

Astronomy Education Review

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Astronomy Education Review: An Afterword

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This October would have marked the 12th anniversary of the first paper published in a new on-line journal called *Astronomy Education Review* (*AER*). Instead of celebrating that anniversary, however, it appears that we must face the fact that the journal will cease publication in its present form. After taking over the journal from its founding editors (Sidney Wolff and Andrew Fraknoi) and its founding publisher (the National Optical Astronomy Observatories) and subsidizing and publishing the journal for five years, the Council of the American Astronomical Society (with the advice of its Publications Board) decided that *AER* had too few papers, too few readers, and covered astronomy education too narrowly to be supported by the Society, with only a very small contribution from the Astronomical Society of the Pacific and a few small donations as outside income.

The AAS has made it clear that it strongly supports astronomy education. It simply felt that *AER*, as it was currently edited and published, was not the best vehicle to assist its members and the community that does education and outreach. The AAS has kindly pledged to keep the *AER* archive on the web in perpetuity, so that the articles published so far will remain available (and citable) to readers and authors.

The AAS is also asking its Astronomy Education Board to review its complete education program. From this review, it is possible that some other publication covering astronomy education may yet emerge. The Society's elected Education Officer, Dr. Ed Prather of the University of Arizona, will oversee this review and certainly welcomes comments from members or potential members of the AAS about the Society's educational objectives and programs.

When we were first imagining what *AER* might look like, what I had in mind (and wrote up as a proposal) was a journal more like *Science* or *Nature*, where refereed research reports shared space with news, commentary, discussions of educational practice, letters, announcements, resource guides, etc. You can still see this vision reflected in the wording you come to when you click on the "About" and "Authors" tabs of the top menu on the journal's home page. Admittedly, such a publication would have taken more staff and more effort than a journal with research papers alone. But I believe that an education journal in astronomy with broader coverage might have attracted more readers, more authors, and (perhaps) more sources of income for its publisher. That experiment remains to be tried.

In the meantime, as the person who has been associated with the journal for its entire life span (from conception to final repose), I hope I can take the liberty of being the one to thank both NOAO and the AAS for putting their own staff and resources behind the journal. I would also like to thank co-founder Sidney Wolff and current editor Thomas Hockey for their years of work helping our authors to present their work as accessibly and intelligibly as possible. Much thanks is also due to the dozens of astronomers and educators who served—with no compensation other than the good feeling of helping our community—as referees, on the international Board of Editors, or on the Council of Advisors for *AER*. Their hard work contributed immeasurably to the effectiveness of the journal.

The lifespan of *AER* corresponded to a remarkable period of expansion in both education and outreach work in astronomy, and in serious research investigating that work. It was also a time when many scientists in our field came to see that, with the U.S. government requiring more and more demonstrable social benefit in exchange for research support, the educational value and output of astronomy deserved to be better understood and better nurtured.

With a variety of budget problems and changes at the federal level in the U.S., that period of expansion may be coming to a halt at the same time that *AER* is. We can only hope that some of the momentum of the last decade and a half will be sustained by national, local, and private funders. A number of people published their astronomy education thesis work or their first refereed education papers in *AER* and are now established in academic and organizational positions teaching their own students or younger co-workers how to be better educators. Wherever they publish their work in the future, let us keep an eye out for them, and support them as they help all of us all become more effective in conveying the excitement and societal value in the unfettered exploration of the cosmos.

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