



Navigating from ‘heroic’ leadership to a distributed leadership model in a virtual community of practice

Ian Johnson

University of Portsmouth, UK

Ed Bickle

Bournemouth University, UK

Ralitsa Kantcheva

University of Bedfordshire, UK

Abstract

Third space workers face the dual forces of an often-flexible working space yet a tendency for their work to be ill-defined and for them to become professionally isolated. This case study discusses how a virtual Community of Practice (vCoP) acted against these challenges by allowing a group of professionals (Learning Developers) in a third space field to connect, experiment, and build collective identity. We further suggest that the approach we took can be emulated by other third space groups. However, we also evidence how our successes were contingent on the Distributed Leadership (DL) model we adopted. The way in which CoPs function (Wenger, 1998) was important to the formation of DL theory (Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001). Vice versa, DL has been argued as facilitative for CoPs by allowing them to be self-driven by members’ interests, abilities, and willingness (Lester and Kezar, 2017). This article documents how DL became increasingly important through three critical junctures for our vCoP: formation, evolving identity, and leadership transfer. We show how power was progressively and beneficially transferred away from the founding coordinator, yet also demonstrate how coordination remained equally important as the vCoP matured. Not least, we argue that a careful balance of coordination and distribution is required to allow a CoP to evolve while holding true to its initial values and purpose. We urge third space professionals considering forming or participating in a CoP to attend carefully to both these elements of a DL model to safeguard the ethos of their CoP.

Keywords: third space professionals; Learning Development; distributed leadership; communities of practice

Introduction

This auto-ethnographic case study examines how adopting a distributed leadership (DL) approach facilitated three critical moments – the establishment, evolution, and leadership change – of a virtual Community of Practice (vCoP) of geographically dispersed UK Learning Developers, exemplifying third space professionals. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond's (2001) pioneering work identified Wenger's (1998) notions of communities of practice (CoP) as a key influence on the theory of DL, thereby suggesting that the two are an apt fit. Similarly, Bennett et al. defined DL as 'an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals, an openness of the boundaries of leadership, and varieties of expertise distributed across the many rather than the few' (2003, p.7). We draw upon this definition, yet pay heed to the notion that the effective function of CoPs generally also requires community coordination (Lester and Kezar, 2017). In keeping with Lester and Kezar (2017), we argue that both coordination and distributed responsibility have been required to navigate the vCoP through its critical junctures, and document how both elements operated at those moments.

Learning Development (LD) has been widely recognised as a third space profession (Bickle et al., 2021; Webster, 2022), although its practitioners tend to regard the third space identity as secondary to that of being a Learning Developer itself (Johnson, 2018). Whilst the field of LD has been characterised by inclusivity (Briggs, 2018), shared values, and collegiality (Stapleford, 2019), the disparate nature of the LD role and the fact that many LD practitioners work within professional services remits means that for many, LD's position within the third space can lead to feelings of institutional invisibility (Gray, 2015) or isolation (Whitchurch, 2015). Therefore, third space workers must often seek outside collaborations (Bickle et al., 2021) or build external networks (Whitchurch 2015). Whilst feelings of frustration may be common for third space staff, Whitchurch (2023) compares this position to being a third space 'professional', who creates opportunities through developing new space and building upon existing contacts, thereby relishing 'the opportunity to use third space to experiment with different roles and activities' (Whitchurch, 2023, p.24). In other words, individuals take advantage of the ever-changing priorities and

politics of higher education (HE) to situate their own work and position (Zurhellen and Karaus, 2023).

In this case study, we explore how a group of LD professionals navigated these challenges by forming and sustaining a vCoP. The vCoP is based on its members' shared interests in pursuing research about Learning Development, from the professional standpoint of a Learning Developer. In and of itself, this position indicates some of the wider contradictions of working in the third space, since only an estimated 25-30% of Learning Developers have contractual research allowances (Johnson, 2023). The vCoP helped us to navigate this challenge as third space professionals with something in common that united us to transcend boundaries, reduce isolation, and build individual and collective identity. In discussing how the vCoP began merely as one individual's idea, we explore how it increasingly required a movement towards DL to function as a member-led group, and the mechanics of how we achieved that.

Critical juncture 1: establishing the vCoP

Although the vCoP began through one person's idea and recruitment activity, it was recognised from the outset that a form of DL would be optimal. Whilst DL has been associated with a variety of meanings and practice (Woods et al., 2004), it views leadership not through an individual leader's attributes and behaviours, but instead as aggregated between some, many, or indeed, all members of a group or organisation (Gronn, 2002; Woods et al., 2004; Bolden, 2011) with individuals leading when and where they have expertise (Liang and Sandmann, 2015). Spillane emphasises DL's focus on the practice of leadership as opposed to 'leaders or their roles, functions, routines, and structures' (2005, p.144). The suitability of DL within a Community of Practice (CoP) is identified by Jones and Harvey (2017) who suggest that the two can combine to support the social learning that develops within a CoP, with Clarkin-Phillips (2011) concluding that characteristics of DL such as collaboration, negotiation, and the sharing of a vision help to strengthen a CoP.

The vCoP began as a proposal that research-active Learning Developers would share their experiences over lunch at the 2020 ALDinHE conference. When the conference was curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic, a replacement virtual meeting took place in May

2020. Of the approximately 30 attendees, a group of 10-15 began meeting monthly to discuss research interests from a critical friend perspective. The overarching purpose documented within the vCoP's terms of reference is to 'provide an informal, supportive environment within which professionals working in and around "Learning Development" can interact and share experiences about research' (Research vCoP, personal communication, 2020). This statement was co-written and agreed by the membership, representing a first example of DL where the voices of members were recognised and valued (Woods and Gronn, 2009), working towards establishing shared goals.

Nevertheless, from a leadership perspective, much work remained for the vCoP's coordinator to translate the members' visionary goal into practical actions in pursuit. To rephrase in Spillane, Halverson and Diamond's (2001) terms, the vCoP required organisational 'macro functions' to be established, to nurture the flourishing of the member-led 'micro functions' that would move the group forward. It was important that leadership created a supportive environment that encouraged members to contribute to the growth. Initially, the coordinator decided to ask one member to lead each meeting by exploring an aspect of their research, and prompting the wider membership to discuss it further. While the vCoP appeared to settle well into this working model and maintain its attendance, there was heavy onus on the leader to decide the agenda and seek volunteers to steer meetings. There was sometimes reluctance from members to nominate themselves, supporting the point that some CoP participants would rather remain 'peripheral' initially (Lester and Kezar, 2017). However, the leader-driven approach was not only impractical from a workload perspective, but also ran against the premise that the group's membership should take ownership of the vCoP (Bourhis, Dubé and Jacob, 2005).

Concerted efforts thus began to encourage a more distributed leadership model. As Wenger points out, the community coordinator role is effective only in the presence of evolving forms of alternative leadership such as: 'thought leaders, networkers, people who document the practice, pioneers' (2000, p.231). The vCoP focused on distributing responsibility for various operational aspects. We were conscious, however, that DL does not mean that every member of the group becomes a leader (Harris, 2013), and that within a CoP there are three levels of participation: peripheral, active, and the core group (Lester and Kezar, 2017). With this need in mind to keep contributions varied and voluntary, the coordinator reached out to members asking for expressions of interest in helping to run the vCoP, receiving two responses. As a result, one member took responsibility for group

administration such as member database maintenance and hosting online meetings, whilst the other began to oversee the vCoP's mentoring activity. In this sense we were distributing what Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2001) described as the 'micro' (day-to-day, member-led) tasks.

Critical juncture 2: evolving the CoP's identity

A key characteristic of DL is that it is seen as part of a post-heroic representation of leadership (Bolden, 2011), moving away from notions of the leader as a hero, who 'visualizes the future, defines and communicates the strategy, inspires and motivates' (Sobral and Furtado, 2019, p.209). Once the group was established, the founder became conscious of the need to start to distribute decision making, enabling the membership to set the strategic direction and identity of the group. They wanted to establish answers to questions such as: What motivated people to join? What did they want from the vCoP? Was it delivering that? How? What else could the vCoP do? This led to the group undertaking a synchronous and asynchronous reflective writing task to reach answers. This exercise was important in the sense that the success of a vCoP can depend on active participation, thereby members should be encouraged to contribute to group discussions (McLoughlin et al., 2018). The written medium seemed to unlock inhibitions compared to attempting the same exercise as an online conversation.

During this process, members were asked for their thoughts about engaging in future synchronous collaborative writing. Responses indicated the appetite for such an endeavour, with members indicating the benefit of developing a shared understanding of the vCoP's practice (Abbott and Lee, 2022). A decision was then taken to write a journal article based on a collaborative autoethnography about our joint experiences of the vCoP. The written outcome of the previous collaborative writing exercise in fact became the raw data to analyse for themes which explained our vCoP's identity. This writing activity was a critical turning point in establishing the group identity and developing a truly distributed approach to leadership (Bickle et al., 2021).

To complete the different tasks (such as constructing a literature review and undertaking data analysis), leadership of the article was divided, with the formation of sub-groups

feeding into the main group. The main group met approximately monthly, with sub-group meetings happening in between. The sub-groups were given full autonomy to make decisions on how to draft their sections, which were then discussed in the full-group meetings to ensure synergy. The autonomy meant that the sub-groups used differing strategies (for example synchronous versus asynchronous writing, and division of responsibilities) to suit their members' preferences. Concluding the article, we reflected that 'the non-hierarchical, highly supportive nature of the group ... has been fundamental in shaping the group's identity' (Bickle et al., 2021, p.150) and further contrasted this lack of hierarchy with the more competitive REF-driven research environment experienced by many staff in traditional academic roles (Hall, 2020).

A further example of the group developing a DL approach was evident when an opportunity arose for a related follow up project – to write a 1500-word book chapter about the process we had undertaken to collaboratively produce the journal article as a group of nine. The vCoP's coordinator wanted to remain in the role, but step away from the coordination on this project. This decision was due firstly to other professional pressures, and secondly to a wish that the vCoP's membership should increasingly drive its activity. Therefore, through a collective democratic decision and anonymous voting it was agreed that another member of the vCoP would coordinate the chapter, demonstrating that we were broadening responsibilities across the group.

Our reflections towards the book-chapter were captured via anonymous writing in a collaborative Google Doc, to ensure that all voices and viewpoints could be heard and represented. The term 'non-hierarchical' stuck strongly in our reflections in the chapter (Welton et al., 2023) on why the activity of writing the article worked effectively. Involved individuals noted that:

[all members had] an equal say, and all suggestions were carefully considered and discussed.

[a] respect ... was shown for each other's writing – nothing was deleted or changed without consultation.

I felt very supported when writing this as a fairly new experience for me and an area I had requested some mentoring for'. (Welton et al., 2023, p.218).

It is self-evident through these reflections how far the vCoP had moved from the leader-as-hero model (Bolden, 2011) towards one where all participants felt empowered, and how the three written activities (initial reflection, journal article, book chapter) contributed to and reified the distributed way of working. The decision to adopt a non-hierarchical approach was also reflected in the ordering of authors: alphabetically in the journal article (Bickle et al., 2021) and reverse-alphabetically in the chapter (Welton et al., 2023).

Whilst this was a highly effective way of working, it was also important to acknowledge that despite the distribution of leadership and responsibilities, there still remained a need for a (non-heroic) coordinator, for example, to set deadlines, manage relationships, and harmonise the different sub-groups (Lester and Kezar, 2017). This position accords with Bolden, Petrov and Gosling's (2008) argument that DL should not be seen as a successor to traditional individual leadership but something that resides alongside it. Whilst the sub-groups may still have successfully completed each task and were not entirely dependent on the community coordination (Lester and Kezar, 2017), the coordinator helped the group to achieve synchrony in finding its academic voice.

Critical juncture 3: transferring the leadership of the vCoP

When the founder of the vCoP decided that they wanted to step down from coordinating its activities and projects, a discussion about a possible succession plan arose. Lester and Kezar (2017) state that changes of leadership are a critical juncture where both coordination and distributed responsibility are needed. By now, the core group member who earlier assumed administrative responsibility had progressed to co-leadership, and was happy to continue that role in conjunction with a second volunteer. We believed that this model would be the least disruptive and most natural way of navigating the vCoP through this critical juncture. The two (then) co-leaders decided that a natural choice of a new co-leader would be the member who coordinated the book chapter. Of interest here in terms of DL is that for democratic reasons, the outgoing leader also sought expressions of interest and informed the group that in the event of multiple volunteers, an anonymous vote would be held to decide the new co-leader. However, this call received no responses. In a sense the nominee for new co-leader had risen organically through the ranks of the vCoP having previously demonstrated desire and ability to lead on the book chapter, while

no other member felt ready to assume responsibility at that stage. The vCoP duly approved the suggested successor through a unanimous vote.

It was important to acknowledge that when changing leadership of a CoP, an evaluation of the 'values and norms of the decision making processes' (Lester and Kezar, 2017, p.32) should be undertaken. The two new coordinators therefore quickly established a close working relationship and clearly defined their areas of responsibility to ensure efficient engagement with all the needs of the vCoP. By the time the coordination of the vCoP was handed over, the working environment had significantly changed in comparison to its establishment phase. Using Wenger, McDermott and Snyder's (2002) stages of development, the group had begun to move towards a stage of 'maturing'. Within this stage, the group begins to develop a greater sense of itself and its members start to develop new areas of knowledge.

While the leadership transfer went largely smoothly, differences arising between the group as a result of 'maturing' presented challenges. With working patterns starting to return to pre-Covid-19 pandemic norms, some members started to struggle to regularly attend monthly meetings, whilst some founding members had withdrawn for personal reasons. These changes, although broadly expected for CoPs (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002; Wenger, 2009), meant that the vCoP sought to recruit a number of new members, naturally changing the dynamics of the group. One of the features of the vCoP membership that posed specific challenges to the DL model was the lack of homogeneity from both a cultural and professional viewpoint. This lack of homogeneity is not unique, and is something that is common across the LD field in general (Webster, 2022). For example, some of the active group members are subject lecturers without a specific background in LD, while others have had some past experience in an LD role, but are currently focusing on working in their subject area. This variation in experiences often poses challenges when discussing core theory and LD practices. Another challenging point for group discussions and when determining ways forward is the varied discipline specific background and beliefs each member brings to the discussions.

In dealing with any forms of conflicts arising from these differences, the coordinators adopted a hierarchical approach (Woods et al., 2004) where conflicts were resolved by the coordinators themselves. The ongoing presence of some form of hierarchical approach within DL is acknowledged within the literature (Lumby, 2019). More specifically for social

learning spaces, Wenger warns that '[a] common mistake is to demonise vertical accountability ... a self governed social learning space is not heaven' (2009, p.14). In the presence of the changing dynamics inside the vCoP, it was important that the original aims of the vCoP were preserved, which required a vertical approach at times. One example is that the coordinators decide on a list of relevant topics and seek suitable presenters for the monthly meetings. Similarly, they co-ordinate post-meeting actions for the vCoP using clear deadlines and task allocation approaches.

Wenger (2009) states that practice and identity are always central to knowledge generation in social learning spaces. The new coordinators, unlike the newer members, had been in the vCoP since the onset. They had therefore been part of the discussions that led to LD practice and identity being placed centrally in the terms of reference that bound the VCoP. With a divergent membership, it was important for the two coordinators to keep these tenets central while accommodating the interests of newer participants. Without oversight, this balance could potentially have been jeopardised.

Within Wenger, McDermott and Snyder's (2002) 'maturing' stage, they point out that one of the roles of coordinators is to manage the relationship amongst new and existing members, which is particularly important towards the goal of developing strong team working skills within a DL model (Bennett et al., 2003). This function became especially important when the group commenced a new research project in September 2023. With a number of members unable to contribute due to work related pressures and changes in their job roles, the smaller active group consisted mainly of founding members and a couple of new members. This meant that a learning and adapting process was necessary for both active and new members (Dubé, Bourhis and Jacob, 2006). Through regular engagement, and positive and supportive language, the newly established coordinators guided the vCoP members to develop new working dynamics and relationships. Specific examples include the use of online scheduling platforms, asynchronous and anonymous individual reflections on an electronic writing wall, anonymous voting and commenting on suggestions by other members of the vCoP.

Conclusion

For those working in the third space, a CoP offers an opportunity for like-minded professionals to join forces around something that unites them and address the feelings of isolation often associated with the third space. In joining and contributing to a CoP, practitioners can transition from merely working in the third space to seeing themselves as third space professionals, creating development opportunities for themselves within their own careers (Whitchurch, 2023).

Whilst the creation and initial development of the vCoP required 'heroic' leadership, as the group evolved there was a natural move to distribute the decision-making process in order for members to set the strategic direction of the group. This was exemplified in the group research projects where sub groups completed tasks separately from the guidance of the coordinator, and a member took on the coordination of a specific research project.

However, as the group matured and underwent membership churn, its dynamics naturally changed, with established and new members forging new working relationships. As relationships developed, the importance of coordination became more critical, particularly given the varying disciplinary backgrounds and experiences of members. In such cases, a more vertical level of coordination was required to ensure the original objectives of the vCoP were adhered to in order to enable the practice and identity of the group to be maintained.

Therefore, we suggest to any third space professionals who are considering establishing a CoP that whilst DL is a suitable model of leadership, a balance between distributing responsibility and community coordination needs to be struck. While the strength of the mixture may differ within each CoP, we suggest that the balance is needed as a means of safeguarding a CoP's ethos during its evolution, and continuing to maximise the benefits of the CoP for its members.

Acknowledgements

The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

References

- Abbott, M. L. and Lee, K. K. (2022) 'Researcher-supported professional learning and development for instructors in adult L2 programs: factors leading to ongoing communities of practice', *The Modern Language Journal*, 106(3), pp.617-634. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12793>.
- Bennett, N., Wise, C., Woods, P. and Harvey, J. (2003) *Distributed leadership: a review of literature*. National College for School Leadership. Available at: <https://oro.open.ac.uk/8534/1/bennett-distributed-leadership-full.pdf> (Accessed: 24 March 2024).
- Bickle, E., Bishopp-Martin, S., Canton, U., Chin, P., Johnson, I., Kantcheva, R., Nodder, J., Rafferty, V. et al. (2021) 'Emerging from the third space chrysalis: experiences in a non-hierarchical, collaborative research Community of Practice', *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 18(7), pp.135-158. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.7.9>.
- Bolden, R. (2011) 'Distributed leadership in organizations: a review of theory and research', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(3), pp.251-269. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00306.x>.
- Bolden, R., Petrov, G. and Gosling, J. (2008) *Developing collective leadership in higher education*. London: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Bourhis, A., Dubé, L. and Jacob, R. (2005) 'The success of virtual communities of practice: The leadership factor', *Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, 3(1), pp.23-34.
- Briggs, S. G. (2018) 'Development of the ALDinHE recognition scheme: certifying the "Learning Developer" title', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, Issue 13, April, pp.1-11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.v0i13.461>.

- Clarkin-Phillips, J. (2011) 'Distributed leadership: growing strong communities of practice in early childhood centres', *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*, 26(2), pp.14-25.
- Dubé, L., Bourhis, A. and Jacob, R. (2006) 'Towards a typology of virtual communities of practice', *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge & Management*, 1, pp.69-93.
- Gray, S. (2015) 'Culture clash or ties that bind? What Australian academics think of professional staff', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 37(5), pp.545-557. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1079397>.
- Gronn, P. (2002) 'Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 13(4), pp.423-451. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(02\)00120-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(02)00120-0).
- Hall, R. (2020) 'Covid-19 and the hopeless university. Intellectual work at the end of the end of history', *Postdigital Science and Education*, 2020(2), pp.657-664. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-020-00118-3>
- Harris, A. (2013) 'Distributed leadership: friend or foe?', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 41(5), pp.545-554. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213497635>.
- Johnson, I. (2018) 'Driving learning development professionalism forward from within', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, ALDinHE Conference Special Issue, October, pp.1-29. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.v0i0.470>.
- Johnson, I. (2023) *The framing and value of Learning Development work in British higher education: an illuminative evaluation of professional practice*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis: University of Portsmouth. Available at: <https://researchportal.port.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/the-framing-and-value-of-learning-development-work-in-british-hig> (Accessed: 27 November 2024).

- Jones, S. and Harvey, M. (2017) 'Revealing the nexus between distributed leadership and communities of practice', in McDonald, J. and Cater-Steel, A. (eds.) *Communities of practice: facilitating social learning in higher education*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp.313-327.
- Lester, J. and Kezar, A. (2017) 'Strategies and challenges for distributing leadership in communities of practice', *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 10(4), pp.17-34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21499>.
- Liang, J. G. and Sandmann, L. R. (2015) 'Leadership for community engagement: a distributed leadership perspective', *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 19(1), pp.35-63.
- Lumby, J. (2019) 'Distributed leadership and bureaucracy', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(1), pp.5-19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143217711190>.
- McLoughlin, C., Patel, K. D., O'Callaghan, T. and Reeves, S. (2018) 'The use of virtual communities of practice to improve interprofessional collaboration and education: findings from an integrated review', *Journal of interprofessional care*, 32(2), pp.136-142. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13561820.2017.1377692>.
- Research Virtual Community of Practice (2020) *Terms of Reference* (Google Doc), 16 July. Association for Learning Development in Higher Education. Personal Communications.
- Sobral, F. and Furtado, L. (2019) 'Post-heroic leadership: current trends and challenges in leadership education', *Revista de administração de empresas*, 59(3), pp.209-214. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-759020190306>.
- Spillane, J. P. (2005) 'Distributed Leadership', *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), pp.143-150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720508984678>.

- Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R. and Diamond, J. B. (2001) 'Investigating school leadership practice: a distributed perspective', *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), pp.23-28. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X030003023>.
- Stapleford, K. (2019) 'The LDHEN hive mind: Learning Development in UK higher education as a professional culture', *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, 16, pp.1-23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.47408/jldhe.v0i16.510>.
- Webster, H. (2022) 'Supporting the development, recognition and impact of third-space professionals', in McIntosh, E. and Nutt, D. (eds.) *The impact of the integrated practitioner in higher education: studies in third space professionalism*. Abingdon: Routledge, pp.178-187.
- Welton, K., Sum, K., Rafferty, V., Nodder, J., Kantcheva, R., Johnson, I., Chin, P., Bishopp-Martin, S. et al. (2023) 'Working together: reflections on a non-hierarchical approach to collaborative writing', in Abegglen, S., Burns, T. and Sinfield, S. (eds.) *Collaboration in higher education*. London: Bloomsbury, pp.216-220.
- Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2000) 'Communities of practice and social learning systems', *Organization*, 7(2), pp.225-246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/135050840072002>.
- Wenger, E. (2009) *Social learning capability: four essays on innovation and learning in social systems*. Wenger-Trayner. Available at: <https://www.wenger-trayner.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/09-04-17-Social-learning-capability-v2.1.pdf> (Accessed: 24 March 2024).
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R. and Snyder, W. (2002) *Cultivating communities of practice: a guide to managing knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

- Whitchurch, C. (2015) 'The rise of third space professionals: paradoxes and dilemmas', in Teichler, U. and Cummings, W. (eds.) *Forming, recruiting and managing the academic profession*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp.79-99.
- Whitchurch, C. (2023) 'Rehabilitating third space professionals in contemporary higher education institutions', *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 34, pp.23-33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14288/workplace.v34i>.
- Woods, P. A. and Gronn, P. (2009) 'Nurturing democracy: the contribution of distributed leadership to a democratic organisational landscape', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 37(4), pp.430-451. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143209334597>.
- Woods, P. A., Bennett, N., Harvey, J. A. and Wise, C. (2004) 'Variabilities and dualities in distributed leadership: findings from a systematic literature review', *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 32(4), pp.439-457. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143204046497>.
- Zurhellen, S. and Karaus, J. (2023) 'Widening the margins: Making space for third space professionals', *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor*, 34, pp.66-74. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14288/workplace.v34i>.

Author details

Ian Johnson is a Teaching Fellow in Learning Development at University of Portsmouth, an ALDinHE steering group member and chair of ALDinHE's Research and Scholarship Development Working Group. In 2023 he completed a professional doctorate on the framing and value of Learning Development work in British higher education and its implications for professional practice.

Ed Bickle is a Lecturer in Learning Development at Bournemouth University. He is co-lead of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education research Community of Practice and recently led a research project that examined the future role of Learning Development within the third space.

Ralitsa Kantcheva is the Senior Learning Development Tutor and is leading the Learning Development team at the University of Bedfordshire. She is a co-lead of the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education research Community of Practice and is currently co-leading on a research project about LD practice and its connection with Academic Literacies theory.

Licence

©2024 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE) is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE).