On Being a Maritime Lecturer

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Maritime education and training has seen a progressive shift from further education to higher education in recent years, particularly in the UK. This shift has brought about a change in how we teach our maritime professionals, as well as a change in the skills and abilities required of maritime lecturers.

Previously, our emphasis was on technical proficiency in a prescribed, and some would say, limited range of skills. This range of skills was prescribed not only in terms of the type of skills, but also in terms of the curriculum that would foster them. Detailed syllabuses guided maritime lecturers as to the subjects to teach and how long to spend on each area. Moreover, the curriculum was content driven; the more subjects cadets covered in their training, the more 'qualified' or competent they were thought to be. The requirements of the maritime lecturers tasked to deliver this curriculum also emphasised technical proficiency; ex-mariners were sought who were highly skilled professionals that could transmit their considerable knowledge to their class through lectures.

Unfortunately, in maritime education we have learnt since that if we are determined to cover too many subjects, it will be at the expense of the understanding and thus the technical proficiency we desire (Gardner, 1993). Cadets will adopt coping strategies such as rote learning to pass exams. They may pass, appear to be competent, but their understanding will be superficial at best and their competence will be counterfeit (Ramsden, 2003). This is not only a problem in maritime education and training, but it is also evident in other professions, such as veterinary medicine (Banks, 1992).

The second lesson we have learnt is that it is necessary but not sufficient to have a deep understanding of your subject. Highly competent professionals do not necessarily make for good maritime lecturers. However, this is not about the actor, but the script that they follow (Biggs, 2003). The old script was to lecture, and as long as your lecture was interesting, your students would learn. However, what we have found is that passive students of the type found dozing in lectures are not learning students. Students need to be actively engaged in their learning in order to foster the deep understanding and the competence that our industry needs. Paradoxically, this requires maritime lecturers to do less, not more. It also requires them to learn from their students as much as their students learn from them by seeking their feedback on their teaching.

Does this mean that we do not need the highly skilled professionals of old? Not exactly. We need maritime lecturers to have a deep understanding of their subject, yes, but we need them to do less of the 'transmit' mode of delivery and acquire new sets of skills in teaching and learning that emphasise what the cadet is doing rather than what they, the lecturer, are doing (Tyler, 1949). For example, a lecturer who prepares a lecture on stability naturally enough focuses on the content of their presentation. They make sure it is full of interesting facts, diagrams, and calculations. They think about how they can make it more

interactive by asking the cadets questions. All the while, they are focussing on their performance; what they are doing, not what the cadets are doing. The new script entails maritime lecturers changing their focus to what the cadets are doing and how they learn. Rather than giving the cadets a lecture, they give them a project to do where they have to investigate for themselves and test out ideas by building ships' models and seeing what happens when they get their calculations wrong.

More recently, there has been pressure to expand the curriculum still further to include non-technical competencies such as leadership, management, and cultural awareness. This expanded view of a curriculum designed to meet our future professionals' needs places even greater emphasis on student-centred teaching. One cannot 'teach' these skills through lectures; they are learnt through experience and thus the job of the maritime lecturer is to create these experiences.

In order to enable maritime lecturers to make this switch from teacher-centred to student-centred learning, we need to develop their professional practice in teaching as well as help them to maintain their technical expertise. At Warsash Maritime Academy, we have developed a postgraduate programme for lecturers in maritime education and training designed to achieve this aim. This one-year programme encourages individuals to be innovative in their teaching by giving them the understanding of how people learn, the tools to reflect on their teaching practice, and the skills to use technology, such as simulators, to best effect. It also prepares them for postgraduate teaching, where even greater emphasis is placed on fostering students' independent learning. This is only achieved if maritime lecturers have the confidence to let go of the responsibility for their students' learning, which inadvertently fosters dependency, and to replace spoon-feeding in lectures with opportunities for hands on experience of applying knowledge and ideas.

In conclusion, it is my belief that there is no genetic code or innate ability that sets a good maritime lecturer apart from his or her colleagues. It is a dedication to professional teaching practice, which, ironically perhaps, involves the lecturer doing less and their students doing more that will produce the results we desire: competent professionals who have a deep understanding of their craft.

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