

*This chapter considers issues related to institutional research and its potential role in the move toward an ethos of cultural democracy in higher education.*

## Institutional Research as a Tool for Cultural Democracy

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[W]hen we notice that our social institutions are driven by the larger political contexts in which they are embedded, we are forced to acknowledge that the content of our research and the methods we use are likewise subject to the prevailing political forces.

Kenwyn Smith (1990, p. 121)

American educational institutions are currently struggling to contend with the widespread demographic changes that are sweeping this country. As the population of people of color increases in the United States, it is becoming far more difficult to maintain the facade of cultural equality without dramatically increasing the number of students, faculty, and administrators of color on college and university campuses. Yet cultural equality is not only about numbers. It is, foremost, about an institution's ability to embrace a culturally democratic view of life that not only supports participation by all constituents, but also provides avenues for different cultural voices to be heard and integrated within the changing culture and history of the institution.

This struggle for cultural democracy<sup>1</sup> cannot be defined merely in terms of social justice paradigms that focus solely on the redistribution of material and nonmaterial benefits within the academy. Such a transformation must also address the ideological tenets and philosophical contradictions that have historically structured academic environments to benefit an elite group, while systematically marginalizing the participation of "the other"—people of color, women, gays and lesbians, and the working class (Young, 1990).

Most importantly, institutional change in the interest of cultural democracy cannot take place without major shifts in the manner in which school life is organized, academic issues are framed, education is actualized, and research is conducted (Smith, 1990; Crossen, 1988; Jaramillo, 1988; Loo and Rolison, 1986; Sanders, 1987). Although each of these areas of change is equally significant and vital, this chapter will specifically consider issues related to institutional research and its potential role in promoting an ethos of cultural democracy in higher education.

Institutional research, as a tool of traditional organizations, has often contributed to the perpetuation of asymmetrical power relations and the subordination of groups existing outside the mainstream. Inextricably linked to organizational values, beliefs, and practices defined by the structure of Western scientific thought, institutional research has served to make acceptable decontextualized and victim-blaming views of culturally diverse students—students who, more often than not, have found it difficult to succeed within the traditional structure of American higher education.

For example, test scores are widely used by college and university researchers to make conclusions about the future success of students of color. Their academic ability and potential are often determined by the scores they receive on standardized tests, even though these tests reflect the norms of the dominant culture and class. Moreover, the knowledge required to score well on such tests is generally achieved by means of the student's exposure to certain educational conditions. These conditions include the availability of well-prepared teachers, challenging instructional approaches, higher teacher expectations, adequate educational materials and equipment, and significant home educational resources—the very conditions that have been historically denied to the large majority of students from disenfranchised communities. Yet such differences in context are usually ignored; instead, students who score poorly on standardized tests are judged less able or less motivated, a practice that places the fault for lower scores directly on the student.

Institutional values and practices that sustain racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in educational settings have perversely shaped and defined the nature of institutional governance, hiring practices, academic standards, testing and assessment, curriculum design, faculty–student interactions, financial priorities, and what is deemed legitimate research. As a consequence, traditional institutional research on diversity unwittingly supports institutional conditions that perpetuate:

- Simplistic perceptions of discrimination by failing to distinguish those acts of discrimination that function in the interest of exclusion and those that function in the interest of diversity
- A view of women and people of color as deficient
- An overemphasis on the “special” attributes of people of color to justify their entry into the institution

- Admitting too few people of color to enact an actual culture of diversity
- Insufficient services for promoting the success of disenfranchised students, faculty, and staff
- Hostility toward alternative cultural spheres that promote cultural integrity
- The silencing of discourse that fails to adhere to the Eurocentric ideal of dispassionate objectivity
- An absence of knowledge of students' histories and community realities
- The collusion of white students, white faculty, and white administration resistant to institutional change
- Fragmentation of subordinate group leadership to forestall institutional change
- Arguments of "political correctness" to abdicate social responsibility to struggle for equality
- Research-driven classifications (for example, "Hispanic" or "minority") that obscure the extent to which diversity actually exists within educational institutions.

### **Critique of Traditional Research Values**

Educational conditions promoting inequality have been made possible by the underlying philosophical assumptions that inform traditional research methodology, namely, the acceptance of a dualistic, objective, value-free, hierarchical, and instrumental perspective regarding knowledge. It is a view that sees human beings as separate from nature, and thus as objectifiable, observable, quantifiable, predictable, and controllable. Through objectifying human beings into "things," human behavior can be treated as if it existed according to a predetermined set of universal rules, independent of the contexts in which the behavior takes place. Knowing the universal causes and effects provides the instrumental basis on which to effectively intervene and manipulate the flow of events, to bring about a desired control over the environment (Fay, 1987).

Traditional research has emerged from an authoritarian context bent on the prediction of the environment for the purpose of controlling and dominating its evolution, with an emphasis on the hierarchical categorization and compartmentalization of human experience. As a consequence, the belief exists that to conduct legitimate research, to produce legitimate knowledge, requires distancing "oneself emotionally from the rest of life" (Slater, 1991, p. 99). Both Philip Slater (1991) and Page Smith (1990) speak against this "rationalism of science."

[T]he vaunted rationalism of science is often merely a guise for the zealous suppression of feeling which authoritarianism has always demanded... The most irrational of all beliefs is the belief in rationalism... and the most subjective of all delusions is the belief that objectivity is possible. [Slater, 1991, p. 99]

[T]here is no such thing as “value-free” thought or research; those who act sincerely on such a premise deceive the world and, more dangerously, themselves.... The notion of value-free inquiry of social research without reference to social ends is the bugaboo of escapist science. [Smith, 1990, p. 161]

Other aspects of traditional educational research include a tendency toward reductionism, an overemphasis on the search for universals and homogeneity, and ethnocentric bias. These tendencies have resulted in the production of decontextualized knowledge, limiting the attention given to the unique impact of cultural, gender, and class influences in the attitudes and behaviors of students from subordinate cultures. Gordon, Miller, and Rollock (1990) perceive this neglect as “probably the result of androcentric, culturocentric, and ethnocentric chauvinism in Euro-American and male-dominated production of social science knowledge. We refer to this chauvinism as communicentric bias: The tendency to make one’s own community the center of the universe and the conceptual frame that constrains all thought” [p. 15].

## Research and Social Power

Without doubt, institutional relations of power are always at work in the manner in which traditional research is defined, implemented, and utilized within educational environments. In other words, the primary purpose of traditional research and the cultural values that inform it is directly related to the production of knowledge; and this knowledge is intimately linked to questions of social power. Michel Foucault (1977) describes this relationship between knowledge and power:

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society [culture] has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; *the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.* [p. 131; italics added]

The emphasis on objectivity and value-free knowledge can readily be understood from the standpoint of preserving the integrity of the status quo. It is generally those who are most protective of current conditions who most adamantly insist on institutional research that reflects a neutral and objective perspective, and who likewise respond with great suspicion to any research results that challenge the existing relations of power. Further, this emphasis on objective and value-free research functions to veil the implicit control the dom-

inant culture holds over subordinate populations. Slater (1991) addresses this phenomenon and its consequences:

It is easier for those who are satisfied with things as they are to appear neutral, unemotional, and unmotivated. The motivational impetus of those who seek change is more visible. They are more likely to be seen as “shrill” or “strident.”... Those who seek change—those who attempt to challenge [explicitly] the powers that be—must speak louder in order to be heard at all, and the demand for a quieter, “more objective” voice is an effective way to silence them.... [And] when dissenting voices grow in numbers, authoritarian [institutions] will often stave off change by calling for further study. [p. 100]

Slater’s comments point to the manner in which institutional research is used to prevent movement and to subvert institutional transformation. Instead of utilizing institutional resources for necessary organizational change, time, money, and human expertise are diverted to abstract research tasks that in and of themselves change nothing. It is as if change could somehow be pretended or magically actualized through the technocratic accumulation of volumes of “scientific” research reports. Frank Fisher (1985) describes the power of such “technocracy”: “The power of technocracy is based on a positivistically oriented empirical conception of knowledge, which is reflected in a growing inventory of operational techniques such as cost-benefit analysis, operations research, systems analysis, strategic planning and computer simulations. Emphasizing the tenets of value-neutral objectivity, empirical operationalism and professional expertise, modern technocracy stands or falls with the ideology of scientism” [p. 232].

In summary, what is clearly missing in the traditional perspective concerning institutional research is an acknowledgment of the manner in which culture and power intersect to support a view of research that is apolitical and ahistorical. The standards and norms assigned and the approach utilized are encapsulated in a belief in the existence of universal values and an ideal of individualism and assimilation. These function to perpetuate a view of research that is not only devoid of critical<sup>2</sup> insight, but that reduces knowledge into abstract parts and perceives ideas as useful only to the extent that they produce actions that sustain the status quo. By so doing, traditional research reinforces the homogenizing intent of the dominant culture, while negating the cultural reality of subordinate groups; perpetuates a deficient view of women and people of color, while positioning the researcher as neutral and objective; denies the political nature of the research process, while assuming a moral posture of superiority; defines what constitutes legitimate knowledge, while ignoring the impact of sociopolitical contexts on such a value judgment; and de-emphasizes issues of social class and sexual orientation, while the hidden values reproduce social class inequality and compulsory heterosexuality.

## Institutional Responses to Cultural Diversity

All educational institutions are fundamentally grounded on a set of values and beliefs that inform the manner in which they engage with questions of cultural diversity. All educational institutions enact an organizational culture that enhances or deters the process of cultural diversification. Institutional research on diversity must address the manner in which cultural democracy is stifled and truncated in the interest of preserving the existing organizational dynamics of power at work. Toward this end, it is valuable to assess the manner in which institutions respond to questions of cultural diversity. For purposes of discussion, most institutional responses to cultural differences can be considered in terms of an organizational power continuum that moves from traditional to culturally democratic, with liberal and multicultural reference points existing in between:

Traditional—Liberal—Multicultural—Culturally Democratic

In creating this framework, certain fundamental assumptions are clearly at work. First, culture incorporates all the implicit and explicit relationships and interactions that impart a sense of continuity and integrity to community life, despite individual differences. In as much as shared cultural beliefs, values, mores, and assumptions strongly shape individual and organizational practices and responses of a group, the environmental conditions in which groups live and work also impact their cultural practices and responses. Hence, efforts to contend with issues related to cultural differences in a reductionistic and decontextualized manner can easily lead to distortions of reality and major flaws in the subsequent prescription of institutional practices. Second, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation constitute subcategories of culture and thus represent differentiating systems of belief within the particular worldview. All cultural communities must contend with the underlying cultural assumptions that shape their prevailing views related to each of these dimensions of life. Third, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia exist as interlocking spheres of institutional oppression that are driven by institutional practices (carried out by individuals) supporting what Iris Marion Young (1990) calls the “five faces of oppression”: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural invasion, and violence.

Also significant to the following analysis of institutional responses to diversity is a critical view of power. Such a view encompasses a notion of power as existing everywhere, forever at play when people come together. Thus, power is perceived as a social phenomenon that occurs between and among people—never in a vacuum. What institutions do, as much as what they do not do, affects the lives of their constituents, because institutions exercise power through decisions that lead to particular actions and consequences. Most importantly, power must be understood with respect to the impact that actions

and their consequences have on particular groups. What are the consequences of institutional research, policies, practices, and standards? Who benefits the most from particular kinds of research, policies, practices, and standards? Who benefits the least? Whose voices are heard and whose participation is valued? These are useful questions for unveiling the power dynamics at work within an institution and identifying possibilities for creating the conditions for social justice and equality.

The remainder of this chapter will provide a framework to consider the manner in which four different institutional paradigms—here termed *traditional*, *liberal*, *multicultural*, and *culturally democratic*—engage the issues of cultural diversity and how they might inform institutional research.

### The Traditional Institution

The values of the traditional institution support a view of culture as a depoliticized and neutral construct. In such an institution cultural differences, for the most part, are denied and are not considered legitimate. Hence, when cultural differences between people surface, much effort is made to label them as an individual phenomenon. Any effort to openly address cultural differences between groups is viewed as suspect, generating much talk and concern about divisiveness and tribalism. This response is supported by an ideology that reinforces the notion of American culture as a “melting pot” and a belief in cultural amalgamation, social Darwinism (“survival of the fittest”), and the doctrine of Manifest Destiny (an ostensibly benevolent policy of American imperialistic expansion).

The value system within a traditional organization places a great deal of emphasis on unity, conformity, and homogeneity, on the one hand, and on the ideal of individualism and a “boot-strap” mentality, on the other. To support the utmost possibility of unity, conformity, and homogeneity, power relations are highly centralized and marked by a strong hierarchical and authoritarian governance structure. This strong homogenizing effort results in positions of power being held almost exclusively by members of the dominant group. Little action, if any, is taken to address issues of diversity; these are generally ignored or dealt with in a manner that forces conformity. As a consequence, subordinate groups are generally excluded from participation and perceived as deficient, even to the point of being considered genetically inferior. Moreover, traditional institutions are marked by strong xenophobic attitudes regarding the use of languages other than English anyplace other than in the foreign language classroom.

The expressed purpose of research at traditional institutions is to produce “objective” knowledge that is focused upon prediction of conditions and subsequent interventions, with the goal of better managing or controlling the institutional environment through more effective control of its constituents. In the area of diversity, research is focused upon identifying deficits in subordinate

groups and determining ways to facilitate widespread societal assimilation. This research is often found at work in vocational tracking of working-class students, women students, and students of color, particularly within the community college system, a practice that is considered to be the most effective educational approach to remediating problems caused by presumed poor academic achievement. Simultaneously, this approach meets the demands of the labor market. Generally, the underlying perspective here is that “diversity is viewed as deviance; and differences are viewed as deficits” (Gordon, Miller, and Rollock 1990, p. 15).

### **The Liberal Institution**

Liberal institutions view culture as primarily an apolitical and decontextualized phenomenon that is readily identified as the experience of Latinos, African Americans, and other subordinate cultural groups. Cultural differences are considered to legitimately exist in the world, but their social importance is minimized or they are viewed as exotica. When cultural differences are addressed within such a context, the goal is to reveal the human similarities that unite all people. This approach is driven by an ideological foundation that is often described as “color-blind”—an ideology steeped in a belief in universalism, assimilation, and a notion that all human beings are essentially the same “under the skin.”

Liberal, like traditional, institutions place an emphasis on unity and conformity by highlighting the similarities among people, and place an even greater emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual. Such values reinforce power relations that remain highly centralized, although they also lead to a more liberal hierarchical and authoritarian governance structure than is found at traditional institutions. As a consequence, those in middle management positions may gain more influence and control within the organization. Most of the positions of power are held by members of the dominant culture, but people of color are generally brought into the organization at entry or service levels. The belief that there are few people of color who are qualified for professional positions highlights discussions related to hiring, as does concern about finding the “right fit.”

When the liberal organization chooses to address cultural differences, the extent of change is at a very basic content level, leading to the “adding-on” of cultural artifacts that are symbolic of diversity (for example, ethnic art on the walls, ethnic food in the cafeteria, and other forms of window dressing). People of color are both seen and treated with benevolence and are granted the possibility of becoming equal to members of the dominant culture, *if* they can overcome their cultural environments. Victim-blaming attitudes are often hidden beneath the organization’s drive and passion to help the “disadvantaged and deprived.” As a consequence, these attitudes support a missionary mentality. There is some acceptance of language diversity but, without question, English is considered the most important language.



The liberal institution must contend with oppositional responses to its liberalism from conservative members of the institution or the larger community. Opposition is generally most prominent among those who hold a strongly xenophobic and ethnocentric view of life in the United States. Most of their concerns are strongly linked to the need to be reassured that their own privileges and entitlements as members of the dominant culture will not be jeopardized.

Liberal institutional research strongly reflects most of the apolitical and ahistorical tenets of traditional research, with a similar emphasis on prediction and control of the environment. Much of the research on cultural diversity is focused on discovering the similarities and differences between the dominant and subordinate groups. The similarities are used by these institutions to promote an assimilationist ideal and efforts to integrate. Differences are studied primarily to identify areas that require intervention to assist students of color to perform as well as members of the dominant culture. There is some development of descriptive ethnographic approaches that function to generate popular narratives about subordinate groups.

### **The Multicultural Institution**

The multicultural institution views culture as a legitimate and significant determinant of individual identity, but the focus remains on members of subordinate cultural groups. Cultural differences are generally acknowledged and a strong diversity rhetoric permeates the institutional discourse. Cultural differences are addressed in an effort to find ways to limit the increased tensions that result from an increasingly diverse institutional environment. The prevalent ideology within the multicultural institution is shaped by a belief in “fair and equal” representation and cultural pluralism.

The multicultural institution places a greater emphasis on shared common values, as the distribution of power begins to shift as an increasing number of members of subordinate groups enter the institution. As a consequence, the multicultural institution is marked by its greater decentralization of power and greater liberalizing of the traditional governance structures to accommodate differences. Despite these changes, undercurrents of unity and conformity are still at work challenging proposals for dramatic structural change. The majority of power positions are still held by members of the dominant culture, but more efforts are made to recruit and hire members from subordinate cultures. People of color hold some positions of power, but generally the higher his or her position, the greater the expectation that he or she will express and demonstrate loyalty to the dominant group’s multicultural notion of shared common values and an integrationist discourse.

Within the multicultural institution there are many visible adaptations and a variety of efforts to address issues related to cultural difference. Much effort is also made to appear “culturally conscious” and to incorporate obvious material representations of the institution’s commitment to diversity. Some new

positions and departments are created to address the expanding needs of the newer members and constituents of the institution. People of color are welcomed into the culture of the institution, so long as they are able to function within the prescribed multicultural vision of those who hold power. It is not unusual for “acceptable” people of color to be utilized in efforts to neutralize those who hold strong radical positions of cultural integrity and who openly acknowledge the existence of cultural conflicts between groups. This practice can cause some fragmentation of leadership among subordinate groups. There is greater acceptance of language differences, but some ambivalence still remains as to the viability and effectiveness of multilingual societies.

Oppositional responses to change from mainstream constituents increase as cultural differences produce tension, conflict, and ambiguity within the institutional environment. Those who have lived within a context of privilege and entitlement now express anger and fear of “losing ground.” This can result in backlash efforts by conservatives coupled with a growing hostility toward affirmative action<sup>3</sup> and claims of “reverse racism” when actions are carried out in the interest of diversity. Often institutional transformative efforts are fragmented by those who feel the need to appease any opposition voiced by powerful business, government, church, or political groups.

The research perspective of multicultural institutions most often reflects an acceptance of alternative approaches to producing knowledge. Nonetheless, there still is a strong underlying concern about questions of objectivity and professional distance. As a consequence, some researchers express concerns regarding the validity of diversity studies conducted by women or people of color. Although there is a greater willingness to contend with issues of inequity, often the research continues to reflect a perception of culturally diverse student populations as deficient and in need of compensatory programs. Some elements of cultural relativism and determinism are often present in research on diversity issues at multicultural institutions. The persistence of these views results from the failure of researchers to engage the impact of power in the formation of subordinate cultural values and practices. Institutional tensions surface as people of color collide with power structures that, for the most part, are of the dominant culture. As diversity increases, educational researchers also tend to aggregate groups due to limited numbers and then utilize the results to make group generalizations. Such practices inadvertently lead to distortions in research conclusions and flawed recommendations that perpetuate cultural subordination, despite well-intentioned efforts.

### **The Culturally Democratic Institution**

Within the culturally democratic institution culture is viewed as an integral and fundamental component of the collective, as well as crucial to the individual identity of all human beings. Cultural differences among people are understood and accepted as inherent in any environment that is governed by

a strong culturally diverse population. Cultural differences are engaged as common and ongoing occurrences, with tolerance for ambiguity, conflict, and uncertainty. The strengths and limitations of all cultural perspectives that exist within the institution and in society at large are accepted.

The culturally democratic ideological foundation of the institution is shaped by the belief that culture and power are linked and must be understood within the context of historical struggles for voice, participation, and self-determination. This foundation is not only understood with respect to abstract ideals but also in relation to community struggles for the improvement of material conditions. The institutional emphasis is placed on creating conditions for social justice and cultural equality through a dialogical view of working values that are continuously defined and redefined by the historical context and social realities in which people function. Instead of a static notion of specific "shared values," what is shared is the willingness to create working values that can inform institutional decision making.

The distribution of power within a culturally democratic institution is defined in terms of maximum possibilities for structural decentralization. There is greater shared influence and control among the members of the institution. In the interest of social justice and equality, the decentralization of institutional power is also connected to a structure of centralized power in which representative views of all groups are engaged. Multiple spheres within the institution are created to provide the opportunity for expression of cultural integrity and diversity, and for cross-cultural dialogue, decision making, and social action to take place. Within the culturally democratic institution positions of power are redefined in politically equitable, representative, and fair terms, as determined by the social context in which the institution functions. Consequently, people of color hold many positions of leadership, particularly where the interests of specific cultural communities are involved.

The extent of institutional change reflects policies that ensure an ongoing and consistent system of equity. There is greater latitude for the open expression and practice of diversity. The rhetoric diminishes due to an internalized acceptance of cultural differences that is reflected in widespread institutional practices. New and more fluid institutional structures can emerge that support the wider participation of the institution's constituents and the communities it serves.

People of color, just like their white counterparts, are perceived as active "owners" of the institutions. Hence, all are actively involved in shaping the institutional culture as equal participants in the process. Diversity among people of color is recognized and understood as part of the human conditions of all groups. Language differences are accepted and efforts are maximized to cultivate and support multilingualism as a positive and commonplace phenomenon. This view supports the establishment of effective multilingual programs and services that support and encourage the academic success of bilingual and immigrant students. Oppositional responses to change are expected to exist on

a continuous basis, as ongoing themes of privilege, entitlement, subordination, and domination surface for all groups, depending on the particular contexts and specific decisions and actions being taken during the historical evolution of a particular institution.

Research methods within a culturally democratic institution are expected to produce knowledge that supports the emancipatory intent of the institution. To facilitate the production of such knowledge, interdisciplinary team research approaches that incorporate a historical, political, and culturally contextualized view of knowledge are utilized. The utilization of diverse approaches to the study of institutional diversity can assist institutions to understand the relationships that exist across the spectrum of human experiences, particularly concerning issues related to social injustice.

In addition, a participatory approach that begins and ends with those who are the subjects of study is strongly encouraged. This approach encourages participants to be involved in the planning and development of the study, the collection of data, the final analysis of the information gathered, and the development of a set of recommendations for institutional action. This research methodology conveys a vision of empowerment by returning to the participants what truly belongs to them, namely, their voice and self-determination. Inherent in this approach is not an attempt to learn *about* people, but to come to know *with them* the reality that challenges them. Through this process, research participates in the discovery of those actions that will function to transform institutional conditions that limit and prevent the enactment of a culturally democratic process (Darder, 1992).

## Research in the Interest of Cultural Democracy

Research and its function within an institutional environment are closely linked to the values, beliefs, and practices that are held by those in power. How questions of diversity are framed and defined, the questions that are asked or ignored, and the consequences of institutional research on the lives of subordinate groups are all guided by the prevailing political forces at work. Research in the interest of cultural democracy must be shaped and defined by principles supporting social justice.

In contrast to traditional research that reduces human beings to quantifiable objects in order to predict and control behavior, culturally democratic research begins with the view that human beings participate actively in producing meaning and knowledge in their ongoing interactions with the environment. Research cannot be perceived as a neutral and objective function, but instead must be viewed as an active historical, cultural, and political process of knowledge production. Research must function as a tool for appropriating the codes and cultural symbols of institutional power in an effort to transform institutional environments in the interest of cultural democracy.

Culturally democratic research stimulates constituents to reflect critically upon their world, cultural values and practices, and personal histories so that

they may better understand themselves and the social relations of power that affect their lives and shape their social participation. Such research must demystify the artificial limits that are imposed by racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia, by fostering acceptance and understanding of different forms of cultural systems that shape and define diverse communities. Research that supports culturally democratic life must reinforce a language of possibility while acknowledging the human experience of despair that can arise when people must contend daily with the impact of social and economic injustice.

Research in the interest of cultural democracy enables participants to recognize and name their own realities and to understand and assert their own voices within the multitude of discourses present in any institutional environment. It is in essence a critical form of research that stimulates creativity, risk taking, doubting, and questioning in the interest of social justice and equality, while affirming and challenging the strengths and limitations of particular social conditions and institutional realities.

In such a process of study, the researcher can never be perceived as neutral. There is a recognition that knowledge production is always informed by the values and interests of all the participants. It is expected that researchers make their values explicit and make consistent efforts to understand how their values shape their work (Gordon, Miller, and Rollock, 1990). In this way, researchers who carry out their work in the interest of cultural democracy can function as social advocates, facilitating a production of knowledge that is committed to the creation of institutional conditions where people find their voices and their rightful places as full and equal participants.

## Notes

1. For an in-depth theoretical discussion of the principles that inform a critical view of cultural democracy, see Darder's *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (1991).
2. The term critical is used here in its direct relationship to a theory of critical social science. This is to say that "critical" encompasses a view of the world that is both historical and dialectical in nature, which openly acknowledges the cultural, economic, and political dimensions inherent in all forms of knowledge production. Most importantly, it is a view of social science that opposes the positivist tradition inherent in most forms of Western, scientific thought. A significant principle of a critical perspective is its commitment to an emancipatory worldview. For an in-depth discussion of this topic, see Fay's *Critical Social Science* (1987).
3. For an excellent discussion on the oppositional politics surrounding affirmative action and the impact of the myth of meritocracy upon institutional diversification, see Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).

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