LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I am writing to give my personal support for your position on the health of refugee children in detention. Your position should be used as an example for the government to change its policy. No change will mean the continuation of child dysfunction, which will proceed to the next generation and beyond. Your editorials1,2 and the articles that appeared in the July edition of the Journal3,4 brought tears to my eyes.

Your stand and that of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians5 and the authors3,4 make me proud to have been a paediatrician. I have been retired for nearly 20 years because of vision loss due to retinitis pigmentosa. Although I can still read, my guide dog helps me with orientation and mobility.

I would like to offer my continuing support in these endeavours.

Dr John C Vance
Retired Paediatrician
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References

Dear Editor,

WRITING WELL IN MEDICINE AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

We commend your editorial, ‘Writing well’, and agree with your advice to writers to master the art of writing.1 We propose that writers also consider the style of writing they need to master for specific disciplines and specific media (e.g. Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health vs. The Conversation). Sometimes writing is rejected by academic journals because of disciplinary differences in writing style conventions, rather than poor content. Physicians can feel frustrated if they need to use a different writing style, such as an education style for medical education journals.

Most readers of Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health would be familiar with the scientific writing style, which aims to be ‘clear and significant, [rather] than curiously adorn’d’.2 However, even here, you highlight the ‘incomprehensible scientific jargon’ and ‘resounding banality’ in a template-driven style of writing.3 In contrast, writing in education and the humanities involves stylistic writing and can be criticised for ‘dense and extended prose’.4 It seems that these writing styles can deter those within, as well as those outside, their disciplines.

Individual disciplines also approach research in different ways. For example, medicine and science typically conduct research based on observable and measureable data and ‘objective rationality’.4 In contrast, social science-based disciplines, such as education and nursing, typically argue that data can be interpreted from multiple perspectives, permitting ‘a diversity of ideas and truths’.4 Although there have been successful collaborations between researchers with different approaches and writing styles, such as in medical education, there have been many disappointments.

We argue for a greater understanding of research approaches and writing styles, especially given the increasing interest in, and funding for, interdisciplinary research. The University of Sydney’s recently opened Charles Perkins Centre, for example, aims to address increasingly complex health issues (obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease) by bringing together researchers from a range of disciplines, including medicine, education, agriculture and engineering.

We believe successful collaboration between researchers from different disciplines requires an appreciation of diverse perspectives, a willingness to collaborate, clear communication and careful negotiation of barriers. Researchers reporting on interdisciplinary research need to consider the research approach and writing style of journals in which they aim to publish, or try new, open forms of publishing. We appeal to editors and reviewers to focus on the content of journal submissions, rather than their writing styles and research approaches.

References