

# Peer-Supported Teaching Practice: Embodying a Relational, Practice-Led Approach to Enhancing Educator Wellbeing and Practice

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## Abstract

Peer review of teaching (PRT) programs have the capacity to address the practice imperative of evaluating and enhancing teaching practice, and the ethical imperative of safeguarding and promoting educator wellbeing, which is intrinsically linked to student wellbeing. This article outlines the practice-led development of an institution-wide, embedded and contextualised PRT program, which we conceptualise as Peer-supported Teaching Practice (PTP). In contrast to traditional PRT, our working framework is built from the ground up and situates the educator as the driver of a relational peer-review process informed by psychological wellbeing literature. By incorporating peer reflection as a core function of the model, we seek to ensure all staff can access growth-fostering peer relationships regardless of their role, discipline or existing social capital. Rather than position academic developers as the facilitators of these conversations, we argue that peers are best equipped to support each other to explore, interrogate and mutually develop the embodied 'self-in-practice'.

**Keywords:** Peer reflection; wellbeing; belonging; Peer Review of Teaching.

## Introduction

This conceptual article outlines the development of an institution-wide, embedded and contextualised peer enhancement of teaching practice program, which we conceptualise as Peer-supported Teaching Practice (PTP). The program was initiated by an academic capability building team located in a university's central teaching and learning division. We argue that PTP is a way of working rather than a discrete program to engage with periodically. Just as we now strive to always be evidence-informed in our practice, so should we be peer-supported through embedded and contextually appropriate observation, review and reflection. Critically, our approach draws upon psychological wellbeing literature to illustrate how PTP can contribute towards enhancing educator wellbeing.

Contemporary higher education increasingly requires academics to be nimble, simultaneously engaging with emerging and complex practices (Smith et al., 2022). At the same time, they are expected to demonstrate effective teaching as prescribed by institutional and national standards (Patfield et al., 2022). While universities have a vested interest in measuring teaching effectiveness at an institutional level for accountability (Blackmore, 2009), they have an obligation to provide opportunities for individual educators to develop self-efficacy through professional learning and recognition initiatives that improve not only student success but also wellbeing. For example, Blackman (2020) contends that the provision of quality feedback and supportive educators are important for both student success and wellbeing. Evaluation of teaching practice serves both quality assurance and developmental functions (Patfield et al., 2022). As a formative assessment, it draws on a range of inputs such as self-reflection, student feedback and achievement, and feedback from colleagues and peers (Chalmers, 2007). There are



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currently two dominant methods of assessing teacher effectiveness: formal student evaluation of teaching surveys (SETs) and peer review of teaching (PRT). However, Chalmers and Hunt (2016) argue that the evaluation of university teaching should be undertaken in a holistic, reflective cycle incorporating a range of evidence which, in turn, promotes better outcomes for students, the curriculum and educators' careers.

While it is acknowledged that SETs are often discriminatory (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2021), they remain the most commonly used metric of teaching quality for promotions and institutional quality assurance. Despite their prominence, Heffernan (2023) found that 59% of academics surveyed reported abusive, offensive or derogatory comments in SETs, with women and those from marginalised groups most impacted. Furthermore, these comments negatively impacted educators' mental health in the weeks leading up to and following the survey and were perceived to delay career progression (Heffernan, 2023).

PRT, "a process where teaching academics provide feedback on one another's practice to improve quality of teaching" (Johnston et al., 2020, p. 2), has the capacity to provide educators with a more supportive appraisal of their teaching practice. Within the higher education literature, PRT has been conceptualised as both a strategy to improve, and as an indicative measure of, teaching quality (Johnston et al., 2020). Used alongside SETs, professional learning activities like PRT can address the practice imperative of evaluating and enhancing individual teaching practice, and the ethical imperative of safeguarding and promoting educator wellbeing (Gunson et al., 2016). Given that student and staff wellbeing are entwined (Abery & Gunson, 2016; Brewster et al., 2022), and that excessive workloads in academia can lead to occupational burnout (Springer et al., 2023), institutions must provide teaching environments that are conducive to 'care-full' practice (Khoo et al., 2022) and can foster educator wellbeing.

Within the scientific literature, wellbeing is predominately divided into two distinct but related conceptualisations of eudemonia (i.e., functioning well and/or experiencing personal fulfilment) and hedonia (i.e., feeling well and happy). Whilst much of the early research tended to focus on the hedonic elements of subjective wellbeing, researchers have been critical of this at times fleeting and state-based conceptualisation (Ryff, 1989). Psychological wellbeing comprises several dimensions including: (a) personal growth (e.g., is open to new experience to develop); (b) self-acceptance (e.g., has a positive attitude about the self); (c) purpose in life (e.g., has a sense of direction and life goals); (d) autonomy (e.g., an independent and self-determined person); (e) positive relations with others (e.g., fosters trusting relationships), and; (f) environmental mastery (e.g., seizes opportunities in the immediate environment) (Ryff, 2013). Importantly, researchers have established that psychological wellbeing can influence an individual's career pursuits and their vocational identity. For example, those higher in personal growth and purpose in life had a strong commitment to their careers (Ryff, 2013). It is therefore plausible that psychological wellbeing is related to educator development. For instance, an educator who expresses a desire for feedback on their teaching practice to improve overall quality is likely demonstrating the psychological wellbeing dimension of personal growth (i.e., desire for self-improvement). These conceptual and empirical connections subsequently provided the foundation for the present article to integrate psychological wellbeing into a unique model of PRT.

Academic developers are cultural practitioners who operate across disciplines and levels of a university, navigating the friction between the institution's demands and local disciplinary practice contexts (Lisewski, 2021). This work is necessarily broad and hard to define, incorporating a range of processes, identities, and experiences (Le May Sheffield & Serbati, 2022). Nonetheless, the editors of the *International Journal for Academic Development* (IJAD, 2022) attempted to capture this breadth in their working definition:

Academic development (also known as educational, faculty, or staff development), aims to enhance the practice, theory, creativity and/or quality of teaching and learning communities in higher or post-secondary education.

Our work as academic developers is oriented towards individuals, groups, or organizations and can take the form of both deliberate actions and informal initiatives, including those in partnership with academic colleagues and students. We focus on supporting the professional development of academics and/or senior administrators at any stage of their careers and in relation to such key dimensions of their academic roles as teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership. This work can inform context-specific institutional and organizational development, and thereby effect positive change. (IJAD, 2022, Working definition of academic development section, para 1-2)

Further, the authors of this article bring a particular philosophical perspective and relational approach to our academic development work. From our roles within a central teaching and learning unit, we create institution-wide professional learning programs that strategically increase capacity through relational capability building activities. These programs may be delivered centrally through our Teaching and Learning Academy or locally through faculty learning and teaching support units. We define our roles as 'capability builders'. Moreover, the authors come to this work from unique positions as educators and

practitioners within the social work, psychology, and visual arts disciplines. Our disciplines share a grounding in reflexive practice, which strongly influences this work. However, our disciplines diverge in our approaches to inquiry. We openly and enthusiastically take a transdisciplinary approach to our work which this project and article reflect.

### **Peer Review of Teaching**

Pioneering research on PRT identified three distinct categories of models: (a) the evaluation model, (b) the development model, and (c) the collaborative model (Gosling, 2002, 2014). The evaluation model is typically underpinned by an institutional policy that may mandate the involvement of teaching staff in the peer review program (Zeng, 2020). Under this model, organisational and contextual factors such as having senior staff conduct PRT, providing training at the faculty or departmental level (Johnston et al., 2020) and institute climate and leadership culture (Esterhazy et al., 2021) are thought to contribute to the efficacy of PRT. However, these factors are also thought to increase the risk of alienating and reducing cooperation (Zeng, 2020), which likely accounts for the mixed findings regarding the success of evaluative PRT models.

The development model aims to facilitate professional development in teaching by having experienced teaching staff or educational developers lead the process (Zeng, 2020), with the provision of experienced reviewer feedback deemed essential to such processes' success (Johnston et al., 2020). However, a criticism of this approach is the hierarchical imbalance in expertise between the reviewer and teacher, which often undermines the peer review process (Zeng, 2020). The collaborative model addresses some of these concerns by empowering teaching staff to consider the review of their practice on an as-needs basis. Seemingly at the heart of this approach are organic conversations between teaching peers that provide the basis for professional development (e.g., Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Thomson et al., 2015; Thomson & Trigwell, 2018). Within the available research, several benefits appear associated with this model, including greater reflection on teaching practice and improved confidence (Esterhazy et al., 2021), which are thought to enable teaching staff to develop ownership over their practice (Zeng, 2020). However, the collaborative model has been criticised for potentially instilling a sense of complacency among teaching staff (Zeng, 2020) and may lead to excessive self-congratulatory practices (Esterhazy et al., 2021), perhaps due to the known absences of institutional policy and power imbalances evident in other models (Zeng, 2020).

### ***Existing Models of PRT***

It is clear from the reviewed research on PRT that there are numerous benefits associated with these activities. At the individual level, teachers report experiencing greater support and increased confidence following PRT (Zeng, 2020), whilst at the faculty/department level, observed benefits included enhanced student learning outcomes (Johnston et al., 2022) and the fostering of teaching communities (Esterhazy et al., 2021). Yet these formalised programs also have limitations (e.g., time and financial resources). Often, PRT is portrayed as a top-down initiative from senior management that evokes a sense of compliance rather than engagement (Byrne et al., 2010). When designed in this manner, these programs offer little in the way of professional development to those involved, may lack rigour, invoke complacency among participants (Gosling, 2002), and may perpetuate the audit culture in higher education (e.g., Darbyshire, 2008; in Byrne et al., 2010). This perspective appears exacerbated by time restrictions imposed by the institution; indeed, much of the research suggests that PRT was a once-off initiative with little long-term application in mind (Esterhazy et al., 2021). Further criticisms include the limited exploration of peer review's impact on teaching expertise (i.e., the acquisition of new knowledge and/or skills, or enhanced judgement leading to improved performance) (Zeng, 2020). In short, there appears to be a disproportional focus on examining the process compared to the outcome, with findings also failing to demonstrate whether PRT actually results in changes to student achievement (Zeng, 2020). Most relevant to this article, however, is the absence of individual wellbeing in any of the reviewed models; at no point has consideration been given to whether PRT affects educator wellbeing.

Following a recent systematic review of PRT that yielded mixed findings regarding the rationale for peer review, Zeng (2020) proposed restructuring peer review along a continuum of developmental and evaluative approaches, from approaches that are self-initiated and owned by the teacher with the view to enhance their professional self to those that are university-driven with institutionally-determined reviewers to inform quality assurance and/or identify underperformance. This continuum serves to contextualise the PRT approaches taken and clarify the intended outcomes for the individual and institution. Intersecting the developmental-evaluative continuum are new initiatives, such as collegial faculty development, which serve a formative function in the development of teaching practice (Esterhazy et al., 2021).

Critical to moving beyond traditional approaches to PRT is acknowledging the narrow scope of practice that predominated much of the peer observation research. For example, there is an assumption in traditional PRT that observing an educator's lecture is a fundamental element of improving their teaching practice. Furthermore, tokenistic, one-off observations typically fail to result in meaningful change, with researchers advocating for longitudinal relationships to replace these brief transactional ones (O'Keeffe et al., 2021). To demonstrate meaningful impact on developing our teaching practice, we must

consider and incorporate all aspects of our teaching practice (Bennett & Barp, 2008; as cited in Byrne et al., 2010). The importance of enabling informal conversations between teaching peers as meaningful catalysts for change is central to such approaches (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009; Thomson & Trigwell, 2018). The trust established in such relationships establishes an educational alliance (Telio et al., 2015) between peers, which removes structural/hierarchical barriers, fosters dialogue, and promotes intellectual intrigue (Roxå & Mårtensson, 2009). Congruent with Ryff's (2013) dimensions of psychological wellbeing, approaches such as these will not only yield improvements in practice, but they also foster educator wellbeing by creating opportunities to develop positive relations with others and facilitate personal growth and self-acceptance.

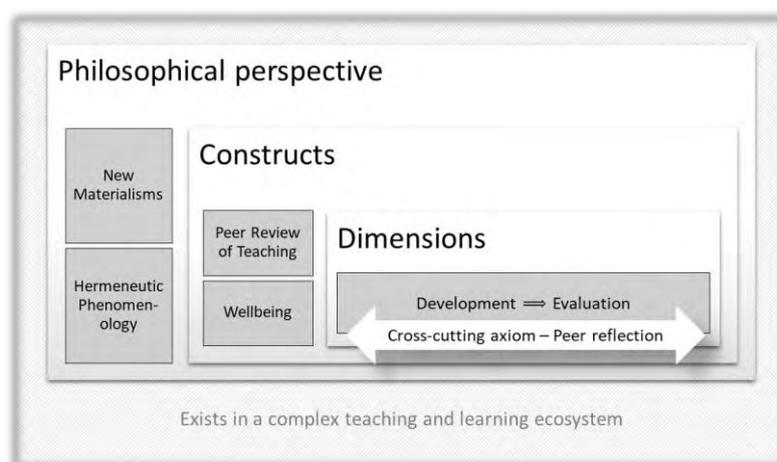
### Working Framework for Peer-Supported Teaching Practice

Building on Zeng's (2020) continuum of peer review (i.e., developmental-evaluative), there remains a need to identify a framework that defines, builds, and fosters supportive teaching practice that can serve both developmental (e.g., capability to work with diverse groups of students) and evaluative needs (e.g., demonstrating inclusive teaching practices within academic staff promotion processes). In parallel, the framework should also provide opportunities to foster educators' psychological wellbeing, such as enabling staff to set the direction of the peer review, develop positive relations with peers, and reflect upon all aspects of their practice (i.e., strengths and areas for improvement). It need not be the case that the review of our teaching practice sits at dichotomous ends of a continuum. Rather, nurturing our teaching practices may serve both developmental and evaluative outcomes. Furthermore, our review of the PRT literature suggests that traditional PRT practices adopt a 'top-down' institutional approach, which can impose an implicit hierarchical structure and undermine the success and durability of such an initiative.

In contrast to traditional PRT, our working framework is built from the ground up and situates the educator as the driver of the peer review process. The PTP framework exists in a complex teaching and learning ecosystem (see Figure 1, below). PTP is a process rather than an outcome; it will become part of how we teach, just as evidence-informed practice has. In order to be fit-for-purpose and sustainable, it assumes an embedded and contextualised approach to purposefully working with others to improve the quality of individual teaching practice. PTP takes a holistic approach to building capability incorporating new materialist and hermeneutic phenomenological perspectives. Specifically, by adopting Heidegger's (2013) hermeneutic phenomenology, we seek to uncover what lies hidden in our teaching practices and bring these into the light. Noting that PTP is a social enterprise, our practice of making meaning of our peers' experiences as they reflect upon them is congruent with the hermeneutic circle. Added to this, our philosophical perspective is aligned with the ontological turn recently evident in the Australian higher education sector (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). Further, we draw upon the New Materialisms which offer an extension of how we might conceptualise the more-than-human actions/interactions that inflect the way we work. The New Materialisms offer our practice and research a way to engage with the complex relations that occur between embodied humans with/within the material world (Coole & Frost, 2010). Interactions that are best conceptualised through Heidegger's notion of relations between humans and technologies as that of care, responsibility and indebtedness (Heidegger, 2013). We describe these as the particularities of human responsiveness to, or collaboration with the technologies, environments and/or materials at play within educational practice.

### Figure 1

*Peer-Supported Teaching Practice (PTP) Prototype Framework: from Philosophy to Function*



PTP integrates the constructs of PRT with individual interventions designed along a dimensional continuum from developmental to evaluative functions of PRT. The framework includes the typical developmental and evaluative functions which may be provided by a near-peer (those with similar levels of experience) or expert-peer (those with greater experience or knowledge in the area under review). Also embedded in the framework are the principles of psychological wellbeing, which have theoretical foundations in the fully functioning person (Rogers, 1961), attaining self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968), pursuing personal development (Erikson, 1959) and the like. The convergence of these foundations enables us to position our framework such that practitioners who demonstrate autonomy, mastery of their immediate environment, personal growth, positive relationships, life purpose, and or self-acceptance as part of PTP will likely experience psychological wellbeing.

Importantly, by aligning the framework with Ryff’s (2013) dimensions of psychological wellbeing, we aim to empower individuals to independently seek out opportunities in their working environment, foster trusting relationships with colleagues, and reflect upon their practice. A defining feature of PTP is the cross-cutting axiom of practice-focused peer reflection, crucial for traversing a period of rapid organisational and industry change, in all interventions. In this context, peer reflection allows colleagues to share experiences and engage in dynamic feedback practices within a respectful relationship that leads to mutual behaviour change and growth (Ajjawi & Regehr, 2019). These relationships foster and support connections within the workplace (Zhou et al., 2021), and create opportunities to enhance psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 2013).

**Dimensional Design**

Fundamental to the PTP framework and consistent with Ryff’s (2013) dimension of autonomy, the individual has the power in the relationship to invite the peer-supported review from their colleagues rather than it being imposed/advocated by the institution. In this way, the individual can decide the basis of the peer-support process. Indeed, Boxall & Macky (2014) found that providing employees with task choice supported greater workplace wellbeing. For example, some seeking validation of their teaching practice may decide to engage an expert peer to provide an objective review of their teaching as part of the academic promotion process. Others may solicit feedback from peers with a similar career progression, discipline area or educational background or from those with expertise in specific areas of teaching practice such as learning design, educational technology, or inclusive practices. The authors have adopted Zeng’s (2020) continuum conceptualisation of PRT to allow for a dimensional design of PTP initiatives (see Figure 2, below).

**Figure 2**

*Dimensional Design of PTP Initiatives*

Dimension	Development			Evaluation	
<b>Purpose</b>	Supports the wellbeing of staff and students	Supported integration of theory to practice	Sharing teaching practices and perspectives	Providing feedback and mentorship	Reward, recognition and quality assurance
<b>Peer type</b>	Near-peer			Expert-peer	
<b>Embedded reflection</b>	Formal peer reflection incl PQ	Powerful Questions		Reflective intention setting and feedback sessions	
<b>Process ownership</b>	Peer				Leadership
<b>Structure</b>	Embedded in existing practice			Formal program	
<b>Contextualised to</b>	Individual	Discipline	School	Faculty	Organisation
<b>Capabilities</b>	Self-identified	Teaching Capability Framework (TCF) – individual choice		TCF - areas of need	TCF - prescribed

A dimensional design approach seeks to provide a balance of peer agency and alignment with the broader objectives of the program. It allows teaching and learning practitioners and leaders to create PTP activities that are fit-for-purpose and supports the authors in building capabilities, structures and resources across the PTP continuum. Notably, the focus of the peer-support dialogues does not need to be centred on curriculum design. Rather, the PTP framework enables individuals to identify other aspects of their practice that they may wish to nurture using the university’s Teaching Capability Framework (Panther, 2022) (e.g., responding to student concerns, providing quality feedback or sourcing student placements). The dimensional approach also guides the inclusion of appropriate peer reflection practices within PTP activities, which may be unfamiliar to some.

## The Case for Peer Reflection as PRT

Skilled teaching practice demands a sophisticated combination of the professional self, what we know and can do, and the personal self, of who we are – our whole self. Structured, ongoing peer reflection incorporating peer feedback, critical reflection, and coaching techniques provides care and reflection opportunities for the whole educator, or what we refer to as the 'self-in-practice'. We conceptualise the 'self-in-practice' as how our whole selves impact our practice (the *use* of self-in-practice) and how our whole selves experience our teaching practice (the *experience* of self-in-practice).

'Use of self' is a core element of social work practice which refers to the use of personality, belief system, relational dynamics, anxiety, and self-disclosure when working with clients (Dewane, 2006). In higher education teaching practice, the 'use of self' is ubiquitous, often unexamined and can positively or negatively impact student learning. However, if we can support educators to identify their 'use of self' in practice, we can address the negative impacts and enhance the positive impacts on student success. The vulnerable experience of 'use of self' in social work practice is supported by organisational self-care practices (Beddoe & Maidment, 2015), with supervision sessions assisting in identifying and refining the 'use of self' to improve client outcomes (Australian Association of Social Workers [AASW], 2014). Critically reflecting on practice experiences, a key feature of social work supervision, is essential for enhancing professional judgement and developing professional identity (O'Sullivan, 2005). However, this level of practitioner support is not customarily provided to tertiary educators, despite the increasingly complex and often competing needs of students and contemporary teaching practice.

If we are to encourage educators to explore and experiment with the 'use of self' in their teaching practice, we must also attend to the 'experience of the self' in these practice encounters, addressing the whole 'self-in-practice'. Peer reflection offers a space for both the use and experience of self to be examined. Feminist, posthumanist scholar Rosi Braidotti (2011) helpfully provides the concept of embodiment to reframe interactions within practice. Instead of the dualism of the mind and the body, embodiment is about the material structures that constitute thought itself. Braidotti calls this approach a "materialism of the flesh that unifies mind and body" (2011, p.2). In this respect, we can think about teaching practice as embodied practice whereby educators are embedded within environments, situations, and relationships in excess of the experiences produced through teaching. Indeed, it is a spatio-temporal engagement that lingers and transgresses into all aspects of life – beyond the bounds of university life, its policies and processes. By framing PTP as a practice of embodiment, we become sensitive to the human and non-human actions and interactions experienced in and through practice and the forces that shape practice.

Peer reflection can take our practice from reflective thinking, analysing decisions, and integrating theory for greater understanding; to reflexive – challenging and changing our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and assumptions. Through purposeful reflection, we can become reflexive and change our practice (Mooney & Miller-Young, 2021). Including ongoing peer reflection as a cross-cutting axiom within the PTP model also draws on Relational Cultural Theory (Jordan, 2009). Relational Cultural Theory suggests that humans are essentially social beings and that connection and relationships with others are vital in forming and understanding the self. One of the key principles of the theory is the benefit of 'growth-fostering relationships' to the development and maintenance of resilience and greater wellbeing (Hartling, 2008). Growth-fostering relationships are positive, increase self-worth, allow members to know one another and are productive, helping each other take action and reach goals. Moreover, this embodied connection produces a desire for more connections.

### ***Embodying PTP***

Indeed, both the 'self-in-practice' model and the inclusion of peer reflection in this project emerged from exploratory work conducted between author 1 and author 3 from November 2021 to June 2022. Through praxical dialogues, we explored our complex teaching practice experiences and considered the implications for our professional roles in academic development (McCarthy & Hansen, 2022a). In addition to the tangible impacts on this project, our wellbeing and our practice, the growth-fostering, generative relationship also led to the creation and road testing of a dialogic tool, *Creative Cartography* (McCarthy & Hansen, 2022b), that invites users to map their implicit theory of creativity as it relates to collaborative practice.

Within our embodied collaborative practice we remained grounded and sensitive to the contexts, materials, media and environments explored through our practice. A feeling of belonging was nurtured through an open dialogue attentive to space, place and the emotional intensity experienced through practice. An approach that draws upon a New Materialist framework (Coole & Frost, 2010) in which the human is decentred as the axis of thinking knowing and being – in so doing we enter into relations of co-responsibility and indebtedness with the environments, technologies and materialities involved in our practice interactions. Gravatt and Ajjawi (2022, p.1387) identify the dominant conceptualisations of "belonging in higher education often contain several key omissions", conceptualising that belonging is more than "a basic human need" (Strayhorn, 2019, p4) and more than "an emotional attachment, feeling 'at home'... an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p.199). They propose that belonging is more than a uniform or

universalised human experience – more than many common conceptualisations of belonging imply. Indeed, Gravatt and Ajjawi make the provocation that belonging is something more than an exclusively human experience or even an experience fixed in time and space (2022). In their broadening of the boundaries of belonging beyond the human – as it is commonly framed within university policy and procedure – the authors propose a conceptualisation of belonging that exceeds a psychological framing that operates beyond stratified layers and cross-sectioning aspects of belonging considered in isolation (Gravatt & Ajjawi, 2022). This much richer and entangled accounting of belonging is situated, contingent and embodied in myriad ways, and reflects the mutual growth we fostered through peer reflection.

### ***Peer Reflection as Cross-Cutting Axiom of PTP***

The use of regular reflective discussions to enhance teaching practice is not a new concept, with Roxå and Mårtensson's (2009) 'significant conversations' and Mooney and Miller-Young's (2021) Educational Development Interview providing robust evidence for their value in effecting real change in teaching practice. Additionally, Carter et al. (2021) and Gilmore (2021) provide excellent examples of academic development's role in moving individual practitioners from reflective to reflexive through supported coaching programs. A wealth of evidence also supports the benefits of formal and informal peer communities and networks (Gunson et al., 2016; Savage & Morrisey, 2021).

By incorporating structured peer reflection as a core function of the PTP model, we seek to ensure all staff can access growth-fostering peer relationships regardless of their role, discipline or existing social capital, thus addressing the 'positive relations with others' dimension of psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 2013). Rather than position academic developers as the facilitators of these conversations, we argue that peers are best equipped to support each other to explore, interrogate and mutually develop the 'self-in-practice'. Additionally, PTP cannot be sustainably scaled across a university and remain effective without distributed ownership and iteration. However, as Carter et al. (2021) rightly point out, the value of this deeply vulnerable work must be supported by institutional structures and recognised by leadership. Brewster et al. (2022) argue that rather than local, discrete wellbeing interventions, institutions should seek to "proactively and cohesively embed cultural and structural change across the whole institution" (p.549).

As highlighted by Zeng (2020) and Esterhazy et al. (2021) this kind of collaborative PRT may lead to complacency or excessive self-congratulation. To guard against this, peer reflection within PTP draws on coaching techniques to ensure that sessions are purposeful. Each session begins with the exploration of the experience-of-self in practice, which may be positive and involve celebration, or negative and involve a discharging of the emotional experience. However, peer reflection is a purposeful endeavour which seeks to make meaning of our practice experiences, whether positive or negative. One way to ensure this is with the coaching technique of Powerful Questions – open ended and broadly applicable questions that evoke or provoke reflection. Powerful Questions can support deep transformational learning (Sammut, 2014).

However, not all educators are experienced nor comfortable with reflective work with peers. In our role as academic capability builders, we need to provide the resources and guidance that will support this deep form of professional learning (Carter et al., 2021). One way we do this is through the creation of interactive tools. Authors 1 and 3 have developed a set of interactive tools which support peers to ask Powerful Questions during reflective sessions. These tools include a master set of 40 powerful questions that address clarity, perspective, vision, identity, and action as well as provide space for participants to develop their own. Several modes of delivery are being trialled including giant dice, prize wheels and custom card sets (see Figure 3 below). By gamifying the choice of question asked, peers feel less pressured to ask the 'right' question as all Powerful Questions will evoke or provoke reflection from their peer. These modes have been chosen as they bring levity to what may be intense conversations.

**Figure 3***Examples of Powerful Question Cards***Practice-Led Development and Implementation**

As teaching practice becomes more complex, and the skillset of the higher education workforce becomes more diverse (for example, industry professionals), universities must find ways to better align professional learning initiatives with applications in the field (Gilmore, 2021). The prototype framework has emerged from substantial literature reviews, desk reviews of local and international programs, and the authors' practice wisdom. However, it is untested in the varied teaching and learning practice contexts found in the modern university.

While our roles are to design strategic professional learning programs that build teaching capability, we firmly believe that to effectively build an educator's teaching practice, we must first unburden it of the strictures of institutional bureaucracy. As academic development is considered an enabler of teaching practice, Roxå and Mårtensson rightly ask, "are we liberating academic teachers or are we part of a machinery suppressing them?" (2017, p. 103). For this reason, we have chosen to take a practice-led approach to the further development of the framework and the PTP program's implementation.

While SETs are centrally managed, automated, and require little educator participation, traditional PRT requires educators to contribute significant emotional, intellectual, and administrative labour by acting as reviewers for colleagues. However, even educators who are keen to develop and grow their pedagogical practice are often thwarted by structural barriers such as institutional policy, processes, and lack of resources, including time (Johnston et al., 2020). The neoliberal university also requires individual, committed educators to shoulder the burden of pedagogical innovation (Averill & Major, 2020). Furthermore, academic burnout increased during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gewin, 2021), fuelled by precarity, restructures, and complex student needs hampering the development of even those most dedicated to teaching practice enhancement. To draw crudely on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, when lower-order needs such as health and financial security, psychological and intellectual safety and a sense of belonging are not met by institutions, self-actualisation initiatives are a cruel folly.

Practice enhancements that support student wellbeing, such as inclusive and accessible teaching practices, staff-student partnerships, and embedding student mental health initiatives, add to the complexity of teaching practice and require creative responses from educators (McCarthy & Hansen, 2022a). Academic programs must be mindful of the intrinsic link between student and staff wellbeing when developing academic policies and procedures (Abery & Gunson, 2016), and this is reflected in our practice-led approach to developing and implementing the PTP framework.

One criticism of central teaching and learning support units is their distance from students and teaching practice, the coalface of the classroom. Sharing and encouraging the use of best practices without a creative engagement strategy is unlikely to lead to staff participation and practice enhancement (Southwell et al., 2010). With staff workloads and cognitive overload in mind,

we did not want to create a ‘top-down’ program of PRT that would further burden and overwhelm busy educators. Rather than create a centralised, opt-in, one-size-fits-all program, we seek to:

- identify, support and amplify good PTP where it already exists;
- embed PTP into existing practices and programs where appropriate; and
- build structures, resources and cultures that support distributed creation of PTP interventions bespoke to practice contexts.

The grand challenge of this project is to create a PTP program that is both effective and sustainable across all teaching and learning contexts within the university (Brewster et al., 2022) but is also tailored to the setting (Gunson et al., 2016). Wingrove et al. (2018) argue that teaching and learning leaders must support institution-wide change through policy, action and culture. Crucial to this is cultivating practitioner agency and trust and exemplifying collegial respect (Wingrove, 2018). For this reason, we set out to talk to, and work directly with, teaching and learning staff to co-create PTP projects that explored the framework in local practice and to develop resources, processes and structures that support a distributed, contextualised and embedded PTP program. Through these projects, we also build a distributed leadership model of ‘champions’ (McCarthy & Panther, 2021).

Wingrove et al. (2015) found that a distributed leadership approach to peer feedback garnered strong outcomes. The authors’ institution has a well-resourced central teaching and learning unit, with academic development teams embedded in each faculty. The co-created PTP projects engage both coalface teaching and learning staff and these faculty teams, building their capability in PTP and the dimensional design approach and equipping them to support the future co-creation of PTP projects in their faculty. In this way, we develop our colleagues’ leadership and expertise in PTP through PTP in action, building a core team of PTP champions capable of consulting, guiding and initiating PTP through their networks. The university has committed to a multi-year, iterative, co-designed implementation of PTP, owned by teaching and learning practitioners.

PRT programs work best when they are voluntary and reciprocal in nature and recognised through established reward structures (Wingrove, 2015). Through the university’s new Teaching and Learning Academy, the practice and career development value of PTP is highlighted. PTP as a form of evidence of teaching effectiveness is supported in applications for Higher Education Academy Fellowship, teaching and learning awards and the annual Teaching and Learning Conference. The Academy hosts sessions to support staff to articulate their impact for academic promotions, awards and fellowships which draws on Chalmers’ (2007) framework which includes PTP as peer feedback. As the authors are embedded in both the PTP project and the newly established Academy, they are able to infuse new and existing Academy initiatives, including leadership and career development programs, with the PTP approach.

### ***Testing the Conceptual Framework***

Academic developers sit between the policy and strategic goals of the university and the practice realities of educators. Our role is to work with educators to negotiate the implementation of strategic initiatives and ensure they are scalable and sustainable. Effective change is about the process rather than the outcome (Turner et al., 2021). Academic developers must have walked the talk to credibly and effectively support educators in enhancing their teaching practice (Marquis et al., 2016). For this reason, we chose a practice-led and collaborative approach to validating and refining the framework. By starting the work with a deliberately imperfect and incomplete prototype framework, we seek to provoke and invite meaningful contributions from our colleagues. Lisewski (2021) notes that academic developers habitually move from macro to micro levels of the organisation and can relay messages between the hierarchical layers to influence policy.

The PTP project includes three initiatives to assist us in developing and refining the prototype framework and determining the structural resources and reforms needed to support this kind of relational work across the university.

#### **Coalface Conversations**

Ethical approval has been provided for a qualitative study which builds upon the existing peer review narrative in the literature by specifically focusing on identifying and articulating the peer-supported teaching practice experiences of staff, including how staff further develop and or evaluate their teaching practice. The preliminary findings from the coalface conversations reveal several prominent highlights supporting our framework’s mechanisms. Most participants have spoken of the need to have a safe/trusting relationship with their colleagues to embrace the development of teaching practice. Establishing such a relationship provided a basis for mutual respect and genuineness between peers that fostered a cooperative/non-competitive environment for providing and accepting detailed feedback.

### **‘Self-in-Practice’ Model Development and Pilot Peer Reflection Program**

We are further developing the conceptual model of ‘self-in-practice’ (use of self + experience of self) in higher education informed by an integrative review of transdisciplinary literature. A matched pair, peer reflection program will be piloted through the Teaching and Learning Academy in late 2023. This program pairs near-peers for eight, one-hour structured peer reflective sessions over the course of four months. The sessions incorporate peer feedback, critical reflection, and coaching techniques and are supported through a group induction session, customised resources such as the Powerful Questions tools (Figure 3), and regular guidance from Author 1. The contribution of the pilot program to staff wellbeing will be evaluated using a mixed methods design, including pre- and post-program completion of Ryff’s Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

### **Pilot Practice Applications**

We are currently trialling and evaluating practice-led, co-designed projects with small teams addressing curriculum approval processes, curriculum design and new unit implementation, classroom delivery and collaborative graduate employability strategic planning and community building. The current expert-peer developmental pilot program within one faculty is allowing the authors to road-test the utility of the dimensional framework (Figure 2). The small pilot of formal PTP, in partnership with the faculty teaching and learning unit, focuses specifically on developing capability in classroom teaching delivery, aligned with the university’s Teaching Capability Framework and addressing a need identified by faculty leadership. Its purpose is to provide feedback and mentoring for teaching and learning staff who voluntarily participate in the initiative.

Faculty teaching and learning unit staff are conducting the observation and review under the mentorship of a leading expert in teaching practice from the central teaching and learning unit. Peer reflection is embedded in the process, which includes self-review/reflection, a reflective intention-setting session with expert-peer, observation, a dialogic feedback session with expert-peer and a final written report. Early outcomes indicate that self-review/ reflection may best be done following or during the reflective intention-setting session where participants can select one or two conditions for learning for review. Additionally, participants may opt for the dialogic feedback session before or after receiving the written feedback depending on how they prefer to process feedback. These choices, in an otherwise formal and prescriptive program, may allow for greater agency and sense of ownership for participants, while remaining faithful to the institutional aims.

### **Conclusion**

By incorporating constructs of both PRT and psychological wellbeing, operationalised through the cross-cutting axiom of peer reflection, we aim to establish PTP as a way of working that supports both staff and student staff success and wellbeing. We have drawn on Zeng’s (2020) continuum of peer review to develop a framework for peer enhancement of teaching practice that not only serves developmental and evaluative functions but explores the potential of structured peer reflection to improve both practice and wellbeing.

The practice-led validation of the framework and the dimensional design approach, seeks to navigate the tensions between institutional policy and local practice. We have engaged directly with the complexities of teaching practice to further refine the framework, focusing on a program that offers both structured and relational approaches to PTP, owned by staff and tangibly supported by leadership. Through this teaching capability program, we locate PTP firmly within the constellation of evidence for teaching effectiveness alongside SETs, student achievement metrics and critical self-reflection. The development of this framework is responsive to the absence of individual wellbeing in current models of PRT and we look forward to further refining and reporting on the framework’s potential to support the self-in-practice and enhance educator wellbeing.

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