The Faculty Scholar Role in Peer Review of a Journal Article

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The Faculty Scholar Role in Peer Review of a Journal Article

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Peer review is a process to help ensure publication of high-quality research. Manuscripts submitted for publication are evaluated by others with similar content or methodological expertise, and the feedback is used by editors to determine suitability for publication. Participation in the peer review process may help improve agile teaching as well as contribute to the faculty scholar roles of professional service. This paper describes the process of peer review, including criteria for becoming a reviewer and how to perform a review.

Introduction

Peer review is an important element to ensure publication of high-quality research. The purpose of peer review is to evaluate a journal article written by others working in the same field or discipline and provide feedback on the quality of research and writing to both the authors and editor of the journal. The peer review process results in manuscript revision and ultimately, improved quality of the writing and concepts. This paper will demystify the peer review process and share the characteristics of excellent peer review.

Learning Outcomes

The reader will be able to:

1. Understand how the peer review process relates to agile teaching and the faculty scholar role.

2. Outline the peer review process for a scholarly article.

3. Describe the benefits of being a peer reviewer for a scholarly journal.

Institutional Context

Faculty members have multiple roles and responsibilities related to teaching, scholarship, and service to meet university promotion and tenure guidelines. Faculty are often required to provide service at multiple levels including

departmental, college, university, and professional. Peer reviewing is often noted on one's curriculum vitae and institutions may include a researcher's participation in the peer review process when making promotion decisions (Kelly et al., 2014). Participation in peer review is a professional level service to the scientific community that provides many benefits for reviewers, authors, and readers. Although serving as a peer reviewer is a volunteer role, it is necessary to ensure the quality, rigor, and accuracy of published research. Participation in peer review supports agile teaching and the faculty scholar role.

Agile Teaching and Peer Review

Agile Teaching

Agile teaching involves innovation, collaboration, and designing meaningful learning for students (Krehbiel et al., 2017). Agility in teaching is reflected in active, cooperative, and collaborative learning strategies. Developing scenarios for students to engage in problem solving, critical thinking, and interactive group processing are part of agile teaching, which highlights innovation. These skills can be enhanced through peer review of articles submitted to scholarly and education journals in any discipline, because the process of peer reviewing articles exposes higher education faculty to the most current scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) research (Pytynia, 2017). Critiquing the writing of others through peer review of articles in higher education and discipline specific education journals can help improve professional writing skills and the critiquing of students' writing skills (Caffarella & Barnett, 2000). This in turn creates opportunities to improve student work, as students' writing skills may improve based on the more nuanced faculty feedback. Additionally, by peer reviewing new articles, faculty can become aware of current trends in higher education and discipline specific publications and therefore be innovators or early adopters of new agile teaching strategies. Students benefit from this as well, as the recipients of the agile teaching strategies should result in greater gains in student learning.

Faculty Scholar Role

The faculty-scholar role involves both agile teaching and peer review of new research in their field. Peer review of research articles mimics agile teaching in the following ways:

- Peers and instructor both offer reflective feedback
- Peers seek guidance from peer reviewers, as students seek input from faculty and other students

- There is iterative feedback with each revision for both
- Peers bring diverse experience to the task of peer reviewing as students and faculty bring diverse experiences to the teaching/learning situation
- Peer review and agile teaching are both about learning, people, and change.

For faculty, performing article reviews can support the promotion and tenure process by providing evidence of content expertise (Pytynia, 2017). Mentor feedback, formal training, peer support, and practice reviews can be useful tools in improving the ability to critique the work of other faculty and students (Gasparyan & Kitas, 2012; Steinert et al., 2008). Faculty can embed active learning experiences modeled on the peer review process; demonstrate how to provide professional critiques on writing assignments; and role model the professional role of peer reviewer. These processes are mutually beneficial for students and faculty.

Benefits of Peer Review

There are numerous reasons to be a peer reviewer of a scholarly or educationally related article. One of the most common motives is a faculty member wishes to contribute to a publication in their subject area and the article being reviewed is relevant to their own work, research, and interests. Other reasons to volunteer to be a peer reviewer are out of a sense of professional duty and to be associated with the sterling reputation of a particular journal (Rosenbaum, 2005). Lastly, a faculty member may wish to be a peer reviewer to keep up with current research in their discipline or college teaching and the opportunity to learn something new (Tite & Schroter, 2007), which benefits student learning by exposing students to the newest content, via novel, evidence-based pedagogy.

There are reasons to decline an invitation to peer review an article. The most important reason would be that it conflicted with a faculty member's current workload. Another situation may involve too tight of a deadline for completing the peer review. Faculty may not be interested enough in the article they were asked to review or feel confident or knowledgeable enough in the subject matter. Finally, a faculty may be busy reviewing too many manuscripts from other journals to consider another invitation to peer review (Tite & Schroter, 2007).

For peer reviewers the down sides are it can be time consuming, it is rarely acknowledged by the journal formally, and it is a service that is not remunerated. For editors of respected journals, it is extremely difficult to find qualified peer reviewers. It is time consuming to locate peer reviewers, get them to agree to be

reviewers, and communicate with them numerous times. It can delay publication of articles, there can be a bias, and there is often a lack of quality and consistency among peer reviewers (Derraik, 2015; Gasparyan & Kitas, 2012; Tite & Schroter, 2007). These concerns are important because they may prevent faculty from engaging in the peer review process, and ultimately students may not gain the related benefits of faculty participation. Additionally, if faculty express to students the frustrations or limitations of the peer review process, it may prevent students from seeking out the experience themselves.

Peer Review Process

The peer review process begins following submission of a manuscript to a peer-reviewed journal. The editor or other member of the Editorial Board first screens the manuscript for quality and to ensure that it aligns with the mission and scope of the journal, if the content adds something new to the literature, and if the writing is at an acceptable level (Causey-Upton et al., 2020). If the editor approves, the manuscript will move forward for peer review. At that time the editor identifies appropriate peer reviewers with the relevant content and methodology expertise and initiates a peer review request. The peer reviewer reviews the manuscript title and abstract (authors are blinded) and decides if they are qualified to perform the review, and if they have the time and interest. Potential peer reviewers may choose to accept or decline the request. This process continues until the editor solicits the appropriate two to three reviewers who agree to complete peer review of the manuscript.

The peer reviewers complete a thorough critique of the manuscript using a peer review form, checklist, and/or track changes and submits their review to the editor. The editor then sends feedback from all reviews to the author(s) along with the disposition of the paper which typically includes the following options: accepted, accepted with minor changes, major revisions required, or rejected. For dispositions other than reject, authors may choose to revise the manuscript based on reviewer feedback and resubmit to the journal; the peer reviewer may be asked to review the manuscript again, especially if the paper required major revisions. This process of revise/resubmit and review continues until the manuscript is accepted for publication. Generally, if authors make all required revisions the article will most likely be accepted for publication, but the final determination is made by the journal editors.

Criteria to Peer Review

A peer reviewer must have familiarity with the content of the article, whether it be the discipline specific or educationally related content, and/or research methods. Peer reviewers demonstrate expertise via their curriculum vitae, by showing that they have already published articles with similar content in the journal the article was submitted to or other respected journals of similar quality. Additionally, editors may ask peer reviewers to submit keywords that reflect their expertise, which helps the editor to select the most effective reviewers (Pytynia, 2017). A faculty member is ready to be a good reviewer when they have both the time and interest in being a good peer reviewer. Two indicators that a faculty member is ready to build a track record as a dependable and high-quality reviewer are that the reviewer reads current journal articles extensively in their field and the faculty person has excellent writing skills (Gasparyan & Kitas, 2012).

How to Become a Peer Reviewer

There are several ways to become a peer reviewer. The most common source of reviewers comes from authors who have published within a journal; editors will often ask authors from their journal to serve as peer reviewers for articles with similar topics (Pytynia, 2017). Once an author has established content and/or methodology expertise by publishing in the same area repeatedly across journals, editors may also reach out to request a peer review in related topic areas. Other mechanisms for becoming a peer reviewer include responding to a general call for peer reviewers from a journal website, reaching out to a journal editor directly and expressing an interest in becoming a peer reviewer, or being referred by a colleague to complete a peer review request (Tumin & Tobias, 2019).

Peer Reviewer Responsibilities

General responsibilities for reviewers include completing peer review within an established time frame and providing feedback that is thorough, constructive, and kind in nature. Individuals who serve as reviewers also have specific responsibilities to authors, editors, and readers. Reviewers should provide detailed, written constructive feedback regarding the quality of the manuscript to authors within a reasonable time (Garmel, 2010). This feedback should be professional and should not include personal comments or criticisms. Peer reviewers must also maintain confidentiality by not sharing authors' work prior to publication. Reviewers have a responsibility to editors to respond promptly to the peer review request and to thoughtfully determine the quality of an article manuscript followed by their recommendations for acceptance or rejection

(Garmel, 2010). Peer reviewers must also notify editors of any personal or author related conflicts of interest for a particular manuscript. Reviewers' responsibilities to readers relate to ensuring that published articles meet standards for the specific journal as well as general research standards, in order to protect readers from "fatal flaws" or inaccurate research (Garmel, 2010; Tumin & Tobias, 2019). Missing references or citations that misrepresent other published work must also be identified and addressed prior to article publication.

Writing a Peer Review

Prior to writing a peer review, reviewers should review the journal's author guidelines as well as the peer review form provided by the journal. In general, a review should include assessment of the importance of the research question and originality of the study. A review should also discuss strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, study design, statistical and other analysis methods, as well as interpretation of the results. Reviewers should comment on writing style and clarity, table and figure presentation, and also report any ethical concerns to the editor (Garmel, 2010). Serious concerns should be provided as confidential comments to the editor, such as related to ethics or plagiarism, and would not be shared directly with authors.

A peer review should provide thoughtful, constructive comments that include a detailed critique of the components of the article in addition to completing the specific peer review form required by the journal. These comments can be provided by referring to specific lines within the document, by providing a bulleted list of comments, or by adding comments to a PDF of the paper itself. Comments should be specific and provide examples to clearly guide authors in revising to improve the quality of the article. Reviewers should avoid recommending additional work that exceeds the scope of the study or the journal requirements. It is also not useful to only provide comments on grammar, typos, or reference style; while these issues are important, they can be addressed during copyediting and the review should focus more on the quality of the study and overall writing of the article rather than surface issues. Reviewers also should not rewrite portions of the article for authors or tell them exactly how to revise their manuscript. Promoting one's own ideas or agenda is also not appropriate in a peer review.

After completing a thorough assessment of the quality of the article manuscript, reviewers must specify their recommendation for the disposition of the paper. Recommending rejection of the paper is appropriate when the content of an

article is not suitable for publication or when there are significant methodological errors that cannot be fixed. Major revision is a common rating and is used when there are correctable errors in the data, the paper needs major rewriting for organization and flow, or the description of the methods is unclear. Minor revision is appropriate when there is minimal rewriting needed for clarity or to fix small errors, changes to the paper can easily be made within the current structure, when technical clarification is needed, or if there are minor APA issues. Publish as is would be used rarely, if ever, as almost all articles can be greatly improved through the peer review process.

The Editor and Peer Reviewer Relationship

The relationship between the editor and peer reviewer should be collegial. During the peer review process, the peer reviewer may communicate with the editor for a variety of reasons. For example, the reviewer could express comments or concerns that are not appropriate for the author, alert the editor in delays with their review, recommend additional reviewers, or note concerns with conflict of interest. Likewise, the editor may reach out to the peer reviewer to ask for clarification of an element of the review or to request a re-review. Peer reviewers have an obligation to provide a thoughtful decision regarding their recommendation for the disposition of the paper; however, the editor or editors make the final decision after weighing the results from all peer reviews, editor input, and based on the timeliness of the paper's content. Many journals alert the reviewers, in addition to authors, as to the final disposition of the article.

Conclusion

Participation in the peer review process has the potential to benefit the reviewer, the author, the journal, and students. The reviewer gains additional knowledge and expertise in their area of interest, which can in turn improve their agile teaching abilities. Students benefit from improved critique of their own writing, as well as exposure to cutting edge content and pedagogical techniques. Critiquing the writing of others is a useful tool in improving one's own writing. Reviewers are also able to claim credit for professional service which benefits efforts toward promotion and tenure. For authors, the peer review process potentially alerts them to methodological concerns, errors, or issues with clarity, and through revision the manuscript may be significantly improved. Journals, and ultimately disciplines, benefit from the peer review process via the dissemination of high-quality research.

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