

Shifting Responsibilities

Researching Accountability in Three Acts

LISA WEEMS
Miami University

FIRST LET ME SAY how honored I am to be included in this collection of articles. I increasingly believe that special issues of journals have the potential to reach a broad audience both inside and outside higher education. As the world of public schooling and educational reform emphasizes specialization and the compartmentalization of knowledge, special issues centered on a particular topic might allow peer-reviewed scholarship to become more accessible across disciplinary and professional boundaries.¹

In attempting to write this article, I have struggled with how to proceed in addressing the important issue of educational research in the age of accountability. I've started and stopped, written dozens of pages filled with passionate rants and reasoned arguments. In doing so, I've come to the conclusion that for me, the larger question is, "Can the rhetoric and culture of accountability tolerate educational research and can the rhetoric and culture of educational research tolerate accountability?"

As I set out to investigate this question, I began to explore some of "the unsaid" or taken for granted assumptions regarding both accountability and educational research. It appears to me that both of these concepts invoke certain images and ideas regarding public education. More specifically, the concept of "the public" is operative within discourse practices of educational research and educational policies of accountability. However, it may be that rather than one singular public, there exists multiple publics that operate within and among these two distinct yet interrelated fields of knowledge and practice. In this paper, I explore a line of inquiry that investigates 1) the possibility of multiple publics; 2) some of the components of specific publics within educational policy and research; 3) the extent to which a particular public could be, to utilize Nancy Fraser's (1997) delineation, categorized as "weak" or "strong"; and 4) how we as educational researchers might utilize such a framework to think differently about our work. I envision this framework as a problematic of shifting responsibilities—both in terms of what has been done and what is necessary to move forward. My use of this term "shifting responsibilities" suggests that the discourse practices of "accountability" are not static or fixed, but rather consist of rhetoric, imagery and policy that is invoked at particular times in particular spaces to refer to how various citizen-subjects can and should be responsible to educational publics. Since at least

2002 discourses of accountability have come to be equated with standardized tests and educational research is positioned as responses to the “governmental intrusion in educational research” (Lather, 2004), I stage my current address in the form of three acts: Rhetoric, Research and Accountability in Educational Research; Multiple Publics in Educational Research; and Speaking Through/To the Public. I begin my narrative with a short synopsis of the current politics of educational research and how political theory might help us theorize the publics to whom education (including educational research) is accountable.

Setting the Stage—On Accountability and Responsibility in Educational Research

Critical educators have written eloquently and extensively about the conservative ideological positioning and deleterious effects of the discourse-practices of “accountability” in terms of narrowing definitions of educational research (Lather, 2004, 2006; Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005) and compromising democratic ideals (Epstein, 1993). I take seriously these critiques of “accountability.” Yet, as I read critical educational scholarship, many scholars simply dismiss this rhetoric as neo-liberal or right wing conservative propaganda. Indeed, it is easy to point to the ways in which the rhetoric of accountability has been appropriated by a conservative agenda (Boyles, 2005; Hyslop-Margison & Dale, 2005). However, as Epstein noted in 1993, there is great danger in viewing accountability within binary terms of “left” versus “right” politics as well as not directly responding to or appropriating the language of accountability within the philosophical, socio-cultural and curricular tradition of progressivism. Understandably it is difficult to work with the construct of “accountability” given that it is overpopulated with unfounded claims, mis-used research findings and bureaucratic procedures passing as “science” or “truth.”² In the face of questionable leadership, where daily news reports reveal deceit and corruption, it is very easy to cry in utter disbelief and despair, and/or chuckle in smug disapproval. It is difficult to maintain hope for greater participation, critical dialogue and faith in the public sphere.

For those who are familiar with my research it may seem odd that I am making appeals to dialogue and deliberative democracy given that I typically frame issues of representation in terms of interpretive contexts, communities and discourse-practices. My decision to foreground the former constructs in this paper is based on two points. First, I believe there is an ethical imperative of responsibility that structures both educational researchers and governmental claims to “getting things right.” In other words, there might be a desire for fairness and our societal obligations to ensuring fairness, that under girds the current “rage for accountability” (Lather, 2006) despite the particular (and many) shortcomings of the multiple ideologically-driven definitions of accountability. Second, I worry that the focus on interpretive context and community *within* educational research will do little rhetorically to advance the aims of interpretive specificity in speaking to a larger public audience.³ It may be scientifically rigorous or truthful to speak of knowledge as “partial and situated” (Haraway, 1991), but it may not be a robust platform upon which to form alliances with students, teachers, administrators, policymakers and parents. Thus, I argue that Nancy Fraser’s notion of public and counter-publics may be a fruitful way to theorize both the needs for situated inquiry as well as cross-disciplinary dialogue regarding educational research (policy, theory and practice) as the “public good.” In many ways, what is at stake in this paper is the recognition of multiple interests and needs in imagining and discussing our role as educational researchers.

Act I: Rhetoric, Research and Accountability in Education Policy

I'm exhausted with rhetoric. I'm exhausted with the rhetoric of accountability and rhetoric in general. As a scholar of cultural studies, I am typically enamored by "wordsmithing," "spin doctors" and even how this culture of rhetorical positioning that is highly produced and consumed through the media has created a new generation of youth who view themselves as "shape-shifters" who actively manage their own identity portfolios in representing themselves.⁴

Indeed it is through my encounters with student teachers that I have come to engage deeply and critically with the actual guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act as well as the rhetoric that was utilized to inaugurate and authorize it. In order to understand my students' language of AYPs (Adequate Yearly Progress reports), the requirements for HQTs (Highly Qualified Teachers) and OGT (the Ohio Graduation Test which now replaces the Ohio Proficiency Tests), I went to the Internet. I found a plethora of materials (literally thousands of pages of official documents and reports) available to the public on the U.S. Department of Education website (<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>). Navigating this website and all of the procedures outlined in thousands of pages of guidelines for this and that is like stepping across a minefield of ideological warfare. The bombs and mines are the rhetorical devices employed and deployed to discursively link the rhetoric of equity and social justice to the positivist rhetoric of science as "value-free."

Consider this juxtaposition of statements on the section regarding using "proven methods" and "scientifically-based research" to "close the achievement gap" between children of color, "economically disadvantaged" students and the national "average" student (read white, middle class male or female).

1. The field of K-12 education contains a vast array of educational interventions—such as reading and math curricula, school wide reform programs, after-school programs, and new educational technologies—that claim to be able to improve educational outcomes and, in many cases, to be supported by evidence. This evidence often consists of poorly designed and/or advocacy-driven studies...
2. If practitioners have the tools to identify evidence-based interventions, they may be able to spark major improvements in their schools and, collectively, in American education...
3. As illustrative examples of the potential impact of evidence-based interventions on educational outcomes, the following have been found to be effective in randomized controlled trials—research's "gold standard" for establishing what works...
4. Reducing class size in grades K-3 (the average student in small classes scores higher on the Stanford Achievement Test in reading/math than about 60% of students in regular-sized classes).⁵

Let's first look at the coupling of "poorly-designed" with "advocacy-driven studies." Did I miss something or isn't education by definition 'advocacy-driven'? Isn't the No Child Left Behind Act a form of advocacy—thus, rendering any interventions NCLBA authorizes to be "advocacy driven?" Or could it be that this rhetoric implies a particular form of advocacy that is dangerous? I'll return to this point momentarily.

The second rhetorical weapon I see in this passage is the explicit statement that "If practitioners have the tools to identify evidence-based interventions, they may be able to spark major improvements in their schools and, collectively, in American education..." This statement is

somewhat of a backhanded compliment or gesture to motivate teachers into backing NCLB by tapping into a desire for improving education through educational reform. There are two problems with the seemingly innocent “call to teachers.” First, in an earlier passage on the same page, the authors of the report suggest that 30 years of educational reform has been ineffective in creating change and that seeing this teachers tune out any new “fanfare” that comes their way. It seems the authors lost their short term and long-term memory in suggesting that this new and improved educational reform can surpass the entrenched (and often warranted) distrust of educational practitioners of educational policy. Second, insinuating that, by identifying and utilizing random-controlled empirical classroom research, teachers can “spark major improvements in their schools” negates the ways in which schools are social and physical structures which reflect the vast socio-economic disparities in resources that plague the United States in general. It is difficult to see how the academic performance of a child who is served cold pizza for lunch at 10:30 AM is an effect of the implementation of a math curriculum that was devised through random-controlled trials.

Third, the authors make a highly flammable claim that the use of randomized controlled trials is the “gold standard” of “research.” While I believe good research comes in a variety of methodological frameworks, including randomized controlled trials, the privileging of any one particular methodology seems unnecessary and unjustified. Furthermore, I suspect that the historians, biographers, ethnographers, demographers and political scientists, who built the field of social science over the 20th century would disagree with this narrow definition of research and the pronouncement of experimental design as “the gold standard.”

What is important here is how various educational constituents are constructed and positioned within an imaginary public sphere to which public schools and educational research needs to be accountable. Based on the technical specialization, textual staging of knowledge and education as value-free, and the rhetorical privileging of scientific expertise in educational reform, it seems to me that this document imagines a reader that is middle-class and white and who also subscribes to an ideology of individualism, meritocracy and historical trust in social institutions including public schools and government agencies. Yet, what is interesting about this rhetoric is that it actively marginalizes the contributions of entire fields of knowledge, the contributions of progressive educators and researchers that have, in fact, operated from openly ideological or ‘advocacy-driven’ platforms. In addition, and perhaps significantly, are the targeted student populations and communities that are most effected by NCLB and its “high stakes” accountability—“economically disadvantaged students” and students of color as the report specifically outlines its interest in “African American students.” The rhetoric of the NCLB policy positions such students as “victims” who will be “rescued” by bureaucratic procedural definitions rather than the strategies of survival and resistance that have long been part of the African American tradition of a womanist framework of caring (Beaubouef-Lafontant, 2002). Thus, there is a clear construction of the public sphere at work in the rhetoric of educational policy. Within this rhetoric, some constituents are construed as experts (educational researchers who follow the prescribed methodology); others who are middle-managers or transmitters of externally-derived expert knowledge (teachers); and yet others who are the recipients of the gift of scientifically-based curriculum (“at risk students.”) Within this economy of the public, the rhetoric of educational policy effectively rules out the voices of parents and scholars who do not share this vision or goal for public education.

What is the possibility of rhetoric to reform educational research and educational research to intervene in educational rhetoric?

Amidst such dictates from policymakers and debates among educational scholars, quite frankly, I'm not sure that more or "better" rhetoric is the solution in addressing the question of the role of educational research in educational reform and public schooling. My rationale is based on the following points: 1) educational scholars assume that "reason" can and should guide educational policy; 2) policymakers and politicians admit relying on contradictory sources of data in the form of "empirical" or "hard data" as well as "anecdotal" recommendations from peers; and 3) classroom teachers rely on their own experience to guide their pedagogical goals and strategies. This suggests to me that despite mandates for singular definitions of authoritative knowledge, we are far from achieving consensus on what constitutes valid, credible knowledge in both theory and practice.

Yet, despite its capacity to frustrate, obfuscate and complicate understanding, communication and community building, rhetoric sways emotion and emotion sways policy. So perhaps it is not that we just get rid of rhetoric—but that we become better at mobilizing rhetoric that mobilizes people to engage in dialogue and decision-making.

Let me elaborate further. I share the position of Lather (2006) that "paradigm proliferation" is a "good thing, too!" I agree with Lather's assumption that educational researchers can and do operate from the premise that their/our scholarship represents "situated, partial knowledge" (Harraway, 1991) rather than Truth. Working with pre-service and in-service teachers and administrators as future educational researchers, I advocate for Lather's position of employing multiple perspectives with particular conventions for various purposes of educational research. Yet, I do have some concerns. Specifically, in follow-up sessions with the same students, I learn that this approach to validating and utilizing multiple perspectives gets set aside along with the hundreds of pages of research reports to which they have been exposed.

My intention is not to blame students (who are educators), as if their decisions are a result of individual deficiencies. Quite the contrary, I believe their decisions to set aside educational research is very much tied to the larger trends and dynamics of public policy in general and educational reform specifically. Contemporary educational policies actively discourage or require educators to ignore educational research across a variety of methodological perspectives, and to adhere to educational practices that they, for the most part, have no interest or faith in personally, but realize that their jobs depend on utilizing. In case it is not clear to which practices I am referring, let me state it explicitly. Although most educators place very little value and credibility in high stakes standardized testing (such as the Ohio Graduation Test) as adequate measures of student learning and knowledge, every single educator I know reports that they modify their pedagogical aims and strategies specifically to accommodate or "teach to the test." This is particularly true for educators that work in schools that are identified as in "academic emergency," (particularly schools that serve students from low-income families) precisely because the success rates on an annual singular test will determine whether or not the school building will be closed the following year.

With this kind of pressure, and the panic it produces, is it any wonder that teachers, administrators, and the local community to which that school is supposed to "serve," express little desire to read, let alone attempt to seek out educational research of any sort to address issues related to curriculum, instruction or social contexts of education? The disconnect between educational practitioners and educational researchers has been historically posited as a tension between theory and practice (Labaree, 2004; Herr & Anderson, 2005). In the contemporary moment, this disconnect takes new form through federal policy that fuels existing flames between colleges of education and educational practitioners by twisting old rhetoric into new aims. Public policies,

such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), rhetorically mandate that educational practices be based on “sound educational research.” NCLB further defines educational research in a very narrow definition of science—what Lather calls “scientism”—specifically experimental design, a methodology whose contribution to the field has diminished greatly in the last 50 years. To my knowledge, the only subfield within educational research that utilizes experimental design is educational psychology, which is outside the realm of curriculum and instruction. According to George W. Bush’s rhetoric, this is evidence of the how and why schools are in jeopardy and/or failing. However, the discursive practices of educational research in the past fifty years leads most educational researchers and theorists to conclude that educational research studies based *only* on experimental design are of little use given the humanistic and interpretive nature of learning and knowledge.

My point is this: contemporary educational policy and practice seems to be driven by neither the rhetoric, actual research of educational professionals within higher education, nor the repertoire of “best practices” of veteran teachers in K-12 classrooms. It is driven by closed room deals between members of the Department of Education and private sector curriculum and assessment industry executives.

Case in point: The Office of the Inspector General within the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) released a report in September 2006 which found that the DOE violated its own rules of compliance in awarding grant monies to specific curricular programs. The report shows that the DOE engaged in a conflict of interest grant allocation by explicitly favoring the Reading First program and bypassing the peer-review process, which would evaluate the effectiveness of curricular and instructional programs through evidence-based research.⁶ Put simply, despite the rhetoric that policy and curriculum would be determined by “scientific method”—the reality is that the decision that effected schools nationwide was based on personal financial and ideological interests. One does not need to be a conspiracy theorist nor a critical theorist to conclude that it is not educational research (or even scientism) which runs U.S. American schools, it is capitalism and alliances between political and corporate elites. We don’t even need science or rhetoric to decipher this. All we have to do is read the newspaper. And yes, Virginia, that is educational research.

Act II: Multiple Publics in Educational Research

Thus far I have attempted to argue that educational policy and educational research both make claims to a sense of the public sphere in addressing issues of accountability. Most of these claims (including my own) are implicit rather than explicit and made through rhetorical strategies such as privileging “scientific” or “community” or “professionally” derived conventions. In this section I seek to interrogate the notion of the public sphere in more depth by investigating multiple publics within educational research. I begin with a discussion of the public sphere as articulated by Fraser (1997) as well as outline the distinction between “strong” and “weak” publics that operate in educational spheres.

In “Rethinking the Public Sphere” Nancy Fraser (1997) suggests that there is debate within political theory regarding whether or not democracy and its assumption of an egalitarian public sphere is an ideal whose time is yet to come or whether it is a theoretically problematic construct from the outset, given its tendency to reproduce “bourgeois, masculinist, white-supremacist” ideologies and arrangements (p. 76). She writes:

What conclusions should we draw from this conflict of historical interpretations? Should we conclude that the very concept of the public sphere is a piece of bourgeois, masculinist ideology so thoroughly compromised that it can shed no genuinely critical light on the limits of actually existing democracy? Or should we conclude rather that the public sphere was a good idea that unfortunately was not realized in practice but retains some emancipatory force? In short, is the idea of the public sphere an instrument of domination or a utopian ideal? (p. 71)

In this passage, Fraser, highlights one of the contemporary tensions regarding the future of political theory and theorizing on the “public” for a progressive model of citizenship. She argues that we must trouble the vision of a singular “public” and instead think about how multiple publics are a result of the disparate needs, expectations and conventions of various communities in late-capitalist societies that constitute multiple publics. In addition to arguing for the “recognition” of multiple publics, Fraser argues that certain “subaltern counter-publics” need to formulate oppositional rhetoric, policies and strategies for articulating seemingly “private interests” in public spheres.

To this point, I ask, what *are* the existing movements and strategies that represent multiple publics within and regarding educational research? Are there subaltern counter-publics, and if so, what are the desires of these counter-publics to participate and intervene in the public dialogue about educational reform? Furthermore, can a Habermasian view of the public sphere, despite its limitations, serve as an adequate model for thinking about how we might understand the role of educational research in contemporary educational reform?

The simple answer is no, the more complicated answer is yes and no. The title of the paper suggests, I believe, that educational researchers must negotiate multiple publics thus, rendering Habermas’ notion of a singular public unhelpful. On the other hand, I do believe that there is a larger economy of publics—meaning that there is some sort of necessary relationship between multiple publics and that we, as educational researchers, can and should engage in these by “shifting responsibilities.” As I positioned myself in the first act, I am responsible for teaching research courses for both teachers and educational administrators. As part of that capacity I keep current on existing trends within educational research across methodological perspectives. While I am partial to Foucauldian discourse analysis for my own research agenda, I recognize that such an approach is but one of the multiple theoretical and methodological traditions which can produce “rigorous” research to inform classroom practice and educational theory. Among the approaches I incorporate are: participatory action research; statistical analysis; survey research; critical feminist and critical race analysis; case studies; ethnography; historiography; narrative analysis; and interpretive interview studies. These are, of course, only a sampling of the myriad traditions, each of which I consider to consist of the multiple publics of educational research.

To a certain degree, there is some cross-methodological deliberative dialogue that occurs in academic journals such as *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Educational Researcher*. However, like Hatch (2006), I am somewhat concerned that there is a retreat against publishing articles regarding the content or substance of the dialogue across these journals towards more internal methodological discussions and debates. As Hatch notes, in recent years there appears to be a trend (at least in *IJQSE* and *QI*) to privilege “reflexive” pieces rather than reports of empirical educational research. I, too, have participated and will continue to participate in such “methodological” pieces—given that this has become

normative within higher education. In other words, if one wants (or needs) to publish in “high ranking” or “reputable” journals, she must engage in the discourse practices of self-referential analysis. The field of educational research, and particularly qualitative research in education no longer privileges “realist tales” (Van Maanen, 1988) which present substantive findings from field research as unmediated ‘snapshots’ of cultural fields of study. Twenty plus years of scholarship have articulated how ethnographic or case study analysis that stages narratives as “truth” reinscribes imperialist (Trinh, 1989), masculinist (Haraway, 1991), race-based (Lopez & Parker, 2003), and class-based (McRobbie, 1994) ideologies and interpretations. Thus, in order to do “good qualitative research” one must attend to the disciplinary and personal bias inherent in all empirical research utilizing the framework of “perspectival” reading and writing (Martin, 2006). This has meant that many qualitative research reports include a theoretical deconstruction of the possibilities and limitations of the researcher’s own intelligibility. I believe this strategy has its merits. Unfortunately, however, this move has also had the effect of alienating potential readers of educational research given their interests to conveniently access easy-to-understand educational research (Institute of Education Sciences, 2003a; Willinsky, 2003).

It is important to make the distinction here between different kinds of publics or what Fraser (1997) characterizes as “strong” or “weak.” The context of this distinction, according to Fraser, is that conceptions of the public sphere within political theory assume that it is necessary to make a sharp distinction between the public and private interests of private individuals. She suggests that this results in favoring liberal bourgeois interests, and what she terms a “weak public” given that the “deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making” (p. 90).

Using this distinction, we might think of educational policy as an arena that constitutes a weak public in that the forms of participation, dialogue and decision-making are highly mediated by governmental and bureaucratic procedures. If one wants to participate in the public arena of educational policy, she must go through much more complicated processes of credentialing, nomination and election. Specific educational issues (for example culturally relevant teaching, school funding formulas, or establishing standards as to what constitutes “good research”) are deliberated through public opinion but do not eventuate into policies or laws because they are viewed as the private interests of private individuals. Simply put, educational policy constitutes a weak public in the sense that the clear majority of folks affected by it (students, teachers and parents) are not active participants in the decision-making process.

In contrast, Fraser describes a strong public as one in which its members articulate, dialogue and basically agree upon certain common interests, goals and values. Furthermore, a strong public is one in which the members have an institutionalized role in decision-making processes. In the case of qualitative researchers in education, I would point to the fact that our journals and conferences are peer-reviewed and that there are disciplinary conventions that involve both enculturation as well as self-governance. If one wants to participate in the public of qualitative educational research, there are clear venues for participation, dialogue and decision-making regarding what constitutes “good research.” Furthermore, the impact of critical and/or subaltern voices within educational research and our ability to modify the conventions of “good research” suggests that qualitative educational researchers (and perhaps other groups of educational researchers) constitute a “strong public.”

Returning to Fraser’s notion of multiple publics, then, one can see that there exists not only multiple publics **within** the field of educational research, but also multiple publics **regarding** educational research. On both accounts Fraser might conclude that the multiple publics within

educational research may internally contain “parliamentary sovereignty” (1997, p. 90). However, in their relationship to educational policy and governmental arrangements they represent “weak publics” given that a) there is no common agreement of what constitutes good research; b) there is no deliberative dialogue which includes critical or subaltern perspectives as a “discursive check” (p. 90); and c) there is no formal or institutionalized mechanism for educational researchers to make decisions regarding educational policy. Many educational researchers work inside and outside of schools with educators in building curricular projects that utilize the insights of educational research. However, these efforts are largely the acts of individual teachers and individual schools—which is good—but does not have the same impact that a state-wide policy has such as requiring students to meet a pre-determined score on standardized tests that consists of pre-determined externally derived content, “skills” and correct responses. The problem here is less about the actual standardized test and more about the level of importance it is attributed in terms of understanding student achievement and academic success. Herein lays a central problem, who decides what is adequate student learning and progress? How can issues of social inequality and social justice be part of this discussion not as private interests but public concerns? Fraser asks, “What institutional arrangements best ensure the accountability of democratic decision-making bodies (strong publics) to their (external, weak, or given the possibility of hybrid cases, weaker) publics?” (p. 91). It is almost as though the authors of *No Child Left Behind* had read this passage and appropriated its rhetoric. As it should be clear, I support Fraser’s compelling argument for accountability in democratic decision-making. But again, here is an example of how rhetoric can get co-opted, marketed and sold to a public audience; after all, NCLB is a bi-partisan agenda and many school teachers, although never actually reading either the executive summary or the full legislation, are very much in support of it. Rhetoric can be so persuasive that it invites us to trust, to believe and have hope in agendas, even if the fine details of the agenda include the abrogation of our own agency in decision-making processes.

Let us further add to the mix the previously articulated problems that practicing teachers encounter regarding issues of educational research. As I mentioned earlier in Act I, practicing teachers and administrators are highly aware that they are “accountable” to multiple publics—the least of whom are educational researchers. For those working in P-12 schools, there may be at least two publics to whom they are accountable: their administrators who are in turn accountable to the State, and the parents of their students. Here is where, perhaps, Fraser’s theories of multiple publics and even subaltern counter-publics may both be insightful, but not necessarily useful for understanding the realm of education.

As I have argued, educational policies are determined by external factors which are in fact the private interests of some publics, particularly political and corporate elites. And it may be true that these interests serve a general public—that is the public of families in the United States that are performing very well in terms of high stakes standardized testing. In fact, members of these publics, according to teachers, are both satisfied with educational policy that emphasizes standardized testing but also pressure teachers to work towards ensuring that their children have a better edge when they leave school.⁷ Whereas, the private interests advocated by students, parents and teachers in schools with low performance on standardized tests advocate curriculum that offers not just “access to basic skills” but also provides “the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views” (Delpit, 2006, p. 224). However, the private interests to empower students to challenge socio-economic inequality are considered “out of bounds” for public education. Thus, these “private interests” of these two distinct publics are not just “different” but completely unequal and in competition with each other. I believe that Fraser would suggest that

Delpit's position, and the "public" she invokes, would constitute a subaltern counter-public. However, what is one to do with the knowledge that there is no deliberative dialogue regarding competing (private) interests, but hegemonic institutionalization of private interests (specifically white liberal bourgeois) masquerading as the public?

To reiterate, it appears that teachers, students and parents are aware of the competing interests of multiple publics. And, at present, the trend within educational policymaking is to fail to acknowledge or actively deny the ways in which the rhetoric of "flexibility" of multiple publics can and does actually harm the very interests (that is of "disadvantaged" students) for which it advocates. One striking example of the harm of assuming the symmetry of multiple publics is articulated by the watchdog group, the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Advocacy in School Funding (a counter-public), which is responsible for pushing the legislation for equitable funding in Ohio as well as documenting dissidence among high level policymakers. They note:

The NCLBA mandate will require massive new fiscal resources. Will the feds provide these new resources? U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, in a letter of January 19, 2001, indicated that the states have the responsibility of providing educational resources to meet new standards. Riley wrote: "Indeed, raising standards without closing resource gaps may have the perverse effect of exacerbating achievement gaps and setting up many children for failure. (OCEASF, 2006, p. 3)

And, as the Coalition documents, while the amount of money allocated for "education" at the federal level may have increased in real dollars, the proportion of funding allocated toward learning in public schools is highly compromised by the amount of funds that are re-directed specifically for conducting and assessing standardized testing as well as re-directed for charter schools.

I return to Fraser's commentary on how we might proceed in articulating a public sphere that is necessary and sufficient for "actually existing democracy." Fraser (1997) contends:

...an adequate conception of the public sphere requires not merely the bracketing but, rather, the elimination of social inequality.
 ...a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere in both stratified societies and egalitarian societies.
 ...a tenable conception of the public sphere must countenance not the exclusion but the inclusion of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels "private" and treats as "inadmissible."
 ...a defensible conception must allow both for strong publics and for weak publics and that it should help theorize the relations among them. (p. 92)

As I understand Fraser, the field of education (reform, policy, research and practice) constitutes a "weak public" in that there are competing definitions of credibility, rigor, success and accountability. Perhaps *within* each of these spheres there is a sense of a strong public (such as educational research) where there is active engagement, dialogue and equitable decision-making about the criteria of credibility and accountability. However, there exists very little dialogue let alone agreement between educational policymakers, researchers and practitioners regarding how to proceed in serving the students of today and tomorrow.

As educational researchers and educators we must reclaim the profession of education. Whether it is through unions, our professional organizations or direct dialogue with multiple publics, we must do our part to articulate our claims to experience, expertise and knowledge in shaping the direct educational policies that effect youth in general and effect particular groups of students differently. This is our privilege and our responsibility.

Act III: Speaking to Different Publics

Dear fellow citizens of Ohio,

Like many of you, I am deeply troubled by the current state of education in Ohio. Multiple indicators of "success" (ranging from academic performance to cultural relevance) reveal that schools are not currently meeting the needs and expectations of students, teachers, parents and the general public. The question that confronts us, then, as advocates for children and their education is, "How can we improve the lives of our children through the educational system?"

Popular conceptions of "success" center on the premise that high test scores on standardized testing are a reliable and fair measure of student knowledge and learning. Unfortunately, however, three decades of educational research shows that performance on standardized testing measures three things: students' test-taking ability, socio-economic status, and level of education of the student's mother. What this tells us is that standardized testing does not measure student's previous or current knowledge or learning particular content standards, but rather, measure external factors that shape students' performance. Thus, calls for more standardized testing, even in the name of learning "no child left behind," is destined to merely reproduce existing educational inequalities.

Research with practicing teachers in Ohio revealed that the effects of educational reform which mandates standardized testing increases the amount of classroom time devoted specifically to "teaching to the test," "coaching students on test-taking skills" and produces higher levels of anxiety among students, teachers and school administrators about the performance of a single test as a "one-best-way" to assess student learning. Over one hundred years of educational research and theorizing suggests that these factors actually diminish the opportunities for authentic learning in students in terms of critical thinking skills, problem solving and long-term comprehension of materials.

As concerned citizens we must read between the lines of political rhetoric in understanding and making important decisions in educational policy and reform. We must not rely on sound bytes and proposed quick fixes, but educate ourselves about "best practices" as defined by teachers, educational researchers and students themselves. I encourage you to seek out the teachers and educational researchers in your community to help you understand the contextual factors that contribute to student learning and success as defined by educators, not policymakers. After all, in making decisions about the physical well-being of our children we would first consult and trust doctors and medical consultants, rather than policymakers and politicians.

*Finally, I wish to call attention to the economic situation of public schooling in Ohio, specifically, and the United States, in general, since it gives a graphic picture of the social and symbolic message that we are sending young people and their teachers about how the public values education. First, the policy of school funding based on property taxes has been **ruled unconstitutional three times** by the Ohio Supreme Court. Despite these rulings, the policy remains intact and no public official has initiated any agenda for change. This is unacceptable. As educators, parents and citizens we must hold public officials accountable for enacting what is ethically, socially and legally just.*

Second, we must restore public trust, respect and faith in both teachers and schools. The lack of respect can be measured by how public school teachers are compensated. For example, the starting salary of public school teachers in my local metropolis is \$35,000 that, ironically, is the same gross income that the university in which I teach has decided is the cut-off for low-income students. At Miami University, we have just initiated a program called Miami Access, which provides a four-year tuition-

free undergraduate education for students whose household income is below \$35,000. In other words, the very teachers that are expected to inspire students to cultivate an interest in lifelong learning and respect for education, are neither valued in terms of their intellectual and material contribution to the profession in terms of deciding "what counts as learning" nor rewarded for their efforts to participate in creating an educated workforce. Both of these economic factors contribute to dual messages for both students and teachers: educational "success" is expected but not respected or valued.

Some politicians would like to completely privatize public schooling. Contemporary social as well as historical analysis illustrates the problems with such an approach. Specifically, students of color and low income white students, who make up the majority of the students in public schools, would be negatively affected by such changes—especially because transportation and other issues of access have not been considered. In addition, the teachers of schools which serve predominately low-income students and African American students (most of whom are teachers of color) would be displaced by such efforts. This means that the public would be jeopardizing its pool of highly qualified teachers who have experience in successfully educating students labeled as "at risk."

In conclusion, I encourage dialogue among educators, policymakers and educational researchers regarding how to improve the purpose, quality and future of public schooling. In a world in which we are positioned to think of our own needs and interests first, at the expense of a public arena, I encourage us to challenge these divisions and work together towards more creative solutions in advancing educational reform.

*Lisa Weems, PhD
Department of Educational Leadership
Miami University
Oxford, OH 45056*

In this article, I have investigated and articulated multiple "private interests" of multiple publics. I have attempted to argue that educational research in the age of accountability is strife with political, ideological and theoretical problems. I understand that my writing is open to challenge and critique on various grounds and I welcome that dialogue. But as I recognize that tomorrow will be yet another day in the struggle to make my local schools, Ohio schools and the nation's schools more equitable and meaningful, I can rest a little easier tonight knowing that I spoke my mind based on passion and reason. Educational research should consider both of these sources of knowledge as it seeks to improve the lives of youth and creating democratic spaces of deliberative dialogue.

About the Author

Lisa Weems is an Associate Professor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She holds a joint appointment in the Western program for Interdisciplinary Studies and the Department of Educational Leadership. Weems teaches courses in qualitative research methodology and feminist transnational cultural studies. Her current research focuses on the role of imperialism and heteropatriarchy in the construction of girlhood.

NOTES

1. For example, John Willinsky (2003) noted that policy-makers do seek out discipline-based scholarship—but are more likely to utilize intermittent Internet searches (than subscribing to print journals) for reasons of access and convenience. According to Willinsky, policymakers expressed issues of accessibility, indexing and credibility as barriers to utilizing the Internet more extensively.
2. Lather (2004) refers to the current movement within philosophy of science as “scientism” and makes a compelling argument for how and why the National Research Council’s policy to delimit educational research to the realm of experimental design attempts to construct a “one-size-fits-all” model of science and knowledge production.
3. I want to highlight the important work that has been done across educational research to advance the principle of “community”—both as a measure of methodological rigor where the researcher is required to “create” community, as well as the broader use of the notion of “community” within qualitative research where the researcher actively investigates, analyzes and articulates how “community” operates within and throughout the researcher project. The former sense of the term community is most evident within participatory action research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Herr & Anderson, 2005); decolonizing methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and/or educational research that privileges “praxis” (Lather, 1986) and conscientization (Freire, 1970). The latter sense of the term “community” serves as a primary analytic construct for gathering and interpreting the substantive research findings such as *Africana* (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and *Critical Race* (Lopez & Parker, 2003) methodological frameworks.
4. See Young, Dillon and Moje (2004).
5. See Mosteller, F., Light, R. J., & Jason A. Sachs, J. A. (1996). The small classes averaged 15 students; the regular-sized classes averaged 23 students.
6. The main findings from this report are:
 - FINDING 1A: The Department Did Not Select the Expert Review Panel in Compliance With the Requirements of NCLB.
 - FINDING 1B: While Not Required to Screen for Conflicts of Interest, the Screening Process the Department Created Was Not Effective
 - FINDING 2A: The Department Did Not Follow Its Own Guidance For the Peer Review Process
 - FINDING 2B: The Department Awarded Grants to States Without Documentation That the Sub panels Approved All Criteria
 - FINDING 3: The Department Included Requirements in the Criteria Used by the Expert Review Panels That Were Not Specifically Addressed in NCLB
 - FINDING 4: In Implementing the Reading First Program, Department Officials Obscured the Statutory Requirements of the ESEA; Acted in Contravention of the GAO Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government; and Took Actions That Call Into Question Whether They Violated the Prohibitions Included in the DEOA.
7. This is the language that several of the teachers serving upper-middle class schools utilized in describing “community relations” in their experience.

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