

Editorial: Peer Review and the Practitioner Journal

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The peer review process is often viewed as a hallmark of many academic disciplines. However, the history of peer review may be shorter than once thought with the idea that referees should be responsible for the quality of literature not emerging until the 20th century (Baldwin, 2017; Smith, 2006). Despite the wide-spread use of peer review in the current era of academic publishing, the peer review process remains the subject of frequent conversation and is by no means widely considered to be devoid of flaws (Baldwin, 2017). One reason for the ongoing conversation about peer review is the possibility of reviewers altering the work of authors, or so-called “Design by Committee” (Ziman, 1980). Manuscripts are often accepted under the condition that authors satisfactorily address the concerns raised by anonymous reviewers. Thus, the revisions are highly susceptible to coercion to conform to the preferences of the reviewers (Bradley, 1982). Inevitably, the name of the author(s) is present on the published article regardless of the significant changes resulting from reviewer comments. Although the article may have undergone major revisions at the request of reviewers, the author(s) are responsible for what is, and is not, included in the published article and reviewers remain anonymous despite the often large role they play in bringing a manuscript to publication. Indeed, the work of peer reviewers often does not count toward tenure and promotion in meaningful ways which may result in little incentive to write careful, detailed reports (Baldwin, 2017). While much has been written on this topic, much of that literature relates to peer review as it applies to research funding and publication of research reports. Practitioner journals also rely on peer review, although in somewhat unique ways.



While the peer review process may differ for conferences, publications, and grants, across publication types, the process may vary as well. Practitioner journals are the place where practitioners can share what they do with other practitioners. *Innovations in Science Teacher Education* is a place for science educators to share a description of their work preparing preservice science teachers and providing professional development for inservice science teachers. Both research and practitioner manuscripts are likely initially screened by editors to

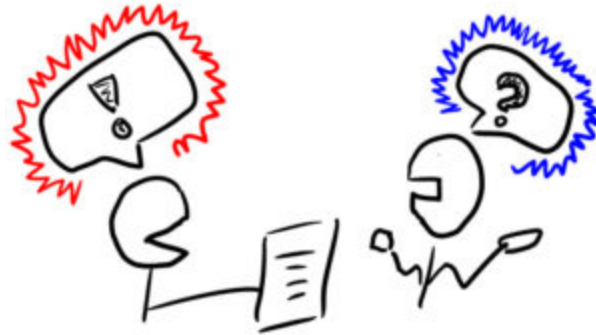
determine if the manuscript is suitable for the specified mission of the journal and adheres to stylistic guidelines. Manuscripts that address the mission of the journal and adhere to submission guidelines are sent out for double blinded peer review.



In considering the extent to which peer review works, Smith (2006) posited that it depends on what the peer review is for that determines whether it works. While there are some similarities between the review process for research and practitioner manuscripts, the hallmark of practitioner articles is that they provide information on the practice of preparing others to perform a specified task. In regard to *Innovations*, the peer review process works if the information in the articles is of interest to readers such that they can replicate all, or parts of, the described science teacher preparation activities or programs in their unique context. Thus, the reviewer of practitioner articles has two main criteria in addition to several minor additional criteria. The first major criteria is to evaluate the extent to which the manuscript is of broad interest to other practitioners. Simply put, for *Innovations* a central question is the extent to which the manuscript offers a unique or novel approach to preparing science teachers. The second criteria is the extent to which the manuscript contains specific details that will enable practitioners to replicate the work of the author(s). Once the manuscript is deemed to be innovative and of broad interest to science educators, the work of the reviewer centers on helping the author(s) more clearly communicate their practice to others. Reviewers evaluate the manuscript without having been present during the reported activities and are well situated to contemplate what information is required to ensure journal readers receive all the information needed to envision replicating the work in their own unique contexts.

The work that is reported in manuscripts is described as it was conducted by the author(s). Reviewers may have ideas for how to change that work, but the fact remains that the authors are reporting what they did, not what they hope to do in the future. Thus, reviewers should not ask authors to change what they did unless the work is deemed to not be innovative,

and, therefore, not publishable in the current form. Reviewers may then provide insight into ways to modify instruction to make it more innovative or effective and authors would need to implement that work in their setting prior to rewriting the manuscript.



While authors are not required to revise each instance of reviewer feedback, doing so in order to provide readers with more detailed information is at the heart of the peer review process for practitioner journals. Those comments and suggestions that go beyond the scope of improving readability may not be addressed by authors who instead may choose to explain to editors why the comment or suggestion is not addressed. It should come as little surprise that authors who revise and resubmit manuscripts ultimately develop manuscripts that provide more insightful details and ultimately are accepted for publication. This is an iterative process, though, and any manuscript may be subject to multiple rounds of peer review. Knowing that the purpose of this process is to improve the manuscript and provide a published article that is more meaningful to readers should provide a powerful incentive for authors and reviewers to strive to work together to develop an article that authors and reviewers can be proud of and readers can utilize in their own practice.

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