ASCILITE 2026

The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

From doing the work to shaping the work: Reflections from an ASCILITE community mentoring journey on leadership and influence

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The pressing pace of change in higher education has created a greater demand for professionals who can influence practice, spearhead innovation and navigate complexity beyond the confines of their formal roles. Although mentoring is widely recognised as a valuable form of professional development (Zachary, 2012), community-based mentoring models that combine individual development with collective reflection and shared learning have received less attention. This poster reflects on a six-month journey undertaken through the ASCILITE Community Mentoring Program, involving three mentees and two mentors from different institutions and professional contexts. Each participant entered the program with different goals that included leading organisational change, advancing curriculum and assessment innovation, and strengthening leadership presence and communication. Yet the group shared a common aspiration: to strengthen their capability to influence practice, people and institutional direction, moving beyond technical expertise.

Drawing on mentoring conversations, reflective activities, peer discussion and individual project work, the poster presents each participant's personal development story alongside a synthesis of the common themes identified through iterative reflection and discussion. The reflective approach provided insights into how these professionals experienced professional growth through structured reflection, dialogue, challenge and sense-making within a supportive community, rather than through the acquisition of new knowledge (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Schön, 1983; Wenger, 1998). A key outcome of the program is the proposed development of a simple working model of professional influence (Doing – Understanding – Leading – Shaping). This model will surface how experience can be transformed through reflection and conversation into insight, leading to action and ultimately greater influence within professional contexts. Across the three journeys, participants were prompted to consider their shift in thinking from doing to understanding, from understanding to leading, and from leading to shaping practice and change.

This poster argues that community mentoring can provide more than just career guidance and motivation. It creates a space for professional identity formation, critical reflection, and the development of leadership capability by facilitating connections with others who are facing similar challenges. In a complex and continually changing sector, these reflections highlight the importance of conversation, community and reflective practice as the basis for professional growth and influence.

Keywords: mentoring, professional development, leadership, reflective practice, higher education, communities of practice, professional identity

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