

# *A Letter from the Editors*

As this issue goes to print, we find ourselves reckoning with the cataclysmic events of 2020 that have radiated across the world—the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recessions, anti-Black and other racialized violence, natural disasters due to climate change, increasing political polarization, rising tides of nationalism, and more. These syndemic crises have disrupted education in countless ways, resulting in school closures, testing delays, and shifts to online learning and remote relationship building. While, at times, these events have shown us the potential of people to collectively care for one another amid hardship, they have also revealed what many have long argued: deep, structural weaknesses exist throughout the layers of American democracy and the institutional fabric of nations around the world. As a result, the institutions tasked with providing justice and care are not only failing to do so when we need them most, but also are systematically endangering poor and marginalized people globally, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). These failures are evident in the disproportionality of COVID-19 infections and deaths, in the essential workers who lack sufficient health and economic protections, and in state-sanctioned violence, disenfranchisement, and alienation of human rights. The violent insurgency at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, occurring less than a week before this letter went to print and unfolding amid the growing power of nationalist and white supremacist movements globally, is just the latest manifestation of the foundational faults our society has yet to rectify.

We confront these challenges as an Editorial Board and as individuals of different ethnic/racial identities, genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, religious faiths, citizenships, academic disciplines, and political orientations. We are students and educators; parents, siblings, and children; community members and scholars of education. These injustices are personal; they impact our lives, our families, and our communities in daily and heartbreaking ways. We offer this letter with humility, knowing that there would never be sufficient space to fully acknowledge the impacts of these intersecting crises. Our aim is to reaffirm our commitment to leverage the *Harvard Educational Review (HER)* as a journal for rigorous and creative research by and for those seeking justice and equity in education.

The crises of the past months have underscored the urgent need for education that is equitable, that centers social justice, and that equips young people to be informed, ethical, and effective citizens of diverse nations in an interconnected world. However, these crises have also demonstrated that justice and equity in education is a vision we are far from realizing. Last March, school closure decisions highlighted the reality that, for many students, schools were essential providers of food, shelter, and protection. As fires, hurricanes, floods, and other ecological crises continued to devastate communities around the world, many students and teachers in the US grappled with the violence of racism and the growing wave of Black Lives Matter protests. Now, inequity and structural weakness are laid bare as we witness which schools have the infrastructure to support online teaching and safe working conditions for staff; which students have internet access, devices, and home environments that facilitate remote learning; and which communities have resources to maintain daily instruction in the midst of a public health emergency and collective trauma. Though varied in manifestation, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed similar inequities in countries around the world. We hope the elevation of these truths to public discourse motivates a broader reckoning—one that will guide us in envisioning and building communities, institutions, and futures that honor the dignity and worth of all children.

Our role in this reckoning as journal editors emanates from our core belief that academic scholarship has a crucial role to play in advancing equity. We believe the goals of social justice and academic rigor are intertwined: rigorous analysis demands amplifying unheard and silenced voices and viewpoints, vigorously questioning commonly held conceptualizations, embracing complexity, and carefully probing history. As an Editorial Board, we have the responsibility to publish research in service of these aims. We affirm this responsibility alongside the recognition that academia has often supported, upheld, and reproduced systems of racism and oppression, from the eugenics movement to deficit framings of marginalized communities. We acknowledge that we write this letter as students at Harvard University, an institution standing on the ancestral lands of the Massachusett, Nipmuck, and Wampanoag Nations and created by the labor of enslaved peoples. Furthermore, we recognize the power and privilege we have as researchers, editors, and students at an elite institution. Like the Editorial Boards that have preceded us, we aim to use our power and privilege as *HER* editors to contribute to an honest and more complete picture of the field of education and to develop a sharper understanding of solutions that advance educational equity.

In this striving, we look to scholars past and present who have championed justice in our pages. We seek to honor *HER*'s legacy as an interdisciplinary forum for those who pursue common aims of educational equity and justice and offer a multiplicity of pathways to achieve these goals. We remain committed to affirming the cultural wealth of students in an unequal world; to elevating teaching by critically interrogating curricular and pedagogical choices;

to reimagining engagement with students and their families; and to honoring the full, complex humanity of all students with their communities, and *their* visions for change. In recent issues we have published pieces on the ways anti-Black racism and dehumanization influence the education of Black girls (Joseph, Hailu, & Matthews, 2019), the essential and undervalued care work of bilingual support staff (Ventura, 2020), and the perspectives of youth and student authors who shared their wisdom and insight alongside educators and researchers in our Youth Voices in Education Research special issue.

It is clear now more than ever that we must carry forward this mission of social justice scholarship. The events of 2020 will only deepen the “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) already owed to marginalized students and communities. In advancing scholarship that reveals and addresses this debt, we are guided by the work of scholars like Eve Tuck (2009) and Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (Glazer, Howe, Lawrence-Lightfoot, & Willie, 1987) that urges us to move beyond solely documenting pain, deficit, and brokenness and instead make an epistemological shift to highlighting the complexity, goodness, and strength of communities. We see these mindsets as essential to supporting and publishing work that tackles racism and oppression throughout our global society.

Specifically, the *HER* Editorial Board commits to the following goals:

- seeking manuscripts that advance our understanding of educational theory and practice in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and energy inequity, increasing national and political polarization, and racial violence as reflected in our Fall 2020 manuscript call;
- inviting submissions from authors whose work addresses issues of educational equity and social justice, from BIPOC authors and authors of other identities underrepresented in academic publishing, and from early-career scholars;
- nourishing work through a growth-oriented, developmental editorial process;
- creating opportunities to elevate the voices of youth in knowledge creation; and
- recruiting and supporting a diverse Editorial Board that represents a range of identities, perspectives, disciplines, and methodologies.

As we seek a path forward for healing and justice, education will again be critical to investigating, dismantling, and transforming the institutions that have historically perpetuated harm. We urge all scholars of education to join us in committing to this work of reckoning, redressing, and rebuilding.

## References

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