Professionalism, Golf Coaching and a Master of Science Degree: A Commentary.

I am going to focus on a single theme in this commentary. It stems from the central thesis of Jenkins’ paper, which is that a Master of Science degree would facilitate the development of ‘professionalism’ in golf coaches (Jenkins, 2014, p1). Importantly, I want to offer an alternative, additional perspective on what a Master’s degree might do for golf coaches, by considering a further notion; professionality. This is not because I agree (nor disagree) with Jenkins’ central idea, it’s just that another perspective might catalyse thinking around the purposes that such a degree might fulfil for the coaches who undertake it. In that understanding, professionality might offer a way of thinking that helps to develop a better degree. To my mind, a ‘better’ Masters degree will meet more needs and be more successful in delivering on it’s educational (and professional) aspirations when the students’ learning preferences are central to planning and delivery.

As a concept, professionality has a long history, emerging first out of the work of an Education professor at the University of Bristol, Eric Hoyle. This work has recently been revisited by academics in Leeds (e.g., Evans 2002), which gives nice symmetry to my account, since I’ve worked at the University of Bristol (and knew Eric Hoyle) and I now work in Leeds, where I work with Simon Jenkins. In Hoyle’s writing, professionality describes the way in which any individual approaches working in a profession and how they go about practicing that profession. Professionality, therefore, can subsume professionalism and a host of the other key terms that Jenkins uses to summarise his account. It is also important to recognise that Hoyle’s notions of professionality, while heuristic when he was writing about them, have subsequently been shown to have real relevance to teachers. For that reason, I’d suggest they have a similar standing among coaches, whose work is centred on learning.

With two main forms - restricted and extended – professionality can be conceptualised as existing on a continuum. In the context of the current account, it could be used to locate different golf coaches, some coaches lean more toward a restricted approach while others favour the extended form. Any individuals’ position on the continuum identifies their ‘professionality orientation’(Evans, 2002); it does not represent a fixed perspective of their character or personality, but shows how they approach professional life. This extends to their learning life too.

Individuals with an extended professionality often delve deeply into the nuances of theory, epistemology, ontology and axiology. It is easy to see that these individuals willingly embed themselves in the debates of the day, to learn about underlying concepts and philosophies. They take an intellectual approach to their work so they will be equally interested in delivery that improves not only what they know but also how they came to know it. These individuals may prefer ‘knowing that’ over ‘knowing how’, leaving them less motivated by practically-based learning.

In contrast, individuals with a restricted professionality favour learning from experience and day-to-day realities. Relying on ‘book learning’ doesn’t really float their boat, whereas learning how to do things better will. They respond to activities that centre on the ‘doing’ of daily life; they want practical experiences that link to, and that can enhance, their daily professional practice. Much of their learning challenge is to realise that what they’ve learned to do may not be the best way to help their clients; unlearning of longstanding habits is tough. It’s no accident that the old adage is ‘old habits die hard’!

Professionality allows us to think about recruits in ways that we might not do using other approaches. Just as each of these sets of recruits have their own preferences for learning, they will experience the same challenges as any who are asked/required to learn in an unfamiliar way. Sustaining learning for individuals on the different positions on the Restricted-Extended professionality continuum, shows all degree design teams that there is much to both learn and to unlearn. After all, those teams are just as likely to include people on different points on the continuum too.

References

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