



Research, Remedy, and Repair: Toward Just Education Renewal

2025 Conference Theme and Call for Presidential Proposals

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“Our Nation, I fear, will be ill-served by the Court's refusal to remedy separate and unequal education, for unless our children begin to learn together, there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together.”—Thurgood Marshall, Dissent, *Milliken v. Bradley*, 1974

“Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.”—John Dewey, *The Middle Works of John Dewey, Volume 9, 1899–1924: Democracy and Education*, 1916

“Ending racial segregation in education is a first step in the repair process and requires not only a policy change, but affirmative action to merge the separate systems. . . . Why? So that the damage is repaired.”—Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice Under the Law*, 1998

As education researchers, we conduct our work in a variety of settings, including universities, community colleges, schools, school districts, professional preparation programs, museums, libraries, think tanks, advocacy and community organizations, philanthropies, and in legislative or governmental contexts. While these settings differ, we share a common desire that our research will help to improve experiences, outcomes, and equitable opportunities for all. Our engagement with the field binds us together as producers, consumers, sensemakers, and implementers of research. We come together at the AERA annual meeting to share insights from our work toward a goal of improving education for all and to remind ourselves of the critical importance education holds in realizing democratic ideals.

The last five years have seen democratic ideals under attack and have been marked by challenges that place education at the center of complex social problems and proposed solutions and interventions. The

2025 AERA Annual Meeting provides rich opportunity to reflect on the monumental challenges and transformations we have undergone due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing social and environmental crises; to reflect on the history of efforts to repair educational inequality through law, policy, practice, and pedagogy; to consider opportunities for research to inform remedies; and ultimately, be a part of holistic repair for those who have suffered harm, loss, and trauma. Thinking of our research in the service of remedy and repair allows us to learn from our past while using our interdisciplinary knowledge to address the present crisis of our multiracial democracy and the one institution—our public schools—tasked with renewing it.

The concepts of remedy and repair exist in law, medicine, education, and, in various manifestations, across many faith traditions. In medicine, providers seek to diagnose ailments and remedy them with appropriate treatments. Doing so effectively requires comprehensive assessment of illness and considerations of how potential remedies might improve one aspect of well-being while making others worse. When diagnoses are accurate and comprehensive, and when remedies are available, the practice of medicine can improve quality of life and well-being. In law, when plaintiffs prove that their rights have been violated, the courts offer remedies designed to redress the harm. In each case, remedies can be narrow or expansive, depending on how problems are framed.

In education, too often the notion of remedy has been misunderstood to require remedial approaches to teaching and learning, mis-locating deficits in individual learners, schools, and school systems instead of critically examining our institutions, social processes, politics, and policies, and our own research approaches that produce hierarchies of knowledge and epistemological silos. At times, we have allowed our research to be used in the service of narrow or trendy interventions that have ignored community-based and professional insights and cautions, leaving educators and communities skeptical of the claims and directives of researchers. Given historical and ongoing harms, there is a legitimate mistrust of research expertise from those who have been harmed by researchers and educators. For our research to contribute to remedy and repair, our field must address where our research has caused damage, and how we have inadvertently or intentionally neglected the situated knowledge and wisdom rooted in communities and the traditions of learning and care from which education research might have otherwise learned.

The concept of repair, when joined with remedy, implies the responsibility to right what is wrong. It enhances the possibility of acknowledging the full scope of harms, to understand how educational inequalities are interconnected with social, health, and political injustice, and to imagine multisector and multifaceted approaches to the education of young people, college students, and graduate students and to the professional preparation of teachers, school leaders, mental health providers, medical providers, and lawyers.

Education research has helped with reparative efforts. For example, many education researchers, working with advocates, organizations, policy makers, and educators, have advanced promising work on reparations and on restorative justice pedagogies and practices. Similarly, some local teachers' unions have incorporated school and community well-being elements into their collective bargaining, noting that learning conditions for students are inseparable from working conditions for educators. We can also turn to history for examples of broad-based efforts to respond to educational inequality and harm with multifaceted legislation and interventions. For example, in 2024–2025, we commemorate the 60th

anniversary of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Voting Rights Act, the *Lau v. Nichols* decision, the 50th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the 70th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Brown II* decisions. These policies were attempts to remedy longstanding educational inequalities through policy, law, and practice at critical moments of rupture and civil rights advocacy and backlash in U.S. history; as researchers, we must consider how they advanced educational opportunity and how they constrained it. Our current moment, and how we respond to it as researchers, is just as critical for our shared democratic and multiracial futures.

There is much to remedy and to repair—in education, and in society. The collective research expertise in our field is needed to confront racism and ethnic discrimination, violent extremism, political repression and polarization, climate change, science denial, deepening racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and linguistic segregation and inequality, and the ongoing loss and trauma related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 police murder of George Floyd and attacks on Latine/a/x people and Asian Americans, coupled with ongoing anti-immigrant policies, forced too-often delayed conversations about the ongoing role of race, anti-Black racism, ethnic discrimination, and anti-immigrant sentiments, power, and violence—resulting in global outpourings of outrage and demands for structural change. Within months, a coordinated backlash to these actions unfolded, primarily focused on the content of teaching and learning about race in K–12 and higher education. Bans against curriculum, books, and even words have been enacted, as have laws, proposed or passed in 20 states, prohibiting diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in public colleges and universities.

Protracted local political conflicts over reopening of schools, mask and vaccine mandates, and school board rancor over the teaching of race and rights for 2SLGBTQIA+ students have been central over the last few school years. Students and their families are contending with ongoing health issues, new and existing forms of disability, housing insecurity, food insecurity, climate crises, and income insecurity. Meanwhile, education institutions are facing fiscal cliffs, born of declining enrollments and rising costs, and are struggling with teacher, staff, and school leader shortages, burnout, and insufficient staffing for school psychologists and counselors for the students who remain. And neoliberal logics pushing for the privatization of public education are successfully informing the adoption of voucher programs that are further destabilizing public education.

Amidst this rancor, rollbacks to civil rights, and deepening inequality, we have lost millions of lives to COVID-19 and long-term COVID-related illness. In the United States, over one million people have died from COVID. This loss of life has been disproportional by race and socioeconomic status. In the United States, some 300,000 children have lost one or more parents or caregivers. The loss of life on the global scale is staggering, with over 10 million children having lost one or more caregivers, and while many pundits refer to this time as “post-pandemic,” the virus continues to devastate the health and well-being of people around the world. Meanwhile, we have much to learn about the long-term health and cognitive effects of COVID-19 on children, adolescents, and adults. We are all making sense of these challenges, coping with these losses, and imagining their worlds and possibilities. We need holistic, research-informed approaches to remedying and repairing the ongoing losses with which we are all contending. These losses are magnified by climate change, constitutional crises, white supremacist violence, school shootings and other gun violence, environmental crises, and ongoing war and rising fascist political movements around the world.

The 2025 meeting theme calls us to consider how we can work across disciplinary, epistemological, and methodological orientations to forge deeper connections in our field that can speak to the challenges

we face in education and in our imperfect multiracial democracy. Well-meaning efforts to democratize knowledge for too long have operated alongside efforts to undermine research in favor of a society in which knowledge and facts are atomized from rigorous theory building and robust study and analysis. A focus on how our research can contribute to remedy and repair provides the bridge to just educational renewal in which we engage with public discourse and with current and ongoing challenges, and partner with local communities and organizations and with educators across the education spectrum—from early childhood education through higher education, and in education systems and settings around the world. This focus considers the role that rigorous and relevant research can play to remedy educational inequality and to repair the harm done to and within public education, democratic institutions, and higher education.

We can contribute to robust remedies and foster holistic repair if we work across our AERA divisions and SIGs to produce relevant and rigorous research that can repair past harm and renew more just and inclusive present and future educational possibilities. We call for proposals for Presidential Sessions that are multidisciplinary, cross-cutting panels that consider questions and issues such as:

1. The role of public, private, and alternative education—early childhood, K–12, and higher education—in a democratic, multiracial, and yet unequal society.
2. The role of educational evaluation and assessment in developing policies, practices, and pedagogies that repair harm and renew the promise of education to meet the needs of all students.
3. The design and delivery of holistic education that accounts for and addresses ongoing loss and trauma, community need, and disability, including policies, pedagogies, and practices that support and sustain high-quality and equitable education and healthy communities.
4. The changing nature of the teaching profession, graduate studies in education, and the education doctorate, and how our field might respond to these alterations in ways that expand opportunity and strengthen research capacity.
5. What new civil rights data, educational measures, and methods are needed to answer pressing questions, and what existing federal and state data sources require expansion or revision.
6. How partnerships with youth activists, community organizations, lawyers, policy makers, philanthropies, media, and civil rights organizations can work to advance the production and utilization of research.
7. How research can identify historical harms and intergenerational injustice and imagine remedies that include professional and community-held forms of knowledge and practices.
8. The possibilities, dangers, and pitfalls that advances in artificial intelligence and education technologies bring to education research and practice.

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