

## Research-Led Teaching

**Summary of article “Understanding Research-Led Teaching”, by Angela Brew, *HERDSA News*, Volume 25, No. 1, April, 2003.**

Research-led teaching lies at the intersection of a number of approaches to teaching. It may involve the use of any number of these dimensions simultaneously. The extent to which it does so reflects how different academics understand “research”, how they view the nature of their discipline and subject content, and how they view the practice of teaching.

Research-led teaching takes many different forms. If one sees “research” principally in terms of its “external” activities (presenting conference papers, posters, teamwork and networking) then research-led teaching will mirror these aims. If one sees research in terms of “internal” activities (analysis of data, conceptual advances of ideas) then the teaching will take the form of classes in methodology and data interpretation. If one understands “knowledge” in objective terms as external facts independent of minds, then the teaching one does will reflect this emphasis, whereas if one sees “knowledge” in constructivist terms (being as much “made” by knowing agents as “discovered”) then teaching will emphasise communication and the social and environmental conditions under which knowledge can occur. Similarly, how one views the nature of scholarship and different models of learning will also influence how research-led teaching is conducted.

Research-led teaching is also influenced by the different ways in which academics view the content of the subject matter of their discipline. If they see the subject content as “generalist” (of broad relevance) or “specialist” in nature (of narrow relevance) this influences the teaching. Some academics therefore regard research-led teaching as only being appropriate at certain levels of the curriculum (e.g., Honours and above), while others see it as fundamental at all levels.

The extent to which academics feel inclined to teach the content of their own research interests to students is also a factor in research-led teaching. Academics can choose to teach by means of personal experiences and anecdotes related to their own research. Others are more inclined to teach by means of engaging students in how conceptual changes occur in their respective disciplines (and rely less on providing “models” by way of personal examples).

Student-focussed and teacher-focussed paradigms of teaching are also determining factors in research-led teaching. There are a number of different forms of research-led teaching that are relevant here. If there is a great degree of student participation in classes—and students learn by some degree of involvement rather than just listening, then this will also influence the extent to which students engage in “real” research. However, in this case they are not “doing” research as such, merely learning about it, and participating in this process. This is in contrast to teacher-centred teaching where there is no in-class engagement at all and, correspondingly, no engagement in research practices (i.e., students just listen).

There is also a difference in emphasis in terms of communicating the “product” or “content” of the research and in communicating the “process” of research. When students learn by “doing” (for example, engaging in library search exercises or textual/statistical analysis) they are learning about real research (i.e., research as a “process”). When they only learn about research as a “product”, they are not actively involved at all. Research-led teaching can, in this way, take the form of either research simulation activities, or content dissemination, or a mixture of the two. Student-focussed and “process”-based teaching may also involve entire course content (“Problem-Based Learning”) or it may be limited to certain topics or subjects. When students are engaged actively in the research of the lecturer in a given topic area, this may be a cause for concern, as it may involve the danger of exploitation (especially when students are not acknowledged in subsequent publications).

Research-led teaching is not the same as the scholarship of teaching. Using disciplinary research in one's teaching and fostering disciplinary research practices in students are different educational aims. When academics reflect on their teaching practices after they complete a course, these aims may be seen to merge, but they are not the same initially. Furthermore, it is only when academics reflect on what steps need to be taken in improving teaching processes using a variety of evaluation methods, and only when they act on these evaluations in a practical way, can they be really seen to be doing research-led teaching. Methods of communication about one's teaching to others may range from reporting and publishing one's findings in relevant educational journals and attending and presenting at conferences, to informal contact with colleagues, or doing nothing about one's teaching practices at all.

Research-led teaching is also motivated by different factors depending on the research and teaching emphasis of different universities. Research-intensive universities use research-led teaching as a form of competitive advantage in attracting students. Students can be taught by active researchers in their discipline. For universities that place less emphasis on research, research-led teaching derives from aspirational motives, specifically in avoiding funding-based decisions based solely on research and teaching aims.

It should not be assumed that because teaching can be "research-led" that it therefore enhances learning and is of benefit to students. It should not also be assumed that research-led teaching is the same for all subjects. Research-led teaching is a function of how academics view a number of teaching-related and discipline-related factors that are relevant to the teaching process.