

PEABODY JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, 82(1), 150–165
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The Media as Educators, Educational Research, and Autonomous Deliberation

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This article explores the connections between the media's responsibility to educate the public, politically and morally contested education policy debates, and public information and deliberation. The author argues that it is crucial for education policy researchers to clarify the competing perspectives on policy disputes by providing theory and research-based information to the public. This requires researchers to understand not only the nuances of the policy issue but also how the media serve as educators and how to find ways of disseminating research to journalists and members of the public.

Immediately after the Supreme Court decisions in *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), critics of affirmative action vowed to keep up their battle against affirmative action, if not in the court of law, then in the court of public opinion. The effort in Michigan to abolish affirmative action, the Michigan Civil Rights Initiative (MCRI; 2004), was the first ballot initiative since the *Gratz* and *Grutter* decisions to be proposed for popular

I gratefully acknowledge that funding from a National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship supported this article. I also thank the editors of this special issue, especially Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin, for astute and insightful editing and suggestions, as well as the anonymous reviewers. Of course, the views represented herein are mine alone.

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vote by affirmative action opponents such as Ward Connerly¹ and the American Civil Rights Institute. In this article, I aim to uncover the connections between the media, politically and morally contested race-conscious education policy debates, and public information and deliberation. Often, educational researchers are not as effective as they would like in disseminating research and theory so as to inform current policy debates (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Smith, Jarvis, Heinecke, Miller-Kahn, & Noble, 2004). As researchers, we tend to rely on dissemination through scholarly journals and books in the hope that policymakers, the media, and educators will somehow discover our important findings.² There are examples of academic writings taking hold in the mainstream press and political arena (e.g., Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Harrington, 1962; Lakoff, 2002; Murray, 1984). However, this happens less often than scholars would like.

Much information on education policy debates gets to the public via media outlets. Herein, I emphasize print media (i.e., newspapers, magazines, and Web articles, rather than television or radio broadcasts), because they are seen as highly influential in people's voting decisions, though many of the conclusions would apply to broadcast media as well (Chaffee & Frank, 1996). The print media have a powerful role as educators of the public, which is especially important in policy issues that are decided by popular vote (Graber, 1994). The process of ballot initiatives like the California Civil Rights Initiative (1996) to abolish affirmative action and Propositions 227 in California and 203 in Arizona to abolish bilingual education (known as "English for the Children") serves to give citizens an opportunity to decide on education policy issues that would otherwise be decided by education leaders and policymakers. The information that the media supply (or do not supply), then, may play a significant role in the policy process.

The first anti-affirmative action initiative, California's Proposition 209, was entitled the "California Civil Rights Initiative" by its authors. They felt that invoking the issue of civil rights brought out the heart of the debate over affirmative action. However, opponents of the proposition felt that they had deliberately used this wording to confuse the

¹Connerly was a regent of the University of California system. He spearheaded successful anti-affirmative action ballot initiatives in California (Proposition 209) and Washington (Initiative 200).

²There are, of course, examples of education researchers who work to publicize their research findings in outlets other than scholarly journals and books, for example, Angela Valenzuela at the University of Texas at Austin and Alex Molnar through the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University. Still, the point here is that too often, education research does not get included in public debates over policy (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Haas, 2004, 2007/this issue; Smith et al., 2004).

M. S. Moses

public about their intent to dismantle a traditional civil rights policy. The MCRI uses the same wording. In cases such as these, in addition to individuals' development of their own awareness, it is incumbent upon the press in a democratic society to clarify the language of the proposition in order for voters to understand what they would be voting for if they voted in favor of the ballot initiative. The opportunity is certainly there. For example, in the 21 months following the announcement of the MCRI ballot campaign, not one print news article analyzed the ballot language for the public or the substantive issues at stake (Moses, 2005). In an effort to find evidence for the policy information they provide, journalists tend to rely on information provided by think tanks, which may provide research-based information but often do not (Haas, 2004, 2007/this issue). Deeper theory- and evidence-based claims easily can be neglected or ignored.

This article's central purpose is to show that policy controversies like the ones over race-conscious education policies require researchers to transcend their traditional academic role and work more actively outside of the confines of the university to strategically ensure that their work reaches a wider audience. I argue that it is crucial for education policy researchers to engage in a more popular and visible way in order to provide the voting public with pertinent information on policy disputes, specifically those decided through ballot initiative.³ Thus, the article has two primary purposes: (a) to clarify the media's role as educators regarding disagreements over education policy and (b) to call attention to the need for educational researchers to intervene actively to inform the public about disputed education policy issues.

My examination takes the following form. First, I examine the media's role as educators of the public so as to foster autonomous deliberation over controversial issues. By *autonomous* deliberation, I mean decision-making thoughts and processes by individual citizens that are not coerced but are informed in a meaningful way, so that citizens are able to engage meaningfully with competing claims, values, and arguments concerning moral and political disagreements before making an informed decision and voting. The media play an important role in shaping the choice-making context of these citizens. Next, I analyze how educational researchers might use the power of the media to provide information about their research to members of the general public.

³Although this article is most concerned with the need for research to help inform the debate over education policy decisions being put to popular vote, I acknowledge that voting is just one arena within which researchers can make a difference regarding democratic deliberation.

The Media's Role as Educators in a Democracy

In addition to their role as watchdog to the government by informing the public about and criticizing government actions, the media have a broader, educative purpose. The media have the function of informing the democratic citizenry on matters that are in the public interest, especially political matters necessitating autonomous deliberation. As John Dewey (1916) pointed out, "a government that relies on popular elections cannot be successful without an educated citizenry." The media's role as educators is all the more important now that ballot initiatives on controversial political issues have become so common. I argue that the media have a responsibility to help educate a citizenry so that it is adequately prepared for well-informed deliberation. In order to fulfill their responsibility of informing the public about political issues and fostering meaningful deliberation, the news media must contribute to providing members of the public with enough information for autonomous deliberation.

In the print media coverage of the first 21 months of the MCRI campaign, few news pieces included any mention whatsoever of the substantive or research-based issues at stake within the initiative campaign (Moses, 2005). For example, journalists focused on superficial information, political controversy, and the opinions of politicians and the "person on the street." Two themes were most prevalent in the articles: (a) a recap of the University of Michigan admissions policies and the Supreme Court decisions in *Gratz* and *Grutter* and (b) information about the logistics surrounding MCRI, especially updates on the petition process for putting the initiative on the Michigan ballot, which has been fraught with legal issues (Jean, 2004). Perhaps these foci are understandable given that at the time of this writing the vote on MCRI is 6 months away. However, I believe that the news media are wasting a significant opportunity to provide information to the public and contribute to a healthy deliberative democracy. Because affirmative action and related race-conscious education policies are especially difficult political issues, the media's educative role is even more significant.

In this section, I explain what the media's role should be related to educating the public about the various issues and competing claims involved in moral and political disagreements in a democratic society. First I briefly describe the historical background of the role that the media have played in educating the public, and then I make the case that the media should contribute to citizens' autonomous deliberation about controversial issues.

The Media's Historical Role

Since at least the late 18th century, the role of the press as public servant has been of paramount importance. For example, the Continental

M. S. Moses

Congress saw freedom of speech and the press as important for responsible government and social life. More explicitly, Thomas Jefferson saw the press as crucial for enlightening people's minds and facilitating rational democratic participation (Lichtenberg, 1990). The media's role is no less central to democracy today.

With the advent of mass broadcasting on the radio, there were heated debates about the educative role of the media. The 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s saw the formation of the National Broadcasting Corporation, the Columbia Broadcasting System, and the American Broadcasting Company. When they began broadcasting on the radio, education groups were concerned about their educational impact. As a result, they formed a coalition including the National Committee on Education by Radio, the National Education Association, the American Council on Education, and the National Association of State Universities. At a 1934 conference, the coalition argued that the most significant role for radio was to help build enlightened culture outside of educational institutions by informing the public of major political issues (Lichtenberg, 1990). These historical examples serve to show that since the inception of the press and the broadcast media, it has been an acknowledged and important function of the media to contribute to the education of the American public.

The idea that the media have a responsibility to provide the public with education about important issues is controversial. The freedom of the press is a right granted by the First Amendment, and it is not officially tied to any responsibilities. The media could ostensibly report on anything they wanted. However, that is not exactly correct in that there are certain restrictions to the freedom of the press and other First Amendment rights. These rights are conditional. Take, for example, the right to freedom of speech. It is certainly a basic right; nevertheless, it can also be seen as a privilege that can be limited if it is abused, as when someone wrongly yells "fire" in a crowded place, to take a well-worn example. The freedom of the press is conditional in the same way; persons are not allowed to publish falsehoods or incitements to commit crimes. In that respect, it is a privilege that can be restricted.

It is also important to keep in mind that the freedom of the press is a right afforded to private organizations that, at the same time as providing a public service, often are deeply concerned with making a profit. The media have been granted the First Amendment freedom of the press in exchange for the public information and education function they serve. Like educators, journalists are responsible for offering members of the public pertinent information about matters of significant public interest (Lichtenberg, 1990). Therefore, although it may be controversial to claim that by virtue of its special freedom, the media have a positive responsibility to provide public

education, the claim has merit. Still, it is difficult to formulate just how the media should go about satisfying their educative role. In addition, news media may present information in a less than neutral way. Consider the critiques of Fox News's "fair and balanced" reporting or repeated complaints about the "liberal media" (Ackerman, 2001; Alterman, 2003). Politics, power, corporate interests, and financial motives all have an effect on what stories get airtime, how they get covered, which perspective or perspectives are represented, and what information is presented (Alterman, 2003; Galindo, 1997).

We often assume, as John Stuart Mill (1774/1859) suggested in *On Liberty*, that a free press can serve the public's interests better than a constrained press. In order to serve the public interest, the media need to fulfill their role as educators. Unfortunately, the media often fail to do this in two important ways: (a) they do not place issues of public interest (viz., issues of education policy) in their proper historical contexts, and (b) they do not provide complete or at least substantive contextual information about these issues. There are several possible reasons for this neglect, including bias, sensationalism, profit motives, power and corporate interests, ratings, the nature of the news cycle, and time constraints (Alterman, 2003).

Regardless of the mitigating factors against substantive news coverage of controversial issues, it is crucial for the voting public to have information on the historical development of issues that are in the public interest. By and large, journalists and media outlets attempt to furnish the public with the information that they believe the public wants. However, this often fails to include the historical information that can provide the context for current debates (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987). As Stephen Klaidman and Thomas Beauchamp pointed out, journalists repeatedly end up focusing on selected pieces of news stories, usually the most dramatic. There is nothing wrong with presenting stories that are of human interest; in fact, these are often the most engaging stories. Indeed using educational research can help journalists meet the desire for human interest stories; consider educational research that incorporates people's compelling stories *along with* historical and substantive information on policy issues (e.g., Holland & Eisenhart, 1991; McNeil, 2000; Smith et al., 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). A problem surfaces when human interest is covered *instead of* pertinent historical or political information about an issue. It is then that, because they ignore historical and substantive information, members of the media fail in their educative role.

In addition, due to the complexity of many political educational issues, such as debates over vouchers, bilingual education, and affirmative action, it is misleading if the public is told only part of the story or if issues are presented through only one political lens. Because the information the

M. S. Moses

media provide is often the primary source of information for political issues, what reporters choose to include can have a significant impact on voting decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, 1993; Tan, 1980). Newspaper reading in particular is almost always cited as "a significant predictor of political knowledge" (Chaffee & Frank, 1996, p. 52). When only selective bits of information are disclosed, the reader does not get a complete enough picture of a given policy issue.

Consider what the news media has thus far chosen to share with the public regarding the MCRI campaign. The media's treatment of this controversial policy issue is instructive, as they focused on highlighting the political disagreement and only reporting what politicians and local people thought about the issue. Coverage of the pros of affirmative action offered readers little information that actually explained or defended affirmative action. When journalists did provide information in this regard, the information lacked substantiating evidence and depth. For example, a *Washington Post* reporter tried to give print space to both opponents and supporters of affirmative action; he mentioned that leaders of Citizens for a United Michigan "charge that the new amendment would allow more discrimination against minorities" (Pierre, 2004, p. A3). Mark Hornbeck (2005) of the *Detroit News* pointed out, "The ballot effort, if successful, will eliminate affirmative action programs that have helped government address racial and gender issues and will do nothing to stop racism in society" (p. B1). There was little mention of the many other important arguments in favor of affirmative action, most notably the diversity rationale that was highlighted by the *Grutter* court and the related educational research supporting the educational benefits of diversity (e.g., Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado, Dey, Gurin, & Gurin, 2003; Moses, 2001; Orfield, 2001). The news media failed to provide either the historical context for MCRI or complete coverage of the relevant issues surrounding MCRI in the wake of the 2003 Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action at the University of Michigan (Moses, 2005).

What would be a "complete enough" picture of a policy issue? I say complete *enough*, because information can never be truly complete, especially given the various constraints of time and space that the media face. In delineating the meaning of complete coverage, I follow Klaidman and Beauchamp's (1987) account of substantial completeness, which is characterized by the amount of information an intelligent nonexpert would need in order to weigh the different facets of an issue.

It is important to consider that a heavy burden is placed upon news media in saying that they should be responsible for educating the public on political issues. Perhaps the burden is too much for many journalists to bear. Critics of viewing the media as educators would maintain that it is

The Media as Educators

educational institutions that need to educate people, and, indeed, people also need to be responsible for educating themselves. Even advocates of the need for the press to serve the public maintain that one cannot rightly expect journalists to provide a perfectly complete account of every controversial political issue (Klaidman & Beauchamp, 1987).

Even though most people get their political information from newspapers, news magazines, Internet news sources, and television news, that is not the most compelling reason to insist on the media's role as educators. It is more compelling to point to the fact that along with the media's right to freedom of the press in our society is the responsibility to serve the public interest. I have argued that this responsibility requires that the media provide one prominent source of education to the public, at the very least, about political affairs in order to enhance autonomous deliberation. Autonomous deliberation is a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation.

Fostering Autonomous Deliberation

Although individual autonomy is a complex concept, in matters of democratic deliberation and participation it is essential. In order for citizens to be able to make meaningful decisions in elections and other important political issues, there needs to be a feasible way for them to become adequately informed about those choices. Because of how the U.S. system of public political information operates, a broadly accessible media system has the potential to provide relevant information for informed public deliberation. Of course, there are factors that complicate just what the media system chooses to focus on. For example, because most media and news companies have significant corporate interests, they can be affected by power relations, political ideology, or advertising revenue. Nevertheless, news media inform the public on a wide array of issues. Klaidman and Beauchamp (1987) underscored the media's role:

Unless the media provide accurate, objective, and substantially complete reports on matters such as personal health, environmental hazards, demographic trends, taxes, interest rates, and political developments, autonomous choice for many people becomes unlikely, because choice in the absence of adequate understanding is not autonomous. (p. 150)

But just why is autonomy so important for meaningful deliberation?

According to Joseph Raz (1986), "the autonomous person is a (part) author of his own life" and autonomous people "can shape their life and determine its course" (p. 154). This conception of individual autonomy is

M. S. Moses

connected with a set of conditions that are required for an autonomous life. These conditions include independence, integrity, appropriate mental abilities, and an adequate range of options (Raz, 1986). Independence is characterized by an ability to make choices without being coerced or manipulated to do so. Integrity requires that people identify with their choices and be loyal to the projects and relationships they choose. If people have appropriate mental abilities, they are capable of deliberating, planning, and making choices. They also understand how their choices may have long-term consequences for their lives. Finally, autonomous people must have an adequate range of options. An option is a personally conceivable, socially recognized, and materially possible alternative. For the range of options to be adequate, people need choices between material goods, not only between concepts such as good and evil.

Now, although Raz's (1986) idea of autonomy is a meaningful one, it is not entirely unproblematic. It is quite difficult to determine whether or not people have made genuinely autonomous decisions about political matters. It may seem questionable to imply that people's autonomous deliberation and decision making hinge on the information that the media provide. After all, media consumers bear responsibility for their own decisions and for making sure their choices are well informed. Just because members of the public may receive selective bits of information about certain issues does not necessarily mean that their decisions about those issues are not autonomous. Accordingly, Claudia Mills (1995) showed skepticism about the notion of autonomy. She contended that even though harm can come from manipulation, manipulation does not necessarily "take away our fundamental autonomy" (p. 107). This is certainly true. However, important questions arise: What kind of autonomy are we left with? And does it lead to meaningful political deliberation? The issue here is that the ability to have an adequate range of options and enough information is put at risk by a media system that shirks its educative responsibilities. Just as students' choices may be suspect if they are not provided with adequate information within the education system, citizens may be much less able to make autonomous decisions about political matters without receiving information that is as complete as possible from media outlets.

What is more, autonomy is extremely valuable in a political culture such as that of the United States, which presupposes individual autonomy as essential in order for people to be able to engage in deliberation and democratic participation. When we conceive of autonomy as an essential component of a person's ability to make well-informed decisions, we see that because the media are highly significant sources of information, they are in the important position of being able to expand or limit people's autonomous deliberation.

Because the media play an important part in providing the public with enough information in order for people to engage effectively in deliberation over controversial education policy issues, it follows that educational researchers need to be able to provide reporters with theory and research-based information relevant to education policy issues. This would contribute to what Donald Schön and Martin Rein (1994) called higher level reflection about policy controversies. They argued that higher-level reflection is *not* out of place in the world of policy practice. According to Schön and Rein, policy making is “a dialectic within which policy makers function as designers and exhibit, at their best, a particular kind of reflective practice” (p. xi). This sort of reflection, by policymakers and members of the public (who sometimes function as policymakers) alike, would be fostered by increased news media attention to peer-reviewed research. In the next section, I make suggestions regarding how researchers might more effectively engage with the news media to disseminate important findings and clarify political debates.

Informing Public Policy Debates

To improve the deliberation over contested education policies, it is important for stakeholders in the policy process to be able to understand the competing moral and political views within the debates and ballot initiatives.

There are examples of educational researchers who attempt to bring their work to bear on immediate policy issues. Consider how active and mobilized many researchers were during the ballot initiative campaign surrounding Proposition 203, “English for the Children,” the initiative to eliminate bilingual education in Arizona. Even though the preponderance of the scientific evidence favored opponents of Proposition 203, the initiative passed in 2000 anyway. Politics and values have as important a role in political decision making as research and evidence. As Lorraine McDonnell (2004) and Bent Flyvbjerg (2001) both have argued, values, persuasion, and power play crucial parts. Educational research can help provide information that can affect how people perceive and understand education policy issues. To take one example, educational researchers were able to effectively influence the discussion surrounding affirmative action in the *Gratz* and *Grutter* cases,⁴

⁴In particular, educational research was used to bolster the idea that racial and ethnic diversity on campus has educational value for all students, which was the primary rationale for affirmative action invoked by the University of Michigan in the *Gratz* and *Grutter* cases (e.g., Chang, 1999; Gurin, 1999; Hurtado et al., 2003; Orfield, 2001). Invoking this rationale was controversial; there are many other important rationales that some have argued may be more significant than the diversity rationale (Bell, 2003; Feinberg, 1998; Moses, 2001). Nevertheless, the point here is that educational research was salient in an important policy debate. In this case it affected court deliberation more directly than public deliberation, but the potential is there for research to be used to inform public deliberation as well.

M. S. Moses

which provide a strong example of how research can affect controversial and political policy debates. Education policy researchers therefore need to make a concerted effort to transcend the bounds of academe and the scholarly world to bring scholarship to bear on pressing public issues.

People need to hear both data-related and values-related information about disputed policies. McDonnell (2004) made a relevant point: "Even when potential targets disagree with a policy's goals and underlying values, if they at least share an understanding of it, debate and opposition can proceed in a thoughtful manner" (p. 198). This is especially important for policies that appeal to values that can be divisive and misunderstood. For example, affirmative action opponents often refer to race-conscious policies as special preferences, and the press uses that term as well. People tend to reject "special preferences" whereas they tend to support "civil rights" or the "educational benefits of diversity." Indeed, a majority of people have supported "affirmative action" through the years (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Consequently, as advocacy organizations pursue ballot initiatives like the California Civil Rights Initiative and MCRI, it will be important to provide information, for example, about the difference between "special preferences" based on race or ethnicity alone (which, according to the Supreme Court, affirmative action policies are not) and the use of race and ethnicity as one qualifying factor among many in a holistic, individualized review of college and university applicants as was the argument in the MCRI case.

The Role of the Media

In order to provide such information and take advantage of the media's role as educators, researchers will be required to use media outlets as one part of their informational strategy. Across the United States, 82% of Americans say that they pay attention either somewhat closely or very closely to news stories about education (Bennett, Rhine, & Flickinger, 2004). Both print and electronic media need to be included, as print media tend to be most used by people who are trying to find information to form an opinion on a given topic, whereas electronic media (television in particular) are more useful for those who are less interested in political issues or have less political information about a topic (Chaffee & Frank, 1996).

Even though media attention is not generally highly regarded by the traditional academic reward structures, researchers should try to bring their work to bear on public debate, and using the media is one way to do so. Experts on using the media effectively to disseminate research and scholarship have outlined three key strategies for getting media attention and using it in positive and constructive ways. Patricia Marin, Cathy Horn, Patricia Gurin, Julie Peterson, and Angelo Ancheta (2004) provided

relevant advice for educational researchers. First, they said, researchers need to be accessible and quick to provide journalists with information. Accessibility refers to both being available for comments or interviews and to using accessible and generally understandable language and ideas. Second, researchers need to be proactive in disseminating their work. This includes connecting one's research to what's "hot" in the news, sending press releases to media outlets, pitching stories to reporters, using the Web to disseminate findings, staying connected with reporters, and holding press conferences. Third, researchers must take time and be careful that their work is well understood by reporters so it is not distorted or misrepresented (Marin et al., 2004). All this may not be easy, due to the demands of regular academic schedules and university reward structures, but it is crucial if scholarship is to reach beyond the confines of specialized scholarly conversation. Although entering the fray on national dialogues around issues may seem daunting, connecting to local newspapers and television stations can be as easy as contacting one's university's press office or the media outlets directly to let them know of one's expertise.

According to John Zaller (1992) the information provided to people by "elites"⁵ and the mass media matter to people a great deal and can make an impact on mass public opinion. Take, for example, the issue of racial equality. In the 1920s and 1930s, social scientists began to believe in basic equality between the races in ways they had not previously thought. This fostered more widespread egalitarian beliefs among members of the public, including African Americans (some of whom suffered from internalized racism), so that racial equality, although certainly not a universal belief, came to be more generally accepted nationwide (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro noted that the public can be credited with "a considerable degree of collective sophistication" based on the "connections and distinctions" people have made over the years regarding the rights of women and people of color (p. 97).

Public Deliberation

Purposeful public dialogue is another venue, although perhaps less immediate than working with the media, where researchers can get information to members of the public by engaging in local deliberative discussions. The time-tested example is the New England town hall meeting, which is generally a gathering of the people who live in a town, designed to discuss shared issues and make decisions that affect the group. Frank

⁵Elites includes researchers and other policy experts, high- and low-level politicians and government officials, and journalists (Zaller, 1992, p. 6).

M. S. Moses

Bryan's (2004) decades-long research on town halls showed that as a form of direct, deliberative democracy, town halls work, albeit on the scale of local democratic participation. Public deliberation over critical issues can function to clarify contested values, increase public understanding, foster people's willingness to reconsider their own views, and increase communication between opposing sides on a given issue (National Issues Forums Institute, 2001). When communities actually engage in deliberative democratic processes, the results are promising. Studies of public deliberation in communities in Oregon, Colorado, and California have shown that deliberative dialogues can foster greater understanding of contested issues and a willingness to break moral and political deadlocks (Weeks, 2000). This would require that educational researchers actively use their research and expertise to contribute to dialogues around issues facing their state and local schools and institutions of higher learning.

Providing information that helps advance public deliberation over controversial issues is a responsibility of academic theorists and researchers. When it comes to the issues discussed here involving race consciousness, politics, and education policy, well-informed public deliberation is even more important as people attempt to understand and negotiate their way through some of the most contentious moral disagreements faced by society. Accordingly, Michael Eric Dyson (2003) urged that "knowledge must be turned to social benefit if we are to justify the faith placed in us" as intellectuals (p. B12).

Concluding Thoughts

In the wake of the 2003 Supreme Court rulings on affirmative action, there was talk of student movement to subvert the rulings. Both the *New York Times* and the *National Review* reported that some students were considering obfuscating race and ethnicity in college application processes (Edmundson, 2003; Nordlinger, 2003). There was even a Web site promoting the protest as an act of "civil disobedience." The idea was to misrepresent one's race-ethnicity on college applications, thereby disrupting the college admissions system, which some White students felt was unfairly advantaging people of color, or so the claim went. Even though a new national movement to lie about race on applications was not born from these discussions, the fact of their existence is telling. They seem to indicate a deep misunderstanding of both the Supreme Court rulings and the aims of current race-conscious education policy by assuming that race alone determines admissions rather than just serving as one of several factors. More widely disseminated research-based information on race-conscious education policies like affirmative action is sorely needed. I have

attempted to argue that educational researchers need to connect their efforts with the news media and their local communities in order to be able to provide the voting public with such information. I want to add that in order for this to occur successfully, educational researchers need to learn about the media, that is, how they work and how to get research information to their attention, as well as critical media literacy that highlights the way in which media coverage can shape, distort, or misrepresent issues (Kubey, 1991, 1998).

Education policy researchers often search for ways to make their scholarship matter. This means doing work that addresses important societal issues that can be disseminated within and also beyond the usual scholarly journals. As education-policy-related ballot initiative campaigns continue to emerge as political forces, I hope that the news media begin to focus their reporting on research and theory-based information from which voters can investigate the arguments for and against the contested policies in order to understand the central ideas—ideas that are based in research and at least somewhat transcend partisan political bickering—that will be shaped by their vote. As I have argued herein, the media have a responsibility to contribute to educating members of the public so that they may be able to engage in meaningful deliberation about important policy issues, which are, in some cases, policies that affect the lives of many individual students, policies that many would say are hallmarks of the cherished American principle of equality of educational opportunity. To that end, I assert that educational researchers also have an obligation to help the media live up to that responsibility.

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M. S. Moses

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The Media as Educators

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