

# EMPOWERING PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN THE THIRD SPACE: A CASE STUDY ON THE NEXUS PROGRAM AT UNSW

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**SUBTHEME:** Empowering Educators

To tackle grand challenges in tertiary education, universities rely on a diverse range of staff to address the many dimensions of educational design and implementation (Middlehurst, 2010). This work often occurs in the “Third Space” (Whitchurch, 2013), where education-focused, academic and professional staff, work together to innovate and improve student outcomes.

In late 2023 UNSW introduced the Nexus Program (UNSW, 2024), assembling a team of 24 education developers and over 40 academic staff, embedded across 7 Faculties. Nexus focuses on exceeding educational challenges through cross-disciplinary collaboration – by sharing methods and co-creating solutions to address local and university-wide goals. The Nexus program is shifting the paradigm in education innovation through scale and structure, and by emphasising partnership between professional and academic staff. Thus, we view Nexus as a Third Space initiative, and will present our experience as professional staff in the Faculty of Science Nexus Education Team.

Third space professional staff often feel a lack of belonging, self-efficacy or professional identity (Smith et al., 2021). By focusing on co-created projects with professional-academic collaboration in mind, Nexus has created a unique space for professional Third Space staff to assume greater leadership and refine their identity in the education development and innovation space. However, by creating and engaging in community building activities, we have identified areas that need further intervention, including addressing the ambiguity often associated with these roles and improving how professional staff are integrated and supported across the university.

In the Faculty of Science, the Nexus program has had substantial success in both cultivating the Third Space community and working collaboratively toward educational goals. We hope to explore with the ACSME community how we can build on our shared knowledge to benefit professional and academic staff working in Third Spaces across the Science Education community.

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