Editor's Corner - Originality

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Originality

“What a good thing Adam had — when he said a good thing, he knew nobody had said it before.” — Mark Twain

The purpose of this journal is to provide an avenue for sharing ideas in the field of science education. Some old ideas which may not be widely known are certainly worth sharing. The new ideas which are worth sharing we particularly treasure — perhaps because there are so few of them. Most of the time we are doing a bit of rearranging of ideas and finding new applications. These are certainly helpful, and to share them seems a worthwhile goal.

As an editor, I am constantly faced with these thoughts as submissions arrive on my desk. Some papers are a repetition of the obvious which readers would find boring. Some resurrect good old ideas — some combine old and new — some are old ideas with no credit given (plagiarism) and some are new pearls of wisdom. Sorting for publication is not easy, and mistakes may be made even with the assistance of able referees and earnest assistant editors. We want to share the worthwhile and avoid cluttering the Journal and educators’ desks with the mundane. We would like to be able to rely on the professional integrity of authors, but it is well known that publish or perish lies at one end of a continuum while not bothering to put good new ideas on paper lies at the other.

Editors fall into the same quandary when viewing the works published in other state journals, particularly when their own submissions are few and good ideas appear in journals which have no local circulation. It has been said (probably by Adam) that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. Finding an article in an east coast journal which is reprinted from ISTJ is a thrill. Finding it without reference to author and journal source is disappointing. And finding it under another author’s name is depressing.

As professionals who desire to be treated as professionals by those who are not science educators, we must uphold professional standards. Part of our commitment is to take the time to share good old and new ideas, to cite complete reference sources so that professional contacts may be made and to give credit where credit is due. Due credit encourages the quality and quantity of productive ideas. The withholding of due credit depresses and degrades the profession which we hold dear.

The next best thing to what Adam had is a personal sense of total integrity. Some writers have a problem achieving this and so do some editors. Although Adam had a great advantage, he had some trouble with it too.

Have you had a “good” apple lately? Share it!

— C.W.B.