



The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers
in higher education

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Examples from Australian universities

Potentials for the Teaching-Research Nexus in Literacy Teacher Education

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Broad discipline area:

Education

- Literacy teacher education

Year level:

- Final year undergraduate
- Postgraduate coursework

TRN strategy:

- Drawing on personal research in designing and teaching courses
- Placing the latest research in the field within its historical context in classroom teaching
- Building small scale research activities into postgraduate assignments
- Conducting and drawing on research into student learning to make evidence based decisions about teaching

Teaching and learning context:

- Large group lectures
- Small group classes/tutorials
- Oral/research presentations
- Mentoring of individual postgraduate students
- Assignment/assessment (including applied assignments and community-based projects)
- Reflective learning

Brief description of the initiative:

Maintaining a nexus, or connection, between teaching and research in higher education presents many challenges for academics. One of the obvious challenges is to find the time and energy to maintain both research and teaching while publishing the research and applying for research grants. At times this can seem a daunting task. As a lecturer in teacher education in the areas of English Curriculum and Literacy Education, this Associate Professor is in a domain where there is often a preferred emphasis on practice rather than on theory and research. Yet there should not be a

dichotomy between research and practice where each can inform the other. She has found in recent years that grounded classroom research has provided rich findings that are able to be communicated to the academic community as well as to undergraduate and postgraduate students. One example is an ongoing research project, *Literacy for e-learning and multimodal contexts 2006-7* and this project is continuing in 2008.

This research project has been supported by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) Sydney which employs a large number of ACU graduates in Sydney schools. The project was developed in response to the need for new conceptualisations of literacy within rapidly changing modes of visual, digital and multimodal communication.

The project involved teachers from six Primary schools within CEO Sydney with most schools having two teachers working together. A wide variety of programs were developed by teachers to combine traditional with digital and multimodal texts, including use of Web 2 technology. These projects addressed a range of outcomes from the NSW K-6 English Syllabus as well as from other Curriculum areas, such as Mathematics, Human Society in Its Environment (HSIE), Science and Technology and Creative and Practical Arts (CPA). Teachers worked collaboratively with this lecturer, Education Officers and Regional Advisers. A rich range of data was obtained and analysed. The data consisted of teachers' programs, videotapes of classroom episodes, observations of school students and samples of students' work in print and digital mode. The findings from this project have now been produced in a document that will be available as a resource in ACU's library with an accompanying DVD of classroom exemplars.

The results of this project are gradually impacting on teacher education programs at ACU and on the wider educational community. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students in the School of Education (NSW) have had the opportunity to reflect on data from this project, to view classroom exemplars and to consider applications for their future teaching contexts. Such data from the field enables students to reflect on the realities of changing practice and to consider their relationship to current and future theories of literacy education.

There have been several other rewarding outcomes from this project and aspects of these will continue and be extended further as the research has been extended into 2008. In summary, these are:

- Examples of theories of multimodal literacy, e-texts and classroom practice, including video exemplars, presented within several undergraduate English Curriculum units and postgraduate Literacy Education units;
- Having been introduced to research on multimodality several Master of Education students have completed research projects within the area, e.g. projects on visual literacy; an investigation of the impact of Interactive White Boards; the influence of technology on boys literacy; and a PhD student is investigating how the incorporation of technology can enhance the reading of non-achieving adolescent students. In turn these students' findings will be communicated to other students;
- Some teachers from the research project are enrolling in ACU's postgraduate courses;
- A Seminar was presented to ACU students, staff and outside participants by a teacher (recent ACU graduate) from the project with her Kindergarten students to

demonstrate how curriculum was integrated with the use of a Smart Board. This teacher and her students won a SMART World Video Contest;

- Reporting of the findings of the project to ACU staff has increased awareness of pedagogical change and contributed to a decision to purchase and induct staff into use of new technology such as Smart Boards, podcasting and video editing within their teacher education units;
- Two refereed publications will be available during 2008: one will be a Chapter in a book on Research and new literacies, the other will be in the UK Journal *Literacy*.
- Communication of the research within ACU's *Mathematics and Literacy Education Research Flagship* has enabled the research to be disseminated nationally including a collaborative research project and publication between academics in Victoria and NSW; and
- Sustainability of the project [through CEO Sydney's intranet, teachers presenting at conferences, and continuation of the project] will ensure that further results are communicated to teacher education students.

There are many challenges in higher education in undertaking research and making this research relevant for the profession of teaching. One of the challenges is to know the best way to communicate research effectively to teacher education students. A further challenge is to find ways to involve students in the research, considering the logistics of large student numbers, their program and assessment issues. In traditional academic areas, tutors and research assistants provide potential for research to be integrated within the university program. However, teacher education, at this stage, has not attracted full time doctoral students, so those engaged in their doctoral research are completing it part time while employed full time and often unable to participate in research projects. Furthermore, it is difficult to attract funding from bodies such as the ARC for research that is linked to teaching. Despite these challenges this Associate Professor has found many benefits to be gained from undertaking research in the field and linking this to teaching. She has experienced that the nexus between research and teaching can be an ongoing, dynamic process.

For further details:

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