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FOREWORD

Soaring Together: Foreword to the Educational Justice Symposium 2026 Special Edition

Dr. Chevelle S. Hall[1]

[1] Founding Editor-in-Chief, Educational Justice Journal; Professor of Sport Management, Virginia State University
Correspondence: chall@vsu.edu

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EDITORIAL NOTE
This foreword was written by the Editor-in-Chief and was not externally peer reviewed. The articles in this edition were reviewed under the journal's double-blind peer review process.

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When we gathered in Rockhampton, Queensland, from 24 to 26 August 2026, the Educational Justice Symposium was the first of its kind. It was a joint undertaking of the Educational Justice Institute, Virginia State University and Central Queensland University, and it brought educators, researchers, practitioners and community partners from Australia and the United States into a single conversation about what educational justice demands of the institutions that claim to serve learners. It is a privilege to introduce the first fruits of that conversation in this special edition of the *Educational Justice Journal*.

The gathering took place on Darumbal Country, and we were welcomed by Darumbal Elders and by the leadership of CQUniversity. The theme, *Innovative Leadership in Education: NextGen Learning — Exploring the Future of Education*, was carried by two symbols: the phoenix of the Educational Justice Institute, a bird of renewal that rises from adversity, and the kookaburra, whose laughter calls a community together at dawn and dusk. Together they gave us our title, *Soaring Together*, and they describe the spirit in which the three days were conducted. Each morning began with a Reflection

Wall, facilitated by Dr. Brian S. Maiden, a grounding practice that invited those present to pause and listen before the formal programme began. That habit of listening shaped the sessions that followed and, as these pages show, it has shaped the scholarship as well.

From the outset, the Symposium was intended to lead to publication. Presenters were invited to expand their sessions into full manuscripts, and manuscripts were reviewed through the journal's double-blind peer review process. Acceptance for presentation carried no guarantee of acceptance for publication, and the five articles gathered here are the first to complete that process. I am grateful to the reviewers, whose careful and generous work remains anonymous by design, and to my fellow Editors-in-Chief, Dr. Aaron Livingston, Dr. Brian S. Maiden, Dr. Corey Bloomfield and Dr. Linda Lorenza, whose commitment to this edition made it possible.

The contributions that follow approach educational justice from different positions, yet they share a conviction: that the burden of adaptation should not rest with those who are least able to carry it. Dr. Gemma Mann asks what it would mean for institutions to learn how to belong to their students, rather than the reverse, and offers three practical ways to begin. Dr. Trixie James turns to Enabling education and argues that truth telling, renarrativisation and a subversive habitus allow students to re-author deficit stories, while making belonging a pedagogical and institutional responsibility. Ana Larsen listens to Enabling educators themselves, who act as discursive brokers between institutional norms and the needs of structurally disadvantaged students, often at considerable emotional cost. Cameron Leeder extends that concern to the staff of flexible schools, proposing that self-care cannot be separated from the workplace conditions in which it is practised. Geoff Higgins closes the edition with a community-led effort to create a safe place for young people in Rockhampton, a place that does not yet exist but that a community has begun, together, to imagine.

The programme also gave our United States delegates a view of the context in which this work is done, including a First Nations art exhibit and a visit to the Edmund Rice Flexible Learning Centre, and Dr. Willis W. Walter of Virginia State University joined us as guest speaker. The exchange between our two countries, so different in history and so alike in the inequalities that remain, was among the most valuable parts of the week. Some of the authors say as much in their own reflections: that what they carried home was a sense of belonging, connectedness and shared values, and the recognition that there is still a great deal to discuss.

I hope this edition is read in that spirit. The Symposium was a beginning, not an endpoint, and I invite readers to regard these articles as one contribution to an enduring, global conversation about what educational justice can and should look like. To every presenter, delegate and partner who joined us in Rockhampton, in person or online, thank you for soaring with us.

Dr. Chevelle S. Hall
Founding Editor-in-Chief, Educational Justice Journal