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Addressing the Teacher Exodus via Mobile Pedagogies: Strengthening the Professional Capacity of Second-Career Preservice Teachers through Online Communities of Practice

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Abstract: In recent years, the discourse from media outlets around the globe, including Australia, has narrated a teacher supply crisis and highlighted the need to address an ever-growing teacher shortage. In Australia, a recent exodus of accredited teachers has seen a rapid change in the stability of the teaching workforce. School leaders are significantly challenged to find suitable teachers, especially in hard-to-staff schools in rural and remote communities. To fill the supply gap, governments have targeted career professionals looking to segue into a second career in education. Initial teacher education (ITE) preservice teachers trying to balance their external commitments and studies have necessitated a more flexible and versatile online learning platform and community. This paper discusses the need for ITE providers to pivot from the traditional modes of on-campus teaching and to establish a more accessible and highly engaging pedagogical approach to preservice teacher education to prepare this cohort of future teachers to be educators in schools. With a focus on the well-established pedagogical approach of collaborative communities of practice, this paper explores new narratives surrounding collective engagement and the link to academic accomplishment. The findings and thematic analyses unveiled a teaching-focused lecturer's lived experiences while creating and delivering collaborative and authentic pedagogically mobile curricula. The goal is to prepare preservice teachers for their new careers while creating authentic learning experiences that build their capacity to become pedagogically adaptable beginning teachers.

Keywords: pedagogy; pedagogical mobility; preservice teachers; teacher exodus; communities of practice; online learning



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1. Introduction: The Teacher Exodus

The desire to teach is viewed by many as an inspiring, motivating, and rewarding career choice. Realistically, teaching is also a professionally and personally demanding occupation, with many teachers reporting work-related stress, leading to poor wellbeing and burnout [1–3]. It is well documented that in almost every country in the world, there is an increasing phenomenon of teacher shortages [3]. Discourse surrounding a teacher shortage is not a new discussion, but in the post-pandemic world, the teacher supply deficit and teacher retention rates are being highlighted around the globe as a major cause for concern, with supply issues in many countries reaching critically low levels. Research has determined that there is still speculation surrounding the cause of the teacher exodus, but the evolving empirical data have determined that the reasons why teachers are leaving the profession are contextually motivated [1,3]. It is reported that contextual factors such as limited autonomy, ever-increasing accountability, and mandated demands for data collection are causing stress among teaching professionals [1,2,4]. Further, mainstream media discourse has persistently placed blame on teachers for low student outcomes, claiming that education strategies are not closing the widening gaps in educational outcomes [1]. Whatever the reason, what is known is that there is a reduction in school leavers wanting to enter the profession and an exodus of classroom teachers leaving it [3].

2. Background and Literature Review

2.1. Second-Career Teachers in Australia

In Australia, the teacher exodus has created a significant need for authorities to address the attrition of beginning teachers and the growing resignation of experienced teachers. It is well-reported that across Australia's education sectors, the country-wide teacher shortage has reached critical levels [5]. Per capita, the shortfall is even greater in Australia's rural, remote, and hard-to-staff schools [5,6]. There has been no official government investigation or report to provide clarity on the level of the crisis, but it is well-documented that the teacher shortage is felt at every level of the education system [6]. By way of example, it is estimated that by 2025 there will be a nationwide shortfall of more than 4000 high school teachers [5,7]. Adding to the concern, a recent teacher perception report detailed that 48% of Australia's in-service teachers had actively thought about leaving classroom teaching in the twelve months prior [7]. In addition, while the exact data surrounding early career teacher retention rates remain contested, the recent literature has reported that almost 50% of Australia's beginning teachers were likely to leave the profession in their first five years [6].

Out of a high need, Australia's education departments have targeted industry professionals, who are seeking a second career, to retrain as teachers and fill the void. Second-career teachers are seen as committed professionals and a promising solution to the teacher shortage [8]. Second-career teachers bring valuable professional and personal experiences to a teaching career and approach study with a committed maturity. Research demonstrated that embarking on a tertiary education journey to retrain in a second career is a well-considered commitment; however, this decision often comes at extensive personal, time, and financial costs [9]. A current global push to address the teacher shortage turns attention to strategic, time-effective options to upskill and educate, with a professional purpose to develop school-prepared second-career teachers. The need to employ workforce-ready second-career graduating teachers without delay puts significant pressure on universities to supply initial teacher education (ITE) courses and programs that develop graduates ready to accommodate student needs [8].

Through a lens of critical inquiry and reflection, the purpose of this paper is to argue for careful consideration and re-assessment of the capacity-building strategies for second-career graduating teachers. Students enrolling in online ITE courses are mostly of mature age, predominantly identifying as female, and require an adaptable pedagogy that enables them to juggle the commitments of work, family, and study [10]. This growing cohort of ITE students requires an accessible and flexible online learning platform that provides them with the opportunity to engage in learning at the time and location that suits them. This may come through a hybrid model of access with a blended on-campus and online model of learning, or an entirely pedagogically flexible model of professional development through a course offered solely online. Nevertheless, the student-driven ambition to balance their external commitments and thrive in their ITE study has compelled some universities to move away from the traditional on-campus mode of learning and engage with more innovative mobile pedagogical practices in the online space. Given their specific requirements and the potential impact of this ITE student cohort, the expectations of online initial teacher education courses are justifiably high.

2.2. Online ITE Education

For tertiary educators, building the professional capacity and employability of this cohort of preservice teachers is essential; the implications of their career preparedness are extensive [11]. To improve learning frameworks and pedagogical practices, some tertiary institutions have emphasised teaching-focused pedagogical practices [12]. Across disciplines, teaching-focused, student-centred academic roles have developed for educators who have a passionate energy for creating inclusive curricula and who also demonstrate effective and reflective pedagogical practice techniques [12]. With a focus on quality teaching, recruiting career educators with connections to schools and recent classroom

teaching experiences into academic roles has provided valuable opportunities for reflective practice at a tertiary level. At the Higher Education (HE) provider in Australia, where this investigation was conducted, creating the distinctly unique disciplinary role of a teaching-focused ITE lecturer has allowed for a rich analysis of quality teaching practices in the ITE context. Appraising curriculum accessibility; adjusting online teaching, learning, and assessment; and monitoring student satisfaction rates are actively encouraged. Reflective practice is at the centre of this professional pedagogy. Analysis and reflection have allowed for reasoned insights into the effective practices of the contextually discussed pedagogically mobile ITE.

The goal of ITE pedagogical practice is to provide preservice teachers with the essential skills and capabilities that are highly valued in the education sector [13]. ITE students have reported feeling unprepared to deal with the complex theoretical, sociological, psychological, and educational discourses of the modern education system and need the right pedagogy to support them throughout their learning journey [9,14]. For students of ITE to effectively access learning content, education frameworks—including those solely online—should facilitate an interactive engagement between the learner and the learning environment [15]. ITE pedagogy must deliver both a comprehensive theoretical basis and practical professional learning opportunities, as well as the solid foundational knowledge to develop an ITE student's understanding of the relevance of their learning and the links to their role as a preservice teacher [13]. The relevance and applicability of education are essential to identifying value in the learning experiences and illuminating quality teaching practices for their future roles and identity in the education system [9]. Fundamentally, at the core of online learning experiences, a student's personal resources, via self-efficacy and self-regulation, are necessary considerations. Academic proficiency is directly linked to learning motivation and vice versa, and ITE students need structure and support to develop the essential intra- and inter-personal skills needed to engage in independent learning activities in a (somewhat paradoxically) collaborative online community of learners.

Initially, online teaching and learning resources need tools of functionality. Independent activities cannot take the traditional cycle of the lecture and tutorial, as independence, flexibility, and ease of access are demanded in the online learning space. For ITE students to achieve proficiency in their learning, activities must adopt a balance between self-directed learning that links theory, practice, and community engagement, as well as opportunities for collaboration and reflective discussion. Online learning platforms have the potential to be socially isolating, but social capital, in a safe educational setting, can be developed through interactions in online ITE community learning spaces. Students need spaces to discuss experiences and lessons. This community of practice has been identified as crucial to student satisfaction and academic success [9]. Learning design should ensure that students can progress easily through each subject (unit), actively emerging in their sense of psychological and academic self-development. Learning frameworks should be designed specifically with the knowledge that subject engagement is improved as students form relationships in and through an online community of learning [9,16].

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framing

The methodology offers a clear structure to guide the aim and purpose of this study. The critical inquiry narrative demonstrates a deep, reflective process to understand and to find answers to address the research question: how do ITE educators use mobile pedagogies to strengthen the professional capacity of second-career preservice teachers through online communities of practice? A reflective, qualitative approach was used to explore how pedagogical mobility could be used in ITE to better support the learning need of second-career preservice teachers. The theoretical framing, outlined below, supports the autoethnographic, reflexive narrative, and the data gathered enabled the researcher to construct meaning from their own lived experiences and the experiences of the ITE students [17].

3.1. Theoretical Framing

Social constructivism forms the framework for this study to conceptualise and represent personal, lived experiences linked to best practice in ITE. To explore the unique lens and perspectives of the teaching-focused academic, ref. [12] discusses the need for a combined professional practice and pedagogically reflective framework. This effective framework needs a combination of research, practical design, and professional practice reflection [12]. Situated in [18] socio-cultural theory, social interaction is at the core of this discussion surrounding online ITE. In this first-person exploration of pedagogically mobile learning, ref. [18] works in scaffolded learning experiences, and collaborative learning has been identified to provide an essential theoretical framing for this examination of an ITE educator's experiences. The social constructivism framework helps examine, chronicle, and analyse my personal experiences in relation [19] to the Communities of Practice (CoP) framework and the HE provider's implementation of the Universal Design for Learning's (UDL) pedagogical structure for learning [20].

In ITE education, a CoP-considered pedagogy requires a platform for like-minded preservice teachers to mutually engage in learning communities that develop their professional identity and support their practical skills and pedagogical practice [21]. Supported by situated learning theory [22], communities of practice participants become actively involved in the scholarship of learning provided by social interactions. The CoP framework acknowledges that learning is a product of a social structure and that meaning is created when the cognitive, psychological, political, and sociological contexts of the participants form the basis of quality engagement [19]. Conceptualisation of the self is a fundamental element of CoP; the learner and the learning and the knowledge and the knower are not separated; knowledgeability is a process; and personal identity is the core element [19]. Second-career preservice teachers are developing new professional, social, and personal lenses to form their identity as educators. ITE pedagogically mobile practices should encourage preservice teachers to identify and consider these lenses as formative realisations, essential for their new career.

3.2. Living Life as Inquiry: Self-Reflective Narrative

First-person methodological inquiries acknowledge that analysis and experience are synonymously important [23]. This article adopts an autoethnographic approach to the research and considers the value of the literature as well as the personal experience and reflections of the researcher [17]. Considering how a researcher's position in the field influences the research process, a framework for discussion with epistemological underpinnings of reflexivity was needed to provide structure to the article. In the tertiary sector, reflective practice is a necessity as academics and students benefit when tertiary educators critically reflect on their approaches to pedagogy and engage in innovative practices [24]. As a teaching-focused academic working in ITE, with recent classroom teaching experience, I have first-hand familiarity with reflective practice across disciplines, and I recognise that my experiences and professional field knowledge are embedded in my pedagogical practices [24]. Linking reflexivity and reflective practice through a methodological approach provides a structure for a lived experience method of inquiry [17].

When legitimising first-person exploration as a values-based approach to research, ref. [17] proposed that such inquiry should involve a fluid link between life experience and systemic thinking (as cited in [17]). Ref. [17] penned the construct "living life as inquiry", as a framework that combines methodology, field knowledge, and personal practices (as cited in [17] p. 442). "Living life as inquiry" is acknowledged as a self-reflective research framework where the researcher is in embedded in the field and connects and explores ideas (as cited in [17] (p. 442)). Endorsing the quantity of reflexivity, the collection of material and the subsequent interpretation are shrouded in subjectivity [24]. The researcher is not separate to the inquiry but positioned and emended in the epistemology of practice, where knowledge is an active and an evolving endeavour [17].

The following critical self-reflective narrative is based on the experiential knowledge and beliefs of one teaching-focused academic working in the online ITE context. Situated in the “Living life as inquiry” framework, this discussion serves to offer researched pedagogy and tools to enhance pedagogical practice for an online, pedagogically mobile ITE [17] (p. 442). It gives a personal reflection and account of my lived teaching and learning experiences working in this unique context.

4. A Lecturer’s Life as Inquiry: Creating Communities Online

4.1. Communities of Practice: A Pedagogical Approach

Personal and context-conscious lived experiences, as a teaching-focused lecturer, have determined that the well-established pedagogical approach of collaborative communities of practice is essential for quality ITE, especially one with a solely online presentation. The phrase “communities of practice”, first penned by [22], frames learning as collective engagement that integrates the learner into a learning community with similar and agreed-upon goals, values, and practices [25]. The CoP framework shares three main elements, The Domain: the shared interests or subject, The Community: relationships built through social interactions, and The Practice: the platforms and tools for engagement [26]. In my experience, these three elements are essential in the implementation of an effective pedagogically mobile educational experience in ITE. This awareness aligns with the research, which shows that communities of practice have been effectively used in the higher education sector, and there is a strong link between identity, collective engagement, and the link to academic accomplishment [25].

4.2. Identity

In education research, there is much importance placed on the development of professional teacher identity. For career development, ref. [11] highlighted the implications of a teacher’s professional purpose mindset. Framed by this mindset, I argue that personal and professional identity are developed through curiosity, collaboration, action, and reflection [11] (p. 14). Identity is formed from the cumulative experiences in an individual’s personal and professional contexts [27]. A professional identity is how one “refers to one’s self-image in a profession” (as cited in [27], (p. 2)). As a teaching-focused academic, I acknowledge that how I present as a lecturer, but also as a teacher with lived experiences, is critical to creating a sense of authenticity and relational agency in the online ITE context. My educational discourses, theoretical positioning, disposition, accessibility, interactions, and social–emotional characteristics all play a significant function in strengthening my value as an educator and authenticating my approach to my pedagogical practices [12].

For every teacher, including preservice teachers, their professional identity is dynamic, evolving, contextual, and relational and impacts every decision in their pedagogical practice and professional relationships [27]. To navigate the complexities of their place in the teaching profession, all preservice teachers go through various stages of identity development and redevelopment, with ITE courses found to play a pivotal role in identity formation [27,28]. In my experience, and supported by research, second-career ITE students often acknowledge a tension between their identity as an experienced adult and becoming a student, a novice, in this new teaching and learning space [9]. Added to this, the feedback I have received is that ITE students have found it frustrating to develop their professional teacher identity in an online community, where flexibility is an essential component of success, but collaboration can be limited by their own external factors and proximity and access to mentors. There is an identified need to further explore the practical and effective collaborations between online facilitators and preservice teachers and the impact on professional identity development [27]. However, in my experience, acknowledging that identity tension is complex is imperative for this cohort of ITE students. Acknowledging the existence of tension validates the ITE students’ experiences but can be a valuable shared experience, for when connections within the cohort are made, it impacts the (developing) ITE preservice teacher’s identity in the field.

Reflecting on my experiences as a lecturer in online ITE, I believe that for this second-career cohort to find success as educators, they need an ITE course that provides a theoretical framework to help them create a new professional identity, whilst simultaneously acknowledging and placing value in their previous experiences and the importance of their skills transference to their new career [9,16]. Working with this online cohort of preservice teachers, I see that there is a significant value found in second-career ITE students' personal capabilities and professional expertise. The recent literature identified that the administrative, communication, and management skills of second-career teachers add great value to the education system [8]. This cohort of preservice teachers frequently demonstrate strong content knowledge, skills in their area of expertise, and an expressive identity from their past experiences. Professionally, second-career teachers require a malleable pedagogy that aligns their professional learning with their evolving professional knowledge, a chance to see where these skills are useful. To achieve this, academics are encouraged to facilitate learning, so students become "active interpreters and participants" in the process of their knowledge development and their reflective considerations [15] (p. 274). Purposeful and deliberate pedagogical practices should empower student agency and deliberately increase essential problem-solving and critical thinking skills, providing opportunities for ITE students to become reflective practitioners [15].

Online and pedagogically mobile ITE must have a comprehensive curriculum that balances academic programs, identity development scenarios, and accessible opportunities for critical reflection to unpack personal value systems and positioning. Understanding the emerging educator identity and the connections to an individual's personalised value systems and goal-setting abilities should not be underestimated. Personal values and professional goals are intrinsically linked to teacher identity and determine the motivational engagement throughout learning experiences and an ITE student's engagement in the workforce [4,28]. Education sociologists would argue that the goal of ITE is for preservice teachers to use the theoretical underpinnings of educational theory to build their understanding and create their own comprehensive pedagogical framework that enables them to appreciate and embrace the diversity found in modern classrooms. Pedagogical identity evolves and is directly linked to professional development and learning experiences.

4.3. The Community of Learning: Building Pedagogical Adaptability Capacity

Research data show that an individual's professional identities are formed through three main pieces of evidence: an ITE student's prior knowledge of the online space, their motivation to participate, and their commitment to the online community [28]. The students found motivation to engage in the learning through inner and external drivers [28]. Ref. [28] found that in an online platform, reciprocal community engagement is necessary to ensure that participation and motivation remain high.

Reflecting on my discussions with ITE online students, value is placed on communication with other students and their accessibility to academics. Opportunities to connect with other ITE preservice teachers create an essential sense of belonging through connective enactment, and research shows that identity is primarily moulded through communicative interactions with other beginning teachers and education professionals [16]. Ref. [25] discusses the importance of connective enactment, where students reach out to connect through collaborative practices such as listening, questioning and seeking clarification. Collaboration through a process of socialisation is necessary for forming identity; the individualised teacher identity is socially constructed [19].

4.4. The Importance of Social Capital

It is my opinion that to be effective and collaborative, online pedagogical practices need to have a high social capital. Social capital is the accessible expertise and resources that are embedded and available through a person's social networks or ties to that network (as cited in [8]). My lived experience shows that fundamentally, social capital and collaborative, social relationships are intrinsically linked [8]. Many second-career ITE students report

poor social capital and community engagement in their previous careers and discuss this as a catalyst to career development and satisfaction [9]. As preservice teachers, they enlist in a collaborative undertaking. Collaboration between professionals, including classroom teachers, specialist teachers, and industry professionals is a highly effective professional development activity. In schools, educators work together to develop contextually appropriate pedagogy and effective growth-based teaching and learning cycles. It is well-evidenced that active and reflective collaboration is paramount to improving student outcomes and building successful learning communities.

I have learned that quality interactions in the ITE context need high social capital to create a sense of identity and belonging [29]. In my experience, high social capital has a direct impact on ITE student engagement and achievement. A recent systematic literature review of social capital in teacher education found that highly effective collaboration and high social capital had a direct impact on teacher retention rates and job satisfaction [29]. In addition, there is a direct link between social capital and improved professional development, where information is contextualised, interpreted, and shared [29]. The education literature discusses how the teaching profession is a “multidimensional activity embedded in an organisation” and how a teacher’s professional development should not just relate to pedagogical practice but must also focus on a teacher’s competencies to work within this organisation [8] (p. 3). I have witnessed how effective social capital in initial teacher education discourses allowed for open and honest discussions on the social, political, and organisational considerations associated with the profession, as well as the personal and professional adaptations that are required to work in the role of a teacher [8].

As a lecturer for this cohort of ITE students, I became aware of the value that is found in contextualised interactions, where the relevance of learning and authentic organisational examples is placed at the forefront of discourse. The modern classroom is a diverse ecosystem, and these preservice teachers openly state that they want to feel prepared to embrace the unique psychological, educational, and socio-cultural needs of their students. The most valued best practice principle, identified by this cohort of students in the online learning space, is authentic collaboration where the depth of interactions has led to quality relationships built between educators and the students, as well as between the students themselves. For second-career preservice teachers, the optimisation of professional interactions and networking should be considered the most important component of all ITE pedagogy. The literature, analysing the social capital in beginning and preservice teacher networks, identified that strong and sustained relationships heavily influenced the development of identity as a teacher and had a direct impact on self-efficacy and sustainment once in the profession [8,29]. Most importantly, it is the interactive communities of practice, created beyond the traditional modes of tertiary pedagogy, that allow for this career-affirming socialisation and networking.

5. The Practice: Exploring Inductive Pedagogical Reasoning Capacity

Upon reflection, a comprehensive ITE curriculum sees a preservice teacher’s professional development categorised into practices. This effective curriculum encompasses student development and identity, the teaching and learning cycles including assessment, and forms a link between student growth and reflective practices [8]. Research identifies that many ITE courses do not cohesively tie theoretical frameworks to real teaching practices [4]. ITE students report that there is a disconnect between their university education and their in school experiences [27]. Professionally, most learning occurs through in-school placements and internships, but this cohort of preservice teachers has expressed a need to have an ongoing and developing professional relationship with experienced staff to build and reflect on their depth of contextual understanding. As an academic staff member with relevant and recent classroom experiences, I have professional, autobiographical narratives that I share with the ITE students that are reported to help the learners connect the theory to practice. Preservice teachers report that they value the relevance of my discourse, with the meaningful content carrying them into their future role as educators.

Studies also show a positive link between high social capital and high-performance outcomes, recognising that teachers valued both informal and formalised mentoring where experiences could be shared and knowledge capital could be gained [29]. A key component of a successful online community is one of trust, where members collaborate, share ideas, and learn from colleagues [28]. Communities of practice established in a safe and democratic way empower teachers from diverse communities to name and negotiate contextual challenges [21]. Ref. [28] found that students prefer to have a live, verbal conversation rather than a textual one—in my experience, this is evidenced by the HE provider. Academic staff need to be accessible and responsive to student needs. The advantage of a high social capital pedagogy is that mentoring opportunities revitalise professional knowledge, improve self-efficacy skills, enhance commitment to pedagogical learning, and improve social capital [29]. Seeing ITE students learn and succeed reaffirms a sense of purpose for tertiary educators.

A Context-Conscious Universal Design for Learning Framework

At the HE provider, the implementation of the principles of a UDL framework has been effective in creating an inclusive curriculum that caters for student diversity and provides a consistent and accessible scaffolded learning framework across each subject (unit), learning module, and embedded activity. The term Universal Design was originally used in architecture as a phrase to describe design spaces that are universally accessible and inclusive for a diverse range of participants [30]. Universal Design concepts quickly transitioned into the education discourse, literature, and practice. The principles align with education settings; educational practitioners used the UDL framework to place students at the centre of learning, and they developed universally accessible curricula in adaptable and innovative learning spaces [20].

UDL principles are known to reduce barriers to learning for all students, removing the need for students with catalysts to learning and/or disabilities to disclose their need for support and seek accommodations [30]. The three planning and instructional principles of UDL are Multiple Means of Representation: providing learners with a variety of methods to acquire content knowledge, Multiple Means of Expression: giving learners a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge, and Multiple Means of Engagement: improving motivation by providing an interesting curriculum with an appropriate level of challenge [20]. The implications of practice and the benefits of UDL in the tertiary education context are outlined with a comprehensive review of the literature conducted in [31]. Overwhelmingly, the review concluded that the inclusive practices embedded within the UDL framework enhance learning for all students, improve student engagement, and heighten content knowledge [31]. The principles align with best-practice ideologies: inclusive pedagogy and quality teaching—essential components of effective ITE courses. University courses that have embedded UDL principles in the design and delivery of their courses have a high student satisfaction rate—making a compelling case for the implementation of UDL in tertiary course learning designs [31].

6. Findings

Relating to effective professional learning opportunities, recent discourses around collaborative learning experiences have formed the concept of practice architectures [25]. Within collaborative communities, effective online architectural spaces allow learning experiences to become malleable, are social and site-specific, and evolve to accommodate the social and political circumstances of the cohort [25]. Conceptualising collective practices as an architectural framework for the pedagogical online learning design of ITE creates a universal approach and places preservice teachers at the centre of learning.

UDL principles have been effective when implemented in the online teaching and learning space at the HE provider. Course and subject learning designers have mentored academic staff to create educational experiences that encompass UDL principles and are embedded in best-practice pedagogy. This community of specialist practitioners share

experiences, resources, and expertise in the area, reflecting on practice and adjusting pedagogy to improve the student experience. The School of Education at the HE provider has an on-campus presence, but most students access learning through the online Moodle platform. The benefits of using technological innovations through multi-media products to deliver dynamic content, and making learning activities and assessments accessible, are well established [31]. Facilitating pedagogical mobility remains a developing process at the HE provider but is now well-established in the curriculum. The instructional practices of the UDL framework are embedded within the course structure, learning is scaffolded to build and enhance the digital capabilities of participants, and collaborative reflective practices aid ongoing improvements. As a teaching-focused lecturer reflecting on my experiences, when applying the UDL to my pedagogical practices, I have identified and summarised the following practices that were reported to me as consistently enhancing student experiences in my online ITE pedagogy:

Learning Design

- Subject (unit) and modulated learning activities need to demonstrate accessibility and consistency throughout each subject and across all course subjects;
- Online platforms must be easy to access, user-friendly, student-led, and allow for self-regulation and monitoring;
- Instructional activities are effective when they show differentiated instructions and varied modes of engagement. For example, effective practice includes instructional pre-recorded videos, written instructions, and visible learning checkpoints throughout each learning module;
- Scaffolded learning designs should lead to an engaging and authentic curriculum experience. Students value access to weekly check-ins with academic staff, both on monitored community forums and via live drop-in sessions;
- Outcome-based assessment practices included clear marking criteria, graded rubrics, and exemplars. “Unpacking the Assignment” tutorials set expectations for students, and feedback was delivered to individuals within the assignment and to the group via pre-recorded videos.

Content Delivery

- Content needs to be valuable, and relevant and must be delivered with authenticity;
- The “why” of learning is valued. Students report that providing context to theoretical underpinnings demonstrates the relevance of the learning;
- Content is delivered best when it is sequentially organised, informative, and chunked effectively for ease of use. A visual presentation allows for accessibility;
- Content delivery is most effective when it is multimodal. Examples of best practices include providing written activities as well as short, pre-recorded video segments from academic teaching staff;
- A mixture of interactive and collaborative spaces. Successful examples include timetabled live drop-in sessions, formalised tutorials with interactive activities, and breakout rooms for small group discussions;
- Live content delivery is also made available outside traditional office hours, to enable higher community engagement.

The Role of Academic Staff

- Academic staff must be approachable, accessible, and understanding of the unique needs of the ITE students. Students value flexibility and compassion;
- Modelling reflective practices as a core component of professional identity is effective and emotive. This builds confidence amongst learners;
- Value is found in building relationships within the community of learners. Students value these relationships as essential to developing a sense of community in an otherwise potentially isolating learning experience;
- Activity levels and student engagement can be actively monitored. Mentoring and support can be made available for students deemed at risk of failure.

7. Discussion

Engaging in the self-reflective, inquiry-based narrative framework has given me a valuable opportunity to consider my practice as a tertiary educator and understand how my role helps prepare this unique cohort of ITE students for their career in education. Reflecting on an online pedagogy strengthened in best practice principles, I considered the link between an ITE preservice teacher's pedagogical capacity and preparedness for the profession and how it is impacted by their experiences of online study. Engaging in inclusive, collaborative pedagogically mobile curricula is considered and discussed as an essential factor in both the accessibility and engagement levels of this cohort of ITE students. Teaching in the online space clearly demonstrates that academics need the structural tools and training to facilitate essential community interactions that build social capital and create effective collective experiences. In solely online curricula, academics need a comprehensive, architecturally sound but malleable learning space to create and deliver content and promote collaboration. Coursework and learning activities are most effective when guided by teacher socialisation, nuanced through observation, and centred on developing contextual understandings [32].

As an inclusive, teaching-focused educator, my individual teaching philosophy has been essential in creating a pedagogical framework in which to situate the learning experiences of the ITE students across learning subjects. Vygotskian in nature, I place value in the socio-cultural perspectives of education, actively working with students to identify their contextual understandings and reflect on the social, emotional, and personal positionality of their evolving identity as an educator [18]. It is well documented that students learn when they connect empirical understandings with practical examples and experiences. Pedagogical proficiency identifies the educational importance of Vygotsky's work in scaffolded learning experiences and accepts the (interchangeable) role of the knowledgeable other, seeing collaborative learning as key, in the "zone of proximal teacher development" [32] (p. 252). Frames of reference are found through theoretical foundations, the identification of conceptual understanding, explicit links to localised teaching standards, and opportunities for observation and reflection [32]. Collectively, it is here that pedagogical maturation is found, and learning becomes reciprocal.

When facilitating learning, I actively attempt to remove my own ego and create authentic discussion using my experiences and professional development in various culturally, socially, and academically diverse classrooms. My teaching-focused lecturer role is comprehensive and sees me working with students across their entire degree. There is joy to be found in developing authentic relationships with students, and it is a privilege to support them on their journey to graduation. I see my role as one of a mentor and make myself available to guide ITE preservice teachers through experiences of experimentation, failure, and success, and I actively encourage engagement in reflective practice. Embracing vulnerability within discussion reveals, what I believe to be, a critical turning point for teacher development—students learn best when they are challenged. Authentic discussion of the challenges faced and real-life, collaborative group problem-solving that embraces struggle are seen as a "catalyst for developmental change" [32] (p. 252). I actively model self-reflection as a best practice because I genuinely believe it is.

With teacher recruitment and attrition being a serious problem for many countries around the world, ITE providers need flexibility and accessibility in their approaches to pedagogical practice. It is the tertiary education system's responsibility to prepare ITE preservice teachers for a successful career in a dynamic, rewarding, and ever-evolving profession. For second-career teachers, there is a delicate balance of individual and contextual factors that impact their academic outcomes and satisfaction. Different stages of the ITE learning journey require a developmentally appropriate curriculum and different levels of support. The online learning process contributes to a more individualised approach to knowledge and skill development, as study can be self-paced. Research shows that an ITE student's engagement in learning creates an important psychological link to their personal and professional development [28]. Motivation and engagement are inextricably linked to

wellbeing, and there is much value to be placed in supportive and positive online communities of learning. Collaboration via communities of practice with high social capital means that students build valuable connections with academic staff and their peers. Universities must aim to have a collective culture focused on building and maintaining positive and supportive relationships throughout a student's degree. Connection improves motivation, motivation improves confidence, and confidence improves performance.

8. Conclusions

The teacher exodus and subsequent teacher shortage have seen second-career preservice teachers enter ITE with a unique set of experiences and expectations [3]. This new cohort of ITE students has highlighted a need for HE providers to consider alternate and pedagogically mobile framing for their ITE courses. The discussion throughout this article highlights the need for ITE courses to find the correct balance of curricula and enriching learning experiences, with solely online learning needing the correct framework to successfully prepare this cohort of ITE preservice teachers for their new career. UDL principles embedded in course learning design has had great success in creating architecturally inclusive learning frameworks for the online learning space [20,31]. To be effective, pedagogically mobile ITE needs the correct balance of flexibility, accessibility, and frequent and suitable opportunities for connection to develop professional preparedness.

The findings of this self-reflective, narrative inquiry show that the role of the tertiary educator is essential in facilitating identity development and highlights how academics play a pivotal role in connecting theoretical understandings with the practicalities of the modern classroom [21]. Throughout the discussion, the theoretical underpinnings of well-established theoretical frameworks of [18] sociocultural learning communities and [19] Communities of Practice highlight the connection between established frameworks of practices and modern pedagogy, highlighting the need for ITE educators to provide authentic experiences through collaborative pedagogical practices. Fundamentally, second-career preservice teachers need access to an effective mobile curriculum that develops their professional identity, as well as their agency as an educator. Appropriate, context-conscious capacity building that embraces theoretical learning and professional development is critical to the success and longevity of the next generation of teachers' future careers.

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