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Editorial by David M. Hoffman<sup>1</sup>, Sarasadat Khalifeh Soltani, Martina Lazarevska

## **An ‘Editorial from the field’: Conceptually navigating language, policy, practice—and the potential for change**

In this Editorial, we do two very different things. Firstly, we highlight our journal’s *Notes from the field* submissions. We describe these types of submissions, their role, key differences from peer-reviewed articles and why we believe these submissions are important. Secondly, we offer our own concrete example of a *Notes from the field* submission which spotlights a very real set of challenges our journal’s team has thought a lot about, since our launch in November 2019.

When it comes to *Notes from the field*, we want to remind our readers that we hope to receive more submissions of ideas that might not yet be quite ready for peer-review but are developed enough to offer up for discussion across our journal’s growing global audiences. Quite often, our journal’s readers are working with ideas that show a great deal of promise but are not yet to a point where they can be published as empirical studies, scholarly essays, theoretical articles, or literature reviews. That said, some ideas, even in their earliest stages of development are well-suited for what we are thinking of as an “in-between” space or a “middle ground”: more than a book review, blog post, conversation, or interview, but not quite—*yet*—ready for peer reviewed status but moving in that direction.

In *Notes from the field* submissions, we are purposefully creating a space for “half-baked”, early thinking, even “messy” ideas. This type of early thinking is *exactly* what we are looking for! Examples include thoughts that need a bit of input and interaction from peers to ‘move things further along’ in some cases, gently suggesting ‘going back to the drawing board’ in other cases, or perhaps opening-up and revealing connections with colleagues in other places and spaces with similar interests who might be open to collaboration.

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We have a hunch there are lots of ideas out there which need a bit of exposure to sunlight to grow. To be clear, we are not aiming for “anything goes”, rather a space to test ideas and see if they resonate with colleagues and perhaps confirm a hunch is worth pursuing. If you have something you want to publish, work-through—and especially if you think your topic might be part of a wider dialogue, something controversial (that really is not), something uncontroversial (that ought to be), a good argument, even a healthy, thought-provoking rant that needs to be aired; something that might be of interest to more than “just you”, *Notes from the field* in the JPHE might be exactly the right place to publish! At the end of this editorial, there is a short, practical section that hopefully answers more detailed questions about *Notes from the field* submissions and our open review procedure. In addition, you can always reach out to us directly, via email to ask more questions if you believe your submission might be what we are looking for.

### **Moving on**

The second aim and main focus of this issue’s editorial, is for David, Sara and Martina, three members of our journal’s editorial team, to attempt and move a vibrant and often very messy conversation that has been going on *inside* JPHE’s editorial team *outside*, into the wider spaces of our readership with our own *Notes from the field*, or as we call it an ‘*Editorial from the field*’.

In this editorial (from the field), we hope to spark dialogue on a set of broad ideas we are engaging from our far-flung locations in Finland (David), Iran (Sara) and Sweden (Martina). In addition to geographical space, the three of us have our own take on *Notes from the field* from different gendered perspectives, career stages, disciplines, specialties, as well as the different roles we have in our journal’s team. These differences in locations and perspectives are what piqued our interest in further developing *Notes from the field*, as a distinct space in our journal. It is our hope that anyone with insights about our topic might contact us with reflections, critique or input that will help us engage, navigate, and further refine the preliminary set of ideas we present in the next few pages.

In the following section, the central focus of our *Notes from the field* (below) concerns tensions that we argue often prompt far more unquestioned assumptions and unanswered questions, than interesting answers and novel insights, depending on what part of the world the reader might be sitting in, and especially the position and role that same reader might have in higher education and/or scholarly publishing. Specifically, we are thinking of conceptual dimensions which explain,

in part, the tension between *content* and *form*, especially the way in which language principles, policies and practices bear on work that is—and is not—published.

If our topic is not of interest or—even better—if you have a topic that is more interesting (which is quite likely), skip straight to the end of this editorial for the practical information on submitting your own *Notes from the field*. If our topic seems interesting, please keep reading and do not hesitate to let us know what you think of our preliminary ideas.

### **Is ‘doing something different’ in the already saturated field of higher education journals even possible?**

The preliminary ideas we now present might be seen as an attempt to get conceptual-level traction on a set of key aspirations that have defined the highest hopes of our JPHE team from the earliest days of our launch. Specifically, our hope has always been to offer an evolving, multifaceted, highly creative, open-access, unconventional, free, internet-based alternative to conventional, commercially driven publications produced by large, international publishing houses. That’s not the same as saying we are opposed to for-profit journals and publishing. But it is saying we see ourselves quite differently. Not “better” or “worse”, but clearly *different*, in a hopefully healthy sense.

One of the ways several of our team members began thinking about, when it came to distinguishing ourselves from other higher education journals, from the beginning of our launch, in November 2019, was the tension between *content* and *form*. We are now, in a sense, revisiting JPHE’s very first editorial (Aarnikoivu et al., 2019) and highlighting—once again—key tensions with an aim to continue that conversation. It is also important for us to stress—as we did earlier—that we have kept our conversation going about content and form *inside* our editorial team. With this editorial, we hope to make a few key aspects of our internal conversations about form and content more visible to our readers, in a way we all hope to build on.

There were limitations to struggling with this tension for our team. The main limitation for David, Sara, and Martina (if we speak for ourselves) was our lack of experience within the realities of international scholarly publishing, at scale. Lack of experience aside, at the point when each of us joined the team and committed to working with our journal, some of the key dimensions or sub-tensions that explain, in part, how we have begun to think about the tension between content and form began to emerge.

*Two obvious dimensions: Inclusion versus exclusion and monolingualism versus multilingualism*

The first clear tension or sub-dimension that popped clearly into view for many members of our journal's team was inclusion *versus* exclusion. In almost everything we do in higher education we have opportunities to be *inclusive* or *exclusive*. While that is happening, almost all higher education actors are continuously presented with the option to privilege *monolingual* or *multilingual* approaches to the core missions of higher education. These two distinct dimensions, a conceptual proxy for that all three of us feel to be important, social justice (inclusion/exclusion), along with two basic orientations to language principles, policies and practices (mono/multilingualism) can be used to form a rudimentary conceptual field or typology, in which principles, policies, and practices play out within concrete settings involving all aspects of higher education's core missions: *teaching*, *research*, and specific forms of *service* to communities of practice within higher education, as well as purposeful *engagement* within and beyond the boundaries of our disciplines and campuses. Personally, each of our practices, professionally, as scholars, involves more or less constant multilingualism, as well as our shared commitment and aspiration to be more inclusive, where possible, not less inclusive.

In addition to our three core missions, the two dimensions highlighted above shape action in focused domains across educational ecosystems everywhere, like policymaking, leadership practices, the administrative routines and specialties which support our work, and *especially pathways to publishing and publications*, which we decided to bring into conceptual focus, in our Editorial from the field.

Initially thinking about the most obvious two dimensions that formed two intersecting tensions or spectrums, specifically, *inclusion* and *exclusion*, along with *monolingualism* and *multilingualism*. These two dimensions turned out to be the beginning (*early thinking*) or foundation of our broad-brush initial attempt at conceptualizing key challenges our journal's team may be dealing with. We recognize that a typology defined by two dimensions is an abstract simplification of complexity. Like all typologies, this danger of oversimplification suggested, for us, further qualification, definition, operationalization, perhaps measurement, analysis, and most likely critical assessment and reflection. All that aside, these two initial dimensions, even if minimally problematized, form a sufficient basis for *beginning a discussion* aimed at initiating and sustaining wider *dialogue* involving (at minimum) three key groups: our journal's key audiences, our journal's editorial team, and our journal's editorial board. Which is why we decided to present our discussion in the form of a *Notes from the field* submission.

What our Journal's Editorial Team (ET) has noticed since November 2019, because most of us are scholars highly interested in the tensions between content

and form, the conventional and unconventional, the reproduction of power relations or the transformation of power relations, is that it is far easier to *silence* challenging, provocative creativity than *facilitate* it—especially creativity that is critical of prevailing power relations within higher education.

The most common and concrete example we often encounter is in reviewing texts which are well-suited to national discourses, disciplinary/specialist discourses or especially the combination of national/disciplinary/specialist discourses, where many types of writing conventions, forms of argumentation, and expectations of voice can be assumed, but only within a particular national or disciplinary silo or patch of academic turf. The challenge in this sort of manuscript is that it might *only* be clear within a very circumscribed setting and community of practice, yet conceal very important general insights, relevant internationally and many fields of science and higher education areas. The value of these manuscripts easily gets “lost in translation”, even though we believe we are operating in a single language. In other words, where a text has been written *as if* it’s only going to be read within a single higher education (national) ecosystem, where important cultural and linguistic assumptions are shared and can be assumed, or where scholars from a particular discipline/field/specialty write *as if* only folks in that narrow lane are going to read the work and benefit from outstanding insights, the simplest thing to do—as an editor—is click the ‘reject’ icon. Specifically, silence authors who may not have realized their excellent work *can be written up in a way that is highly relevant to scholars on other continents, in vastly different disciplines, fields of study and specialties they have never heard of or thought much about*. In other words, writing for general, international audiences, across disciplinary boundaries and higher education missions requires a skill set many of us never learn and many struggle with, even if we become aware of the challenges. Facilitating reviews of excellent, often unconventional work, which has been written in ways that render the international and interdisciplinary implications *invisible*, makes for long review times and often requires coaching and coaxing reviewers to resist the temptation to simply silence and reject unfamiliar, unconventional, and non-conformist voices.

Silence is golden in some places. Our hope is that higher education does not need to be one of them, except where there are excellent reasons for silence, (which do exist). ‘Silencing’ or ‘canceling’ others on the other hand, while very popular in some circles, is hopefully not what higher education is about, when we are at our best.

Thinking about *what counts* as higher education and the incredible variety of ideas we hope to encounter as a journal brings a third dimension and very challenging tension into view, which is not always obvious, but is always present: *power*.

*Taking another step back, conceptually speaking: Forms of power in higher education*

In addition to the obvious realities of inclusion/exclusion and monolingualism/multilingualism, a third dimension, *power*, in the sense that Bourdieu (1988, 2004) theorized the field of academic space, makes almost everything more complex in higher education. Power, in this sense is defined by a tension between two fundamentally distinct forms of capital unique to higher education: *scientific power* which transforms the very nature of science itself and quite regularly societies and the eras in which we all live. At the opposite end of this spectrum is *academic power*, which is focused on reproducing power relations within academia: specifically, preserving the power and privilege of scholars who already have power and privilege, within science, mainly via an intense preoccupation of controlling the time of subordinates (Bourdieu, 1988). Since higher education is shaped by—as it shapes—societies, these two distinct extremes scientific and academic power within higher education, manifest in power relations across wider society in ways that are inextricably linked and often very challenging to untangle and unpack (cf. Bourdieu, 1988, 2004; Brennan et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2014; Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016). Higher education scholars are generally not too famous when it comes to the critical analysis of power relations *within* higher education (cf. Alvesson, 2003; Bourdieu, 2004; Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016; Tight, 2012) and early-stage/career scholars are often advised this type of backyard research is to be avoided at all costs (Hoffman et al., 2014; see also Aarnikoivu in this issue on the topic of power from a doctoral researchers' perspective). Bourdieu (1988) himself anticipating criticism of his seminal analysis of power in academia characterized his work 'A Book for Burning'.

In discussing the type of scholarship we—David, Sara and Martina—enjoy *doing* the most and on occasion have been lucky enough to participate in and publish we have become very aware of the particular forms of power at play and especially how this particular tension is often the least likely to be explicitly discussed in contrast to the first two tensions we highlighted (above). When preparing our editorial, we talked a lot about how power manifests and has been (and is being) experienced by the three of us and differs, as we shift between global, national, and local competitive horizons (Hoffman et al. 2016). Notions of power in education is also something that doctoral researchers are expected to understand and navigate in their academic careers as an integral part of researchers' education.

What complicates the analysis of power in higher education, in many settings, is that there is quite often a lot of transformation and reproduction going on in very close proximity, depending on what we choose to bring into focus, as

analysts or *editors, reviewers, readers citing sources*. The question—‘who do we give a voice to and who do we exclude?’—has shaped a lot of our JPHE team meetings’ discussions. The idea for *Notes from the field* submissions, or a different type of “middle ground” that does not exist for many, is a concrete example that flowed from our team’s discussion as to how we could include more and varied content from more places, people and settings. Metaphorically, our team sees *Notes from the field* as another door into the ivory tower of scholarly publishing focused on higher education.

Without getting too far into the weeds of social theory, the three focal dimensions, social justice, language principles, policies, and practices and power—along with their inherent tensions—introduce three big picture questions that can be asked within any higher education setting, especially publishing. Specifically:

- Are our processes, policies, and practices inclusive or exclusive?
- Are our principles, policies and practices privileging monolingual or multilingual discourses?
- Are we mainly reproducing power and privilege for those who already have power and privilege, or are we facilitating transformative power relations and potential, in a positive sense, across transnational higher education ecosystems?

None of these questions or tensions are new, nor are they strictly ‘either/or’ propositions. Higher education is complex in the sense that answers to questions like these are often ‘*both/and*’ realities and cannot be reduced to ‘*either/or*’ oversimplifications. Transnational realities often mean our own best efforts, even on our best days, may very well be continuously *undercut from within the higher education ecosystems we work within and across* (cf. Bourdieu, 1988, 2004; Brennan et al., 2018; Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016).

However, imperfect our initial questions might be in this editorial, it could be that continuously seeking out and posing these types of questions to ourselves, over time, sets up an arc that bends toward a longer term, more inclusive, multilingual set of principles, policies and practices that result in the type of journal most of our team “signed up for”, when we came together in 2019, as well as our newer members who have joined us, since that time. In a perfect world, over time, a dialogue might result in increasingly more relevant and focused questions, aimed at enhancing our journal’s creative potential and ultimately, our journal’s collective contribution to higher education. Our modest ideas regarding *Notes from the field* could be the start of a modest contribution to the wider field of higher education publishing.



Our hope is that by introducing these preliminary ideas, we begin talking about, working toward and developing a clear set of *evolving* principles, policies and practices that might come in handy for our audiences—especially authors, our journal team and editorial board. We would argue that an evolving set of principles, policies and practices can be used to purposefully and continuously mediate and problematize the tension between the most creative *content* we hope to publish and the very practical, relentlessly detailed, processes entailed in *form* that governs the practices of publishing a scholarly journal. In a word: *praxis*.

Our initial ideas boil down to three key tensions, and questions, that all play out very differently across the complex field of transnational higher education depending on particular *positions* in the field or *trajectory* through it; whether one's work aims at (re)defining the cutting edge of science or is addressed to a colleague just down the hall (and anywhere, in between those two extremes). Another example of alternative texts, used by many journals, is change through interviews. For instance, an interview as form of a co-constructed/co-authored dialogue between an early-career researcher and a highly-recognized academic in HE research from two different countries to explore further feminist praxis and gender power relations in HE (Khalifeh Soltani & Grant, 2022). Along these lines, another type of publication from our journal's team, pushing the boundaries of publishing in HE journals can be found in the section *Conversations*.

With regard to *Notes from the field*, as well as the above-mentioned different forms of content we are trying out, our argument, *from the field*, is that asking the three questions (on the previous page), moving forward, may hopefully keep us on track and—in part—result in a journal our key audiences, editorial board and editorial team are all happy with and value. Posing these three analytical focal points, their tensions, and questions to our journal's audiences, team and board also underlines a key strength of *Notes from the field*. We are only starting a conversation here and are acutely aware that far better focal points, dimensions, tensions, and questions might exist (probably do exist), all of which could move our journal in the direction we hope to travel together, in a more imaginative, creative, and rigorous manner.

Either way, the most interesting facet of higher education is that our work—*on a good day*—allows us to ask and seek better questions, as well as enter dialogue with folks who are keen on doing *exactly the same thing*. This type of potential dialogue is exactly what the JPHE's *Notes from the field* section has been designed for.

In the following section we present what an abstract conceptualization of our three dimensions *might* look like. We are painfully aware that many are not overly fond of abstract conceptualization. That said, we suggest, as these

conceptualizations are still *Notes from the field*, that thinking carefully about abstract ideas is merely a milestone on the way to methodology and methods that are both far more intuitive and appealing, like (spoiler alert) facilitated visualization or other arts-based methods. In other words, we are using editorial license to *set a direction*, for follow-on peer-reviewed work. If you have critique for us, that is warmly welcome, and it is why we are asking for it.

*Abstract visualization as our 'point of departure': Facilitated visualization as our 'destination'*

The tension between the *content* we seek and defining the *form* that makes publishing both feasible and something worth spending time on, has presented our team with a continuous set of challenges when it comes to including authors from as many places, groups, situations, disciplines, circumstances, specialties, generations, types of institutions as possible, while working within principles, policies and practices that evolve in a purposeful, constructive direction with regard to what a journal might look like if our journal team succeeds.

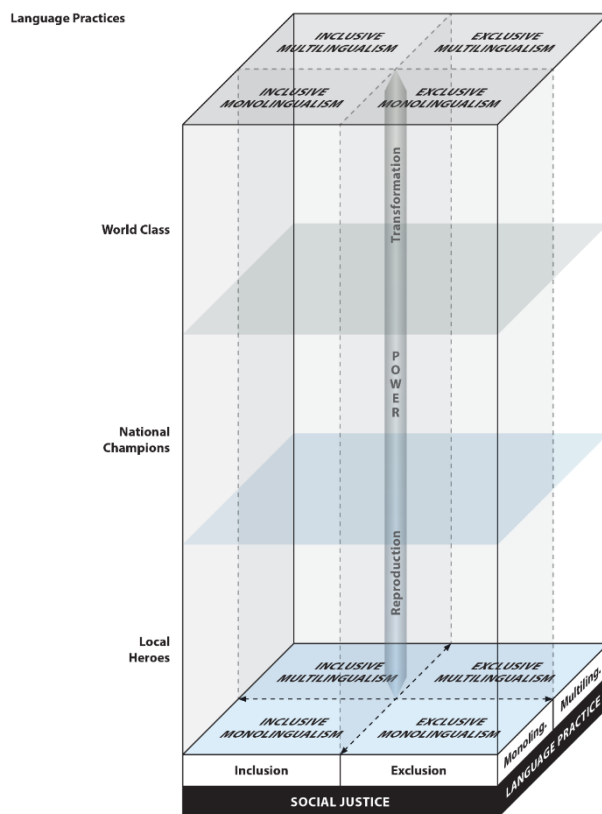
With respect to the linguistic inclusion, many of us wish, hope for, or even aspire to a multilingual journal, *someday*. These types of journals and publications exist, and as Taylor (2021) persuasively argued, developments in ICT, particularly AI may answer our hopes sooner than many might imagine with regard to the JPHE becoming a multilingual journal. That said, symmetrically defining the fundamental distinction and tension between the actual pragmatic set of monolingual practices our team *currently uses* and forms of multilingual publishing practices many of us *aspire to*, is a clear dimension that we hope continuously reminds our ET, if our key audiences and editorial board agree with us, of *unrealized types of potential* that is over the horizon, if our interest in inclusion and power remain genuine. That multilingual reality, distant for now, immediately introduces a host of new practical issues and actualities that would need to be addressed if the JPHE were to become more inclusive and genuinely multilingual. Additionally, like any transformative development, the negative potential of AI could as easily reinforce monolingualism. While the multilingual and positive potential of AI is obvious, that cannot be an assumption and the controversial and negative aspects of AI need to be at the front of our minds as well.

The field we are thinking about, initially, might look something like Figure 1 (below). While abstractly problematizing three dimensions in this fashion leaves many cold and others scratching their heads, it is highly useful in two respects. Firstly, an abstract visualization of this type allows *robust critical feedback* on the ideas we are merely speculating about, which is crucial if we are to successfully sharpen, improve, refine, and ultimately *apply* these ideas. Secondly, if the ideas

are sound, theoretical, and actionable, in a more practical sense, their application can be made easier—far easier—using modes of inquiry, methodologies and methods that make our initially abstract ideas more intuitive and accessible. Our hope is to use an arts-based approach, like *facilitated visualization*, in order to further develop ideas like these in practical settings. What *that* looks like is a topic for another day and hopefully a peer-reviewed article.

### Figure 1.

*Conceptualizing the field in which form and content are socially mediated by journal teams.*



*Note. The diagram is adapted from Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016.*

### Next steps

Our journal team has now had plenty of time to experience some of the freedom and creative potential that comes from working in the open access space. It is fair to say we have fully enjoyed that freedom in many ways. However, we very quickly

noticed, this freedom comes with a serious set of challenges. This is especially the case if we are really interested in opening-up a transnational, multilingual or multi-voiced scholarly space for creativity, criticality and ‘out of the box’ ideas that might be viewed as out of place in many types of journals or spaces across global higher education.

When it comes to engaging and navigating an evolving approach to the underlying tensions which explain, in part, the broader tension between content and form, we hope our early thinking can be used by our journal’s *key audiences, editorial team, and editorial board* to bring more possibilities and potential into view over time, and keep faith with our journal team’s aspiration to be distinct in an interesting way, especially for scholars writing about higher education, but who may feel their work, voice or perspective seems unwelcome in some spaces.

In this initial conceptualization, David, Sara and Martina are thinking about inward-looking national, regional, linguistic, disciplinary, organizational, professional, and institutional silos—just to name a few of the spaces which have their own unique combinations of inclusion/exclusion, as well as monolingual/multilingual principles, policies, and practices. In these silos, power is often *invisible*, something in the background, most often undiscussed and taken as self-evident across transnational scholarly space (see Hoffman & Välimaa, 2016). We—David, Sara, and Martina—have both studied power across and within higher education and experience it daily, as do scholars everywhere. The three of us are not overly thrilled with the idea of assuming anything about power, and our shared interest in being more explicit about how power plays into everyday publishing principles, policies and practices led us to wanting to collaborate on the ideas that we have presented in this *Editorial from the field*.

Two of the tensions our team has never escaped from are our desire to be an inclusive journal and to mitigate the normative views what all too often turns out to be very narrow, monolingual norms of international publishing. In addition, several of us sense that the monolingual norms foisted on colleagues around the world bear most heavily on many whose first choice—if a choice existed—for publishing their work would *never* be English.

One way to open-up space, linguistically speaking, that many recognize and have acted on is to recognize and flexibly work with *the many forms of the English language* that are used around the globe. To be critical, that’s a far cry from the flexibility that exists in settings, situations, and spaces where multilingualism is everyday practice, or where even more interesting possibilities, like trans-language exist.

And to be candid, language, per se., is only ‘half the story’, as our team found out as we have had to work through the broader set of realities entailed in

publishing a journal, especially a *free, all-volunteer* journal. These realities include adopting and working with an ICT-based platform for our content, selecting a style guide for our content, crafting guidelines for authors and reviewers, defining a consistent process that determines how authors submit different types of work, what that work needs to look like, regardless of the ideas—and how several types of highly interesting content ends up in the form of a visually appealing, seamless whole. These practical realities are issues that we regularly discuss, develop, and change, in order to hopefully make the publishing process smoother for our all-volunteer team, working with our volunteer reviewers, all of whom are working for the benefit of our growing number of creative, contributing authors. The result, we hope will be a place and space where our shared dreams of a (someday) multilingual and, thus, fully inclusive journal will come to be!

Our *Editorial from the field* stops here, for now. If you read it, thanks! What we are hoping for, from anyone interested in these sorts of ideas, is critique, feedback, collaboration, insights, ideas—*anything*—that helps us improve, sharpen, develop, refine, and ultimately *apply* principles, policies and practices. Our quest continues to make the JPHE more inclusive, by using language(s) creatively, rigorously, and critically, in constructive ways that work for more people *beyond* higher education—because of what we are all doing *within* higher education.

**PRACTICAL INFORMATION: Call for Papers for *Notes from the field* (NFTF) section of the *Journal of Praxis in Higher Education*.**

We invite submissions for a special section of our journal: *Notes from the field* (NFTF). NFTF submissions address our commitment to inclusive journal publishing principles, policies, and practices. Our aim is to showcase ideas ranging from innovative and unconventional to everyday conversations with a colleague down the hall or reflective thoughts on daily teaching and research practices in academia. We welcome ideas that are not yet fully formed and formulated as is more typical in peer-reviewed articles. Submissions that are creative, in terms of both form and content are welcome and encouraged. For more information about our aims and scope, see [here](#).

We encourage authors to submit original works that challenge traditional academic conventions and push the boundaries of established publishing processes and conventions. In this space we especially encourage early-stage/career scholars and in particular doctoral researchers to share and reflect on their journey, by contributing with—among other things—writings centering around their literal ‘notes from the field’.

*We are particularly interested in papers that:*

- Present novel ideas or approaches that have not yet been fully developed or tested.
- Explore unconventional points of view, perspectives, research questions or hypotheses.
- Use creative forms of expression, such as arts-based approaches including (but not limited) to poetry, fiction, or visual art, to communicate insights.

NFTF Submissions will undergo an *open review process*, with a JPHE Senior Editor who will assist authors in developing a focus with originality, creativity, and potential with respect to building a dialogue with scholars or education practitioners within and across different disciplines, a very wide variety of locations, types of institutions and different milieus.

*Submission guidelines:*

Please make sure your submission clearly indicates '*Notes from the field*'.

NFTF submissions must be original work and not been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere.

In terms of length, please refer to the JPHE guidelines, as NFTF should generally follow our journal's formatting guidelines. For more information and submission information, see our link and guidelines [here](#) and use this [JPHE Paper Template](#).

We look forward to receiving your submissions and exploring the exciting possibilities of unconventional ideas and creative forms to build dialogues!

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