

Mind the gap: a case study about learning and advanced scholarship in a new and developing curriculum area.

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This paper explores the links between teaching, learning and advanced scholarship in a new and developing curriculum area. Advanced scholarship activities underpinning an undergraduate programme over a ten year period are briefly described, and the benefits and challenges to the curriculum, lecturers and students are discussed in the context of relevant literature. Suggestions about a concept of academic enquiry that moves beyond conventional views of research and of teaching to achieve a more integrated notion of academic enquiry in this subject area are proposed in light of this experience.

Leisure, sport and tourism is one of the newer curriculum areas and has seen dramatic expansion in the last twenty years. Some areas such as sport science, tourism and leisure studies are more established, others such as health and fitness management, and outdoor adventure are in earlier stages of their development.

The case study below is related to advanced scholarship for a programme comprising BA (Hons) Maritime Leisure Management, BA (Hons) Watersports Studies and Management, and BA (Hons) Outdoor Adventure Management. The courses are multi-disciplinary and are underpinned by business. The courses currently have 140 students, and a core team of six lecturers who also teach on other courses. As Head of School, I have led many of the knowledge transfer projects discussed below, and been involved with most of them. I also teach on these courses.

Southampton is situated beside the Solent, recognised by many as the centre of the UK sailing and watersports industry. The national governing body for sailing, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA) is close by on the River Hamble. Southampton Solent University offers some of the very few degrees in the UK related to the watersports and maritime leisure industry. Our course portfolio closely reflects this niche but important sector of the leisure industry, and last week our yachting team won the British Universities Yachting National Championships for the sixth time in eight years.

Like most post-92 UK universities, we pride ourselves on the relevance of our courses to industry. In validating courses employers are consulted about curriculum content and are represented on panels. Where possible curriculum is linked to Sector Skills Council guidelines, National Occupational Standards and professional body accreditation. In addition the course team maintain their closeness to industry in a number of ways; the

programme manager sits on the RYA Council, is senior helm of a local lifeboat and an activity centre inspector. Industry provides a source of visiting speakers; the course team circulates seasonal and permanent job vacancies to students. Many students work locally and spend their summers working as instructors for UK activity centres and overseas tour operators such as Sunsail, Neilson, Minorca Sailing and Mark Warner.

Courses are underpinned by the knowledge, skills and competencies required by employers, and academic challenge and rigour specified by the sector (FHEQ, QAA Subject Benchmarks). Comments by Middleton (2007) about the nature of education as a matrix of theoretical, empirical and practical knowledge might equally refer to leisure management.

Southampton Solent University uses the term advanced scholarship to refer to, encourage and value a wide range of activities and outcomes that include subject-based and pedagogic research, consultancy, community engagement and knowledge transfer.

Advanced scholarship is characteristic of and essential to the nature and status of a modern university. It is most simply and broadly defined as the creation of new knowledge, or the critical reinterpretation, application and transfer of existing knowledge. In established usage within higher education, advanced scholarship is university-level activity informed by, at, or extending the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice. It is characterized by disciplined enquiry, which addresses and seeks to resolve significant theoretical and practical problems.

The university expects that advanced scholarship will enhance the quality of the student learning experience and the reputation of the university and its staff. It must have demonstrable links with student learning, teaching or the furtherance of higher education practice if it is to be properly valued. (Southampton Solent University Advanced Scholarship Policy, 2004)

Lecturers are expected to undertake advanced scholarship related to their teaching and record outputs. A recent study into the links between advanced scholarship and teaching at Solent (Palmer, Fletcher and Pike 2006) identified that those engaged in advanced scholarship found it provided opportunities for staff and students, developed links with industry, helped to keep courses 'fresh' and up to date as well as giving teaching staff more confidence with students. Lack of time, incentives and recognition were seen as key issues, as was the perception that it may be easier to engage with advanced scholarship in some disciplines than others.

Knowledge transfer is an important form of advanced scholarship underpinning the watersports and maritime leisure curriculum. Hattie and Marsh (2004) suggest that the links between research and teaching are not automatic but require conscious effort. The watersports and maritime leisure lecturing team feels that linkages between advanced scholarship and teaching are essential in this new curriculum area, and they will only take on knowledge transfer activities if there is a direct link to the curriculum.

Over the last decade the lecturing team has undertaken over thirty consultancies for sport and maritime leisure providers. Whilst many have been small-scale, reflecting the 'cottage' nature of the maritime leisure industry, some have been UK-wide in scope. These include the 1996 National Youth Watersport Audit (resulting in a book), research about overseas waterbased visitors to the UK (English Tourist Board), research underpinning the development of Project Oarsome (Amateur Rowing Association) and Onboard (RYA), research at the London and Southampton International Boat Shows and more recently research for a national Volunteer Support Strategy (RYA).

Lecturers have supported employers and national governing bodies to research and develop UK-wide initiatives and gain insights into the nature of the watersports leisure industry and sporting participation during rapid industry transition. Our key input is normally in the research phase; however there are exceptions where we have been involved in product design and promotion. For instance, part of the brief from the RYA to research and develop a national volunteer support strategy was to visit, consult with and promote the strategy in nine regions and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The integration of research and teaching varies by discipline (Colbeck (2004) and students in different disciplines have different ideas about what constitutes research (Robertson & Blacker 2006). Although leisure is a multi-disciplinary area, the qualitative and quantitative research techniques carried out by lecturers and students as part of knowledge transfer are similar to those utilized by students in unit assignments and dissertations.

Engagement with employers has been a two-way process as the research has also informed curriculum design and content. In the early days these links were of greater significance as the data on sport in general and watersports in particular were scarce.

Advanced scholarship: student.

Each year a small number of 'hand-picked' leisure students are employed on various consultancy projects. Typically students will be trained and employed as interviewers or data inputers. As interviewers at boat shows, or waterbased locations such as marinas and quay-sides these students are an asset as they have a close connection with their clientele. One benefit is to enhance employment prospects; however since these tend to be the higher achieving students it is perhaps not surprising that they get the more prestigious jobs within industry. Occasionally on larger consultancies recent graduates are employed.

As yet no formal research has been conducted into the attitudes of students who have been directly involved in knowledge transfer, however, informal conversations indicate that they gain from exposure to different research methods in relation to planning their dissertations. Collectively, students gain from the fact that knowledge transfer provides up-to-date raw material for teaching purposes, and that lecturers build good industry contacts.

Breen and Lindsay (1999) in Brew (2007) indicate that well-motivated students are most likely to see a link between staff research and teaching. Healey (2005, 193) reported by Wuetherick 2007, argues that students perceive clear benefits from staff research, including enthusiasm, credibility, and the reflected glory of being taught by well-known researchers. So, for example, when national governing bodies in sport moved to greater social inclusion after a shift in government policy in the late 1990s, students benefited from our research with target groups such as women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities.

Parents at open days are becoming increasingly discerning, and there are major benefits in being able to list national organizations and high profile watersports companies as consultancy clients.

The potential downside is that students put their time into this rather than their studies, but the team ensures that final year undergraduates are not included in these projects. A further downside is that only a small minority of students are able to take part in these external projects.

Advanced scholarship: lecturer perspective

All of the lecturers teaching in the watersports and maritime leisure courses are involved in knowledge transfer activities, suggesting that this may be a small inclusive scholarly knowledge building community (Brew 2006). Other lecturers with specific expertise are invited to join in particular consultancies. Quality is central to consultancy activity and in particular deadlines are critical: if lecturers are unable to meet deadlines or unable to work effectively in a team they are not invited again.

Over the decade watersports and maritime leisure lecturers have specialized in knowledge transfer according to their strengths, e.g. project management, bid writing, liaising with the client, devising questionnaires, ethics, developing in-depth interview or focus group checklists, field supervision, and report writing.. Employing and supporting students is a particular feature of this subject area and may be complicated as most maritime leisure activities take place at evenings, weekends and holiday periods at a range of waterside venues.

Lecturers are positive about their involvement in knowledge transfer, and are proud of their achievements. In reflecting about the benefits of knowledge transfer, lecturers report that up-to-date sector knowledge is the key bonus.

Doing consultancies adds significantly to my job satisfaction. It provides a reality check to let me know that what I am teaching is valuable and keeps me and therefore my students current.

Senior Lecturer

It keeps my knowledge current and lets me provide good industry examples. It also lets me make good industry contacts.

Principle Lecturer.

Networking and it brings in a few more pennies.

Senior Lecturer

I'm really pleased that I have now got a recent data set to teach SPSS which should interest the students.

Senior Lecturer

Others reported an increased confidence in supporting dissertation students. Lecturers are working on a range of methodologies in knowledge transfer, and keeping their own skills active.

My experience in writing consultancy proposals has helped me to become a better facilitator when my students develop aims and objectives for their own dissertation.

Senior Lecturer.

Lecturers are also managing deadlines, writing complex and technical reports and presenting to varied audiences. The experience of group working in a pressured environment has been of value to lecturers who need to be able to support students in their own group work assignments. Colleagues have learnt from each other, for example in the project management role, as more lecturers are prepared to take on this responsibility.

Working with colleagues has helped me identify their strengths and weaknesses so I will know who to turn to if I have a problem later on. I think it fosters a team spirit too.

Senior Lecturer new to consultancy.

A further benefit is the impact of knowledge transfer and academic research on individual CVs, and also the esteem the course team feel is generated from their collective activity and is made evident to them by peers at events such as validations.

It gives us credibility with students. We can say we helped design 'Oarsome' or 'Onboard' and suddenly students are much more willing to listen.

Senior Lecturer

Raising awareness and dissemination of research success in student and lecturer communities should not be undervalued (Wuetherick 2007) and this is something the team are going to develop.

As lecturers honed their consultancy knowledge and skills in one curriculum area, we have successfully expanded into general sport areas (monitoring a County Sport

Partnership for six years), and hockey (research into volunteering for the National Governing Body England Hockey) which has involved other lecturers and student groups.

One down side of knowledge transfer activity is timing and intensity of projects. Currently the team has just completed one consultancy, another is being signed off and a final presentation is due for a third in a month's time. This has been a busy period for those most closely involved; however there is only one consultancy on the horizon at the moment. Watersports is a seasonal industry, and to some extent so is higher education; there are times when the team is unable to take on the external work because, as we explain to employers, we are teachers and our first priority is to students.

Other Outputs

An undergraduate text book was written in the early days of the first course, and another book in 1996. The lecturing team has also converted some but not all of the data into academic publications such as book chapters and conference presentations. One lecturer is completing a PhD at Loughborough University in volunteering in sport incorporating some of this data. There is a backlog of data which has not been written up, but this is about priorities.

Lecturers, particularly in the late 1990s have been invited to present the findings of our research at industry conferences. At this time national governing bodies were putting together sport development plans to encourage more young people into their sport. The team presented at national sports centres, national boat shows and national conferences. The key benefit to lecturers was interaction with and feedback from employers and volunteer groups, and also building skills in communicating with non-student audiences.

Conclusion

In this case study, knowledge transfer activities have successfully been used to underpin curriculum development and teaching on courses in a new curriculum area. Students have been employed to work alongside lecturers on these projects. So far the benefit of knowledge transfer is to lecturers, directly to a select few students and indirectly to many students. Lecturers were very positive about their knowledge transfer activities and feel that keeping up to date with industry and networking are the key benefits. The down side is juggling deadlines in peak periods.

In terms of links between advanced scholarship and teaching, this case study highlights the benefits to lecturers who in turn pass on the knowledge and skills to students. The gap referred to in the title is that between the lecturers who are all involved and who benefit and the students who are not all involved and do not all benefit to the same extent or in the same ways. To bridge that gap a more holistic and inclusive approach needs to be developed. The model of handpicking students for particular projects is not sustainable on a larger scale.

With regard to setting up an enquiry based curriculum involving lecturers and students there are several challenges:-

1. *Scale of Activity*

Quality in research and knowledge transfer activities has to be maintained as small scale activities grow. There will be a requirement for staff development, pilots and the development of a reasonable timeframe.

2. *Range of underpinning activity.*

At this university lecturers lead on average five units; they may teach on more. It would be unrealistic to expect the same levels of advanced scholarship and enquiry based learning across the whole curriculum. Priorities need to be identified; some areas of the curriculum may be more appropriate for enquiry-based learning involving more students and lecturers.

3. *Advanced scholarship as one of many institutional priorities.*

As a new university, there are other priorities in addition to increasing advanced scholarship to underpin our courses; course development, recruitment and retention are high on the list and all are time consuming.

4. *Engaging the unengaged*

Those lecturers who were already involved in advanced scholarship talked about it and the impact on their students in favorable terms, but there remain lecturers who have yet to get involved.

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