

Professional Learning in the Third Space – Supporting the supporters in Teaching and Learning Centres

Rebecca Shaw

University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia

Rebecca.Shaw@utas.edu.au

Natalie Brown

University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia

Natalie.Brown@utas.edu.au

Emily Marshall

University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia

Emily.Marshall@utas.edu.au

Sophie Lloyd

University of Tasmania, Tasmania, Australia

Sophie.Lloyd@utas.edu.au

Teaching and Learning centres are ubiquitous in Higher Education institutions. Although specific responsibilities vary (Palmer, Holt & Challis, 2010) these units are almost exclusively centralised in university structures (Gosling, 2008). In essence, they exist in a ‘third space’ (Whitchurch, 2008) between the faculties and the administration of the institution. Given this position, it is unsurprising that these units comprise both academic and professional staff. Whilst some attention has been given to the professional learning and networking needs of staff working in this area (e.g. Kahn, 2003), this has been predominantly focussed on those who work directly with staff in faculties. Little attention has been given to the specific needs of professional staff working in support roles. This poster presents the results of a small qualitative case study in a Teaching and Learning centre. Three professional staff who support the work of the centre have been interviewed to determine: the types of roles they are asked to undertake; the background knowledge and experience they draw upon to undertake these roles, and the type of professional learning they have found valuable. The results indicate that an understanding of teaching and learning practices (including online teaching); knowledge of the university’s strategic direction and; sector-wide trends in Higher Education are all important. Furthermore, the participants reported that much of their understanding in these areas comes from lived experience rather than formal professional learning. The findings suggest that professional staff in support roles would benefit from planned and targeted professional learning in teaching and learning.