



# [Book Review]: Reimagining Scholarship in Higher Education—A Review of Sam Illingworth’s *Bridging Scholarship and Practice in Higher Education*

## KEYWORDS

higher education research, pedagogy, academic scholarship, evidence-informed teaching

Sam Illingworth’s *Bridging Scholarship and Practice in Higher Education: Fostering Innovative Research and Enhancing Teaching*, published in 2025 by Routledge, presents a compelling argument for integrating research into teaching in order to enhance pedagogical practice and institutional excellence. As a professor of creative pedagogies, Illingworth draws on his expertise in poetry, games, and generative AI to explore how these approaches can foster belonging and inclusivity in higher education. By systematically examining the intersection of research, pedagogy, and academic scholarship, this work makes a significant contribution to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). A structured, accessible guide for educators at all career stages, it demonstrates how evidence-informed teaching can transform higher education.

The power of creativity in higher education emerges as a key theme throughout Illingworth’s work. Creativity, often seen as a distinct element within artistic and humanistic disciplines, plays a profound role in transforming the research cultures that underpin higher education itself (Torrance 2017). When harnessed and promoted within academic settings, creativity not only sparks new ways of thinking about pedagogy but also influences how research is conducted and shared. The integration of creative pedagogies encourages both educators and students to approach problems with a sense of curiosity, exploration, and openness, challenging traditional boundaries that often separate teaching, scholarship, and research. This innovative fusion of creative thinking and academic rigour promotes a holistic view of education—one that transcends disciplinary confines and fosters a more inclusive, dynamic approach to learning and inquiry.

In this context, Illingworth’s work underscores how the intersections between research, scholarship, and teaching need to be thoughtfully considered so that they enable a rethinking of what truly matters in higher education engagement. The current trend of compartmentalizing these elements limits the potential for real transformation within teaching and learning cultures. Bridging these divides, rather than maintaining the traditional boundaries that often separate them, enables new, more effective models of scholarship. It reimagines the role of research not as a detached academic activity but as something that can be actively woven into the fabric of everyday teaching. In this sense, the work advocates for a dynamic, integrated model of teaching and research that continuously evolves in response to the needs and realities of both students and educators.

Illingworth’s response to SoTL is both critical and constructive, positioning it as a vital component in the evolution of higher education. He acknowledges the potential of SoTL to bridge the divide between research and teaching, advocating for a more integrated approach that places inquiry at the heart of pedagogical practice. His work challenges the conventional view that teaching and research should remain separate, proposing instead that they are inherently interconnected. By emphasizing the importance of evidence-informed teaching, Illingworth pushes for a model where research actively informs the classroom, transforming both teaching

and learning experiences. His contribution to SoTL is not just theoretical; it provides actionable strategies for educators to embed research into their teaching practices, thus fostering a culture of continuous improvement and engagement. This response positions SoTL not only as a means of enhancing individual practice but as a tool for institutional transformation, encouraging a shift toward greater collaboration, inclusivity, and creativity within higher education environments.

Organized into thematic sections, the text guides readers through key aspects of research integration in teaching. Foundational concepts such as identifying research questions and designing studies are introduced before progressing to ethical considerations and strategies for disseminating findings. This structured approach ensures clarity, allowing educators to better navigate the research process. Chapter-specific learning outcomes, practical activities, and reflective exercises encourage active engagement, aligning with best practices in SoTL (Trigwell and Shale 2004).

The necessity of bridging the traditional divide between research and teaching is a central theme of the work. Challenging this separation, Illingworth advocates for an interconnected model where inquiry informs pedagogy and vice versa. A strong evidence base supports this argument, demonstrating that embedding research in teaching improves student engagement and learning outcomes (Jenkins and Healey 2010; Jenkins, Huber, and Ciccone 2011). Strategies such as inquiry-based learning and research-led teaching are presented as practical approaches, though their success depends on institutional support, a challenge acknowledged in the book (Fanghanel et al. 2016). When educators and students engage with these methods, research ceases to be a theoretical or abstract endeavour, becoming a lived experience—something that is enacted in the classroom and meaningful in real-world contexts. This shift encourages students not only to participate in research as passive consumers of knowledge but to also become active contributors to the production of knowledge. In doing so, the process of research is re-envisioned as an intrinsic part of learning, where both teaching and inquiry are shaped by creative collaboration.

Guidance on formulating research questions is particularly valuable. In directly drawing on Hutchings' (2000) taxonomy of scholarship, the text categorizes research themes into four key areas: "what is," "what works," "what could be," and "new theories." This framework provides educators with a structured method for shaping meaningful research inquiries, reinforcing the idea that scholarly investigation extends beyond evaluating teaching methods and into the ideation of new theories and practices in higher education.

A comprehensive overview of research design includes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Each approach is examined in terms of its strengths and limitations, ensuring readers can make informed choices about research strategies. Ethical considerations receive significant attention, underscoring the importance of respecting student rights and adhering to institutional guidelines (Macfarlane 2010). This focus enhances practical utility, preparing scholars to conduct ethical research within the complexities of higher education settings.

Accessibility is further enhanced through visual tools, such as tables mapping research methodologies to specific educational goals. By illustrating the tangible impact of research on teaching and learning, these tools make complex concepts more digestible and actionable. These elements provide clear, practical guidance, particularly for those unfamiliar with research methods.

Disseminating research findings is another key focus, exploring various channels, including academic journals, conferences, and public scholarship, while emphasizing the importance of impact and outreach. This discussion is particularly relevant as higher education research value is increasingly measured by real-world application (Liu and Panagiotakos 2022). Engaging both academic and non-academic audiences is positioned as essential, reinforcing the broader societal significance of educational research.

While highly effective, further discussion could enhance the practical value of the ideas discussed in this work. A dedicated section on securing research funding would be particularly beneficial, as financial constraints often pose significant challenges for scholars. Providing guidance on grant writing and institutional funding mechanisms would strengthen applicability. Additionally, a discussion on career progression within SoTL could help educators navigate institutional priorities, where pedagogical research is sometimes undervalued compared to traditional disciplinary research (Hutchings, Huber, and Ciconne 2011).

Beyond practical contributions, Illingworth explores broader debates about how scholarship shapes pedagogy and institutional transformation. Advocacy for a more integrated approach to academic work aligns with the growing movement toward evidence-informed teaching, which seeks to bridge the gap between research and classroom practice (Barkley and Major 2020). Structural challenges impeding this integration are acknowledged, emphasizing the need for institutional policies that recognize and support pedagogical scholarship.

One of the most powerful aspects of Illingworth's approach is his acknowledgment of creativity as a catalyst for transformation in higher education. When viewed through the lens of research, creativity has the potential to break through entrenched institutional silos, to reimagine how knowledge is constructed, and to enable new forms of scholarly engagement. The intersection of creativity, research, and pedagogy requires a commitment to rethinking what constitutes "good" research and what the purpose of teaching can truly be. By shifting away from a narrow, productivity-driven model of research, institutions can create a culture that values intellectual curiosity and interdisciplinary collaboration. Creativity, in this context, is not merely an added extra; it is an essential driver of change.

In addition to supporting current SoTL research, the work has the potential to shape future inquiry. Its structured approach provides a replicable framework, guiding educators, particularly those new to the field, in their own research projects. Reflective exercises encourage scholars to question their own pedagogical practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. By embedding research into everyday teaching, a sustainable model for SoTL inquiry is promoted, one that extends beyond individual projects to influence institutional teaching cultures over time.

Relevance extends beyond research-active educators to institutional leaders and policymakers. Emphasizing evidence-informed teaching strengthens the case for broader adoption of SoTL principles across higher education institutions. Advocacy for systemic change positions SoTL not just as a scholarly endeavour, but as a crucial element in shaping the future of education. If widely adopted, these strategies could shift how institutions value and support research-led teaching, reinforcing the legitimacy of SoTL as a field of study.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is also emphasized in the work. Breaking down barriers between disciplines encourages educators from diverse fields to engage in shared inquiry, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue on the efficacy of teaching and learning practices (Tobi and Kampen 2018). This aligns with contemporary trends in higher education research, where interdisciplinary approaches are increasingly recognized as essential for addressing complex pedagogical challenges.

In conclusion, *Bridging Scholarship and Practice in Higher Education* is a foundational resource for advancing SoTL. The book's structured approach, practical insights, and engagement with key scholarly debates equip educators with the tools to integrate research into their teaching. Beyond immediate applications, the text serves as a catalyst for ongoing SoTL inquiry, providing a framework adaptable to evolving research needs. By emphasizing research-informed teaching, its impact extends to institutional cultures and student learning outcomes. An accessible style and well-structured activities make it particularly valuable for those new to SoTL, while depth of discussion offers meaningful insights for experienced scholars. Although further exploration of funding mechanisms and career development would enhance its utility, the work remains a

critical tool for embedding research into pedagogical practice. As higher education continues to grow and change, its insights support educators and institutions in their commitment to evidence-informed teaching and meaningful scholarly engagement. Through its focus on creativity, institutional transformation, and interdisciplinary scholarship, this work offers the blueprint for a more integrated and dynamic future for higher education.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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