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The Future is Connection:

Collaboration, Creativity and Compassion in a Digital Society

Human-centred design in an online community of practice for teacher professional learning

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In our fast-evolving digital learning environments where social media has incredibly shaped online communities of practice (CoPs), human connection and relationships are often neglected. Studies have identified recurring challenges in these online CoPs such as member inactivity due to discomfort in openly expressing their views in public (Abidin et al, 2021), superficial or off-topic discussion (Bergviken Rensfeldt et al., 2018), and cultural friction within heterogeneous groups (Manzoor & Atiq, 2026). However, existing research rarely explores how to maximise human connection in online CoPs for teacher professional development. This paper addresses this gap by asking: (1) How can human-centred design principles inform the development of an online CoP on social media? and (2) How do these principles support human connection for teacher professional learning?

Grounded in Giacomin's (2014) Human-Centred Design (HCD) Pyramid, the study investigates how a "closed" (private) Facebook group was designed as an online CoP for teacher professional learning in English writing skills. This group aims to support 30 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, following a face-to-face workshop on how to improve English writing skills. A qualitative case study methodology was adopted to capture the relational nature of human connection within the online CoP.

Data included 30 reflective papers, analytics of online activities in the Facebook group, and four semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis indicated participants' positive feedback on their professional learning experience in the CoP. Although many self-identified as lurkers and contributed minimally to CoP activities, they valued diverse opportunities for human connection via online cohort-based meetups, virtual coffee chats, private direct Facebook messages, and shared Google Drives used to build resource libraries. Participants' responses further identified several key design elements to foster human connection, aligned with each layer of the HCD Pyramid, including activities, tasks, and functions (*What*), interactivity (*When*), communication and discourse (*How*), and meaning (*Why*). These findings contribute to extending the HCD Pyramid to the context of online CoPs and offer practical implications for designing teacher professional learning communities on Facebook and other digital platforms. This paper argues that human-centred design is critical to fostering meaningful connection and relationships in social media-based CoPs for professional learning.

Keywords: Human-centred design, community of practice, teacher professional learning, human connection, Facebook use in education

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