

Editorial

Writing locally, publishing globally: making papers 'international'

On our extensive travels, and in the course of many workshops on writing for publication in various parts of the world, the issue of how to make a paper relevant for an international readership is often raised. This topic is clearly of as much interest to authors now as it is to editors: the publishers of *JAN* extol the value of the journal in international terms and promote the fact that all our papers must address an international audience, hence our authors become more curious and more demanding in what they should do to meet our standards.

These pages have carried a previous editorial on international relevance by a previous Editor-in-Chief, Alison Tierney (2005), and one of the present authors has also addressed the issue while editing another journal (Watson *et al.* 2007). The purpose of Tierney's editorial was mainly to define the extent to which *JAN* was an international journal and she also provided some advice – slightly adapted, but mainly extant at the time of writing this editorial – on international relevance of papers submitted to *JAN* ([http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1365-2648/homepage/jan_essentials.htm#Relevance](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1365-2648/homepage/jan_essentials.htm#Relevance); retrieved 30 August 2013). Watson *et al.* were more concerned with explaining what aspects of a paper might make it international.

We urge authors to read these editorials, but we also wish to highlight the most salient points here before considering whether some new information related to 'internationality' is emerging. Tierney (2005) pointed out that, while *JAN* was a UK-based publication with a string (the tradition is maintained, although not deliberately) of UK Editors-in-Chief, it has increasingly employed the services of international editors, appointed international editorial board members and engaged with hundreds of reviewers across the globe. The content of *JAN* is, self-evidently, international, with over 50 countries publishing in some years. Papers with UK-based first authors remain the single largest percentage, but it is worth noting that they constitute a minority (approximately 15%) against papers with non-UK-based first authors. Some regions of the

world, political sensitivities suspended for the sake of argument, have far more papers accepted for publication than the UK and one such region is greater China (Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong). Watson *et al.* (2007) pointed out that all papers came from somewhere and were, by default, 'international' with respect to everywhere else. However, they also concluded that what made any particular paper international was its relevance within a field of study, something that should transcend international boundaries. Our specific guidance to authors is to consider the following points:

- whether a reader in a region or country very different from your own will be able to make sense of everything in your paper
- whether you have clearly outlined the relevance of your paper to the subject field internationally and also its transferability into other care settings, cultures or nursing specialities
- if your paper explores focused cultural or other specific issues, have you clearly placed the discussions within an international context?

These points offer a broad guide, but we would like to expand on them here to provide some detail on how papers can be written for an international audience. These are the aspects of a paper that the editorial team at *JAN* wants to see when we first consider papers for publication.

Simply because a paper has an international set of authors, it is not automatically an international paper; it is the content and context of the paper that distinguishes papers in this regard. Furthermore, although papers based on a multi-country study are likely to be international, that does not mean this is the only marker of an international paper; again, content and context are vital.

An internationally focused literature review is the backbone of an international paper. Placing the study in this context enables the author to discuss the results of the study or literature review in relation to this body of knowledge. The author can make the essential comparisons with the existing empirical evidence – highlighting the differences or similarities with his/her work. A good example of this is a paper written from a specific cultural

perspective. A paper on, for instance, Taiwanese aboriginals may have a very local focus, but comparing the study with the international literature on aboriginal health and using this discussion to expand our understanding of this issue give this paper immediate appeal beyond Taiwan.

Explanatory theories and concepts are often internationally relevant and important. Placing the paper in this context and then making a contribution to our understanding of the theory or concept elevate the paper beyond the local. By theory or concept, we are not referring exclusively to nursing. Nursing research and scholarship takes place in the natural world where the social sciences, in particular, offer frameworks and theories to explain and understand phenomena: stress; burnout; stigma; or sexuality, for example. As such, a study on nursing stress in Thailand – whilst reporting locally useful findings – could explore the theoretical implications of the study, comparing and contrasting the study with similar theoretical work elsewhere.

Authors should also think about internationally transferable nursing issues when writing their paper. For example: staff attrition; skill mix; and quality of care are all internationally understood. Therefore, a paper should place itself – both in the background and discussion – in this context and highlight the internationally transferable messages, and discuss how local or national research results can inform the thinking of others in the global nursing community.

In addition to these theoretical and contextual aspects, authors should write for an international audience. Have the three bullet points above in mind throughout the development of a paper. Do not use only locally understood terms or phrases, or, if they are used, ensure that an explanation is given. For example, a UK health programme called ‘Change for Life’ means nothing outside the UK; however, adding that this is a Health Department strategy

to improve the diet and exercise levels of the population is an explanation with which most health professionals in any country can identify. Ensure that international comparisons are given when describing local costs or care environment: use widely understood terms such as ‘public hospital’ or ‘registered nurse’ rather than ‘staff nurse’, for example.

And finally, another important way that the international relevance of papers in the journal can be made apparent is when authors from around the world write to us and offer some constructive criticism to which the original authors are invited and encouraged to respond. We publish these contributions in our correspondence pages, *JANForum*, to which we receive a regular, but low, level of contribution, and most of this is from very few countries. These contributions ‘keep us on our toes’ – a western idiom for keeping us alert – in this case, to what we do well and what we could improve: this applies to us all, whether as *JAN* authors or editors. Therefore, we welcome receiving more contributions to *JANForum* in the future.

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