



## The Teaching-Research Nexus

A guide for academics and policy-makers  
in higher education

[www.trnexus.edu.au](http://www.trnexus.edu.au)

### Examples from Australian universities

---

#### **Research into the Effectiveness of Fostering Independent and Collaborative Activities in an Undergraduate Popular Music Program**

Lecturer Don Lebler  
Griffith University

**Broad discipline area:**

Creative Arts

- Popular Music

**Year level:**

- All undergraduate year levels

**TRN strategy:**

- Conducting and drawing on research into student learning to make evidence-based decisions about teaching
- Encouraging students to feel part of the research culture of departments
- Infusing teaching with the practices and values of researchers

**Teaching and learning context:**

- Curriculum design
- Learning to learn/lifelong learning

**Brief description of the initiative:**

This program convenor is engaged in comprehensive research into the extent the Bachelor of Popular Music program, structured to enhance students' ability to learn independently as part of a collaborative learning community, suits the learning style of the 'gamer generation' (Lebler, 2007; McWilliam, Lebler, & Taylor, 2007). Lecturers in this course, which has 90 students across the three year levels, view themselves as 'co-producers of learning' and do not set themselves up as expert arbiters of 'good' music.

The program demonstrates careful scaffolding of learning experiences and research tasks, aimed at encouraging students to be self-monitoring and self-directing. An example of this scaffolding is the structure of *Popular Music Production*, the major study in the program, which students take in all six semesters of the degree. Students engage in six repeating research-based learning cycles of internally scaffolding sets of activities, where more is expected of them each time. Activities include:

- A written proposal outlining intended creative submission (early in the semester)
- Staff mark this proposal and provide feedback

- Students then present creative work-in-progress and receive feedback from their peers and lecturers.
- At the end of the semester, students assess their peers' submissions as members of a formal assessment panel [explained in greater detail in Popular Music 2].

Within this structure, students are able to exercise high levels of self-direction in terms of specifically what they create and with whom they work. As students progress through their degree, they are required to increase the quantity of material to be submitted. Thus, students are required to be more efficient and productive with their creative processes. Students are able to access increasingly sophisticated recording studio infrastructure as they progress, moving from relatively simple studio configurations in first year to highly sophisticated studio configurations in third year.

This researcher demonstrates his commitment to collaborative research by reporting his findings to the students each semester to encourage them to view themselves as research partners and to feel they are contributing to an important project. This reporting infuses the lecturers' teaching with the values of collaborative researchers, inducts the students into the research culture of the Department and helps them to understand that research is a big part of their lecturers' job.

**Evidence of effectiveness and impact:**

The academic in this case study gathered evidence of the effectiveness of his teaching strategy through:

- Student evaluations of courses and teaching
- Students' reflective journals
- Recorded interviews with students and graduates
- Surveys on students' prior learning, hopes, fears and expectations of their conservatorium study and life after graduation
- Data on involvement drawn from track reports
- Data drawn from participation in work-in-progress feedback mechanisms
- Data drawn from student involvement in the formal assessment process

Findings from these evaluations have been presented at conferences nationally and internationally and have been published in peer-reviewed journals (see below).

**References:**

- Lebler, D. (2007). Student-as-master? Reflections on a learning innovation in popular music pedagogy *International Journal of Music Education*, 25(3), 205–221.
- Lebler, D. (2005). The master-less studio: An autonomous education community. *Journal of Learning Design*, 1(3), 41-50. <http://www.jld.qut.edu.au/>
- McWilliam, E., Lebler, D., & Taylor, P. G. (2007, June 17–21). *From passive consumers to active prod-users: Students as co-teachers in a popular music program* Paper presented at the 13th International Conference on Thinking, Norrköping, Sweden.

**For further details:**

Don Lebler  
Griffith University  
[d.lebler@griffith.edu.au](mailto:d.lebler@griffith.edu.au)