Editorial: On the Importance of Practitioner Journals

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Innovations in Science Teacher Education is the practitioner journal of the Association for Science Teacher Education. Practitioner journals are often misunderstood, and at times, undervalued. Take our university for example. We are science educators in the Department of Physics, Astronomy and Geosciences within the Fisher College of Science and Mathematics. Our college contains mathematicians, computer scientists, scientists, and science and mathematics educators. As such, we have a department chair who is a physicist and a dean who is a geologist. The science educators in the college have often needed to explain the work of science educators to our colleagues and administrators, especially as related to promotion and tenure discussions. In our college's past, practitioner journals were misunderstood as a place for manuscripts that were not selected for publication in prestigious research journals like the *Journal of Science Teacher Education*. Practitioner articles were also perceived by some faculty in our college as being extremely easy to write because they were shorter in length compared to research manuscripts, and printed on glossy paper.

We are glad to say that our department and college now have a much better understanding of what a practitioner journal is and why it is important to our field. Science educators prepare the next generation of science teachers and there is great value in sharing our practice with other science educators. One of the hallmarks of teaching is discussing great ideas with peers to implement with your own students. Practitioner journals provide an outlet for sharing ideas about preparing science teachers within the peer-review process to help ensure the ideas are innovative, engaging, and of broad interest to science educators.

At an institution like ours, an institution that is not research intensive, but values teaching (65%), research (25%), and service (10%), teaching is the majority of our workload. As such, it makes sense that we teach well. We are practitioners. That is to say, we practice what we teach others to do. So, it is critically important that we have an outlet to share how we teach, design lessons and programs, implement professional development programs, and assess our progress as science educators. Practitioner journals provide a place to do so.

But what about research intensive universities? Even among science educators at universities with the highest research activity, the preparation of science teachers is arguably as important as developing and reporting on grant-funded research programs. Moreover, many grant-funded programs focus on preparing science teachers in innovative ways. The results of this type of work are not only applicable to research journals, but the details of the program are important to other practitioners. The *Innovations* journal is a place to report the details of the program: what was done, why it was done, how well it worked, and what

lessons you learned along the way. Thus, *Innovations* serves as another way to disseminate information about grant-funded projects. Practitioner journals like *Innovations* serve a unique niche in helping other science educators reflect upon their work with preservice and inservice science teachers and incorporate innovative practices in their curriculum or professional development programming.

While there is no disputing the important role research plays in the work of science educators, the work science educators do in and out of the classroom to prepare preservice and inservice science teachers is equally important. Unfortunately, we have heard stories from our colleagues at other institutions where the work of preparing science teachers seems undervalued due to the view that publishing in practitioner journals is not something that "counts" for promotion and tenure decisions. Given the often central role of our positions in developing science teachers it seems that one would be derelict in their duties not to try to enhance their instruction by learning more about innovative teaching strategies or sharing their own innovative teaching strategies.

A search for the terms "practitioner journals" indicates a nonexistent literature base on just what a practitioner journal is or why they are important. However, such a search yields numerous examples of practitioner journals across many fields of study. Many fields have found it advantageous to foster collegial discussions of their practice and a way to provide ongoing professional development. Science educators are no different. Prior to *Innovations*, science educators had journals that served as outlets for sharing their practice in K-12 classrooms, and some content specific journals for sharing their work preparing science teachers in a narrow field. *Innovations* is a practitioner journal that welcomes innovative ideas for preparing preservice and inservice science teachers for any grade band or science content field. We hope all science educators find value in sharing their innovative ideas in this practitioner journal and that your work as a practitioner is valued by your institutional colleagues. After all, the teaching which we continue to practice is what drew many of us to academia in the first place.