Staff Colleges can learn from other professions to develop and share evidence-based knowledge for emerging security challenges

David Last, Royal Military College of Canada
International Society of Military Sciences, Working Group 9

Introduction

Military and other security professionals in the majority of the world's countries (174/193 states are smaller than 50 million people) do not specialize to the degree possible in a few big powers, so they face challenges to professional development that differ from those of the major exporters of professional security knowledge. In particular, smaller countries' professionals are more concerned with emerging security challenges like survival migration, climate change, and stabilization of nearby failed states.

How can we improve mid-career education for security leaders by learning from other professions?

Sources and Methods

I began with secondary sources on professionalism, the emergence of bodies of knowledge, and knowledge transfer through professional education. The key informant approach (Bernard, 2002, 188-191) helped me to identify experts in three related fields:

- **Higher education and professional development** – studies of health, education, policing, and business, conducted at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE);
- **Comparing credentials, curriculum and credential management** – national and university practices identified through the Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC), the business One45, and university medical curriculum management
- **Knowledge translation and implementation strategies** – research to practice, university-based research teams, and funding models in use in Canada and Europe

Using active interviews (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) I explored the solutions devised by other professions to challenges faced by security professions in countries previously studied (Table 1).

Results

Important insights are gained from the management of higher education and professional development in health, education, and law. Health and education are increasingly international, but law is not. Military staff colleges can learn most from the way collaboration works in diverse health professions.

Table 1 Sources of data on professional security education

Interview data from International Seminars	Site visits and thick descriptive data
Serbia, 2009 BOS, HRV, MTN, KOS, SRB, NLD Botswana, 2011 BEN, BOT, DJI, JOR, KEN, MLI, NAM, NIG, RWA, SEN, TZA, UGA Brazil, 2012 ARG, BOL, BRA, COL, ELS, HON, JAM, URU, CHL, GTM, MEX, PER, CAN Indonesia, 2014 AFG, BGD, JOR, KEN, MNG, MAR, MYS, NPL, NIG, NLD, PAK, KOR, SEN, TNZ, THA	Canada – baseline studies, RMC, CMR-SJ, CFC 2008 – Netherlands, Mongolia 2009 – Serbia, Croatia, Israel, Palestine 2010 – Japan 2011 – Botswana, South Africa 2012 – Brazil 2014 – Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia 2015 – Finland

ISO standard country codes are used

How do professions learn?

Rapid change challenges professions to evolve. Professions like medicine, engineering, education, and law have developed models for development, accreditation and expansion of knowledge. These involve institutions like universities, specialized schools, colleges, and clearing houses for bodies of knowledge. National bureaucracies and commercial pressures compete with professional objectives to shape learning and influence professionals. Most professions advance through increasing specialization of knowledge.

Military professions are different – officers begin with specializations (army, navy, air force, infantry, artillery, etc.) and generalize as they advance, making mid-career education crucial for integration of knowledge. For smaller countries, comparison of credentials is important for international credibility, because forces will seldom be deployed in isolation.

Exploring diffusion of innovations in service organizations, Greenhalgh et al (2004) describe a spectrum of conceptual and theoretical bases for the spread of innovations, from "letting it happen" to "helping it happen," and "making it happen" (Table 2).

Defence Education Diplomacy can help to establish "thought collectives" in which groups of military officers develop common assumptions and approaches. These may be useful to address common threats, but smaller countries can be steered by states with more resources, and may wish to guard against this.

Professional schools and universities with independent research programs addressing practical problems contribute to common bodies of knowledge, but mechanisms for sharing knowledge in military communities are weaker than in health sciences, and are still evolving. Security fears can reduce willingness to share. Peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, and responses to some emerging security challenges elicit more collaboration than national defence.

Table 2 Building Security Education Communities

	"Let it happen"	"Help it happen"	"Make it happen"
Defining features	Unpredictable, unprogrammed, uncertain, emergent, adaptive, self-organizing	Negotiated, influenced, enabled	Scientific, orderly, planned, regulated, programmed, systems "property managed"
Mechanisms	Natural, emergent	←more social science more technical →	Managerial
Labels used by other studies	Communities of practice Epistemic communities	Networks of learning	Projects, programs, and directives
Security Education Examples	*Conferences *International Society of Military Sciences (ISMS) *International Police Executive Seminar (IPES)	*Global security education project *International Association of Peacekeeping Training Centres (IAPTC) International Military Testing Association (IMTA)* Technical Cooperation Program (TTCP)*	*Bilateral visits and exchanges *Defence Education Enhancement Program (DEEP) *Consortium of Defence Academies *ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (ACCHA)

Adapted from Greenhalgh et al (2004). Expanded in Last (2014)

Learning from other professions

Drawing on expert interviews, practices were explored in areas of interest to entry level and mid-career security education institutions.

Curriculum management. Sixteen of 17 Medical schools in Canada use a common curriculum management system (www.one45.com) . It provides tailored reporting on courses, internships, practicums, and the balance of time spent on different aspects of medical education, allowing Deans to calculate statistics, provide reports, and compare student performance with other institutions. The software is useful because of commonly accepted knowledge and performance standards associated with entry-level medical practice. For military education, the challenge is to articulate the common international standards across the range of subjects taught at staff colleges, within regional alliances like NATO, and more broadly.

Credential assessment. Most countries and many provinces or individual universities maintain credential assessment units. But getting comparisons right is resource intensive. The push towards university status is widespread. National professional schools (e.g. law and education) don't normally accept equivalencies. Comparing credentials serves national purposes, but military personnel do not migrate much, so the investment in credential assessment only makes sense as a collaborative venture for benchmarking national institutions.

Evidence-based practice. The fields of health care in general and preventive medicine and public health in particular have moved from the "expert apprentice" model towards evidence-based practice. The Cochrane Collaboration in medicine, and the Campbell Collaboration in social policy (crime, education, development, methods, welfare, and

knowledge transfer) are major initiatives that use systematic reviews of evidence to advance practice. This may be where military education has the most to learn. The evidence on which doctrine is based is often obscure. A prerequisite for evidence-based practice is that researchers and practitioners collaborate to conduct relevant research, review findings systematically, and adjust professional practices.

Reflecting on the evolution towards evidence-based practice, five factors appear to have been important (Box), and may be replicable for military science to address emerging challenges:

- Charismatic leaders with international reputations (like Archie Cochrane) led the way towards systematic use of evidence
- A prestigious publisher (Oxford University Press) supported dissemination through publication series
- Consistent government funding permitted a collaborative multiyear strategy in several countries
- International partnerships allowed modest contributions to be multiplied, even when funding dried up in some countries
- Integrating systematic reviews of evidence with widely used guidelines for practice sustained progress towards better practice

Knowledge translation for professions has become a field of knowledge in is own right, and has progressed beyond "lessons learned" techniques typically applied by small armed forces and police services.

What Staff Colleges can learn

Staff colleges in majority countries have broader mandates than those in major powers, and this should be an advantage, if they can develop and share knowledge effectively.

Staff colleges should collaborate internationally to benchmark and raise professional standards, as medical schools have done.

Mid-career officers should be given the tools and resources to research emerging security challenges, as part of their staff college education. Research should be designed and reported to facilitate systematic review and comparison, using the standards and techniques of the Cochrane and Campbell collaborations. This means much more focused attention to professional research, and to the quality of evidence it produces.

International collaboration on systematic reviews can establish a consensus body of knowledge on the best ways to manage instability, failed states, survival migration, and other emerging challenges. Human security and international security subjects are the most likely to elicit cooperation amongst majority states.

International clearing houses like Canada's Knowledge Translation Clearing House should have stable long-term funding to help move security research towards practice.

Staff Colleges should participate in formal networks of learning but should also encourage individual officers and professors to participate in communities of practice to support innovation and diffusion. Epistemic communities (Bloodgood, 2008) are important vehicles for advancing knowledge.

Staff Colleges should be equal contributors to epistemic communities, through critical examination of assumptions and original research. This will prevent groupthink and preserve common national and international security interests of smaller countries. In contrast, "thought collectives" relying on ideas disseminated by powerful states, class and commercial interests may undermine security, as these interests have sometimes risked undermining health.

Conclusion

By learning from other professions, staff colleges can develop a university-like culture of scholarship combined with practical expertise to advance relevant knowledge that addresses emerging security challenges.

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