

Editorial

What are science education journals for?

Perhaps a simple answer is “to provide information to, and a means of communication between, science educators in order to improve the quality of science education in our schools and universities”. This immediately raises the question as to whether science education occurs entirely, or even mainly, within schools and universities but it seems that most science education journals are distributed through institutions or to individuals engaged in teaching and/or researching in science departments.

However, we suggest that things are not quite that simple and that a discussion between those compiling, publishing, writing for and reading these journals might move us closer towards achieving aspirations to *improve* science education.

A reasonable, if controversial, starting point is to ask some questions about the motives of those involved in the journal ‘process’.

Firstly, the readers: Who are you? Why do you read this journal? Do you find the contents interesting? Does your reading improve your knowledge and understanding of science, science teaching or research? Does it impact on your practice of teaching or research?

Unless there is a ‘Yes’ to some extent for most readers to the last two questions then clearly the journal is not succeeding for you, and is unlikely to retain *your* readership for much longer.

There is also a question as to whether those who might benefit from reading the journal actually have access to it. We know, for example, that most science educators in Colombia and other countries do not see a copy and that a very small proportion of educators across South America even know of its existence. In this continent it is likely that the majority of teachers in secondary schools and university here do not read copies of any science education journals - either because they do not know of their existence or because, if they do, they cannot afford the subscription. One problem, in South America (and elsewhere), is that many Science teachers do not feel the need to read journals or even to try to improve their teaching (there is the anecdotal situation here about the “the book of battle” - el libro de combate - , which provides lessons for one teacher for 20-30 years of his class work). Also, generally speaking there are not many people who are keen of reading, because secondary schools in Latin-American countries do not enthuse students with a love of reading books. Another important issue is that there is not an appropriate National system of accreditation and improvement of professional skills of teachers in Latin-American countries. One of the purposes of this Journal is to support science teachers’

continuing professional development both in terms of their own science knowledge and their professional teaching skills.

It really would be helpful to receive feedback from our readership on some of the above issues and on questions such as:

- do you think it would be useful for this journal to be made available (free or at minimal cost) to all science teachers? Clearly for this to be possible it would require sponsorship from government or a major commercial organization. However, the cost would be relatively modest since the investment for creating the journal has already been made. (Are any potential sponsors reading this?)
- could this journal be adopted and adapted to become *the primary journal* for Associations of science teachers across the South American continent. This would in no way diminish its interest throughout the rest of the English/Spanish speaking world. (Are you an active member of such an organization?)
- how could the journal be made more useful to you?

Secondly, the Writers, Editors and Publishers: what motivates them?

Certainly it is not a way of becoming rich! The printing and distribution costs have to be covered and it is necessary to maintain an office to support the editorial work but all others involved are volunteers. Editors and publishers are interested, professionally committed to the journal and together with our sponsors are pleased with the success of the journal, which has already published more than 100 articles written by experts from 30 different countries. The journal is indexed and abstracted in major international databases and now that it is available online it is possible to access the information from anywhere.

Our Journal centres its interest on concerns of teachers and those in authority charged with supporting the improvement of learning and teaching of science in our schools and universities. Many of the articles published address important and current issues such as evaluation, assessment, computers and the Internet and active and engaging methods of learning and teaching.

Authors who work in universities are *required to publish* as part of their contract of employment. We believe/hope that most who publish in this journal also have an important message or enthusiasm or issue to share with colleagues. Many have to re-draft articles a number of times and a number of submissions are rejected!

Those concerned with the launching of this journal have achieved the most difficult tasks in getting a new international journal established. The crucial next stage is for you, the readership, to ensure that it evolves to meet your needs and links you into a wider network of colleagues in science education. Please see that your colleagues are aware of the journal, encourage them to read some articles. Engage in discussions

about science and science education and consider writing a paper – or a letter - yourself.

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