

COMMENTARY

Looking Abroad to Enhance the Work We Do at Home

Kyle John Wilby, PharmD, PhD

Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Corresponding author: Kyle John Wilby, BSP, PharmD, PhD, College of Pharmacy, Faculty of Health, Dalhousie University, PO Box 15000, 5968 College St., Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, B3H 4R2. Phone: +1-902-494-2378. Email: kyle.wilby@dal.ca.

Submitted June 30, 2022; accepted July 11, 2022; ePublished November 2022.

Growing up in Saskatchewan (a province on the Canadian prairies), I was fascinated with tales of exploration and dreamt about sailing off in search of adventure and new experiences. My family didn't travel much (aside from an epic road trip through South Dakota) but I was an avid reader with an imagination greater than average. I remember when my grandmother was one of the first people in my city to 'get the internet' and I would spend hours in her basement (it was dial-up after all) navigating my way through online encyclopedias and articles in my quest to learn everything I could about the world and the way people lived outside of what I knew.

I was 16 years old when I finally left North America on a 2-week exchange to Japan. I'm pretty sure my parents were hoping this would satisfy my itch to travel (at least for some time) but it just got stronger from there. Next came England, and then Australia. Now, 20 years later, I have been privileged to visit, live, and work in many countries across the globe. One of the things I have learned throughout my journeys is that each time I step out of my own routine and setting, I learn something valuable about the world unknown to me before.

Like how we learn when we travel, visit a museum, or watch programming that depicts how the world works outside of our own settings, there are endless lessons we can also learn from international scholarship and peers within the academy. Such as the experience of learning a new language, cooking technique, or how to access public transit, international scholarship can open our minds to different perspectives and new ways of understanding the data we collect, analyze, and share. While it may be easy to disregard a study reported from a different country (or even state or province) because we immediately question its relevance, we may be overlooking important considerations and learnings that can help extend our scholarly conversations and improve applicability of our own work to others.

One of my favorite things to do when traveling is to attend a local cooking class. Whether it is using a new ingredient to enhance the flavor of a usual Tuesday night dinner or learning a new method to put things together in a different way (e.g., onion and chili grinding in Ghana!), we usually end up with something interesting, tasty, and many times enhanced from our usual routines and recipes. The same can be said when designing and implementing new educational research and scholarly projects. Perhaps there is a new audience response system gaining traction in the U.K. that might be adaptable to our own contexts, or a new simulated patient training program out of Malaysia that accounts for social and cultural variables known to influence assessment that may be applicable to our own diverse populations. Identifying these 'new' tools and methods and incorporating them into our local work and research may help to elevate our scholarship, bring international interest to our work, and keep those Wednesday morning writing sessions as appealing as the revamped Tuesday dinner the night before!

Some of the most memorable moments I've had abroad are the conversations with locals and other tourists alike. It is always fascinating to learn about different ways of life, compare where our routines align and depart, and understand how cultural or contextual nuances may shift how people live, work, and play. I find that these points also make for great conversation starters with my friends and family after returning home. In the same way, international scholarship can be used to extend the conversations within our writing by forming part of our theoretical or conceptual frameworks, identifying cultural or contextual factors that may need to be considered for future scholarly work, or through discussions of how our findings align (or differ) from the broader global research in our area of study.^{1,2} Being able to discuss applicability or alignment of findings from a study in Canada with one from Chile, for example, may broaden our perspectives and lead to greater relevance of our results. Alternatively, findings that do not align with studies outside of our own settings may spark interesting research questions around cultural or contextual differences that could be further explored.³ Just as we like to keep in touch with friends we've met abroad via social media or otherwise, it is quite possible

that productive global research collaborations could naturally form when making the effort to read and cite outside of our usual colleagues and circles.

One part of traveling that I do not do particularly well is the return to reality and self-inflicted pressure to organize photos, try out all my new cooking class recipes, and foster the friendships with those I've met abroad. I know very well that it can be easy to slip back into routine and without conscious effort and planning, the trip slowly starts to become a distant memory. When considering the points I've mentioned about incorporating international scholarship into our projects and writing, I do think, at least at first, it needs to be a deliberate process and one that we need to practice and foster. Reading articles to look for the nuances and learning points takes time and relevant findings may not always be particularly clear. The continued use of theory and conceptual models in our work will help, but we still have a long way to go.⁴ Similarly, developing collaborations and new teams can also be time consuming and difficult, especially when considering time zones and holiday schedules. That being said, making a pointed effort to broaden our horizons and incorporate international scholarship and collaborations into our regular writing routines may lead to tangible rewards and new friends along the way.

Although we've come a long way from dial-up internet, my childhood dreams still persist. I think I'll forever have a desire to learn about others and the way things are done outside of my own space. I feel fortunate to be able to practice this in my professional life and scholarship by learning from and working with colleagues both near and far. As we progress, I look forward to working with authors across all settings and hearing the success stories of how we can come together collectively as an academy to advance the profession and elevate our contributions to pharmacy education worldwide.

REFERENCES

1. Lingard L. Writing an effective literature review. *Perspect Med Educ*. 2018;7:47-49. Doi:10.1007/s40037-017-0401-x
2. Savard I, Mizoguchi R. Context or culture: what is the difference? *Res Pract Tech Enhanced Learn*. 2019;14:23. Doi:10.1186/s41039-019-0112-5
3. Wilby KJ, Diab M. Key challenges for implementing a Canadian-based objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) in a Middle Eastern context. *Can Med Educ J*. 2016;7(2):e4-e9.
4. Stewart D, Klein S. The use of theory in research. *Int J Clin Pharm*. 2016;38(3):615-619. Doi:10.1007/s11096-015-0216-y