

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Six years ago, a group of enterprising William & Mary doc students got together to create a student-focused, student-run journal of educational research. Their intent was to provide both an outlet for students to publish their work and an opportunity for students to engage in authentic peer review and editing. Since then, we have continually improved the online presence, the print quality, the manuscript review process, and the reach of the WMER. It became clear to us last year, though, that a new visioning process needed to occur for the second phase of the journal's existence. There were new challenges and opportunities to which our work needed to respond.

Last summer, the WMER underwent a strategic planning process, during which our members reflected on what they want to get out of their experience reviewing for our journal. As a result of these discussions, we began to conceive of the WMER as chiefly a professional development activity for future researchers and consumers of research. This required a shift away from a production mindset, in which most of our work was spent in putting together the journal for publication, to a peer review focus, in which most of our work is spent reviewing, critiquing, and responding to author submissions. We crafted a new mission statement to reflect this new direction:

Our mission as a transdisciplinary community of practice is to engage in collaborative peer review and publication, build interest and understanding across educational disciplines, and expand the reach of student research, in order to prepare scholars and practitioners for professional success.

Like any good mission statement, ours contains several carefully chosen words and phrases. As it turns out, these heavily deliberated turns of phrase contain the essence of our work, and warrant some elaboration.

“Transdisciplinary community of practice.” We have tried to maintain a broad view of what kinds of research are appropriate in an educational review, from the philosophical to the technical, the mathematical to the anthropological. As a community of practice, the editors and reviewers of the *Ed Review* are a self-selected group of master's and doctoral students, practitioners and researchers, from all departments, who share a commitment to rigorous critique of original student research. In the School of Education, we are the only student organization that can

boast voluntary participation from every department: Curriculum and Instruction; Educational Policy, Planning, and Leadership; and School Psychology and Counselor Education. These overlapping dimensions of reviewer diversity enrich both our own experience on the journal, as well as the feedback our submitting authors receive.

“Collaborative peer review.” Our manuscript review process is unique. In keeping with our mission as an educative experience and not merely a production-minded publication, it is a collaborative and iterative process. One of the defining characteristics of a community of practice is that its practice changes as its members learn how to do what they do better. Parts of our process will undoubtedly change, but at its core it is a cohort-based peer review exercise wherein each submission is double-blind reviewed by a cohort of at least four students with a range of experience levels, disciplines, and areas of focus. Reviewers read, score, and comment on each submission independently, and then meet to discuss their responses and propose a collective decision to the Editorial Board. This collaborative dimension of our process is how we are making our work a learning experience and not merely an instrumental one.

To say something has been “a learning experience” has become a euphemistic cliché for something that didn’t go as planned, or that didn’t quite work out in the way one might have intended. This is certainly true of our first year with the new cohort model. But it is not all that is true. I believe this year has been a deep learning experience both for the leadership of the WMER, who have implemented a model based on an idealized theory of action, and for the reviewers, who have been forthcoming with feedback about the procedures we established from the beginning and the adjustments we made throughout. We have been a true community of practice, united by our common devotion to learning peer review and feedback, and driven by our commitment to showcasing and improving student research and writing.

I had the opportunity to speak this spring about our collaborative process at an American Educational Association (AERA) working group on how to use and teach feedback in graduate programs. Faculty from other institutions were impressed with two things about our journal: the iterative and collaborative review process, and the level of time commitment our members volunteered to it. “What do reviewers get in return for their participation?” was their first question. My response reflected our mission: we create community, and we learn. No compensation, and no course credit (yet), just a community of scholars.

It is time for graduate education, especially doctoral-level education, to consider the importance of instituting sustainable learning models beyond the confines of coursework. Our work is both important enough to be mandated of students

who intend to enter the professoriate, and rich enough to be recognized as a credit-bearing contribution to our degree. We have been fortunate that resources exist at the College for us to produce a print journal (a rarity among student-run publications, especially from institutions of our size), and we have thrived because of the generous donations of time that our reviewers have made. But we also recognize that the potency of the experience and the reach of our impact is dependent on the next generation of students.

This is the first year in which none of the founding members of the journal were either reviewers or editors. They have moved on to faculty positions and postdocs, leaving their creation to us, the second generation of WMER leadership. I believe we have been good stewards of their original design, and that we have improved the journal's reach and relevance in the broader graduate community. This year we received submissions from over two dozen universities across the United States, from six different divisions of AERA and ASHE, and due to our participation in Digital Commons through Swem Library and BePress, we have hundreds of readers on each of six continents. We are quite proud of the growth of the WMER in its first five years, and we look forward to its next five. Now get back to work.

Sincerely,

Davis Clement

Editor-in-Chief