



**Book review: Illingworth, S. (2025) *Bridging scholarship and practice in higher education: fostering innovative research and enhancing teaching*. Abingdon: Routledge.**

***An excellent new guide for anyone undertaking scholarship work in higher education***

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Sam Illingworth's *Bridging scholarship and practice in higher education* fulfils an important role in supporting the drive towards embedding the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) within higher education (HE). The book offers thoughtful guidance to colleagues new to SoTL work, whilst also acting as a practical companion text for more experienced teacher-researchers and those who lead postgraduate courses on teaching and learning for HE. Its engaging and conversational style means that whilst the book is informed by a wide range of relevant educational literature, it is a highly accessible and practical resource. The book achieves what its title promises: it integrates scholarship and practice across coherent chapters, informed by detailed readings of existing literature that are discussed by the author in a way that is accessible and thoughtful.

In his introduction, Illingworth argues that whilst key frameworks of SoTL have been in place for more than 30 years (Boyer, 1990), it remains an umbrella term for the critical review of teaching practices and their impact on students. Part of his book's intent is to provide a toolkit that makes SoTL more accessible to all university teaching staff, particularly by placing an emphasis on how colleagues' findings can be disseminated so 'the collective understanding of effective educational practice can grow' (p.3). In this respect, Illingworth's work recalls the aim of Hattie's Visible Learning Project (2015), and Hattie's call that teachers can increase their impact by evaluating their teaching practice.

Evaluative discussions of teaching practice have always been central to designing and enacting rich learning experiences for students. As HE has grown considerably and inclusive practice has become more widely established, influential writers such as Brookfield (2017) have set out principles for thinking about the distinct and overlapping lenses through which we can reflect on the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices. Illingworth traces the adoption of SoTL practices within professional recognition schemes such as Advance HE fellowships. He makes a convincing case for scholarship as both an output and a process. He positions it as a mindset that helps university teachers and third space practitioners – including learning developers – to be responsive to changing educational realities, such as the restrictions of the COVID-19 lockdowns and emergence of generative AI. Scholarship and the informed, evidence-led questioning it promotes is shown to be a value as much as an activity.

Illingworth's decision to structure each chapter around learning outcomes and activities emphasises the interactive nature of this work. Throughout the text, well-chosen activities and case studies are used to explore best practices from across the UK HE sector. This approach helps to develop the reader's critical thinking on key areas, including research design, the development of appropriate methodologies, and the dissemination of SoTL findings. For example, the incorporation of a case study focusing on a key part of the author's own scholarship on enhancing science communication through poetry offers clear communication on the goals, challenges, and outcomes of SoTL in practice. Illingworth's acknowledgement of the impostor syndrome he experienced when developing CPD courses focusing on intersections of science and poetry is a generous encouragement to those who may be just starting to engage with SoTL and feel out of their depth. By sharing his experiences, Illingworth reinforces his assertion that SoTL is about process – a way of moving towards reflective practice – as much as it is about outputs and research findings.

The use of tables and figures throughout the book increases its accessibility and utility by providing summaries of key ideas. Through exploring ethical considerations, Illingworth explains how a teacher should think about their positionality and its implications for how their scholarship work values all participants – students and teachers alike. Drawing on these principles, Illingworth creates an ethical research checklist that will be a helpful reminder to all users of this book. By presenting ideas in multimodal formats, he follows Universal Design for Learning principles (Novak, 2023) that he cites as a core framework

in effective research-led practice that can be empowering and transformative (Simonson, 2022).

Addressing research design, Illingworth uses another detailed table to draw direct links between theoretical perspectives of making knowledge and the methodological approaches that these imply. Clarity in these tables is extremely helpful to university teachers looking to understand ways of constructing knowledge that may differ from their original academic disciplines. Within this and other tables, Illingworth provides examples of studies that used each epistemology, offering opportunities for readers to develop their own knowledge base. Third space professionals will find this approach helpful when teaching educational research methodologies that inform SoTL. The clarity of Illingworth's explanations means that this book merits inclusion in any postgraduate module, workshop, or training materials focused on scholarship and practice.

Throughout the text, and in signposting future directions for practice and further reading, Illingworth puts scholarship at the heart of the process of professional development. This is both right and important. Far too often, time and workload pressures mean that opportunities for conducting and disseminating SoTL research are pushed to the sidelines, left for an imaginary period in the summer when marking is finally completed. In the book's closing chapter, Illingworth sums up a key part of his approach: collaboration and ongoing evaluative discussion are what make the symbiotic relationship between scholarship and practice rich and meaningful. This book has the potential to help colleagues better realise that ambition: it passionately explores how asking questions that are grounded in professional and personal curiosity can improve our practice. The success of this work is that it provides so many activities and case studies that will guide that questioning, within a framework of mutual support that seeks to break down the silos that academic teachers can find themselves in as disciplinary experts.

Illingworth has added meaningfully to the body of literature on scholarship and practice, precisely by helping us to see the bridge more clearly, inviting us to seek company along the way. Always instructive and coherent, the book's greatest strength lies in its unwaveringly supportive tone – an encouraging companion for all academics and learning developers navigating the evolving landscape of SoTL.

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