

Chapter 6

A Higher Education Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Online Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

To improve global rankings, increase student numbers and enhance the quality of teaching and learning, Australian Higher Education institutions have increased emphasis on faculty to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). However, there is an absence of SoTL capacity-building opportunities to support those with limited knowledge of, and engagement with SoTL. This lack of support has broad implications for scholars' identity, professional confidence and capacity to undertake SoTL. Using collective autoethnography, the chapter showcases the experiences of eight scholars who participated in a two-year SoTL online community of practice, aimed at building SoTL capacity. Results indicated increased confidence,

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refashioned scholarly identity, institutional recognition of SoTL and leadership skills, and heightened professional self-worth. The chapter yields key messages for those mentoring SoTL scholars, and those adopting a community of practice approach to professional learning. More pointedly, the chapter provides recommendations for institutional policy and practice.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter showcases the processes, benefits, and outcomes of a two-year, synchronous online Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) mentoring initiative. The aims of the initiative were to raise awareness of the value of and enhance members' capacity to engage in SoTL. Members met online fortnightly to initially explore the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) SoTL resource: five sequentially scaffolded online modules with embedded readings and learning activities. The meetings were facilitated by an experienced SoTL scholar who adopted the tenets of a community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the design and functioning of meetings.

Eight geographically dispersed members employed in learning and teaching roles, from varying higher education institutions, shared their scholarly journey in the CoP. To function effectively, a range of technologies were used allowing real-time group conversation and collaboration as well as supporting asynchronous planning and reading tasks (Corcoran & Duane, 2017).

The CoP members used collaborative autoethnography (Bochner & Ellis, 2022), sharing their SoTL stories to create the data for this chapter. These data were analysed thematically (Yin, 2015) and triangulated with Lave and Wenger's (1991) communities of practice (CoPs) characteristics, as well as literature on scholarly identity and transition (Gardner & Wiley, 2016; Hathaway et al., 2018; Kolomitro et al., 2017; Simmons et al., 2013; Supramaniam et al., 2020). The results are presented thematically using extracts from each member's autoethnographic 'story'.

The chapter highlights (a) the professional and personal outcomes for the members and (b) the conditions conducive to the sustainability and efficacy of an online SoTL CoP. The results revealed that members reported an enhanced understanding of the nature and purpose of SoTL, legitimising its place in relation to their own teaching and, once disseminated, as a contribution to the academy: a pursuit they now viewed as worthy of serious academic attention. Furthermore, the members identified that their engagement in the SoTL CoP resulted in an emerging sense of scholarly identity, together with a heightened self-confidence in pursuing SoTL. The CoP had allowed them 'permission to thrive' in the institutional jigsaw of the academy. Many voiced feeling a level of relief as their CoP engagement empow-

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