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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Co-creating pedagogy through an institution wide Community of Practice on learning and teaching technologies

Danielle Battersby, Alyce Greenwood, Daniel Steen

RMIT University

The Australian higher education sector is operating in a period of rapid technological and social change. As a result, educators are navigating increasing complexities in their teaching, including complexities related to assuring learning, providing quality learning experiences and responding with appropriate pedagogical practices. As a way of navigating some of this complexity, RMIT University has developed an institution-wide Community of Practice (CoP) focused on learning and teaching technologies (L&T Tech). The CoP brings together academic and professional staff from across vocational and higher education sectors, to collaboratively drive continuous improvement in high-quality, technology enhanced learning and teaching. Established to support teaching continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CoP has evolved into a collaborative space where participants collectively explore, critique and influence technology related pedagogical practices.

This practice report describes the design, implementation and early outcomes of the CoP, highlighting how a pedagogy-first approach, that is informed by social learning, has enabled the co-creation of institutional teaching practices. Through peer-led showcases, collaborative problem-solving, themed discussions, hackathons, and cross-functional engagement, the CoP fosters reflective practice. Early anecdotal outcomes indicate strengthened cross-institutional networks, increased confidence in technology-enhanced and pedagogically informed teaching, and the emergence of collaborative initiatives that extend beyond individual CoP sessions. The paper concludes by reflecting on the role of institution-wide communities of practice as career communities that enable collective capability development and educational innovation.

Keywords: community of practice, co-creation, educational technology, reflective practice, professional learning, higher education, practice report

Introduction

The Australian higher education sector is operating in a period of rapid technological and social change. The emergence and proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) technologies is changing labour markets, with this having flow-on effects to industries and disciplines (Jobs and Skills Australia, 2025), as well as giving rise to increasing complexities in learning assurance and assessment design (Corbin et al., 2025). Moreover, the internet and networked technologies have influenced education and pedagogical delivery, particularly through the adoption of Learning Management Systems (McLean & Wheaton, 2024). Additionally, the disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically through learning and teaching moving mostly to online delivery, has been perceived as accelerating the digital transformation of learning and teaching in universities (Scholkmann et al., 2024). Compounding this, universities face growing vulnerabilities in their digital infrastructure, as Learning Management Systems and network-dependent platforms become critical to teaching and learning delivery, yet remain susceptible to outages, cybersecurity threats, and vendor-driven disruptions that can rapidly undermine continuity of education (Sankey, 2024). With these complexity factors mounting, higher education is operating within what Jarni and Gurr (2024) describe as a period of significant disruption and transformation, where technological change, evolving student expectations and institutional pressures are reshaping teaching and learning. For many contexts, this means educators are navigating increasing complexities in their teaching, including to assure learning, provide quality learning experiences and respond with appropriate pedagogical practices. In this operating context, educators require opportunities not only to learn about emerging technologies, but also to critically examine how these technologies support quality pedagogical practices.

At RMIT University, a large dual-sector institution operating across Australia, Vietnam and Europe, this challenge is amplified by diverse teaching contexts, disciplines and learner cohorts, and by the differing regulatory, pedagogical and organisational environments in which vocational and higher-education staff operate. While professional development opportunities exist, many focus on specific tools, systems or compliance requirements, with fewer opportunities for educators to collaboratively reflect on practice, share experiences and shape approaches to technology related to learning and teaching.

To this end, adopting a social learning approach informed by Communities of Practice theory (Wenger, 1998), RMIT University established an institution-wide L&T Tech CoP. While initially developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to support rapid digital teaching transition to mostly online learning, the CoP has evolved into a collaborative environment where academics, educators, learning designers, educational technologists and professional staff co-create pedagogical practice. Central to this evolution has been a deliberate philosophical positioning that pedagogy is the primary driver of CoP guided explorations of technologies related to learning and teaching. Accordingly, the CoP adopts a "pedagogy first, technology second" approach to ensure that discussions are framed around specific learning and teaching challenges, rather than assuming technological solutions are always the answer.

This paper reports on the design, implementation and early outcomes of the CoP, reflecting on its role not merely as a career community, but as a collaborative and sustainable model for professional learning related to educational technologies. It embodies best practice features supporting reflective practice, professional growth, and collective institutional pedagogical innovation, with the ultimate purpose of enhancing the student learning experience at the heart of its design and purpose.

Conceptual frame: Co-creation and communities of practice

CoPs are broadly understood as groups of individuals who share a common concern, interest, or professional domain, and who deepen their collective knowledge through sustained interaction and shared experience (Wenger, 1998). Rather than locating expertise within formal institutional structures alone, this framework positions learning as an inherently social process, one that emerges through participation, reflection, and collaborative practice over time. Central to Wenger's conceptualisation is the idea that knowledge is not simply transferred but actively constructed through community engagement, as practitioners make meaning together through their shared work.

There is emergent evidence that CoPs can support this kind of knowledge construction within the Australian higher education context. Fleischner et al. (2026) found that education-focused academics participating in a CoP reported tangible benefits including improved teaching practice through peer exchange, a strengthened sense of professional identity, and reduced feelings of professional isolation, suggesting that community participation can validate and sustain academic expertise in ways formal structures often do not. Internationally, McCune (2021) similarly found that informal development of academic teaching practice plays a meaningful role in higher education contexts, with academics actively drawing on peer networks and shared environments to sustain and grow their practice. CoP methodology is therefore well positioned as both a conceptual frame and a practical mechanism for enabling this kind of informal, socially embedded professional learning for higher education contexts. Within this context, co-creation is understood as the collective development of pedagogical knowledge, resources and practices through collaboration between CoP members. Unlike top-down professional development models, the CoP operates through shared ownership, where members contribute ideas, challenges, successes and failures that inform collective learning.

This approach aligns with emerging understandings of reflective practice and professional identity development in higher education. McCune (2021) highlights that academic identities are shaped not only through formal development pathways but also through participation in communities that value teaching and learning, with the environments academics inhabit playing a meaningful role in sustaining their professional sense of self. Where institutional contexts may not always affirm a teaching-centred identity, CoPs can offer an alternative site of recognition and belonging. A distinct strength of this CoP lies in its informality; beyond structured sessions, participants engage through Teams discussions, resource sharing, and peer networking, connecting academics, learning designers, and technology specialists in ways formal structures rarely facilitate.

This is intentional: the architecture is anchored in authenticity and designed to democratise the educator voice, allowing shared learning to emerge organically from genuine professional relationships rather than prescribed channels. The CoP thus provides a space to test ideas, seek feedback, and learn from peers across disciplinary and organisational boundaries, enacting precisely the kind of informal, values-aligned community McCune points to as significant in shaping academic teaching identity.

Design: Setting up the institution wide CoP

The L&T Tech CoP was designed to support staff across RMIT University, a dual-sector environment, including vocational education teachers, higher education academics, learning designers, educational technologists and professional staff. Membership is open to all staff, and participation is voluntary. The community is facilitated through a partnership between educational technology and learning and teaching specialists. Rather than operating through a formal governance structure, planning is undertaken collaboratively by a small cross-functional leadership team who work closely with community members to identify themes, speakers and emerging priorities.

The CoP meets monthly for one hour through Microsoft Teams, providing a consistent and accessible format for staff across campuses and international locations. Sessions are recorded with resources available after the monthly meetings. Recent participation has exceeded 640 members, reflecting broad institutional interest in technology related to learning and teaching. A significant design shift occurred in 2026 with the introduction of themed monthly sessions, presenter expressions of interest, and enhanced communication strategies. Rather than relying on centrally determined content or institutional updates, sessions are increasingly informed by community feedback gathered through surveys, discussions and ongoing engagement. This has enabled the CoP to respond more directly to educator needs and emerging pedagogical challenges.

Mishra's (2019) TPACK framework has been used to frame the pedagogical design of CoP meetings, labelling the different types of knowledge educators require when integrating technology into learning and teaching. The framework has been shown to benefit reflective practice in the Australian university context (Greenwood, 2023). One of the CoP's learning and teaching co-chairs ran an initial session on TPACK and has since used the framework to help shape sessions with presenters and facilitate the chairing of meetings, enabling sessions to be designed with practical teaching practice in mind. Mishra's (2019) updated version also emphasises contextual knowledge, which has provided useful framing for an institutional CoP. This framing facilitates careful consideration of factors such as the learning management system, available educational technologies, taught disciplines and their signature pedagogies, strategic aspirations, policy context, and student cohorts.

Practice in action: How the CoP works

The CoP is designed around active participation rather than information transmission. Institutional updates are increasingly disseminated through asynchronous channels, freeing live sessions for discussion, reflection and collaborative problem solving. Typical activities include peer-led demonstrations of teaching innovations, lightning talks, college showcase sessions highlighting discipline-specific practice, collaborative discussions on shared pedagogical challenges, and design challenges. Presenters are encouraged to share work in progress rather than polished outcomes alone, creating space for collective reflection and dialogue. This has fostered an iterative learning culture, with presenters returning to later sessions to discuss how community feedback has shaped refinements to their practice illustrating the community's ongoing role in professional growth.

Several practices have emerged as particularly valuable. The introduction of short, focused eight-minute presentations has increased engagement and reduced participant attrition during sessions. Themed meetings provide greater clarity regarding session purpose and enable participants to attend discussions most relevant to their interests. Presenter expressions of interest have broadened participation and increased diversity in showcased practices.

Operational challenges

Despite its successes, the CoP faces ongoing challenges. Maintaining engagement amidst competing workload demands is an ongoing consideration; while participation is voluntary, staff often face pressures limiting consistent engagement.

Balancing technology-focused content with pedagogical discussion also requires careful facilitation. Participants often seek information on emerging tools, but a pedagogy-first focus remains essential to keeping the content relevant. Key lessons include starting with educator needs rather than technology requirements, enabling shared ownership through presenter expressions of interest, maintaining consistent scheduling, and offering multiple avenues for participation beyond live events.

Outcomes and early impacts

While formal evaluation has not been undertaken, as co-chairs we have observed several indicators of positive outcomes for participants and the institution.

In our observation, the CoP has strengthened cross-institutional networks. College showcase sessions and cross-functional presentations appear to have reduced disciplinary and organisational silos, enabling staff to learn from practices across the university. We have noted participants frequently establishing ongoing relationships following presentations, extending collaboration beyond the CoP itself.

What makes this CoP unique, in our view, is its direct alignment with organisational processes for continuous improvement and innovation. In 2025, we invited all members to a Hackathon focused on member and expert-sourced teaching, learning, and technology provocations, generating over six provocations, 27 ideas, and five refined concepts. Unlike many hackathons that result in shelved outcomes, ours funnels directly into our Digital Learning Environments Innovation Engine, a structured pipeline resourced to rapidly prototype, test, and validate or invalidate ideas, empowering RMIT University to quickly evaluate suggested improvements to the educator and student experience (Malcolm et al., 2026). These insights are cyclical, feeding back into the community to distribute validated institutional knowledge.

The community's growth since 2024 offers evidence of expanding reach and demand for flexible, customised professional learning. Membership has more than doubled, from 267 members at the end of 2024 to 453 in 2025, reaching 639 as of July 2026. Engagement shows a similar trajectory, with recorded attendees growing from 510 in 2024 to 702 in 2025, and 602 as of July 2026. |There was also growth in the number of presenters, from 64 in 2024 to 69 in 2025, and 39 as of July 2026. It is our view as co-chairs that this data reflects a community increasingly willing to contribute knowledge, not just consume it.

This trajectory reflects a deepening institutional culture of shared practice around exploring the potential of technology to enhance learning and teaching. We have sought to create a supportive environment where successes and challenges can be openly discussed, with the aim of lowering the threshold for experimentation and encouraging participants to try new approaches, seek peer advice, and return to share what they have learned. Recognising that sustainable and consistent time for staff workload remains a barrier to participation, session recordings are made available to support those unable to attend live, helping to broaden access to the community's activities. We interpret the sustained growth in membership and engagement as an indication that educators and teaching support staff are finding value in this space.

As co-chairs, we consider the CoP to have become an important professional learning space that may also contribute to participants' broader career growth. Participants range from sessional staff and early-career academics to experienced educators and professional staff. In our observation, community participation creates opportunities to present practice, build professional networks, and develop expertise; experiences which over time may support individual career trajectories. For early-career academics in particular, presenting within the CoP can offer a low-stakes space to build confidence and test ideas ahead of conference presentations or publications, therefore, potentially contributing to early-career academics' emerging scholarship of learning and teaching contributions.

We have also observed the community supporting reflective practice and resilience, with discussions normalising uncertainty and acknowledging the complexities of teaching and educational innovation. Rather than presenting technology adoption as straightforward, participants share practical insights, unexpected outcomes and strategies for improvement which, in our view, foster a culture of collective learning that builds capacity to navigate the evolving demands of technology-enhanced teaching.

Concluding reflections

The CoP continues to evolve in response to community needs and institutional priorities. Future directions include expanding opportunities for student participation, strengthening links with formal recognition and professional development pathways, and undertaking more systematic evaluation of community impact. Ethics approval associated with broader educational innovation initiatives may also provide opportunities to formally investigate the relationship between CoP participation, professional learning and institutional change.

As higher education continues to navigate uncertainty and transformation, institution-wide CoPs offer an important mechanism for supporting reflective practice, collective capability development and pedagogical innovation. The L&T Tech CoP demonstrates how a pedagogy-first, co-created approach can foster meaningful professional learning while building the relationships and networks necessary to sustain innovation and continuous improvement of pedagogical practices over time.

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