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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the increasing pressure for publication for early childhood academics and the lack of current information about journals' publication practices, this study surveyed editors of Australian and international journals. The journals were selected through a survey of 43 academic staff of an institute of early childhood education and through a library search. Mail replies were received from 73 of the 121 editors contacted, for a response rate of 63 percent. Findings indicated that almost 70 percent of the journals reported fewer than 5,000 subscriptions while only 8 percent had a circulation greater than 10,000. Nearly all the journals targeted academics and published research articles, with 30 percent publishing only research. The number of journals publishing theoretical or review articles could not be determined because of different interpretations of the questions. Most journals published between 5 and 10 articles per issue, with almost two-thirds preferring manuscripts of less than 5,000 words. The American Psychological Association referencing style was required most commonly. For about three-quarters of the journals, editors sent manuscripts to two or three reviewers, with blind reviews used in about 80 percent of the journals. Almost all editors shared reviews with the author. The estimated review time averaged 3 months and publication lag averaged 6 to 12 months. Acceptance rates for unsolicited manuscripts ranged from 8 to 80 percent, with half of the editors accepting between 20 and 50 percent of unsolicited manuscripts. Only 5 percent of manuscripts were accepted without revision. (An appendix presents condensed publishing information for approximately 143 journals. Contains 13 references.) (KDFB)

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PUBLICATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD ACADEMICS

Jennifer Sumsion Macquarie University PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Marilyn Fleer

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood academics are under increasing pressure to enhance their research profiles by publishing in refereed journals. This paper reports on a study undertaken in response to that pressure. The editors of 121 Australian and international journals were surveyed to obtain information about publication policies and processes. They were asked about target audience, circulation, preferred content, the review process, the number of manuscripts received, acceptance rates and publication lag. They were also asked for their advice to intending contributors.

INTRODUCTION

The dismantling of the binary system of tertiary education in Australia in the late 1980s saw the provision of early childhood teacher education move from the CAE to the university system. Early childhood academics involved in this transition have had to adopt new roles, including that of researcher. Integral to research is the dissemination of findings through publication (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). Indeed, publication output is a widely regarded measure of research productivity and academic status. It influences perceptions of individual and institutional excellence and impacts on decisions concerning funding, employment, tenure and promotion, and the awarding of research grants (Bazeley, 1994; Ramsden, 1994; Webb, 1994; Beattie, 1993; Poole, 1993). Thus, for early childhood academics (and institutions) seeking to establish themselves within a university culture, publication - particularly in refereed journals - is vital.

Advice about writing for publication is readily available (e.g., Ross & Morrison, 1993; Moxley, 1992a; Moxley, 1992b). There is, however, relatively little information about publishing in specific refereed journals, apart from the brief Notes to Contributors in the journals themselves. Information about journals of potential interest to early childhood academics tends to be scattered, incomplete, outdated and US oriented. For example, Henson (1993) regularly surveys editors of 53 education journals in the US. Similarly, Gargiulo, Sefton and Graves (1992) surveyed 16 editors of US early childhood journals. Both surveys included a mix of refereed and non-refereed journals. In Australia, Harmon (1989) compiled information about eight refereed education journals, none of which related specifically to early childhood. Since these surveys were conducted, several new Australian and international journals have been established.

THE SURVEY

Aims

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The survey reported in this article was prompted by the increasing pressure for publication and the lack of readily available, complete and up-to-date information about journals and their publication practices and policies. Funded by the Institute of Early Childhood as part of a program to assist novice researchers, the survey had three aims:

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- to establish a data base of refereed journals in which early childhood academics might publish;
- to provide information to guide decisions concerning the submission of articles for publication; and
- to compile guidelines for intending authors.

This article focuses on the second of these aims.

Selection of journals

The multi disciplinary nature of early childhood is reflected in the wide range of journals which publish research related to young children, their families or the professionals who work with them. The journals surveyed were selected by a two stage process. Forty three academic staff of the Institute of Early Childhood were surveyed about their research interests and the journals in which they had published or would like to publish. The 31% of staff who responded nominated 30 research interests and 46 journals. Using these responses as a guide, a library search was then conducted for additional relevant journals. To keep the task manageable, preference was given to research interests mentioned by more than one staff member. Subsequently, 121 refereed journals were selected. Of these, 20 were primarily Australian while 101 were foreign/international. Some were specialist early childhood journals. Others reflected the diverse interests of early childhood academics, including psychology, sociology, teacher education, curriculum, multicultural and special education. Because of funding restraints, the journals selected were representative of those available and did not constitute an exhaustive list of possibilities.

Design

The survey was similar in design to those conducted by Gargiulo, Sefton and Graves (1992) and Henson (1993). Editors were questioned about audience and circulation, content, publication format, the review process, the number of manuscripts received, acceptance rates and communication with intending authors. In addition, they were invited to offer advice to intending contributors.

THE FINDINGS

Replies were received from 73 of the 121 editors surveyed, giving a response rate of 63%. The response from editors of Australian journals was higher (75%) than from those of international journals (60%). Not all editors completed all sections of the survey. Detailed information about specific journals follows the summary.

Audience and circulation

The audience for the journals surveyed, based on the number of paid subscriptions, varied from 90 to 60,000. Almost 70% of journals had less than 5,000 subscriptions while only 8% of journals had a circulation of more than 10,000. Nearly all journals (96%) targeted, at least in part, academics and/or researchers but only 6% of journals targeted practitioners solely. The number of issues per year ranged from 1 to 10, with 4 issues being most common.

Content

Almost all journals (97%) published research articles, with 30% of journals publishing only research articles. A question concerning the number of non-empirical articles as a percentage of all research articles caused confusion. The intention was to determine opportunities for publishing theoretical articles or reviews of literature, rather than data-based research. Some editors, however, interpreted *non-empirical* as *qualitative* while others argued that it was a meaningless distinction. Furthermore, 20% of editors did not attempt to answer. Consequently, the responses to this question should be interpreted with caution.

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In general, however, there seem fewer opportunities to publish non-empirical research than empirical research. Twenty one per cent of journals published empirical articles only while, for another 21% of journals, at least three quarters of the articles published were empirical. In contrast, 4% of journals published non-empirical articles only and, for another 7% of journals, at least three quarters of the articles only and, for another 7% of journals, at least three quarters of the articles were non-empirical.

Sixty percent of journals published themed issues but, for most of these journals, themed issues were published only occasionally. Information about forthcoming themes was available either from the editor or the most recent copy of the journal.

Publication format

Most journals (73%) published between five and ten articles per issue. Almost two-thirds of journals preferred manuscripts of less than 5,000 words, while the remaining third asked for between 5,000 and 10,000 words. The American Psychological Association (APA) referencing style was required most commonly (by 56% of journals), followed by 'in house' or un-named style (16%), Harvard (15%), Chicago (8%) and the Australian Government Publication style (4%).

The review process

Most commonly, editors sent manuscripts to two or three reviewers (for 77% of journals), although 15% sent manuscripts to more than three reviewers. Reviews were undertaken blind (i.e., author's name unknown to reviewer) in 82% of cases. A small number of journals (5%) offered blind reviews upon request. The high percentage of blind reviews suggests that decisions are made on the basis of the quality of the manuscript, not the reputation of the author - in some ways, cause for optimism amongst beginning researchers.

Very few journals (3%) charged for reviews. The charge made by these journals was approximately \$US20. Reviewers were provided with a rating instrument by 80% of editors. Almost all editors (93%) shared the reviews with the author.

Typically, the estimated average review time for manuscripts was up to three months (69%) or from four to six months (25%). Anecdotal evidence suggests, however, that these times might be a little optimistic. Publication lag - the time between acceptance of manuscript and publication - was usually between six and twelve months (62%). For 10% of journals, however, this extended to eighteen months, while 20% of editors claimed a lag of less than six months. In reality, however, these times may be longer.

Acceptance rates

Slightly more than 40% of editors solicited manuscripts for at least some issues, although these were not necessarily accepted. The number of unsolicited manuscripts received monthly varied considerably. Most commonly (36%) journals received between five and ten manuscripts per month. However, 19% received less than five manuscripts monthly; 18% received between ten and twenty, while 10% of journals received more than twenty unsolicited manuscripts monthly. Acceptance rates for unsolicited manuscripts varied from 8% to 80%. Half the editors surveyed, however, accepted between 20% and 50% of the unsolicited manuscripts they received.

Typically, manuscripts required revision before being accepted. Most journals (70%) required revision to all manuscripts which were accepted. Approximately 39% of all manuscripts eventually accepted required major revision. Overall, only 5% of manuscripts were accepted without revision.

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Communication with intending authors

Most editors welcomed communication with intending authors, although they emphasised that it was not required. Those editors willing to be contacted preferred letter (82%) to facsimile (68%) or telephone contact (64%).

Advice to intending contributors

In general, editors advised intending authors to become familiar with the journal to which they intended to submit; to write clearly; to report meaningful research; to seek feedback from peers appropriate; and to follow the notes to contributors provided in the journal. The following advice was typical:

Read previous issues of the journal first to gain a clear idea of the audience and alternative formats. Read the "notes to contributors". Get some informal peer review before submitting. Note that it is an international journal and most readers will not know the details of the Australian context. Editor, Teaching and Teacher Education

Know the audience and write clearly. Avoid jargon and academic pretence. Editor, Journal of Curriculum and Supervision

Do meaningful research that is methodologically rigorous, describe it precisely yet in detail, and draw meaningful implications. Editor, Topics in Early Childhood Special Education

Follow - to the letter - the 'notes for contributors'. Editor, British Journal of Educational Studies

Advice of this type was pervasive. Heeding such advice seems essential!

CONCLUSION

The pressure to publish is unlikely to dissipate. Publication offers many intrinsic rewards, however, apart from the extrinsic motivators of funding, employment, tenure and promotion. Rewards include opportunities to share one's work with colleagues and interested others and, hopefully, to influence policy and practice. As well, publication offers greater professional recognition and a personal sense of achievement and closure. For these rewards to be realised, however, a number of challenges must be overcome.

Firstly, intending contributors need to target an appropriate journal. One's purpose for publishing must match the nature of the journal. If one's goal is to reach as many practitioners as possible, for example, then choice of journal will be different if one is targeting primarily researchers and academics. A specialist journal - albeit one with a smaller circulation - is more appropriate for disseminating highly specialised research. Similarly, for research concerned with Australian contexts and issues, a national journal may be more appropriate than an international one.

Secondly, intending contributors must be thoroughly familiar with the journal's style and conventions. Editors were emphatic that authors adhere to the required format. Careful study of the journal's *Guidelines for intending contributors*, therefore, is essential. Adherence to these guidelines will increase the likelihood of one's manuscript being accepted for publication and enhance the professional image of early childhood academics.

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Thirdly, new authors need to develop confidence in submitting manuscripts to a range of journals. Blind reviews predominate, suggesting that author, cultural or gender bias in the reviewing process will be unlikely. Thus, novice authors are not discriminated against per se.

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Ultimately, decisions about which journals to target must be personal decisions. Hopefully, however, this survey will alert early childhood academics to new publishing possibilities and assist them in making more informed decisions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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