Is there an irreconcilable separation between faculty who do research and those who concentrate on teaching? **Mark Jenkins** argues that world-class academics and thought leaders do both

Making the case for cases

It is a common perception that in many higher education institutions there are faculty mainly engaged in research and those whose main brief is to teach. Many see this as an irreconcilable separation. But I disagree.

My perception is that it is complementary and not a question of "either/or". Leading academics enjoy and benefit from doing both.

Junior faculty may start with a focus on building up their teaching portfolio but know that the only way to achieve promotion is by publishing in well-regarded journals. Senior faculty may want to spend all their time researching but various stakeholders, from governments to parents and students themselves, want to see higher-quality teaching and learning in the classroom.

And a key part of this is ensuring that students benefit from being exposed to those leading academics whom universities are proud to claim as their own.

It is my experience that the really great thought-leaders love to be in the classroom as well as at their keyboards. The ivory tower is not for them. They understand and appreciate that even those most eminent in their fields can still learn a great deal from bright and responsive students in class, particularly if you are teaching more experienced learners.

Their input can make an invaluable contribution to research. And they, in turn, will be thrilled and motivated that their input is valued and can have an impact in the real world.

Using research in the classroom has become a hot topic in business schools, precisely because it offers the perfect way for academics to develop their work.

If their research has a significant impact in the classroom, then they are getting greater value from their activities. Classroom teaching based on current and innovative research that is firmly anchored in the real world attracts high-calibre students and will help to enhance the reputation of a school as forward-looking and relevant.

But it must be said that using research to teach is also very easy to do badly. For example, it is not a good idea for a faculty member to show a group of MBA students his or her latest correlation matrix – I can guarantee it won't go down well!

Instead, it is vital to focus on real-world organisational issues and to share with students relevant research carried out to contribute to the ongoing debate.

It is my view that research needs to be significantly more centre-stage in the classroom and that teaching needs to be an integral part of any credible academic's portfolio. Even better, use research insights to create case studies for use in the classroom.

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Cases are ideally suited to provide an output for research data and if done well are an extremely effective – and fun – way to both communicate in the classroom and develop your research agenda. Cases can be used effectively to integrate teaching and research, resulting in an inspiring and invigorating experience for both faculty and students.

This synergy can reap major benefits. My own experience writing the *Formula One Constructors case series* (available from The Case Centre: www.thecasecentre.org/formulaone) is testament to this.

Writing and teaching these cases led to more in-depth research and eventual publication in flagship journals. This is a path open to academics in any field and one that I would strongly encourage.

First, however, it is useful to be clear about the distinction between teaching cases and research cases. And the most important difference to establish is the purpose of each.

The purpose of a teaching case is for the participants to learn something, whether about a particular framework or technique or how to make decisions in "real-life" complex situations with incomplete data.

A teaching case can include primary or secondary data and can be fictitious to illustrate particular points or based on real-life events. The teaching case sits within the context of a course or teaching module.

In contrast, the purpose of a research case is to provide an empirical basis for developing or testing a theory and sometimes to illustrate how a theory could work in practice. The objective is to explore a research question and the case may incorporate a variety of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The case should always be empirical, based on real data and sit within a programme of research.

Whereas a research case is not designed to work in the classroom, it is also true to say that there is absolutely no point in submitting a teaching case to an academic journal for publication. There are some specialist teaching case journals but these are not generally regarded as high-quality research journals, certainly not in the field of business and management.

With regard to research cases there are some journals that are more sympathetic to case-based research – these would normally sit within a more qualitative perspective on research. The key is to know the journals in your area and the kind of research they like to publish.

You can start by writing either a teaching case or a research case depending on your situation

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and aspirations. If you are a researcher with a lot of data who wants to begin teaching topics related to your research, then start with a teaching case. But if you're a teacher who wants to draw on your areas of expertise to publish in respected journals, then think seriously about writing a research case.

Research cases have the same potential shelf-life as teaching cases and some of the best research cases are revisited numerous times by many researchers. I suspect that research cases can in fact have a longer shelf-life as they are building theories and concepts that can live on for many decades whereas teaching cases very often need to be relatively recent to be seen as relevant and of value. Although there are, of course, a number of notable exceptions to this general rule.

I feel very strongly that teachers should be encouraged to write their own cases for use in the classroom as an excellent way to develop their own teaching agenda and build their credibility. My advice would be to start with the areas that excite you, the bits you really enjoy teaching, and then look at where the possible opportunities are for a teaching case study. These will stem from current questions related to your area of interest.

The challenge with moving from teaching cases to research cases is that you need to spend time understanding what has already been written in the area. The only way to get published is by making a unique and valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge – not simply duplicating it. I'm a great believer in drilling down into particular industries or sectors; find a sector that interests you and use it to explore the kind of questions that you are interested in.

For example, academics interested in networks have focused on biotech; those interested in competition have looked at airlines; and those interested in innovation and patent generation have looked at pharmaceuticals.

New industries are emerging all the time, so perhaps there are the opportunities to develop a teaching and research agenda through the development of case studies based on them.

For me, pursuing your particular interests is the most important thing. Life's too short to spend time working on things that do not hold any passion or excitement for you.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Jenkins is Professor of Business Strategy at Cranfield University School of Management in the UK. He will be running a one-day workshop for The Case Centre, "Aligning Your Teaching and Research", on 20 January 2016 at Rotterdam School of Management (www.thecasecentre.org/teachresearch).