



NW Network Group

Universities of Central Lancashire, Chester, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan and Cumbria Institute of the Arts,

Case Studies in support of the Support for New Academic Staff (SNAS) Strand 3 project

Linking Disciplinary Research to Teaching

Interviewee

Anonymous

Interviewer

Rachel Studd
Senior Lecturer in Design
University of Manchester

rachel.studd@manchester.ac.uk

0161 306 4136

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Perceptions of Research and what it means to the Interviewee

The interviewee is a xxx and programme leader for xxx at the University of xxx involved in recruitment of students and interviewing, administration and managing the programme team, along with a high teaching load. With these activities the interviewee has little structured time to carry out his practice – photographic research.

“My research is about Marxist theory, based upon the decline and migration of the xxx industry and why it has moved from country to country and geographic zone to geographic zone and the economic reasons for that – it is xxx- and xxx-based research, which is the documentation for installation work that is gallery-based”

The research is very important to the interviewee, trying to bring awareness to the general public of what is happening in the xxx industry and the economics that surrounds it. The work began from studies at university as a student along with his family background which gave him his passion for the subject. This research has been a documentary path of how the xxx industry has fragmented and migrated across the globe, leaving behind generations of workers and empty xxx plants and factories. The installation-based work consist of large pteces, creating mosaic effects by layering images of factories and portraits of works on a large scale. Accompanying these large pieces are documentary videos of xxxworkers and employers which gives the installations a real personality, voicing the concerns for the ever changing xxx industry.

“that is what my work was about...bringing awareness to people of what is happening and the economics of why...and that is what my work should still be about, research to me is my practice, my practitioner work, but with my current load and programmer leaders’ role that is not currently possible. It is frustrating”

Perceptions of Institutional support for Research

The University of xxx has a varied approach to the importance and significance of research. A balancing act between teaching, administrative activity and research is by no means straightforward leaving staff members to make their own decisions of prioritising often leading to one, or other not being carried out. Although there is certainly an expectation that research will be carried out there is a concern by staff that this just can not be realised.

“I don’t feel that there is a pressure that I do research but there is an expectation. I do not know how these expectations could be realised with my current work load. I have taught in other schools where it has been a reality and I have been very active, but here is it a myth. It is different here because of managing the programme and staff, and that just doesn’t end! I just don’t get the time I need for my own work”

Members of staff at the University who do to get involved in research and who are active within their practice have often moved roles within the department or faculty to enable this to happen. The balancing act between teaching and research is not the significant problem, that comes when administrative loading off set that balance.

The University had developed a strategy to develop a support system when a Professor was appointed specifically for Research. A research forum was set up and a few meetings were held but nothing really came from this and once this Professor left the concept of a support network for research also seems to have left with this.

Externally there is certainly more support for research, with networks and personal relationships with fellow practitioners established over the years, to enable a conversation to take place sharing knowledge and methodology.

Perceptions of relations between Learning and Teaching

As a practitioner in the field, the process of research and learning is something has been naturally developed over time. Students are an important part of this development as the research itself.

“From my previous experiences this is certainly the case, relating my teaching and with my research... and forms an important part of the critical evaluation of my own work...and my previous work is definitely brought into the classroom.”

The interviewee goes on further to explain:

“There is a sense of professionalism that you are an active researcher, you are using the medium to its fullest and appreciating it for what it is, to convey and communicate your science and how the medium differs from other art mediums. In these terms it would be a photograph and not a painting and mine would be a video with the advantage of a time-base verses stills so that by using them and bringing them into the classroom, the students appreciate that, and also do realise that first of all what it is used for correctly and so artists have a certain commitment to that medium.”

It is clearly an important part of the teaching and learning process that students really understand what research is and how they can develop and utilise this in their own work. The Interviewee gives an example of this:

“When I bring back things that I have looked at as part of my research from museums and galleries and put it into my research, which is my practice, it all works together – they all see that, how and why do I use a montage, I tell them it came from an equal distribution of power of Marxism – do think that would work? – of course it would work and how it came from something that you researched and understood it, reinvestigated it and applied it to your own practice. They witness this and then they take this on, into their own practice. They see how art is based around research, it’s not just their own talent, there’s a lot more involve to it.”

Further examples are given as to how specific links have been made between research and teaching within the learning environment. Linking learning to research happens at various levels, from first year students’ trialling techniques through to final year dissertation topics.

“The first year level – the nuts and bolts of xxx techniques where a student is really hunting for a solution to a very simple technical xxx dilemma, has tried

everything with xxx and it just doesn't work but through the process of research has across a particular artist xxx, their xxx technique is very unique and beautiful. They come across this and apply it to their own specific work and their research then comes out in their product – that is a very simple first year level – technical thing.”

“A specific example when I was studying, I was reading into work that was interesting and though I came from a blue collared family and I had made work that was pretty and work that people enjoyed and which moved me long through school, it was bought it my attention to research further and although I had already looked at xxx whose work was about xxx – it was dated and as a student you want something that is contemporary - you're a young student - a professor sent me to look at something more contemporary – some Marxist Realist work – so I looked at these artists work and got really interested, not just interested and got really excited about making work about that and now I am really happy to say that these artists are now all friends – I think that, that is what happens when they got what you got and it is not that you have clone them, not that you redid it or revisited it, you have made it your own and I think that that is what comes out.”

“Linking the research to teaching is just how I teach.”

Support for integrating Research with Learning and Teaching

There is a clear perception that there is no specific support for research or any integration methods suggested as to how to link this into the learning and teaching process. The important issues here are teaching the subject and administering the activity however the individuals involved see fit rather than any formal support. As with the integration methods there are also no formal methods of peer support although the role of programme leader enables the interviewee to give support to the team as much as it is possible.

“Compared to my experiences elsewhere there is such an incredible difference for the idea about supporting research. There really should be formally support.”

It is clear from the discussion that it is very dependant on administrative loading and how much is required to carry out research practice. Structuring research around a busy academic framework causes frictions on your time available. From experiences in other universities in the world support by the universities differs and as a practitioner your research support then requires you to exhibit.

In the xx the pressure is on in a different way. Because you have usually not got tenure, you are showing that you have been an active part in a certain way in the larger community including your own specific community – curating exhibitions to showing your own work, grants that you have written and that, is what I call career development and that is was is expected in the day a week supported by the university... I think that because I am a programme leader it is different here. I have been here 1 ½ year and I have not taken a single photograph. My practitioner career, not teaching, has taken a complete nose

dive – it feel like it is just disappearing – I never heard of anything like this and it is totally frustrating!

These different pressure and balances are addressed by different people in different ways but the important factor is the clear feeling of being supported with mechanisms in place.

“The links that I have between my teaching and my practice can not be separated; it is so important and really helps both myself and the students that I am teaching.”

Reflections on the impact of research and dissemination

Dissemination of research is very important and really varied; exhibitions are carried out through the practice of research and with those the interviewee has found himself give talks regarding the work and additional lectures and teaching. More importantly he has had several retrospectives of personal work at major galleries and museums. With those come reviews by curators and art critics and the comments and feedback from this leads the Interviewee to revisit the work and investigate what has been, then re-research, reflect again and all this helps develop the next stage of research and the next art piece.

“Dissemination is really important to my work. Work shouldn’t sit quietly on the wall it should be floor to ceiling.”

“When I do something done, I show it and, when you come out of graduate school you come out into a really lonely place, and that’s a studio, then you start working in a vacuum, and the problem with working in a vacuum is that you can just keep doing the same thing without any growth.”

“I really respected student opinions so I would show them my work and get them to critic it, this exposes them to my work and different methods of how research can be developed and how important critical evaluation is, that’s what we where talking about earlier about research linking into teaching, when you invest in the students and at the same time you are showing them that you respect their opinion by asking them about different work and then at a critic in class I would always, if I could, put my work in too.”

Funding is also an important part of the research that is carried out. Funding in the past has been from Foundations for a variety of projects. Also artist residencies have been carried out, getting some real focus into projects. This funding also has dissemination requirements, with evaluations being written up for the funding bodies but also to get the work out to a wider audience, that was really important to the Interviewee.

The research both funded and non funded have to same remit to reach as wide an audience as possible, it is about dissemination.

“that is the key to my work, what it is trying to do, get people into galleries who would not normally go and then to also inspire students to gain a real passion into the field.”

Plans for continuing Research

Plans for the future are really important for the interviewee getting back to personal practice. It is vital to be able to adjust the balance between all aspects of being an academic and not letting one take over or become more important. There should be a partnership which enables the activities to run smoothly.

“I just want to get back into my practice, Getting back into the work I do with the migration of the steel industry and video tape work – getting the audio testimonies even though I will just be teaching photography, video is an important element that sits beside this. I would still continue to link that into my teaching.”

Summary of Key Points

- Educator/Artist/Administrator
- Programme Leader requires a good deal of administration, leading to time issues
- Research is Practice
- Research should be formally supported
- Teaching and practice can not be separated
- *“I am really passionate about my research, my practice. That is what I am about. That is why I go into teaching in the first place.”*