

The first two years of the Latin-American Journal of Astronomy Education (RELEA)

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Abstract. We present and discuss in this work the motivations, goals and strategies adopted for its creation and launch of the e-journal Latin-American Journal of Astronomy Education (RELEA). We identify and present the difficulties encountered for the achievement of the proposed objectives and operational issues in this period, together with the adopted solutions (refereeing procedure, periodicity, etc.).

Keywords. Astronomy education

1. Introduction

In mid-2002 and after several conversations and exchange of ideas with colleagues, the three signing authors decided to establish and launch a publication devoted to scientific education in Astronomy.

In August 2003 the home page of the Latin-American Journal of Astronomy Education (RELEA) was released, containing a first call-for-papers and information about its goals, Editors and Editorial Board and preferred style for the contributions. Several messages and announcements were sent to international publications to call the attention to the new journal (Bretones, Jafelice, & Horvath, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c). We describe below the main features of the RELEA and some of the most important issues arising about its publication.

2. The RELEA “first light”: August, 2004

Technically, the RELEA is an electronic journal produced by the technical support team of the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Aplicadas (ISCA)*, based in Limeira city (São Paulo, Brazil). The contents may be printed and copied for distribution for educational purposes without profit, and giving a proper acknowledge to the source. The RELEA is registered in the ISBN and the adopted editorial procedures for publication demand blind refereeing by two specialized colleagues, selected by the Editors upon submission. There is no *a priori* rule about the number of articles per issue or their length. These and other parameters will be in fact selected by the Editors, Editorial Board and referees, which will asymptotically establish how much and what to publish (Fig.1).

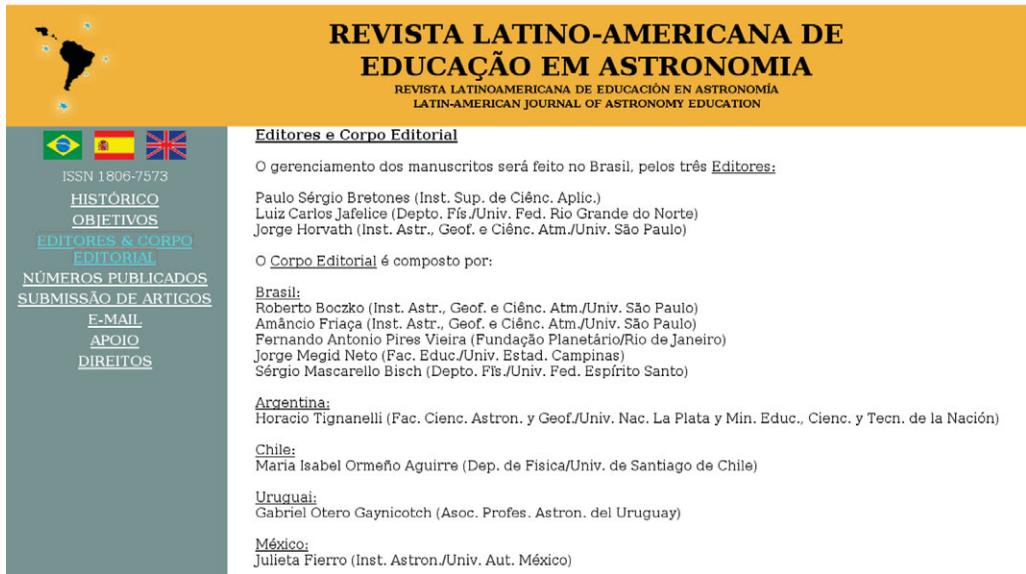


Figure 1. The cover page of the RELEA journal, showing the the Editors and Editorial Board representing their respective Latin-American countries.

The RELEA is composed of the following Sections:

- * Culture, History and Society
- * Teacher Formation
- * Teaching and Learning
- * Didactic Resources
- * Educational Policies
- * News
- * Reviews
- * Events

Some of the motivations, goals and strategies adopted by the Editors, have been partially covered in the Editorial of No.1, available at the on-line edition

<http://www.iscafaculdades.com.br/relea/>
and will be discussed in the next section.

3. The motivations and aim for the launching of the RELEA

Our first motivation for the creation of the RELEA was the noteworthy absence of a specific publication in the field in Latin-America. In spite of the existence of some general astronomy journals, their educational contents are marginal at best. This need was in fact pointed out by the President of the Commission 46 of the IAU to one of the editors (PSB) some years ago. Thus, we believe there is a parallelism between the new journal and its established cousins, such as *Gnomon*, *Universe in the Classroom* and *Teaching of Astronomy in Asian Pacific Region*, among others.

One of the consequences of this lack of dedicated journals for the Latin-American region was that, until now, the contributions have been mainly published in more restricted journals or outside Latin-America, mostly in English, and thus being quite atomized and somewhat invisible to potential users. A journal with a representative Editorial Board from the region, with easy access and low production costs (which was one of the main

factors defining the adopted electronic format) was deemed important to improve the described situation.

Naturally, the specific reality of the Latin-American education, largely shared by the region countries, is an important factor for the need of dissemination of the contents, preferably in Spanish and Portuguese, but without excluding English at all since the latter became the international *lingua franca* of science today. An important positive feedback is also expected from this launching: in other words, we expect that the RELEA could become an additional instrument to boost the research in Astronomy education, respecting and reinforcing the quality standards accepted by the community, which is the main goal of the blind peer review established as a necessary publishing criterion.

Our own experience and a large amount of evidence suggests a serious lack of reliable and updated astronomical sources which can be employed in the classroom without translation and adaptations. The RELEA attempts to provide methodological and content support for educators, researchers, students and interested readers to fulfil this demand, at least partially.

More generally, an important concern is the advance of scientific illiteracy observed not only in the region, but also in other regions of the world, including developed countries. The paradox of the existence of overabundant information leading to an increasing deficit of basic scientific formation is very complex and will not be discussed here. However, we believe this is especially dangerous for the developing countries, since an impoverished logical thinking complicates the process of decision making. Thus, problems of political, social and economical nature deepen because of this lack of basic education, in particular in sciences.

In spite of these facts, some important features come to help this kind of initiatives. It is quite apparent that teaching of Astronomy has some notorious advantages over other sciences because of its very nature. In first place, Astronomy is a natural science, at least in its historical form. Even without appealing to high-tech developments, a simple and careful observation of the sky planned according to educational purposes (and preferably without unnecessary rigidity) leads to questioning and captures the students and public attention alike. In fact, it is arguable whether an empirical (and less academic) approach is more suitable than the traditional one, given that several researchers put the blame on the latter for the lack of interest in science. The RELEA is expected to be an adequate forum to improve the studies along these lines as well.

Overall, the response of the targeted community has been a bit slow, since the very lack of a well-established forum in the region quenched not only the amount of work dedicated to these matters, but also the practise of publishing the results for general appreciation, criticism and usage. We have experienced a slight increase in the number of submitted papers lately, and hope to be able to publish good quality works increasing the frequency of the issues (presently restricted to one annual edition) in the near future.

4. Conclusions

In summary, the electronic RELEA was launched to stimulate the research in Astronomy education focused in the Latin-American region, and also to act as a resource of useful contents for educational purposes and experiences. It also welcomes contributions from outside the region written in any of the official languages.

Envisioning the long run, we should attempt to constitute a forum to discuss and expose the problems of scientific education, acting as a “meeting point” to help design public policies. This ideal mission is not at odds with the present, more limited role. On the contrary, we feel that a Latin-American initiative may join together independent

valuable efforts and experiences towards this common enterprise without losing the regional focus.

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