Texas Education Review

To Be of Use:
A Narrative Roadmap for Creating an
Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Graduate Student Educational Journal

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Abstract

The ability of doctoral students to publish is necessary for a career in academia. Yet, publishing is difficult, which is compounded by the fact that most student-run journals reside outside the field of education. Utilizing a qualitative narrative reporting approach, our findings offer an experiential-based roadmap for establishing an open-access, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal. Drawing from organizational and critical theory, we focused on the Texas Education Review's process, policy, challenges, and successes to date. The aim of our research is to contribute to the limited educational knowledge on student-run journals, outline the research, pedagogical, and leadership-based value that student journals can add to university environments, and foster public spaces dedicated to the development of student work.

Keywords: educational open-access, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal, qualitative narrative self-reporting, organizational theory, critical theory

Significant pressure is placed on doctoral students to publish. Opportunities for students to display research range from class presentations, workshops, conferences, and fellowships to collaborative and individual work within the competitive realm of journal publications. Yet, the ability to convert graduate research into published format is limited. In education, this situation is compounded by the fact that of the student journals that currently exist, most reside outside education in fields like the health sciences (Pearson, VanNest, & Jasinski, 2004) and psychology (Ware & Burns, 2008). This reality prompted three Educational Policy and Planning PhD students at The University of Texas at Austin, a Tier I research university, to create an open-access, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal within our College of Education – currently known as the *Texas Education Review* (*TxEd*).

A year into the process, which involved everything from learning about good journal practice and establishing an editorial board, to writing *TxEd* policy, fundraising, and soliciting author entries, we concluded that other graduate students might benefit from our experience. Utilizing qualitative narrative self-reporting (Josselson, 2010; Mertens, 2010; Mischler, 1995, 2004), the purpose of our research is to outline *TxEd's* policy, processes, challenges, and successes to date from the perspectives of its executive editors. Aligned with the qualitative research aim of answering the "what" and "how" of an issue (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 2), our overarching research questions included:
1. What processes work best in beginning a graduate student journal?
2. How are long-term goals best supported so that the journal sustains for many years?
3. What value does a graduate student journal bring to both the students and the College of Education itself?

Our research is significant given there is a dearth of educational research literature on graduate student journals, particularly those in the field of education. In the following section, we outline some of the publishing pressures graduate students face if they seek a career in academia, as well as how graduate student journals can help alleviate these pressures. To build the limited research base on graduate student journals, our findings section offers three executive editors' narrative accounts of journal processes, including for example selection of board membership, development of board policy, website creation, and the launch of our Inaugural Volume. We conclude our analysis by outlining the research, pedagogical, and leadership value that student journals can contribute to university environments.

Organizational Culture and Pressures to Publish

U.S. organizations are distinguished from other social groups in a variety of ways. They tend towards hierarchy concomitantly having internal power dynamics that transcend physical boundaries of the organizational structure. Organizations usually have a specific social, political, economic, or educational focus. They assign responsibilities to members, criteria for participation, and/or formal dismissal. Finally, organizations typically have the ability to officially register and be situated publicly, interfacing with society via highly structured mechanisms (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Thus, organizational design functions to merge the ideal and the real, vision with pragmatism, as well as contemporary context with the prospect of directing the future. Despite vast educational research literature on organizational theory and policy, there is limited knowledge about the processes and policies of certain educational organizations – here educational graduate student journals.

This is a significant gap in the research literature considering the emphasis placed on solid research literature, analysis, and the ability to publish in education (Boice & Jones, 1984; Boote & Beilie, 2005; Deonandan, Patel, & Winterbottom, 2012) – a field considered the "hardest-to-do science of them all" (Berliner, 2002, p. 18). Moreover, publication, peer-review, and *generativity*, or the ability to build on previous research, are said to be the hallmarks of academia (Shulman, 1999). As discussed by Boice and Jones (1984), the ability to publish is a major factor in "decisions about hiring, promotion, and tenure in academic and other professional settings" (p. 567).

In order to prepare students for careers in academia therefore, most graduate programs place decent emphasis on academic writing within the classroom setting. Students write numerous research papers and give multiple in-class presentations throughout their given program of study. Despite this, research has found that graduate students still experience angst, a lack of support, or ill-preparation in academic writing (Boice & Jones, 1984; Boote & Beile, 2005; Granello, 2001; Rose, 1980)). Put simply, the lack of opportunities and support, which often mirror a lack of funding, contributes to a dearth of graduate student knowledge necessary to navigate the complex world of academic publishing. This reality exists despite the fact that publishing "within the context of peer-reviewed journals, is acknowledged to be important for career advancement" (Deonandan, Patel, & Winterbottom, 2012, p. 1).

Young (2001) stated that education may be advanced if researchers and students work to address "issues of vision, making the implicit explicit, reflecting and critiquing work, honoring ex-perience and culture in more intentional communities of inquiry" (p. 5). It is with this spirit that we aim to transform current organizational theory and practice related to the processes involved in building a student journal from the ground up. By encouraging "exploration and

investigation of social practices, understandings, and situations" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 589), we hope our research will increase scholarly discourse and drive communicative action around a current deficit in educational research. Broadly, our narrative self-reports were guided by contemplating the processes we thought worked best in establishing and maintaining a graduate student journal, as well as the value such journals bring to students and university settings. Thus, we aimed at assisting those who critically seek to expand publication and research opportunities for students. In the following section we outline our research methodology, theoretical lens, data collection, and data analysis.

Methodology

As an educational institution, the *Texas Education Review* (*TxEd*) is interested in open-access research, shared knowledge production, and continuous self-reflection. Organizationally, its members also are concerned with learning from and building upon the experiences of other journals. Thus, qualitative narrative self-reporting (Josselson, 2010; Mertens, 2010; Mischler, 1995, 2004) was an appropriate research method. Aimed at interpretation rather than historical fact, narrative research operates from the premise that individuals make sense of their lives and life events in storied form (Josselson, 2011). Narrative research is an analysis of lived experience via words and an understanding of the context within which the story is located. Moreover, since narrative analysis is not exact, narrative researchers must be keen to account for context, audience, point of view, and reflexivity (Josselson, 2011; Mischler, 2004).

Thus, our narrative self-reports covered a number of contextual and process-based events. They focused on how *TxEd* developed to its current state including for example our editorial board selection process, development of board policy, website design, working with authors, and securing journal funding. Given the need for researcher reflexivity in narrative research, we also aligned our research with the kind of autonomous, empowered, and inclusive *communicative public space* described by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) in their work on critical action research. We see striving towards this kind of space as a mechanism to balance both our voice as executive editors and the growing needs of *TxEd* with those of the broader academic community. In taking this two-tiered approach, our research aimed at supporting those students interested in founding and supporting graduate student journals.

Theoretical Framework

Our research was designed to provide a narrative roadmap for educational graduate students interested in starting an open-access, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal. In doing so, we were concerned with outlining traditional organizational characteristics such as structure, product, and politics. Bolman and Deal's (2008) four-frame organizational model provides a useful tool for illuminating these characteristics. Concerned with striking a balance between vertical (e.g. authority and policy) and lateral (e.g. meetings and networks) coordination needs, the structural frame allowed examination of *TxEd's* division of labor, location, process, and audience. Stressing organizational attention to holistic human needs, the human resource frame permitted examination of interpersonal coalitions and networks established by *TxEd*. Organizational conflict resolution and ethical dilemmas can be understood through the political frame. Finally, the symbolic frame allowed analysis of how *TxEd* works to "socialize, stabilize, reassure, and convey messages" to those within and outside the organization (Bolman & Deal,

2008, p. 266).

Bolman and Deal's (2008) framework was useful for illuminating key facets embedded in the structure and functioning of an organization like *TxEd.* Yet, it lacked a critical approach to understanding organizational tendencies towards inclusivity and/or exclusivity, knowledge construction, and point of view. Many scholars have critiqued traditional policy and organizational analyses for failure to problematize decision-making processes, bias, and the tendency to regard value-laden structures and policies as value neutral (Aker, 1992; Banks, 1993, 1995; Gordon, Miller &Rollock, 1990; Lather, 1999; Marshall, 1997; Scheurich, 1994; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Young, 1999). Our research therefore, also drew upon a critical approach (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) to guide our narrative examination of *TxEd* process, policy, and outcomes, as well as to check our privilege as researchers. While we understood that traditional frames of reference provide consistency in experience, we also acknowledged the importance of epistemological diversity (Metz, 2001; Pallas, 2001) and that "knowledge, technology, and the production of knowledge," including our own, "are cultural products and are not culture-free" **(**Gordon, Miller & Rollock, 1990, p. 14).

Data Collection and Analysis

We utilized narrative self-reporting (Josselson, 2010; Mertens, 2010; Mischler, 1995, 2004), which involves iterative data collection and reflective analysis in written form. The primary data source for our research and analysis came from an executive editor ledger maintained through Googledocs, executive and editorial board meeting notes, *TxEd* policy and process documents maintained through DropBox, and our own personal narrative reflections. Given the main source of information for this paper came from documents created by the executive editors and from our own experiences, we recognized limitations in research trustworthiness. As stated by Feldman (2003):

> Issues of validity are important because when we engage in reflective processes that focus on ourselves. . . we cannot be sure of the accuracy of what we see. That is because when we reflect, we do not know if what we see in the mirror is accurate or the distorted view provided by a funhouse mirror. (p. 27)

Thus, we realized that throughout our research and writing processes that we needed to take steps to ensure that the knowledge we constructed was not biased, limited in scope, nor simplistic congratulatory homage to *TxEd*. To account for research limitations we aimed to utilize dialectical reflexive practice throughout all stages of research, as well as permitted the critiquing of each other's narrative accounts. We acknowledged that while most of our data are primary source texts, they also were created by the authors of this proposal and therefore deserved additional scrutiny during analysis. Thus, we also aimed to increase research trustworthiness through a detailed, clear, and critical delineation of methodological approach (Feldman, 2003).

Findings

Our research looked to contribute to the kind of *communicative public space* described by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005). As a new open-access, peer-reviewed graduate student educational journal we aimed to share organizational information gleaned from the founding, policy, and structural processes of the *Texas Education Review* (*TxEd*). Guided by a critical

approach that views the research process as value-laden, our findings were divided into three executive editor sections that include narratives from the Managing Editor, Coordinating Editor, and Editor-in-Chief of TxEd. Each executive editor responded to the same guiding narrative questions, which included the following:

1. What made you want to start a journal like the *Texas Education Review*?
2. How has the journal incorporated inclusive community participation and governance?
3. What are some key components of your job as editor?
4. What do you see as some of the journal's major successes to date?
5. As a new journal, what have been some challenges and/or obstacles you have faced?
6. Where do you see the journal five or ten years down the road?

Narrative One: Managing Editor

When I was first asked if I was interested in founding and serving as an executive editor of what would become the *Texas Education Review* (*TxEd*) I remember thinking, "what a brilliant idea – why had no one done this already?" Considering The University of Texas at Austin is a Tier-I research institution and the pressure to publish extends beyond the faculty to its PhD students, the idea of having a journal housed within the College of Education was an obvious win. This win would permit graduate students to gain invaluable copy-editing, peer-review, and publication experience, prerequisites for attaining a faculty position upon graduation. Moreover, it would facilitate new forms of collaboration between departments within the College.

From the start, I viewed inclusivity and collaboration as editorial board necessities. It was essential to stress in conversations with students, that while the three executive editors were from the Department of Educational Administration, the policy focus of *TxEd* was designed to be inclusive of all educational policy research. Moreover, having an editorial board constitutive of students from across the College of Education was a must for me. In our first informational session and in crafting the board advertisement, application, and interview processes, we strove to ensure that the board was representative of all College Departments, which includes Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Psychology, Educational Administration, Kinesiology and Health Education, and Special Education. In the end, establishment of the editorial board collectively took the executive editors three months to complete. In addition to the three executive editors, our process yielded four editors and three assistant editors from the Departments of Educational Administration (editor; assistant editor), Curriculum and Instruction (two editors; assistant editor), and Educational Psychology (editor). Ideally, future boards will attain representation from all five College departments, a goal I hope to see become a reality in our 2014-2015 editorial board transition.

My tasks as Managing Editor kept me busy over the past year – averaging anywhere from 5-12 hours per week. Early on, two former editor colleagues highlighted that while technological innovation is key to open-access journals, solid organizational structure, and policy are essential for long-term success. Thus, during the first half of our inaugural year I researched various student and American Educational Research Association journal formats to develop *TxEd*'s policy, submission, and communication guidelines. These policy documents included the following: journal call; editorial, manuscript, background piece, and bibliography submission guidelines; copy-editing guidelines; peer-review policy and rubric; publication timeline; and standard author "receipt of submission," "accept and revise," and "reject and resubmit" letters.

Development of board policy also involved that I run a board training on copy editing and peer-review in Summer 2013 and currently includes planning a full-day board summer workshop, which will permit a review of board accomplishments, challenges, and five year-mark goals. The development of book review, letters to the editor, and special issue guidelines are policies that I am looking to develop in the near future, with the goal of adding new types of publications to our journal.

In addition to overseeing board policy, I have mentored three *TxEd* editors with the intent of providing increased personal guidance on board processes. Since each editor took on their own "Critical Issue" topic, mentoring offers editors a more personal space to voice issues they experienced with their sections. *TxEd* is unique in that it is structured by topic, or Critical Issues in education. Over time, multiple pieces published under the Critical Issue topic of urban education for example, will be available at the click of a button rather than having to do a traditional search of journal archives. To back-up *TxEd* policy and publication documents, I also have been in charge of creating and maintaining a secondary website through the Texas Digital Libraries – Online Journal Systems.

In terms of accomplishments to date, I think the three executive editors and board would agree that our Inaugural Volume was a huge success. Not only did we come together as a board – successfully learning to meet deadlines, have flexibility with newly established board procedures, and work together as a new journal entity – but in a process that involved many moving parts, we published a lengthy first volume that included many distinguished scholars and policy writers. Our Inaugural Volume also is truly exciting because it included multiple Critical Issues, which ranged from bilingual education and campus climate, to urban education, minority student achievement, and queer theory in education. The range of these topics tested our skills as editors and therefore, another collective success has been learning the business of publishing, which involves flexibility as unanticipated situations arise. On the heels of these successes, persistent teamwork and problem-solving put us in the comfortable spot of being ready to publish upcoming volumes.

In terms of challenges, there is little else to be said besides the prudent need to respect work-life balances or as one faculty member quipped, "juggling chainsaws." As a new editorial board, we had the triple task of melding significantly different leadership experience, building a solid editorial structure and policy, and turning out a decent product. Not only were we trying to get scholars to publish with a new peer-reviewed graduate student journal, but our board possessed a range of expertise in terms of copy-editing and peer-review. Thus, in bringing together varying skill sets and leadership styles, as well as taking on more work than hands to do it, communication and reliability definitely could be improved. Needless to say, with an immense workload and equally steep learning curve, the board recently agreed that establishing clearer norms on appropriate journal capacity is a must do.

Yet despite these challenges, the establishment of sound structure, policy, and collaborative relationships has proven fruitful – as most evident in our Inaugural Volume and expected publications. I see *TxEd* as continuing on a path to publishing leading academics and policy writers in the areas of educational praxis, politics, and policy, as well as being a vital part of what the College of Education has to offer its students. In the next few years, I would like to see *TxEd* consider moving away from its hierarchical board structure, which although beneficial at its founding, could become a future organizational trapping that limits student involvement and creativity. In five to ten years' time, I also hope *TxEd* will have grown in its academic inclusivity by building collaborative mentorship relationships with master's level and

undergraduate College of Education students, while also networking with other graduate student-run journals across the United States. At its current juncture, there is limitless potential of the *Texas Education Review.*

Narrative Two: Coordinating Editor

When our Managing Editor first approached me with the idea of the journal to see if I was interested in helping bring the idea to fruition, I did not hesitate to say yes. I then met with our Editor-in-Chief to learn more, and I was both intrigued and excited about the opportunities a journal would provide for graduate students, including myself. Navigating the publication experience is a critical part of our education as doctoral students, yet very few chances exist to participate in the publication process. I thought *TxEd* would change that. This, combined with the prospect of forging connections with peers in other departments and at different institutions, as well as with professors and policymakers alike, made me fully committed to launching *TxEd*.

From the beginning, our goal was to achieve buy-in from all departments within the College of Education. We saw this as a necessary step to ensuring longevity and success. Because of this, we strategized how best to recruit board members from departments other than our own. We also spent time considering how to communicate the idea to all graduate students across departments, because we understood from the beginning that we needed to garner as much support as possibly. Once we formalized our editorial board, we encouraged editors to recruit team members to help them with the Critical Issues sections they would facilitate. The team structure helped ensure we not only are creating the best possible journal, but also forging ties within the College and beyond the board's ten editors. Moreover, because of these additional team members we also were able to gather insight about *TxEd*'s processes from a variety of perspectives.

As Coordinating Editor, my jobs have been to take care of the many "outside" details. More specifically, I see my job as helping manage many of the communication processes that are separate from publication tasks, but essential to keep the journal running smoothly. To that end, I have scheduled and helped to plan meetings. I also have taken on all of the details that come with planning meetings, including securing spaces and equipment as needed. I am in charge of building our public presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social media outlets – in doing so, communicating our progress and successes to others in the field of educational policy. As a new journal, we had no financial resources to assist our start up processes. As such, I have worked with our Editor-in-Chief to locate funding, write funding proposals, and follow through on the details necessary to utilize received funding in the best way for *TxEd*. Though these are my "assigned" tasks as Coordinating Editor, I feel my job also is to be flexible in assisting my fellow executive editors in completing other tasks that might be more complex, or not fall under one of our specifically "assigned" categories. I strongly believe working together to accomplish our goals is necessary for *TxEd* to move forward, and therefore I do not see our roles as stringently defined, but rather fluid as we navigate through new and unpredictable situations.

In addition to the above, I also have mentored three editors. Essentially, I act as their sounding board and help them when complications arise in their own work. Along with my fellow executive editors, I have been an integral part of the editing and publication processes. Because we are striving to achieve excellence, we each review pieces for publication extensively. For our Inaugural Volume, we repeatedly reviewed each piece that was ready for publication, ensuring it was formatted correctly and that we had not missed anything. While time consuming,

this was necessary in order to achieve the rigorous journal we are striving to produce.

Successes in my opinion have been achieving our goals along the way. Creating interest in *TxEd* and recruiting the kind of editorial board that we did was a major success. Soliciting authors and articles for our Inaugural Volume also was a huge success, and the fact that we were able to review and publish so many strong pieces in our very first publication was a significant accomplishment. The other thing I see as one of our successes has been our ability to adapt and be flexible with changing deadlines, expectations, and situations we do not anticipate. We have had to make quite a few adjustments along the way, and as a team of executive editors, I feel we have done well in moving past and learning from issues that arose from these adaptations, which puts us in a much stronger position going forward.

Certainly there have been some challenges along the way as well. First and foremost, I feel we have struggled to identify our capacity as individuals and a team. We have tested this a few times along the way, and we are learning how much is too much. Because of this, we have had to move deadlines and, as mentioned previously, be more flexible with our expectations in order to balance our own academic responsibilities with the journal and other life commitments. Additionally, with so many moving parts communication has broken down at times. We therefore, have had to learn what works best for us as a team and how we can communicate more effectively without creating more work for ourselves.

Despite the challenges, I am very proud of what we have accomplished in the last year. I personally have forged and strengthened friendships, and believe we have all learned a great deal about the different aspects of the publication process. In five to ten years, I see the journal as an integral part of the graduate student experience at The University of Texas at Austin. I anticipate it will elicit more widespread participation from both students and faculty members, and it is my hope that this reaches even outside the College of Education. I also see the *Texas Education Review* as being a place where leading scholars want to be published and I believe in five or ten years that will certainly be the case. Being located in the heart of Texas' education policy arena, I believe our influence can expand beyond just our College of Education and university. I am confident *TxEd's* successes will continue and multiply in the coming years, and I feel honored to have been a small part in its beginning.

Narrative Three: Editor-in-Chief

I come to education after a first career in law, which involved at its inception attending law school (obviously) and serving on law journal. As a result, shortly after arriving at the College of Education and coming to appreciate the importance of publication as a part of the doctoral experience, as well as its role in academia, my first question was "who runs the student journal here?" I was surprised to learn that a student journal did not exist, which took me to Google to see if this was the norm or an exception in Colleges of Education. Minus a few universities, by and large the landscape was all green fields. Yet, I took inspiration from the fact that Berkeley, where I attended law school, recently launched its own student-run journal and thus decided to explore the possibility of starting one at The University of Texas at Austin.

I approached a University of Texas at Austin faculty member and mentor regarding the concept and was encouraged to pursue the opportunity. In the initial months, I began a process of speaking with other faculty to get input with regards to how to go about starting the journal and trying to understand how a journal would "fit" into the College, as well as whether there was any interest in supporting the journal and the startup process. I also contacted the *Berkeley*

Education Review and spoke with a founder and an executive editor about the early stages of their journal. Their advice was extremely helpful as well.

Based on all of this input, I crafted a "Proposal" document that outlined the journal structure, its mission, and budget. The purpose of the proposal was threefold: (1) to organize my own thinking regarding the concept; (2) to serve as a starting point for an editorial board to build from; and (3) to solicit support from faculty. Through this process, I learned that this was not the first time a journal was proposed in the College of Education, but past efforts had been unsuccessful.

The next step was recruiting two additional members to assist with the process in terms of founding the journal and recruiting a broader team. As I was new to the College of Education and my PhD program, I sought out students who were further along in the program, were experienced writers, were actively integrated in the College, and widely respected. I was fortunate to find two outstanding individuals who met these criteria and were as excited about the idea as myself.

My work as Editor-in-Chief has run the gamut from managing the startup process and soliciting grant funds – which were successfully obtained from UT System – to recruiting faculty sponsors and building a WordPress website on which to launch *TxEd*. The vast majority of my effort was expended on managing the startup process. As a new journal, we had to create an entire journal structure and process from the ground up. While many of us had experience working with journals, either through copy editing, peer-review, or publishing, none of us had experience starting a journal. – I liken this process to building a house. We all have lived in houses, been in other people's houses, and seen thousands in our lifetimes. Yet, having to build one from the ground up involves skills and knowledge that we might not possess at inception. *TxEd* decisions, many of which are iterative, had to be made about journal mission, submissions, dealing with authors, editorial board membership, length of tenure, and so on – with many "issues" arising at the very moment a decision must be made, making it impossible to anticipate everything. Thus, I concur with the other executive editors that starting *TxEd* involved more of a significant time commitment than any of us anticipated.

We have been at this for over a year now and successfully launched our Inaugural Volume which included an amazing array and breadth of authors. I was especially pleased that we were able to publish not only works by well-known academics, but also included pieces by practitioners and politicians – those who actually are out there implementing policy and working within its constraints. Our greatest challenges have involved workload management. We probably can be accused in our zeal and excitement, of undertaking more in terms of volume of publications than might be prudent for a startup journal. Lacking thoroughly established processes, journal tasks take on added complexity. Thus, if I had any advice to give a startup journal, it would be to look at our Inaugural Volume, count the number of pieces we published, and divide by three or four. A smaller launch publication would have been easier to manage and still would have gotten the ball rolling – also helping to work out kinks in our process at much lower stress levels.

Now that we are preparing to launch our second volume, I am thinking in terms of leaving the board and transitioning management to a new team. Yet again, this is another new process for *TxEd*. In preparation for that the team has taken on board feedback from other journals as their approach. I am comfortable that we have a solid plan in place to make the transition and I expect to actively watch from the sidelines along with other team members. When we established *TxEd*, we asked everyone for a four-year commitment as a part of joining

the editorial board – two years as an editor and two additional years as a mentor to succeeding board members. While this is a significant commitment, it is one way that we felt we could increase the likelihood of *TxEd's* long-term success and viability. We are very committed to the *Texas Education Review's* ongoing success and will be available to future boards to help in any way we can.

Conclusion

As previously discussed, participating in the publication process is an essential part of the graduate student experience. Yet, graduate students and even new faculty members continue to cite underdevelopment of skills as the reasons they do not publish (Baldwin & Chandler, 2002). While there are a variety of ways to address deficiencies in preparing academics for publishing, it is clear through our own experience that the creation of an open-access, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal is beneficial. Research supports this idea and cites that a journal provides both faculty and students a chance to "build confidence in writing and publishing" (Pearson, VanNest, & Jasinski, 2004, p. 68). Student-run journals permit opportunities for faculty mentoring beyond the classroom setting (Pearson et al., 2004). Both faculty and students benefit from the collaboration that stems from working together on a journal (Ware & Burns, 2008). Finally, learning *how* to transition a paper to a publishable piece is one that a graduate student-run journal helps students conceptualize as a simpler and more streamlined process (Deonandan et al., 2012).

In addition to editors gleaning knowledge about publishing, either arrived at through individual or collaborative editorial board activities, the *Texas Education Review* is freely accessible to the public and does not require that authors to "pay to publish." In doing so, the *Texas Education Review* strives at including academics, policy writers, and practitioners alike in nurturing a *communicative public space* (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005) around critical issues in public education. Further, by creating a public platform for all doctoral students within the College of Education, our journal participates in the opening up of intra-disciplinary knowledge, social understanding, and critique that all too often is walled off within individual disciplines.

What we have learned through our building of *TxEd* has been invaluable, and we believe strongly that students in other Colleges of Education would benefit from a similar experience. Guided by organizational and critical frameworks, we sought to share our narratives to offer support to others who set out on a similar endeavor. However, the reflective process has proven beneficial in considering where we have been, where we are going, and where we want to be in the near and distant future. In this way, our approach to this research has been both cathartic (Pillow, 2003) and productive.

While we are not completely confident of all that *TxEd's* journey holds, we are certain of several things. In our second volume, we accomplished the publication of one complete Critical Issue on charter schools. This Critical Issue showcases how the board envisions that all future *TxEd* publications will look, which includes editorials dialoguing over charter schools and a featured article that addresses a specific aspect of charters. The Critical Issue also includes a background piece that traces charter school history, contemporary concerns, and offers a bibliography highlighting suggested references one might consult in order to learn more about this "critical issue" in education. Additionally, Critical Issue featured articles were published in the spring volume – with the remainder of each Critical Issue section being rounded out in Fall 2014.

Our goal is to be the place scholars, policy writers, and practitioners go to gather the maximum amount of information about one or more Critical Issues in education. We believe we are on our way to meeting that goal. As mentioned previously, we know challenges remain and there will be more bumps along the way. Yet, we believe we have accomplished something that will enhance the graduate student experience at The University of Texas at Austin for years to come. We also hope our research and experiences will assist students in other Colleges of Education aiming to take similar steps at their own schools.

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Meghan D. Lehr is a student in UT Austin's Educational Policy and Planning PhD Program and is Coordinating Editor of the *Texas Education Review*. She has been a part of several research teams which have focused on data use in schools, and on principals and their preparation, particularly as both relate to issues of social justice. Meghan's own dissertation will examine how leadership, shaped by principal preparation, might impact both principal and teacher turnover in schools.

Raul R. Calvoz is a PhD student in UT Austin's Educational Policy and Planning Program, and is Editor-in-Chief of the *Texas Education Review*. He is Managing Partner of the law firm of Tuggey Calvoz LLP, and currently serves on the boards of the Texas Charter School Finance Corporation, the Rawson Saunders School, and Montessori for All. Raul's dissertation focuses on entrepreneurship education.

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