

Senses and Subtext: Culture in the Education Curriculum

Clara Rius-Covas

Clara Rius-Covas, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

Ann E. Wilson-Daily

Ann E. Wilson-Daily, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

Maria Feliu-Torruella

Maria Feliu-Torruella, Universitat de Barcelona, Spain

Abstract:

The Spanish Education Curriculum employs the term culture extensively and in multiple senses; it appears 238 times in *Real Decreto* 157/2022 (State Royal Decree). In Catalonia's Curriculum for Basic Education (covering both Primary and Secondary schooling)—the focus of this study—the term appears 855 times.

The *Real Academia Española* (Royal Spanish Academy, RAE, 2014) and the *Institut d'Estudis Catalans* (Institute of Catalan Studies, IEC, 2024) identify three principal senses of culture: "cultivation," "knowledge derived from study and intellect," and "the set of values, traditions, knowledge, and heritage belonging to a community." Additionally, each institution recognizes a distinct, non-overlapping sense: religious worship (RAE, 2014) and mass culture (DIEC2; IEC, 2024).

The persistence of this construct renders its examination significant and suggests the emergence of meanings—or nuances—that extend beyond these institutional definitions. Accordingly, a preliminary hypothesis is advanced: alternative uses of *culture* may obscure specific representations, potentially aligned with ideological bias.

As *culture* functions as a category central to the formation of intersecting identities, it is essential to analyze not only its meanings but also the contexts and subtexts in which it operates. These dimensions are critical for a reflective understanding of both the curriculum and the broader socio-educational landscape in Spain, as well as for the field of Social Sciences Education and, more broadly, across other educational areas.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative approach designed to enable a systematic, comprehensive, and critical analysis of meanings. This approach also seeks to develop an analytical framework transferable to curricula from other autonomous communities and states, as well as to comparable educational texts and contexts.

To this end, the research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover the meanings of *culture* embedded within the Curriculum of Catalonia and to examine how these meanings may shape conceptualizations, understandings, and pedagogical practices surrounding the notion of *culture*.

Preliminary findings lend support to the general hypothesis. The variability of uses is confirmed, alongside the emergence of non-traditional categories of meaning that conceal alternative representations. Among these emergent significations are notions such as national or ethnic origin, access to specific cultural referents or forms of knowledge and memory, and social markers of difference.

Ultimately, the research proposes a critical and transferable analytical framework for interpreting both the explicit and implicit senses of *culture*—its uses and concealments—as a lens through which to interrogate the political-educational context and its didactic and socio-emotional implications. This framework aims to inform future curricular reforms and educational guidelines or decrees.