Inaugural Editorial: What We Mean by “Open”

Mark Warschauer
Greg J. Duncan
Jacquelynne S. Eccles
University of California, Irvine

We applaud the American Educational Research Association for its decision to launch an open-access publication: AERA Open. As its inaugural editors, we are inspired by the AERA Council’s Mission Statement for this new journal. We would like to share our vision for making that mission statement a reality, and that means answering this question: What do we mean by “open”?

(1) Open to Readers and Authors. Although scientific and scholarly journals are typically available to university-based researchers in the United States through online libraries, other researchers—including scholars in other countries, educational policymakers, and leaders in the United States and around the world—typically lack online access. AERA Open will be freely available to everyone, and articles will be published as soon as they have been accepted, copy-edited, and type-set online. By providing rapid access to high-quality scholarship, we seek to establish better connections among diverse audiences in the United States and abroad in the field of education research and in policy and practice.

As is true of many other open-access journals, the costs of publishing will be borne in part by authors. However, we are pleased that AERA and Sage will be charging authors very low rates, and even lower rates for graduate students and scholars in low-income countries.

(2) Open to Disciplines and Contexts. Research conducted by education research scholars and published in education research journals is often isolated from the best research on education published by scholars in other disciplines and vice versa. Our goal is to make this journal an exciting home for rigorous research on education conducted in a wide range of academic disciplines. Even more important, we will encourage state-of-the-art interdisciplinary research in emerging areas such as educational neuroscience, behavioral economics, and learning analytics.

Education research journals sometimes restrict their content to particular educational contexts or to research conducted in specific countries or regions. We welcome submissions that examine learning processes and outcomes in any context (e.g., early childhood, primary and secondary, after-school, post-secondary, lifelong learning) or country. Although we anticipate that the vast majority of articles published in AERA Open will be empirical studies, we also seek innovative conceptual articles that make exceptional contributions in illuminating learning processes and outcomes or methodological articles that offer new approaches in the collection or analysis of data.

(3) Open to Inspection and Replication. One-off studies featuring statistically significant results based on single estimation approaches and data sets are of limited value, yet they typify today’s social and behavioral research, including in education research. Indeed, one recent study indicated that only 0.13% of articles published in the top 100 education journals are replications (Makel & Plucker, 2014). To help place education research on the strongest footing, we will ask contributors to engage in extensive robustness-checking using alternative estimation techniques or data sets and report results in online appendices; publish their research instruments, protocols, and guides; and, if appropriate, include direct replications of related findings from published research. Consonant with AERA data-sharing policy, we will expect authors to provide access to article-related data and setup files.

Unlike many journals, AERA Open will also welcome manuscripts that are based exclusively on replication studies as well as manuscripts that report precisely estimated null results. As with all AERA journals, we encourage attention to the AERA standards for reporting on social science (AERA, 2006) and humanities-oriented (AERA, 2009) scholarship. And consistent with “the new statistics” (Cumming, 2014), we encourage estimations based on effect sizes, confidence intervals, and meta-analysis. Also welcome are submissions of rigorous empirical studies that draw on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods traditions other than null hypothesis statistical testing, such as ethnography or data mining.

(4) Open and Accessible to a Broad Audience. The guidelines for AERA Open set forth the parameters for manuscript
submission. Articles should not exceed 8,000 words (exclusive of references, figures, tables, and appendices) without consultation with the editors. In particular, we encourage authors of empirical articles to consider submitting carefully honed manuscripts that are shorter in length and in the following format: (a) a relatively short main article (preferably under 5,000 words) focused on summaries of relevant research literatures, procedures, and results; (b) supplementary online material to provide further details of data, measures, and robustness-checking; and (c) inclusion of or links to data sources. Such a format will allow the broadest possible audience to read the many empirical studies we hope to publish, while also enabling those with deeper interests to explore further details in appendices, and to replicate and extend key results.

In keeping with this fourth goal, we encourage submission of comprehensive reports of large-scale projects that are integrative rather than more piecemeal reports of isolated sets of findings. For such reports, the essence of the analytic goals and findings should be summarized in the main article with the more comprehensive details included in the unconstrained appendices.

Finally, although the journal’s articles will not be grouped in issues, we may have special topical sections that bring together and feature a number of related papers. We welcome recommendations of topics that are nascent, cutting edge, or relevant to education research but largely emerging or anchored in other fields. All such clusters of papers will go through AERA Open’s peer review process. If you have specific ideas and are potentially interested in working with us or have questions related to publishing in the journal, please contact us at AERAOpenEditors@aera.net.

Conclusion

Years before the World Wide Web first appeared, cognitive scientist Stevan Harnad (1991) predicted that the emergence of new “electronic journals” (p. 39) would revolutionize the means of production of knowledge. True to his prediction, new open-access digital journals have accelerated the dissemination of research and scientific communication in a broad array of fields. Through AERA Open, we seek to promote strong education research; strengthen the ties between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners; and foster greater international communication and collaboration in education research scholarship. We invite you to help us achieve this vision by reading our journal, bringing it to the attention of your colleagues, and submitting your best work for publication. In short, we invite you to help us open up education research.

References


MARK WARSCHAUER is Editor in Chief of AERA Open. GREG DUNCAN and JACQUELYNNE ECCLES are Co-Editors. All three are professors at the University of California, Irvine. They can be reached at AERAOpenEditors@aera.net.