REHABILITATING THIRD SPACE PROFESSIONALS IN CONTEMPORARY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This paper updates earlier work by the author (2008, 2013, 2018) to consider ways in which better recognition might be achieved for people working in third space environments, suggesting that an acceptance of Mode 3 knowledge in higher education, alongside disciplinary and professional knowledge, could provide a way forward in promoting their work. It considers how such knowledge is co-created between individuals and groups, often as a result of activity across the informal institutional economy, and how this might be used by institutions to re-evaluate third space activity within the formal institutional economy. This process is illustrated via a case study of a wildlife garden, which acts as a boundary object linking disciplinary teaching in ecology to engagement with local communities, the development of woodland management skills for students, and a social environment for both. Finally, the paper develops ideas about how organisational processes and structures, representing the formal institutional economy, might be adapted to reflect third space activity in parallel with disciplines and professional specialisms, including specific initiatives relating to promotion, progression, and career development. By contextualising third space activity in Mode 3 knowledge theory, therefore, it makes practical suggestions as to how individuals might be better recognised within institutional systems, thereby increasing the perceived value of their work.

Keywords: third space professionals, Mode 3 knowledge, misrecognition, boundary objects

INTRODUCTION

The term 'third space', originating in cultural studies, has been used to overcome binary understandings in relation to, for example, race, class, gender and urban geography, and to explore spatial relationships as opposed to cumulative, historic accounts of human and organisational behaviour (Said, 1978; Bhabha, 2009; Soja, 2009). It has been applied by the author (Whitchurch, 2008, 2013, 2018), and others (for example Bossu & Brown, 2018; McIntosh & Nutt, 2022; Veles & Danaher, 2022), to explore the identities of groups of individuals in higher education who do not fit conventional binary descriptors that assume a sole focus on either academic or professional activity. In a university context, such individuals may be involved in work that enables and enhances academic endeavour, in fields such as educational development, widening participation, employability, knowledge exchange and public engagement. They include academic faculty, some of whom may be employed on professional contracts of employment, as well as people having professional contracts, although the latter may possess master's and doctoral qualifications. The roles and spaces that such people occupy are often felt by them to be invisible in that they are not written into organisation charts or job descriptions, and they may not have physical space dedicated to them. Although hierarchical line management relationships exist on paper, these may be less significant in day-to-day working than lateral networks, both across and outside the university, that can be activated at short notice. The concept of third space is used in this paper, therefore, to explore a cognitive dissonance between formal institutional structures and the reality of day-to-day activities and interactions, demonstrating ways in which pressure for recognition has come from the bottom up.

Furthermore, although third space activity may be recognised by immediate colleagues and some line managers, this is less likely to be the case vis-vis the university as an organisation, for example in relation to reward structures, career progression and professional development.

The paper builds on earlier work by the author which showed that while some people experience frustration with institutional structures, for example in relation to career progression, others are better able to thrive in third space by pushing boundaries. While the first group might be seen as simply 'working in third space', the second group have been categorised as fully fledged 'third space professionals' (Whitchurch, 2024, forthcoming). The former are more likely to speak of a mismatch between their role and university structures, even if they find third space a relatively safe place, resulting in what they feel is a lack of recognition, whereas the latter group are more likely to develop new space, and to build on contacts that they make, feeling that they can thereby create opportunities for themselves, either within their academic career or in a potential new field. Those categorised as simply 'working in third space' may have a lack of appreciation of opportunities that their work could offer, lack confidence, or feel that their circumstances, for example family commitments, mean that they need to take a more cautious approach to their career, focusing on existing structures and progression criteria rather than taking a more exploratory approach. Fully fledged 'third space professionals', by contrast, are more likely to relish the opportunity to use third space to experiment with different roles and activities, albeit this may involve some risk (Whitchurch, 2024, forthcoming). Nevertheless, even fully fledged 'third space professionals' might be said to thrive in spite of, rather than because of, institutional structures and processes. Both groups of individuals are likely to be classified as either academic or professional in their contracts and job descriptions, even though this appellation may be at odds with an individual's day-to-day practice. This, in turn, may cause them to be conflicted in how they see themselves. The extent to which such dislocation is felt, and how far an individual is able to accommodate it, is likely to affect whether they prosper, or otherwise, in third space.

Furthermore, a dislocation between formal and informal institutional economies (Whitchurch, Locke & Marini, 2023), a metaphorical framework relating to the production, exchange and consumption of academic and associated activity, may mean that institutions fail to optimise the contribution of all those in third space environments, resulting in such individuals being lost to similar roles with other employers, in the public or private sectors. The formal institutional economy is represented by, for example, contracts of employment, promotion and progression criteria, and disciplinary and departmental affiliations. By contrast, the informal institutional economy is based on understandings that are not necessarily articulated, relating to, for example, individual relationships, networks, personal interests, and work-life balance. Whereas the formal economy is more visible and quantifiable, for example, via measurable outcomes such as completion of projects, grants, publications and student feedback, the informal economy is articulated via individual preferences, relationships, values and priorities, which, if recorded at all, may appear in personal development plans, which are likely to be confidential, and therefore not visible.

The paper begins by giving a description of the project on which it is based. This is followed by an outline of the theoretical framing used to problematise the concept of third space: firstly, the misrecognition that can occur between formal requirements within an institutional system and day-to-day patterns of activity (Althusser, 1971; Birdwell, 2017); secondly, the Mode 3 type of knowledge (Caryannis & Campbell, 2012, 2016) that is likely to be created by those working in third space; and thirdly, a case study of the creation of a wildlife garden, exemplifying a boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989), that brings together diverse groups of people in a third space environment on a university campus. Finally, suggestions are made as to ways in which institutional structures and systems, i.e., the formal economy, might be adjusted in order to rehabilitate those working third space, as well as actions that individuals themselves might take via the informal institutional economy.

THE STUDY

The material in this paper draws on data from a project that explored trends in the development of the UK workforce, conducted between 2016 and 2020 for the UK Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE), an international research centre based at the University of Oxford and University College London (Whitchurch, Locke & Marini, 2021; Whitchurch, Locke & Marini, 2023; Whitchurch, 2024, forthcoming). Interviews were initially conducted with 69 individuals having academic and professional contracts, including directors of human resources and members of senior management teams, in eight higher education institutions, selected on the basis of:

- regional location, covering all four UK nations (five English and one each from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland);

- institutional type (three pre-1992 Russell Group (leading research-intensive universities); two pre-1992 non-Russell Group universities; two post-1992 universities (former polytechnics prior to the Further and Higher Education Act 1992); and one post-2004 university (former college prior to 2004, when the requirement that non-university institutions held research degree awarding powers before they could gain university status was dropped in England and Wales)); and

- disciplinary and faculty profiles.

- 39 of the 53 respondents in the study not having senior management roles were re-interviewed two years after the first interview, so that there was a longitudinal element to the study. It became evident from these narratives that what amounted to 50% of this subset of respondents, i.e., 26 out of the 53, described significant elements of their work as being in what could be seen as third space. This paper focuses on these 26 respondents, 21 of whom agreed to be re-interviewed.

The 26 respondents from whose narratives the material in this chapter is drawn can be classified as follows:

Table 1

Respondents from the CGHE study categorised as working in third space environments

	First round of interviews **(2017-2018)**	**Second round of interviews** **(2019-2020)**
Academic faculty having academic contracts	15	16
Academic faculty having professional contracts	3	1
Individuals having professional contracts in areas such as educational development, academic practice, quality assurance and community engagement	4	1
Research development professionals (professional contracts)	3	3
Librarian (professional contract)	1	0
Totals	26	21

Notes: *(i) Two of the academic faculty having professional contracts at the first interview had been transferred to academic contracts by the time of the second interview; (ii) Two of the people having professional contracts had fixed term contracts, and three members of academic faculty were part-time; (iii) Six of the eleven people having professional contracts had doctoral qualifications, including the two who had transferred to academic contracts at the time of the second interview, and one had begun but not completed such a qualification; (iv) The overall gender balance of all the study participants across the two sets of interviews was 65% female, 35% male. Of those categorised as working in third space, 69% were female, 31% male.*

As can be seen, the contractual situation was by no means clear cut, and some individuals undertaking academic work had been placed on professional contracts. This affects returns to national datasets such as the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2022), and illustrates how people undertaking third space roles are likely to be subject to

misrecognition, at least in a formal sense, and to be dependent on self-identification (Grant, 2021; Avenali et al., 2022; Whitchurch, Locke & Marini, 2023).

Those classified as working in third space environments in the study demonstrated a broad range of activity. This included:

- educational development, including academic practice, learning support, study skills, academic writing, and English for academic purposes;

- student employability and skills development, including liaison with employers, local career services/job centres and volunteering organisations;

- educational technology, including online learning, the development of the digital environment, and information and library services;

- support for underserved students and communities, including diversity and inclusion, and student success initiatives;

- promotion of research enterprise, impact, knowledge exchange and transfer;

- public engagement, charitable and humanitarian work, and community outreach.

The extent of this list demonstrates the reach of academia beyond the classroom or laboratory, how integral this broad spectrum of activity has become to mainstream teaching and research, and how individuals working in these areas have become critical to academic endeavour in contemporary institutions. Furthermore, a number of people in the study had come into higher education from another career, for example in project management, marketing, public relations, charity work, local government, libraries and museums. Others had been unable to obtain a mainstream academic job and had settled into, for example, an education or research development role, which crossed over into academic activity. Some of them also saw themselves leaving higher education for a different sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMING - MISRECOGNITION

Althusser theorised the concept of misrecognition as the state whereby institutions mould individuals living or working within them to their rules and structures, so that they are trapped in an "imaginary", or false relationship to others, and to the institution as a whole (Althusser, 1971; Birdwell, 2017). Individuals are therefore required to adopt a particular identity, in the case of third space environments, either as academic faculty or as professional staff, whereby they become alienated from what they feel is their 'true 'self. For example, one such individual in the study, a lecturer in social sciences, had responsibility for a project improving student attainment. For this they were responsible to the central university team and pro-vice-chancellor managing the student experience. Although they had a strong interest in widening participation and supporting students, they did not feel that they were best employed undertaking all the detailed data management that was needed, and suggested that a project manager was needed: "I write reports three times a year…, they include a lot of data, and a lot of the reporting I'm not sure anyone reads, so they are really onerous…, a project manager should be doing them, rather than me…" (lecturer, social sciences, pre-1992 university). This person felt, therefore, that they were subject to misrecognition, suggesting that their contribution to student attainment would be better served by embedding learning skills into their teaching.

In another instance, in relation to an individual who was responsible for an interdisciplinary programme and employed on a professional contract, despite the fact that they were undertaking academic work, a distinction was made between the rigidity of institutional structures and the attitude of senior managers responsible for implementing them. Although this person's managers acknowledged that their contractual position was inappropriate, they had, despite their best efforts, been unable to re-'place' them on an academic contract: "…everybody has been very well intentioned… wanting to help find clarity on the way forward, and it just has never [happened]… I think I probably am on the radar generally as somebody that the institution is not quite sure what to do with… contractually… individuals are all very willing and supportive but the structures, it hasn't yet been resolved…" (senior lecturer, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university). It seemed therefore that misrecognition was embedded in employment conditions, despite the best efforts of individuals in the university management hierarchy. Nevertheless, working relationships within this person's interdisciplinary programme, which was effectively a third space environment, were positive: "… we're all very

respectful of each other's expertise…, [we're] really proud of the culture in our department and the way we engage with each other… we don't fit into some of the more hidebound sort of structures of some departments" (senior lecturer, humanities, pre-1992 Russell Group university). This person was, therefore, was able to overcome misrecognition via their own commitment to the interdisciplinary programme that they led, which represented a third space environment, focusing on collaborative relationships across their department rather than on structures, and thereby drawing on a local, informal economy.

THEORETICAL FRAMING - MODE 3 KNOWLEDGE

The concept of Mode 3 knowledge (Carayannis & Campbell, 2012, 2016) was developed to extend the concepts of Mode 1 (pure disciplinary knowledge) and Mode 2 (applied disciplinary knowledge) described by Gibbons et al. (1994). It does this by putting emphasis on the involvement and feedback of knowledge stakeholders and users, and therefore "… allows and emphasizes the co-existence and co-evolution of different knowledge and innovation paradigms" (Carayannis & Campbell, 2012, 49). It therefore reflects "Practical wisdom on how to address and act on social problems in a particular context" (Flyjberg et al., 2012, 1), that goes beyond scientific 'truth' and technical know-how, and is sensitive to application in specific settings, emphasising situated knowledge that leads to local understandings for specific contexts. It thereby reflects the development of more open public institutions, citizen participation, and calls for more networked forms of governance and management (Benington, 2011; Grant, 2021; Siekennen et al., 2022), involving clusters and networks of people undertaking collaborative activity, as are likely to be found in third space environments.

In higher education, knowledge creation has in the past tended to be associated solely with teaching and research, other types of activity being regarded as supporting or administering academic endeavour. The co-construction of knowledge with other participants, including external stakeholders, has therefore tended to be subsumed within the overall academic enterprise. However, in practice, many people working in areas such as research development have doctorates and research experience, and are therefore involved in work that requires an in-depth knowledge of, for example, the research process, "bringing creative practice into research… actually shaping research… and saying…, what are our strengths, what do we want to carve out and what are we going to be focussing on" (research and engagement manager, post-1992 university). Recognition of individuals in third space environments, therefore, is likely to be closely linked to recognition of the type of in-practice knowledge that they create. This may, in turn, be stimulated by the use of what are described in the literature as boundary objects (Star & Griesemer, 1989), which give a focus to collaborative events such as retreats, described by some respondents in relation to, for example, the development of academic writing or ideas for research.

THE USE OF BOUNDARY OBJECTS

A boundary object has been defined as "any object that is part of multiple social worlds and facilitates communication between them" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, 409). It can offer coherence and co-operation without the dominance of a single, more powerful, party, such as university authorities. One way that this can be achieved is via "the use of versatile, plastic, reconfigurable (programmable) objects that each world can mould to its purposes locally" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, 404). The authors give the example of a museum associated with a university, in which "research required the labours of (among others) university administrators, professors, research scientists, curators, amateur collectors, private sponsors and patrons, occasional field hands, government officials and members of scientific clubs" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, 392), all of whom had different interests in the outcomes of the research conducted. Boundary objects were therefore identified to motivate a range of stakeholders, thereby "maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds" (Star & Griesemer, 1989, 393), and optimising outcomes.

The following example, drawn from the study, illustrates this happening in practice in the third space environment of a wildlife garden.

The Case of a Wildlife Garden

A senior lecturer in applied science, in a pre-1992 university, with a part-time academic contract, had a range of interests and practical skills that included conservation, art and woodcraft, in addition to their disciplinary focus on ecology and the environment. They had created their own third space via artistic and woodland projects, including a wildlife garden. This acted as a boundary object linking disciplinary teaching to engagement with local communities, the development of woodcraft skills for students, and a social environment for both: "I've… set up a spot down in the woods, where I teach woodland crafts… traditional woodland management…, and I do those under… a really nice

scheme…, because it's outside the formal curriculum, so are the students who are being assessed, but… these courses go on the students' final degree certificate as well, so that's a nice thing… given all this employability [agenda], so it's demonstrating team skills… at the moment I'm working with a local organisation to try and get them involved in… a vegetable garden that I helped set up with some students a few years ago, and it's sort of waxed and waned, and now this local enterprise trust, who work with the mentally ill, they're quite interested in coming in and getting involved with the garden, so that's a little project". They also collaborated with members of the university's botanical garden, architecture students, botanists and wildlife conservationists, and had constructed a timber frame building, "which will be something between a classroom and a hang out space and maybe a making space, so the materials that are grown in the… botanical garden can be used to teach students to make baskets or whatever… I've always been a great believer in education as a capacity building process and I like to try and build capacity in my students, and when you're working with science students… it can be a bit of a challenge to get them to step outside their sort of epistemological mindsets…. I see [education] as a process of facilitation and [myself as] being a sort of creative producer in some ways". The linking of science with creative arts, employability and skills agendas, plus community engagement, had created a unique space largely driven by the participants rather than the university authorities. Although the garden as a whole can be seen as a boundary object, connecting the different worlds of university colleagues, students, local organisations and the public, there were also individual boundary objects within the project, that brought participants together. These included a shelter, artefacts constructed by participants, vegetables and plants in the garden, experiments conducted on site, and even a fire pit which provided a focal point for discussion and relaxation. As well as informing the ecological and botanical curriculum, therefore, the project was developing student team work and understandings of construction, architecture, woodcraft, coppicing, wildlife conservation and biodiversity. It supported the university's community outreach and employability agendas, and also provided recreational facilities.

The person in the case example can be seen as a facilitator, who got people to work together by dint of their personal energy and enthusiasm. They used their negotiating skills to satisfy the university authorities on issues such as health and safety, and building regulations required by established processes in the formal institutional economy. They also made allies of those who could help, such as persuading the estates department to offer spare logs for woodcraft, with the incentive that the project helped with recycling. If there were difficulties with required formalities, as there had been with an earlier project, they had made judgements about which battles to fight and which to let go. They also performed a translational function between, for example, the university authorities, participants and the community, focusing on shared goals, and providing leadership in which colleagues had confidence, but which was at the same time participatory. The outcomes of the project linked the core science curriculum with skills and practice, feeding into ecological, employability and community engagement agendas, at the same time as offering health and social benefits to individual participants, the local community, employers and the world of arts and crafts. The development occurred bottom up via the senior lecturer who initiated it, and could be said to be in spite of, rather than because of, formal university structures. They had followed the principle of bringing people together on neutral territory away from disciplinary centres on the campus, raising funds independently, then presenting work-in-progress as an exemplar for future development.

The project reflected Star & Griesemer's (1989) suggestions about binding groups together around boundary objects, including:

- Repositories to which participants can refer (in the case of the wildlife garden this might include, for example, a taxonomy of plants and guide to woodcraft, contained within a project manual, blog or social media account).

- Ideal type or map of the project as a whole, to which participants can refer (again this could be part of a project manual or blog, showing how the constituent parts contribute to the project as a whole).

- Coincident boundaries or common objects which have the same boundaries but different internal contents (in this case these might be undergraduate student projects, taster sessions for school children, woodcraft classes, and/or ecological research projects).

- Standardized forms, or methods of common communication across dispersed workgroups (these might be a project manual with sections for each activity, an online newsletter, blog, and social media account, which could maintain the information flow between people

within and outside the university about developments across the different projects within the wildlife garden, together with ideas for new projects).

With reference to universities in particular, Carayannis & Campbell suggest that "A "Mode 3" university, higher education institution, or higher education system would represent a type of organization or system that seeks creative ways of combining and integrating different principles of knowledge production and knowledge application… and by this also creating… innovative organizational contexts... [Thus] Mode 3 encourages the formation of "creative knowledge environments" (Hemlin et al., 2004)" (Carayannis & Campbell 2016, 18). The example of the wildlife garden can be seen to represent both "innovative organisational contexts" and "creative knowledge environments", involving a recombination of skillsets in which synergy occurs and knowledge is democratised and co-created. This is likely to involve two-way, lateral channels of communication, and a flexing of membership of decision-making groups and of formal channels of communication, both within institutions and across into the communities that they serve, together with discretion in interpreting formal processes.

This example illustrates ways in which disparate groups can come together under the aegis of a common project and learn from each other in a third space environment. It generated the involvement of individuals with a range of preoccupations and talents who had different skills to bring. In this particular project the incentive was not only for participants to gain new knowledge and skills, but also the social element. In a more office- or laboratory-based environment the latter might include, for example, regular tea and coffee meetings, blogs and presentations by participants, and round tables between academic faculty, students and local stakeholders as part of the informal institutional economy. There was, nevertheless, potential for the garden, or any similar activity representing a boundary object, to be absorbed into either an academic department or the university's corporate estate, particularly if the person initiating and running it left the university. In the latter scenario, it could be argued that it could cease to be a third space environment if organisational control, by a department or the university, became overly prescriptive i.e., it became absorbed into the university's formal economy. There are therefore issues about the amount of discretion accorded to participants in any third space project, and about how to maintain a light touch relationship with formal structures, which the member of faculty in the case example was successful in doing.

PATHWAYS TO RECOGNITION

Issues of misrecognition and invisibility are not unique to people working in third space and have been noted in relation to academic work that is interdisciplinary, and also the work of doctoral researchers (Ylijoki, 2022; Deem, 2022). This suggests that changes are not only needed to structures, but also to mindsets in higher education, in order to attract and retain the best talent. As one respondent said: "…there's a lot of roles within higher education that need to be… clarified as a career… There doesn't seem to be a clear… way into them… It would be nice to have some sort of professional framework for some of these roles… people wouldn't even be aware that some of these roles exist…" (research and engagement manager, post-1992 university). This example reflects pressure for recognition coming from the bottom up. However, as recognition grows among line managers, who may work in third space environments themselves, and onward to senior management teams, there is likely to be increasing acknowledgement that adaptations to formal structures are needed. As a first step, some modifications might be made by involving people working in third space, and their immediate line managers, in the design of career and development initiatives, so that these reflect third space activity in parallel with disciplines and professional specialisms. Possible initiatives to give it a higher profile, and thus to more fully incorporate it into institutional systems, might include, for example:

- Establishing a 'third track' between academic and professional progression routes, in which, for example, people who are not formally categorised as academic, but who are undertaking innovative work, would be allowed to teach in their area of expertise, to apply for research grants and to publish papers in university time, and to receive career credit for this.

- Developing job descriptions, reporting lines, promotion criteria and career pathways appropriate to this 'third track', and regulatory processes associated with these.

- Creating opportunities within this track for individuals to design their own objectives, performance criteria and career targets, in consultation with line managers via annual performance reviews.

- Allowing flexibility for individuals to move into this open track, either permanently or for a specific period of time, without losing career credit.

- Running pilot schemes in the first instance in specific schools or faculties.

- The identification of boundary objects within third space projects that will engage a range of different actors.

- Light touch management of boundary objects, as in the example of the wildlife garden above, within institutional systems.

- The appointment of third space 'champions' to encourage recognition of third space environments, mentor those within them, and provide a conduit of information to senior management teams.

- A redrawing of lines of responsibility to reflect the combination of skills and interests in third space, in an organogram more likely to be represented by intersecting spheres than a hierarchical organisational chart.

The identification and use of boundary objects at local levels, as described in relation to the case of the wildlife garden, is likely to be a valuable tool in stimulating and spreading understanding of collaborative activity. The appointment of third space 'champions' at both local and institutional level would also ensure that third space activity does not go by default and combat the fact that "trust relationships built by Third Space professionals can easily be undermined in relation to the difficulty of maintaining relationships in complex HEIs" (Stoltenkamp et al., 2017, 21).

The post-Covid world is likely to accelerate the exchange and dispersal of Mode 3 knowledge, particularly in online environments. Although opportunities for serendipitous, face-to-face communication, in work space, social space or in conference environments, may have been reduced, third space environments have, at the same time, become more fluid and extended. This is particularly so for those working in, for example, educational development, online learning, knowledge exchange and the technology supporting such activities (Livingston & Ling, 2022). Attention to virtual boundary objects, in addition to the type of physical boundary objects in the case example, would be one way of maintaining and building on knowledge generation in the digital world. These could include, for example, blogs, handbooks, newsletters, the creation of digital artefacts, virtual round tables, and a social media presence for third space projects. The rapid expansion of virtual environments also highlights the case for formal recognition of third space work, for example in job descriptions and progression pathways.

At the same time, the onus is also on those who work in third space to harness their agency and activism to promote the value-added of their work as part of the overall academic offering, and to combat any sense of invisibility. As one respondent said, "getting to show your work… what you do… is important, but how you sell it is even more important" (research fellow, applied social science, pre-1992 Russell Group university). This process could include discussions and presentations to colleagues, communication with line managers about innovative developments, attendance at round tables, seminars and conferences, publishing in blogs and journals, and the use of online fora and social media. Although practical and visible outcomes were intrinsic to some third space roles, as in the following example, it was also necessary to ensure that such activity was recognised inside as well as outside the institution: "I… come into academia from an activist perspective… trying to see change in the world… from my… involvement with civil societies… and so from my perspective, research shouldn't be ivory tower…, it should be how to improve things into communities and societies…" (senior lecturer, law, pre-1992 Russell Group university). This person had developed relationships and networks with a range of external partners, including non-governmental organisations, and had thereby raised the profile and impact of their academic work, working seamlessly with academic and other colleagues within and outside the university. They also saw the possibility of moving into one of these organisations in the future, therefore a career path that moved in and out of higher education.

Achieving a balance between highly structured and unstructured environments has also been noted in the literature (Kincheloe, 2008; Stoltenkamp et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2021), and the concept of "an ecology of related but loosely linked professional tasks, roles and responsibilities" (Healy et al., 2021, 1127) may be helpful in developing such a balance, and reducing conditions of misrecognition. The liberalisation of formal structures may also enable a stronger profile for what have been termed "scholar practitioners" (Streitwieser & Ogden, 2016), and "practitioner scholars" (LaCroix, 2021; Green et al., 2022), and as part of this process, reveal "what academics can teach practitioners, and what practitioners can teach academics" (Fink-Hefner & Dagen 2022, 18). Without these kinds of initiatives, there is the danger that the identities of those in third space environments continue to be subsumed with 'non-academic' staff and/or' new professionals 'who support what is seen as 'management', perpetuating perceptions of an academic/non-academic divide (Krücken et al., 2013; Baltaru & Soysal, 2018; Stage & Aagaard, 2019; Stage, 2020; Croucher &

Woelert, 2021; Enders & Naidoo, 2022). Such divisions are reinforced by national data sets such as those of the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2022). However, more positively, Watermeyer et al. (2022, 16) suggest that "Work-based polarisation may… potentially decline, where spaces of ritualistic and performative interactions recede and give way to new spatio-relational dynamics arranged on trust, which help to dismantle role prejudices and ameliorate role recognition".

CONCLUSION

Although third space environments have existed *de facto* in the last 20 years or so, there has been increasing pressure from those working in them for recognition by their institutions, whether or not such individuals identify as fully fledged 'third space professionals', and whether or not they feel entirely comfortable in third space. This has gained momentum through the expansion of online environments, which in turn have been progressed by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a first step in the process of recognition, this paper has contextualised third space activity in Mode 3 knowledge theory, using the case example of a wildlife garden as a boundary object. This shows how collaborative activity between teachers, students and local community groups might be facilitated in practice, drawing on the informal institutional economy. The garden thereby not only fosters practical skills, craft and team work, but also contributes to the disciplinary curriculum and university employability agendas.

As recognition develops among local line managers responsible for those working in third space, this is likely to create pressure for new human resource processes and structures to be built around projects or activity streams, in parallel with those based on disciplinary, professional and management requirements. The paper therefore goes on to make practical suggestions as to how third space environments, and those working in them, might be better recognised and acknowledged within formal institutional systems. It suggests that adapting and developing structures relating to, for example, promotion and progression routes and career development, would enable a re-evaluation of work that does not fall entirely within the formal employment categories of 'academic' or 'professional'. Such measures would, in turn, give a higher profile to work that not only enables and enriches academic endeavour, but is critical to contemporary institutions, thereby rehabilitating all those working in third space.

NOTE

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