

# Practice-Based Scholarship: Introduction to the Special Issue

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The Journal of Applied Instructional Design (JAID) was founded to publish “articles at the intersection of instructional design research and practice” ([https://jaid.edtechbooks.org/about\\_jaid](https://jaid.edtechbooks.org/about_jaid)). Now in our 15th year, our archives are a valuable source of insight for those on the front-lines of educational technology and instructional design practice. The success of JAID shows the value of Practice-based Scholarship (PBS)—meaning scholarship that treats practice as a site of theory generation, not just theory application—and how scholars and practitioners can work together for the advancement of educational renewal and innovation.

With maturity in any field, however, comes the need for greater clarity in what it is offering to those devoting their time to read its literature. Consequently, at JAID we have asked ourselves the fundamental question: what is the nature of practice-based scholarship? This special issue is the result. As a field centrally concerned with making a meaningful difference in the lives of real students, teachers, designers, and all other educational stakeholders, scholars do not have the luxury of looking inward and focusing on their own, pet interests that are disconnected from the realities of educational practice. Neither can we, as a field, continue to uncritically jump on the latest technology bandwagons, that are often more interested in selling us new products than they are with really improving the learning experience. And given the fast pace of change, both in our technologies and our understanding of human beings and what it means to learn, we also cannot afford to ignore the insights of professionals who are on the front lines of supporting students and teachers, and who are therefore developing insights that are simply unavailable through traditional research means. However, placing the needs of practitioners and practice first does not mean that we abandon the quest for rigor, precision, innovation, and deep understanding that the scholarly process was meant to offer the field. We continue to need scholarship that takes an unflinching look at the realities of practice, and how it can be improved in ways that those closest to it may simply not be able to see. We also need work that shows scholars that they need the insights of practitioners, since knowledge is co-constructed between the spaces in which both groups work. The articles in this issue are a valuable contribution to helping us wrestle with issues like these; studying them will undoubtedly improve our ability to conduct useful PBS, and/or apply it in various contexts.

For the issue, papers were sought that (a) illuminated the connections between scholars and practitioners, (b) provided researchers with broadened viewpoints on how to carry out effective PBS (c) illustrated both effective and ineffective practices for collaborating with practitioners through the reporting of detailed cases, (d) highlighted the complexities that can accompany meaningful practice-based work, (e) challenged our existing notions of PBS, or (f) provided compelling visions for future types of PBS work. We particularly sought out those in professional positions to offer their insights into how scholarship affects, or can affect, their efforts to improve education at all levels.

# Original Research Articles

We're proud to begin this issue with a series of original research articles. Across action research, co-design–informed evaluation, and co-created design-based research, these studies advance the work of practice through methodological transparency, reflexivity, and attention to context. Together, they position practitioners not merely as implementers but as knowledge producers whose systematic engagement with design decisions, tensions, and outcomes contributes meaningfully to theory and practice.

Of course, many of our authors contributed sound research to help us better understand PBS.

In a study expanding conceptions of practice-based scholarship in educational technology, Kumar et al. analyzed 79 doctoral dissertations to examine the types of problems addressed, the instructional interventions designed, and the challenges encountered by researchers. The findings highlight the complexities of conducting practice-based research and outline implications for doctoral students, mentors, practitioners, and educational leaders seeking to strengthen and disseminate this form of scholarship.

Ahlf and McNeil conducted a systematic review to trace the evolution of Networked Participatory Scholarship. They introduce a complexity framework identifying four interacting dimensions: individual, institutional, technical, and social. The framework provides strategic guidance for educational professionals implementing practice-based scholarship.

Peacock et al. examine the evolving hybrid role of faculty who serve as instructional designers within a College of Education, using practice-based scholarship and collaborative autoethnography to explore structural, relational, and personal dimensions of their work. Their findings reveal both opportunities such as mentorship, identity development, and strategic advocacy and persistent challenges including role ambiguity, boundary negotiation, and responsibility creep. The study underscores the importance of cooperative reflection, mentoring, and clearer role definition to support sustainable workflows and organizational learning.

Pinckney offers a design case that, in her words, explores “a dilemma common to practice: the need to balance client request with best pedagogical practices.” By providing an overview of her organization’s three-phase, interactive design approach, she showed how designers can be flexible, responsive, and attuned to client needs (a need of practice) while still providing high-quality educational experiences (as encouraged by research). This artifact-rich design case will be of interest to practitioners because of the detailed walkthrough it offers of a dilemma common to practically every professional, and demonstrates how practice and scholarship can be partners in the educational process.

Leary et al.’s design case focuses on the needs of rural science educators, who so often work alone and have few opportunities to collaborate to improve their teaching. In this article, they describe an intensive series of workshops as well as ongoing professional development that brings rural educators together to support each other in the development of innovative lesson plans. They also discuss how technology-mediated gatherings can allow educators to reflect, observe, and give feedback to each other across the distances they face. Their work was the outgrowth of an NSF grant, spanning multiple years and showing how researchers can invest themselves in the practical needs that teachers face.

Short et al. report on their intensive work to develop a set of open resources (nine books and over 250 videos) for K-12 educators. Of particular interest to this special issue, the development and curation of these resources brought together dozens of practicing teachers with scholars to ensure the materials were high quality and met real needs. Short et al.’s design case summarizes their approach into a replicable framework that will be of interest to both researchers and professionals in many contexts.

By using an autoethnographic methodology, Harris and Olesova reflect on, and analyze, Harris's experience as a Black woman working to lead an instructional design team. This article shows another way that practice-based scholarship can provide

value to our field; by turning our scholarly tools back upon ourselves we can develop insights that exceed what we can find through more casual reflection. Harris and Olesova demonstrates this through their careful, thoughtful piece articulating how gender and race intertwine with our process-based techniques.

Pangburn & Arslan-Ari examined a practitioner-driven instructional intervention situated in a college mathematics context. Through action research methods and transparent reporting of both quantitative outcomes and learner perceptions, the study demonstrated how systematic inquiry into everyday instructional design decisions can yield practice-relevant insights, even when results are mixed, thereby reinforcing PBS as a credible and reflective research approach.

Stefaniak advances practice-based scholarship by theoretically and methodologically reframing evaluation as an embedded, participatory design activity rather than a discrete phase. By articulating tensions, heuristics, and design-informed decision pathways grounded in real instructional design practice, the article strengthens PBS by connecting practitioner knowledge, stakeholder collaboration, and evaluative rigor to broader scholarly conversations in educational technology.

Giacumo & Wilson exemplified PBS through a co-created, design-based research case study that positioned practitioners as active knowledge producers. Drawing on connectivist theory and rich practice-generated data sources, the study illustrated how participatory structures, reflexive practices, and networked tools support rigorous, community-centered scholarship, thereby extending PBS as both a pedagogical model and a theoretically generative research paradigm for the field.

## Practitioner Notes

As editors of this issue, we were also very interested in the insights of those who have not published traditional scholarship, but have developed practical knowledge that should be shared with the broader community of scholars and practitioners. So we also requested what we're calling Practitioner Notes: short pieces that allow professionals to share new ideas, processes, examples, etc.

For this issue we are publishing six notes. Measom et al.'s note introduces their work on how teaching assistants can become a stronger support to students learning online. Jersin Woods et al. offer a framework for implementing the findings from learning analytics. Zeitler describes an approach to designer-faculty collaborations that combines insights from agile methodologies and backwards design. McMurry brings her perspective as a graduate student, provoking us to think about how well graduate education is preparing new scholars with a practitioner perspective. Monroe et al. highlight efforts to adapt courses to be more inclusive of neurodiverse populations. And Nelson offers her insights into PBS and evaluation in workplace settings.

All of these Practitioner Notes offer both applicable tips as well as rigorous thought that can prompt future studies.

We hope Practitioner Notes becomes a regular part of JAID, and invite readers to submit pieces of 1,500 - 2,000 words that quickly and concisely present their ideas to the broader community.

## Conclusion

With the continued—and accelerating—advancement of technology, it is crucial that our scholarship keeps pace. We believe Practice-based Scholarship is an underutilized, but crucial tool in our toolbox that supports this aim. May this special issue only be the first word in advancing our understanding of this crucial space of research.



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