

When Ideas were Falling Down from Trees

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According to a popular legend, Newton thought of the Universal Law of Gravitation while he was sitting under an apple tree and an apple fell on his head. This story expresses two main concepts: a scientific mind is always elaborating ideas and novel explanatory ideas might be found in unexpected places or through a “changed perspective”. Many important ideas in science have seemed to appear “out of the blue”, as represented by the metaphorical light-bulb, apple head bonk, or intuitive dream. Among theories about the creative process, one explains that it begins with the generation of “crudely formed ideas and associations, followed by their exploration through evaluation and testing” [1]. In the process of associations of ideas the concept of “linking” is important in connecting human thoughts with the external environment [2].

The hallmark of a successful scientist is the ability to continuously develop new, testable ideas in the context of current knowledge. Nowadays, science is evolving so fast that for scientists it is hard to remain updated on topics other than their specific (and sometimes narrow) field of research. Moreover, many researchers feel overwhelmed by information and prefer to focus only within their own research niche. So how can the modern scientist find regular inspiration for new ideas, link his/her theories and test them within a relevant theoretical framework? Rather than waiting for a fortuitous falling apple, he or she would be best served by a pro-active approach that takes advantage of the full spectrum of information available in the 21st century.

Today, diverse sources (and thus, journals) can enlarge horizons and perspectives in research. The spreading of new media has made communication easier, as well as increasing the diffusion of ideas and results of scientific inquiry. Peer-reviewed publishing is the keystone of scientific communication, but access to peer-reviewed journals is frequently restricted by high prices. Scientists in developing nations are particularly disadvantaged by the *status quo*. In this context, the open-access model is challenging current systems of scholarly publishing [3].

A primary focus of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants journal is to disseminate articles “freely for research, teaching and reference purposes” through open accessibility. Open access journals are an increasingly important resource to communicate science across a vast pool of researchers around the world. Open access journals enlarge the audience, increasing the visibility of research work. This may allow a higher number of people to test or reject the hypotheses at the basis of one’s research. In science, negative results are results in any case and open accessibility is likely to accelerate progress. In this way, ideas can facilitate the development of new ideas.

For a researcher, reading journals to keep up-to-date with current knowledge and discovery is important for two reasons: to develop and fund cutting-edge research proposals and to produce novel, salient publications. Publications are important to communicate and track the primacy of ideas [4] and the contextual significance of a new theory or concept. In developing research projects as well, background context helps avoid “re-creating the wheel”: the idea at the basis of a research project has to be original [5] in order to facilitate the advance of knowledge.

Ethnomedicine and Ethnobotany are interdisciplinary fields of research: their theoretical contexts and key publications are the product of a bewildering array of sub-disciplines and scientific journals [6]. In such a jungle, open access journals are like a refreshing community waterhole. Publications are easily detected and tracked and researchers can easily find and share information. Better communication of diverse perspectives and methods provides inspiration for new ideas and new applications across diverse fields of research.

Conclusions

When ideas are not falling down from trees, new perspectives and inspiration may come from a more open science. The advance of science today lies in the sharing of ideas. These ideas, made available through easily accessible sources, like open access journals, can reach a wide audience, melting boundaries and tunnel-vision, energizing scholarly debates and stimulating creative and critical thinking.

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