Scientific Journals and Support for New Researchers
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Scientific writing is a researcher’s primary instrument, and new researchers are encouraged and supported in this area during the early stages of their research career—during doctoral education and in the postdoctoral phase. In the Nordic countries, for example, dissertations often comprise 4-5 scientific articles published in international journals and a summary of their results. This means that scientific journals, their reviewers, editors, and authors contribute to supporting the development of a scientific career, and new researchers can, on the basis of their feedback, either become enthusiastic or disappointed regarding their own competence. There are many ways to encourage enthusiasm, and the following remarks address this topic.

To begin with, defining a clear scope and aim for the scientific journal facilitates selection of the right publication. In terms of the author, the most important factor is to consider the target audience for reporting the research results. Indeed, many journals have specified their mission and profile, and today the number and quality of scientific journals in nursing science alone provides a new researcher with plenty of possibilities. However, when submitting a manuscript to a journal, an author always strives to forecast the opportunity for success of his or her manuscript in the journal, and the editors could support this in the form of an editorial-style review of the situation regarding their publication. Editors also should inform authors if the journal has some guidelines concerning the type of manuscripts it does not accept in the process. For example, a few years ago a doctoral student received some quite positive feedback on an article (minor revisions). However, the review ended with the following sentence: “This seems to be a European study, maybe not of interest for the readers – reject?” The student would have been quite happy to know in advance that the journal does not consider European research results to be of interest to its readers and thus avoid wasting the time on the part of both parties.

A smooth and professional process for submitting articles for publication supports new researchers. Today the processes are actually quite smooth—journals announce the approximate review period for submissions for special issues, technology is easy to use, and the results are available fairly quickly. Occasionally there can be problems if, for example, the reviewer changes in mid-process, and the new reviewer has a different opinion than the first. In such cases, the author may initially receive feedback indicating that minor revisions are required and, after making the changes, be told that major revisions are still needed even though all of the requested work had been done. It is important for new researchers to have faith in how the process progresses and know, for example, that a negative decision will be provided as quickly as possible. It is particularly gratifying to notice that some editors make a decision that a manuscript does not correspond to the scope of their journal and return it with a recommendation concerning another publication. This gives new researchers access to the valuable opinion of an experienced editor-in-chief concerning a suitable journal.

There should be a clear rationale for international publication. At times, the topic of research may be very national or linked to a certain domestic structure or practice. In such cases, an international
scientific forum may not be the right publication channel. Ideally new researchers should ask themselves why this article should be published internationally and how the background can best be presented. For example, research on healthcare education is typically linked to the education system in the country concerned, and international publication requires a particularly thorough examination of the rationale. On the other hand, some countries may find innovative and new solutions that can also be utilized elsewhere. Editors must avoid making value judgments when reviewing manuscripts of research performed in different countries: we need research done in other countries and in joint international projects in order to improve nursing care all over the globe.

Enthusiastic feedback is inspiring and negative feedback is discouraging—this fact is well known to authors, reviewers and editors. Researchers who are just starting are particularly sensitive to how their manuscripts are assessed. As reviewers, we should focus more on finding positive aspects regardless of whether the manuscript meets the requirements of the journal. This becomes apparent in the feedback that a doctoral student received from two reviewers. Reviewer A states “There is nothing new in this study,” and Reviewer B says “The author seems to have problems in identifying a new perspective to this topic, which has already been largely studied.” The first comment has a negative approach (and is not even true, as everything involves some new element) while the latter makes the author consider what new perspective could be taken and perhaps also find it. Thus, the manner in which critical feedback is given is relevant. Many editors have outstanding skills in this area.

Fairness is an important factor in reviewing. This is manifest in the fact that if something especially important is missing from a source (in the reviewer’s opinion), he or she identifies this when reviewing the manuscript. Articles published in international scientific journals are easy to find, but a missing source may be a publication from a hospital or system, which can be difficult to locate (sometimes nearly impossible). It is also appropriate to mention the fact that the journal in question has published an important source earlier, which should be considered for inclusion. However, some reviewers only state that the author has not used enough earlier publications on the topic or earlier articles from the journal (the latter of which is problematic in terms of research ethics, because earlier sources should be used for scientific purposes rather than allowing use of that particular journal’s publications to become the accepted practice). Fairness is a good ethical principle throughout the process of reviewing a manuscript.

The number of cross-cultural studies is increasing and their evaluation requires special competence (e.g. Suhonen et al 2009). New researchers are increasingly involved in these extensive projects, and they also receive support in this area. For example, The European Academy of Nursing Science (EANS, www.eans.org/), which collaborates to carry out broad-based doctoral education in the European region, strives to support the creation of international researcher networks, while many funders require multidisciplinary research projects involving different countries. Reviewing research jointly produced by different countries calls for knowledge of the countries involved, which is usually achieved by using international reviewers. However, projects involving many countries may demand flexibility from the journal regarding the number of authors or the extent of the manuscript, as in many cases a description of the systems in the various countries is inevitably required to understand the results. It is also essential that the group of authors include writers from each participating country to interpret the results. At best, cross-cultural studies provide new researchers with an excellent opportunity for developing as a writer as well as developing respect for the competence in other countries, to say nothing of improving language skills. Cross-cultural studies may also promote a deeper understanding of the issues being studied because the concepts being used must be
analyzed and defined at the start of the project, just as the research protocol must be especially strict (e.g., Verbeek et al 2012).

Scientific writing also promotes learning related to research ethics, even though a high level of ethics is required in all stages of a study. Essential ethical questions in reporting include remaining within the scientifically justified reporting concepts (avoiding slicing) and the rights to research material and/or reporting. Doctoral students always write their dissertations under guidance and have the chance to consult with their instructors concerning ethics. However, the instructor may also constitute an ethical problem at times. The ethics concerning use of existing instruments may represent a new area of learning for a new researcher. It is clear that obtaining permission from those holding the copyright is essential prior to using any instruments. However, ethical use also requires an ethically sustainable translation process and piloting for the instruments. A user permit rarely includes permission to modify the instrument or publish it in conjunction with reporting, and sometimes the use involves a monetary investment. For new researchers, the use of existing instruments can, in the best case, mean collaboration with the original developer. The ethics of using instruments in scientific journals is rarely reported; it is probably assumed to be included in the sentence stating that the study has ethical approval.

New researchers are particularly concerned about scientific publications and writing for them is one of the key challenges in a research career. This concern is partly due to the fact that researchers in the early stages of their careers do not participate in the editing or reviewing processes, and are subsequently unfamiliar with this world. Some thought should be given to considering whether unnecessary anxiety could be reduced. For the past several years, we have invited experienced editors-in-chief from high-quality scientific journals to lecture to doctoral candidates at the University of Turku. These events have always been an important experience for the doctoral students, serving to bring the editors-in-chief a little closer: it is easier to approach the journal after having met the editor-in-chief in person. Furthermore, the editor-in-chief of a journal has a lot of useful information.

In summary, scientific journals play a diverse role in the development of a researcher career: practices established in the early stages of a career tend to influence researchers' activities in the future as well. We all have to contribute to ensuring that scientific reporting develops in a quality manner: a researcher who is just starting out must write a manuscript of the best possible quality and be convinced of its international relevance; the editor of a scientific journal has to ensure flexibility and a high-quality review and editing process; and reviewers have to provide quality feedback that is fair and constructive. And eventually, the readers have to assess the relevance of the research results and the potential for implementation. Co-operation of this kind will safeguard the future of nursing science research.

References
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