who has completed secondary school] which most powerfully articulates social difference into new configurations. . . . Schooled identity and the category of educated person create new configurations of difference by bringing together and identifying previously opposed or antagonistic identities rooted in distinct [home] cultures. (Levinson, 1996, p. 231)

This difference that the school and students constructed held implications for whom the students interacted with, whom they wanted to know and emulate, how they thought about their past and future, and what they worried about and wished for.

Using a similar approach, Aurolyn Luykx (1996) studied a Bolivian (Aymaran) normal school. As the teacher candidates from various rural areas came together for instruction in preparing to become teachers, they appropriated the national discourse of professional teacher development. In so doing, they began to differentiate themselves from their rural relatives and friends. Yet the teacher education students also maintained discourses from their rural homes, to which they would eventually return as teachers. By careful investigation of these competing discourses, how the teacher education students used and manipulated them, and their connections to larger structural forms, for example, the rural poverty of Bolivia's indigenous population and the economic allure of professional teaching, Luykx was able to reveal the contested terrain of culture and its mixed messages for these students becoming teachers. Her analysis of the Bolivian teacher education students' experiences also suggests a way of seeing the dilemmas of minority teacher candidates in the United States.

> Part of their socialization involved coming to grips with the fact that the achievement of professional status would distance them from their ethnic and class origins, while simultaneously requiring them to live and work among those from whom they had differentiated themselves. Furthermore, their transformation from captive subjects of the educational system into its active agents meant incorporating themselves within an institution which has traditionally threatened the integrity of indigenous culture. As future teachers, they would be called upon to disseminate a worldview opposed to the one they were encouraged to identify with as Aymaras. The only choice [they found] legitimate was to maintain these two ideological loyalties simultaneously, despite their cultural and historical incompatibilities. It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that this dilemma constitutes a collective cultural-psychological crisis which [minority] teachers . . . must traverse on their journey toward personal and professional identity. (Luykx, 1996, p. 246; see also Fordham, 1996, for similar experiences of Black teachers at Capitol High in Washington, D.C.)

Using a different approach, Jan Nespor (1994) traced the networks of affiliation that undergraduate college students in physics and management are joined to as they move through the

organizational arrangements, textbook materials, content requirements, and social demands of their college degree programs. The students' movement through the curriculum is conceptualized as a process of consuming and producing the material and symbolic representations made available in the social organization of coursework, and thereby becoming attached to and embodied by wider networks of social relations and meaning that extended far beyond the program, college, and immediate scenes of action. In Nespor's account, the lives of students in physics and management—though they may have entered college with similar backgrounds—are differently arranged by their respective curricula, which lead them to very different productions of college life, professional and social networks, and plans for the future.

One other issue bears mentioning here. Most studies of cultural productions suggest that subordinate groups or their members can, potentially, contribute something new or different that will alter the status quo. However, very few studies have provided examples in which this potential has been realized. One that does is Dorothy Holland and Debra Skinner's (1995) account of songs produced by Nepali women for the annual Tij festival. The women's songs were structured and performed in conventional ways, yet some had novel elements that, once they were performed, added to the personal and collective ways Nepali women could think about their (oppressed) circumstances and act on them. Sara Harkness and her colleagues (Harkness, Super, & Keefer, 1992) described something similar among first-time parents, who formulated new models of "being a parent" from the received wisdom and mistakes they gleaned from other parents, self-help manuals, and their own babies' responses. And, Margaret Eisenhart (1995b) illustrated how talk about "being a mother" and "being a scientist" led women in one workplace to create new ways of thinking about their jobs—ways that put pressure on the work place to accommodate the needs of mothers.

These recent studies of cultural productions illustrate how local practices of cultural production become meaningful and consequential to participants; differentiate otherwise similar individuals; make similar otherwise different people; are connected to wider processes of nationalism, stratification, globalization, and professionalism; and sometimes motivate change. The processes by which teachers, students, and other school participants take on and make meaningful the contemporary cultural possibilities associated with schooling, adult identities, peer groups, leisure activities, work, and citizenship would seem crucial to understanding the conditions and needs of contemporary education. Yet, these processes seem nearly invisible to most educational researchers. Those who abhor insensitivity to (conventional) cultural differences should be chastened to realize that ignoring the contemporary interests of young people and teachers, and the forces which affect their lives, is tantamount to the same thing. Researchers must take more seriously the possibility that, through regular exposure to numerous contemporary cultural possibilities, many of today's young people, including new teachers, are developing interests and identities that are unfamiliar to older generations and unlikely to be piqued by traditional discipline-oriented curricula and instruction.

The focus on cultural productions also suggests that we need some new methods of ethnographic research. In particular, the turn toward cultural productions requires approaches to collecting and analyzing data that can explore structures and meanings—physical and symbolic representations—that stretch across time and space. Put another way, ethnographers' traditional dependence on direct participation and observation—what can be participated in and observed firsthand—must be expanded. Ethnographers must find ways to learn about cultural forms and structural constraints that materially and symbolically organize people in and across times and spaces, as well as what can be "seen" and experienced by a positioned researcher-actor. However, such methodological issues are not the ones that have drawn the interest of most people who are presently engaged in discussions about improving ethnographic techniques, especially in educational research.

Conceptions of Ethnographic Methodology

Changes in ethnographic methodology have not necessarily kept pace with changing ideas about culture. Although feminist, ethnic, and postmodern critics have influenced the way ethnographers think about their relationships with study participants and the styles ethnographers use to write their accounts, methods of site selection, data collection and analysis remain virtually unchanged. In this section, I first review the conventional approach to ethnographic methodology; then I take up some of the challenges and proposed alternatives to it.

The Conventional View of Ethnographic Methodology

The conventional view of ethnographic methodology makes understanding culture dependent on an attentive researcher who comes to understand the lives of others primarily by watching them, listening to them, and participating with them. This firsthand acquaintance with the lives of others produces categories, concepts, pictures, and images that are close to the empirical domain, as others experience or "imagine" it (Blumer, 1969; Geertz, 1973b), and "that can successfully handle and accommodate the resistance offered by the empirical world under study" (Blumer, 1969, p. 23).

To the extent that older conceptions of culture have guided ethnographers' goals, studies have focused on different things and involved the researcher in different ways. For example, ethnographers with a conception of culture as way-of-life have pursued observations, interviews, and participation for the purpose of identifying the categories of activity (e.g., the uses of time, space, and language) that order and give direction to people's lives. The accounts these ethnographers produce describe the categories and suggest their implications for filtering people's experiences and attitudes (e.g., Heath's 1983 account of everyday life in Trackton and Roadville). For the most part, ethnographers working in this tradition have seen themselves as unobtrusive recorders of the flow of activity and faithful reporters of its characteristic patterns.

In contrast, ethnographers with an interpretive conception of culture as an "imaginative universe within which . . . acts are signs" (Geertz, 1973b, p. 13) pursue observations, interviews, and participation in order to grasp the significance others give to acts. As Erickson (1986) put it, interpretive ethnographers

aim to be "empirical without being positivistic" (p. 120), to provide an "'objective' analysis . . . of 'subjective' meaning" (p. 127). The accounts these ethnographers produce attempt to represent the meanings (symbolism) of acts, as they are understood by participants (e.g., Geertz's 1973a account of a Balinese cockfight or his 1973b account of a Moroccan sheep raid). These researchers consider themselves active, reflective subjects, who produce the images, concepts, and understanding represented in ethnographic accounts, based on firsthand knowledge of others and deliberate scrutiny of one's own viewpoint in light of others'. However, regardless of the differences between these two groups of ethnographers, both consider the "reality" of others' worlds to be the constraint which checks bias and assures social science.

Challenges to Conventional Ethnography

The challenges to ethnographic research that have come from feminists, ethnic scholars, and postmodernists derive from concerns about perspective and power. In particular, these scholars have decried the one-sidedness of ethnographic procedures and accounts, which give the researcher exclusive control of the research design, the final account, and any subsequent uses of the material. For the most part, ethnographers have decided on the research questions to be asked and the kinds of information to be collected from others. In addition, they have been the ones to make interpretations of the information they collect and to author accounts of "what it's like to be a _____." Informants or study participants have had little say in what was done to them or written about them. Thus, critics have asked: Whose lives or views are really being represented in ethnographic research? If ethnographers purport to represent the lives of others, why don't "others" have greater voice in what is studied and how the results are presented, interpreted, or used? These concerns have led in two directions: to more collaborative models of the relationship between researcher and researched and to experiments in writing (so-called "textualist strategies") that allow more different perspectives or "voices" to be revealed in final accounts. Within anthropology and beyond, these issues have arguably been the most hotly debated topics in ethnographic methodology of the past decade.[8]

The Relationship of Researcher to Researched

Most contemporary critics of the conventional relationship of ethnographer to the people studied have called for more collaborative or "dialogic" relationships in which participants help to set the research agenda and contribute to the data collection, analysis, and writing. This alternative follows from the views of some feminist, ethnic, and postmodern scholars who argue that understanding is personally derived; that is, it is derived from one's negotiated position (identity) in a social context. These authors complain, in consequence, that a single-authored account of culture is no more than the subjective and partial view of one precisely situated person (Clough, 1992; Krieger, 1983, 1996; Richardson, 1990; Tyler, 1986). As such, it has no more claim to accuracy, authenticity, or comprehensiveness than anyone else's view. Further, because individuals' views are affected by the actual circumstances of their lives, views are likely to differ by race, class, gender, and other enduring inequities (such as who is likely to be the researcher and who the researched) that differentially constrain circumstances. One way to overcome these limitations is to involve more different kinds of people in designing the research process and creating the final product. Another is for the researcher to disclose more about his or her own views, commitments, and social position, that is, to become a subject of the research in the way other participants are.

Researchers working in the tradition of critical theory have also complained about conventional ethnography. The processes and products of ethnography, they claim, should do more than account for the actions of others; they should empower participants to take greater charge of their own lives (e.g., Anderson, 1989; Carspecken, 1996; Roman, 1992; Roman & Apple, 1990). Researchers can contribute to empowerment in several ways: by exposing the power inequities that shape a situation, including the research itself; by actively participating in consciousness-raising about power inequities in one's own and others' lives; and by actively taking steps to change unequal power relations.

These debates have made clearer how the ethnographer's social position, cultural perspective, and political stance affect the research relationships he or she forms and, in turn, how the research is done, what is learned, what is written, and what subsequent actions are taken. They also make clear that salient features of the ethnographer will necessarily vary in relation to the group she or he is studying, and that a careful ethnographer must be conscious of both the opportunities and constraints of his or her social relationships in the field and the choices of research relationships that are possible to make.

Writing Ethnography

Ethnography is inevitably a means of representation; accounts of what ethnographers learn from studying others are, as Geertz put it, "our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to" (1973b, p. 9). Conventionally, ethnographers have written these accounts for people like themselves (not the "natives") to read. Recently, postmodern researchers have drawn a great deal of attention to "textualist" issues, that is, questions about how ethnographers write about other people (e.g., Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). Committed to a view of the researcher as active yet partial and positioned, postmodern scholars stress that ethnographers struggle with their own images or interpretations of an unfamiliar group and the need for written accounts to appeal to a familiar audience. As such, ethnographers inevitably tell about another group by drawing on literary conventions of persuasion that are familiar to them. Thus, it is not others' "reality" that constrains what is written, but the literary conventions

[8] Because these feminist, ethnic, and postmodern challenges to ethnography have been extensively discussed elsewhere—see Atkinson & Hammersley (1994); Clifford & Marcus (1986); Van Maanen (1988)—I review them only briefly here.

of inscribing (writing), narrative (storytelling), searching for understanding (formulaic ways of demonstrating that one has gained insight), and "sentimenting" (adding emotion and drama) with which the author is familiar (e.g., Atkinson, 1990; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Clough, 1992).

Accepting that there is no neutral way of representing the world, postmodern ethnographers have dealt with the resulting anxiety by proposing to change writing, that is, to produce experimental ethnographic texts that present any one "reality" as contested, open-ended, and contingent (Clough, 1992; Marcus & Fischer, 1986, Van Maanen, 1988). Thus, we have impressionist accounts (Van Maanen, 1988), travelogues (Pratt, 1986), theoretical fiction (Cohen, 1993), ethnographic fiction (Tierney, 1993), ethnographic drama (Tanaka, 1997), multivoiced accounts (Krieger, 1983; Lewis & Simon, 1986; Richardson, 1990; Shostak, 1981; Wolf, 1992), and autoethnography (Ellis, 1995)—all of which have been proposed as more honest as well as more circumspect ways of depicting ethnographic findings and the researcher's role in constructing them. In one way or another, all of these experimental writing strategies acknowledge the central interpretive role of the researcher, allow more voices to be represented in the final account, and leave final conclusions open or ambiguous. As such, they make readers skeptical of conventional, "realist" ethnographies, such as Heath's *Ways With Words* (1983), Willis's *Learning to Labor* (1977), Holland and Eisenhart's *Educated in Romance* (1990), and many others, which present one relatively uncontested, coherent view of culture.[9]

Interestingly, the textualist criticisms of ethnography assume, as Patricia Clough (1992) points out, a dubious distinction between field methods and writing, where the methods remain virtually the same, while the style of written presentation is changed. Field methods of firsthand participation, observation, and open-ended interviewing, as well as some systematic procedures of content analysis, are presupposed; then, the various writing experiments are suggested as better ways of reporting the researcher's findings and experiences. In Clough's (postmodern) view, these approaches ignore what, for her, is the key issue: That questions of ethnographic method have always been "about writing and reading practices and the technologies of their mass (re)production" (Clough, 1992, p. 136). In consequence, her suggestion is to do away with ethnography and replace it with "a social criticism that gives up on data collection and instead offers rereadings of representations in every form of information processing, empirical science, literature, film, television, and computer simulation" (1992, p. 137). This move away from empirical data collection and analysis in favor of textual deconstructions is common among postmodern critics of ethnography.

While the postmodernists are surely correct that ethnographies would be improved by including the interpretations of more and different voices and exercising more caution in forming relationships and making generalizations, they go too far when they suggest that there are no good reasons for ethnographers (or anyone else) to collect or analyze any more data about "other people." For educational researchers in particular, it is one thing to be careful about interpretations and generalizations, quite another to disengage from collecting data that might contribute to improving education. Policymakers and other decision makers will not stop trying to frame the experience of "others" in discourse or making plans that affect "others," while postmodernists deconstruct old accounts.

What is needed are powerful modes of representing what ethnographers know about the world, which, once "made transparent, public and capable of evaluation" (Agar, 1996, p. 13), can instruct but do not invalidate the informed views of others. (See Eisenhart & Howe, 1992, Maxwell, 1996, and Sanjek, 1990, for more detailed discussions of improving ethnographic validity without eliminating ethnography.) Historically, ethnographies of education that revealed experiences of nondominant groups have been used, with some success, to "move the world" (Agar, 1996, p. 13) toward more concern about and sensitivity to these groups and to their educational opportunities. These successes were not accomplished without some cost to participants' desires and voices. Yet, the dangers in this work do not cancel out the value of a research method that, unlike any other, tries to understand how people act in and make sense of their worlds and is committed to doing so before taking or supporting actions that affect those people (Harding & Livesay, 1984; McCall, Ngeva, & Mbebe, 1997).

However, the debates about research relationships and writing styles do not address all of the methodological issues that new conceptions of culture pose. What about methods for investigating contemporary cultural phenomena, such as the mixed-up group affiliations and new technologies referred to in the first section of this chapter? What about methods for exploring the present circumstances, for example, of the families who participated in Heath's 1983 study of Trackton and Roadville? Writing about these families in 1996, Heath says:

> Fieldwork such as that behind *Ways with Words* [1983] has [become] impossible. Present day households and communities of children and youths lack the easily described boundaries of their parents. . . . In many of these households [in 1996], weeks go by when no two members of a household eat at the same time, share any chore, or plan work together. Hours go by when no one is anywhere near home. Over a decade ago, I could generally find the children of Roadville and Trackton at home or at school. Today, with no one at home to organize chores or to watch over play in the community, children and young people scatter and disappear. Youngest children are in daycare centers. School-age children go inside friends' houses to watch television or play video games; they crowd into the vans of community youth athletic leagues and move from sport to sport by season. . . . Older youths either race to their cars when the school bell rings and head for fast-food restaurants or malls, or ride the bus to one another's houses and then scatter to favorite gathering places with their friends. On the go, they listen to car radios or wear headphones and throb to the muffled beat of their compact discs or cassettes. Older and younger children segregate themselves by gender, activity, space, and sounds. . . . If the movement of adults and children in and out of households and their uses of space, time,

[9] But see Levinson (in press) for a discussion of the limitations encountered when trying to put ideas about collaboration and multiple voices into research practice.

> work and leisure [have changed] so much, then ethnographers must develop new methods of seeing and understanding. . . . Now ethnographers must learn patterns of affiliation in numerous networks of different spaces and times, follow modes of physical transport and learn where [people] meet, and delineate technological means and sources of communication. (Heath, 1996, pp. 370–372)

Changes such as these seem to demand that educational ethnographers who want to understand contemporary culture must develop some additional (and nontextualist) methodological strategies. We need strategies, for example, to explore friendships and other relationships that stretch out across time and space, to identify brief encounters that have special significance, and to analyze activities and entertainment taken up locally but formed and controlled elsewhere. Especially if educational ethnographers intend to be helpful to teachers, students, and parents in the near future, we need ways to explore the new influences and developments which Heath's description so aptly captures.

Nontextualist Methods

In contrast to strategies that focus on collaborative research relationships or reflexive presentations as the means of correcting conventional ethnography, George Marcus (1995) has proposed what he calls "multisite ethnography" (see also Marcus & Fischer, 1986). Multisite ethnographies are

> designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, or putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multisited ethnographies. (Marcus, 1995, p. 97)

Put another way, multisited ethnographies would investigate the connections among sites that together make up arena of social practice, such as the complex arena of contemporary childhood socialization described by Heath (above).

Multisited ethnography seems an especially appropriate methodology for studying contemporary cultural productions. Using a multisited design, cultural forms taken up or produced in one locale would be followed and explored in other places, allowing a sense of connection to emerge by following paths of circulation. Marcus (1995) suggests several strategies for making this connection. First, ethnographers might follow the cultural productions of the same people when they move from one site to another, as in, for example, studies of young children talking about learning at home, in school, and after school; studies of students' discourse about "growing up" or otherwise socially differentiating themselves as they move from home to school, elementary school to middle school, high school to college, or school to work; or studies of teachers' discourse about "professionalization" as they move through different stages of their career or between their lives as teachers and parents. Second, ethnographers might examine one form of cultural production, for example, the discourse of computer technologies, or the meaning of "being somebody," as it appears in distinct but related groups, for example, among teachers and students, or among young people at school, at leisure, and at work. Third, ethnographers might follow a narrative or life history, where the salient "sites" are defined by a storyteller and then further explored by the researcher.[10] Finally, ethnographers might follow the discourse about an innovation or reform as it takes shape in various locales and later affects others, for example, the discourse about science education reform when formulated by policymakers and the discourse about the same thing among those who have to implement it. In Mike Rose's book, *Possible Lives* (1995), he tries to imagine what the effects of new educational reforms might be on the lively, impressive classrooms he studied:

> We might ask ourselves how a particular proposal would advance or constrain the work we saw in a classroom that had special meaning for us, that caught us up in its intelligence and decency. Would that proposal create or restrict the conditions for other such classrooms to flourish? (Rose, 1995, p. 431)

Rose notes that some of the teachers he observed were discouraged by previous reforms, while others were inspired and motivated by them. Yet, he cannot say what makes the difference. Studies that develop research strategies for following educational reforms or innovations as cultural productions—as they form, are taken up, and compete with others in the lives of teachers, students, and others involved in education—might be able to identify the difference. Identifying the difference might be possible because studies of educational reforms-as-cultural-productions would focus broadly on the meanings and struggles that create the specific, local context for those involved with a reform to act and identify themselves in relation to others and wider scale projects (e.g., a national or state-level reform). A multisited study of cultural productions—such as the discourses of teachers involved in reform, the expressions of young people experiencing the reform, and the struggles of parents to prepare their children for an unknown future—would further offer a broad means of understanding how educational activities, concerns, and needs depend on and are constrained by each other.

Note, however, that multisited design puts conventional ethnographic method at stake in ways that "textualist" approaches to method do not (Marcus, 1995, p. 100). In a multisited design, the "specialness" of one site is lost; what is gained is the ability to make connections among distinctive discourses and practices from site to site. Similarly, in multisite design, the specialness of one "people" or group also is lost; attention is redirected to

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[10] Studies of "narrative" have become a methodological type in educational research in recent years. See, for example, Riessman (1993) and the 1997 Theme Issue of *Teaching and Teacher Education*, "Narrative Perspectives on Research on Teacher Education." Although I think narrative research, inquiry, and analysis are important methodological approaches for educational research, I approach narratives as a form of cultural production, that is, as a meaningful, situated, and consequential construction of one's life in the world (Eisenhart, 1995a), similar to the way older anthropologists considered life histories to be one manifestation of culture, and not, as some have suggested, a distinct way of knowing.

the cultural forms that connect and construct various people in context, regardless of their previous social affiliations or cultural traditions.

This multisite approach also challenges the privileged position of the strange, the unfamiliar, the different, the subordinated—those groups for whom ethnographers' romantic and progressive impulses have historically been engaged. "[Questions] of resistance, although not forgotten, are often subordinated to different sorts of questions about the shape of systemic processes themselves [e.g., cultural productions] and complicities with these processes among variously positioned subjects" (Marcus, 1995, p. 101), including teachers, students, parents, researchers and their communities.

Marcus is vague about specific methods for collecting and analyzing multisite data. However, others grappling with similar issues have pointed out that, compared to previous ethnographers, ethnographers attempting to follow contemporary people, artifacts, or ideas from place to place are likely to face: more long-distance travel; greater dependence on interviews; greater reliance on what can be learned in short, intensive visits; increased use of electronic forms of communication, and greater attention to the analysis of significant events (in contrast to ongoing interactions) and of the material and symbolic interconnections among contexts, tools, and ideas (e.g., Moore, 1994; Nespor, 1994; Ortner, 1997; Rose, 1995). For ethnographers of education and researchers of teaching, the most profound implications would seem to be, first, the need to develop methods for obtaining information about cultural processes outside of school that bear on the people and outcomes of classrooms and schools; and, second, the need to develop ways of understanding how cultural processes inside and outside of school are interconnected, sustained, or changed. (See Heath & McLaughlin, 1993, for a multisite approach focused on differences between young people in youth organizations versus schools; Ogbu, 1981, for an approach that he calls "multilevel" ethnography; and Eisenhart and Finkel, 1998, for a multisite approach that explores science learning inside and outside of schools.) These considerations suggest the outline of a direction for new methodological strategies that can follow cultural forms, rather than specific groups, in contemporary society.

Conclusion

In comparison to the model of interpretive research outlined by Erickson (1986), cultural and ethnographic researchers today face greater demands to investigate contemporary cultural issues, more options for conducting their research, more issues regarding one's positioning as researcher and writer, and more questions about the validity of their findings and conclusions. These challenges are difficult ones, worthy of ethnographers' serious attention in the near future. In this chapter, I have argued that the revision and expansion of issues, choices, and questions is not a reason to give up on either culture or ethnography. It is, rather, a reason to pay careful attention to new cultural phenomena, new perspectives on culture, and strategic decisions about research design, methods, and reporting. It is also a reason to scale back hopes for universal appeal and to rededicate ourselves to making solid arguments for what ethnographers know and how we know it. As Signithia Fordham (1996) has recently written, those empowered to write about culture are thus empowered to deeply affect the policies and practices perpetrated on those identified with culture. By the stroke of a pen, we may extend, reshape, transform thinking and perceptions of a group: "Our perceptions of an entire generation could be permanently altered as a result of these ethnographic images" (Fordham, 1996, p. 341). This is no small curse, privilege, or opportunity. The promise in this power is good enough reason not to abandon culture or ethnography, but to rearticulate their versatility and value, try to detach them from their oppressive complicities, and to apply them creatively to contemporary phenomena that affect teachers, students, policymakers, and educational researchers. We must follow cultural forms where we now find them and where they take us, be cognizant of our power and limitations, and figure out the methods we need to do so.

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