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Response

Speaking Each Others' Language: Should Insularity Concern Us?

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Samdahl and Kelly and Jordan and Roland give reasons for thinking that we are "speaking only to ourselves". Practitioners don't often read research-based journals, people who publish in other contemporary research journals don't often cite papers that appear in leisure research journals, and leisure researchers who publish in leisure research journals don't often cite papers in those other journals. So far as these observations are accurate, what does this mean for *JLR*? Of course, this is not an issue that is unique to leisure studies, nor is it something that hasn't been talked about for some considerable period of time. This suggests then that while we've been aware of our propensity to be inward looking, we've not known how to respond to that, or how to adjust our academic practices in ways that draw us more fully into the broader circle of researchers and scholars beyond leisure studies.

Most would agree, I think, that the situation is even more pronounced than Samdahl and Kelly suggest. For the most part those whom we cite also work within our own area of specialization or one that is closely aligned to our own. My hunch is that we remain pretty firmly embedded in a fairly narrow body of literature. And I imagine that the same narrowness is found in other social science disciplines. The collection of work that we cite often includes our own work (as Samdahl and Kelly suggest) but it is also limited to the same group of researchers within our field that we repeatedly return to in reporting our research. Occasionally, with the entre of bright new scholars into our field, we are happy to be able to expand our bibliography. But by and large, our bibliographies look very consistent from publication to publication.

Should the insularity that Samdahl and Kelly refer to concern us? Perhaps it makes very good sense, especially when one thinks in terms of the typical evolution of a strong research program and the dissemination of the results of that program over the course of an academic's life. I think most would say "no argument" that the depth of knowledge and understanding that comes with a strong research program requires that we are grounded in our subject in a way that is less feasible when one's activity is entirely

eclectic. So, we tend to recognize those who specialize and cite those "specialists" who work in similar or cognate areas of investigation. In other words, specialization has obvious benefits. But the issue isn't whether researchers should be well acquainted with their own area of research. Rather, it is whether the work in that area would benefit from greater acquaintance with research in cognate areas; especially, with research in other disciplines that addresses the same or closely related issues, but from different perspectives? I think the question answers itself. That said, what can be done?

The situation is unlikely to change much unless we change the way in which we train young scholars and researchers and unless there is a concomitant shift in the reward system within academe. We quickly instil the belief in those in graduate school who are pursuing doctorates (and sadly even among masters candidates in some instances), that it is essential for them to publish if they are going to "get ahead". They respond very often by working hard to research and publish at an early stage in their tenure as doctoral students. Efficiency is helped by the fact that they can "plug into" the pool of "specialists" who already publish in their area of focus and they rapidly build up a bibliography that will characterize much of what they put out for the foreseeable future. As an interdisciplinary endeavour, many of the more senior leisure studies scholars have come from a wide range of disciplinary backgrounds which perhaps suggests to the student today that there is less need to go to the literature in those other disciplines. When all is said and done, isn't that broader disciplinary base now part of our own literature? We've made it our own so to speak, by virtue of the earlier wave of leisure studies researchers and scholars who came into the then young field of leisure studies having trained in a "pure" science or discipline. Hence, the need to expand one's intellectual horizons beyond one's particular specialization within leisure studies research is less apparent to the novice researcher.

As well, we tend not to venture beyond our area of specialization when attending leisure studies symposia or conferences. And so it turns out that even within the field of leisure studies, we talk to ourselves, more specifically those who work within our specializations. All kinds of wonderful discoveries are being reported in the room next door, but we stay close to those whose work we know about and accordingly, cite. Extraordinarily wasteful. This suggests we take a fresh look at how we organize our symposia and indeed there are efforts being made now to have researchers from different areas of research activity come together and exchange ideas and knowledge in conference sessions, rather than being organized to talk about our research only to those who work in analogous or similar areas of specialization. This shift to "mixing us up" can only be healthy for the leisure studies community.

Meanwhile, the results of the Jordan and Roland study on the reading habits and attitudes toward leisure research are prophetic for leisure research and practice in general. Jordan and Roland ask the question, "Does the [researcher-practitioner] gap matter?" Yes, of course it does. Without access to leisure research, practice may be able to tread water for a while, but it cannot in the long haul expect to move forward, grow and realize its

potential to make a difference." Similarly, in a field such as ours, research that occurs in isolation of practice can only go so far in terms of understanding the phenomenon it purports to study and influence.

It is interesting that both researchers and practitioners read so little, according to the Jordan and Roland findings. The time squeeze presumably takes its toll on many. But does this mean we don't care about keeping in touch with research and the literature? If we cared, would we have reading be our priority and let something else go? For practitioners, as the Jordan and Roland findings indicate, it is easier to let research reading go than it is practice-based reading. It goes without saying that practice wants the "how to". But it is disturbing that huge numbers of the Jordan and Roland respondents never read the major research journals. This situation is likely to persist as long as research and practice fail to speak each other's language. And certainly journal editors and their reviewers can do a lot to help move us beyond this quagmire by encouraging the presentation of research in ways that are "true" to sound research practice, but equally are intelligible to those who do not have doctoral training in research methods and analysis.

Action research is one way we can bring research and practice together. Where this is done in a genuinely participatory manner, with the practitioner taking a major research role from inception through to conclusion of the research, then we begin to speak each other's language. A challenge for academics is to work in ways that allow for this co-creation of knowledge and practice with practitioner-researchers. Again, both the training and the reward system within academe discourage academics from working this way. The time and effort required to develop trust and genuinely collaborative research activities with non-academics is not something people often naturally gravitate toward as part of their research program. But for those who do, the outcomes can be extraordinarily satisfying for researchers, practitioners, and the public who benefit from praxis. As well, the results of these sorts of collaborative endeavours can be presented in ways that are accessible to a wide audience, but which maintain the integrity of the research activity.

None of this directly addresses the question: What might *JLR* in particular do to respond? Some possibilities include the following. In the interest of overcoming the researcher-practitioner gap, we should continue our efforts to encourage papers co-written by researchers and practitioners. Additionally, in reviewing papers, we probably need to remind ourselves of the relevance question and ensure that we routinely query the implications of the research for practice. This further suggests the need for the field to develop the research so that those implications are brought out. Similarly, in the interest of opening up our research so that we may learn from the work being done in other disciplines, perhaps we need to seek out reviewers who typically publish in journals outside the field of leisure studies. These reviewers would certainly be well positioned to call attention to the importance of citations from journals in related disciplines. As well, we might increase the pool of associate editors who come from these related disciplines. This in turn could conceivably enable us to actively seek out papers that

would normally be published in journals outside the field of leisure studies. Perhaps with these shifts in mind-set as to "what counts", we shall be able to stop talking to ourselves and reach out in ways that will bring leisure research and practice more centrally into the broader community.