

Motivating the first-year learner through research informed media practice

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There is a significant body of literature highlighting the importance of student engagement in the first year of undergraduate study (Krause et al, 2005; Kift, 2008). McInnes (2003) argues that enhancing the teaching and research nexus through strategies designed to involve students in research-based learning activities is one way in which academics can help to reconnect disengaged students with the University learning community. However, despite the reported benefits of strengthening the teaching and research nexus in the curriculum (Boyer Commission, 1998; Brew and Boud, 1995; Brew and Prosser, 2003; Elton, 2001; Rowland, 2006), newer universities that have parented vocationally or professionally based areas of study (Hazelkorn, 2004) face particular challenges in their attempts to engage students in research within the undergraduate curriculum (Wood, 2009).

These challenges together with effective strategies employed to engage first-year learners through inquiry learning and reflective practice will be explored in this presentation. Drawing on the findings from four years of student evaluations of a first-year media arts course, the author will discuss the apparent contradictions and tensions encountered in attempting to meet the expectations of students who regard training in media production as “entrée to the media industries” (Quin, 2006) and the need for them to develop skills in critical discourse, analysis and research (Thornham and O’Sullivan, 2004, p. 720). The findings from this case study highlight the benefits to be gained by engaging first-year learners in authentic research through inquiry learning and media related activities they perceive to be meaningful, relevant and likely to “make a difference”.

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