

Whitchurch, C. (2013). *Reconstructing identities in higher education: The rise of third space professionals* (Research Into Higher Education, Society for Research Into Higher Education). London, England: Routledge. 184 pp.

Review by Jeri L. Childers

Reconstructing Identities in Higher Education explores the roles and the identities of professionals in higher education operating in the *third space*, or on the boundaries of traditional areas of professional practices. The third space in our institutions is defined as areas like student life, learning support, and institutional research as well as the areas of research, business, and community partnerships. These roles are increasingly important as universities seek to differentiate themselves in how they create a valuable student experience; ensure student outcomes; and positively impact their local, regional, and global communities and economies through research and engagement.

Whitchurch's research has implications for our understanding of professionals in higher education and organizational structures in modern higher education institutions. She frames professional roles according to four "dispositions"—bounded professionals, cross-boundary professionals, unbounded professionals, and blended professionals—that can be distinguished by their degree of agency within their organizational structure and their affinity to their associated spaces, knowledges, relationships, and legitimacies. The resulting typology forms 16 unique identity categories that can help us understand the context, motivations, and operational behaviors of professionals in complex organizations.

The professionals in the third space are also characterized by their affinity to organizational identity, change, innovation, collaborative skills, and client-centered or partnership-centered approaches to the provision of value within and across the boundaries of organizations. Whitchurch evolves our ways of knowing professional identities from what might have been formerly described as "fringe specialisms" to a spectrum of identities that provide specialist contributions on topics ranging from governance, intellectual property, and commercialization to just-in-time academic support or donor or partner relationship management. By comparing the responses of third space professionals in a variety of case study institutions across Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Whitchurch found that these new roles and

identities are not necessarily recognized, rewarded, or leveraged appropriately or comparatively across organizations.

In Chapters 1 and 2, Whitchurch explores the third space context, the “insider and outsider voices” (p. 21), the significance of their “in-between spaces” (p. 21), and how these professionals view themselves as managers and leaders. In the study and analysis of the workspace, three types of space emerged: integrated, semi-autonomous, and independent space, each exemplifying various characteristics, individual responses, and institutional activity. The distinctions of the types of spaces illustrates various environments and individual responses to these environments. Interesting was her data analysis contrasting the types of workspace across the Australian, U.K., and U.S. contexts and her hypotheses for variations in individual and organizational behaviors. As I have recently transplanted myself from the United States to Australia, I can testify that these contrasts are evident, and her explanations seem plausible and worth more study.

Any analysis of individuals and work contexts and their related rewards, challenges, and opportunities must include an exploration of career trajectories and career development/management strategies. Whitchurch explores these in Chapter 3 and reveals a list of skills for success in the third space. In Chapter 4, Whitchurch turns to the paradoxes and dilemmas central to the role and identity of third space professionals.

Third space professionals operate in unique and often ambiguous and evolving organizational structures and contexts. In Chapter 5, Whitchurch outlines the connections between professionals and their organizations through the lens of structure and agency (Giddens, 1991). The ability to navigate these contexts with the intention of making a career in higher education was explored in a further typology distinguishing dedicated and portfolio professionals. Dedicated professionals are defined by their devotion to and continuity of careers in higher education; in contrast, portfolio professionals keep career options open and often move in and out of the higher education sector. Whitchurch explores organizational structures, rewards, incentives, professional development, and career paths of these professionals and their workspaces. Whitchurch touches briefly on the trend toward the increasing importance of the third space and the lack of positional power held by professionals in this space, which is relevant for many professionals, particularly in research intensive institutions in the United States and other countries. The changing organizational structures, varying degrees of role legitimization within and across institu-

tions, and trends like the corporatization of higher education will challenge professionals in the third space throughout their careers. Kezar (2004) describes these challenges and the corporatization of the management of higher education and its focus on increasing efficiencies, cost effectiveness, and the creation of unilateral change management strategies that lead to the decline of faculty and staff motivation.

Although there are reasons for optimism about the creative space called the third space, there are also associated challenges. Resistance to change is intense. Additionally, the market forces for change are dynamic and can be career changers for third space professionals. Change agents in the third space must be prepared to withstand the challenges facing higher education. In Australian universities, the federal government's tightening of controls over academic activities has simplified and standardized funding allocations almost to the point of leaving innovation in the third space on the sidelines. This corporatization overly focuses on key indicators (i.e., research publications and funding of postgraduate research degree completions) in a way that further marginalizes professionals in the third space by narrowing professional activity into discrete categories and moving to create a tiered system of either "research" or "teaching" institutions (Neumann & Guthrie, 2002). This bifurcation is antithetical to the vision of the university as a fully engaged partner in communities and regions, committed to solving local and global challenges, and runs counter to higher education's traditional public role of contributing to the public good (Kezar, 2004). Whitchurch does not fully address the dynamics of the larger context of higher education for third space professionals.

In Chapter 6, Whitchurch reflects on possible futures of careers and organizational structures in higher education and describes the third space as moving from being considered a territory for fringe groups to being seen as a space to be leveraged for its added value and contributions to experimentation and innovation. That is, it will be viewed as an institutional "yeast" required in the best recipes for the future in higher education.

Although the themes of the book are thoughtfully presented and have the potential to connect to the work of scholars to that of practitioners in the outreach and engagement fields, Whitchurch's framework would be enhanced by situating the concepts of dispositions, typologies, and related career and organizational dynamics within a contemporary view of the community-engaged institution, thus connecting to the work of Weerts and Sandmann (Sandmann & Weerts, 2008; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010) and other scholars exploring

the implications of boundary spanning, organizational dynamics and change, and leadership and organizational development in higher education.

The strength of this book is the robust nature of the framework presented and its links to both individual and organizational development at a time when our institutions are changing dramatically. Whitchurch offers a contrasting view on defining professionalism that has implications for the preparation of professionals in higher education and for building innovation and resilience in organizational structures.

The third space is a valuable space for institutional change agents and for nurturing institutional capacity for change. Professionals in the third space are cultural integrators and boundary spanners and bring great value to their networks, projects, and stakeholders. The third space is a test bed for institutional innovation, and institutions will need to attract, retain, reward, manage, and motivate these professionals. Creating intentional strategies for talent management will be important in the future, and more research is required to guide practice and strategy building. Are we preparing third space professionals and the next generation of leaders in higher education to withstand the challenges and to define the future of higher education?

The third space should be invested in and leveraged appropriately as a resource for responsiveness and resilience in our institutions. Understanding this space and maximizing its potential will be a crucial strategy for leaders in higher education. At a time when we are seeing an erosion of academic leadership within our institutions and rapid corporatization the academy, it will be even more important to invest in the third space and thus in a new vision of higher education that balances demands from market forces and the need for serving the public good. This will call for a new form of leadership and organizational structure; clear vision of the future of our institutions; and commitment to diverse student, staff, and faculty to be community-engaged and industry-engaged and for change agents and leaders in higher education to leverage the third space. I have navigated in the third space my entire career, never embracing the mantle of being on the “fringe” and constantly “surfing the waves” of change in institutions and higher education. The professionals that surrounded me were and are doing the important work of the institution. Many of those roles, best practices, and standards of our professionalizing area of the higher education are now considered the core work of the modern university. Whitchurch’s work adds to the growing body of knowledge

about the importance of boundary spanning and the impact that is created by the professionals in the third space.

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