



**Transcending Borders and Boundaries in Education Research:
Toward a Beloved Global Community**

2027 AERA Presidential Program Theme

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“But of course, no idea is perfect and forever valid. Always to be living and apposite and timely, it must be modified and adapted to changing facts.”

—W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn* (1940/2017)

As education researchers, we find ourselves at a critical inflection point—one marked by a growing public distrust of research, political and governmental constraints on intellectual inquiry, institutional attacks on academic freedom, and fracturing within scholarly communities. Global in scope, these myriad challenges raise urgent questions about the sanctity and future of research and educational institutions. We are charged to honor our capacities, as education researchers, to co-create and facilitate knowledge that investigates fundamental research questions while addressing pressing societal concerns (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

At such moments of rupture, scholarship that foregrounds our interrelationships, shared understanding, and collective responsibility becomes especially needed. A growing body of research conceptualizes learning as occurring within ecosystems shaped by relationships, institutions, cultural histories, and social practices (Lee, 2010; Nasir, 2024). From this perspective, knowledge creation and human flourishing are sustained, not in isolation or through individual achievement and formal institutions. They occur through communal arrangements marked by enduring social ties, shared moral commitments, historical continuity, and cultural affirmation, particularly within communities that have long been marginalized or dispossessed.

The theme of the 2027 AERA Annual Meeting, “*Transcending Borders and Boundaries in Education Research: Toward a Beloved Global Community*,” responds to the challenge of the moment while serving as an invitation. The theme invites scholars to learn from one another, communicate across difference, and remain attentive to power and what is happening within and beyond our diverse research spaces. It encourages education researchers to reconceive research not

merely as a technical production, but as an ethical, equitable, and relational practice that moves beyond nation-states, scholarly disciplines and traditions, institutions, and epistemologies. We are pleased that Toronto, Canada—an international city whose demographics mirror that of our global education research community—is hosting our 2027 annual meeting.

Transcending entails crossing conventional and established boundaries with responsibility and accountability (Tate, 2012). It also requires engaging critically with institutional and professional incentives, which too often reward the maintenance of established boundaries and conformity over intellectual risk-taking. The call is for sustained reflection on how knowledge is conceptualized, authored, authorized, and valued. The 2027 theme emphasizes AERA's role as a bridge that connects a diverse scholarly community, regardless of researchers' locations, preferred scholarly traditions, or the institutions where they work. This theme focuses on cultivating an ethically grounded and globally interconnected scholarly ecosystem.

Across millennia, rigid ideas about humanity and learning have produced artificial borders and boundaries, which have narrowed ways of knowing, established hierarchical domination, and fragmented communities. Building on the 2026 AERA theme by Maisha Winn, "*Unforgetting Histories and Imagining Futures*," the 2027 theme, "*Transcending Borders and Boundaries in Education Research*," also involves looking to the past to imagine more humane and equitable futures. The expansion of voices and epistemologies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that challenged long-standing ideas has reshaped our field; this theme urges us to deepen that transformation for the present and future generations. As education researchers, we have been able to hold empiricism and emancipatory inquiry in creative tension (Du Bois, 1940/2017), and center dialogue, praxis, lived experiences, and collective struggle (Freire, 1970). Moreover, Toni Morrison (1987) implores us through her concept of the "beloved"; rather than seeking consensus or closure, a beloved community must grapple with the difficult work of remembering and repairing.

The 2027 Annual Meeting in Toronto, Canada, welcomes participation from scholars at all career stages and across institutional locations, including community-based researchers, school district personnel, graduate students, community college faculty and staff, research institute fellows, and university scholars. AERA is more than a venue for presenting research findings; we are also a scholarly community—a sanctuary that facilitates and protects intellectual exchange, provides renewal, and promotes collective responsibility.

Amid ongoing global displacement, suppression of speech, and the erasure of intellectual, practical, scientific, and sacred ways of knowing, this theme affirms diversity, relationality, mutuality, and communal bondedness (Morris, 1999, 2009). When we invoke the "global," we do so with the fullness of humanity in mind, not as a hierarchy, but rather as an inherent commitment to ethical interconnection. Research, in this vision, is a co-creation among researchers and communities.

Attentive to histories of coloniality and dispossession, the 2027 theme reverberates with Smith's (2021) reminder that research, far from being value-free, must transcend established boundaries and acknowledge the histories, knowledges, and cultures of people that have been studied. As an association with members across at least 96 countries, AERA, and education scholars, bear

responsibility for addressing how imperial traditions have shaped research agendas, relationships, and methodologies.

Education researchers are called to engage in principled dialogue with one another and to be aware of the scholarly, policy, and practice implications of their research. Grounded in traditions of community-based scholarship and the moral vision of the *Beloved Community* articulated by Howard Thurman and embraced by Martin Luther King Jr., the theme urges transformative inquiry rooted in humanity, open-ended engagement, care, meaning, and ethical responsibility. It embodies the Kiswahili concept of *Ujima*: collective work and responsibility.

With these traditions and moral vision taken together, “*Transcending Borders and Boundaries in Education Research: Toward a Beloved Global Community*” provides a more expansive and generative frame for AERA’s global membership. It welcomes scholarship on migration, diasporic education, sexuality and gender, disabilities, policy, ethnicity, intersectionality, and beyond. And it insists that such work remain attentive to power, accountability, and collective flourishing. In centering relationality, ethical practice, and imaginative possibility, the theme both reflects and extends a long-standing scholarly tradition committed to using education research to build more connected, humane, and hopeful worlds.

In the spirit of the transcendent scholar Howard Thurman’s *Beloved Community* (1971), the 2027 AERA theme affirms that community flourishes not through isolation, but through the widening of its boundaries, through relationships with others beyond ourselves. I invite you to join us in Toronto, Canada, as we—literally, figuratively, and communally—transcend borders and boundaries and renew our commitment to building the *Beloved Global Community*.

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