



**Unforgetting Histories and Imagining Futures:
Constructing a New Vision for Education Research**

2026 AERA Presidential Program Theme

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“It’s because we can imagine different futures that we can struggle against the present state of things.” -Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, 2013

“There is no separation between past and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of our past. Our history is the future.” -Nick Estes, 2019

“When you open up the future as a thing we can all imagine and construct differently, you’re essentially putting a lot of power and agency in the hands of people who are in the traditional system, completely left out of the equation.” -Pupul Bisht, 2024

The 2026 annual meeting theme is an invitation to collectively reflect on how to leverage our disciplinary and methodological diversity in service of unforgetting histories. These histories inform our current challenges in education research and shape policies and practices that will enable thriving futures for learners across the lifespan in a range of contexts.

We invite students, educators, practitioners, and researchers to engage in *futuring for education and education research*; that is: “intentional collective planning and future making that seeks to spark innovation, sustainability, and equitable opportunities” (Winn, 2025). Imagining and planning for the future is not solely about looking ahead. An important first step is looking back to look forward, being intentional about examining historical frameworks that can inform future norms we seek to give shape to, and nurture. Historian and AERA past president Vanessa Siddle Walker (2020) makes the case that histories of education can and should inform contemporary education changemaking and coalition building. In the United States, for example, histories of education analyze models of teaching and leadership and broad social movements, illuminating

potential and tested pathways forward as well as numerous lessons and starting points for collective undertakings to develop and pursue widespread future making.

What could happen if education researchers take a “long path” approach by “thinking and feeling beyond our individual life spans . . . to the impact we will have on future generations” of students, educators, and education researchers (Wallach, 2022, p. 10)? What can we learn when we put histories of social movements, grassroots organizing, and innovation in the name of education in conversation with our various disciplines as we seek to find solutions to enduring problems in the field? How can we “unforget the past”—to borrow from writer and social work scholar Patty Krawec—drawing from the histories of our respective disciplines to create and iterate current and future agendas for teaching, learning, and research as frameworks for collective thriving? With what considerations will we construct “consequential” research agendas and practices to cultivate and sustain robust opportunities for all learners (Milner, 2023)? Through which intersections of our research, practice, and partnerships will we prioritize and invest in *futureing for education and education research* in the sites and systems of formal and informal education that we choose to research?

Any discussion about histories and futures should not elude current national and global concerns that can impede our ability to imagine and plan for education futures. Our deeply divided social and political terrain—both nationally and globally—reinvigorates questions about how to support teaching and learning communities with the skills of civic reasoning and discourses (Lee, White, & Dong, 2021). The dismantling of education institutions permeates all our work regardless of disciplinary and methodological expertise. We are imagining the future of education research amidst enduring debates over what to teach, whose histories and identities matter, and ultimately whose stories get told and erased. Harm and wrongdoing across education spaces—both in and out of school—suggest an urgent need for future-oriented restorative and transformative dialogue that can support empirical, conceptual, and applied research.

Education researchers have opportunities to examine these issues and to construct their research as a pathway to solutions and equitable futures for learners in P–12, higher education, and community education settings. Across the globe are teaching and learning communities—past and present—that offer maps, tools, and wisdom for navigating tensions and challenges in education. Some of us study these sites of possibility and most of us live and work in storied spaces and systems where we ourselves navigate myriad perspectives, goals, and approaches. Nondominant communities have long engaged in active re-imagining of their lives and their children’s education, because institutions and institutional dynamics have so often isolated or excluded their ingenuity (Gutiérrez et al., 2017). This call thus invites scholars and practitioners to consider the expertise of Indigenous, BIPOC, and LGBTQ communities in innovating for equitable futures, and maps that already exist, from prior generations who grappled similarly with teaching and learning for future thriving and preparing future generations.

We seek proposals that offer a new vision of education research as an intentional process and practice of futuring, through engagement with historical pasts and current tensions and challenges. How can we address our most pressing education challenges through inter- and trans-disciplinary dialogue? What kinds of dialogue can we inspire when including historical perspectives on topics in proposed symposiums? How can we organize our findings with a keen eye on the past, present, and future? We especially welcome multigenerational roundtables and symposiums in addition to posters and papers that address the following topics from a range of perspectives, each of which invites examinations of the past, present, and future in consequential ways:

- Teaching and learning in an era of polycrisis
- Politicization of education
- Historiographies of education
- Transforming education policy
- Neurodiversity and ability justice
- Climate justice and sustainability
- Restorative and transformative justice
- Equity-oriented scholarship examining intersectionality of race, class, gender identity, and abilities
- Civic education, democratic engagement, and the future of ethnic studies
- Tensions and possibilities of generative AI and other multimodal tools
- New visions of neuroscience and education
- Leveraging big data in pursuit of equitable futures
- Research-practice partnerships and humanizing research methods
- Los Angeles and California as examples of rich local histories of education and equitable and thriving futures

Please join us in Los Angeles for the 2026 annual meeting, to imagine and plan for research agendas that bridge our histories, current struggles, and desired outcomes for education. We look forward to learning from and with you in Los Angeles.

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