

Turning the Tables on Teaching and Research

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Imagine for a moment an academic universe in which scholars emerge from the library or laboratory and heave a sigh of relief: “Thanks goodness I’ve finished with all my research for this year! Now I can get on with my real work!” Rushing back to the classroom, they throw themselves with relish into the job they have been trained to do through years of postgraduate study, the labour for which they are recognised and rewarded by their peers and institutions, the “real work” of teaching. Committed research scholars, meanwhile, profess frustration at the inequities of the system, but their complaints fall on deaf ears. Their commitment to developing cutting-edge research methodologies is actively discouraged by their HoDs (“You have to think about your career, you know!”) and disparaged by their colleagues, who secretly regard excessive attention to research as a sign of intellectual deficiency (“If they were truly talented at teaching, they wouldn’t let their research absorb so much of their time and energy”). When asked by administrators to develop measures for demonstrating research competence via a system of peer review, academic staff rise up in anger: “How can anyone really measure or evaluate good research?!” Academic colloquia on research-related issues are poorly attended, and the university’s Centre for Research Excellence is relegated to a far corner of campus and consistently understaffed; some administrators question whether it ought to exist at all. “This is a teaching-led university, after all.” The above scenario sounds absurd – until you interchange the words “teaching” and “research,” at which point it becomes a description of everyday academic life in PBRF-obsessed Aotearoa New Zealand. In this session we will discuss the lessons that can be learned when familiar paradigms shift to reveal the fissures and faults in the fabled “teaching/research nexus.”