



Editorial Introduction
**Critical Commitments in Educational Research and Practice and
Reflecting on the Life of David C. Berliner¹**

Brandon J. Yuhas
Arizona State University

Erica Reed
Arizona State University

Lindsie Spengler
Arizona State University

Fredrick Ayirah
Arizona State University

Kristin Baillie
Arizona State University

Sally Croy
Arizona State University

Enrique Gutiérrez Carreras
Arizona State University

Arisandy Johnson
Arizona State University

¹ Author order after the first three authors is alphabetical by surname. Author order for contributing authors is alphabetical by surname.

Contributing Authors: Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, Arizona State University; Lenay Dunn, WestEd; Paul Gibbs, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Evaluation; Jessica Holloway, Australian Catholic University; Ildi Laczko-Kerr, Ph.D., Co-Founder/CEO Ribbit Learning Company; Noelle A. Paufler, Ph.D., Clemson University

Abstract: The editorial introduction to Volume 27, Issue 2 of *Current Issues in Education* offers a tribute to Dr. David C. Berliner and provides an overview of the issue’s eleven articles. In Part I, “Always in Our Corner: Honoring the Life and Legacy of David C. Berliner,” we reflect on Dr. Berliner’s legacy as an important educational researcher and a tireless advocate for public education, educational research, and for his students and colleagues. Included are personal essays written by his former students. In Part II, “Democracy, Equity, Purpose, and Context: Introducing Eleven New Articles,” we briefly discuss the new articles in this issue. Each article is discussed in its own right; we also invite readers to consider the new articles as we see them connecting to Dr. Berliner’s work. The articles are organized around four areas of inquiry central to Dr. Berliner’s work: public education as a cornerstone of democracy; educational research as rigorous, pragmatic, and “morally purposeful”; the imperative to challenge the narrative of the “manufactured crisis” in public education; and consideration of the social conditions that shape teaching and learning. Together, the articles in this issue highlight the continued importance of contextually grounded, equity-oriented educational research committed to improving educational practice.

Keywords: David C. Berliner, educational research, public education, democracy, educational equity

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Editorial Introduction

Critical Commitments in Educational Research and Practice and Reflecting on the Life of David C. Berliner

For Volume 27, Issue 2 of *Current Issues in Education (CIE)*, the editorial team has taken a slightly different approach to the editorial introduction. In addition to a brief overview of the articles in this issue, we pay homage to Dr. David C. Berliner, who passed away last September. We have, therefore, structured the introduction around these two related purposes. In Part I, “Always in Our Corner: Honoring the Life and Legacy of David C. Berliner,” which includes personal essays written by some of his former students, we dedicate this issue to Dr. Berliner, world-renowned education scholar and Regents Professor Emeritus at Arizona State University, where he spent most of his long career as an educational researcher. In Part II, “Democracy, Equity, Purpose, and Context: Introducing Eleven New Articles,” we introduce the articles published in this issue. Each article is discussed in its own right and recognized for its

original contribution to educational research. At the same time, we have organized the articles around four areas of inquiry central to Dr. Berliner's work; areas we believe remain especially important to the field and particularly relevant in the current political climate.

Part I: Always in Our Corner: Honoring the Life and Legacy of David C. Berliner

With Dr. Berliner's passing on September 26, 2025, the world lost an important and influential educational policy scholar and public intellectual. We also lost an important advocate. Dr. Berliner tirelessly advocated for public education, educational research, and for educational researchers, especially graduate students. He believed in public education and was always one of its strongest proponents. He famously argued that educational research is "the hardest-to-do science of them all" (Berliner, 2002, p. 18). And he was a devoted mentor who advocated well for the students he advised, mentored, taught, and partnered with on research projects.

Much has been said about the indelible mark that Dr. Berliner's scholarship has made on the fields of educational psychology and educational policy. For decades, his work has underscored the value of public education per se and its crucial importance to democracy in the United States (Berliner & Hermanns, 2021), and it has challenged the assumptions and arguments made by those who endeavor to hollow out public education and, consequently, democracy (Berliner & Glass, 2014). Despite the many challenges Dr. Berliner noted in conducting rigorous educational research, he was incredibly productive; his final book, *Public Education for Our Nation's Democracy: Commentaries on Schooling in America* (2025), was released on the day of his passing. Dr. Berliner published rigorous research that supported his claims about the importance of public education and the myriad challenges to it, many of which stem from what he called a "manufactured crisis" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). His former student and advisee, colleague, and friend, Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, observed,

At David's core was a simple conviction that research matters most when it is both methodologically sound and morally purposeful and when it shines light on problems honestly, while endlessly helping (or striving to help) safeguard the democratic promise of public schooling, even in the face of politics. (Powers et al., 2026, p. 9)

As well, not a little has been said about Dr. Berliner's exceptional mentorship of graduate students. It is this aspect of his legacy that we at *CIE*, a student-led, peer-reviewed academic journal, would like to highlight in our dedication to Dr. Berliner. To this end, we have invited his former students to write brief remembrances of him (we knew they could easily write volumes about what they learned from him!).

Whether it was tirelessly advocating for public education, educational research, or for colleagues and graduate students (who, in fact, he considered his colleagues), Dr. Berliner was always in our corner. The editorial team at *CIE* is honored to dedicate Volume 27, Issue 2, to Dr. David C. Berliner.

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Dr. Berliner: In the Words of His Former Students

Although none of us at *CIE* knew Dr. Berliner well, I, the first author, did have the honor of working with him briefly. David was kind and approachable from the moment I met him. During our brief meeting, I provided only a light sketch of my dissertation idea, yet he enthusiastically accepted my request to serve on my committee without hesitation. Regrettably, my own personal misfortune the following year prevented me from making much progress, and as a result, my interactions with him were limited. In the few emails we exchanged, however, David was insightful, encouraging, kind, and caring. At the end of July, when he was in the hospital, he replied through his daughter, BethAnn, to an email I had sent him the previous day. My email was an update on my dissertation; I had not known he was ill and had been hospitalized. BethAnn ended their reply, "In the interest of moving your dissertation forward, he has asked you to find others to help you.... He wishes you the very best of luck with your studies." As you will read in the personal essays that follow, this was typical of David. He was collegial and enthusiastic about working with doctoral students, generous with his time and expertise, and supportive and dedicated to students' success as educational researchers and as human beings. He fostered his students' self-confidence in part because he had confidence in them. He inspired his students to carry on his legacy with future generations of educational scholars. He was their advocate and their coach. He was always in their corner.

My Academic Father: David C. Berliner

Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, Arizona State University

To call David Berliner my "academic father" is not simply to describe a mentor–mentee relationship, akin to that of a father and daughter, but to name a form of intellectual formation that, over the past three decades, has shaped how I think, question, and carry responsibility as a scholar and now as a mentor to multiple mentees myself, all of whom David consistently regarded as members of his "academic family." Trained under Lee J. Cronbach, who was

renowned for his foundational work in educational measurement, validity, and psychological testing, David carried forward a lineage of rigorous, public-facing scholarship. This was an intellectual inheritance he instilled in those he mentored and that we, in turn, continue to sustain. Across the many spaces we shared, from dissertation meetings and defenses to conferences and their lively gatherings, to long dinners marked by extended conversation and generous pours of red wine, and moments of both celebration and critique, David did much more than guide my work. He shaped my academic identity.

From the very beginning of my doctoral journey, David (along with Gene Glass and Mary Lee Smith) helped build what I have often called my “academic spine.” By this, I mean a foundational structure grounded not only in methodological rigor but also in intellectual courage and ethical transparency, all in service of the public good. My dissertation on high-stakes testing, one of our earliest collaborations, was not simply a research project; it was an initiation into a way of doing scholarship that demanded precision, skepticism, and, above all, responsibility as a public-facing scholar. When that work gained national attention, David did not celebrate visibility for its own sake. Instead, he taught me how to “ride the wave” and recognize that scholarly impact carries obligation, that public scholarship requires care, and that one must always return to the work with humility, discipline, and deep respect for the field of educational research and its influence on both policy and practice.

What truly made David an academic father, however, was how he framed the very nature of knowledge itself. He resisted easy answers and warned against seductive and reductionistic simplifications (often grounded in “objective” large-scale standardized test scores). Relatedly, his now-familiar insistence that “data should not drive us anywhere” was not a rejection of evidence. Rather, it was a defense of human agency and judgment. Research must inform, not replace, ethical reasoning and professional responsibility. In this way, he modeled a form of scholarship that fused rigor and humanity, refusing to separate method from meaning.

David also taught me that educational research is inherently complex. Indeed, it is “the hardest science of all.” Educational research asks us to study complex people within complex contexts shaped by (in)equity, cultural diversity, poverty and wealth, and lived experience. To conduct educational research well requires care. Conclusions must be earned, and claims must remain accountable to those most affected by them. His scholarship consistently reflected this stance, challenging dominant narratives about schools while insisting that evidence be used responsibly, especially in public debates where evidence is still so often distorted.

In the end, to remember David as my academic father is to remember someone who taught me not only how to do research but also how to be a researcher and mentor. He showed me that scholarship is not just about producing knowledge but about stewarding it, carefully, ethically, and in service of something larger than oneself. In carrying this forward, I also continue to strive to be an academic parent to my own mentees, extending the lineage of care and responsibility he so powerfully modeled, as did his academic father, Cronbach. In this way, that lineage will endure across generations and relationships through the ongoing work of multiple educational scholars committed to the public good and, subsequently, to the strengthening of our democratic society.

In Honor of Dr. David Berliner, a Remarkable Teacher

Lenay Dunn, WestEd

I had the great privilege of having Dr. David Berliner serve as my doctoral advisor and dissertation chair. I have fond memories of meeting with him to discuss my courses, my dissertation data collection, and—over many years well beyond my time as his student—how to ensure that my work was relevant and useful.

David modeled that one way to produce relevant research was to spend time in classrooms. Not only did David's time in classrooms shape his deep respect for teachers, his understanding of the complexity of teaching and learning, and his passion for meeting the needs of all students, but it was something he genuinely delighted in. As David wrote in his most recent book: "The professional activity I enjoyed the most was to occasionally visit classrooms and schools, in different states and countries, and try to make sense of them," (Berliner, 2025, p. 1). He approached classrooms not just as a researcher, but as a curious observer genuinely interested in understanding what teachers and students were doing together.

Being in classrooms shaped the way David thought about education research. His early career in applied research at the Far West Laboratory took him to numerous classrooms to observe and gather data on teaching practices and student engagement. Those observations allowed him to see firsthand how context and conditions influence outcomes. He shared with us that for research to matter, it has to attend to context and honor the complexity of teaching and learning.

It's not surprising that someone who spent so much time carefully observing great teaching was a remarkable teacher himself. He cared deeply about us as his students. He cared about our motivations, our aspirations, and our experiences. He wanted us to succeed. He challenged us, encouraged us, and pushed us to think more carefully about teaching, learning, and research. David was our thought partner, critical friend, and cheerleader.

I cherished being David's student and seeing, up close, how his brilliant mind worked. I hope to honor David in many ways, as many of his former students do. One way we can honor David is by approaching education with curiosity, humility, and respect. We can also spend time in classrooms and, as David said, try to make sense of them. And most of all, we can honor him by striving to be good people enjoying life, as he always encouraged us to be.

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Collegiality

Paul Gibbs, Ph.D. in Educational Policy and Evaluation, class of 2022

David was, for me, an exemplar of what it means to be a colleague. Indeed, that I would even think of myself as David's "colleague"—and that he would introduce graduate students to others using that same term—is a testament not to me, nor to the countless other students he served over the years, but to how he made us feel.

As a student nearing the end of my doctoral program in 2022, I had the opportunity to collaborate with David and with Margarita Pivovarova on a small project that led to several presentations and publications. Certainly, David was a matchless writer. Everything he touched brimmed with an authentic voice that I find it impossible to replicate, and his style brought

energy and clarity to our work. His industrious disposition quickly turned ideas into reality. And his belief in the potential of research to impact policy brought an urgency to research that was contagious. In one email exchange following a round of revisions, he wrote, “I am proud of what we have, and it could, maybe, perhaps, someplace, sometime in the near future actually influence policy.” He believed in scholarship and maintained an inspiring hope for the public value of the work.

But, more than that, what impacted my conception of collegiality the most was the pervasive respect that he exuded toward others—a respect that made you want to work with him. I was amazed when, in first discussing the possibility that I might do some data cleaning for a project he was working on, he insisted on paying me. I would gladly have given my time for free for the prospect of working with a scholar of his stature, but he insisted that I shouldn’t undervalue my time and that graduate students and their families needed all the help they could get: “Your time is worth it,” he said.

In the too-brief time I knew him, I remember him on several occasions sharply disagreeing with people, but then, in the next breath, conceding some other area of respect that he nevertheless held for them. He could be very direct in his critiques, but he seemed to remind himself—and those listening in—of the shared humanity of his interlocutors.

And, perhaps most memorably, he liberally employed a humorous self-deprecation that graciously lifted others up. After one sweeping douse of red-lettered edits, he wrote, “Accept or reject my little suggestions. Your choice. Nothing I said is important. Merely preference or thoughts.”

It was all important, David. Thank you for your “little” suggestions, your preferences, and your thoughts. Offered up with grace, all of them were welcome. All of them are treasured.

Taking a Position: Lessons from David Berliner

Jessica Holloway, Australian Catholic University

I had the privilege of having David Berliner as a committee member and mentor during my Ph.D. at Arizona State University (2011–2014). Like many students, I was well aware of his reputation before I met him. What stayed with me, however, was not his reputation but the way he worked with students and early career academics: generous with his time, direct in his feedback, and fully engaged in the work.

What I came to understand quite quickly was that David’s work on teaching, accountability, and the harms of high-stakes testing was not just something he wrote about—it shaped how he approached academic work and the people around him. He was deeply committed to the idea that education research matters and that it carries a responsibility to challenge harmful policy, particularly when it narrows what counts as teaching and learning. That clarity carried through to how he worked with students.

I saw this most clearly in the way he responded to moments of uncertainty and vulnerability. Early in my Ph.D., I recall a Twitter discussion lambasting a commentary I had published with my supervisor (and the person who introduced me to David), Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley. I remember feeling terribly embarrassed and exposed. But one of David’s many quips—that if you’re not provoking someone, you’re probably not doing it right—came to mind, reframing the moment as part of the work rather than a failure of it. It prompted a broader reflection on the role of research in public debates about education and reminded me that critique

was not something to avoid, but often a signal that the work was doing what it needed to do. I return to this thought often.

At the same time, he was clear that confidence in your work did not mean absolute certainty. In a particular conversation about impostor syndrome, he made the point that it never really goes away. You learn to live with it and to see it as part of working in a field where there is always more to understand. That combination—being willing to take a position while remaining open to learning—has also stayed with me. It offers a way to navigate the tension between conviction and uncertainty that sits at the center of academic work.

What I valued most about David as a mentor was the way he combined intellectual clarity with genuine generosity (and curiosity). He was rigorous, politically engaged, and clear about what he stood for. At the same time, he made space for others. When I was transitioning from the classroom into academia, I was quite insecure about where I sat in the academic “hierarchy.” David made it clear that my experience as a teacher wasn’t something to move past, but something to work from. It was part of my intellectual profile, rather than something to abandon, and it has remained a core part of my identity ever since.

His influence on me has been lasting. He shaped how I think about the role of academic work, particularly its public and political dimensions, and he gave me a way to navigate the uncertainty that comes with it. More than anything, he showed what it looks like to take the work seriously while still taking people seriously as well. The field is better for David’s relentless work, and I am as well.

Enduring Lessons

Ildi Laczko-Kerr, Ph.D., Co-Founder/CEO Ribbit Learning Company

David C. Berliner was my teacher, dissertation chair, mentor, co-author, champion, business advisor, cheerleader, and friend. I learned many lessons from David. I’d like to share three that have had a lasting impact on my life.

I met David in 1998 at a dean’s reception at the University of Arizona. We’d been corresponding by email about my transfer from the University of Arizona’s doctoral program to Arizona State University. Darrell Sabers, my department chair, had coordinated it all with David, who was then Dean of the College of Education. David could easily have delegated this task to a department chair, but he handled it himself. He made me feel genuinely welcome, took me on as his student, served as my dissertation chair, and invited me to be his research assistant. All sight unseen.

When I spotted David, I excitedly walked over and introduced myself. The first thing I noticed was his smile—wide, authentic, and inviting. When I told him who I was, he opened his arms and gave me a hug. David gave the best hugs. I thanked him for his willingness to take me on as a graduate student. He smiled and said, “I’d be stupid to say no to a student of Darrell’s who comes as highly recommended as you.”

That was the first lesson David taught me: trust your colleagues. He took a leap of faith because he trusted and respected Darrell’s judgment.

From David, I learned how to be a scholar, researcher, writer, collaborator, and advocate. He introduced me to education policy and showed me how to identify research questions that were truly consequential. My dissertation on the impact of teacher certification on student achievement, including my analysis of Teach For America, led to publications, national

recognition, and some controversy. Throughout it all, David guided me carefully and generously, both as a mentor and a colleague.

That was the second lesson David taught me: trust yourself. When imposter syndrome crept in, David reminded me of my integrity, training, and the quality of my work.

Before I defended my dissertation, I went to work at the Arizona Department of Education in research and evaluation. David was proud that I'd be, as he liked to say, "doing good work." A few months later, while David was publicly criticizing No Child Left Behind, I found myself negotiating with the federal government and writing Arizona's implementation plan. The juxtaposition was not lost on either of us.

This wouldn't be the last time my work conflicted with David's educational research. Nonetheless, his support for me never wavered. David was my cheerleader in everything I did, always urging me to use what I had learned to keep "doing good work."

That was the third lesson David taught me: loyalty isn't conditional. Once family, always family.

I'm grateful to have had David in my academic, professional, and personal life. His memory will always be a blessing to me; may it be for you as well.

In Memory of Dr. David Berliner, with Gratitude

Noelle A. Paufler, Ph.D., Clemson University

I consider myself very fortunate to be among the many doctoral students whose lives and careers were profoundly shaped by Dr. David Berliner's generosity. As a third-generation member of his academic family, I am truly grateful for David's willingness to give generously of his time and expertise first as a mentor and advisor to his own students, including my dissertation chair, Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, and later as a dissertation committee member for her students, including me. When I reflect on his legacy of mentoring and how it directly and indirectly shaped my experiences as a doctoral student and early career scholar, I feel as though I won the lottery in many ways. In fact, I vividly remember my conversation with Audrey when she suggested her mentor, David, and her colleague, Dr. Gustavo Fischman, as possible members of my dissertation committee. Certainly, I thought, such internationally renowned scholars have better things to do than volunteer to serve on additional dissertation committees. Nonetheless, both readily agreed to serve, and in my opinion, my committee was second to none. In addition to giving thoughtful feedback on my dissertation, David wrote a letter of recommendation both times I went on the job market and even offered to have a coaching phone call with me along the way to discuss how to negotiate job offers and navigate changing institutions pre-tenure. While the advocacy and support of my committee made all the difference, I know my experience as a member of David's academic family is not unique, and my desire to pay it forward continues to inspire me as a scholar, teacher, and mentor.

I also had the privilege and pleasure of working as a graduate research assistant on a project conceptualized and hosted by Audrey, titled *Inside the Academy*. This online educational historiography captures the legacy of significant and inspirational scholars in education through video interviews, curated lists of recommended readings, personal and professional photographs, and reflections from their family and friends. David was the first of several distinguished honorees (<https://ita.education.asu.edu/honoree/david-berliner/>). I recall watching each engaging interview clip with a smile as he reflected on his career and shared lessons learned. His advocacy

for public education, commitment to producing impactful research, and sense of humor about the day-to-day realities of working in academia made being a professor sound like a fascinating and rewarding career. His enthusiasm as a scholar and teacher was contagious in many ways and guided my own aspirations toward the academy. I particularly enjoyed reading the reflections written by his family and friends, including his wife, children, colleagues, and former students. In doing so, I recognized the spark of life that David brought to so many around him, including me, as one of his many wonderful attributes, and for that, I am forever grateful.

Part II: Democracy, Equity, Purpose, and Context: Introducing Eleven New Articles

As we introduce the articles in Volume 27, Issue 2, the *CIE* editorial team would like to invite you to consider the unique contributions that each article makes to educational research in light of four enduring themes that were important to Dr. David Berliner's research and public-facing scholarship. Although the pieces address different contexts, populations, and educational questions, and often touch on more than one of these themes, each speaks in some way to Dr. Berliner's insistence that education must be understood as a democratic, moral, and research-informed project. These summaries show the need for rigorous academic research that challenges the status quo and propels educational discourse: from questions of access, placement, language justice, and belonging; to the responsible use of new technologies and teacher well-being; to critiques of standardization and deficit narratives; to the social and material conditions that shape educational opportunity.

The first theme centers on the idea that public education is a cornerstone of democracy. The articles grouped here highlight how educational systems either expand or restrict opportunity, particularly when policies determine who gains access to advanced coursework, culturally sustaining pedagogy, or more just forms of participation in schools. Through this lens, education is not merely about individual advancement; it is about who is recognized, included, and given meaningful access to the promises of democratic life.

The second theme reflects Dr. Berliner's conviction that education research should be rigorous, pragmatic, and, in the words of Dr. Audrey Amrein-Beardsley, "morally purposeful" (Powers et al., 2026, p. 9). These articles emphasize moving beyond identifying and describing educational problems; they examine them carefully with the aim of improving practice and outcomes. Whether addressing students' uses of generative AI, teachers' secondary traumatic stress, or educators' critical AI literacy around culturally rich topics, the articles in this grouping reflect a commitment to research that is methodologically sound, practically useful, and attentive to human consequences.

The third theme draws from Dr. Berliner's critique of what he called the "manufactured crisis" (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) in public education. Articles we have connected with this theme challenge simplistic or politically convenient claims about "failing" schools and instead ask what counts as evidence, whose voices are heard, and how institutional reforms can sometimes reproduce the very problems they claim to solve. This theme is especially visible in work that resists deficit framings, questions overreliance on standardization, and exposes the gap between reform rhetoric and the lived realities of students and educators.

The fourth theme emphasizes that education does not occur in a vacuum. Dr. Berliner repeatedly argued that poverty, racism, insecurity, trauma, and other persistent social conditions profoundly shape what happens in classrooms. The articles grouped here reflect that insight by showing how learner success, teacher well-being, and institutional effectiveness are all bound up

with broader social and material realities. Rather than scapegoating public education for problems rooted in society, these pieces insist on a fuller understanding of the conditions under which teaching and learning occur.

Theme 1: Public Education is a Cornerstone of Democracy

In the article “Investigating the Impact of a Multiple Measures Placement Algorithm on Student Achievement in a Dual-Credit College Algebra Course: A Quantitative Study,” **Jason Robertson** explores how course placement policies shape access to educational opportunity. Using secondary data from 2,928 dual-credit students at a large suburban community college, the study compares student outcomes across placement methods based on standardized test scores, ACT math scores, and measures of high school achievement. The results indicate that students placed through multiple measures, particularly prior academic achievement, performed as well as, or better than, those placed solely on ACCUPLACER scores. In doing so, the article raises important questions about how institutions can design placement practices that more equitably support access to transferable college coursework.

Mylia Briggs and **Monica Gonzalez Smith** expand on this theme in their article “Teaching Against Erasure: Transformative SEL, Language Justice, and Belonging for Multilingual Learners in Hawai‘i.” Using the Transformative Social-Emotional Learning (tSEL) framework, this case study examines how a teacher in a Title I school in Hawai‘i supports multilingual learners’ home languages, cultural identities, and criticality through translanguaging, cultural inclusion, and critical reflection. Drawing on lesson plans, classroom observations, student artifacts, feedback, and reflective journals, the study demonstrates how tSEL can foster students’ voice, agency, and cultural pride. The article highlights the importance of supplementing SEL with language justice-oriented and culturally sustaining practices to create school communities where multilingual and multicultural learners experience genuine belonging. In this sense, the study reflects the democratic purpose of education by emphasizing who is recognized, included, and empowered within school systems.

Theme 2: Education Research Should Be Rigorous, Pragmatic, and “Morally Purposeful”

Airy Farhan and **Christopher Eaton’s** article “Learners Do Not Trust GenAI, but They Find It Useful Anyway: Pedagogical Implications of the Enduring Allure of GenAI for Learning” examines how students incorporate generative AI into their broader learning practices, revealing a tension between skepticism and attraction. Drawing on interviews with former first-year writing students, the authors find that while learners often questioned the reliability of GenAI, they still found it highly accessible and appealing as an academic support tool. This research highlights an important educational challenge: students may recognize GenAI’s convenience more readily than they critically evaluate the quality of its outputs. The results of the study ultimately point to the need for teaching approaches that help learners engage with AI tools more discerningly, reflectively, and with more agency.

Angèlica Muñoz’s systematic literature review, “You Are My Sunshine: The Effects of Secondary Traumatic Stress in PK–12 Educators,” synthesizes eight empirical studies to examine PTSD and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) among PK–12 teachers in the United States, focusing on measurement tools, reported symptoms, and contributing traumatic events. The findings reveal concerns about the validity and consistency of current STS measurement

approaches, as well as limited attention to the specific traumatic experiences teachers face in the profession. The review also identifies a lack of clear and comprehensive documentation of PTSD and STS symptoms among educators. Muñoz's study highlights a critical need for improved measurement tools and expanded research to better understand and support teachers experiencing trauma-related stress.

Rebecca Mancuso and **Drew Coles's** article "Utility vs. Authenticity: Exploring Teacher Perceptions of AI-Generated Podcasts on Culturally Rich Topics" uses a qualitative instrumental case study design arising from a graduate-level course on Hip Hop pedagogy. Participants, composed of in-service music educators, were instructed to identify their own artistic and social justice inspirations and reflect on the process and outcomes of using AI-powered podcasting software. A central distinction in the course was between "Hip Hop music education" and "Hip Hop education," emphasizing the importance of a culturally authentic approach grounded in the ethos and elements of Hip Hop as critical pedagogy. The study raises questions about educators' perceptions of AI tools used to synthesize complex, culturally specific topics, as well as the tensions that arise when AI intersects with social justice pedagogy. A key finding is the need for critical AI literacy among educators, underscoring the importance of pedagogical judgment over simple technological adoption.

Theme 3: Challenging the Manufactured Crisis in Public Education

In "Exploring Educational Injustice in Iowa Through Latina Youth Poetic Praxis," **Carlos Casanova** and **Julia Silver** examine how public education is often described as being in crisis by voices far removed from the students and communities most directly affected by schooling. Their article shifts attention to the experiences often left out of those conversations. Drawing on a critical ethnography of two Latina youth in Iowa, the authors explore how students make sense of their schooling through poetry written in a community-based program. Their work shows how everyday classroom experiences—curriculum, teacher interactions, and access to opportunity—can reflect broader patterns of exclusion and racism. At the same time, the poems offer insight into how these students understand their own lives and push back against those conditions. Rather than framing students through deficit-based explanations, the study centers their words and perspectives, offering a different way to think about what counts as knowledge in discussions about schools.

Tiffany Spatz argues that counselor education programs are being quietly diminished by the very structures designed to sustain them in her article "Exploring the Downside of Standardized Counselor Education." When CACREP accreditation standards are treated as the destination rather than the starting point, programs risk producing graduates who meet minimum requirements but may be underprepared for the complex realities of the field. Spatz contends that institutional barriers—rigid hierarchies, limited academic freedom, and the precarious employment conditions of adjunct faculty—suppress both faculty creativity and student development. Drawing on research with counselor educators and doctoral program faculty, she finds that some institutions are pushing back against the claim that we have failed our students. Those in high-quality programs are consistently described as going beyond standardized benchmarks, cultivating professional identity and leadership skills that accreditation standards alone do not require. Building on Kolb's experiential learning framework and research on doctoral program quality, she contends that hands-on, relational, and student-centered

approaches distinguish programs that genuinely prepare counselor educators from those that simply satisfy accreditation requirements.

Theme 4: Education and the Social Conditions Around It

Medson Mapuya's conceptual paper, "Exploring How to Promote Access to and Success in Postgraduate Studies Through Supervision: A Conceptual Perspective," challenges the assumption that postgraduate students need less support as they advance through higher education. Instead, Mapuya argues that equitable and effective supervision requires a humanistic, context-responsive approach that recognizes how academic success is shaped not only by student effort, but also by broader institutional and social conditions. By reframing supervision as a morally purposeful practice, this paper contributes a research-grounded framework for promoting access, persistence, and success in postgraduate education.

Joshua Sule Mamman's "Nexus of Security and Quality Higher Education in 21st-Century Nigeria: The Perspective of Stakeholders" examines how physical safety and regional insecurity have significantly hindered the role of higher education in Northeast Nigeria. Using interview data from 31 participants, the study explores how insecurity has disrupted learning, decreased enrollment, contributed to teacher shortages, and strained funding for higher education institutions in the region. Participants emphasized the need for stronger community engagement, greater awareness of security issues, the use of technology to combat terrorism and insurgency, and other practical security measures. Overall, the study shows how the quality of higher education in Northeast Nigeria is deeply shaped by broader social and security conditions.

Meghan Balderama, Nicole Dann, Megan Guise, and Sarah Hegg's article, "Supporting New Teacher Wellness & Mitigating Burnout: An Exploration of the Self-Care Strategies of New Teachers," examines how first-year teachers use self-care practices to navigate stress and mitigate burnout. Drawing on weekly reflections and interviews with 14 novice teachers, the study identifies practical strategies such as relying on support systems, establishing work-life boundaries, maintaining hobbies, and attending to physical, emotional, and mental well-being through self-compassion. At the same time, the article moves beyond individual coping strategies by showing that teacher wellness is also shaped by institutional and relational conditions. Burnout is presented not simply as a personal struggle, but as an issue connected to the emotional demands of teaching and the extent to which schools and preparation programs provide meaningful support.

Isaac Kofi Biney's "Motivating Young Adult Learners in Higher Education Institutions: Experiences from Ghana" uses an exploratory mixed-methods case study of young adult learners in Ghanaian higher education to examine the institutional conditions that support motivation as well as the social realities that shape students' ability to succeed. Biney finds that learners are encouraged by responsive academic programs, committed lecturers, student support services, and access to digital learning materials through blended learning. At the same time, the study shows that educational participation is deeply influenced by factors beyond the classroom, including financial hardship, limited family support, and the demands of balancing work and study. The study concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening student support services and improving institutional systems that promote academic persistence and success.

Conclusion

Each article in the new issue makes a unique contribution to educational research that we have also invited you to consider in light of some aspects of Dr. Berliner's long-time research agenda. We cannot say whether the authors of these articles conducted their research with Dr. Berliner's work in mind. We can, however, say with some certainty that Dr. Berliner's research opened a door, or caused it to open more widely, to a worldview that considers the value and broader ramifications of public education, how rigorous educational research might be conducted in service to others, and the contexts in which education occurs. The articles in this issue help us consider these ideas, as well as others, more deeply, as they highlight the complexity of educational systems, the students they serve, and the need for ongoing work. We are pleased to see this throughline in the educational research in this issue. We hope that this issue serves as a tribute to Dr. Berliner's legacy, and we believe the articles in it underscore the continued efforts of researchers to advance educational research and practice.

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Author Notes

Brandon J. Yuhas

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4160-8145>

Arizona State University

brandon.yuhas@asu.edu

Erica Reed

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8077-8830>

Arizona State University

esreed2@asu.edu

Lindsie Spengler

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7619-2242>

Arizona State University

lindsie.spengler@asu.edu

Fredrick Ayirah

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7150-8261>

Arizona State University

fayirah@asu.edu

Kristin Baillie

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-1283-7320>
Arizona State University
kebailli@asu.edu

Sally Croy
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-9659-1777>
Arizona State University
smcroy1@asu.edu

Enrique Gutiérrez Carreras
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3598-8197>
Arizona State University
egutierrez@asu.edu

Arisandy Johnson
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3509-7709>
Arizona State University
farisand@asu.edu



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