

EDITORIAL

Reflections on the First 3 Years of *Mathematics Teacher Educator*: Successes and Challenges

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As I indicated in my editorial in the inaugural issue of *MTE*, the publication of *MTE* represented an historical moment for mathematics teacher education, providing for the first time a much-needed forum for supporting and improving the practice of educating teachers of mathematics. This current issue of *MTE*, the last one for which I will serve as editor, seems an appropriate time to reflect on the successes of the journal to date and the challenges that the editorial board is actively addressing.

Successes

Most notably, the 29 articles that have been published over the past 3 years (including those found in the current issue) provide the starting point for the knowledge base for mathematics teacher education that was conceived by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (AMTE) visionaries who laid the groundwork for the journal. As the Editorial Board stated in the call for manuscripts, first published in 2011, “The journal is a tool to build the personal knowledge that mathematics educators gain from their practice into a trustworthy knowledge base that can be shared with the profession.” While we have yet to see articles that explicitly build on work that has previously been published in the journal, the foundation for such building has been laid with articles that address a breadth and depth of issues faced by mathematics teacher educators in their work.

Many of the articles that have been published in *MTE* have taken advantage of the online nature of the journal. For example, in the article “Using Simulations to Foster Preservice Mathematics Teachers’ Self-Assessment, Learning, and Reflections on Teaching” (Volume 1, Issue 2), Garofalo and Trinter (2013) link to a movie of one of the simulations created by a preservice teacher. In the article “Developing Teachers’ Knowledge of a Transformations-Based Approach to Geometric Similarity” (Volume 2, Issue 1), Seago and her colleagues (2013) include dynamic figures that make the relationships they describe salient. In addition, they link to video clips of students applying

transformation-based and static perspectives in solving a geometry task. In both these cases, the technology serves to enhance the article and make the content more accessible to the reader.

Other authors have taken advantage of the journal’s online presence by providing additional content. For example, in the article “Using ‘Lack of Fidelity’ to Improve Teaching” (Volume 1, Issue 1), Morris (2012) includes an example of the type of detailed lesson plan she refers to in the article. Not only does the inclusion of the lesson plan allow the reader to see exactly what she is describing, but the link within the article makes it possible to view the lesson plan when it is first mentioned and then return to the main article. In addition, teacher educators might choose to use or adapt the lesson plan in their own work. While we may have only scratched the surface in terms of what is possible with our online format, these examples highlight some of the possibilities.

A key element in building the desired knowledge base is helping educate authors and reviewers about the nature of the journal and the characteristics of articles that are consistent with our mission. We have operationalized this educative function primarily by providing feedback to authors and reviewers. All authors are given detailed feedback on how to improve their manuscripts, regardless of whether the author received a decision of accept, reject, or revise and resubmit. For manuscripts that have been rejected, reviewers make an effort to clearly explain the decision to the author and to cite specific ways in which the manuscript could be improved. I have been pleasantly surprised at the number of authors who have written to express their appreciation for this feedback even though their manuscripts were not accepted. Below are two examples from emails I have received (reprinted with permission from the authors).

Thank you for the feedback regarding my submitted article. The feedback was very helpful and I think it has given me a better sense of the scope of the journal as a whole. I do not know if you typically do things like this, but I would appreciate you sending my particular thanks along to reviewer 2. His/Her comments were very insightful and helpful in moving forward. I plan on composing another article framing this work from a different perspective and providing more emphasis on the details of my study and the evidence. I hope that it will be a better fit for the journal. [Author 1]

Thank you very much for this notification. I appreciate your time, the reviewers’ time, and the thoughtful response you composed and reviews you forwarded. I

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look forward to reworking the paper given this helpful feedback. [Author 2]

Every manuscript is reviewed by three people—two selected from the reviewer database who have some level of expertise with the topic addressed in the manuscript, and one member of the editorial panel. All reviewers receive copies of the decision letter that is sent to the author as well as copies of all three of the reviews. The purpose of this is to help reviewers improve their reviews. Although this feedback is less direct than what is provided to authors, notes from two different reviewers provide evidence that this process has helped reviewers reflect on the quality of their reviews. One reviewer (who wrote a very short review with very little detail) wrote to say that after reading the other reviews and the decision letter for the manuscript she had reviewed, she had a better understanding of what was expected and hoped she would be given another chance to review. In a second case, after receiving and reading the other reviews and the decision letter, another reviewer wrote to say that she realized that she needed to “step up her game.”

In addition to receiving reviews and decision letters for manuscripts they have reviewed, members of the editorial panel engage in a group review of one or two manuscripts each year in order to ensure consistency in ratings across members of the panel. This calibration activity provides an opportunity for members of the panel to discuss the review criteria and how they are applied to particular manuscripts. New members of the board receive additional training through a webinar conducted each spring that orients them to the roles and responsibilities of members of the editorial panel.

Challenges

The key challenge the journal is facing is the relatively small number of submitted manuscripts (30 out of 294) that have met the established standards for the journal. While the journal can accommodate as many as six manuscripts in a single issue, this has only been accomplished twice (Volume 1, Issue 2; Volume 2, Issue 1), and we have published as few as three manuscripts in an issue (Volume 3, Issue 1). The editorial board has taken several steps to address the issue of manuscript flow and quality: 1) make criteria for the journal more transparent; 2) feature successful authors at conference sessions who can “tell their stories”; 3) put out a call for manuscripts on a particular topic; and 4) invite manuscripts.

Make criteria more transparent. The Editorial Board is working to make the criteria for manuscripts more transparent through two efforts. First, the call for manuscripts

is being revised to make clearer the types of manuscripts we are looking for and the essential elements of the manuscripts. In particular, we are articulating criteria for manuscripts that do not fall into the category of describing a successful intervention. Second, the editorial feature of the journal has been and will be used to specifically address limitations reviewers frequently identify in submitted manuscripts. Most notably, the editorial “Linking Claims and Evidence” (Volume 1, Issue 2) attempted to articulate the nature of evidence appropriate for *MTE* and provide specific examples of what does and does not constitute sufficient evidence to support a claim. We targeted this particular issue because the most common reason for reviewers to reject a manuscript is a lack of evidence for the authors’ claims.

Feature successful authors. The Editorial Board invited Eva Thanheiser to share her and her coauthors’ experience with the revise and resubmit process at a session held at the annual AMTE meeting in January 2013. The purpose of this session was to provide a specific example, from the first author’s perspective, of the relationship between an original article that is submitted to the journal, the feedback that is sent to the authors, and the final version of the article. The intent was to encourage authors not to give up when asked to revise a manuscript and to seriously consider the feedback that is provided. (See the editorial in Volume 2, Issue 1 for a description of this session and Volume 1, Issue 2 for the article.) Given the positive reaction to this session, the Editorial Board decided to showcase additional authors in 2015. At the annual AMTE meeting in February 2015, Michael Steele and Amy Hillen discussed how they turned a 2011 AMTE presentation into a published article (which appeared in Volume 1, Issue 1 of *MTE*). Similarly, at the NCTM Research Conference in April 2015, Kevin Moore will describe how he and his colleagues turned their research work into a successful *MTE* submission that addressed a teacher education audience (see Volume 2, Issue 2).

Call for manuscripts on a specific topic. Calls for manuscripts that focus on particular topics and have specific deadlines can provide a focus for potential authors. Toward this end, the Board developed a call for manuscripts related to *Principles to Actions: Ensuring Mathematical Success for All* (NCTM, 2104). This call was introduced in the summer 2014 issue of *Connections*, appeared in the September 2014 issue of *MTE*, and was posted on the AMTE and NCTM websites. The call invites authors to submit manuscripts by September 1, 2015, that address the following questions: How can *Principles to Actions: Ensuring Mathematical Success for All* be used to design learning experiences for teachers? What impact do these experiences have on teachers and their students?

Invite manuscripts. To augment the number of articles submitted to the journal and hence provide more content to readers in each issue of *MTE*, the Board decided to invite authors to submit manuscripts. According to the Handbook for the Editorial Board for *MTE* (p. 15):

The editor is authorized to invite manuscripts for the journal to highlight particular issues in mathematics teacher education or for other reasons that may enhance the journal. The selection of authors and topics is at the discretion of the editor. In general, no more than one invited piece should be published in each issue (although two shorter pieces might be published in a point/counterpoint fashion).

Any manuscript that is invited will be sent to two editorial panel members who will provide feedback to strengthen the manuscript. This review will not be blind and will be done outside of the manuscript system. Invited manuscripts will not be included in journal statistics related to acceptance rate or time to decision.

The first invited manuscript, written by Melissa Boston, Jonathan Bostic, Kristen Lessig, and Milan Sherman, appears in this volume of the journal. The article, “A Comparison of Mathematics Classroom Observation Protocols,” is based on a session that the four coauthors presented at the 2014 AMTE meeting. The article was invited for several reasons: 1) the session was very popular, with standing room only, and hence was of interest to AMTE members; 2) the topic, observation tools, continues the focus on tools that was first introduced in a *MTE* editorial (Volume 3, Issue 1); and 3) the author team provides an example of a partnership between more and less experienced authors. In fact, the analysis of classroom observation tools described in this manuscript began within a working group in the Service, Teaching, and Research Program (STaR) in Mathematics Education in which the second, third, and fourth authors participated.

Looking Forward

While launching a new journal is not without challenges, there are lots of reasons to be optimistic about its future. The number of manuscripts reviewed increased by more than 20% in the past year. Individual subscriptions to the journal rose more than 70% from 2013 to 2014, while the

number of institutional subscriptions more than doubled in the same time period. The mathematics teacher education community has supported the journal by volunteering to review manuscripts, returning prompt and detailed reviews of manuscripts, and attending journal sessions held at annual meetings.

To remain viable, the journal needs more contributions of high-quality manuscripts. Help us increase awareness of the journal by sharing particular articles with colleagues and students. Please read the revised call for manuscripts and think about what you might submit. Also, share the call with your colleagues and graduate students and encourage them to submit manuscripts to the journal. If you are in a position to do so, consider mentoring a colleague or student by coauthoring a manuscript or actively supporting them in writing a manuscript for the journal. Consider also the ways in which the presentation of your work or your colleagues’ work could be enhanced by the online nature of this journal.

The journal will continue to grow and develop over the next few years under the leadership of Sandra Crespo (Michigan State University), who will take over as editor of *MTE* in May 2015. Sandra is an accomplished teacher education scholar who will provide new energy and creativity for the journal. I appreciate having had the opportunity to serve as the founding editor of *MTE* and to work with a talented associate editor and dedicated members of the editorial panel. I look forward to seeing how *MTE* grows and evolves toward the goal of building “a trustworthy knowledge base that can be accessed and shared widely in the profession” (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002, p. 3).

Reference

- Hiebert, J., Gallimore, R., & Stigler, J. W. (2002). A knowledge base for the teaching profession: What it would look like and how we can get one. *Educational Researcher*, 31(5), 3–15.

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