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## **Nurturing the research spirit: The ivory tower and the teaching-research nexus in developing early career research**

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*After 17 years as a school music educator I feel that I am only now commencing my career as a researcher. Whilst teaching I completed my postgraduate studies out of a sense of personal curiosity and a professional desire for challenge, but also with a view to possibly entering the tertiary sector at some stage in the future. The catalyst for that change came as my role became increasingly that of an administrator and human resource manager - labels that removed me further from the areas of teaching, scholarship and inquiry. In my first year as an academic starting the research journey has however proven to be more complex than I thought, and I have entered an environment in which my previous perceptions of the academic ivory tower have been challenged. The need to get “runs on the board” with articles and conferences and to collect data and run research projects within a challenging workload is all symptomatic of this complexity. In this paper I will explore some of the ways in which I have sought to solve this dilemma through optimising the teaching-research nexus.*

### **Introduction**

This December will mark the end of my first year as an academic lecturing in music education in a Faculty of Education. However I certainly do not yet consider myself to “be” a researcher. Over the past ten years I have had concentrated times when I have focused on major research projects such as my doctoral thesis, presentations for conferences and articles for journals; but during these times of focused research I also spent my time balancing research with my full time paid work life as a school music educator. Until this year therefore research had never been a component of my professional life. Therefore, after 17 years as a school music educator I feel that I “am” the teacher, but that I am only now just commencing my “official” career as a researcher; I am only now starting the journey of “becoming” a researcher. This paper explores the ways that I have sought to optimise the nexus between these two functions within my role and in so doing achieve my goals as both researcher and teacher.

During the first few weeks in my new role, whilst quickly attempting to understand a new organisation and my role within it, familiarising myself with a myriad of new people and names, and preparing unit outlines and classes I became all too aware of some of the competing demands that were to be made upon my time as an academic. Despite the time constraints of my workload I was determined however to continue to strive for the best outcomes in my teaching practice and to provide my students with the most authentic and positive experience of music education that was possible. I was also equally determined to explore my research interests and to develop as a researcher; the research component of my new position was one of the main reasons I chose to move into tertiary education. I therefore found myself pondering the conundrum of how I could achieve each of these aims within the time allowed to me – a question that many early career researchers must confront.

I came to my new position with three broad aims: first, as illustrated above I wanted to ensure that my teaching inspired pre-service teachers to engage with and value music education; second I was keen to explore my research interest in techniques of engaging students in the teaching and learning process through meaningful learning outcomes and authentic assessment; and third I wanted to pursue the outcomes of my doctoral thesis through the preparation and publication of articles that would stimulate debate around some of my conclusions.

One of the examiners for my thesis had stated in their assessment notes that “I hope he is going to continue the research in this important theme and will write international studies about the Australian innovations taking arts education projects out to a wider range of audiences and participants”. To this time I had only submitted one article for publication related to my thesis (Baker, 2006a), however the fact that writing from my doctoral thesis would not involve collecting and analysing data made this area of research less daunting than undertaking new research within a workload model which comprises a heavy teaching load. The second aim related to engaging students in the teaching and learning process through meaningful learning outcomes and authentic assessment would be less easily achieved and was, along with maintaining high standards in my own teaching, my biggest of concern at this stage.

In one of those moments of clarity whilst I was working on unit outlines and preparing classes I realised that I was preparing programs that, perhaps not surprisingly, strongly reflected my own values about music education and particularly the role of the teacher/lecturer in the process of teaching and learning. Some of these values that I realised were underpinning my preparation for the academic year included: the belief that teaching and learning are fundamentally collaborative processes in which “learning to learn” forms the foundation of the relationship between teacher and student, and the consequent benefits for students of being actively engaged in the management and assessment of their own learning; the belief that for assessment practices to be truly authentic they must necessarily be relevant to the end-needs of the student and consequently both transparent and formative in design; and, finally, the essential role for the teacher as one of the most significant variables in the equation that is student success.

It was at this stage of my thinking about the problem of developing as a researcher whilst simultaneously ensuring that the quality of my own teaching was not compromised that I was reminded of the writing of Schon. Schon (1991) wrote that when a practitioner becomes a researcher into his own practice, he engages in a continuing process of self-education. When practice is a repetitive administration of techniques to the same kinds of problems, the practitioner may look to leisure as a source of relief, or to early retirement; but when he functions as a researcher-in-practice, the practice itself is a source of renewal (p. 299)

Clearly a life of leisure or an early retirement were out of the question, however the essence of Schon’s argument, that research into ones own practice can be a powerful tool for professional and personal vitality, was very apposite.

My next steps, therefore, in “becoming” a researcher in this new context had now become a little clearer to me: for this first year I would focus on the nexus

between teaching and research. It was Schon's reference to being a "researcher-in-practice" that was most thought-provoking and appealing at this time. I began to reflect on the ways in which I could design my teaching units to provide the outcomes for students that I so passionately wanted to facilitate whilst also providing a vehicle for the collection of data that would not only inform the continued development of my teaching practice but also inform my development as a researcher.

This paper therefore explores the ways in which I have sought to optimise the teaching-research nexus in the development of quality learning outcomes for my students and in the development of research focused on teaching design and practice. This paper is divided into two main sections: the first section seeks to clarify some of the values that I have brought to my academic career through illustrating some of the milestones of my teaching career that have been significant in the formation of those values, while the second section investigates the ways in which these values and understandings have underpinned my first forays into research in my first year as an academic. This section also describes some of the very early outcomes of a research project that are illustrative of the ways in which I designed a teaching unit to optimise the teaching-research nexus. The use of this project in this context is intended to illustrate an attempt to address what I describe as the conundrum of the early career researcher.

### **"Being" the Teacher**

On coming into the academic environment I felt I was very much "becoming" the researcher; but I also felt that I had very much "earned my spurs" as a teacher and I believed "teacher" was one part of my new role that would require only small shifts in my educational paradigm and methodology to be successful. And in retrospect this has certainly been the case. My route into tertiary education has been different to those of many of my colleagues and other academic acquaintances who have moved into the academic field straight after completing an undergraduate course or possibly a masters degree, others have spent time completing their doctoral studies whilst working part time in a tutoring capacity and then entered into a full time position. I had spent the previous 17 years as a full time classroom and instrumental music educator in numerous and diverse schools in Victoria whilst completing my postgraduate studies as a part time student.

In order to understand some of the values that have underpinned my teaching over the course of this year it is important to illustrate the contexts in which these values have developed over the last 17 years. I have learnt different lessons about teaching and the role of the teacher in each of the different school contexts in which I have taught. It is important therefore that I attempt to illustrate some of those milestones along the journey that have influenced the development of the educational values that underpin my teaching and research.

When I have taught students the skills of critical listening, as I have done many times in my career, I have focused on what I have called musical "signposts" that lead the listener down a pathway of discovery about the music being listened to. These signposts may include such musical elements as instrumentation and structure. If a listener focuses on the instruments they hear in a piece of music this can often be an indicator or "signpost" that could lead to an important assumption about the style of that music. For example if a piece of music contains a drum kit, acoustic bass,

piano, guitar(s) and perhaps saxophone(s), trumpet(s) and voice(s) then this could indicate that the style of the piece may be “jazz”. If the piece has a series of structural elements such as a “head” or main melodic section and other sections for improvised solos by some of the instruments then the piece could be in a “jazz standard” structure. Having followed these signposts in the critical listening process the listener often comes to a far deeper understanding of the work studied than would have been the case without the signposts. In one sense the milestones to which I refer in this paper are just that – “posts” along the journey of becoming a teacher and researcher. They could also be referred to as educational “signposts”, like the “musical” signposts I have just referred to, that have in a sense directed me to where I am today as an educator/researcher and the values that underpin my activities in both of these key functions in my life as an academic. What follows is a relation of some these milestones or signposts, that I find have become inextricably linked to both my teaching and research and to my research into my teaching.

In one sense some of my experiences as an educator have been significantly influenced by my own experiences as a student. As a young person I came to my love of music at a relatively late stage for a cellist – age twelve. Many cellists and violinists start to learn their instruments from as young as age three. This was not the case with me and most of my time in secondary school was spent “catching up” so that I could achieve my goal of studying at a tertiary level. As a young person in an all-boys school where personal value and social currency was largely vested in sporting prowess I found my sense of belonging and personal meaning through my intense engagement with music. My connection to music as a young person was fostered, nurtured and coaxed by one significant teacher who represents my first “signpost” on the journey and whose influence remains with me today in my practice. This teacher had the skill of engaging and enthusing students with his love of music, with designing learning experiences that were achievable and illustrative of his passion and in so doing he lit the “spark” that has continued through my own teaching practice and into my career as an academic where I see part of my role as that of an “engager” a conveyor of the “spark” of musical passion. This belief in the role of the teacher has underpinned my teaching for many years, and is strongly supported by Michele Bruniges (2005) who maintains that “the unique and specialised knowledge, skills, experience and professional capacity of teachers must be valued as fundamental” (p. 102).

After going on to tertiary study and graduating from Melbourne University with a Bachelor of Music Education in 1988 I commenced my teaching career. Much of my early teaching experience took place in a one-to-one environment that affirmed my belief in the power of the teacher as the driver of engaged and dynamic learning that places the needs of the student at the centre of all teaching and learning. I began to view my role as a teacher much less as the ultimate arbiter of musical success for my students, as perhaps defined by the European tradition of studio music teaching, but rather as a facilitator of learning in a partnership between the student, parent and myself. Schon (1991) describes this collaboration stating that “just as reflective practice takes the form of a reflective conversation with the situation, so the reflective practitioner’s relationship with his client takes the form of a literally reflective conversation” (p. 295). During this period of time and in subsequent years I began to determine my own teaching success by the extent to which each of my students succeeded in engaging musically relative to their own abilities, rather than through

external successes in music exams or competitions. Safer and Fleischman (2005) reflect on this commitment and the need to develop strategies to enable each individual student to “succeed”, stating that “in today’s education climate, school success is defined as ensuring achievement for every student.” (p. 81). The notion of teaching as a “conversation” that places the needs and success of the student at its heart still appeals to me enormously today, particularly when engaging students in a dialogue about the assessment and management of their own learning, and represents the second “signpost” for me as teacher and later for me as teacher/researcher.

My last school appointment was as Head of Music in a large and highly regarded music program in a K-12 school in regional Victoria. After some months in this new role I was also offered a second position as Head of Creativity – a curriculum leadership position in the visual and performing arts. In my music leadership role I had become both a glorified personnel manager dealing with fragile egos and the intricacies of competing personal agendas and also an administrator, regularly completing the swathes of forms, purchase orders, reports, budgets and facility management forms that are the lot of every one in these positions. It was ironically to prove that the challenges of the curriculum leadership role rather than those of managing the music program for which I was initially employed that were to fascinate me, and over the three years I developed an intense interest in curriculum and assessment. This interest in curriculum and assessment was to become a focus for both my teaching and my research and as such represents the third signpost along my journey as teacher and researcher.

It was during this time that I also began to engage professionally with the concept of student self-management of learning and student engagement in the process of learning to learn. Initially this took the form of a reflective student journal in which my year five students recorded their learning experiences and commented on their own strengths and weaknesses in the subject and areas that they might target for improvement in coming musical activities. I began to reflect on the role of the teacher in the classroom in encouraging the development of learning self knowledge in students. In this context management of learning and learning to learn became critical components. Perkins (2004) highlights the importance of this skill in teaching what he refers to as the “knowledge arts” when he refers to “strategic and spirited self-management of learning itself” (p. 14). This belief in student management of learning as a means of engaging students in the learning process represents my fourth signpost.

In this school context there were two highlights that sustained and nurtured me as an educator and as a researcher. Initially these two activities may seem remarkably different, one a management function and the other a teaching function, yet they are inextricably linked to each other: the first was my year five music classes that occurred twice per week, and the second was my role in driving assessment reform through linked essential learning outcomes.

Many of the reforms that I was driving at a school level were being trialled each week in my own music classroom. This process was my first experience as a “researcher-in-practice” (Schon 1991, p. 299) and is the final signpost on the journey to “becoming” the researcher. It was particularly the trialling of rubric style assessment instruments in a formative assessment context and as a means of engaging the student in discussions about the evaluation of individual tasks that was of most



interest to me. Bruniges (2005) maintains that “assessment should not be a covert mission, but rather a process defined by the importance of transparency and information sharing which is directed by positioning the needs of the students as paramount” (p. 102). Placing the needs of the individual student at the forefront of the learning process through the provision of teaching and learning programs that make assessment transparent and meaningful was one means by which my concern and respect for my students could be modelled.

In my year five music classes I began to experiment with the use of explicit learning outcomes and developmental continua as a means of engaging students in the management of their own learning. Developmental continua focus on the explicit statement of learning outcomes through which a student will progress over a given period of time. They are at the opposite end of the assessment spectrum to letter and numerical grades. Continua enable the teacher to collect accurate and meaningful data about student progress, and to provide parents and students with vital information on what is required to improve learning in a subject.

In my classes music literacy activities were undertaken as preparation for the performance of a selected musical piece, the developmental continuum for this essential learning outcome was attached to all worksheets and students discussed what was required to move up the continuum – a means by which I sought to engage them in a conversation about how they would be assessed and what that assessment meant to them. Through focused questioning students were encouraged to engage with their learning by exploring the continuum, and relating the task to the skills suggested by the continuum. Questions included “What do you think you need to do to with this task to achieve the minimum level?” and “How can you move up the continuum for the next activity?” Furthermore students could track their own progress in the skills set by marking with a highlighter where they “sat” on the continuum for each activity, thus engaging the student in meaningful management of their own learning.

The signposts articulated above may be summarised as: a belief in the role of the teacher as a critical component in the question of student success; the concept of teaching and learning as a collaborative process with the needs of the student as paramount; a passion for curriculum and assessment reform; a belief in student management of learning as a means of engaging students in the learning process; and a belief in the value of being a researcher into my own practice. These signposts were to be central to my practice in my first semester of tertiary teaching. They were to frame the development and planning of the first iteration of my early childhood and primary music education subject, and were to significantly inform the development of my first research project entitled. In the following section I outline the ways in which this project evolved and how I sought to solve the dilemma of having limited time in which to develop my research activities through optimising the teaching-research nexus – perhaps not unlike my previous experiences with my year five music classes.

### **“Becoming” the Researcher**

After my experiences of teaching in various early childhood and primary contexts and particularly my most recent experience with my beloved year five music classes I was very excited about the first subject I would be teaching in my tertiary career. The subject was part of a four year Bachelor of Education (Primary and Early

Childhood) course for general primary and early childhood teachers. I was determined to make my teaching transparent, my assessment authentic and meaningful, to provide my students with as many resources and experiences that were useful and usable in the classroom as possible, and above all else to engage my students with the enjoyment of actually making music together. However through various sources I became aware of some complexities that I would need to be mindful of in my planning for this subject.

Initially other far more experienced staff members than I sought to counsel me regarding the standard of some of the students who were enrolled in the subject. I was told by one source that many students in the subject were very shy about their previous often negative experiences of music education and were consequently very reserved about participating in music. I was told by another source that the last experience many students in the subject had of music education was as students themselves in primary and secondary classrooms and that consequently many had become completely disengaged from the value of music as a learning experience. I was also aware from another source that the literacy and language skills of many students in the subject were not of a very high standard in this subject. A student who had already completed the previous iteration of the subject had anecdotally reported that some students did not stay for the full length of music tutorials and had sought excuses to leave tutorials early. Some sources maintained that students often simply did not buy the compiled subject reader at the outset of the subject and that if they did they didn't necessarily always complete the readings in a timely fashion for the class. It was also reported that for some students the use of an essay as a means of assessment was not viewed well – that an essay was not at least in some of their eyes a valid or meaningful measure of achievement in this context. I decided to address some of these issues in my unit design with a view to:

- Enable students to process their previously held perceptions about music education, many of which may be negative
- Provide opportunities for students to engage with the value and power of music,
- Structure assessment in such a way that would encourage students to participate for the duration of the class
- Design the course in such a way that articles contained in the reader were read and their relevance to students reflected upon
- Make the course relevant to the end-needs of the students and thus again assist in the process of engagement, and
- Design assessment in a way that was most meaningful for the students.

These complexities were all in some way related to the areas of participation and engagement that had for so long been a part of my approach to teaching and some were intimately connected with the use of appropriate and meaningful assessment techniques.

I decided, in another of those moments of clarity, during the process of re-writing the subject that I needed to design the unit in a way that focused on student management of their own engagement and learning in the subject. I eventually decided to explore a pre-service journal as a means of connecting with my students, as a means of allowing them to explore the preconceptions and experiences that they bring to the subject and to manage their own engagement with music education. At this stage the shape of a research project was beginning to be clear. Once again I would function as a researcher into my own practice.

One of the aims of the journal was therefore to encourage pre-service teachers to engage in professional reflection through the process of writing. Russell (2005) maintains that whilst students are encouraged to engage in reflective practice they are rarely given the skills to do so (p. 200). I hoped that by providing this opportunity for my students that they would develop some of the skills of reflective practice as they create personal meaning through their engagement with the subject. Using a journal would enable students to not only process their learning but to engage in the management of that learning in a way that merely verbalising an idea or issue cannot. According to Hogan (1998):

Reflective writing can do things for us as professional educators that ‘just thinking’ or ‘thinking through talking’ rarely achieve, important though these are. It is virtually impossible to write about our experiences without reflecting on them to some extent...a journal is thus a rich resource for professional learning, both through the act of writing itself, and as we reread and construct meaning from the record of our experience (p. 26).

By undertaking a journal as a means of engagement and assessment I believed I could subvert some of the negative behaviours anecdotally reported to me and simultaneously engage my students in a meaningful conversation about the activities and theories presented in my tutes. In my thinking at this stage was also the idea that the journals could provide me with one means by which I could research my own teaching practice. Thus the music tutorials could therefore be developed with the intention of solving or at least attempting to address the conundrum facing many early career researchers – how to maintain high standards of teaching whilst simultaneously achieving research objectives within the limited time allowed to me.

I realised that in order to provide journal entries that were capable of assessment within a short time allowance and to collect data in areas that were pertinent to both students and my research interests the journal would need to be a structured document with clearly defined sections. These sections would also need to be very closely aligned with my lesson planning, assessment and teaching practice. I therefore included the following sections for each weekly journal entry:

- A section that asked the student to reflect on the modelling and scaffolding demonstrated during the tutorial,
- A section that asked the student to reflect on the ways that the activities presented in the tutorial could be applied to their own teaching practice
- A section in which students were encouraged to comment on the relevance of the two required weekly readings to the learning completed in the tutorial, and
- A section in which students were asked to report their own levels of learning and engagement in the tutorial

These sections were therefore designed in such a way as to address some of the critical issues raised by various sources and articulated earlier in this section, to enable me to include some of the “signpost” values in the unit design and that would facilitate the completion of the three aims for my first year as an academic mentioned in the introduction to this paper.

I was also interested in providing students with the opportunity to tell their own musical stories, both positive and negative, and I therefore structured the journal to include opportunities for students to reflect on their musical experiences: once at



the start of the journaling process as a means of asking students to report their preconceptions about and experiences of music education, once in the middle to reflect on the ways their thinking had been challenged or not, and once at the end as a means of measuring any changes or non changes in student perceptions during the course of the journaling experience. Finally students were asked their opinion about the journaling process, and they were asked to comment on how journaling compared to the process of preparing an essay as the primary means for assessment in music. I hoped that this question would uncover some valuable data about the experience that would inform both the research and future iterations of the subject.

I was determined to use the journal as a means of assessment while allowing me to model my own belief in the importance of providing transparency in assessment. Therefore the journal would be assessed using a pre-determined rubric that was openly discussed with students prior to undertaking their first journal entries – not unlike my experience with my year five students. Assessing the journal multiple times over the course of the semester meant that students were able to track their own progress and were also able to engage in a process of formative assessment. By asking students to write about their musical stories three times during the semester I encouraged them to reflect on the class as a change process, and simultaneously generated data that may be useful in developing research about the experiences and preconceptions that students bring to a pre-service teacher education course in music education. The reflective journal was therefore developed as a means by which some of these complexities could be addressed, negative behaviours subverted and student engagement in learning maximised. The journal was developed therefore principally to align teaching and learning, learning outcomes and assessment practices in a way that would ensure deeper learning and “constructive alignment” (Biggs, 2003).

Biggs (2003) writes that conventional assessment disempowers learners, whereas education is about empowering learners, and assessment can be made to play an empowering role” (p. 162) and it is in this sense that the journal was created as a vehicle for empowerment.

The results of this foray into the teaching-research nexus have thus far been very encouraging in respect of both teaching and learning and research. The analysis of data indicates that participants perceived five main areas of benefit to the use of reflective journal writing in the unit over the course of the semester. Participants described five positive benefits derived from the use of the journal, for them it encouraged:

1. A sense of “going below the surface” in respect of the skills and concepts taught in the unit;
2. Students to complete and integrate the weekly readings into their ongoing learning;
3. The development of “reflective” skills”, although it was clear that students did not have a shared understanding of “reflection”;
4. Students to make tangible connections with the “real world” of teaching; and
5. Ongoing learning and engagement as a result of the “formative” approach to the assessment of the journal.

The following student voices have been included in this paper to illustrate some of the positive outcomes for my students that have been achieved as a result of

my exploration of the teaching-research nexus. The feedback supplied by students in their journals has given me a much greater depth of understanding of the different ways in which these students have learnt. One theme that has consistently arisen so far has been the usefulness of the journal as a means of making connections between tutes and readings and as a means of processing individual learning. Jack wrote that the *"journal allows for reflection which leads to a better understanding. The journal has been an excellent processing tool. Often after completing I was able to see connections and underlying points of the tutes and readings more clearly than before"*.

Jill reinforced this idea of the journal as a means of making connections: *"I have found that keeping the journal has contributed to my understanding of the readings by requiring me to analyse them more critically and make connections between them and the tutorials"*.

Jenny reflected on the connection between the journal and the assessment for the subject, and focused particularly on the journal as a formative tool: *"Filling out a weekly journal entry really helped me to reflect back on everything I was learning and assisted me in gaining [a] deeper understanding. The journal relates directly to the tutes, whereas an essay is usually somewhat removed. By collecting and assessing the journal regularly during the course of the unit students receive feedback that can help them later in the unit. The journal is definitely a better assessment tool than an essay. Finally a subject that 'practices what it preaches' in the area of assessment"*.

Some students also reported a greater feeling of connection or engagement in the subject and the learning. John wrote that *"I have felt so much more connected to what I am doing"*. Student E reflects this view stating *"It was an assessment that enabled us to become active in our own learning"*. Student F reflected on the requirement to become engaged in the tutorial in order to complete the journal entry, stating somewhat ironically that *"The only downside I feel this journal has, you don't feel that you can't relax at all in the lesson"*.

These positive results have also been evident for me as teacher, in that my understanding of the ways in which my students learn has grown as a result of the project. I now have a sense as a result of this project that this may be where the power of the nexus lies in the mutually beneficial nature of research of this type, where the benefits are evident for both researcher and subjects. The research can highlight some of the elements of good practice that can in turn benefit future students through the improved design of teaching and learning.

## **Conclusion**

I started this paper by attempting to illustrate the conundrum that I face as an early career researcher: how I could manage my dual functions as teacher and researcher while achieving teaching quality and simultaneously developing my skills as a researcher. In addressing this question I have outlined the shift from "being" a teacher to "becoming" a researcher. This narrative has been illustrative in itself of the diverse pathways, values and experiences that different academics may bring to their roles.

I have sought to illustrate this transition through examining some of the signposts of my teaching career and the way I have integrated these experiences and

the values that underpin them into my first research project as a full time academic. This research project sought to optimise the teaching-research nexus in a way that would allow me to confront the conundrum by optimising some of my already developed teaching strengths in a research context.

I have sought to contextualise the process of “becoming” a researcher in an environment where complexity is evident as a result of the competing needs placed on my time framed by an imperfect workload model that privileges teaching over research. I have used the term “becoming” a researcher rather than “being” a researcher because I am still “becoming” that researcher; I am one more step further down a pathway that has been characterised by my own reflective practice. The title of “researcher” does not sit quite comfortably just yet, however, I am quite comfortable with the title of teacher/researcher, which does seem to be most illustrative of my current role as an academic in a Faculty of Education.

The example of my research project was selected for inclusion in this paper in order to illustrate the creative ways in which I have sought to develop research that exploits the teaching-research nexus through a strategic approach to the issues inherent in the conundrum mentioned earlier. This approach has enabled me to get the “runs on the board” as an early career researcher and has also provided me with defensible data as a means of reflecting on my own practice and thereby improving my performance as a teacher. This approach to “becoming” a researcher has been particularly satisfying because of the positive outcomes that have been evident for both my students and for me as the teacher/researcher. Through exploring the teaching-research nexus I have also been able to achieve the three main aims of my first year in academia: to ensure that my teaching inspired pre-service teachers to engage with and value music education; to explore my research interest in techniques of engaging students in the teaching and learning process; and to pursue the outcomes of my doctoral thesis.

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