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Beyond ‘talking out of school’: educational researchers as public intellectuals

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This conceptual article explores the notion of educational researchers operating as public intellectuals. To do this, I situate my analysis within a broader tradition of public intellectual work in the American academy. I also offer a framework for three specific forms of public intellectual work, supported by relevant examples, which can be taken up by educational researchers. I then raise critical issues, concerns, and tensions that complicate such work, and conclude by offering suggestions for better linking educational research to the broader public. Although this article focuses largely on researchers working within the university context, particularly tenure-line faculty, many of its insights are applicable to independent researchers, policy analysts, or others working within the broadly defined field of educational research.

Keywords: public policy; methodology; epistemology; applied research

Although the educational research community has consistently underscored the need to share its findings with a broader range of education workers – particularly teachers, administrators, and policymakers – considerably less emphasis and value has been placed on *public intellectual* work or the articulation of research findings to communities beyond the university or the schoolhouse. Given the centrality of educational issues across societies as well as the inherent accessibility of educational research in comparison to other academic fields, educational researchers are uniquely positioned to share their findings with non-professional audiences (Labaree 1998; Willinsky 2001). By rendering empirical research more public, educational researchers not only contribute to a more educated citizenry, but also increase the influence of educational research in political deliberation, democratic dialogue, and concrete social change.

Despite its considerable value, however, public intellectual work is viewed by many educational researchers as tangential if not antithetical to the mission and mandates of the profession. This disposition is often linked to the belief that the field of education is ill-equipped for rigorous intellectual activity (Lanier and Little 1986; Cochran-Smith 2006) as well as the notion that public engagement undermines the intellectual objectivity and distance that are requisite for rigorous scientific inquiry (O’Connor 2007; Rudalevige 2008). For others, professional socialization and institutional barriers have eliminated public intellectual work from the realm of possibility (Hill 2010).

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Due to this disciplining of professional behaviour, everyday people are denied access to crucial research knowledge related to education and schooling.

In light of these conditions, this article explores what it means for educational researchers to fully embrace the role of public intellectuals. To do this, I situate my analysis within a broader tradition of public intellectual work within academe. I also outline specific forms of public intellectual work, supported by relevant examples, which can be taken up by educational researchers. I then raise critical issues, concerns, and tensions that complicate such work, and conclude by offering suggestions for better linking educational research to the broader public. Although this article focuses largely on researchers working within the university context, particularly tenure-line faculty, many of its insights are applicable to independent researchers, policy analysts, or others working within the broadly defined field of educational research.

What is a public intellectual?

Despite its relative youth as a formalized term, public intellectual work is as old as the academy itself. From W.E.B. Dubois' editorship of *The Crisis* magazine and attempts to serve as superintendent of Negro schools in Washington, DC to John Dewey's anti-war activism and school reform efforts, Western scholars have consistently worked beyond the walls of the university to intervene directly in conversations and activities related to the broader public interest. In addition to professional academics, groups such as the 'New York Intellectuals' of the mid-twentieth century represented a significant sector of university-trained intellectuals whose work as journalists, authors, and literary critics shaped both public and academic discourse (Wald 1987). Within the European context, this engagement has been even more commonplace, as towering intellectuals like Max Weber, George Simmel, and Emile Durkheim have consistently engaged in local and national conversations as well as issues of policy and practice (Stern 2009). More recently, in the latter part of the twentieth century, scholars like Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault directly intervened in public conversations regarding culture, politics, education, and the economy. In the African continent, scholars like Ali Mazrui, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka have played critical roles in policy deliberation, cultural criticism, and anti-colonial praxis (Institute of Global Cultural Studies 2005). In Latin America, figures like Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Mario Vargas Llosa have linked their intellectual praxis to anti-corruption and nation-building projects (Canivell 2004).

The actual term 'public intellectual' and its variants can be traced at least as far back as the mid-twentieth century writings of Mills (1963) and Dewey (1927), both of whom emphasized the need for refashioning academic work into accessible and serviceable public information. The notion of the public intellectual was later popularized by Jacoby (1987) during the height of the 'cultural wars' of the 1980s, when he lamented the decline of intellectual work that was accessible to an educated lay audience. Although Jacoby's analysis focused primarily on intellectuals working outside of academe, he also critiqued university professors for producing theoretical and empirical work that was 'largely technical, unreadable, and – except by specialists – unread' (141). Since this period, discussion of the public intellectual as a unique vocation has grown increasingly prominent within the academy and broader society.

Despite (or perhaps because of) a rapidly growing body of scholarship on the subject, there remains little consensus about what constitutes a public intellectual. A large portion of the literature has primarily focused on university professors who

operate within popular media (Dyson 1996; Reed 2000; Posner 2001). A smaller body of critical scholars has framed public intellectuals as politically engaged cultural workers (Giroux 1992; Said 1994; Melzer, Weinberger, and Zinman 2003). Still others have highlighted researchers who work within the public policy sector (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006). Rather than viewing these as competing definitions, each is subsumed under my broader operational definition of the public intellectual: *an individual whose intellectual production is articulated to a non-academic community*.

In the spirit of Stuart Hall (1996), my use of the term ‘articulate’ is deliberately double-entred, signifying both ‘to speak’ and ‘to connect.’ On the one hand, the public intellectual articulates (speaks) to outside communities in order to share her work with a broader audience.¹ While this work is often within an intellectual’s area of professional training and expertise, many scholars, as detailed in the subsequent sections, produce public work within other theoretical, disciplinary, and methodological domains. On the other hand, the public intellectual’s work, as Gramsci (1973) argues in his elaboration of the ‘organic intellectual,’ is articulated (connected) to a particular community and its expressed interests and concerns. This organic connection places the intellectual in a posture of perennial engagement ‘in practical life, as constructor, organizer, [and] “permanent persuader”’ (Gramsci 1971, 10). As such, the character of public intellectual work is fundamentally democratic, always animated by dialogical encounters between the university and outside communities.² As Borofsky (2000) argues, such an arrangement allows for scrutiny and accountability of intellectual production from the broader public. By situating traditionally private and exclusive forms of knowledge production within the reach of a broader public, educational researchers are forced to operate within a context that limits the extent to which ‘power elite can manipulate problems and solutions to their personal advantage’ (9).

Locating the public(s)

In the most basic sense, the notion of the ‘public intellectual’ is redundant, as all forms of intellectual production are invariably conducted, produced, and consumed for a literal or imagined ‘public’. Even in light of my narrowing definition, which demands a connection to non-academic communities, we must consider the ways in which all academic work reflects and informs the interests of organizations, special interest groups, and power blocs that exist outside of the university (Bourdieu 1988; Readings 1996; Giroux and Searls-Giroux 2006). The critical issue for educational researchers, then, is not to consider whether or not to engage the public, but to critically examine *which* publics should be addressed through our work.

In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey (1927) defines a public as a group of people bound together by a set of circumstances outside their sphere of control. As Dewey argues, such circumstances produce not a single public, but multiple *publics* that emerge, transform, and overlap across space and time. From this stance, professional communities like the British Educational Research Association (BERA) can be viewed as one of many bona fide publics with which educational researchers can associate. Within this particular space, educational researchers engage in forms of intellectual production that address the prominent theoretical, empirical, and practical questions of particular educational subfields. Typically, academic journals, books, conferences, and policy reports provide the primary venues in which this information is disseminated and consumed. As such, communities like BERA represent a legitimate albeit *academic*

public that, based on the definition provided above, does not satisfy the conditions for public intellectual work.

When considering what it means for educational researchers to engage non-academic publics, it is also necessary to consider the various spaces in which these publics are situated. In conceptualizing this idea, I draw from Habermas' (1962) notion of the 'public sphere' as a singular, idealized site for democratic exchange. For Habermas, the public sphere represented a space where ordinary citizens could distribute information, debate ideas, and form opinions. While indispensable for understanding the various sites of bourgeois knowledge formation, Habermas' conception of the public sphere fails to account for the ways that various groups, such as women, people of colour, and the working class, are excluded from such spaces (Fraser 1992). In order to account for this dilemma, scholars have emphasized the importance of locating alternative public and counter-public (i.e. resistant) spheres for knowledge production (Fraser 1992; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Fisher 2006). For educational researchers, this expanded conception of the public sphere forces us to locate not only multiple audiences but also alternate contexts such as the Internet, television, barbershops, and community centres, in which to engage these audiences.

Engaging the public(s)

Based on the definition of the public intellectual that I have offered and developed throughout this article, I outline three methods of public intellectual work for educational researchers: (1) *cultural criticism*, (2) *policy shaping*; and (3) *applied work*. This list is intended to be both descriptive and instructive, serving as a heuristic for understanding current modes of public intellectual work while outlining methods for situating future work. While this list is not (nor could it be) exhaustive, it serves as a frame for understanding the current division of labour among educational researchers who function as public intellectuals.

Educational researcher as cultural critic

One of the most recognizable and popular forms of public intellectual work is *cultural criticism*, where the educational researcher draws upon research knowledge in order to discuss current events, controversial topics, or the general condition of society. Typically, the cultural critic uses outlets such as newspapers, blogs, trade (i.e. non-academic) publishing, radio, and television as the means by which to intervene in public discourses. By writing an op-ed, maintaining a blog, publishing a book for general audiences, or offering media punditry, scholars are able to bring empirical insights to bear on discussions related to education and schooling. In this capacity, the cultural critic operates as a public pedagogue who educates lay audiences and non-specialists about issues within her sphere of expertise. Additionally, the cultural critic often functions as what Elshtain (2001) calls a 'party pooper' by challenging simple solutions and 'common sense' assumptions about public problems. Due to the largely increasing role of media culture in everyday life (Kellner 1995; Appadurai 1996), cultural criticism is often used interchangeably with public intellectual activity. While this conflation ignores the existence of other forms of public intellectual work, it nonetheless speaks to the growing significance of the cultural critic within the public sphere.

A key instance of educational researchers operating as cultural critics emerged in the USA during the 'Ebonics controversy' of the 1990s. In 1996, the Oakland

School Board voted to recognize Ebonics as the 'primary language' of African American children. Although the purpose of the resolution was to facilitate the development of more culturally responsive methods of teaching Standard English, it was frequently misrepresented within the popular media as an attempt to provide African American students with substandard education by teaching them to speak African American Vernacular English (AAVE). In response to this controversy, many educational researchers produced a series of widely read books, wrote op-ed columns in national newspapers, appeared on television, and testified before the US Congress in order to demonstrate the intended purpose of the resolution, the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy, and the legitimacy of AAVE as a legitimate and coherent language system (Rickford 1996, 1999; McWhorter 1998; Perry and Delpit 1998).

Despite its effectiveness in reaching mass audiences, there are several dangers to engaging in cultural criticism. Given the fast pace and style of popular media, the cultural critic is often forced to offer her insights within narrow intellectual spaces. By forcing complex knowledge claims into 20-s sound bites or 400-word op-ed columns, accessible scholarship is often reduced to journalism, which West (1999) describes as 'too simplistic, flat, or clever' (344) for nuanced argumentation. Even when given adequate space, such as a full-length trade book, concerns about 'accessibility' (which is often code language used by for-profit entities to disguise profit motives) compel the critic to compromise intellectual nuance and rigor for the sake of broader appeal. For example, while the difference between correlation and causality are critical for the researcher, such a distinction is often unimportant to the book editor or television producer for whom bold claims (i.e. alleging pure causal relationships) translate into greater public attention.

Educational researcher as policy shaper

For many educational researchers, the most intuitive pathway to broader non-academic audiences is by performing the role of *policy shaper*. While all forms of research have the potential to inform policy – as research studies are frequently appropriated by a range of intermediaries (e.g. policy staffers, journalists) who circulate ideas between the academic and policy domains – the policy shaper affects policy in a more direct and deliberate fashion. Examples of policy shaping include advising politicians, conducting programme evaluations, serving as an expert witness before legislative bodies, or working with policy research organizations. Through this work, educational researchers are able to link relevant research knowledge to critical public policy issues. In many circles, policy shaping is seen as the most 'legitimate' of all public intellectual work. While this belief can be attributed to the common perception among education researchers that the policy realm is the most efficient means by which to effect sustainable educational change, it is also linked to the frequent connection between policy work and formal networks of power (e.g. politicians, lobbying groups) and lucrative funding sources (e.g. grant money). It is for these reasons that policy shaping is at once the most acceptable and most untenable of all forms of public intellectual work.

Examples of policy shaping include Project STAR, a three-phase study that examined the effects of smaller class sizes on short-term and long-term student performance. The study was prompted by local parents, educators, and politicians who were interested in improving student achievement but were concerned about the economic consequences of adding new classrooms and teachers. As a result, the local government, prompted by several individual legislators who had read an

influential meta-analysis of the relationship between class size and achievement (Glass et al. 1982), authorized a 4-year study of students in grades K-3. The study's findings demonstrated that students in reduced-size classes performed better on standardized and curriculum-based tests. In addition to providing one of the most impactful educational studies of the twentieth century (Orlich 1991; Mosteller 1995), as smaller class sizes have become a taken-for-granted condition for improving educational achievement, Project STAR provides a lucid example of public intellectual work.

Unlike most policy-oriented projects, Project STAR can be considered as public intellectual work because it emerged organically based on the needs, interests, and consistent involvement of a local community. As Ritter and Boruch (1999) argue, the catalysts for Project STAR were not only educational researchers interested in addressing urgent intellectual questions raised within the research literature, but also local legislators responding to their constituents' desire to address an immediate educational problem. Rather than viewing the academy and the public as competing interests, Project STAR researchers articulated research knowledge to public deliberation and political negotiation, thereby allowing their research findings to produce concrete educational change. As such, Project STAR not only represents a 'serendipitous connection between the research world and the policy world' (111), but also an organized and democratic response to an academic, policy, and practice-based problem. Furthermore, the STAR case demonstrates that public intellectual projects are not only individualistic endeavours performed by lone researchers but also community-based efforts that draw upon diverse material and human resources.

Regardless of their effects, however, not all policy-shaping activities satisfy the conditions for public intellectual work.³ As Burawoy (2007) argues, policy approaches are performed 'in the service of a goal defined by a client. [Their] *raison d'être* is to provide solutions to problems that are presented to us, or to legitimate solutions' (31). Implicit in Burawoy's critique is a narrow conception of the 'client' as a corporate or governmental agency rather than an organic Deweyan public.⁴ While this conception ignores the wide range of possible alternative 'clients,' it rightly challenges corporate or government-driven approaches, which typically stand in sharp ideological contrast to the democratic principles of public intellectual praxis outlined earlier in this article. Although these projects can produce welcomed outcomes, and may be explicitly performed in the interest of the 'general public' (as most policy workers would likely claim), they often lack the necessarily dialogical relationship between non-academic communities to fulfil the requirements for public intellectual work. For example, in 1988, Mathematica received a competitive contract from the United States Department of Health and Human Services to evaluate the effectiveness of abstinence education programmes. The study's findings demonstrated that abstinence-only education was ineffective for delaying sexual activity, preventing pregnancy, or reducing the transmission of sexually transmitted infections. Despite the significance of the study's findings – US Congress cited it in 2007 to justify the termination of Title V, the \$50 million grant programme that funds abstinence-only programming – its top-down formation and lack of connection to non-academic communities render it outside the boundaries of public intellectual work.

As discussed earlier, the public nature of policy shaping work does not merely hinge on the value of particular findings, but the extent to which a study's design, data collection, and dissemination are conducted in conjunction with outside communities. Based on these criteria, the Mathematica abstinence study, however impactful, does not meet the definition of public intellectual work. Rather, it can be located within a broader

category of professional activity that can be described as *public interest research*. Unlike public intellectual work, which is shaped, monitored, and evaluated by non-academic communities (e.g. Project STAR), public interest research needs only to be conducted with the intent of responding to public problems (e.g. Mathematica). In other words, while all public intellectual research can be labelled 'public interest research,' many public interest research projects cannot be considered public intellectual work. Nevertheless, the labels 'public intellectual' and 'public interest' are not hierarchical indices of value or impact – for example, a compelling argument can be made for the equal public significance of both STAR and Mathematica – but descriptors of a project's relationship to non-academic publics.

Educational researcher as applied worker

Educational researchers can also engage in public intellectual work by functioning as *applied workers*. In this role, educational researchers are able to deploy research knowledge in order to effect change within specific educational contexts. Unlike the aforementioned forms of public intellectual work, which can be performed from physical or intellectual distance, applied work typically demands an on-the-ground engagement with real-world issues. Thus, while often not as professionally lucrative or prestigious as cultural criticism and policy shaping, applied work is in many ways the most 'hands-on' and organic form of public intellectual work.

Given its methodological and epistemological diversity, the field of educational research provides a fecund space for applied public intellectual work. One of the best examples comes from the field of practitioner inquiry. Through practitioner inquiry, teachers and other educational workers deploy rigorous research methodologies in order to make sense of and ultimately improve their own practice (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, 2004). Also, many professional researchers have (re)entered schooling contexts in a variety of capacities (e.g. teachers, administrators, curriculum developers) in order to address specific educational problems. An example of such work is Carol Lee, whose research on 'Cultural Modelling' has demonstrated the effectiveness of 'instruction that makes explicit connections between students' everyday knowledge and the demands of subject-matter learning' (Lee, Spencer, and Harpalani 2003, 7). This conceptual framework became the curricular foundation for the Betty Shabazz International Charter School, an African-centred K-12 school that Lee developed. By deploying her empirical findings in the service of a local community's need for academically successful and culturally responsive educational contexts, Lee was able to relocate research knowledge from the academy to a concrete context.

Despite its broad boundaries, not all forms of practice-based work or applied research qualify as public intellectual work. Rather, like policy shaping, the public nature of applied work is dependent upon the goal of the project as well as the relationship between the researcher and the communities with which she interacts. For example, in my own research, I have functioned as a teacher within alternative educational contexts in order to address theoretical questions related to youth culture, identity, and pedagogy (Hill 2006, 2009). Although this project yielded positive concrete outcomes for the study participants, its design and implementation were not informed by a dialogical interaction with the students, administrators, or broader community. Instead, the study was conducted to contribute to current theoretical debates within the field. While useful, as are many action-oriented research projects,

this study cannot be categorized as public intellectual work. The insights from this study, however, informed my subsequent work as a curriculum developer for an after-school environmental education programme (Hill and Johnson 2008). Drawing from my own research, which critically examines the ‘stakes’ of culturally relevant pedagogy (Leonard and Hill 2008; Hill 2009), I co-developed an afterschool curriculum that was not only culturally responsive, but also anticipated the tensions and contradictions that emerge when curriculum is linked to students’ lived experiences. This project, which emerged through a reciprocal intellectual relationship that included a local educational organization, community leaders, students, and teachers, provides a clear example of public intellectual praxis. Although the study reflected their interest and goals for teaching and learning, I was able to use the insights from my research to shape and challenge the project in ways that yielded more rich and favourable accounts.

Prophets without honour: professional resistance to public intellectual work

Despite its benefits, many educational researchers resist an engagement with public intellectual work. While some researchers merely elect to focus on more traditional forms of professional work, others reject public intellectual work as a legitimate vocation. As I explicate throughout this section, the latter position is largely undergirded by a broader and deeper set of ideological stances, cultural practices, and epistemological commitments within the Western academy that construct public intellectual work in pejorative and ultimately dismissive terms. It is from this stance that public intellectual activity is viewed as a fundamentally inferior or completely nonviable form of intellectual production and practice. Consequently, academics who operate as public intellectuals are often perceived as professional heretics who violate the purist ethic of traditional intellectual work by engaging non-academic publics and real-world problems (Hill 2010).

Scientific rationality

A key factor in the professional marginalization of public intellectual work is the continued influence of scientific rationality within the field of educational research. Despite decades of epistemological turns that have challenged the hegemonic authority of science and contested the notion of researcher objectivity (Kuhn 1962; Clifford and Marcus 1986; van Maanen 1995; Richardson 2000), educational research remains strongly influenced by a scientific ethos that advocates detached, ostensibly objective empirical inquiry (e.g. randomized controlled trials) as the ideal means by which to produce and test knowledge claims (Stone 1997; Cochran-Smith 2006; McDermott and Hall 2007; Hess 2008). Proponents of this approach (Ballou and Podgursky 2000; Walsh and Hale 2004) contend that ideology, politics, and researcher subjectivity should not play a role in the study of educational issues or the development of solutions to educational problems. As Cochran-Smith (2006) argues, it is within this context that public intellectual activity is constructed as subjective, biased, and ultimately incompatible with educational research.⁵

The logic of scientific rationality, both in the natural and social sciences, has been disrupted by a range of post-structuralist, feminist, and Afrocentric scholars (Kuhn 1962; Foucault 1970, 1972; Asante 1987; Haraway 1991; Harding 1991; Ani 1994; Lacey 1999) who have demonstrated the ways in which science functions as a

historically, politically, and ideologically constituted ‘discourse,’ rather than a universal, neutral, and transhistorical court of intellectual appeal. Thus, all forms of intellectual inquiry (philosophical, empirical, etc.) and knowledge production are inevitably shaped by implicit and explicit assumptions, beliefs, truth claims, and configurations of power. From this anti-foundationalist posture, which underpins this article’s conceptualization of public intellectual work, the pursuit of value-neutrality within the context of research is not merely elusive but impossible.

The quest for value neutrality

The notion of educational researchers playing a participatory role in political deliberation, democratic exchange, and concrete social change is not uncontested by scholars. To the contrary, some scholars continue to advocate ‘value-neutrality’ or the belief in a ‘radical separation between what they do as intellectuals/scientists/scholars (the search for scientific/scholarly truth) and the uses public authorities or their opponents make of the knowledge claims of intellectuals’ (Wallerstein 2007, 170). This idea finds its intellectual roots in the work of Weber (1958), who argued that the social sciences should remain value-free rather than normative in order to protect the intellectual integrity of the disciplines and to avoid improper intervention in public affairs. This perspective is based on a belief in the distinction between ‘values’ and ‘facts,’ and the consequent irreconcilability of analytical and normative domains. From this stance, it can be argued that educational research cannot directly inform educational policy and practice, thereby rendering any researcher’s claims to intellectual authority among non-academic publics to be overstated, misguided, or disingenuous. While compelling, this argument not only rests upon a belief in value-free knowledge production, but also the neglect of theoretical and empirical scholarship that collapses the falsely obvious distinction between values and facts.

Based on the anti-foundationalist epistemological stance articulated in the previous section, an engagement with public intellectual work thoroughly challenges the notion of an irremediable tension between the analytical and normative domains. Following the theoretical model provided by Flyvbjerg (2001), who argues that the social sciences have been least effective when attempting to mimic the empiricist methods of the physical sciences, the viability of public intellectual activity rests upon a belief in *phronesis*, or ‘practical wisdom’ in social scientific inquiry. Rather than endeavouring to discover universal truths (*episteme*) or produce pure instrumentality (*techne*), the latter being insufficient and the former being unattainable, public intellectual activity promotes both instrumental rationality (i.e. ‘What are the best means to an end?’) and value-rationality (i.e. ‘What *should* the ends be?’). Such an approach, which is largely informed by considerations of value and power, not only promotes but also demands the syncretism of the analytical and normative domains (Thacher 2004; Bjola 2008).

A range of empirical studies demonstrate the ways that educational researchers can draw from empirical research in order to play a prescriptive role in public life. Examples of this approach are becoming increasingly prevalent across professional fields and disciplines such as urban planning (Jacobs 1961; Flyvbjerg 1998) and organizational leadership (Selznick 1949, 1957), where researchers have drawn from empirical studies in order to determine both the means and the ends of institutional policy-making. Drawing from these and other studies, Thacher (2006) argues that the ‘normative case study’, which includes both quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method methodologies, can be used to help professional communities to

‘clarify, elaborate, or even fundamentally revise the way they define’ policy-oriented ends (16333). Within the field of education, similar demands for ‘use-inspired research’ (Stokes 1997) have become increasingly prominent within conversations related to policy and practice (Bulterman-Bos 2008; Lagemann 2008; Nutley, Walter, and Davis 2008). It is within these spaces that public intellectual praxis can bridge analytical and normative domains in ways that produce concrete improvements on the ground.

The advocacy of public intellectual work, however, should not be understood as a fetishization of professional expertise in general or research knowledge in particular. To be sure, an uncritical acceptance of public intellectual activity can lead to the privileging of pure ideology over informed analysis, professional status over relevant insight, and individual decision-making over democratic deliberation. Consider the following example: a well-known and professionally respected economist publicly argues in favour of school privatization policies in a popular newspaper op-ed. Under this circumstance, members of the general public may find it difficult to distinguish between legitimate intellectual authority and individual ideological commitment, particularly if the researcher does not clarify such distinctions. As a result, the economist’s arguments may appear to be buttressed by a particularly solid empirical foundation that renders them superordinate to other perspectives within the public sphere. While this may be true, particularly in light of the epistemological arguments made throughout this section, it is also possible that the economist’s value judgments are not informed by directly relevant and applicable research. Nevertheless, the economist may win unearned public approval for her argument based on the currency that is generated from her institutional affiliation, disciplinary orientation, and general expertise within a subject area. Such circumstances, though undesirable, do not undermine the fundamental legitimacy of public intellectual activity for educational researchers. To accept such a notion would be to concede the existence of a public that is incapable of intellectual discernment and unavoidably vulnerable to intellectual demagoguery. Rather, they speak to the need for greater transparency, increased mechanisms of accountability, and deeper democratic deliberation from all members of the communities in which public intellectuals operate.

Modernist elitism

While traditional methods of producing, disseminating, and consuming research knowledge remain restricted to highly exclusive professional communities, public intellectual work renders these activities accessible to traditionally excluded communities. Professional resistance to this shift is informed by modernist sensibilities regarding ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture. Within this elitist framework, high culture, which is created and shared by a selected group of elites, is imagined as the sole refuge for intellectual ingenuity and socially transformative praxis. Conversely, low culture is viewed as the province of ‘ordinary’ people, and therefore inherently lacking in intellectual integrity, sophistication, and rigor. Such a stance reflects a deep skepticism towards populist methods of knowledge distribution (e.g. television, trade books) and, more significantly, an implicit denial of the capacity of everyday people to engage in rigorous (i.e. highbrow) forms of intellectual production (Giroux 1993; Hill 2010). Such a stance calls for an *a priori* rejection of any research knowledge that is constructed and/or comprehended by people outside of the academy.

The significance of these tensions is reflected in the case of philosopher and public intellectual Cornel West. In 2001, West was criticized by Harvard University president

Lawrence Summers for his involvement in a variety of public intellectual activities, including media punditry, trade book publication, and serving as an advisor on three presidential campaigns (West 2004; Bradley 2005). Summers argued that West's activities were a departure from 'pure academic work' (Cowan 2004, 72) and unbefitting a scholar at a research university. The following year, a group of scholars threatened to boycott an academic conference on pragmatist philosopher Sidney Hook if West was permitted to participate. Despite West's expertise on the scholarship of Sidney Hook – an analysis of Hook's work is featured prominently in *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, one of West's many academic books – several participants argued that West's role as a public intellectual rendered him unqualified to participate in traditional academic activities (Hill 2010). As Cowan (2004) argues, these incidents:

imply that an attempt to make one's ideas accessible to a multiplicity of publics, taking the time to re-explain and reconceptualise ideas, is a frivolous option pursued only by those lacking in the realm of cogent scholarship... [M]uch of the academy remains locked in the elitist premise that 'legitimate' scholarship is that read by those within one's respective field rather than by the masses. (77)

Although the field of education is less rigid than many traditional academic disciplines with regard to engaging the public, as evidenced by the broad range of public intellectual projects detailed in the preceding sections, educational researchers nonetheless operate within broader institutional and intellectual spaces that are pervaded by these sensibilities.

The logic of late capitalism

Academic wariness regarding public intellectual work is not only an outgrowth of nineteenth and twentieth century modernist sensibilities, but also a reflection of the vocational expectations embedded within late capitalism. In particular, professional antipathy towards public intellectual work is underpinned by late capitalism's focus on specialization over versatility, and narrowness over proteanism. Thus, the notion of the educational researcher as public intellectual, which demands the performance of a range of professional identities (e.g. author, pundit, activist), is viewed as counter to the ethos of the university, which has become increasingly organized around the values, structures, and profit-motives of multi-national corporations (Bok 2003; Giroux and Searls-Giroux 2006). This condition is further exacerbated by the forces of neo-liberal globalization and the consequent recoding of terms such as 'public' and 'private' (Hall 2005; Harvey 2005). In contrast to prior historical moments, where terms like 'public' and 'welfare state' were viewed as positives, the current neo-liberal state has helped to create a social disdain for all things public. As a result, the very notion of 'public' has been reconstituted as pejorative, further indexing the public intellectual's ostensible departure from 'significant' intellectual concerns and 'rigorous' academic work.

Professional demerits

Professional resistance to public intellectual work is not only merely ideological, but also produces tangible professional consequences for educational researchers. An engagement with work that lies outside the traditional boundaries of the profession can also result in various forms of professional marginalization. Most significantly, such work can undermine collegial relationships, favourable funding decisions, and

tenure and promotion decisions. To be sure, these professional penalties can be avoided or mitigated by not including public intellectual work within one's professional dossier and producing traditional research output at comparable rates of professional peers. While potentially effective, such decisions force the public intellectual to work (at least) twice as hard in order to remain professionally buoyant. Additionally, such decisions do little to alter the collegial perceptions and relationships that are frequently undermined when educational researchers operate outside the traditional boundaries of the profession (Hill 2010). Within this context, public intellectual work not only remains undervalued as a legitimate form of intellectual production, but also becomes a professional demerit that effectively dissuades researchers from engaging non-academic communities.

Moving forward

Despite the ideological and practical barriers detailed in the previous section, the practice of public intellectual work remains a viable and worthwhile practice for educational researchers. In order to facilitate increased public intellectual engagement in the future, I recommend the following strategies. While some are already being deployed in the academy, particularly within schools of education, a more systematic and organized commitment to these approaches will further expand and normalize public intellectual work.

Make research literature more public

In order to strengthen the significance of educational research beyond the professional community, educational researchers must expand the general public's access to research findings. One of the most significant methods of achieving this goal is embracing what Willinsky (2006a) refers to as the 'access principle,' which contends that 'a commitment to the value and quality of research carries with it a responsibility to extend the circulation of such work as far as possible and ideally to all who are interested in it and all who might profit by it' (xii). While this principle would be best realized by rendering all scholarly journals 'open access' – for example, making all research journals freely accessible via internet – such a shift would require radical changes in the journal publication industry. More immediately, however, educational researchers can increase public access by self-archiving their own scholarship. As Willinsky (2006b) points out, 93% of all scholarly literature can be made open-access without copyright violation if scholars exercise their contractual right to make readable copies of their research articles available through institutional repositories or personal websites. Institutions such as Brunel University, West London and Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Law School have modelled this practice by requiring faculty to provide free online access to their scholarly articles. By making readable copies available, educational researchers can remove many of the economic and social barriers that obstruct access research literature. Such a move also expands the range of engaged readers and interlocutors within the intellectual community, thereby making academic production more transparent, democratic, and rigorous.

Translate research findings

In addition to expanding public access to traditional scholarly literature, educational researchers can also increase public engagement by distributing more accessible versions of research findings to non-academic communities. Examples of this work

include the circulation of plain language documents, such as press releases or executive summaries that provide lucid descriptions of significant research findings. In addition to traditional printed text, educational researchers can deploy New Media (e.g. digital video, and audio, Podcasting, social networking websites) in order to articulate research findings to a variety of literacy communities. Organizations like Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>) have modelled this work by releasing traditional research reports as well as the aforementioned texts to a variety of non-academic communities. By making findings more accessible, we increase the amount of public attention paid to educational research and help to build public anticipation for future research findings, both of which create a more favourable environment for public intellectual work.

Provide institutional support

The promotion and expansion of public intellectual work can be facilitated through increased support from professional organizations and universities. Professional organizations such as BERA can contribute to this process by producing and expanding spaces that nurture public intellectual activities. These spaces include specialized journals, conference sessions, and special interest groups that provide scholarly exchange, mentoring, networking, and action planning related to public intellectual work. In addition to supporting many of these efforts on a local level, universities can promote public intellectual work by offering appropriate theoretical and methodological training for undergraduate and graduate students. Such efforts, which are becoming increasingly common within colleges of education, help to normalize public intellectual work within professional circles as well as create spaces for intellectual growth, experimentation, innovation, and specialized training.

Reconsider what 'counts'

To increase the impact and prestige of public intellectual work, the educational research community must expand the range of possibilities for professional productivity. In addition to traditional forms of scholarship, such as peer-reviewed journals and books, institutions must prioritize the more public forms of knowledge production, application, and dissemination that have been described in this article. Such a shift requires a restructuring of merit-based reward systems, particularly the university promotion and tenure process, in ways that privilege public intellectual work. Although public intellectual projects should not supplant traditional scholarly activities – to the contrary, as I have argued throughout this article, public intellectual work is only as effective as the empirical and theoretical work that undergirds it – they must be viewed as legitimate and beneficial processes that extend the value of educational research. Many institutions have begun this process by providing recognition and reward to researchers who articulate information regarding their research projects to the broader public, particularly through op-eds, references in major media, and appearances on radio and television. By aligning institutional values to reflect the principles outlined in this article, we constitute a more enabling and productive environment for public intellectual work.

Notes

1. Throughout this article, I make deliberate use of feminine, rather than masculine or gender-neutral, pronouns. I do this in order to mark my own positionality as a 'Black male feminist'

- (Neal 2005), as well as to draw implicit attention to the ways in which notions of the public intellectual have historically privileged male identities (Hooks and West 1991).
2. It is worth noting that, despite its fundamentally democratic character, public intellectual work does not always yield favourable outcomes. One of the most troubling examples comes from the work of European eugenicists in the middle of the twentieth century. Scholars like William Bradford Shockley, Arthur Jensen used the public sphere in order to advance arguments about the inherent intellectual and moral superiority of whites over people of colour, namely people of African descent. These arguments became central to public policy debates, as they were used to buttress segregationist attacks on civil rights movements in general (Zuberi 2001), and school integration movements in particular. More broadly, as Baker (1998) contends, the social sciences (particularly anthropology) have played a critical role in the reification of 'race' within the public imagination through their engagement with a variety of public spaces including trade publications and the World's Fairs. It is my contention, however, that such examples do not speak to the fundamentally antidemocratic character of public intellectual activity, but rather the need to expand the public sphere in order to accommodate competing truth claims and alternate ideological positions.
 3. Throughout this article, I use phrases like 'qualifies as' and 'satisfies the conditions for' in order to mark the definitional boundaries of public intellectual work. It is not my intention, however, to suggest that more traditional (i.e. non-public) approaches are less authentic, important, or useful.
 4. Burawoy's stance on policy work is an absolutist one, as he constructs 'policy' and 'public' in sharp opposition to one another. Although I take Burawoy's critique seriously, I echo Patterson's (2007) counter-argument that not all policy approaches are performed in the service of a corporate or governmental client. As such, I consider policy shaping activities to be central to public intellectual work, provided they cohere with the principles articulated throughout this article.
 5. I do not mean to suggest that methodological approaches that are undergirded by scientific rationality are incompatible with public engagement. As I demonstrate throughout this article, multiple methods and methodologies (including those used by individuals who embrace scientific rationality) can and must be used in the interest of public intellectual activity. Rather, like Cochran-Smith (2006), I am arguing that resistance to public intellectual work within the current historical moment is often undergirded by the same epistemological frames that enable the fetishization of scientific forms of inquiry.

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