

EDITORIAL

Reviewing for *JUME*: Advancing the Field of *Urban Mathematics Education*

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Peer review—I think all of us in the academy have a love–hate relationship with this facet of our multifaceted academic lives. Most of us, specifically those who have earned, sought, or will seek tenure, have experienced a full range of emotions with respect to the peer-review process: joy, sadness, pride, disappointment, confusion, success, defeat, and so on. I certainly have experienced this smorgasbord, if you will, of emotions throughout my 15 years in the academy (which includes my 4 years as a doctoral student). During the past decade and a half, I have been a receiver, writer, requester, and assessor of peer review. Within each of these roles, although I might not always want to admit it, I have learned something invaluable about the process: when written with both evaluative and educative purposes in mind, peer review, more times than not, just makes us and, perhaps more importantly, our research smarter.¹

Silver (2003), in his *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education (JRME)* editorial “Reflections on Reviews and Reviewers,” made a distinction between the evaluative and educative purposes of reviews. The evaluative purpose, as discussed by Silver, is rather self-evident: researchers with particular expertise identify and discuss what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of a submitted manuscript and make a recommendation regarding its publication (i.e., they *evaluate* the publication worthiness of a manuscript). The educative purpose is not always as self-evident: researchers with particular expertise provide comments and suggestions about theoretical and methodological choices of a submitted manuscript and often attempt to extend the findings and implications. They do all of this with the intention of assisting the author in revising the manuscript or in making decisions about future projects (i.e., they *educate* the author about other possibilities).

¹ One should not infer from this statement that I accept and participate in the peer-review process—a more than 1,000-year-old idea (Spier, 2002) argued to be “a flawed process at the heart of science” (R. Smith, 2006)—without critique. The extensive scholarship of Foucault on discourse and discursive practices, surveillance and discipline, and power/knowledge critically interrogates the entire enterprise called science, including (directly and indirectly) the peer-review process (see, e.g., 1969/1972, 1966/1994, 1975/1995).

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Pushing further into this distinction between evaluative and educative purposes, Smith (2004) suggested that reviewers approach the task as one of mentoring authors by writing “reviews that teach” (p. 292). Such reviews, he claimed, “clearly articulate the main reasons why authors’ current arguments are inadequate *and* also present strategies they might pursue in correcting those deficiencies” (p. 293, emphasis in original). Borrowing three practices from good classroom teaching, Smith offered a frame of sorts of how to write reviews that teach. The reviewer needs to (a) “understand what the author thinks and, to the greatest extent possible, why he or she thinks it” (p. 293); (b) identify not only particular errors in the manuscript (or project), but also the general research misconceptions that are evident; and (c) model clear and sound arguments throughout the review, especially those that conclude with an unfavorable recommendation. Writing reviews that teach evidently are more time consuming. Nonetheless, Smith’s proposal for reviews that teach was grounded in his conviction that

(a) it is what [the field of mathematics education] produces that counts, and (b) the field does not principally advance when we make individual contributions to the literature. Rather, it advances when the average quality of published research rises. Reviews that teach are an important influence on average quality because they supplement, in a very cost-effective way, the professional education of researchers. (p. 294)

In repositioning Smith’s (2004) argument in the context of urban mathematics education, we have:

It is what the field of urban mathematics education produces that counts. The field does not principally advance with individual contributions to the literature but rather when the average quality of published research rises. Reviews that teach are an important influence on average quality because they supplement, in a very cost-effective way, the professional education of urban researchers.

But before discussing what it might mean to advance the field of *urban* mathematics education, we must first ask, “Is it even a field?” Well, let us see. It has its own *Urban Education* special issue (Tate, 1996). It has its own *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education* (Matthews, 2008). It has its own *Handbook of Urban Education* chapter (Martin & Larnell, 2013). It has its own *Encyclopedia of Mathematics Education* entry (Stinson, 2014). It has its own (developing) theoretical framework (Larnell & Bullock, 2015). And Google and Google Scholar searches of the phrase return 5,610 and 365 hits, respectively. So, let us dispense with arguing whether or not urban mathematics education constitutes a unique disciplinary field, and just agree that it does.²

² Let us also dispense here with the challenges of “defining” or describing urban mathematics education. The complexities of that task have been critically discussed at length in Martin and Larnell (2013).

So then, given that *urban mathematics education* is its own unique disciplinary field, how might it be advanced and who is responsible for that advancement? Over the past eight years, one group that has been instrumental in advancing the field is comprised of the scholars, researchers, practitioners, and graduate students who have offered their time and expertise to review manuscripts for *JUME*. Without authors *and* reviewers the journal would not exist. There have been approximately 230 double-blind reviews written by over 100 unique reviewers.³ We celebrate those reviewers who have written reviews that teach. These reviewers, who understand that reviewing is indeed scholarly work (Heid & Zbiek, 2009), have assisted authors in getting smarter about their work and, in turn, they have made the research and scholarship available in the disciplinary field, well, just smarter.

Recently, I completed a 3-year term as a member of the *JRME* Editorial Panel. During my time on the panel, I learned much about the historical beginnings and inner workings of what is certainly the most established and arguably the most respected journal in mathematics education.⁴ I also learned much from the extraordinary leadership of Cynthia Langrall, *JRME* editor during my tenure on the panel. Through the next several months, I plan to use my newly acquired insights about knowledge production and dissemination and work with members of the *JUME* Editorial Team to think and rethink the inner workings of *JUME*, including the peer-review process. We will keep readers, reviewers, and authors up to date as changes are implemented that will hopefully continue to advance the field of urban mathematics education in more ethically and just ways. As *JUME* matures, going through growing pains along the way, we hope to forever get closer to our mission:

To foster a transformative global academic space in mathematics that embraces critical research, emancipatory pedagogy, and scholarship of engagement in urban communities.

In the mean time, the *JUME* Editorial Team invites you to become part of a unique group that is advancing the field through writing reviews that teach. If you have not reviewed for *JUME* in the past, “make this your year to review” (Langrall, 2015, p. 2)—you can sign up [here](#). And if you have reviewed in the past, please

³Every other year the *JUME* Editorial Team acknowledges the significant and time consuming contributions of our reviewers, please see [January 2008–December 2009](#), [January 2010–December 2011](#), and [January 2012–December 2013](#).

⁴ One should not infer from this statement that I uncritically position *JRME* as the “gold standard” in mathematics education knowledge production and dissemination. To do so, would be wrong. The genesis of *JUME* was in reaction to the very fact that the mainstream or, more aptly, the “White-stream” journals (Gutiérrez, 2011) of mathematics education research are all but void of the kind of research that is published in *JUME* (see Matthews, 2008; Stinson, 2010).

make sure that your profile information, including your areas of interest, is up to date and complete.

—We look forward to receiving your reviews that teach!

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