

EDITORIAL

Duty is Necessary, Passion is Sufficient: It Takes Both

Robert M. Capraro
Texas A&M University

I enjoyed reading the *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education (JUME)*; I was published in *JUME*, and several of my doctoral mentees were published in it. I reviewed for Dr. Stinson and used his editorial letters to me as a model for my graduate classes to talk about an editor who does “it” right. I liked the scholarly dialog that took place on the journal’s pages and the balance of new scholars who found a home for their work amongst the work of more established scholars. Recently, one of my newest doctoral mentees was developing a manuscript dealing with urban mathematics issues, so I directed him to *JUME*, just to be told the journal had gone inactive for nearly a year. I felt a tremendous sense of loss, both personally and for our field. I also felt immense regret that the work of the prior editorial team was going to pass into history and that their sacrifice and contribution to all of us would only survive as a commemorative footnote. I contacted Dr. Stinson, learned about the application process, and immediately put together a package to present to him and his team. Assuming the mantle of leadership with *JUME* became a perceived DUTY of mine. I assembled a team, and together we have moved the journal to a new, more modern operating system, developed a journal handbook, established an editorial board, and applied for inclusion in SCOPUS. We were able to do this because we inherited an excellent journal that was already listed in the *Directory of Open Access Journals* and had a robust list of potential reviewers and a prestigious list of scholars who have been published within its pages.

I am so pleased that I am at this perfect moment in time with the *Journal of Urban Mathematics Education* to be able to put all my thoughts, hopes, dreams, and promises in print so that you, our readers, can hold me and the team accountable. When I completed my application for the editorship of *JUME*, I was asked to respond to several questions from the committee. One was to conceptualize the mission statement, and below is what I wrote on the application:

The mission of the journal is to foster discourse among a community of scholars to catalyze and transform the global academic space in mathematics education into one that embraces critical research, emancipatory pedagogy, and scholarship of engagement in urban communities. Here, “urban” transcends geographical, socio-economic, gender

ROBERT M. CAPRARO is Professor of Mathematics Education and co-director of the Aggie STEM Center at Texas A&M University, Department of Teaching, Learning, and Culture, 4232 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4232; e-mail: rcapraro@tamu.edu. His research interests are centered on STEM educational research initiatives, urban mathematics achievement and representational models, and quantitative methods.

identity, and political contexts and rejects the use of “urban” as code. Specifically, our focus is on the teaching and learning in formal and informal places related to mathematics situated within urban contexts and wherever else teaching and learning takes place.

This mission is not completely unrelated to what was already in place. At most, it was my opportunity to read each word, consider meanings, and plan for how I would act and think about research and potential manuscripts.

The deep reflection on the mission precipitated an internal dialog about how I would foster and nurture new and more seasoned scholars to work outside the box and encourage *JUME* to be a safe place to try out new ideas, suggest new paradigms, and enact new methodologies. My driving question was about the nature of duty and what my duty is in this situation. I was struck with the idea that a good editorial team pushes limits, but I was haunted by what Dr. Carl Grant, editorial board chair, said to me during an interview for another journal much earlier in my career. Dr. Grant said, “A great editorial team creates a space where the field pushes limits and takes the heat when it goes wrong.” To me, that meant that the editors *do not* push limits. Instead, they create the environment where scholars challenge the status quo, where junior scholars challenge long-standing beliefs and practices, where new ideas have an opportunity to be heard, and where senior scholars can express new or evolving understandings of their long-standing positions. As such, it is the scholars in the field who must push the limits, take risks, and submit their work. When ideas receive critique, the editorial team must assume its responsibilities of making the decision to publish and providing opportunities for vetted professional dialogs to play out in published literature. In my response to the question on my application, “Why are you the best person to be the next editor of *JUME*?” I responded as honestly as I could have managed. I wrote:

I am not the best person to do the job. I can think of three or four others who would likely do a better and perhaps more efficient job than I will be able to do. However, what I bring with me is broad experiences in mathematics education research, institutional support, a large committed team, and a history of successful editing practices.

There are some amazing scholars in this space, and I am humbled by their accomplishments and the scope and breadth of their research. Looking at the list of now-senior scholars published in the journal’s first 10 years alongside the many new scholars who make up the early ranks of assistant professors or new associate professors in mathematics education, I see that there is a great deal of room for the journal to grow alongside this highly motivated and enthusiastic field. I believe that my work ethic and the current team will ensure that *JUME* reaches its potential as a journal that serves the field and its many voices while retaining the amazing quality it has had in the past. Therefore, I stand by my short but complex statement, and I feel

strongly that this team is uniquely situated to nurture and support the journal mission and evolution of *JUME*.

My experience with editing and my service on editorial boards provide the background and skills necessary to deal with the complexity of our field and the flexibility that it demands. There may be many people who received a rejection from me in my previous editorial roles; after all, the acceptance rate of the editorial boards I served on ranged from 5–25%. This percentage means that many people received rejection letters from me, and that group far outnumbers those who received acceptance letters. So, there will always be more people with a reason to be angry with me than to be happy. I expect that *JUME* will also have an acceptance rate between 5–25%, and I cannot promise that everyone will be happy with this. I can promise, however, to value the work entrusted to our review, to respect the efforts that our authors have made, and to treat each manuscript as I would expect mine to be treated. My editorial practices have always fostered a diverse conversation without bias toward a paradigm, entitled university group, or legendary professor status in the field.

This journal will not favor one research paradigm over another, and we will not honor or harbor any preconceived notions that “good research” comes from a handful of universities or graduates of a small number of professors (past or present). I promise that no one associated with the journal will ever imply that one person’s work is always good or that a newly submitted manuscript will be good by association. Each piece, each effort, each hard-fought research battle will stand on its own, judged for its merits and accepted or rejected based on its individual quality. With false hurdles and preconceptions removed from the editorial process, I believe the *JUME* team will be uniquely situated to nurture junior and mid-career faculty and underserved scholars with important messages, and thus help move marginalized research lines to a broader audience.

For our vision to move marginalized research lines to a broader audience, the right team must be in place, one that is not hobbled by allegiances that propagate biases toward certain research lines while marginalizing others. The former editorial team of *JUME* functioned well before our tenure. I am very grateful for all the work they put forth! They did the work for free, off the sides of their desks and with little recognition. Much of this is still true for our current team, but times change and transparency is paramount during periods of transition.

The best journals in academia have an editorial board: scholars in the field whose perspectives frame our work. To ensure that *JUME*’s editorial team remains dedicated to our high standards and lofty goals, we decided to solicit the most forward-thinking, provocative, and committed scholars in mathematics education for our first editorial board. One editorial board member will be a reviewer on each and every manuscript we send out for review. The most prominent and recognizable scholars in our field were solicited, as well as some incredible junior scholars with amazing promise. To choose a scholar to nominate for the editorial board, we read

the work of each nominee, listened to their published voice, and were persuaded by their logical arguments, reasoned perspectives, and fearless confrontation of the status quo. I am pleased that we had a 72% acceptance rate to serve on the board and that only one person did not respond to our invitation. The outstanding scholars who will serve on the editorial board will function as the rudder to ensure that although the *JUME* ship may tack against the wind, the journal's course remains true. There were those who declined to serve on the board. The main reason for this decision is best characterized by this quote from one of those who declined: “. . . I am just swamped! However, I am happy to be a reviewer though, so please keep me on as a reviewer.” I am honored that so many capable scholars have agreed to lend their skills and experience to *JUME*.

In my application, I was also asked to respond to a question about how I would move beyond criticism or stir controversy. My response—

Not sure what this is really attempting to disentangle. I am not sure what the “controversial” refers to, nor what we might call controversial. I believe that the role of the editor is to foster diverse voices and provide opportunities for those who have diverse research interests and perspectives, to have those discussions in the public space where commentary is permitted, but more importantly, the work is welcomed and solicited when appropriate. Extreme controversial topics often increase readership, citations, and the overall prestige of the journal. Receiving those extreme perspectives is probably the most important job of any editor.

As I reflect on what I wrote, I realized there was subtext that reveals my true feelings, particularly in the statement, “Receiving those extreme perspectives is probably the most important job of any editor.” What I meant here is that the field is responsible for submitting extreme perspectives, and the editorial team is responsible for fostering diverse voices and welcoming those perspectives when they are submitted. In my response, I also revealed that I believe that most of us do not think our ideas are controversial or proffer an idea just to be controversial. We move forward with ideas because we believe they are right and just. We believe that it would make the world, even when that world is just our neighborhood, a better place. I truly believe that controversial ideas are perceived to be controversial by those who disagree with an idea as a way to label what they do not understand well.

Another idea that needs to be unpacked from the lack of context in my response about what is thought to be controversial was that I substituted the word “perspectives” toward the end. It is not totally unrelated to my positionality for an editorial team nor my belief that “controversiality” resides in the receiver, listener, or reader. I also do not believe that controversiality is inherently characteristic of an idea that the word is ascribed to. I believe that an extreme or controversial perspective simply comes from a scholar moved by extreme passion to act, one whose belief in change stands in conflict with the status quo.

At this point, I would like to discuss two different words for a person who disrupts: *disrupters* and *disruptors*. During my 15 years as a public-school educator and 20 years as a higher education faculty member, I tended to find that those who were termed a *disrupter* often expressed their passion about a situation or context, and someone outside that situation or context who found that person's opinion "controversial" labeled them a disrupter. This was typically intended to be negative. However, thanks to business, we have the term *disruptor* (see Snihur, Thomas, & Burgelman, 2017; Webb & Gile, 2001). A disruptor is a person or entity that fosters an idea that creates a new niche or network that eventually revolutionizes an existing niche or network. As a result, a disruptor often displaces established ideas, ways of doing things, and/or alliances. It is important to note that revolutionaries are not all disruptors.

The problem with the term having two etymologies, two different uses, and two different interpretations is that it is often difficult to know what a person means when it is used, and these multiple uses create a great deal of ambiguity. The more meanings a term has, the more difficult it is for those from across disciplines to understand intended meanings (see Barroso et al., 2017; Rugh et al., 2018). Because we do not know which sense is intended when *disrupter/disruptor* is used orally, it is difficult to know if we have been complimented or insulted. For an excellent example of early positive disruptors, read about the impactful and important statements made in the editorial by my colleague entitled "*...and a Little Child Shall Lead Them.*" Perhaps an answer to internal and external struggles might be to spend less time labeling others and to invest more time understanding the passion underlying their actions.

Paradigm War Free Zone

I can imagine many authors will want to know how my own personal methodological paradigm will influence the paradigms accepted and published in the journal. When I thought of how to respond to this question during the application process, I was reminded of something Dr. Richard Duran once said to me: "The best research is published research!" He said this statement to me in conversation as a response to my concern that we, as a field, only value what is published. Unfortunately, there are many potential obstacles that can keep phenomenal research from ever being published. Therefore, editors, reviewers, and everyone else in the publication process must be cognizant that what we do impacts real people doing amazing work. We must not be blinded by our own subjective standards or biases; these must be set aside when we review the work of others. We must avoid prejudice in the review process and avoid pushing our paradigm on others by asking researchers to conduct a study we would design. We must respect the works of our peers and offer fair critique and discussion in our reviews and commentaries.

My conversation with Dr. Duran occurred during the time that the American Educational Research Association (AERA) was developing its empirical standards (Duran et al., 2006). So, to be clear, I did not interpret Dr. Duran's comment to mean that we should not hold each other to high standards when reporting research but that those standards should be transparent when possible and always objective and free of our own personal biases.

As I reflected on this matter while assembling my application for the *JUME* editor position, I was confronted with some import myths and truths. The greatest of these is one that I heard during my professional training to become a faculty member and have repeatedly heard since: "The question always drives the paradigmatic choice." Funny that in my career, during which I have helped author almost 200 publications, I have only come across nine questions that necessitated qualitative inquiry. I only became aware of this fact when I worked in collaboration with someone just like me, except she on only rare occasion found a question that necessitated quantitative inquiry. I think that the reality is that a person cannot divorce the "self" from the inquiry or the type of questions that, at least subliminally, aligns to one's own perspectives and beliefs.

I have come to learn that my lens is quantitative and that I need a team who is as strong qualitatively as I am quantitatively. Unapologetically, I believe the *JUME* editorial team is comprised of strongly positioned senior and junior scholars who excel in both quantitative and qualitative methods. This both-and ensures that all "Good Work," regardless of paradigm, gets published in *JUME*. We also believe that the AERA reporting practices article provides valuable assistance when conducting quantitative studies. To further assist with this commitment, we have solicited an editorial from a senior scholar and a more junior scholar in qualitative research and a senior scholar in quantitative research to help make "Good Work" a bit more transparent. Our sense of duty has brought the entire team to action, but it is our collective passion that will sustain us and make what could have been an arduous endeavor a work of love through an act of selfless service.

Warmest Thanks

To David and his amazing team of scholars, we are immensely grateful that you allowed us to continue your work and keep your dreams alive in the amazing journal you nurtured for 10 years. We stand on your shoulders as we continue your work and build *JUME*'s next chapter upon the foundation your team created. We hope our team makes you proud when you reflect on our progress and accomplishments. We trust you can manage a nod and a kind word or two in the twilight of our leadership and the dawn of our own successors in 2025.

To our readership, reviewers, and potential *JUME* authors, we are humbled to lead *JUME* and are in awe of the work undertaken in our field. We hope that if you

are not currently engaged with *JUME*, that you sign up to be a reviewer. If you are interested in serving on the editorial board, please make personal contact with an editor. Look for us at the *Editor's Roundtable* at AERA. Stop in, pull up a chair, and tell us what you are doing or ask questions. We look forward to engaging in broad dialogs and brainstorming for ways to bring the larger community closer together.

Isn't it a pleasure to study and practice what you have learned? Isn't it also great when friends visit from distant places? If one remains not annoyed when he is not understood by people around him, isn't he a sage?

—Confucius

References

- Barroso, L. R., Bicer, A., Capraro, M. M., Capraro, R. M., Foran, A., Grant, M. L., Lincoln, Y. S., Nite, S. B., Oner, A. T., & Rice, D. (ABC order). (2017). Run! Spot. Run! – Vocabulary development and the evolution of STEM disciplinary language for secondary teachers. *ZDM*, *48*(2), 187–201.
- Duran, R. P., Eisenhart, M. A., Erickson, F. D., Grant, C. A., Green, J. L., Hedges, L. V., . . . Schneider, B. L. (2006). Standards for reporting on empirical social science research in AERA publications: American Educational Research Association. *Educational Researcher*, *35*(6), 33–40.
- Rugh, M. S., Calabrese, J. E., Madson, M. A., Capraro, R. M., Barroso, L. R., Capraro, M. M., Bicer, A. (2018). STEM language can be the stem of the problem. In *Proceedings of the 48th Annual IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference* (pp. 1–8). Piscataway, NJ: IEEE.
- Snihur, Y., Thomas, L. D., & Burgelman, R. A. (2017). The disruptor's gambit: How business model disruptors use framing for strategic advantage. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2017*(1), 1–6.
- Webb, J., & Gile, C. (2001). Reversing the value chain. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *22*(2), 13–17.

Copyright: © 2019 Capraro. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.