



EDITORIAL

## Re-opening Access: Why a journal like ACCESS is needed in education

(Labarga, 2018)

### Introduction

The academic publishing landscape has changed significantly since *ACCESS* was first published in 1982. There has been substantial growth in the number of academic journals (although there is some debate as to the speed and extent of this growth), the rise of the publish or perish culture in academia, which is accompanied by the drive for academics to demonstrate the impact of their research and publications. There also have been new forces emerge during the first two decades of the twenty-first century, including a push to broaden conceptualisations of impact, particularly in fields such as education to also include contributions to the development and improvement of policy and practice, and the emergence of open access publishing and knowledge brokerage organisations that attempt to make academic research more accessible to a broader audience.

Since its inception at The University of Auckland in the 1980s, *ACCESS* has gone through various transformations. Emerging from a dissatisfaction with the perceived limitations of existing journals and their focus on specialist approaches, *ACCESS* aimed to be a ‘forum where current educational concerns – theoretical and practical – can be expressed and critical discussion promoted’. In its early years, under the editorship of [Colin Lankshear](#) (and later Michael Peters), a focus on diverse positions and aspects of cultural change in education stemming from changing global and economic forces were strong features of the journal. From the early 2000s, when the journal moved to Auckland University of Technology (AUT) under the editorship of [Elizabeth Grierson](#), the journal was renamed to *ACCESS: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Cultural and Policy Studies*, to reflect a new focus on research on communications studies with ongoing application to educational contexts. And then when the journal shifted to RMIT University in Australia, its focused changed again to explore the creative arts, creativity in education, aesthetics and arts education. Most recently, the journal has been situated under PESA and its journal *Educational Philosophy and Theory*.

This year, *ACCESS* returns to its editorial roots at The University of Auckland and to many of the ideas that informed its inception. Its sub-title has been updated – *ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education* – and it is relaunched by PESA as an open access journal, blind peer reviewed journal under the PESA Agora project. *ACCESS* is further supported by an exceptional [international editorial board](#), whose knowledge and experience will contribute greatly to *ACCESS*’ future. With its relaunch, it is prescient to explore how *ACCESS* fits into the contemporary publishing, academic and educational landscapes and what the renewed *ACCESS* might offer its readership.

## The new focus of *ACCESS*

The newly written aims and scope for *ACCESS* state that:

The aim of *ACCESS: Contemporary Issues in Education* is to provide an international forum where current educational concerns and trends – theoretical, empirical, and practical – can be expressed and critical discussion promoted ... It accepts manuscripts from diverse local and global perspectives, focused on theoretical, empirical or philosophical research, analysis, and commentary on contemporary issues impacting, influencing and informing teaching, learning, and educational studies.

The breadth and non-ideological positioning of the intended focus of *ACCESS* is hugely important in a world that is increasingly divisive and where too frequently academics and commentators in education advocate for and resort to binary positions. For both contributing authors and the readership, the multiplicity of viewpoints sought by *ACCESS* is an intentional promotion of and push towards a pluralistic conceptualisation of education (Mehta & Teles, 2014). By publishing articles that draw on a range of paradigms and approaches, we are encouraging the readership to engage with articles that may be outside of what they typically read. As such, we hope to chip away at the echo chamber that can so easily exist in academia (and all aspects of life) where we primarily engage with people and read articles with viewpoints that closely align to our own.

*ACCESS* also intentionally focuses on big issues effecting education at both a global and local level. In their publications, academics frequently allude to or position their work within a broader context. However, there is an increasing move in much of academia towards a narrowing of the scope and a zeroing in on the minutiae and detail of a particular research area. There is a risk that academics are becoming increasingly insular, focusing on their particular area of education and educational research and expertise, and infrequently looking beyond this to consider how their work may fit into wider debates or contribute to broader meanings and trends in education and society more generally. As such, it is hoped that publishing an article in *ACCESS* presents an opportunity for contributors to stop, step back from, and reflect on their research, on education and on the world more broadly.

*ACCESS* conceptualizes education in its broadest sense. Frequently, journals focus on a particular aspect of education – early childhood, school-level education, higher and further education, professional learning, the philosophy of education, curriculum studies, policy etc. It is relatively rare to find a journal that recognizes the diversity that is present in education. This diversity plays an important role in helping to see how ideas and research from multiple sectors and perspectives are intersecting and diverging, and ultimately are contributing to the knowledge base on education.

## The style of *ACCESS*

The world outside of academia moves swiftly between a wide range of ever-changing media and styles. Academic writing is much slower to adapt, continuing to largely adhere to traditional formulae (although it must be recognised that there are growing attempts to encourage research to be presented in a range of ways, including those associated with the popular media). *ACCESS* is endeavouring to provide an opportunity for a greater range of options for the presentation of content.

There remains the opportunity to write what could be termed traditional-style articles, that would not be out of place in other journals. However, to sit alongside and to complement these, we also accept shorter-style articles or commentaries focused on a contemporary issue or question. Similarly, we publish interviews with or conversations between leading thinkers in education. The situating of *ACCESS* within PESA Agora also provides an opportunity to connect the articles published in *ACCESS* with the broad range of content on PESA Agora, including videos, podcasts,

regular columns and webinars. PESA Agora, which was conceived to provide a public space for comments on issues and concerns related to the philosophy of education, education more broadly and culture in our contemporary world, positions itself as the 'future of the academic journal'. *ACCESS*, then, becomes one part of this future.

## **The audience of *ACCESS***

Central to *ACCESS*' renewed focus and aims is to engage with and provide for an audience that goes beyond just those in academia. While continuing to be conceived as a [new style of] academic journal, central to our mission is also to embrace and cater for the diversity of people and roles engaged with education, perhaps most notably practitioners and teachers, and policy makers.

The research-practice-policy divide is well recognised (and well-entrenched) in education. This reflects both the different knowledge needs of those working in each of the three domains as well as the different incentives and drivers operating in each. As David Hargreaves reflected over twenty years ago, the academic structure and the research it produces too often is 'destined not to be applicable to, or have serious bearing on, any policy or practice: it has become academic self-indulgence' (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 16). *ACCESS* will attempt to overcome this divide in several ways. The focus of the articles are designed to be relevant to a broad audience, with the emphasis on timely articles focused on contemporary and global issues in education endeavouring to make the content of the journal relevant to a wide range of people. Similarly, encouraging the style of articles to be accessible, and by offering a range of modes of presentation helps to increase the accessibility of content. By deliberately catering to a broad audience, similarly to PESA Agora, *ACCESS* hopes that it can join existing initiatives that are seeking to expand notions of reach and impact in academia.

*ACCESS* also will begin, from Volume 40, publishing what it calls 'practice briefs'. These are intended to enable practicing teachers to contribute short papers focused on research or inquiry that they are undertaking in their practice or presenting their perspectives on big ideas and trends influencing education. In doing so, the journal recognises the power and possibilities offered by teachers' knowledge, the importance of teachers undertaking 'research' in their own contexts, and the need to provide opportunities and spaces where teachers can share their knowledge and perspectives with others (BERA-RSA, 2014; Hood, 2017a; Hood, 2017b; Leat et al., 2014).

## ***ACCESS* as Open Access**

*ACCESS* is an online green open access journal. This reflects changing demands and expectations around the world regarding the opening up of knowledge and research, and enabling accessibility to high quality content for all. It also aligns neatly with the focus, style and intended audience of the journal which seeks to serve a diverse range of people engaged and interested in education. A common critique of academic research in education is that much of it – behind publishing paywalls – remains inaccessible to practitioners and policy makers. Having free and easy access to research and writing on big ideas in education is an essential part of the ongoing education project and to ensuring that everyone has ready access to a diversity of perspectives and knowledge.

Relaunching *ACCESS* in 2020 – a year of such global turmoil and uncertainty – presents both challenges and opportunities. With the strains and extra work experienced by so many people involved in education, writing deadlines are invariably being pushed. However, a journal with the aims and scope of *ACCESS* also has the potential to play an important role in the current context. Any crisis presents the opportunity for change, offering a chance for reflection and to question aspects of business as usual. Covid-19 has worked to shine a spotlight on many of the entrenched challenges and issues facing education around the world, and in many instances has exacerbated these. In doing so, it presents us with an opportunity to look afresh at these challenges and to rethink how we want to respond to and address them. It is essential that we encourage people from

various backgrounds and roles, and those who hold a range of perspectives, to write about and comment on the current context and to identify opportunities, challenges and topics for further discussion, debate and exploration. It is hoped that ACCESS can play a small part of this much larger conversation and we encourage scholars from around the world and from diverse scholarly perspectives to submit articles and to have their scholarship and their voice join this broader conversation.

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