CONNECT

Research-rich and informed teaching:

what is it, why is it important and what might support its development?

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This paper, the first in a series focusing on research-rich and informed teaching, explores the nature of and rationale for such teaching and proposes a number of initiatives currently being piloted in the School of Education at the University of Hertfordshire to support its development. A second paper will explore the impact of these initiatives.

Research-rich and informed teaching – what is it?

In this paper, we use the term research to encompass a wide range of activities through which we explore individual interests and which lead to the development of skills, knowledge and understanding about our chosen focus. Such activities range from grant-funded research projects to scholarship activities such as the reflective exploration of teaching through practitioner enquiry. We use the term research-rich and informed teaching to refer to the enriching of academic programmes through integrating research into their curriculum, that is, their teaching, learning and assessment. Many activities undertaken by academics contribute to ensuring the robustness of such integration: conducting research into areas of disciplinary interest or pedagogy; teaching students how to develop their own research skills and a critical approach to reading and writing about research; drawing on and integrating research into curriculum design and so on.

Research-rich and informed teaching – why is it important?

There is a wealth of literature exploring the research-teaching nexus, that is, the relationship between research and teaching which could enhance the quality of learning and teaching for both students and academics. Much of this literature argues for an inconclusive correlation between staff engagement with research and effective teaching. Ramsden & Moses (1992), for example, propose there to be no simple functional relationship between research productivity and the effectiveness of undergraduate teaching. Hattie & Marsh (1996:508), based on a literature review of 58 studies, likewise conclude that 'the common belief that research and teaching are inextricably entwined is an enduring myth'. For Hughes, writing in 2005, the number and prevalence of such myths continues to militate against high quality research into the complex relationship between research-rich and informed teaching and learning. Although there have been further recent studies into this relationship, literature reviews of the overall field suggest that generalisations about the relationship remain tentative (Malcolm, 2014; Tight, 2016).

The impact of student engagement with research is also uncertain, although perhaps to a lesser degree. Elken and Woolscheid's (2016) study, for example, repeats the conclusions from previous research (see, for example, Cochran-Smith, 2005, Jenkins et al., 2007, and Chetty & Lubben, 2010) that there is evidence of only an apparent positive impact on learning from involving students in undertaking active forms of learning such as research.

However, the current lack of an empirically demonstrable and generalisable positive correlation between research-rich and informed teaching and student learning does not necessarily diminish the value of exploring such links in approaches to teaching. Hattie and Marsh (2004) for example were clear only that the research they reviewed did not, in their view, support the many generalisations that had been made from it. Rather, it suggests the flaws in conceptualising research, teaching and learning as separate activities, and in looking for the impact of each on the other. We concur with Westergaard's (1991) argument that conceptualising research and teaching as co-dependent, with each strengthening the other, potentially allows for a deeper understanding of the impact of each activity on the development of an enquiring mind.

This argument is underpinned by a view of the interconnected nature of the elements of academic practice, the overlapping 'scholarships' which make up academic work (Boyer, 1990). Varying understandings of the nature of this interconnection have been proposed. Feather (2010) conceptualises teaching, research and scholarship as forming a happy alliance, whilst Evans (2009) constructs them as connected sub-sets. The potential impact of one academic activity on another is not fully explored in these studies however.

An alternative approach to understanding this interconnection rests on a deconstruction of the processes of teaching and research. Westergaard (1991), for example, deconstructs these processes into the common attributes of calculating, pondering, de-constructing and re-constructing, whilst Brew and Boud (1995), see research, teaching and learning as all underpinned by a common process of coming to know.

Despite providing a degree of clarity, this remains a process-based approach to understanding academic activity and its interconnections. An alternative is to start from individual academics and consider the pattern of activity which would support the development of their identity as holistic academic professionals (Kreber, 2013). Based on our experience as academics, we suggest such activities might be organised into four domains: learning and teaching, research and scholarship, leadership and innovation and enterprise. The argument of Nixon et al. (1998) that all such activities are underpinned by the same core virtues of truthfulness, respect, authenticity and magnanimity is important here, particularly as they suggest that all scholarship activities need to be pursued in tandem; a lack of focus on one impacts negatively on all the others. Conceptualising research as a core element of holistic academic practice (McAlpine et al., 2011) changes its status from a discrete activity which can be pursued with enthusiasm or quietly ignored to a key link in a chain of activities, each necessary for the flourishing of the others. This argument positions academics' engagement with research, through undertaking it, reading about it, introducing it to students and supporting their forays into it, as crucial for effective teaching and learning.

Research-rich and informed teaching – what might support its development?

The focus of the work of academics in Schools of Education is held to be grounded in a concern to do what is best for students (Gremmet and Neufeld, 1994, in Kreber, 2007). The urgent, growing need articulated by HEIs for teacher-educators to develop research skills and build a

research and publication profile (Griffiths et al., 2010) can seem out of alignment with the more natural imperative to teach and develop others (Maguire, 2000). Developing an approach to doing, teaching and using research which feels authentic and which aligns with educators' moral purpose is therefore key to the development of research-rich and informed teaching as we conceive it. This understanding has led to the development of four initiatives, currently being piloted in the School of Education.

a. The Professional Learning Framework (PLF)

The Professional Learning Framework (PLF) seeks to illustrate a view of academic practice as comprising integrated activities which share the aim of supporting learning.
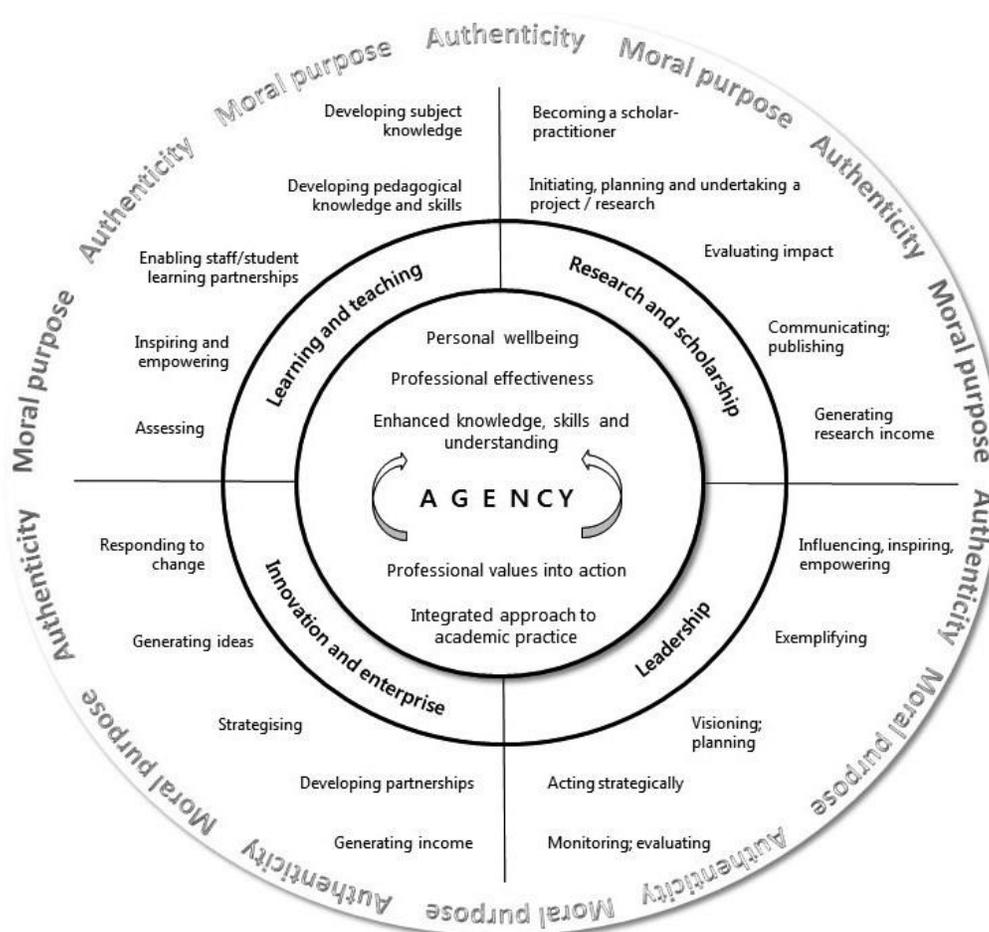

Figure 1: School of Education Professional Learning Framework 2016-17

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The framework draws from and is aligned to the *UK Professional Standards for teaching and supporting learning in Higher Education* (HEA, 2011), which forms the basis for the HEA professional recognition schemes, and to the *Vitae Researcher Development Framework* (2011) where appropriate. Whilst recognising its simplification of the 'messiness' of academic work, the PLF is nevertheless offered as a tool to support academics at all career stages in reflecting on the pattern of their work and aspirations across the four domains of *Learning and teaching*, *Research and scholarship, Leadership* and *Innovation and enterprise*. It is linked to a series of activities which support colleagues in developing chosen areas of their practice and can be accessed at:

http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/crb/co/website226.nsf/Homepage?ReadForm

The framework is bounded by the concepts of authenticity and moral purpose, and has agency at its centre. This highlights our belief that, in order to flourish, academics need to engage in academic activities which are meaningful to them (Kreber et al., 2007), which derive from a moral purpose which allows them to drive meaningful change forward (MacIntyre, 1985). In order to develop research-rich and informed teaching therefore, individuals equally need to undertake activities which are personally and professionally valuable to them (Hughes et al., 2011), which allow them to develop their sense of being an authentic professional. The School of Education is committed to using the PLF as part of its staff development processes in 2016-17.

b.   School of Education research-rich and informed teaching StudyNet site
This website has been developed to facilitate the sharing of thinking and resources to promote research-rich and informed teaching in the School of Education and beyond. It is available to all School of Education staff at:

http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/crb/co/website226.nsf/Homepage?ReadForm

c.   School of Education project: How do we make sense of research-rich and informed teaching in the SoE?

This project, supported by a School of Education Award, explores how we make sense of research-rich and informed teaching within the School of Education as a whole. The project is guided by the following questions:

1.   What views of research-rich and informed teaching are in the literature?
2.   What do colleagues say when asked what the term means?
3.   How do colleagues use research in their teaching?
4.   What are the barriers to research-rich and informed teaching?

We will use the project to explore colleagues' views of the use of research in their teaching content and pedagogy. We will identify examples of research-rich and informed teaching that

are currently being used in the School of Education and surface case studies which can be used to develop future practice.

d.   Research skills workshops for students

Many students find it a challenge to develop the skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence necessary to undertake research which is meaningful to them. A series of online research methods resources have been developed by the UH Schools of Education and Business and the Researcher Development Programme.

These can be accessed at:

http://www.studynet2.herts.ac.uk/crb/co/website158.nsf/Teaching+Documents?openview&count=9999&restricttocategory=main

(StudyNet home page – General Websites – Research Methods online)

These are shared resources, available across schools. Any academic can contribute to this resource pool and can link to it from their modules. We are currently leading a series of workshops for students from across all SoE programmes, based on these resources.

These initiatives will be evaluated in September 2017 in terms of their impact on the development of research-rich and informed teaching in the School of Education. The results of this evaluation will form the subject of our second position paper.

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