Towards a More Equitable Future: CERJ Efforts to Advance Equity in a Post-pandemic Era

Meng Liu

Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

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On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. A year and a half later, the pandemic has changed the world in ways beyond our pre-pandemic imagination. The devastating impact of COVID-19 has been uneven and inequitable, ranging from discrepant death rates in different communities to racial and gender disparity in jobs lost. Education is no exception: Across the globe, few school-aged children were spared from disruptions of their education yet not all school closures and remote learning affected students to the same extent. Pre-pandemic equity issues in education, be it socioeconomic, racial or gender, have been intensified to an alarming degree during the pandemic.

At the critical juncture of history where the world starts to rebuild and recover, it is also critical that CERJ, as an educational research journal and a graduate student-led initiative, plays a part in advancing equity in this post-pandemic era.

The multi-faceted nature of equity is difficult, if at all possible, to capture in a few lines by a single person, for which I turn to the public discourse to examine how equity has been characterised in the public sphere. This also offers a great opportunity to see how CERJ, as well as the graduate community it represents, echoes and complements the voices of the wider public. In Figure 1 I present a word cloud generated from 34,866 sampled tweets related to equity and education in the past 18 months, starting from 11 March 2020, the day WHO declared a global pandemic, to 11 September 2021 (full details of the analyses can be found in the online supplement).

Nothing captures the multidimensionality of equity and education better than the multitude and plurality of keywords that coappeared with them. The post-pandemic world could certainly benefit from more work on equity where the need of different communities and individuals is taken into account. In retrospect of the past efforts made by CERJ in conjunction with the graduate community in education, we find solace in seeing that these efforts, be it from our editorial end or author end, not only resonated but also expanded the public discourse.

Figure 1 Word cloud of top 100 frequent terms in 34,866 tweets related to equity and education from 11 March 2020 to 11 September 2021
CERJ editorial efforts

Below I list efforts attempted by CERJ in the past year towards greater equity, from optimising the editorial process to investing in alternative formats of publication.

Demystifying the editorial process and peer review

Academic publishing is an integral part of the scientific process, yet peer-reviewed scholarly journals are often perceived as black boxes, especially by graduate students who are new to the process. In response to the prevalence of misconceptions and fears regarding publishing research as journal articles, we held two public information sessions in February 2021. Not only did the editorial team introduce the steps involved in the editorial cycle, but we also invited previous CERJ authors to share their experience of publication and jointly took questions from the audience. To further illuminate the black box of peer review, we also opened up our reviewer training session to the public for the first time, so that everyone could learn more about the peer review process. In addition, we also built two Facebook groups: “CERJ Community”, an open-to-all group for exchanging ideas and sharing tips about academic writing and publication, and “CERJ Reviewers 2021”, a group dedicated to reviewers, both of which maintained by the CERJ team to offer support whenever needed. To us, all these steps are about access, support and community, three top keywords related to equity in the public discourse echoed by our efforts.

Optimising the publishing model: distributed editorial power

As the Chief Editor, I recognise the privilege and power I have over the direction of the journal and the outputs it generates. I firmly believe in the value of distributed editorial power, and therefore I did my best to set up a mechanism where such power is balanced and distributed among a team of experts, as opposed to a single person: The team of editors for Volume 8 have diverse research backgrounds and methodological expertise, ranging from second language education to arts-based education, from qualitative to quantitative research insights and bridge the gap between academia and the wider public.

Even though words such as “power” did not appear as a top keyword in the public sphere, what we did aligns with the key idea underpinning equity – redistributing power for fair and just procedures and outcomes.

Power back to the author and enhanced accessibility: bilingual highlights and abstracts

Taking the baton from the editorial team for Volume 7, we are very proud to continue their initial step in practising multilingualism to enhance access to knowledge. Honouring the same spirit, we did something slightly different this year: Instead of the editorial team specifying what languages abstracts should be translated into, we return the power back to the author and let the author decide what language they want their research to be communicated in. We also encouraged the authors, if they can, to translate the abstracts on their own, to retain the nuances of meaning that may be lost in the translation by translators external to the research. Furthering our endeavour towards increasing access, we added bilingual “highlights”, succinct bullet-point summaries of the key insights of the research. We believe bilingual highlights and abstracts, as standalone pieces accessible to wider audience in diverse linguistic communities, could facilitate the dissemination of research insights and bridge the gap between academia and the wider public.

CRedIT author statement: from authorship to contributorship

In this volume we also included CRedIT author statement (Contributor Roles Taxonomy). The CRedIT taxonomy of contributor roles was proposed in response to the insufficiency of the conventional authorship model, particularly in the case of multiple authorship, to properly reflect each author’s roles and contributions (Brand et al., 2015). There are many benefits to using the CRedIT taxonomy, such as greater transparency and accessibility of credits and the prevention of authorship disputes. As a journal for graduate students, we believe it is our role to introduce such tools to our graduate community early on, to prepare them for more transparent and open collaboration both at present and in the future.

Joining Peer Community In Registered Reports (PCI RR): investing in a more open future

Last but not least, I’m excited to announce that CERJ has recently joined Peer Community In Registered Reports (PCI RR) as the first journal in education. Registered Report is an alternative format of publication aimed to address publication bias (e.g., only positive and significant results get published) and prevent questionable research practices (e.g., p-hacking) (Chambers, 2013). It is also different from...
the conventional peer review model in that peer review takes place before research is undertaken, thereby making the feedback from reviewers more constructive and useful for the researcher. Even though we value the benefits such publishing model could bring to the research community, it is unfortunately challenging for CERJ to implement the traditional RR model within the fixed timeline each year. PCI RR, a community-driven initiative launched in April 2021, is a new type of RR initiative committed to reviewing and recommending RRs across disciplines from STEM to the social sciences and humanities. This RR initiative operates independently from journals and thereby allows for flexibilities beyond CERJ’s timeline constraint. Figure 2 illustrates the full cycle of the PCI RR process. By joining as a PCI RR-friendly journal, CERJ benefits from the expertise of the PCI RR recommenders and the rigour of the RR process while serving as a potential outlet for registered reports in the field of education. As an open access journal, we believe what PCI RR represents the promise of a more open future, one that aligns with our efforts to reform academic publishing for greater openness and transparency and we are confident that this format would be a great addition to our existing formats. More information on this new publication track can be found on our official website.

**CERJ author contributions**

The past year has not been easy for many of us, CERJ authors included. In fact, the impact of COVID-19 on research output is increasingly felt in terms of the resources for high quality research. We saw in the submissions and during editorial communication authors mention having to reformulate their research questions, give up their original research design, significantly reduce the sample size or shift on-site data collection to completely online, all because of the pandemic. Despite these on-going challenges, we are proud to reveal to CERJ readers the high-quality content of this volume. What is particularly gratifying to us is the concordance between CERJ and the graduate community on the topic of equity. Such unplanned yet concerted efforts towards greater equity from both the editorial team and the authors, while echoing and complementing the public discourse on equity, is what makes this volume particularly precious.

Volume 8 contains three different formats: Research Paper, Literature Review and Critical Review. A diverse range of innovative and emerging topics are covered –

**Figure 2** PCI RR process

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financial literacy education for Amazonian fisherwomen, haptic learning potential of collage, positive psychology and L2 writing strategy, linguistic identity construction through poetry writing, the teaching of theory of mind, sustained attention development for older children in high poverty communities and teachers’ perception of cyberbullying. We are also delighted to see greater diversity in research methods, spanning from qualitative to quantitative and longitudinal analytical approaches. It’s also exciting to see the graduate community embrace greater openness and transparency of research, as evidenced by the adoption of pre-registration in one of the research papers. Also diverse are the languages in which the research in this volume has been translated – Chinese, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Inclusion is one salient theme in Lily Stone’s playful and subversive reinterpretation of “Lucy’s Picture” to unveil the haptic potential of collage. The embodied, tactile nature of collage is of the potential to serve as an inclusive and accessible means of learning, particularly for blind and partially sighted people, for whom many subjects of learning are inaccessible due to the heavy reliance on visual cues. Also about inclusion is Kyleigh Marie Kai-Li Melville’s literature review on the importance of verbal interaction in the development of social understanding in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). She critiqued existing literature’s use of the deficit model of autism and called for more qualitative research that employs a humanistic model. In nice complement is Claudia Pik-Ki Chu’s literature review on the teachability of theory of mind (ToM) in school settings. Taking a perspective different from Kyleigh, Claudia focused on the heterogeneity in learning effects for school children and drew more attention to the sociocultural and pedagogical differences across societies in children’s ToM development.

Community and justice are what underpinned Raquel Scarpa-Gebara and Jonas Batista’s research on a financial literacy education programme for fisherwomen in Amazonian coastal communities. It is particularly timely to see a piece by authors whose ontological positionality and methodological choices were inspired by Paulo Freire in 2021 – the 100th anniversary of his birth. Through inductive thematic analysis, the authors revealed to us how praxis enables a transformative journey, one of Freire’s key intellectual legacies (2001). They outlined how Amazonian fisherwomen shifted their perception of self and group identities through education, and thereby challenged elements of structural and cultural violence inflicted upon them. Also about community and justice is Yufei Cai, Maria Tsapali, Zewelanji Serpell, Teresa Parr, and Michelle R. Ellefsen’ study on sustained attention for older children from high poverty communities in the USA. One of the first to examine changes in sustained attention in ethnic minority students from high poverty areas, the study demonstrated the possibility that sustained attention improved continuously in these children, despite the difficulties associated with growing up in high poverty environments. Sharing the concern over justice, Peter Hurtubise drew our attention to a different issue – cyberbullying, and examined how teachers’ perception of cyberbullying may influence their response to it. With significant increase of online interaction due to the impact of COVID-19, the issue of cyberbullying certainly merits greater attention and compels educational researchers and practitioners to take action to redress such injustices.

Drawing on positive psychology, Yuchen Zong proposed to infuse hope in L2 writing strategy instruction to empower learners to push through rough times, thereby placing focus not only on the linguistic development of language learners, but also their mental health, a topic of particular salience in this post-pandemic era. Lastly, we have Olivia Halsall’s work, straddling between second language education and arts-based research, which uncovered new dimensions of linguistic identity, expressed through poetry writing, that are more reflective of the characteristics of the contemporary age.

CERJ author contributions and CERJ editorial efforts converge on the common theme of equity, yet each from unique angles and with diverse approaches – from promoting greater openness in the editorial process to shedding light on equity issues through research. Some of these efforts echo the voices in the public discourse, be it justice or inclusion; Others, on the other hand, touch upon equally important elements that complement and expand the public discourse, be it power or openness and transparency. We feel proud and grateful to have taken on this journey together with the graduate community, but we are also humbled by the force majeure of the pandemic. Though we take pride in our attempted efforts, we recognise the gaps in this volume. For instance, the issue of racial equity, particularly regarding the Black community, is not dealt with in attempted efforts, we recognise the gaps in this volume. For instance, the issue of racial equity, particularly regarding the Black community, is not dealt with in depth by submissions to this volume. What we can say is that we have been working diligently since day one and never for once did we give up when things got difficult or overwhelming, while fully aware that all our efforts constitute but one small step towards the right direction. The endeavour towards greater equity is not a year-long journey, and with hope we will pass on the baton to the next editorial team, reviewers and authors to continue on what we and past CERJ teams have built.

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Last but not least, our appreciation extends to the graduate community at the faculty of education who elected us and trusted us with the precious opportunity to serve as the editorial team for Volume 8, without whose support CERJ could not have been where it is today.

About the author

Meng Liu is a PhD candidate in Second Language Education, whose substantive research interest lies at the intersection of Applied Linguistics and Educational Psychology. Meng’s most recent publications are in the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, and the *Cambridge Educational Research e-Journal*. Besides her PhD, Meng is also interested in research methods and is working towards a master’s degree in Social Science Data Analysis. She is an advocate of Open Scholarship, a Cambridge Digital Humanities Methods Fellow, and a Data Champion at the University of Cambridge.

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