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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

When curators become creators: A community of practice approach to vibe coding for teacher designers

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This study examines how participation in a community of practice (CoP) supports primary school educators in becoming designers of teaching and learning through vibe coding. Drawing on an integrated theoretical framework of teaching as design science, end-user development, and CoP theory, this qualitative case study traces the journeys of the Visionary Learning Collective (VLC), a community that began with five primary school teachers in South Korea with little to no prior knowledge of computer science. Analysis of focus group interviews, observational data, and participant artefacts revealed three themes: growth as a designer, growth as a developer, and growth through community. Findings suggest that vibe coding may have functioned as a threshold-like experience that reorients teacher identity from curator to creator, that the CoP provided the affective infrastructure necessary for this transition, and that participation generated cascading circles of legitimate peripheral participation extending beyond the original community.

Keywords: Vibe coding, community of practice, teaching as design science, end-user development

Background

In the current environment of rapidly evolving educational technology, teachers can find themselves caught in a whirlwind of emerging tools—each promising to transform teaching and learning, yet arriving faster than any practitioner can meaningfully evaluate, adopt, or integrate into their classroom practice (Napitupulu et al., 2024; Negrín-Medina et al., 2022). Vibe coding—a term coined by Andrej Karpathy—the practice of using natural-language prompts to instruct generative AI to write functional code, is emerging as a potential approach for these educators. It has the potential to support educators who are lost in the multitude of pre-made digital tools and software by developing customised learning tools that suit their unique learners (Shin et al., 2026). Vibe coding can open the window for educators to develop a customised software application that facilitates learning and provides data on the learning process, with only basic computer knowledge.

Yet technology adoption need not be a solitary struggle. The community of practice (CoP) concept offers a theoretical basis for understanding how educators can collectively navigate a rapidly evolving technological landscape through shared purpose, mutual engagement, and collective knowledge building (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Drawing on an integrated framework of teaching as design science, end-user development, and the CoP theory, this research examines how participation in a CoP enables and sustains educators in becoming designers of the teaching and learning process through vibe coding. This question is explored through the journeys of the Visionary Learning Collective (VLC), a CoP formed around a shared interest in exploring vibe coding as a pedagogical tool, initially comprising five primary school teachers in South Korea with little to no knowledge of computer science and expanded to eight over the course of the study.

Theoretical framework for this study

The three theoretical strands examined in this research—teaching as design science, CoP theory, and end-user development—align and complement one another, providing a coherent and robust framework for examining how teachers can become designers of their own digital learning tools in this fast-paced era of technological change.

Laurillard (2012) addresses the tension between complex reality and education settings, proposing that teaching be approached as a design science—a discipline that aims to continually improve its practice in a

principled way, building on the knowledge and work of others. Central to this proposition is the recognition that technology transforms both what learners learn and how they learn it. This transformation is not incidental but foundational: if technology reshapes the condition of learning, teachers cannot engage with it superficially. What is required instead is the capacity to design with and through technology, deliberately harnessing its affordances in service of specific learner needs and pedagogical goals.

Laurillard's design orientation brings teachers directly into the domain of end-user development. Vibe coding emerges as a powerful response to this imperative—enabling educators to articulate their design intent in natural language while generative AI translates that intent into functional code, dissolving the technical barriers that have historically excluded non-programmers from software development (Barricelli et al., 2019; Nardi, 1993). For educators, this represents a transformative opportunity: not to become programmers, but to become designers whose pedagogical knowledge—rather than technical skill—drives the creation of digital learning tools.

Yet vibe coding alone is insufficient. Engaging with an unfamiliar and rapidly evolving technology requires more than individual willingness. CoP theory provides the theoretical basis for understanding how a community of design science can be constructed in the practitioner field of education (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Through mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire, a CoP creates the conditions of trust, shared purpose, and collective knowledge that enable educators who are novices in technology to engage with advanced tools effectively and sustainably (Wenger, 1998). A CoP thus serves as the social infrastructure that makes vibe coding not merely accessible but transformative, functioning as a natural complement to Laurillard's vision of teaching as a collaborative design science.

Together, these three frameworks form an integrated theoretical lens for this study, as illustrated in Figure 1. Teaching as design science informs the why, what, and how of designing teaching and learning. CoP theory provides the theoretical grounding for constructing a design science community within the practitioner field of education. End-user development offers conceptual insight into vibe coding as a powerful vehicle for teacher-led design of learning tools. As Figure 1 illustrates, it is at the intersection of all three that the central phenomenon of this study emerges: teachers becoming designers of their own digital pedagogical tools through vibe coding, within and enabled by a community of practice.

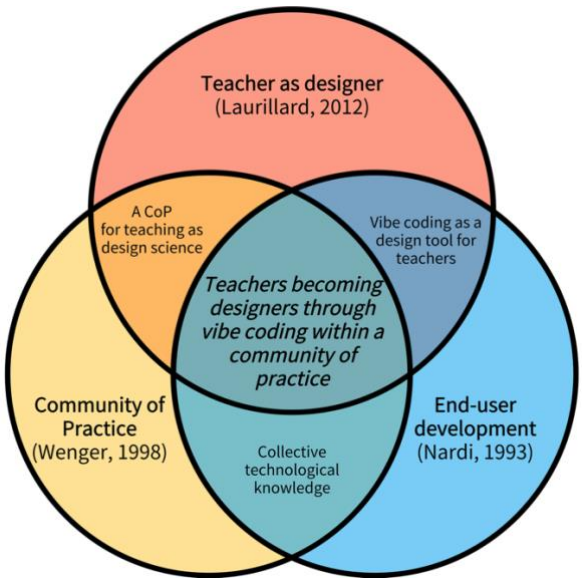


Figure 1. A theoretical framework of teachers becoming designers through vibe coding within a community of practice (high-resolution version available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33442987)

The literature review reveals that vibe coding holds significant potential as a tool for pedagogical design in educational contexts. It also highlights that professional communities oriented around technological knowledge play a crucial role in supporting educator adoption of emerging technologies. However, research

on vibe coding within educational CoPs remains limited, reflecting the novelty of the practice itself. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how a CoP supports educators in becoming designers of teaching and learning through vibe coding. This study, therefore, asks: How does participation in a community of practice support educators in becoming designers of teaching and learning through vibe coding?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the VLC as a case of community-based vibe coding practice among primary school educators. A case study is appropriate when the aim is to develop an in-depth understanding of a real-world phenomenon within its natural context (Yin, 2014) and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Tisdell et al., 2025). The VLC constitutes a well-defined case—a specific community, a specific practice, and a specific period of time—making it particularly suited to this design. As a single instrumental case study (Yin, 2014), the VLC is examined not as an end in itself but as a means of developing a broader theoretical understanding of how CoPs enable educators to adopt vibe coding as a design practice. While the findings are necessarily context-specific, the thick description provided throughout this study supports transferability—enabling readers to judge the applicability of the findings to their own contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Eight primary school teachers participated in the VLC across two rounds: five founding members joined in round one, and three additional members joined by peer invitation in round two. Table 1 provides an overview of participants, including their teaching experience, the round in which they joined, and who invited them. Ethical considerations were addressed through pseudonyms and informed consent prior to data collection.

Table 1
VLC participant overview

Pseudonym	Sue	Brenda	Brad	Matt	Katrina	Joshua	Joe	Ashley
Years teaching	16	7	12	12	10	3	11	2
Round joined	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Invited by						Brad	Matt	Katrina

Note. Frequency of participation varied according to individual schedules and availability. All participants engaged across regular meetings, daily conversations, and artefact development. Sessions were scheduled on Sunday evenings by consensus among members; when members were unable to attend, a meeting summary was shared to ensure continuity.

The VLC operated across two rounds of vibe coding sessions between January and June 2026. The first round ran from January to March 2026, and the second from April to June 2026. Each round comprised three modes of engagement: regular meetings, casual meetings, and daily conversations. Regular meetings were held fortnightly for two hours per session, providing structured opportunities for collective learning and hands-on practice. Casual meetings were convened as needed to address emerging questions or challenges, while daily conversations were maintained through a group messenger to sustain momentum and peer support between sessions.

The first round focused on building foundational familiarity with vibe coding—exploring what vibe coding is, why it matters for educators, and developing simple applications through hands-on experimentation. The primary goal of this round was not technical mastery but psychological accessibility: enabling educators to engage with an unfamiliar technology without feeling overwhelmed or lost. By the end of the first round, participants had developed sufficient confidence to share their experiences with their professional networks, with each teacher inviting colleagues from their respective schools and expanding the VLC from five to eight members. Session agendas for round one are available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33454711.
The second round shifted from exploration to application. Meeting frequency increased to weekly to accommodate the more intensive development work participants were undertaking, and sessions became increasingly peer-led as teachers brought their works in progress to the group for collective troubleshooting and feedback. Drawing on the foundational knowledge and community confidence built in the first round, participants worked to develop functional digital tools for classroom use.

Data were gathered through four complementary sources to form a triangulated evidence base (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, a focus group interview was conducted at the end of round two to elicit collective reflection on participants' VLC experience and their development as teacher designers—a method particularly suited to capturing retrospective sense-making within a community context (Tisdell et al., 2025). Second, participant-generated artefacts—including digital applications, teaching frameworks, and documentation—were collected as tangible evidence of design growth. Third, the first author attended and facilitated every session across both rounds as a participant observer, maintaining field notes throughout to document community dynamics and emerging patterns as they occurred naturally. Fourth, meeting logs comprising transcripts of recorded sessions provided a verifiable longitudinal record of knowledge building across the full six months of the study.

Qualitative findings

The thematic analysis, guided by the study's integrated theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), initially yielded four theoretical themes which, through iterative analysis, consolidated into three: growth as a designer, growth as a developer, and growth through community. Before presenting these themes, an example of a digital application collaboratively developed by participants is shared to ground the findings in the community's concrete design outcomes.

Design outcomes

One of the collaborative outcomes of the VLC was Qraft, a web application developed collectively by community members. Powered by the Anthropic API, Qraft autogenerates multiple-choice quizzes based on learning content uploaded by the teacher through a spreadsheet interface. The application adapts dynamically to student performance, generating follow-up questions in consecutive quiz rounds based on each student's previous results.

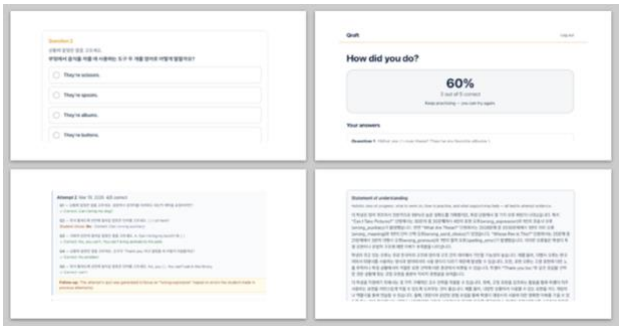


Figure 2. Autogenerated questions application—Qraft (high-resolution version available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33443008)

Qraft also includes a teacher-facing dashboard that provides granular insight into student performance. As illustrated in Figure 2, teachers can view individual student results, identify which questions were answered incorrectly, and track the follow-up questions subsequently generated for each student (bottom-left). At the holistic level, the application aggregates results across quizzes, offering a data-informed overview of the student's collective understanding (bottom-right). This dual view reflects the broader finding that vibe coding enabled teachers not only to create customised learning tools but to generate previously inaccessible learning data that informed their ongoing pedagogical decisions. The following themes trace the journey through which this became possible.

Growth as a designer

Vibe coding shifted how teachers perceived the boundaries of what they could design for their students. Rather than accepting the limitations of existing tools and teaching contexts, participants began to identify

pedagogical problems as solvable through creation. This shift was illustrated among participants, each of whom encountered a different design problem that pre-made tools could not address.

> I don't usually plan conversational speaking tasks for my grade three students, but mostly stick to vocabulary and simple back and forth speaking drills…but while I was working on this, it got me thinking maybe I could use AI to make an English conversation partner for young students. (Sue)

Brenda's shift came not from a gap in tools but from a newly visible layer of data generated through her students' interaction with AI.

> When I realised that there was so much data right in front of me that I hadn't been noticing, it made me want to start analysing it. As I began to recognise that a vast amount of learning data was being generated between the student and the AI, it really changed how I saw it. (Brenda)

What Brenda experienced was a reorientation in how she read her own classroom—data that had always been there became meaningful and actionable, opening up teaching possibilities that participants had long wanted to pursue but could not act on with existing tools.

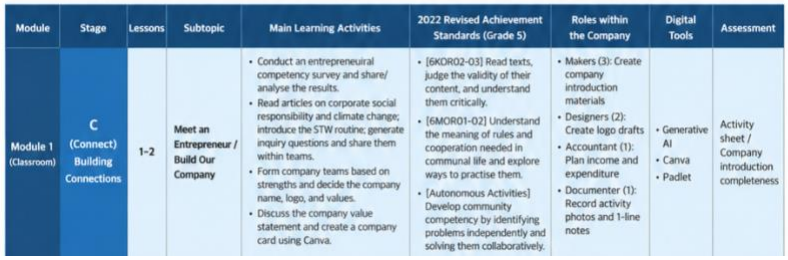
Katrina, for instance, had repeatedly tried to bring entrepreneurship into her classroom.

> I've always wanted to adopt entrepreneurship…but never could adapt that to my teaching context. Now, I'm building a website where students can promote their businesses. (Katrina)

Matt similarly found a way to act on a longstanding interest in the climate crisis.

> Students and I were already taking steps to reduce our carbon footprints, and now I'm collecting that data by having them record it in an application I developed. (Matt)

These examples reflect a pattern across the VLC that was particularly significant in the Korean educational context, where a competency-based national curriculum typically constrains teacher design to learning tasks. Vibe coding expanded that design space considerably, enabling teachers to create tools that collected and documented learning data, supported curriculum-adjacent projects, and addressed pedagogical problems that pre-made tools had never addressed. Importantly, the applications teachers built also generated data that fed back into their design process. Katrina used data accumulated through her application to develop her own entrepreneurship teaching framework—C.E.O. +A (Connect, Enterprise, Outreach, and AI)—documenting her progress across four modules during her first semester. Figure 3 captures her mid-point documentation of this framework.



Module	Stage	Lessons	Subtopic	Main Learning Activities	2022 Revised Achievement Standards (Grade 5)	Roles within the Company	Digital Tools	Assessment
Module 1 (Classroom)	C (Connect) Building Connections	1-2	Meet an Entrepreneur / Build Our Company	• Conduct an entrepreneuiral competency survey and share/ analyse the results. • Read articles on corporate social responsibility and climate change; introduce the STW routine; generate inquiry questions and share them within teams. • Form company teams based on strengths and decide the company name, logo, and values. • Discuss the company value statement and create a company card using Canva.	• [6KOR02-03] Read texts, judge the validity of their content, and understand them critically. • [6MOR01-02] Understand the meaning of rules and cooperation needed in communal life and explore ways to practise them. • [Autonomous Activities] Develop community competency by identifying problems independently and solving them collaboratively.	• Makers (3): Create company introduction materials • Designers (2): Create logo drafts • Accountant (1): Plan income and expenditure • Documenter (1): Record activity photos and 1-line notes	• Generative AI • Canva • Padlet	Activity sheet / Company introduction completeness

Figure 3. C.E.O. +A: English translations of Katrina's documentation of her teaching framework for entrepreneurship (high-resolution version available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.33443053)

Together, Sue, Brenda, Katrina, and Matt illustrate the core finding of this theme: vibe coding supported teachers in adopting a designer orientation toward their practice—identifying problems through their pedagogical knowledge and responding by building solutions. As Sue reflected, "the ability to approach that pedagogically is more important than vibe coding itself"—a sentiment that captures precisely what this orientation means in practice. This shift, from selecting tools designed by others to creating tools tailored to

their own students, reflects Laurillard's (2012) vision of teaching as design science, in which teachers engage with technology not superficially but in a principled, problem-driven way. For the VLC, vibe coding was the catalyst that made this vision practically achievable, dissolving the technical barriers that had historically kept non-programmers from acting on their pedagogical instincts by creating software (Barricelli et al., 2019).

Growth as a developer

The most significant development within this theme was the emergence of the teacher as a developer orientation—a qualitative shift in professional identity that extended beyond the role of curating learning materials to that of creator. This transition represents a fundamental reorientation in how teachers understand their relationship with technology, moving from the position of end-user, selecting tools designed by others, to conceiving and building tools tailored to their students' specific needs. Brad captures this shift clearly.

> The biggest thing was realising that I could actually create something myself that would help my students' learning. Of course, what I make might not be as complete as existing programs, but I started to feel that I could make something much more tailored to my own class. (Brad)

What Brad describes is not simply dissatisfaction with existing tools—it is the moment of recognising that an alternative is possible. Yet this shift in perspective alone is insufficient; what enabled it to translate into action was the gradual accumulation of small successful experiences within the community. Matt describes how this progression unfolded.

> Through those initial discussions and trying things out together, those small successful experiences built up. That made me think, 'I can do this myself,' and then it naturally led to thinking, 'Maybe I can try making this as well,' and then, 'I could probably make that too.' That's how it gradually developed. (Matt)

Ashley also echoes this pattern of incremental growth.

> Since we did it gradually in small steps, the pressure wasn't very high even though I had just started vibe coding. And now it doesn't take nearly as much time as it used to. (Ashley)

Brenda's reflection on her own development process illustrates the invisible labour behind what appeared to be modest progress.

> My application seems the same as last meeting, but if you see the record, I fixed it more than 100 times. Took days to reconstruct from scratch (Brenda).

These patterns were consistent with the first author's own observations across meeting sessions. The sessions were deliberately designed to introduce vibe coding in incremental steps, creating space for teachers to develop tools that suited their specific classroom needs. What emerged, however, extended well beyond what the first author had initially anticipated, diversifying in scope and ambition across the community. In addition, technology stewardship—a concept from the CoP literature referring to members within a community who support others in navigating complex technologies (Wenger et al., 2009)—served as a safety net for teachers initially intimidated by unfamiliar technology and anxious about deploying untested tools in their classrooms. Together, these two mechanisms of incremental success and technology stewardship created the conditions for the teachers to move from hesitation to confidence to independence.

This growing confidence also reframed how teachers thought about ownership of their tools. Rather than adapting what others had built, participants began to value creating something distinctly their own. Katrina articulates this directly.

> I used to modify what other people made, but it took a lot of time anyway. Sometimes, just as long as I make it by myself. So it was good to create my own program that fits me and my students' needs. It also feels safe not having to worry about service stops or changes. (Katrina)

Katrina's comment points beyond convenience—it reflects a sense of professional autonomy and sustainability that pre-made tools could not offer. This developer orientation, approaching pedagogical problems not by searching for existing solutions but by building tailored ones, reflects the core sensibility of end-user development applied within a teaching-as-design-science framework. Critically, this growth did not happen in isolation—it was enabled at every stage by the community's structure and support, a point fully developed in the following theme.

Growth through community

While teachers identified vibe coding as a powerful tool for developing teaching and learning materials, they also identified limitations of the traditional lecture-based approaches to technology learning. Joshua described how this played out in practice.

> Usually, we bring a laptop and learn how to use new technologies. However, the time we actually spend practising is short. In addition, it is usually a one-time thing, so I kind of don't open my laptop again after the lecture. (Joshua)

Matt similarly reflected on the gap between learning and adoption.

> Although I learned a lot in the lecture, what I actually adopted is only a handful. What I can adopt is something that fits my context by accident or something very easy. Otherwise, I feel good that I learned something, but I'm unlikely to actually use it. (Matt)

Both observations point to a fundamental limitation of traditional professional development models, where technology is typically introduced through lecture-based instruction that prioritises learning the tool over applying it in context. As Gess-Newsome et al. (2003) note, this approach resembles an electronic replication of the lecture—familiar in format but limited in its power to produce the kind of deep, transferable professional knowledge that effective technology integration requires. This pattern was consistent with the first author's observations across VLC sessions, in which teachers repeatedly reported feeling underprepared by prior training when they encountered real classroom contexts. What they found more effective was troubleshooting and learning within a community—adapting technology to their specific needs rather than simply learning how a particular tool worked in isolation.

This is precisely what the VLC provided. Katrina highlighted the value of interaction and community support as a condition for broader adoption.

> I used to give up on learning or adopting new technology when I tried to do it myself and ran into trouble. But now we have a supportive community that I can come back to. I improved during these meetings by listening to new ideas. (Katrina)

Joe similarly emphasised the importance of having someone alongside to guide the process.

> When you suggest an idea, there's usually some sense of what is feasible and what isn't, but beginners like me don't really know where that line is. So we end up trying different things, and when something doesn't work, it would be really helpful to have someone alongside us who can guide us and suggest what might work better. (Joe)

The first author also observed that the community's consistency was central to its supportive function. As the VLC comprised teachers from different schools with varying schedules, attendance was not always possible for every member. However, maintaining regular meetings regardless of participation numbers created a reliable space that teachers knew they could return to. Sue captured this sense of dependable presence.

> Showing up to every meeting was one of my challenges. But I know there are people working on this, so I tried to join even though I'm late. (Sue)

Beyond structured support, the VLC also created space for real-time peer feedback on work in progress. Katrina described this as one of the most valuable aspects of the community.

> I really liked it when we brought what we'd done so far, threw it in the middle, and asked for feedback. I could get real-time user feedback and ideas to improve my application. (Katrina)

The mode of learning—bringing unfinished work into a shared space for collective critique and improvement—reflects the joint enterprise and shared repertoire that Wenger (1998) identifies as central to how CoPs generate and sustain knowledge. Significantly, this knowledge sharing was not limited to more experienced members. Teachers with no prior coding experience, such as Joshua, began sharing technical insights they had independently encountered and resolved—contributing to the community's collective repertoire in ways that reinforced their growing identity as developers.

As teachers grew in confidence, the community's influence began to extend outward. VLC members from different schools across regions began sharing their applications with colleagues at their own schools, and several opened demo classes to broader groups of teachers. Brenda articulated plans to seed a new community of her own.

> I think it would be really helpful to have people to work with—so I'm planning to bring together teachers who want to take part next year and actually work together, debug things, share ideas, and review each other's work. (Brenda)

This outward expansion was not limited to local networks. Consistent with this pattern, the first author observed that Brad independently initiated contact with a school in Malaysia to collaborate on a climate crisis project using the application he had developed, with plans to visit and work directly with students there. These examples illustrate what Lave and Wenger (1991) described as legitimate peripheral participation—the process by which newcomers move from periphery toward the centre of a community as their competence and confidence grow. In the VLC, this process operated in two directions simultaneously: teachers who began as peripheral participants moved toward the centre of their own community and, in doing so, became the centres of new communities forming around them.

The analysis of this theme reveals that the community functioned as both scaffold and seed. Inwardly, it created the conditions—structured support, peer troubleshooting, psychological safety, and collective feedback—that made vibe coding accessible to teachers who would not have engaged with it on their own. Outwardly, it propagated: teachers who had themselves been supported became supporters, forming new circles of learning and extending the reach of the practice beyond the original VLC.

The findings illustrate three interconnected movements: teachers growing as designers who identified pedagogical problems as opportunities for creation; adopting a developer orientation to build tailored solutions; and doing so within a community that provided the affective infrastructure for this growth and naturally expanded outward into new circles of practice.

Discussion

This study suggests that vibe coding may have functioned as a threshold-like experience (Meyer & Land, 2003) that fundamentally reorients teacher professional identity—shifting teachers from curators who select and adapt tools designed by others, to creators who design and build tools shaped by their own pedagogical knowledge. This transition extends Laurillard's (2012) vision of teaching as design science beyond the curation of existing digital resources toward the authorship of original pedagogical tools, reconceptualising teacher agency in relation to technology in ways that existing end-user development literature has not fully accounted for (Barricelli et al., 2019). Crucially, this shift was not primarily technical—it was identity-driven, enabled by the accumulation of small successful experiences and the psychological safety provided by technology stewardship within the community (Edmondson, 1999; Wenger et al., 2009).

Vibe coding also expanded what teachers perceived as designable. Operating within a competency-based national curriculum that typically constrains teacher design to learning tasks alone, VLC participants found that vibe coding opened new design territories—curriculum-adjacent projects, data-generating tools, and customised learning environments that pre-made tools could not provide. The applications they built generated interaction logs and learning data that had previously been invisible, enabling a form of reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983) that fed back into their design practice and moved them toward the evidence-based, iterative improvement of teaching that Laurillard (2012) argues is central to teaching as a design science.

Perhaps most significantly, the VLC's influence extended well beyond its original membership. As participants developed confidence and competence, they became a source of support for colleagues in their own schools, opened their practice to wider audiences, and initiated international collaborations. This bidirectional pattern—teachers moving from the periphery toward the centre of the VLC while simultaneously seeding new communities around themselves—extends Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation. Rather than describing only the trajectory of newcomers into an existing community, the VLC data suggests a further stage: that full members become the centre of new communities, generating cascading circles of practice with significant implications for how technology-focused professional learning communities are designed and sustained.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that participation in a CoP supports educators in becoming designers of teaching and learning through vibe coding in three interconnected ways: by providing the psychological safety necessary to attempt an unfamiliar technology, by sustaining incremental confidence through technology stewardship, and by creating a shared space for collective knowledge-building that individual professional development cannot replicate. For the VLC teachers, vibe coding may have served as a threshold-like experience that dissolved the technical barriers that have historically separated non-programmers from software creation, while the community provided the conditions necessary to cross that threshold. Together, these conditions enabled a fundamental reorientation of teacher identity—from curator to creator—with implications for the design of technology-focused professional learning communities in an era of rapidly evolving generative AI tools. The mechanisms identified are not culturally specific and may transfer across diverse educational contexts. Future research should examine how these findings transfer across different curriculum contexts and educational systems beyond this study. Design-based research in particular offers a productive methodological pathway for deepening this integrated framework into practical design principles—translating the theoretical insights of this study into actionable guidance for educators, community facilitators, and professional development designers.

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