



Professionals Teaching Professionals: Supporting and Developing SoTL in the Private University Sector

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Defining and Developing SoTL

The literature on SoTL recognises that it acts as an approach to educational development and enhancement, and as a *“model [...] to reflect on, and transform, teaching and learning practices”* (Fanghanel et. al, 2016:3). Furthermore, *“SoTL is a tool that is gaining traction internationally to develop and recognise teaching competence/excellence”* (ibid). Given this potential for positive impact and the increased status that SoTL seems to be enjoying, it is essential that staff in the full range of Higher Education (HE) institutions are supported to engage in SoTL to develop themselves, their teaching and their institutions. The inclusion of diverse perspectives contributes to the development of SoTL: *“By pushing to recognize and include diverse voices we can achieve respect for all in our community and recognition for our community as a safe space”* (Godbold et. al., 2021:380). Encouraging a range of diverse voices in SoTL is healthy for the sector and the SoTL community and yet, to achieve inclusivity, we need to recognise that some staff will experience barriers to engagement.

Supporting Dual Professionals

This poster will explore an approach to developing SoTL at a UK Specialist Provider - BPP University values industry experience, and recognises that *“Practitioner-teachers, and practice-informed learning more generally, are highly valued by students for bringing real-world experiences, credibility and access to professional networks”*. (GuildHE, 2018:61). However, recruiting faculty who come with industry experience brings challenges and opportunities in terms of supporting pedagogic research and development. Many do not recognise themselves as professional educators, have little experience of undertaking research, and do not necessarily see teaching as theory-informed practice. While the University’s mission of ‘Building Careers Through Education’ may not suggest that scholarship is a priority, the institution has taken steps to make scholarship central to the development of an academic career at BPP University.

1. A focus on teaching quality

BPP University is focused professional education, combining HE qualifications with effective preparation for work. Effective teaching is central to that mission, and scholarship is valued at BPP when it has clear application to enhancing teaching or advancing knowledge in the subject area. In this context, SoTL aligns well with the value placed on practical scholarship.

2. A research-based, broad definition of scholarship

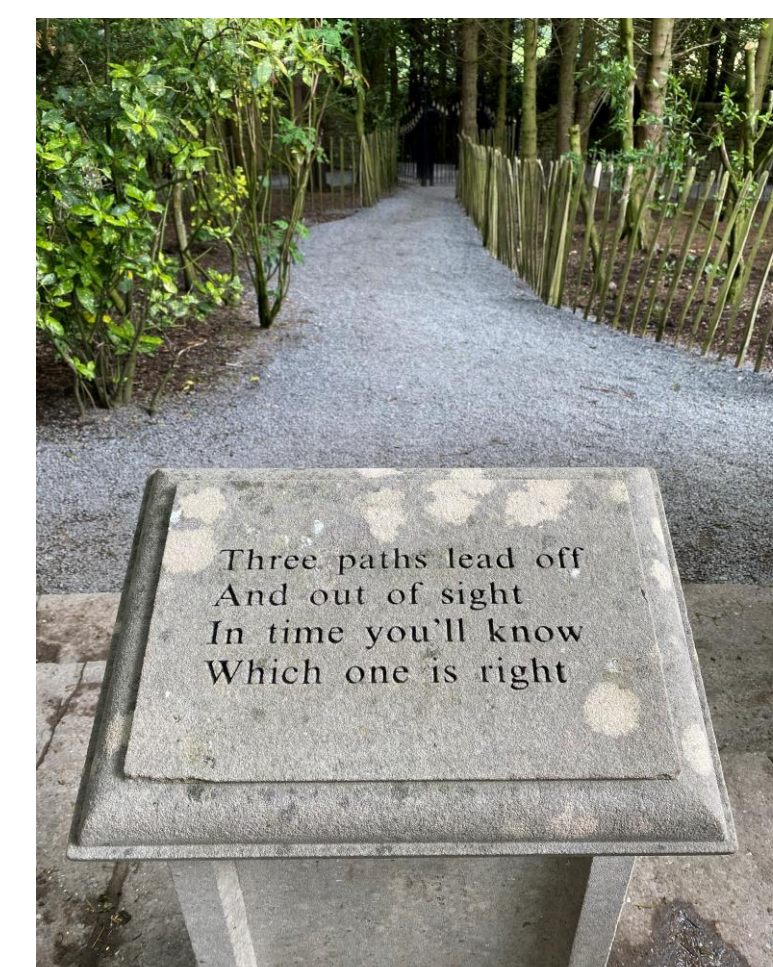
BPP University uses Boyer’s work (1990) as the basis for its definition of scholarship. Boyer’s work expands the traditional understanding of what might count as scholarship to include the scholarship of application and SoTL. In a practice-based learning context, Boyer’s model provides more accessible routes into scholarship. It also offers the institution a broader basis to recognise scholarly contributions, and to promote the work done by colleagues. Boyer’s model underpins the University’s Scholarship Strategy and, in turn, the action plan, which both emphasise the connection between scholarship and teaching and learning.

Routes to disseminating practice and scholarly outputs

Supporting dual professionals to undertake scholarly activity is supported through a range of scaffolded activities to build confidence and skill. BPP’s online Community of Practice space provides opportunities for staff to share good practice, access CPD and build networks. Around 420 colleagues across the institution are members. BPP also encourages colleagues to share their SoTL externally through mechanisms like the ‘National Teaching Repository’, which allows them to gather evidence of impact to underpin promotion applications, demonstrate impact and help to build confidence and professional profiles. Where staff do not have experience disseminating academic work through conference and publications, scaffolding their journey to more formal research and publications is essential in developing their academic identities.

Academic Promotions

During 2022/23, BPP University revised its academic promotions pathways to create clearer routes to professorship for a range of staff. Associate Professor ranks were introduced as a stepping-stone to Professor, and three routes were established, only one of which requires engagement with discipline-based research. Associate Professorships in Educational Practice and Academic Leadership provide opportunities for SoTL to contribute to academic career advancement for those who engage with scholarship to develop their own pedagogic practice and that of others.



Staff are Scholarly Engaged and Scholarly Active.

- Staff are Scholarly Active and undertake a range of Scholarly Activities to inform their practice.

Learning and Teaching is informed by a Scholarly approach and Scholarly thinking.

- The design, delivery and content of Learning and Teaching activities is informed by a Scholarly approach and Scholarly thinking from the point of design to the point of delivery.

BPP supports and encourages Scholarly activity with impact and influence.

- Staff engage in Scholarly Activities which have reach, impact and influence in the wider professional and academic community.

Conclusion

The relationship between HE and the professions has become increasingly intimate as higher education institutions seek to improve employability outcomes, increase educational gain, deliver effective apprenticeship and/or degree programmes, and prepare professionals of the future. Such imperatives have diversified academic recruitment, and we need to ensure that SoTL continues to serve its purpose. Given that academics drawn from industry or practice are unlikely to have an academic tribe or community to support their development as SoTL scholars, organisations are likely to be responsible for providing any support that these staff can access, at least in the first instance. Organisations may, therefore, need to consider how to build a culture that supports scholarly activity, as well as reviewing how recognition for SoTL is built into institutional strategies and processes. We hope that the case study we have offered, grounded in a specialist-provider, can offer inspiration for ensuring that SoTL is inclusive and accessible.

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