

Writing for Practitioner Journals as Reflective Practice

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Over the years, we have found that regardless of the number of times we have taught a lesson, when it comes to sharing that lesson with others in practitioner journals, we realize how many minute and nuanced details there are that we must make a concerted effort to share with readers. The act of writing out the lesson from start to finish is challenging for many reasons, but one reason is the level of detail needed to adequately convey what takes place in the classroom. The interactions between the instructor and students, between students, and the rationale behind each aspect of the lesson must be conveyed with a high level of attention to detail. Whereas, a discussion with a colleague is most likely to include clarifying questions, the act of writing is much more of a one-way transfer of information. As such, the act of writing a lesson for others most often challenges the author to more deeply consider the instructional decisions and theoretical framework that guide the instruction in the first place. We simply must try to anticipate all the questions a reader may have, and provide clarity and depth of explanation to avoid uncertainty among readers in the first place. The act of writing for practitioner journals results in a deeper reflection of one's practice than what may occur from simply reflecting to improve upon instruction for subsequent semesters. Moreover, the comments and questions that arise from the peer-review process result in further reflection on one's practice of teaching. Such reflective thinking is not specific to writing for practitioner journals, but one could argue that it is indeed difficult for one to write a practitioner article without engaging in reflective thinking.



Reflective thinking can occur when instructors develop their own thinking about their own practice with the aim of changing it according to students' needs which may help instructors articulate their own teaching philosophies (Galea, 2012). Reflective practice is a dialogue of thinking and doing through which one becomes more skilled (Schon, 1987). Through the act of writing for a practitioner journal, science teacher educators engage in a reflective practice as a process that helps instructors think about what happened, why it happened, and what

else could have been done to reach their goals (Cruchshank & Applegate, 1981). When science teacher educators work together to submit manuscripts that describe their approach to instruct preservice or inservice science teachers, or to compare and contrast their individual teaching methods, they participate in reflective practice as a systematic and comprehensive data-gathering process which is enriched by dialogue and collaborative effort (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). One of the attributes of a reflective practitioner is that they are committed to continuous improvement in practice (Larrivee, 2009). Thus, the articles that appear in practitioner journals such as *Innovations in Science Teacher Education* have been refined over time as instructors teach and reflect on their teaching. Those ideas are subsequently expressed in written form with great thought and attention to detail which is further explicated through the review of peers upon submission for publication. The resulting practitioner article is enhanced through this reflective process before the article is published and shared with others.



The act of teaching entails reflection upon one's practice. In some cases, reflection is done in isolation as the instructor reflects upon their own instruction in a formative manner. In other cases, an instructor may reflect upon their students' comments provided within a course evaluation, though these comments rarely focus on individual lessons. In other cases, the comments of peers, in a formative or summative evaluation of one's teaching may result in reflection. Having reflected on our teaching as a result of all of these activities, we feel strongly that, while each of these activities is worthwhile and provides invaluable insight into teaching, the act of writing a lesson for a practitioner journal provides a level of detailed reflection that goes beyond most other types of reflective practice. Beyond the reflection that takes place as an individual author contemplates instruction, or the interactions between coauthors as they contemplate the way their instruction is similar or different from one another, the external reviewers provide insightful feedback that is irreplaceable. External reviewers are, well, external to the work described in the article and are in a unique position to provide insight as an outsider who is unfamiliar with the lesson. By their very nature, external reviewers are not likely to be familiar with the innovative practice as described by authors and serve as a sounding board to convey suggestions to authors to mitigate

questions that may arise among readers if the article is not revised. This caliber of feedback serves to extend and enhance the reflection required by authors in a unique way that is difficult to duplicate outside of the publication process.



Writing for practitioner journals is beneficial for both authors and readers. To some extent, we believe that the activities described in practitioner journals offer the best instructional ideas our field can offer. So, we owe it to ourselves and to our colleagues to share ideas which we have reflected upon in great detail. While the process of writing enhances our own instruction, the process of sharing can enhance and transform the instruction of others.

References

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