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EDUCATION WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

CONTENTS

18. BRIDGING DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES THROUGH FACILITATED TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

Alison Jolley; Victor Fester; Nigel Robertson; Jennifer Champion; Stephanie Gibbons; and Angela McGaughan

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

Abstract

In times of increasing workload, even the most well-intentioned of staff may struggle to dedicate time to reflect on and develop their teaching practices. One accessible and important way to engage in this work is through conversations with colleagues. Prior work suggests that even informal conversations can help several dimensions of teaching and learning – enabling colleagues to better manage practicalities, improve their practice, be reassured about their approaches, vent about events, and transform their mindsets. We describe a structured model for facilitating collegial conversations that might not otherwise happen organically. Participants of the ‘Teaching Partnerships Initiative’ (n=14) were assembled into duos or trios with similar teaching and learning interests, but different academic disciplines. With support from an academic developer, participants worked together to articulate their goals and progress then reflect on both over four to six months. Projects included enhancing engagement of online learners, developing more inclusive assessments, and creating interactive activities. Here, we present reflections from three participants on the impact that this work has had on their teaching development, both immediately and approximately 18 months after the initiative.

Participants reported multiple benefits, including prompting changes in practice, affirming existing practice, receiving peer feedback from an ‘outside’ perspective, having accountability, and creating tangible teaching resources (activities and assessments). Alongside participant reflections, we present facilitator perspectives and contextualise our results within the wider academic development literature. We also discuss recommendations for future initiatives based on our findings, including intentionally partnering colleagues from different disciplines

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

Keywords

Academic development, educational development, faculty development, community of practice, teaching conversations, teaching discussions, professional development, interdisciplinary

Introduction

The benefits of higher education staff developing their teaching practice are widely appreciated, but the ways in which this may be achieved are rich and varied (e.g. Macdonald, 2002; Pleschová et al., 2021; Popovic & Smart, n.d.). One common element of many teaching and learning development contexts is talking about teaching with colleagues. However, higher education teaching is often perceived to be a solitary endeavour, and talking about one's own teaching can feel intimidating or even threatening (Marshall, 2008; Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). As a result, teaching staff often do not talk about teaching within their own discipline, let alone outside it. However, evidence shows that interdisciplinary teaching dialogue is beneficial for staff in a variety of contexts (Pleschová et al., 2021). It has even been suggested that interdisciplinarity may offer a sense of safety to freely discuss teaching (Boschman et al., 2021).

In this chapter, we consider an approach for bridging disciplinary boundaries via a structured development programme, called the 'Teaching Partnerships Initiative' (TPI).^[1] Teaching staff were grouped with one or two others from different disciplines to work together on

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

of the process. To investigate the impact of this programme, we ask the following questions:

- What impact do formal teaching conversations held through participation in an interdisciplinary teaching partnership have on participants' teaching?
- What aspects of an interdisciplinary teaching partnership do participants attribute its positive impacts to?

Literature Context

The importance of peer-to-peer teaching (and other types of) conversations is well highlighted by the 2021 special issue of the *International Journal for Academic Development (IJAD)* entitled 'Conversations on learning and teaching: Changing conceptions and practice' (Pleschová et al.). In that special issue, and more widely across the literature, higher education scholars have investigated the form and function of teaching conversations in several different settings. Teaching conversation settings may loosely be characterised by the level of formality that accompanies them. Though we acknowledge that these conversation types exist on a spectrum (Haigh, 2005), we have grouped them into categories below (formal, semi-formal, and informal) to help identify similarities and differences in the literature.

Formal teaching conversations

The most formal teaching conversations described in the literature highlight conditions where conversation occurs as a function of

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

versations about teaching (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009), and teaching conversations may be inhibited by structural barriers within an institution (McCune, 2018). Marshall (2008) details the experiences of ‘teaching circles’, where six to 12 teachers within one discipline met regularly to discuss teaching throughout a semester. Participation in these teaching circles was a stated requirement, and the groups were led by experienced teachers as opposed to academic developers. Although participants largely found the experience beneficial, the quality of the experience was dependent on how heavy-handed the facilitators were. Participants preferred a more relaxed approach and did not want to feel like their outputs were “busy work” (Marshall, 2008, p. 419). In their cross-institutional peer observations of teaching schemes, O’Keeffe et al. (2021) had teaching pairs observe one another, then academic developers facilitated reflective conversations about these observations and prior discussions. Participants valued being cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary, especially in how cross-disciplinary work allowed them to step away from content and focus on the underlying pedagogy. They also appreciated exchanging stories of their teaching practice, felt that honesty and openness needed to underpin every encounter, and highlighted the importance of revisiting their experience, which allowed for deep reflection.

McCormack and Kennelly (2011) describe another formal initiative – the ‘Talking about Teaching and Learning’ (TATAL) project through the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA). In each year, six to 16 teachers from different disciplines worked together on teaching portfolios and teaching philosophy statements, with the group’s work intentionally positioned around social reflection and guided by facilitators. Three key success factors

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

influencers of organisational culture, similar to Dorner and Belic (2021), who posited that centrally located (non-departmental) teaching conversations offer a critical path to institutional change. Such developments may even further reinforce the holding of these important teaching conversations, as other work has shown that when the organisational culture is perceived to support teaching conversations, individual teachers have larger networks and more substantial conversations (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009).

Semi-formal teaching conversations

Here we discuss studies that describe teaching conversations that are not completely informal but instead emerge because of existing structures or events. For example, Beauchamp et al. (2024) detailed the impact of conversations held during a large, multi-institutional project about teaching in higher education. They found that many significant informal teaching conversations occurred after a formal event, such as a project meeting. These conversations were underpinned by relationships, trust, and a common goal. In addition, the value of interdisciplinary conversations emerged as an important outcome, because they offered new lenses for teaching and learning. In another study, Thomson and Barrie (2021) noted that informal teaching conversations often emerged from encounters before or after formal meetings, recognising the department as a situating context for teaching conversations. Formal meetings were also identified as a source of teaching conversations by participants in McCune's (2018) study.

Informal teaching conversations

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

“everyday conversations” (p. 3). McCune (2018) found that the ease of access of such “day-to-day interactions” (p. 315) was essential for their development potential. Haigh (2005) encouraged the recognition of such conversations as a valid form of professional development, drawing from conversational theory. He noted that everyday conversations evoke reflection (sometimes through guided questioning), are open and non-threatening, and offer shared agency to participants. In their study of reflections on informal teaching conversations, Roxå and Mårtensson (2009) used the term “significant conversations” (p. 547). These conversations were held in private places, built on trust, and tended to concern specific teaching challenges. No matter which discipline teaching staff came from, they had fewer conversational partners outside their discipline or department on average.

Several more recent studies have explored the specific benefits of informal teaching conversations as well as the conditions that generate them. Through interviews with 12 academics at a single research-intensive university in Scotland, McCune (2018) found that informal teaching conversations spanned both technical and emotionally supportive content. Their participants reported having conversations with colleagues as well as family and friends. Some particularly appreciated interdisciplinary conversations, whereas others preferred conversations within the same discipline. Thomson and Trigwell (2018) analysed interviews with 24 mid-career academics from a variety of disciplines at a single research-intensive university in Australia. They found that conversation topics included: how to better manage practicalities, improve practice, be reassured about approaches, vent about events, and transform mindsets. Like Haigh’s (2005) highlighting of agency in everyday conversations, Thomson and Trigwell (2018) found

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

contexts of varying levels of support. Their participants sought out conversations with those with whom they shared common ground, with one key aspect being a shared interest in improving teaching. Conversations commonly happened when colleagues saw each other at events, supporting the broader utility of these events. Ultimately, the Thomson and Barrie (2021) model suggests that staff initiate and sustain conversations about teaching when there is a culmination of proximity, similarity, and/or camaraderie. However, the authors noted that “the usefulness of conversation may be vulnerable to the serendipitous nature of physical proximity” (p. 331), and the tendency for people to interact with others who are like themselves might limit the transformative nature of informal teaching conversations.

Study Context

Following our characterisation of teaching conversation types above, the TPI was a source of formal teaching conversations. Participants for the TPI were recruited through an open call in central and divisional newsletters at the University of Waikato. In a sense, our recruitment drew from the trust in our centre, similar to the interdisciplinary community of practice origins documented in Boschman et al. (2021). This chapter focuses on the experiences of three of the 14 teaching staff that participated in the TPI (authors JC, SG, AM). These three were experienced with teaching and learning professional development and came from three different disciplines: JC from Law, SG Philosophy, AM Biology. Like the other formal approaches described above, the TPI was guided by facilitators: three academic developers (authors AJ, VF, NR). The facilitators co-led the whole group meetings, and each part-

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

cussions between participants, facilitators formed partnerships of two or three participants with areas of interest and, based on previous findings (e.g. Beauchamp et al., 2024; Dorner & Belic, 2021; McCormack & Kennelly, 2011; McCune, 2018; O’Keeffe et al., 2021; Pleschová et al., 2021), from different disciplines. This ensured meeting the crucial component of bringing people together who might not always get the chance to have the informal conversations that happen from being near one another (Thomson & Barrie, 2021) – particularly important in our study as the University of Waikato is based on two campuses and has online and offshore programmes with overseas partners.

The TPI differs from similar formal programmes in that the participants defined what they worked on together, rather than this being set by the facilitators or administration. This is one way in which we aimed to avoid overly formalising everyday learning, as cautioned by Boud et al. (2009), and instead hoped to create more opportunities for authentic, participant-led conversation (Thomson & Barrie, 2021). Participants chose to focus on discussions and curriculum design relating to technology-enhanced learning, inclusive pedagogies, and assessment. Facilitators checked in with the partnerships regularly and helped with challenges and queries, but the exact level of facilitator involvement was determined by the participants: some had their facilitator present at every meeting, whereas others worked more independently and touched base at key junctures. The duration of each partnership was also determined by the participants, to a maximum of six months.

Methods



Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

Tisdell, 2015). This approach offered a chance to explore the impacts of the TPI with richness and nuance, and in a way that would allow participant narrative to shine through. Focusing on the stories of three participants provides depth to truly know what their experience was like and how it shaped their practice. In addition, none of the three participants were part of the same partnership, so their experiences represent three unique partnership contexts.

To explore the participant experience, we collected data from three sources: 1) written reflections immediately after completing the TPI; 2) panel presentation at Te Puna Aurei LearnFest conference (University of Waikato, 2023) approximately six months after the TPI; 3) interviews approximately 18 months after the TPI. Prior work has found that longer term reflection on teaching conversations offers deeper insights than immediately after the experience (O’Keeffe et al., 2021).

The written reflections and transcripts from the panel presentation and interviews were analysed collectively using thematic analysis, the aim of which is to identify patterns across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All data sources were coded by author AJ using NVivo 14, reducing larger blocks of text to key ideas. After the first pass, the codes were revisited for clarity and grouped together into initial themes that were discussed between authors AJ, VF, and NR. No substantive changes to the themes were made based on this discussion, but this process did help to generate facilitator perspectives and recommendations that are reflected in our findings below.

Trustworthiness

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

ive notes, which were revisited at various stages throughout the project for further investigation of the TPI impacts. Thus, the interpretations and recommendations in this study are not only informed by participant data, but by our evolving understanding of the project's strengths and weaknesses. The trustworthiness of this research is further supported by the collaboration between facilitators and participants as co-authors on this piece, which effectively offers a form of member checking. Finally, the existence of three data sources that include the three co-author participants at different times post-TPI participation provides an opportunity for triangulation.

Findings and Discussion

Here we present the themes identified in response to our two research questions, alongside illustrative quotes. The themes are grouped by research question, and each sub-heading represents a separate theme. The first section relates to our first research question, investigating what impact the TPI had on the participants' teaching. This is followed by a discussion of our second research question, which addressed the key ingredients that contributed to the success of the TPI.

Impact on teaching: conversations drive positive outcomes

Conversations ranged from specific to broad

Participants took varied approaches to their conversations held as part of the TPI. Some focused on creating a more teaching-oriented work...

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

defined output (e.g. Marshall, 2008; McCormack & Kennelly, 2011). For example, AM decided to create an assessment that honoured a key concept in te ao Māori (the Māori world and/or worldview):

What I really wanted to do was design a new assessment in my course, which is on principles of evolution. And I wanted that assessment to really respond to this concept of ako which is about a two-way dialogue between the student and the teacher. So, it steps away from that hierarchical view where the teacher is the leader and the students have to sit there and listen and be good students. It allows that sort of reciprocal teaching and learning between the teacher and the students, and amongst the students from each other.

In some cases, participants had a specific artefact in mind before beginning the TPI. Although this was helpful for individual motivation, the facilitators saw some partnerships struggle when there was no clear early discussion to negotiate what the partnership would be about. There was no need for partners to work on the same thing, but they did need to be on the same page about where the partnership would be headed for it to be effective.

Those who took the approach of creating an artefact(s) intentionally solicited feedback from their partner. This aspect was strongly appreciated by SG:

It was just incredibly helpful having someone else look through what I was doing in a careful way and try it out. And it's actually not that easy to get people to go through your teaching materials in that kind of careful way.

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

teaching, resources, and challenges. SG highlights why that element felt so unique:

So, a lot of talks that you go to, it's very one way. It's like, here's what *I'm* doing, listen to what *I'm* doing. Or *you* go to someone's talk, and *your* job is to listen to what they're doing. This was much more doing both of those at once.

For some partnerships, these broader conversations took a particularly central role: “our project was an information sharing group that allowed us to discuss different online tools and how they could relate to the work that we were doing” (JC). This partnership took an intentional, reflective approach to their conversational structure:

I think giving ourselves that permission that we didn't have to have a more concrete outcome ... It was okay to just make updates to our own teaching on the strength of the conversations we were having and the information we were learning. (JC)

It was not only what was discussed, but also the conversational approach, that caused shifts in JC's mindset and practice:

I realised through the partnership that going away and learning about something feels so much more worthwhile when you share what you've learned with someone else, so I wanted to introduce more interactivity and create an environment where students could share their learning and learn from each other, as well as me. I started to think of ways to do that not just through using new technologies (the focus of the partnership), but through how I presented the information to students. I started to incorporate more online activities: forum questions. quizzes. short videos.

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

The content of these conversations echo McCune's (2018) study of informal conversations, where conversations included technical teaching content, as well as Thomson and Trigwell's (2018) finding that informal teaching conversations addressed practicalities and the improvement of practice.

Positive experience, positive impact

All participants in the study reported that they appreciated participating in the TPI and that their work positively impacted their students. The enthusiasm of the participants is summed up well by the following quote: "if this initiative gets offered again, just jump in and do it, because there's nothing quite like talking to someone else about your teaching, because you get excited with each other" (SG). It is especially encouraging that participants saw positive impacts on their students, as reflected here: "certainly the student feedback for the courses has been really positive, and there was a lot more engagement from students than I have experienced in some previous years" (JC). These findings are consistent with several other studies that have found effectiveness in teaching conversations (see Pleschová et al., 2021 for an overview).

Conversations were already the outcome, but more specific benefits emerged

In understanding the impacts of the TPI, it has been important to acknowledge the central role that conversations played in all the partnerships. This is exemplified by JC: "for our group it was, the conversation was the real outcome being part of a conversation about teaching

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

Participants identified several other specific benefits from the TPI. One described conversations with their partners affirming their existing practice, similar to what has been found in prior work (Thomson & Trigwell, 2018). Another indicated intending to disseminate their work at the conference associated with this volume, Te Puna Aurei LearnFest (University of Waikato, 2023), and we know of other TPI participants who presented at an earlier iteration of the same conference (University of Waikato, 2022). Participants also appreciated the chance to make new connections, particularly with people from other parts of the university that they would not otherwise have interacted with: “this is a really helpful way to make contacts across the university, and to learn about teaching practices in different disciplines” (JC).

Finally, participants highlighted how conversations in the TPI fostered transformative thinking about their teaching, suggesting that they were having the kinds of “significant conversations” that Roxå & Mårtensson (2009) referred to. Thomson and Trigwell (2018) also found that informal conversations transformed the mindsets of participants. For SG, this shifted the way she saw a specific aspect of her teaching: “I’ve paid a lot more attention to making sure that students understand why we’re doing it. What is it that you are supposed to achieve.” For JC, the transformation in her thinking also included increased confidence with her ability to evaluate teaching resources:

So, I was sort of interested [in teaching technologies] but cautious. But then I think the advantage of the partnership is it gave me confidence to think, okay, there are lots of tools out there. I can learn about them. I can learn how to evaluate them. I’ve got some criteria now for thinking about how I could use them in my teaching. And that’s what I think kept my desire to learn more. to seek

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

Conversations inspired further teaching development

Perhaps one of the most important measures of the impact of the TPI is what continued development it inspired. Both participants who worked on specific teaching artefacts described further changes that they were going to make based on the initial implementation and indicated ongoing evolution of their artefacts even in the 18-month interviews. This might speak to the importance of revisiting their TPI experience through this research (as O’Keeffe et al., 2021 described), but ultimately it further highlights the participants’ strengths as self-motivated, reflective practitioners. JC and SG described how they had applied the knowledge gained through the TPI conversations to other courses they taught. AM expanded her TPI project and reflection to gain formal credit towards a course in the Postgraduate Certificate of Tertiary Teaching and Learning. SG described how participation in the formal conversations that occurred as part of the TPI inspired her to engage in more structured teaching development opportunities for the first time: “Maybe it did help me get used to the idea that I could do something quite structured, which I hadn’t done before.”

All participants indicated a desire for continued teaching conversations, whether one-on-one with fellow participants or as part of a larger, organised initiative. For example: “I think that it would be valuable to continue to have teams or groups of people that have an interest in doing this to discuss ideas together and how they worked and how they didn’t” (AM). This suggests the TPI offers sustainability beyond its formal end date, particularly with ongoing attention to providing a basic structure which enables such conversations (e.g. McCune, 2018;

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

terest in teaching development. This is one of the conditions that Thomson and Barrie (2021) saw in their investigation of enablers for informal conversations. SG described this:

I think it probably does help knowing that someone's done something [like the TPI], in the sense that you know that they're keen on finding out about what you're doing and sharing what they're doing, because not everybody actually wants to.

JC and SG now sit together on a School-level teaching committee (led by SG) and have been involved in facilitating teaching conversations across their multi-disciplinary School of Law, Politics, and Philosophy. Not only are they continuing conversations, but they are actively leading new conversations in their area of the university. This supports earlier work which has suggested that teaching conversation groups have the power to create positive institutional cultures (Dorner & Belic, 2021; McCormack & Kennelly, 2011). It also further highlights the sustainability and ripple effect of programmes like the TPI that centre teaching conversations.

Conditions for effective teaching partnerships: hitting the sweet spot

Successful participants shared key qualities

Our analysis indicated that there were mindset elements that contributed to the success of these participants. These characteristics included being student-centred, self-motivated, reflective practitioners. This is evidenced by the following quote: “having the objective to

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

getting better” (AM). For JC, whose partnership was more conversationally driven, it was also important to have an openness to different aspects to work on through the TPI. From the facilitator perspective, we observed that successful participants were those that took ownership of the partnership and what they wanted to gain from it.

As facilitators, we wonder about how we might better identify partnerships that would benefit from being more focussed on the conversations or how this mindset emerged. Could we have more clearly put this forward to the participants as a valid approach, or is it more effective for such rich discussions to emerge organically as participants with the key qualities described above begin to interact and get to know each other? Following Thomson and Barrie’s (2021) model for informal conversations, perhaps the necessary ingredients of proximity, similarity and/or camaraderie are all that is needed.

Timing and goals

There were a few aspects of the TPI that were just right for what the participants needed. AM and SG described being able to line up what they developed with an upcoming trimester in which they were teaching. The TPI allowed them a structured way to engage in something they were already planning on doing and ensure that it got done. AM and SG also discussed the benefits of being able to apply their learning directly to practice. AM compared this with her experiences in other types of teaching and learning professional development:

I’ve done quite a lot quite a lot of pedagogical things over the years. And I think that oftentimes you’re not necessarily putting it into practice and reflecting on it straight away. You might be

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

works really perfectly, and I understand it as it's being taught to me. But as soon as I go try to apply it myself, it's not really cutting it anymore.

Finally, JC and SG highlighted the importance of bringing people together with common goals and mindsets. As an optional initiative, it is reasonably safe to assume that everyone who participated in the TPI wanted to develop their teaching. In that sense, everyone already shared a key commonality that has been shown to help facilitate teaching conversations (Thomson & Barrie, 2021). In addition, the facilitators collected information about everyone's interest areas so that we could match people with common goals. JC described this succinctly as: "just getting together and pairing up people that you know have these like-minded objectives to do better at teaching and explore new approaches." This finding aligns with McCormack & Kennelly's (2011) finding that participants attributed their engagement to a sense of shared purpose.

Just the right amount of structure

Many of the comments made referred to the need for a formal approach to bring people together, but not one that is overly structured or imposing. This affirms the cautions Thomson and Barrie (2021) made about relying on proximity for our teaching conversations. For JC, the format of the TPI created a unique benefit that was less likely to happen in a casual conversation:

So, actually talking about the specifics of what you're doing and what they may be doing and learning from each other in that way. That's possibly not the sort of conversation you would have casu

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

SG described how the TPI approach helped encourage her to work on a specific area of her teaching: “I found that the structure of the partnership and having someone else organise it and give me a little push was particularly useful”. For all the participants, the benefits of this structure extended to a sense of accountability. For SG, this accountability included both the teaching artefact creation and the associated reflection:

The fact that I was meeting with someone else gave me a timetable and that kind of structure that I would never have kept to if I wasn't having those regular meetings with another person. And it meant that I had to reflect on the intention of the whole thing in a way that I might just have fumbled through. But because I had to explain to somebody else what it was that I was doing, I had to give it that structure, and that was really helpful.

Despite differing facilitator involvement in their partnerships, both JC and AM mentioned how facilitator input contributed to the effectiveness of the TPI. Facilitator presence is documented in other approaches to formal teaching conversations (e.g. Marshall, 2008; McCormack & Kennelly, 2011; O’Keeffe et al., 2021). Crucially, we seem to have struck a balance where participants could decide the level of the facilitator’s involvement as well as their objectives, avoiding the issues with facilitator over-involvement described by Marshall (2008). However, JC did report initially struggling with the lack of clear output in her partnership:

Although we found it really helpful and delivered what we ultimately decided we wanted to do, [the conversational approach] still can be quite a hard approach to maintain, because it can seem

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

allenges for us was maintaining that momentum sort of initially thinking, what is it that we want to achieve here? How do we want to do it? And so that we weren't just kind of meeting to have a conversation that didn't go anywhere.

In hindsight, this is somewhere that we feel the facilitation could have been more directive towards encouraging a defined output or recognising and affirming the value of a conversational outcome earlier in the process. In addition, it may have been helpful to simply prepare the participants about the potential for initial uncertainty so that they had a clearer idea of what to expect.

Outside eyes bring new insights

Perhaps one of the strongest themes that came through was the significance of interdisciplinary interaction in the TPI. The benefits of interdisciplinarity were primarily identified as: being exposed to new teaching contexts, having to explain things that are usually taken for granted, and getting feedback that offers a fresh perspective. For example: "it reinforced for me the value of having somebody who is an outsider, and who you don't get feedback from very often, and who is looking at your teaching resources when they're used to a different way of teaching" (SG). JC and SG also felt it was important to engage with other disciplines because it gave them more insight into the experiences of their students. For SG, it helped remind her that many of her students were coming from other disciplines. For JC, it gave her an appreciation for what her students might be experiencing when taking electives in other disciplines. Broadly, the importance of interdisciplinarity in teaching conversations aligns with several other studies (e.g.

Previous: Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development

Next: Enhancing student retention through staff professional development

the importance of trust or similar relational qualities (e.g. Beauchamp et al., 2024; McCormack & Kennelly, 2011; O’Keeffe et al., 2021). It may be that we could be more explicit to participants about developing these qualities, or perhaps we did not ask the right questions in our data collection to uncover these aspects. Regardless, it is encouraging that participants did not report a lack of these qualities in their partnerships.

Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single university. In addition, the depth afforded to three participants means that we cannot be sure how reflective their experiences are of the TPI cohort as a whole. Future research could explore participant narratives more broadly. Further, the act of choosing to participate in continued reflection and dissemination of the TPI experiences might select for those with positive experiences. However, the advantage of our approach is that it allowed us to take an in-depth, strengths-based look at the TPI, with a view to applying successful aspects elsewhere. Future work could investigate how transferable these characteristics are to other contexts and whether subsequent participant outcomes replicate ours.

Implications and Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the impacts of an intentionally designed, formal approach to interdisciplinary teaching conversations and the

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

ators, bring together people from different disciplines who have shared areas of interest, and adopt a clear but not overly formal structure. A critical aspect of our employed structure was participant agency and facilitator willingness to be flexible around different group approaches and experiences. As facilitators, we focussed not on giving answers to a problem, but on asking guiding questions that preserve participant autonomy and help them to develop and reflect on their teaching. Our findings suggest that it is beneficial to time initiatives like this to coincide with the lead-up to a regularly scheduled teaching period and to be explicit about this potential benefit when recruiting participants.

In the future, we recommend identifying earlier in an initiative that it is valid and effective for the conversations themselves to be the outcomes. We also wonder if it might be helpful to more directly ask participants if they already have a specific project in mind, to help both participants and facilitators make more informed decisions about partnership formation. Although the TPI clearly benefited from an open and flexible approach, providing a discrete list of choices for project focus might help participants find more clarity in their outcomes. We were encouraged by JC and SG facilitating teaching conversations in their School, offering insight into the TPI's sustainability and ability to generate culture change. This might suggest that it could be beneficial in the longer term to form partnerships with people in different disciplines but in the same broader area of the university (e.g. School or Division). However, the success of this approach might depend on how diverse such areas are and what their cultures are like.

Our findings suggest that there are rich benefits to be had from interdisciplinary teaching conversations and, although some structure is

Previous: [Equitable and Quality Teaching through Professional Development](#)

Next: [Enhancing student retention through staff professional development](#)

others to implement similar approaches and explore participant experiences in those contexts.

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About the authors

Alison Jolley

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

Victor Fester

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

Nigel Robertson

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

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UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

Stephanie Gibbons

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

Angela McGaughran

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO | TE WHARE WĀNANGA O WAIKATO

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