Reconnecting relationships through technology

The Health Sciences Scholarship Strategy: a pilot peer-support initiative for academics

Ashley Hillsley, Danielle Burgess, Amber Moore, Dhivya Rajasekaran, Noosha Ehya and Manisha Thakker
Torrens University Australia

This presentation will report on a pilot initiative being undertaken within a team of university academics, with the aim of promoting peer support, space to develop and improve scholarly activity in all its forms. Scholarship and scholarly teaching are at the core of each university academic's role (Ling, 2020; Boyer, 1990): ensuring currency, best-practice and skill development in a rapidly changing educational landscape (Matos et al., 2022). Communities of Practice (CoP) and peer support are known to encourage academics to participate in scholarly activities and professional development (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), arising from Vygotsky's theory that learning is enhanced when occurring in a group (Vygotsky, 1978). The project design contains many features of a CoP, such as a shared domain and set of practices; places for discussion and group activities (Jakovljevic, Buckley, & Bushney, 2013). With the support of online technologies, this innovative project aims to provide a framework for supporting Health Science (HS) academics in the development of scholarly teaching practices and their capacity to immerse in scholarship from a discipline community perspective. The project also aims to demonstrate strategies for promoting team member research capabilities, development, and outcomes.

Designed to sit within the wider institution research and scholarship centres, strategic plans, policies and procedures, the HS Scholarship Strategy is a local, co-creative initiative being formed through on-going and evolving team member participation and feedback. The HS Scholarship Strategy contains two main components – a community group called the HS Scholarly Teaching Think Tank, and the Research Incubator Group. These groups provide an informal space for team members to ideate, plan, progress and support research and scholarly teaching activities. With team members located around Australia, various technologies are being employed to deliver these components synchronously and asynchronously. In addition, four other sub-initiatives are included in the strategy: peer-support workshops; scholarly forums; a scholarly literature club; and an active teaching development project. The main outcomes of interest are participation and engagement in scholarly development activities. The strategy components, including their aims and specific outcomes being measured, will be further described.

Given the challenges of teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, knowledge sharing has been made easier using technology, within this project of enhancing scholarly capabilities. Overall, this pilot strategy been designed with the support of the literature on peer support and its potential in developing faculty scholarship, academic culture and the construction of professional identity (Van Schyndel, et al., 2019; Clarke, Hyde, & Drennan, 2013 In alignment with these theoretical bases, this presentation will share early findings and areas for further professional development. There is potential for broader implementation in other teams across the university. This may be of interest to academic and other university teams looking for contextualised, team-based strategies for improving scholarship activities and scholarly teaching outcomes.

Keywords: Scholarship, Professional Development, Practice Innovation, Community of Practice, Peer Support

References

Boyer, E. L. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate.* Princeton University Press, 3175 Princeton Pike, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED326149.pdf

Caza, B. B. & Creary, S. (2016). The construction of professional identity. In A. Wilkinson, D. Hislop & C. Coupland (Eds.). *Perspectives on contemporary professional work* (pp. 259-285). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Clarke, M., Hyde, A. & Drennan, J. (2013). Professional identity in higher education. In B. M. Kehm & U. Teichler (Eds.). *The academic profession in Europe: New tasks and new challenges* (pp. 7-21). Springer.

Jakovljevic, M., Buckley, S., & Bushney, M. (2013, June 19-21). *Forming communities of practice in higher education: A theoretical perspective.* Active Citizenship by Knowledge Management & Innovation: Proceedings of the Management, Knowledge and Learning International Conference 2013, Zadar, Croatia (pp. 1107-1119). https://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/14634/37_MakeLearn_2013_Jakovljevic_Buckley.pdf?sequence=3

Ling, P. (2020). The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Higher Education Research: Boundaries and Implications. In L. Ling & P. Ling (Eds.). *Emerging Methods and Paradigms in Scholarship and Education Research* (pp. 56-69). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-1001-8

Matos, M. da M., Iaochite, R. T. & Sharp, J. G. (2022). Lecturer self-efficacy beliefs: An integrative review and synthesis of relevant literature. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46*(2), 225–245. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1905155

Trede, F., Macklin, R. & Bridges, D. (2012). Professional identity development: a review of the higher education literature. *Studies in Higher Education, 37*(3), 365–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.521237

Van Schyndel, J. L., Koontz, S., McPherson, S., Reese, C., Sarginson, D. R., Scoggins, L., Woods, M. & Wendler, M. C. (2019). Faculty support for a culture of scholarship of discovery: a literature review. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 35*(6), 480-490. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2019.05.001

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978), *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A.,& Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice: A guide to managing knowledge.* Harvard Business Press. https://www.clearwatervic.com.au/user-data/resource-files/7Principles_Community-of-Practice.pdf