

The Academic's and Policy-Maker's Guides to the Teaching-Research Nexus: A Suite of Resources for Enhancing Reflective Practice

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The proposition that research contributes to educational quality and enhanced student outcomes has long been a basic tenet of higher education. However, as universities have become more diversified in response to a massified, market-driven environment, the role of research in undergraduate learning and teaching has emerged as an issue for discussion, debate and close scrutiny. While the principle of research-led learning and teaching in higher education is advocated internationally, the question of how to operationalise and optimise this nexus is yet to be fully understood. At one end of the spectrum lies the assumption that the teaching-research nexus is the remit of research-led universities and an experience best integrated into later year undergraduate curricula. By contrast, many others argue for the need to infuse teaching with research practices and principles, regardless of the character of the university or the year level involved.

We contend that there remains a narrow conceptualisation of the teaching-research nexus in Australian higher education and that, in order to make advances, two approaches are required. First, individual academics need practical advice and

resources to guide their planning, integration and self-review of teaching-research nexus practices at the classroom and curriculum level. Second, institutions need support and advice to guide enterprise-wide planning, policy-making and review that encourages, facilitates and monitors the embedding of research into pedagogy. This project has been designed to address both these gaps.

The rationale for and aims of the project

Interest in the research-teaching nexus has been growing internationally over the past 12 years. There is now considerable literature documenting the importance of this strand of thinking as part of the framework of 21st century higher education institutional development, where 'knowledge creation' is seen as a primary goal of higher education – graduate attributes being one manifestation of this.

However, despite various institution-level initiatives to ascribe value to the teaching-research nexus, the fact is that for many academic staff, the 'teaching-research nexus' means nothing more than an additional demand on their already stretched resources and crowded curricula. Moreover, when the teaching-research link is considered, it tends to be seen as more appropriate to the remit of academics in research-led universities, or to those who teach later year undergraduates or postgraduate students.

This project will challenge that narrow interpretation of the teaching-research nexus across Australian universities by broadening conceptions of the process, practice and possibilities offered by research-infused learning and teaching. It will demonstrate the applicability of the teaching-research nexus across higher education institutions, drawing on compelling evidence that learners in all year levels, across disciplines and in diverse types of universities benefit from teaching and assessment that reflects research methods, values and outcomes, and embeds research-infused learning and teaching into curricula practices and policies.

The project will also address a significant gap apparent in existing considerations of the teaching-research nexus: the absence of practical resources for academics and policy-makers wishing to engage with the issue and operationalise the teaching-research nexus in classroom and institutional practice. A key deliverable of this project will be the creation of a suite of resources for both teachers and policy-makers. For teachers, this will comprise a planning guide, scaffolded implementation strategies, and checklists for self-review and review of student learning with respect to the processes and outcomes of research-led learning and teaching. For policy-makers, the resources will include step-by-step guides on embedding and sustaining the teaching-research nexus in institutional policy and practice. Project deliverables will result from wide consultation across representative types of Australian universities, thus demonstrating their universal applicability and increasing the likelihood of sustainable and strategic sectoral change in institutional policy and practice in relation to the teaching-research nexus.

With so much disparate activity taking place in the teaching-research nexus field, there is a need to synthesize and evaluate what has been learned, to produce, not just exemplars of good practice, but also step-by-step guides that outline how academics and institutions might initiate teaching-research nexus integration, and work towards embedding, sustaining and building upon these initiatives. This project will extend current practices and databases of examples by adding an evaluative dimension to teaching-research nexus processes and practices in higher education.