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On editor decisions: A framework of best practice

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On editor decisions: A framework of best practice

Abstract

This Editorial calls for change in the practices of editing in response to a culture of mental ill health in higher education publishing. Through extended review of current practices, this Editorial offers practical opportunities to improve the quality of editors' decision-making processes. This includes a focus on publishing clear and formative editorial positions, a broader acceptance of university style guides and referencing, desk rejection that is timely and supportive, peer review with improved integrity, a more genuine revise and resubmit process, and fostering quality post-acceptance engagement. The significance of this Editorial is in the potential to lead reform in the journal publishing industry to be more supportive and kind while maintaining quality and rigorous production of knowledge.

Practitioner Notes

1. The practices of editors needs to change to build a culture of quality knowledge cultivation over blanket desk rejections.
2. High quality editorials can provide prospective authors with feedforward advice to apply prior to submitting a manuscript.
3. Desk rejections should not be simply generic text responses, and instead take a developmental approach to writing.
4. Articles should only go through revise and resubmit if they have the genuine potential to be publishable.
5. Editors should take the opportunity to engage with authors and reviewers after articles are published to recognise their contribution.

Keywords

Rejection, accept, publishing, editing, editorial, publish or perish

Introduction

The practices of peer review and editorial decision-making have real effects on the progression of knowledge or stagnation. The time commitment to develop research, submit it to a journal, respond to reviewer comments or receive a rejection and submit to an alternative journal can result in resources deployed into scholarly dissemination that is immediately outdated or scrapped. Editors have a responsibility to ensure that research dissemination, in the form of draft manuscripts, is treated diligently and with respect. Authors have a responsibility to engage fairly with the process and meet timelines articulated by journals. The sustained high rates of rejection for quality journals – upwards of 90 percent – have a tangible effect on knowledge production, innovation, and the health and wellbeing of those involved. While journals may reject manuscripts with greater frequency, as global academic and research roles increase the process of assessing manuscripts and preparation for publication can be constructive, supportive, and responsive.

In recent years, I have overseen thousands of editorial decisions and participated in more than 100 reviews for dozens of management, education, and psychology journals. I have published on topics ranging from leadership and organisational behaviour to higher education and research methods. As Editor in Chief, I have registered, received, or influenced decisions to reject, revise, and accept a considerable volume of manuscripts. However, in writing this editorial, I did provide earlier drafts to editors for comment (full list in acknowledgements) to test my assumptions and expand the potential translatability of this work.

It is common in such economies of scale for editors to prioritise efficiency: to use stock standard reviewer requests and register generic templated decisions to authors. Many of these processes can become editor-centric: to develop economy within tight and restricted workloads. Empathetically though, most editors have low workload allocations towards editing roles, and they have competing interests to authors to publish their quality work in quality locations, to knowledge through rigorous publication, and to reviewers of which editors are often protective in their finite time to review. Yet, for many authors and reviewers, there is necessity in doing so: the need to meet institutionally mandated publication volumes. I speak not to the latter in this Editorial, but instead to the practices that editors can adopt to build a culture of research flourishing without diminishing the quality and rigour of an extensive history of publishing. In essence, I am arguing for a more supportive editorial process that holds integrity at its core.

In this Editorial, I aim to situate editorial decisions within the broader process of publication and reflect on the role editors play in increasing future quality and supporting research impact and engagement. My aim is to present guidelines for editor decision-making that emphasises a dual role of promoting quality and respecting humans within the process. The aim is to re-enforce the role that editors play in high quality research that is informed by individual experts throughout the editorial process, understanding the

contextual factors that can drive against quality and standards. To do so, I begin with the impetus for change, and situate this within other scholars' calls for change. I conclude by discussing an evidence-based decision process for editors.

A change of course

Allen and colleagues (2020) wrote of a culture of rejection and were not the first to label such a culture in academia. This culture is predicated on grant funding, research articles, journal editorships, board appointments, and for many jurisdictions a self-nominated and self-application promotion process to advance an academic career. Some term this the 'publish or perish' model, and such a normalised culture can be destructive to early career researchers in particular (Bosanquet et al., 2017). Engaging with such practices requires academics to act with tenacity within workload models that do not accurately reflect the variable time needed for high quality publication. The outcome can create poor psychological wellbeing in an environment where the integrity of minds is critical to progress knowledge and create innovation.

In research contexts, there is a genuine need for high rates of rejection. Publication places in quality journals are a finite resource and the editorial team has limited capacity to effectively manage peer review of large numbers of submitted manuscripts. As the global economy and those within it focus on competitive advantage through knowledge over traditional natural resource intensive activities (Powell & Snellman, 2004), there will continue to be a growing need for research to understand the world we live in. Yet, increasing publication space associated with greater research manufacturing should not indicate a reduced level of quality accepted. I argue for a change of course. While acceptance and rejection are important, there still needs to be a high-quality feedback mechanism; we are scholars first and we want to develop and teach our fellow scholars.

Guidelines for editor decision-making

The following guidelines for editor decision-making stems from careful examination of our Journal's current and historical practices alongside discussions with editors from a broad range of disciplines, and my own experiences with publishing and reviewing. The focus is on creating a transparent practice that editors can adopt and implement into practice. I suspect each element will not universally apply to all journal contexts, but many will or may inform an adapted practice. I begin with Table 1 that highlights a summary of the steps justified below.

The aim of these practices is to enable journals to balance their responsibilities to enable high quality research with the importance of editor and author psychological wellbeing. Effective implementation of some, or all, of these decision recommendations may support journals to respond to climates where scholars do not feel supported to publish and place their views on public display through authorship. This is particularly relevant in a post-COVID-19 climate where nice-to-have expenditure – research mentoring, support programs, and internal grants – may see temporary decline in the wake of constrained

financial climates. Journals with careful strategic direction can support a response, and this begins with making journal positions clear.

Table 1:

Summary of editor decision making guidelines

Decision process	Summary
<i>Publishing editorial positions</i>	Publish editorials or notes that highlight where previous authors could have improved prior to submission, and elaborate aims and scope.
<i>Accept universal style guides and referencing</i>	Accept styles available in reference management software (e.g., APA 7) without adaption.
<i>Timely desk rejection</i>	Prioritise rapid desk rejection processes with supportive feedback to justify the decision.
<i>Peer review with integrity</i>	Monitor peer review for quality and integrity, with aggressive reviews removed or contextualised for authors.
<i>Genuine revise and resubmit process</i>	Ensure revise and resubmits are only offered to manuscripts where, if the authors are diligent in response to peer review and editor feedback, there will be space for these to be published.
<i>Post-acceptance engagement</i>	Congratulate authors on their achievement, and express gratitude to reviewers for the contribution to enhance manuscripts.

Publishing editorial positions

The first guideline encourages sharing the editor's policies and expectations transparently through editorials. The statement of journal aims and scope is a typical place for authors to examine if their manuscript falls within the potential boundary of the target journal's publishing remit. These are often brief, and do not accurately go beyond high-level statements that create ambiguity. The top ten Scopus 2021 education journals have an average scope statement of 125 words (*Review of Educational Research, Internet and Higher Education, Computers and Education, Developmental Review, Educational Researcher, Educational Research Review, Language Learning, Science Education, Sociology of Education, Review of Research in Education*). The top ten Scopus 2021 journals have an average scope statement of 96 words (*Ca-A Cancer Journal for Clinicians, Nature Reviews Molecular Cell Biology, Quarterly Journal of Economics, Cell, MMWR Recommendations and Reports, New England Journal of Medicine, Nature Medicine, Nature Reviews Materials, Nature Reviews Genetics, National Vital Statistics Reports*). Across these, many highlight publishing history or host university and the journal title, which leaves little room for effectively discussing what they do and do not publish. Yet, authors rely on these positions and editors use them as guidance regarding initial publishing decisions.

While it may not be appropriate for editors to re-write longstanding aims and scope statements, there are opportunities for further guidance. This can be done through publicly available guidance notes with interpretation notes or practical guidance for prospective authors. For example, the Australian Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority's (TEQSA, 2021) guidance notes provide support interpretation of the federal legislation *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*. Professor Roy Suddaby (2006, 2010) in *Academy of Management Review* and *Academy of Management Journal* offers useful examples by highlighting an editor's perspective on submissions using grounded theory, and submissions drawing on management and organisational concepts. Editors of *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* publish their two stage review process on their about page (see AJET, 2022).

The Editors of *Leadership Quarterly* have also taken a transparent approach to investigating the progress of the journal, and sharing this with its community. In one Editorial, Antonakis et al. (2019) review comparative impact compared to other journals, and on what they were looking for in future leadership works, including discussing editorial positions:

What we care most about is to ensure that we report on how leadership works by publishing quality science; science that is robust, creative, and will make a difference (p. 4).

In the *Asian Journal of Psychiatry*, Editor-in-Chief Professor Rajiv Tandon (2021) addressed how the COVID-19 pandemic related to the current aims and scope of the journal. Editor in Chief Associate Professor Jessica Li and colleagues (2020) address a similar theme in *Human Resource Development International*, following a two-year Scopus impact jump from 1.06 (2020) to 3.98 (2021). While I suspect the mere publishing of one editorial did directly enable major gains in impact, it may be symbolic of an empathetic and supportive editorial team leading a culture of excellence. The opening paragraph, viewed more than 27,000 times, reads:

As we are preparing this scheduled issue of Human Resource Development International (HRDI) in the Spring 2020 during the COVID-19 Pandemic, we feel that it is our responsibility to start a dialogue with our readers, authors, and peers. In an effort to guide this discourse, we want to use this editorial to highlight a few challenges that present close relevancy to the field of human resource development (HRD); then, to discuss what might be the roles of HRDI scholarly community in learning, building resilience, and leading in this time of crisis (p. 199).

To provide a few more examples, Daft and Lewin (1993) also make calls for specific types of research, and Thompson (1995), in *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, articulates methodological considerations editors should take when reviewing quantitative manuscripts. Sarker et al. (2013) similarly discusses qualitative methods through a guest editorial in *Management Information Systems Quarterly*. Wise et al. (2021) discuss the

impact of learning analytics and Twining et al. (2017) on qualitative research in *Computers and Education*.

It surprises me that there are many top-tier journals that do not engage in such practices, where editors hold their views on display as part of the transparent academic process. This practice not only begins to see journals as cornerstones of research communities, but also critical contributors. Indeed, the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* published one of our first attempts at what we term ‘Editorials of Impact’ in 2020 (see Crawford et al., 2020a) where we examined higher level themes of the articles rather than merely describing them. We reflected on this and moved towards more ambitious position statements (see Dean et al., 2020 for guest editorial and Gonzalez et al., 2021 for editorial), and expansions of aims and scope (see Crawford et al., 2020b), although this took time. The editorials of impact, in the context of JUTLP, offer an ability for editors to contribute to the conversations of wider importance to the community from a macro-perspective. Editors have a unique perspective, having seen hundreds of manuscripts that move through publication or towards rejection, and such editorials can guide diligent prospective authors as to where their work may be lacking *before* they submit. These can position prospective authors to see the types of work journals regularly reject and accept, to form better alignment between these.

Table 2:

Comparison of downloads and citations on editorials

Editorial types	n*	Mean scores			
		Total downloads	Downloads per day	Citations per day	Age in days
Editorials of impact	9	317	1.12	0.0230	342
Impact guest editorials	6	302	0.98	0.0123	485
Descriptive editorials	3	148	0.27	0.0003	630
Descriptive editorials	4	75	0.08	0.0003	948

*Editorials of impact include two commentaries written by Editors, and the citations per day score is calculated excluding 2022 editorials (two editorials of impact). Downloads based on JUTLP website, and citations based on Google Scholar (higher coverage of impact-based citations than Scopus). Scores were calculated 15 May 2022.

Descriptive editorials that do little more than write shorter forms of abstracts are practices that no longer resonate with readers. As an example, in 2019-2022, we published 22 editorials with earlier manuscripts, and there was significant variance in citations and downloads between those editorials where editors provided advice beyond description of articles ($n = 15$), and those that did not ($n = 7$). While it is important to note a natural age skew (i.e., description editorials were primarily in 2019 and 2020, with impact primarily in 2020-2022), there was statistical significance between the downloads of descriptive and impact-based editorials ($p < 0.01$). Editorial comparison excluding the guest editorials were also significant ($p < 0.01$), and guest editorial comparison also ($p < 0.05$). Citation

differences across the 2019-2021 sample were also evident ($p < 0.01$). A quick check on downloads per day using only the 2019-2020 sample was also used to re-test, with descriptive editorials ($n = 5$) and editorials of impact ($n = 5$) still expressing significant differences in downloads ($p < 0.01$) and citations ($p < 0.01$).

What the basic analysis indicates is that our research community engages more frequently and applies editorials that have a focus on impact over editorials that describe. For a practice-based journal, this is critical: to create works that are evidence-based and useful in practice. The critical contribution of contemporary editorials is to place emphasis on how authors can submit works that more accurately reflect the journal aims and scope, and to allow editors a voice in the macrolevel challenges observed in the practice of editing.

Accepting universal style guides and referencing

The second guideline encourages the acceptance of simple systems of referencing that conform with discipline norms. Not all manuscript submissions are accepted after their first submission, and not all journals operate with heavy copyediting budgets. And I cannot imagine many authors enjoy the practice of converting references after their first rejection. Many larger publishers now ask for any consistently applied style, to allow manuscripts to be submitted without reformatting. Most small and independent journals are unable to offer such support given the lack of editorial resourcing to rewrite full issues of articles' referencing. However, there are solutions to this that balance editorial resources and author time.

When I became Editor in Chief, one of the earliest changes I proposed was a move away from a University of Wollongong variant of Harvard to a standard APA 7 style. There were resources to support usage of this variant, but it tended to be a style few authors outside of that university were aware of. The move to APA 7 has allowed many authors to convert references within reference management software like EndNote, compared to back-and-forth emails between author and editor to correct for a new style. Senior Editors Associate Professor Gail Wilson and Dr Jo-Anne Kelder have been leading work internally to bring a lot of our journal style in alignment with APA 7.

This work is important and offers an opportunity to simplify the transfer of manuscripts between our journal and others. Our acceptance rate for 2021 was 18.4 percent, and 20.7 percent in 2020. The 2022 interim acceptance rate in the Journal is less than half the previous year. This means for every 10 or so submissions, only one to two will be published. The other eight or nine will need to select another outlet for publication, or perhaps in the filing cabinet. Indeed, some have perhaps selected this Journal as a second outlet following an earlier rejection. Rejection of academic ideas hurts, but it should be those ideas that are improved between submission to new journals, not added time focused on adding commas between volume and issue because the referencing changed. Or, worse, converting from a parenthetical system (e.g., 'Crawford, 2022' for this Editorial) like APA or Harvard to number-based in-text citations (e.g., [1]) like Vancouver, or a superscript system like MHRA can be an ineffective use of scholars' time, and a poor experience.

If I return to the purpose of referencing, it is not about adding the right commas, volume numbers, and page numbers. Instead, it is focused on allowing others to understand and source the evidence used to generate an argument. General Editor of *Journal of Management Studies*, Professor Gerardo Patriotta (2017) comments:

References are probably the most conspicuous manifestation of conventional writing (recently, journal articles will often end with a list that includes somewhere in the region of 100 references). Semiotically, they signal the presence of other scholars in our own work. The use of references in academic articles reminds us that manuscripts are never written from scratch; rather, they are inserted in broader conversations about a particular topic (p. 753).

The value of references is to situate prior knowledge with the current study, and perhaps to add clout of reinforcing arguments with the work of seminal scholars in the area. Despite the aim of referencing, our dedication to compliance to multiple different styles creates a barrier for authors. It also requires prospective authors to adjudge their willingness to convert referencing, and in some cases I suspect authors choose not to submit to particular journals due to the 10-20 hours required for referencing compliance. Solutions such as LaTeX adopted by journals may be a key mechanism to reduce such barriers.

Journals can respond to this with relative ease by adopting a popular style common to the discipline as scholars become more multidisciplinary adopting globally popular referencing styles. Connors (1999, p. 232) argued “APA style now bids fair to become the de facto standard for all fields over the next five decades”, and with 15 million APA manuals sold between 1952 and 2019, it is likely one of, if not, the most popular style available. For that reason, the Journal opted for this style. However, it seems APA 7, MLA, Harvard, and Chicago are generally considered most prominent in popular media. Although, these are versioned are renewed, so it would not be unreasonable for journals to enter hybrid periods when new referencing versions emerge (e.g., APA 6 or 7). This is particularly pertinent when journals (often with altruistic aspirations of open access research) have low operational budgets and volunteer editors, and Word/LaTeX templates need revision, or reference management software has delayed updates to new versions. Likewise, while accepting is a signpost of future publication, this may take time as journal resources slowly work across manuscripts. Some big publishers may have more rapid processes, but this should not be expected particularly of smaller outlets.

A simplification of the procedural components too, allows a return to elements of important related to referencing. Atkinson and McBeath (2021) briefly discuss the politics of contamination and citation contamination in their editorial in *Issues in Educational Research*. I add to this examining use of self-citations, network-citations (citations of close colleagues), and drawing on appropriate seminal work are better places for scholars to focus their time. In this instance, simple referencing solutions allow reviewers and editors to focus on assessing not whether commas are in the right place, but to assess the ethicality of the referencing approach taken; the latter of which is a more valuable use of reviewer and editor expertise.

A timely desk rejection

The third guideline encourages a quick rejection process, where rejection is expected. The practices of journals differ significantly regarding editor initial decisions on manuscripts. Indeed, and like many of us, I have experienced my fair share of rejection and likewise have registered a rejection decision on hundreds of submissions. With each decision I make, I take a developmental and educative approach. Across diverse research sectors, this is important; in higher education research, this is essential. Formative feedback forms a key tenet of quality education, and of online learning (Gikandi et al., 2011). Wingate (2010) provides evidence that students who use formative feedback improve in the areas of that feedback. A desk rejection, while summative for a particular journal, I postulate should be observed as a formative step in the broader research process. An author takes that feedback onboard to build a more cohesive knowledge artifact to submit to another journal. Yet, that view is perhaps less prominent than I might have hoped for in education journals. Instead, it is not uncommon to receive one line of customised text buried in an automated email such as ‘the article is out of scope’. The articulation of short comments – like is known in student populations, see student quote of receiving peer feedback below – does little to support a culture of growth, or enabling and valuing that practice.

I feel as if it was not taken as seriously, as it was very short and very positive
(participant in Bader et al., 2019, p. 13).

As a journal editor, I can lead a culture that values progressive improvement in quality. When an article is submitted, it has hopefully been through an extensive quality process for it to arrive in my workflow. Not all authors, however, have the same support structures and a kind word of encouragement, critical feedback, and direction to relevant sources the author missed may help them on their journey. This practice, for me, should take less than a month. The benefit of doing so is to support authors to have a clear understanding of their progression, rather than leaving them in the lurch (e.g., Han et al., 2019). Some journals use a pool of senior academics as mentors to early career researcher submissions when rejected (Allen et al., 2020), although I can appreciate this is not an easy practice to establish. The critical challenge for editorial teams is navigating the scale that comes with high impact factors, where desk rejections may number in the double digits daily. In this, editors can reference specific previous editorials of impact rather than provide extensive feedback, as those editorials – if constructed correctly – will serve as quality feedback for a good volume of manuscripts submitted.

Instead, editors can support their research community by providing meaningful feedback that addresses the following question:

What would this article have needed to be publishable in this Journal?

In some cases, answering that question may require extensive written decision letters, so it may be more appropriate to select one or two key challenges and briefly discuss those. For our Journal, we have been progressively developing Editorials of Impact that provide extended feedback on specific types of manuscripts we see regularly as rejected. As an editor, this provides the ability to refer to specific editorials in decision letters to support

their professional development in an environment where editors do not want to write the same rationale for rejection or major revisions on repeat.

I do however provide an important caveat. Sometimes articles should never have been submitted to the journal. That is, they are not good or bad quality, but instead irrelevant to the journal's aims and scope. In this event, and where some authors engage in a volume-game, I opt for a desk reject with a simple statement of rejection. This is perhaps a fair comment when the authors have not engaged with reading the journal's aims or scope, or submitting to an appropriate journal. The most common 'near miss' in the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice is receiving submissions on early childhood or primary school teachers. If it is about teaching the Bachelor of Education program, it may be in scope, but if it is about how the kindergarten teacher applies pedagogy to their classroom, it is not. Worse yet, manuscripts which have no relationship to higher education outside of using a student sample, or even less of a tangential relationship. In these circumstances, the provision of effective feedback from an expert in the journal's field is pointless. While we have cultivated extensive knowledge on higher education practice, the experience of kindergarten is limited to personal experiences many decades ago.

Peer review with integrity

The fourth guideline encourages continual peer review improvements to enable integrity of process. There is great importance in the practice of peer review and an important assessment of the relative contribution to the field. Yet, there is remarkable inconsistency between peer review quality and often questionable commentary contained within the body text of each review (e.g., swearing, explicit references to bad research without feedback, and associations with the author's IQ deficiencies). And the expected impact differences between blind peer review and editor-only reviews do not seem significant, in at least one disciplinary context:

Importantly, externally-reviewed papers do not outperform editor-only reviewed published papers in terms of visibility within a 5-year citation window. These findings suggest that in many instances editors can be all that is needed to review papers (or at least conduct the critical first review to assess general suitability) if the purpose of peer review is to primarily filter and that journals can consider reducing the number of referees associated with reviewing ecology and evolution papers (Lortie et al., 2013, p. 1).

The history of peer review is interesting, with a transition towards formal peer review process a somewhat recent introduction (see Jana, 2019; Rennie, 2003; Spier, 2002). The effects of scaled research in a globally connected publishing marketplace however have created a manufactory of peer reviewers contributing on more manuscripts with less time for depth. The informal commentary in the academic community places 'Reviewer 2' as a uniquely bad person, noting of course the evidence to the contrary (Peterson, 2020). However, resentment of 'Reviewer 2' reflects the shortcomings of all poor review practices and those moments where reviewers overtly self-cite, force retrofitting of theory, are unnecessarily negative, or provide vacant rejection recommendations without cause. In the

experience of many editors who Watling et al. (2021) provide interesting recommendations to reviewers for quality peer review. This Editorial focuses more specifically on advice to editors. There have been increased calls for review of front-matter and protocol of manuscripts prior to studies occurring (Larson & Chung, 2012; Loonen, 2010), and I agree with these practices. This offers an opportunity to pre-emptively respond to design issues that cannot be resolved after the study has been completed.

Editors can also support and engage with their industry and discipline of research to support, where feasible, upskilling of future authors and reviewers through trade events or workshops. The *Journal of Learning Analytics*' editor team run a workshop on peer reviewing at their field's major annual event. The Committee of Publishing Ethics (COPE, 2019) provides useful commentary on the peer reviewer process.

Editors are network ties between the author and reviewer, particularly in double-blind review processes. The author selects and makes the initial connection and can mediate the relationship between reviewer and author. Perspectives on how much mediation seems to be divergent across the editorial community. The case I make is for stronger involvement where necessary. The purpose of peer review is to support authors to quality improve their work, and to manage quality assurance of material prior to publishing. When peer reviewers engage in poor or negative practice, the editor should respond, through reviewer substitution or caveating comments. There may be a case here to build different models for review, including engaging in identifiable reviews, single-blind, or public reviews in the review process.

Reviewer substitution has two forms for my editorial practice. The first is to substitute poor reviewers from the reviewer pool, to exclude that individual from future opportunities to provide negative reviews. Such practice should only be taken where reviewers are actively rude, unethical, or vacant after attempts to rehabilitate behaviour. As an editor, it may be more appropriate to communicate with the reviewer of the expected practices of a reviewer and to practice empathy towards that individual's situation. The second form is to deal with the immediate challenge; a poor review on an existing article. An editor could in this case remove the review and seek an alternative; however, this is not a practice I use. I suspect few editors opt for this practice, as it could be perceived as unnecessary control of the editorial process. Instead, it may be more appropriate to seek an additional reviewer and provide contextual advice to the author in a decision letter.

Caveated comments are opportunities for editors to provide context to the author in the event of poor reviews. This seems to be more commonly practiced than substitution. By this, the decision email or letter has commentary from the editor highlighting the profane statements presented by the reviewer. For editors, this should not be in relation to theory or method-based statements from reviewers, but rather how they are presented. The editor is mediating the respectfulness of the blind relationship, rather than changing the content communicated between the reviewer and author.

The value and importance of editorial scrutiny of peer review letters prior to distribution cannot be understated. The culture of publishing should be robust *and* collegial (Chanock, 2008 comments on this in an editorial of *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*). Supporting authors to receive highly critical feedback is important, provided the contribution is directed towards the content of the manuscript rather than personal in nature. Responding effectively to poor feedback practices can support authors to feel confident in the comments provided rather than feel distaste in their own academic practice. To me, the role of peer review is to support the broad community to grow and continue to innovate in the creation of knowledge. It should be a difficult process to publish, as we continue to extend the standard of quality and innovation, but it should not be a toxic process.

Genuine revise and resubmit process

The fifth guideline encourages editors to only progress revise and resubmit options that have a genuine likelihood of being able to be published. The revise and resubmit (R&R) process occurs after the initial decision, where authors are afforded the opportunity to resubmit with changes based on editor and reviewer comments. This process can be considerably long; however, it should not be afforded to manuscripts that are unlikely to be published. By this, and in alignment with timely desk rejections, authors of articles that are not likely to be placed in publication with the journal should not receive the opportunity to revise for latter rejection. In one item of feedback on this practice, this was not always an agreed practice. Journals do have a role in connecting authors to the community they seek to publish within, and the peer review process may support this by facilitating review. In response, I argue that many journals do not have the reviewer resources to send items for peer review that will subsequently lead to a rejection on first review. Instead, I encourage scholars to be open-minded to unsolicited cold call emails and conference introductions that may lead to reviewing work prior to it being submitted to a journal. Indeed, I did this in this editorial with both colleagues I was familiar with, and those I was familiar with their work. Each showed great respect for my work, with the occasional (and important) rejection of my ideas. For this I express gratitude, and hope that scholars across all fields may be open to targeted conversations about work prior to submission.

In revisions where there are multiple rounds, peer reviewers and editors should concentrate their second and third reviews on whether authors have addressed their queries, rather than incorporating new comments. The latter is a practice of changing the bar by which authors must jump to be accepted, rather than clearly articulating the expectation and consistently seeking to understand if the author is now meeting that expected quality level.

Realistically, when authors are afforded the opportunity to resubmit, it is recognition that the journal sees promise in the work and provided the resubmission is active in its response to reviewers and editors, it will eventually be published. This may mean multiple review cycles with peer reviewers considering and responding to the efficacy of responses, and it should also lead to rejection if responses are ineffective. Ineffective responses are when authors fail to respond to all comments either with genuine changes made in-text (not ‘lip service’) or provide an evidence-based defence for not incorporating the reviewer comments.

The process should also be transparent and timely, even if that is complex. Considerable time is already required for a manuscript to be published in the event of a single revision process, however, multiple can lead to significant delays between the conception of the paper and its eventual publication. The *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* has moved to a three-month major revision and one-month minor revision timeline to support clear expectations around author responsiveness. Opportunities to share blinded copies of decision letters, collective peer reviews, and their responses to reviewers is a useful feedback loop for reviewers (and acknowledgment of their contribution). Instructions and templates for reviews may also support a consistent practice, noting that reviewers often opt for the free text space to conduct the review. There are scenarios where extensions are granted, however, these are not common practice with most authors complying with timelines. This supports continued refinement of the time taken to publish.

Post-acceptance engagement

The sixth guideline encourages valuing the members who have contributed to the process of publishing. At the close of the process, there is great value in seeking to recognise the engagement of authors and reviewers who have contributed their time to the process. Reaching out directly and recognising the peer reviewer for their contribution is important and passing on any feedback as to how their practice can be improved over time is valuable. The latter seeks to support a reciprocal relationship between editor and reviewer to support informal learning on the practices of peer review. That informal learning is important, as there is a significant dearth of training available to develop peer review expertise outside of on-the-job training. Yet, most peer reviewers rarely receive feedback on their practice. While altruistic, it does have secondary benefits for editors: peer reviewers will be more likely to accept future review requests when valued for their contribution, and these peer reviews may be progressively higher quality as their capability improves. A tertiary benefit could be an increase in the quality of manuscripts submitted, as these reviewers increase in their understanding of quality writing and research and authors take on board higher quality reviewer comments over time.

Within this practice, there is also importance in building an active community of scholars where those who publish and expect journals to source reviewers should also engage in the same practice of review in at least a future review in the area. This community creates an opportunity to share expertise and develop quality relationships between the journal and the associated discipline(s). Perhaps also authors who have had positive reviews would also be more likely to conduct a positive review of a future work. However, positive does not mean soft, theoretically light, or lacking rigour; it means that difficult theoretical or methodological positions of the reviewer are contextualised with respect and with evidence.

Conclusion

The purpose of this Editorial was to commence an evidence-based commentary on the nature of editing and offer opportunities to improve editorial practices that have tangible effects on the success of knowledge production and innovation. The *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* is considerably young in contrast to many journals, but

we seek to adopt innovative editorial practices that push scholarship to continue to refine practice and elevate quality. For me, this involves being reflexive on our own practices and seeking to challenge current assumptions for the nature of publishing. Importantly, I believe publishing should acknowledge the humans within its process and seek to create collegial spaces for scholars to be ambitious, and to create high quality knowledge.

The practical guidelines encouraged in this editorial are positioned to allow editors to:

- Publish editorial positions to inform current and prospective authors of quality expectations
- Accept university style guides to allow a greater focus on ethicality of referencing instead of compliance
- Desk reject quickly and supportively to allow authors to reshape work for a new location rather than be held in limbo
- Assure the process of peer review has integrity to sustain confidence in the practices of the journal
- Only allow revise and resubmits on manuscripts that have genuine prospects of being published
- Recognise and congratulate those that have contributed to the process of review and publishing.

These guidelines offer a pathway towards more transparent, rigorous, and quality editorial processes. I acknowledge that there are some journals moving to greater degrees of transparency proposed here – such as publicly available reviewer reports, responses, and decision letters – and perhaps there will be a case for this within higher education at some point. These guidelines offer a trajectory towards higher quality research, and I suspect an updated version may be useful in coming years as we apply these and be reflexive in editorial practices.

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