

## Dear Student ...

**If you're a student in a family therapy training program,** or have recently graduated from one, then you possibly subscribe to the *ANZJFT* as part of your course requirements. Issues like this one, with its Symposium on 'The Core Learnings of Family Therapy', are bound to be used in teaching. So as a student, you may be looking at this issue (or part of it) even though you're not a subscriber. If you fall into either of these categories, then this Editorial is for you.

A professional journal can seem rather forbidding. We've heard students say candidly that they just put their copies away unread. They assume that everything in the issue is going to be long, learned and boring. Or maybe they have good intentions of reading their journals later, when they've had more experience. We guess that many students simply read the bits of the *ANZJFT* that their trainers require them to read for class discussion, and skip the rest. Some students, perhaps already thinking ahead to a research degree, may be wondering how they can ever produce the sophisticated theory of some of the articles, or the impressive tables and statistics in others.

Now that the Journal has a substantial number of students among its readers, it's time to address you directly.

Typically, a professional journal is read by the particular group of professionals defined by its title — in our case, family therapists. All social workers and psychologists in Australia receive their copy of *Australian Social Work*, or *Australian Psychologist*, whether they want it or not, and whether they read it or not. So you'd imagine that all family therapists in Australia and New Zealand would automatically receive the *ANZJFT*. But family therapy doesn't have a national professional body, so for us, journal subscriptions are not part of professional membership, and in fact there are a lot of family therapists who don't either subscribe to, or read, the *ANZJFT*. That's a pity, but at least it means that probably fewer copies of our journal than others go straight into the bin, still in their plastic wrappers!

Why wouldn't practitioners read their own professional journals? Partly because of the 'academic factor'. Many professional journals consist largely of papers written by academics for other academics. Such papers are written in formal language, often dense with specialised terms, and present their views 'scientifically', feeling a need to demonstrate the author's knowledge of everything that has been previously written on a given topic (Smith, Jones et al., 2000; Winken, Blinken & Nod, 1998a). Prior to publication, such articles must also be 'refereed', that is, subjected to assessment by experienced professionals who do not

know the author's identity, and who can thus comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the paper without fear or favour. Ideally, the refereeing process should result in better-argued, better-written, better-informed publications. Too often, in practice, it can result in authors being forced to conform to narrowly academic versions of what is acceptable, or even, of what is 'worth knowing' (see the debate in this issue between Jürgen Hargens, Wolfgang Loth, and Malise Arnstein).

But the actual *readers* of a professional journal like ours are, overwhelmingly, not academics, but practitioners out there 'doing it'. Or students who are about to join their ranks. Such readers need to know what 'best practice' is, in a particular area of work. They seek the inspiration that comes from reading about how others are interpreting the approaches they use. They want to be introduced to topics that are relatively new to them, in a way that is readable and user-friendly, not bristling with arcane language and displays of learning.

Here at the *ANZJFT*, we try to perform a difficult balancing act. Detailed research studies are badly needed, if we are ever to convince governments and funding bodies that family-based and family-sensitive models of treatment are effective. And we must retain a commitment to theory. Family therapy began with the excitement of ideas that made sudden, overwhelming sense of phenomena that previously had remained obscure, ideas that opened radical new possibilities for practice. But research and theory must always be balanced by papers dealing directly with clinical practice.

The best way for editors to ensure that what we publish is relevant to your needs is simply to encourage more practitioners to write, straightforwardly, and honestly, about the dilemmas of working with real clients, real families, real situations. In our time as Editors, we have been delighted to publish such examples as Nancy Cogan's 'Yes, but...' (Vol. 19, No. 4), Elizabeth Scott's 'Are the Children Playing Quietly?' (Vol. 20, No. 2), Rita McInnes' 'Landed Gender' (Vol. 21, No. 4), and more recently, Jürgen Hargens' 'Brief Therapy By Letter' (Vol. 22, No. 4). As today's students, and tomorrow's practitioners, you yourselves may one day submit such a paper. We'd love to read it — and so, quite probably, will plenty of others!

So nobody expects you to read every issue cover to cover! But we hope that at least one paper each issue will speak to you.

Hugh Crago