Editorial:

Tips on Writing an Educational Research Article for *Brock Education*

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I read numerous manuscripts as the editor of an educational journal. Some arrive on my desk highly polished and almost ready for publication. Others have many fine qualities yet fall short in certain respects. A few are quite rough, but show promise or are very timely. Finally, there are the manuscripts that do not grab my attention and seem to be of limited interest to readers of this journal of educational practice and research.

Writing is an arduous process. Successful authors must be determined and persistent to craft and re-craft their work based on critical feedback from trusted colleagues and, later, by anonymous peer reviewers. Once this process is complete, there are then reams of suggestions and corrections from journal editors.

As a fellow academic who faces the same challenges when I submit manuscripts to peer reviewed journals, I try to make this process as meaningful as possible. I begin by finding suitable reviewers who understand the field of study and can offer constructive comments. I then help authors make sense of conflicting interpretations and assessments by reviewers: What must be done? What are merely suggestions? How does one structure an argument? Also, with much help from Assistant Editor Catherine Longboat (formerly Editorial Assistant), I work with authors to improve flow and tighten meaning. While editing an academic journal is a tremendous amount of work, I take great satisfaction in knowing that I have helped authors write better scholarly articles.

What are my tips for writing an educational research article for *Brock Education*? Below I highlight some of the qualities that appeal to me as a reader and editor. I draw on the six articles in this issue to illustrate.

First, capture my interest in the first few paragraphs. Too often papers begin “In this paper, I...” or “This is a study of X.” While these are direct and to the point, they are BORING. Imagine that I am browsing through on-line academic articles while sipping coffee on a Sunday

morning. You want to entice me to read on by hooking me with an important social issue, an interesting problem, or a clever analogy. “Keeping First Nations in Their Place - The Myth of ‘First Nations Control of First Nations Education’” is one article that would make me sit up and smell the coffee. The title immediately grabs my interest by challenging the status quo in First Nations education. The opening paragraphs make clear that this is academic *and* personal. Ron Phillips begins by recalling the school experiences of members of his extended family before challenging the differences in quality and funding between provincial and federally controlled schools. While this is more of a critical essay than a research paper, the reviewers and I were drawn to the authenticity and power of the writing. In the way he explains why he cares so passionately, Phillips conveys why I should care deeply about disparities in educational opportunities for Aboriginal people. Agree or disagree, you will be engaged.

Second, tell me why your topic of great interest or importance at the moment. As an editor, I am more likely to work with a manuscript because when has something urgent and important to share with the world. When I received the original manuscript for “Colour-blind: Discursive Repertoires Teachers Used to Story Racism and Aboriginality in Urban Prairie Schools”, I knew that this was a manuscript that I wanted to publish. Many of us engaged in equity work suspect that teachers often have unexamined prejudices concerning students who are different. Through interviews with teachers it became evident to author Tyler McCreary that notions of colour-blindness held by teachers often hide unexamined prejudices that informed their teaching. Now, after significant changes in response to feedback by reviewers and editors, McCreary’s article makes a significant contribution to understanding teachers’ assumptions about students from other cultures, particularly Aboriginal students. He also articulates how improved critical race analysis can improve teaching.

Third, convey a sense of wonder and engagement about the topic and the research. I think that you will be immediately drawn into “An Analysis of Two Critical Educators’ Practice: Research Concerns and Questions.” Author Dolana Mogadime is intensely curious about the ways in which race and cultural background influence the classroom practice of teachers. As readers, we are invited to join Mogadime on her journey into classrooms to develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which two teachers of colour draw on “their insider knowledge as representatives of their communities to provide emancipatory pedagogy” and critique the “Eurocentric knowledge basis in the curriculum.” Mogadime’s sense of wonder draws us into the stories of classroom practice and into inquiring about what it means to be critical educators from diverse communities.

Fourth, tell me how your work relates to the larger field of study. This need not be the entire field of education, but it should be an important subsection. Give me a broad sense of your area, as I may have a general interest rather than a special interest. What are the important issues related to the topic of your research? How does your research fit? What are you offering that is

new and interesting? As a generalist, I found “Rethinking Literacy Education in New Times: Multimodality, Multiliteracies, and New Literacies” to be a highly engaging review of new technologies for classroom literacy learning. Through their discussion of the differences between literacy with digital texts compared with print-based texts, Jennifer Rowsell and Maureen Walsh helped me develop a much stronger understanding of a field that has both intrigued and intimidated me. The thoughtful and engaging way in which they “demonstrate the potential of new technologies for classroom literacy learning” better prepares me for the rewards and challenges of teaching in new times.

Fifth, provide a thorough analysis of the research findings. Often manuscripts arrive with detailed data or stories but very short sections on analysis and conclusions. If you engaged in deep and meaningful research, then there must be something important to say about what it means and how it can inform our understanding of education. The findings are not self-evident. They need to be drawn out by you so that I can make the connections and be more likely to incorporate the lessons learned into my work as an educator and researcher. “Community Action-Based Field Work: Training Counselors to Become Social Agents in Schools and Communities” exemplifies this quality. After providing readers with a detailed account of their research with counsellors, Adonay Montes and Laurie Shroeder engage in a detailed critical analysis of themes that emerge from their research. Through this analysis, they develop an understanding that issues of social justice require “the deconstruction of popular myths about poverty and the oppressed as well as consideration of methods designed to break the cycle of oppression and poverty.” As importantly, they identify specific skills that can be developed in a school counseling program to increase the mindfulness and empathy of counselors work with diverse student populations.

Sixth, write well. Good writing looks effortless, but is the result of countless revisions and edits. For complex ideas to become clear and understandable, the author must carefully select the words and phrasings that bring these ideas to life. In “Examining My Assessment Literacy Instruction Practices with Teacher Candidates,” Mary Rice does a fine job of presenting clearly and cleanly some very complex ideas. But it did not start out this way. The reviewers were confused at times by elements of the original manuscript: brilliant interesting ideas intertwined in complex and, sometimes, confusing ways. In revising the paper, Rice maintained much of the complexity of her original work on using assessment literacy instruction in a course on developing second language literacy. In the final version, the many layers of complexity in her thinking are clearly presented in a model of narrative inquiry and self-study as methods for understanding teaching and teacher education.