Going the extra mile with a postgraduate teaching qualification

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Sitting in a vibrant classroom over a decade ago, on day 1 of the opening module of the MA in Academic Practice programme at City University London, I encountered electronic voting systems (EVS) for the first time in a higher education setting. Little did I know the extent to which my pursuit of that degree would engage me with pedagogic theory and its practical application: it enriched many different areas of my teaching, facilitated my dissemination of original pedagogic research in various international forums, and ultimately led teaching to occupy a prominence within my career that I could not have anticipated when I entered the academic profession as Lecturer in Music.

That single session, for instance, inspired me to introduce EVS within my lectures the very next week, as well as to explore the published literature examining different approaches to its usage. The years that followed saw me draw upon that combined real-world experience and scholarly knowledge in championing EVS widely, delivering teaching workshops at a dozen UK universities and addressing conferences across Europe. These endeavours came full circle when I was awarded funding to publish a report for the Higher Education Academy on my pioneering use of EVS in non-science-based subjects, thereby actively contributing to the same pedagogic discourse that had led to the enhancement of my academic practice in the first place.

Many academic-related staff I have encountered on postgraduate courses of this nature at a range of different institutions have either not sought to progress beyond the introductory module or have taken only the first 60 credits in order to gain the PGCert (or equivalent) qualification, often driven by the need to fulfil the stipulations of their probation. Conversely, my approach has been to proceed through the full Masters degree, in order to sustain my immersion in current research on
education – starting, in my second year of the programme, by furthering my new-found enthusiasm for EVS.

This conscious alignment of my studies with focal points of my teaching career prompted a level of involvement with pedagogic research that in some cases extended significantly beyond the course itself. The module on academic leadership, which I had originally followed to support my assuming a major directorial role, resulted in a reflective essay that the examiners recommended I develop for publication. A couple of years later, an academic colleague came across my article and suggested that I investigate autoethnography as a possible research method. I have since published two further essays on the subject and recently organised an influential conference exploring autoethnography’s potential within music studies, activating engagement in this rich area of pedagogic research for a variety of academics in my home discipline and paving the way for others similarly to improve their own teaching practice.

My pursuit of pedagogic scholarship paid many additional dividends in terms of career progression, leading to my appointment as Director of Learning and Teaching in the School of Arts at the University of Surrey, as well as to successful applications for the National Teaching Fellowship and for Senior and Principal Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. While a teaching qualification may too often be regarded merely as mandatory training for a lecturing position, I found that I reaped significant gains from undertaking formal postgraduate study in terms of my continuing professional development and the transformative impact upon my academic practice. By reaching beyond the programme’s minimum requirements to maintain my engagement with pedagogic research, a number of new teaching-related avenues opened up for my career, which in certain respects have even eclipsed my principal area of activity as an internationally acknowledged musicologist.