



Editorial

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Alicja Syska

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Third Space is a powerful concept in Learning Development. Although originally developed by Celia Whitchurch (2008) in the context of administrative roles and organisational leadership in higher education (HE), it has delivered on its promise to mark ‘an emergent territory between academic and professional domains’ (p.377) that Learning Developers not only occupy but also move across ‘to create new professional spaces, knowledges and relationships’ (p.379). Third Space is Learning Developers’ space due to their unique understanding of the discrete worlds that their students encounter at university, from academic to professional and administrative, mediating them with and for the students in forms of activity not easily categorised within the still fairly orthodox structures of HE institutions.

This is why we were thrilled to receive a proposal for a special issue exploring Third Space in HE from the University of Exeter team led by Kelly Louise Preece. Producing this

collection in such a fruitful collaboration instantly promised – and did not fail to deliver – an array of innovative, thought-provoking, and highly valuable interpretations of the concept and its evolving applications. Indeed, the 57 contributions by over 200 authors that make up this Special Issue emphasise the diversity of experiences and activities within third spaces across the contemporary terrain of HE, not only in the UK but around the world. What they have in common is the revelation that these spaces are truly polyphonic. Concurrent melodies make them creative, playful, and liberating – but also sometimes restricted, precarious, and uncertain. The way our authors have navigated these contrasting and competing tensions highlights their ingenuity in offering ever new insights into how we think about third spaces and their place in universities today.

In their Guest Editorial, Kelly Louise Preece, James Anthony-Edwards, Eleanor Hodgson, Karen Kenny, and Rachel Sloan explain their affiliation with Third Space and the ways in which it informed their goal of supporting colleagues occupying this space in making their voices heard through publication. This could not have aligned more propitiously with our mission in the journal: to provide a productive space for conversation while democratising publishing, diversifying writing, and cultivating the scholarship of Learning Development.

We extend deep appreciation to our Guest Editors, who not only mobilised their resources to bring our missions together but also took on a role that proved more demanding than anticipated. Their persistence in mastering new technical skills and dedicating substantial time to this endeavour while maintaining high editorial standards has been remarkable. Their commitment was essential to bringing this special issue to fruition.

The success of this special edition owes much to the exceptional efforts of Tom Lowe as the coordinator between the Editorial and Guest Editorial teams. His skilful facilitation ensured smooth collaboration throughout the editorial process. As he moves on to new endeavours, we express our sincere gratitude for his dedicated service to the journal and wish him every continued success in the future.

We also thank our reviewers, whose expertise and constructive critiques have not only elevated the quality of the published works but also reminded us of the strength and vitality of our scholarly community. Indeed, their selfless dedication exemplifies the generosity and collaborative spirit of Third Space. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to:

Alex Rey	Emma Kimberley	Maeve O'Dwyer
Alina Congreve	Emma Lewis	Maggie Gibson
Alison Harvey	Emma Norman	Michelle Joubert
Alison Willows	Fay Glendenning	Nicola Clarke
Amira Kebabi	Florence Besse-Jones	Oliver Ryles
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Amy West	Gayle Pringle Barnes	Philip Carey
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Becky Bate	Gemma Stansfield	Rachel Beaney
Briony Frost	Georgi Sinclair	Rachel Lamb
Callum Perry	Helen Bowstead	Rachel Sloan
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Clara Davies	Jennie Fox	Sabrina Vieth
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Emilie Poletto-Lawson	Liv Jonassen	Tina Byrom
Emily McIntosh	Louise Loder	Vanessa Mar-Molinero
Emma Greenhalgh	Loykie Loic Lomine	Zhuo Sun
Emma Kennedy	Lyndsey Carmichael	Zoe Allman

As a final reflection, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that in a competitive higher education landscape, it is easy to turn inwards and experience Third Space as lonely and unmoored. Equally important, we need to remember that the concept itself is – and should

be – contested and that it requires intellectual vigilance. We need to keep reevaluating and reinventing it, so it continues to serve us in the dynamically changing world of HE rather than constraining or imposing unhelpful labelling.

It is thus a testament to our authors that they put themselves onto the page, with its risks and discomforts, and in doing so develop new relationships, conversations, and even identity through writing (Buckley, Syska and Heggie, 2024). As Whitchurch and Healy (2024, p.1) emphasise, third spaces do not exist in ‘organisation charts, job descriptions or career pathways’; they are powerful because they are ‘created bottom up by groups of individuals’, in a striking similarity to communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Bound up by the relationships of the people involved, they are not developed on set hierarchies, but through the organic process of learning together. As such, and for Learning Developers in particular, Third Space can be seen as vaguely ‘heterotopian’ (Foucault, 1984) in its attempts to escape established order and always remain ‘in relation with all other sites’ – a world within another world, with layers of meaning that extend beyond what is expected and immediately understood. It is a space of possibility, creative potential, and relationality. We are pleased to interrogate it here with you.

With very best wishes,

Alicja Syska & Chad McDonald
JLDHE Editorial Board

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