

# Bringing the Learning Home: Examining the Course-Level Impact of International Professional Experience

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## Abstract

Within an ever-increasing time of globalisation, globalised learning and international mobility, international professional experience can provide a range of opportunities for personal and academic growth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, pre-service teachers commonly attest to the positive impact of international placements. What is less well understood is the impact on the learning and teaching that occurs at the university curriculum level prior to and after an international placement. An emergent aspect of this research and the focus of this paper is the impact of these experiences in terms of what they offer the university teaching and learning context. To gain a further understanding of the extent of these impacts, a set of reflective narratives from 10 pre-service teachers and seven teacher educators were gathered and analysed using inductive, thematic analysis. The findings showed that for pre-service teachers and teacher educators that context both culturally and educationally were paramount. The reflections highlighted the impact on the development of a range of general capabilities for both sets of participants. Additionally, international placement experiences increased levels of reflection for both pre-service teachers and teacher educators, which led to further understanding and refining their teacherly identity.

**Keywords:** international mobility, initial teacher education, professional experience

## 1. Introduction

International mobility programs are often described by participants in effusively positive terms, like ‘life changing’ (Ilter, 2016). While this might seem like a somewhat lofty claim, research certainly suggests that in-situ these experiences have a powerful impact on how participants see and position themselves as culturally competent professionals on a global scale (Bryla, 2015). The opportunities are, however, considered by some with scepticism in terms of the transferability and translatability of the learning that takes place internationally back into the ‘home’ context (Murphy-Lejeune, 2008). This criticality stands particular true for areas of study, such as initial teacher education (ITE), where understanding the contextual nuances of local policy and process can have a significant impact on practice.

Based on accessible data (e.g., marketing brochures, websites, etc.), it seems that prior to the global pandemic (e.g., before 2020) about a third of Schools and Faculties of Education in Australia were offering international mobility experiences as part of their ITE offerings. Monash University has been leading the way in this regard for over 25 years (see Fitzgerald et al., 2017) with their *International Professional Experience* (IPE) program, which supports pre-service teachers to participate in a 15-day teaching placement abroad as part of their ITE programs (Bachelor of Education and Master of Teaching). At the time of the data collection for this study, approximately 200 students were being hosted yearly in early years settings as well as primary and secondary school contexts across 12 countries situated in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific. These experiences have been found to diversify pre-service teachers’ teaching approaches, develop their transcultural capacities and engage them with local cultures through meaningful relationships developed in schools, with students and communities (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 2017). From the pre-service teachers’ perspectives, they develop a range of capacities and capabilities that stand them apart as globally minded citizens (Fitzgerald & Cooper, 2022).

This study sought to scratch below the ‘life changing’ veneer of this specific international mobility program to

understand how pre-service teachers and academics working as teacher educators, who had participated in at least one IPE program offering, related to their experience in the months following their return to Australia. Of specific interest was gaining insights into how both parties considered the ways in which their experiences in educational settings abroad spoke back to their learning and teaching in ITE units of study as a possible bridge between educational theory and practice. The research question informing this paper is *what value do international professional experiences have at a course-level?*

## 2. Contributing to the IPE conversation

With a growing body of knowledge in the area of international professional experience, this paper seeks to add to the conversation around the purpose, impact and applicability of international mobility in relation to ITE and future classroom practice. This section has been structured to reflect this contribution in relation to existing knowledge and past research.

### 2.1 Understanding the Purpose of International Experiences

As a response to the changing nature of school-based education and the work of a contemporary teacher, teacher educators are increasingly questioning the current model of professional experience and whether it is adequately preparing future teachers for the realities of the classroom (Allen et al., 2019). Part of this querying is not solely about what professional experience might look like in practical terms (e.g., placement blocks, distributed days over a period of time, etc.), but unpacking the legitimacy of where it takes place and what might constitute an educational setting (Le Cornu, 2015). This conversation is taking place internationally and is ultimately challenging ITE providers worldwide to consider the skills and attributes graduate teachers will require into the future (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). The exposure of pre-service teachers to a globalised and diversified world as well as being prepared for a global workforce is very much part of this discussion (Kopish, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016).

The notion of integrating an international experience into a university degree is certainly not new with a long history of semester-long exchanges, study tours and internships embedded in higher education practices (Webb, 2005). In action, this practice, often referred to broadly as international mobility, is contextualised to suit the discipline (e.g., study tours are common in Arts degrees, internships are popular in Business degrees, etc.) and is often tied to a university-wide approach to enhancing employability skills leading to increased employability post-study (Crossman & Clarke, 2010). In the context of ITE, a common approach to international mobility has been to undertake school placements in overseas locations in blocks of two to three weeks with an accompanying academic (see: Maynes et al., 2013; Willard-Holt, 2001). This approach is often referred to as international professional experience, especially in the Australian context (Fitzgerald et al., 2017).

### 2.2 Considering the Impact of International Professional Experience

In a more globally mobile world, teachers need to be equipped with the skills to support the learning of students from diverse backgrounds with a range of needs. It is commonly reported (e.g., Amaro-Jiménez, 2014), however, that teachers identify as lacking the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to the complex and rapidly “shifting contextual conditions” (Gao, 2015, p. 435) in which they are increasingly positioned. With this in mind, ITE providers have needed to reconceptualise how they better prepare teachers for future classrooms and address this professional learning gap. International professional experiences have a key role to play in speaking to the five knowledge domains of quality teaching for the 21st century as conceptualised by Goodwin (2010): personal, contextual, pedagogical, sociological and social. Moorhouse and Harfitt’s (2019) research with pre-service teachers, who had experienced an IPE in Hong Kong, identified that by immersing the participants in an unfamiliar teaching environment their exposure to the five knowledge domains was more heightened and explicit. This opportunity acted to complement and enhance any learning that took place domestic through ITE courses and local school placements to better prepare the pre-service teachers for the complexities inherent in teaching.

Underpinning quality teaching and effectiveness in the classroom are the ways in which a teacher understands and constructs their own professional identity and sense of teacherly self (Alsup, 2006). Increasingly ITE has sought to embed ways of informing and shaping pre-service teachers’ own notions of teacher identity in programming (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), which can be challenging due to a relative lack of practical teaching experience. Tangen et al.’s (2011) research, drawing on experiences from a Malaysian-based IPE, highlights the significant role that global placements can play in identity formation for pre-service teachers, which can be more difficult to achieve in locally based placements. This work found that participation in an IPE provided pre-service teachers with a platform in which to be deeply challenged in their notions of what learning and teaching is and subsequently what it means for them to be a teacher. Ultimately, to engage in an IPE, is to

step outside one's own comfort zone and to view education from a different perspective.

### *2.3 Making Sense of the Applicability of International Professional Experience*

While the impacts of an international professional experience on the participant, as a pre-service teacher and graduate, are considerable, this does not respond to the scepticism and concerns around the connectedness (or lack of) of these learning opportunities in relation to ITE programming (Cruikshank & Westbrook, 2013). These concerns centre on how these experiences abroad are effectively made sense of to support practice in local contexts. This problem of practice is not isolated to international experiences but resonates through ITE in relation to professional experience in general and the ways in which the theoretical elements of a program inform and are informed by classroom practice (Flores, 2017). While professional experience provides a critical opportunity to close the theory-practice gap, the experience alone does not lessen the divide without an active and dynamic interplay with ITE structure, curriculum and coursework (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Flores, 2016). The political, economic, social and cultural contexts in which the key elements of ITE curriculum are embedded also cannot be underestimated (Craig, 2016).

Educational researchers have long argued that context plays a critical role in learning. Some perspectives of learning, such as situated cognition (Rogoff & Lave, 1984), identify the situation (context) in which understanding is constructed as being interconnected with that understanding. This focus highlights the importance of learning in ways that are congruent with the learning community. In the context of this study, this can be interpreted as the understandings of teaching that are developed through professional experience should aim to represent practices that are acceptable to the wider education community. Learning to become a teacher in this way would provide pre-service teachers with concrete experiences that enable them to see the links more clearly between the more theoretical or conceptual educational aspects they are studying and their future work lives in the education profession (Beasley & Butler, 2002; Ramsden, 2003). This research intends to challenge this understanding of situated cognition by exploring whether learning that takes place in an international context can still adequately prepare pre-service teachers to teach in local setting.

## **3. Research Design**

Located within qualitative research traditions, this study employs a narrative inquiry approach to data creation as a way to both represent and critically explore experiences from different perspectives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Parr et al., 2015). The approach adopted for this study was interpretive (Elliott & Timulak, 2005) as it allows for a sharing of meaning-making practices, while showing how those practices can generate observable outcomes such as themes or recommendations. By narratively situating our work in a particular place and context, we provided insights into the perceived value of and learning from an IPE after the event.

### *3.1 Participants*

The participants in this study consisted of seven academics from the Faculty of Education at Monash University and 10 pre-service teachers from both the Bachelor of Education (n=3) and Master of Teaching (n=7) programs across the specialisations of early years (n=1), primary (n=4) and secondary education (n=5). The teacher educator participants represent around 50% of the academic staff who would have supported an IPE program in that timeframe, while the pre-service teacher representation was approximately 5% of participants. All participants had undertaken an IPE in the previous 12 months and volunteered to be part of this research through a social media callout (e.g., Facebook, Twitter).

### *3.2 Data Creation*

The key data source informing this research is a set of reflective narratives (Tripp, 2012). These narratives were formed through participants being invited to recount their individual experiences. The following four questions were used as prompts with participants taking different narrative approaches (e.g., answering each question one-by-one, using a story to respond broadly to the questions, etc.) to share their insights. The same questions were asked of both academics and pre-service teachers.

- 1) How do you relate/connect your IPE to what you have learnt/ideas you have engaged with in different units?
- 2) How has your IPE helped you to think differently about/apply what you have learnt about in your education units?
- 3) How have you connected your IPE with different assessments?
- 4) How has your IPE helped you (or not) relate to your students/lecturers?

Participants generated their narratives in their own time and emailed to the first author. The result was a set of 17

narrative responses ranging from ½ a page to approximately 2 pages in length.

Participants drew upon their individual experiences within the reflective pieces. In addition, however, their reflective writing also explored the social and interactions with others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This method of data collection was appropriate for responding to the research question shaping this study due to the focus being on the individual as well as on “exploring the experiences” (Creswell, 2012, p. 507) of the individual. The subsequent stories that emerged from the reflective responses “constitute the data” (Creswell, 2012, p. 509), which was then analysed using thematic analysis.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Applying thematic analysis was a natural fit for analysing this qualitative data. An inductive approach to the thematic analysis has allowed for patterns to become visible in the data and for us as researchers to seek new understandings in the process (Gay et al., 2014). A cross-check of the data was conducted to allow for a more “complete picture” (Gay et al., 2014, p. 393) to emerge. This process involved the first author conducting the first reading of the data, which was then repeated by the second author. Discussions followed around congruence between the two perspectives of emergent themes.

As a result of the analysis of the reflective writing from the teacher educators and pre-service teachers a range of perspectives emerged around how a program like the IPE could be used to enhance a course. As a result of the thematic analysis, three key themes for both groups became apparent: (i) contextualization; (ii) general capabilities; and (iii) reflecting on practice.

## 4. Findings

The following section draws on illustrative quotes from the reflective texts to explore the three themes – contextualisation, general capabilities and reflecting on practice – from the perspective of the teacher educators before unpacking the pre-service teacher insights.

### 4.1 Contextualisation: Teacher Educator Reflections

Potentially as a result of their background and experience as teachers, the teacher educator reflections gravitated towards a more student-centred perspective of context. They overwhelmingly viewed the IPE as an opportunity for pre-service teachers to be responsive to the educational contexts they found themselves in terms of both their planning and their practice. The following quote is representative of this sentiment: “context matters, so as skilled and global thinking teachers, [the pre-service teachers] need to be able to be responsive to the needs of their students at any given time and in any given location”. An example of situating this notion of context within ITE coursework was given where links to the New Zealand Curriculum are made as this document is seen “as relatively progressive in terms of the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives”. Caution was given, however, in terms of ensuring that contextualisation is used within approaches to learning and teaching in meaningful ways. This was further articulated as ensuring that the focus is not on “entertainment value over having educational value”. A final way in which context presented itself within the teacher educator reflections was as helping pre-service teachers to stand out in the graduate market and to be recognised as having something distinctly different in their skill set. This quote captures the intent in contextualising practice to benefit employment:

*The experiences of IPE students provide an important contrast to local [Australian-based] placements. The experience is one that they should highlight in job applications and/or interviews, which based on anecdotal feedback, is greatly valued by prospective employers.*

### 4.2 Contextualisation: Pre-Service Teacher Reflections

For the pre-service teachers, their experiences abroad provided a rich opportunity to reconceptualise their understandings of learning, teaching and the purpose of education. Through this process they were able to draw upon new knowledge and skills to articulate the impact of that different cultural and educational context. Like the teacher educators, the international context did sharpen the focus for some pre-service teachers of the importance having students at the centre of the learning and teaching experience. This quote captures the essence of this sentiment: “by being able to focus on the students, I then worked out how to integrate the curriculum, that is, to contextualise the learning and make it about the students”. In a similar vein, the lived experience of a different context opened up more diverse ways of thinking about and understanding education on a global scale that directly contributed to the ways that many of the pre-service teachers engaged with their subsequent coursework. As this was a prominent element emerging from this theme, the following two quotes have been identified as exemplifying this point.

*For my studies it has brought so many ideas connected with diversity and difference to life. This has been a huge theme in all of my education units but to be transported into a completely new environment and to actually experience different ways of thinking and being was both inspiring and challenging.*

*[The IPE] provided me with a wider variety of experience to draw on. Teaching in a different context makes you really think about the fundamentals of teaching and how these need to be modified in different situations. This has not only helped me understand my units here better but has made me more able to determine the core of teaching and learning strategies, and how these might fit into different settings.*

As a result, for a number of pre-service teachers, their international experiences provided them with a more critical lens through which to understand the nuances and complexities inherent in education more broadly as well as how it relates to the individual at a classroom-level. This insight is evidenced through the quote shared below.

*Having the opportunity to observe and participate in teaching in a different country broadened my 'teaching bank' (those pedagogical experiences you reflect on). I am now able to compare teaching and learning between two different contexts which prompts deeper reflection on educational issues and pedagogical practices.*

An important distinction between the narratives of the teacher educators and the pre-service teachers is that the pre-service teachers reflected on the role of context not only for their students as learners, but for themselves in their own learning to teacher journey as well. While it is not clearly articulated, there is a sense that an educational experience abroad provides a platform from which to engage with teaching and their role as a teacher in different ways. This view of contextualisation speaks directly to the development of an individual's own sense of teacherly identity as highlighted in the following quote.

*I think that the opportunity to participate in an International Professional Experience is invaluable to the development of each participants teaching identity. The Australian Education system is quite rigid and strict in terms of guidelines, expectations and objectives and I think it is extremely valuable to branch out and experience another way of doing things.*

#### *4.3 In Summary: Contextualising IPE at a Course-Level*

Both teacher educators and pre-service teachers identified IPEs as providing significant opportunities to put into practice drawing on a particular context to better situate learning for school students. From this point, perspectives about this notion of context diverged with teacher educators considering the employability skills that stemmed from this exposure and pre-service teachers more focused on the broadening of their understandings of education through this lived experience. In both instances, being immersed in a different cultural and educational context opened new ways of thinking and speaking about learning and teaching that would not have been as easily achieved without participation in the IPE program.

#### *4.4 General Capabilities: Teacher Educator Reflections*

Following participation in an international professional experience, the teacher educators wanted to be able to replicate elements of this opportunity in their courses for the benefit of all pre-service teachers. A particular focus was on enhancing the attributes that an IPE fosters, such "creativity", "flexibility" and "confidence". For one teacher educator, this was achieved through their approach to assessments, which were designed to reflect the realities of what is required to navigate a classroom context. The following quote reflects this intent: "these two assignments are a valuable insight into what is involved in teaching in international (or other) locations". For other teacher educators, their own experience abroad supporting pre-service teachers reinforced their own sense of purpose in terms of what they were preparing pre-service teachers for. For example: "I want to develop [the pre-service teachers'] confidence to approach their teaching with an open mind, to be critically reflective, but with the support of general principles that underpin teaching wherever you are". There was also a desire from the teacher educators to leverage their courses to support pre-service teachers, who had undertaken an IPE, to better understanding the key learnings from that experience as being much more than just an incredible experience. This quote brings this sentiment to the fore.

*The students who attend IPE invariably [talk about] their experiences as 'life changing', [my role is] helping them to articulate what is most important to them about learning and teaching (e.g., back to basics, what education is all about, etc. are key themes).*

Finally, one teacher educator reflected on the impact of their IPE participation on their own personal learning and development. Their time abroad strengthened their resolved around the critical role of collaboration in supporting

the professional growth of pre-service teachers as shown below.

*[A] better appreciation of different approaches to education (e.g., socio-cultural aspects, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, school systems) and certainly makes me even stronger in [terms of how I consider] the value of working in collaborative teams of pre-service teachers when on placement.*

#### 4.5 General Capabilities: Pre-Service Teacher Reflections

An overwhelming response from the pre-service teachers was that their IPE provided them with a more open perspective about education and what it means to be an educator. This increased open-mindedness resulted from their lived and deeply felt experience of coming to intimately understand that “everyone is different and has unique ways of thinking”. This perspective was able to permeate into their coursework in the ways they explored ideas and expressed opinions through the lens of their international insights. The following quote effectively summarises this sentiment:

*On reflection, I now approach my teaching subjects with a more open viewpoint. Education is cultural. [For example], I have incorporated my experiences into my recent humanities assignment ... I make regular referrals to this experience in all my subjects (learning styles, student potential, limited resources, pedagogy, student's world outside of school).*

Alongside open-mindedness, collaboration was highlighted by the pre-service teachers as another key capability that was strengthened because of their participation in an IPE. For example: “The collaboration, support, camaraderie, and fun shared with my fellow PSTs was invaluable for my learning [of] new teaching practices and learning reflective practices in particular”. The IPE created the conditions that enabled pre-services to be engaging in more team-teaching opportunities than they may experience in their locally based placements as well as numerous opportunities outside of school hours to contribute to and support each other in lesson planning. This insight is reflected in the following quote:

*I just remembered that collaborating with other [pre-service teachers] about lessons and even across [different] curricula [areas] was a great experience too. Super relevant to what we will need to do in a school upon graduation as well!*

This skill directed impacted on their coursework in terms of the ways they subsequently approached group work as highlighted by this quote: “I have a group assignment and I have been able to apply some of the collaboration techniques I learned on IPE to our group work”.

#### 4.6 In Summary: General Capabilities at a Course-Level

From the perspective of both teacher educators and pre-service teachers, involvement in the IPE program opened up opportunities to think differently about education whether that be through increased open-mindedness about the role of education or stimulating greater critical thinking about what it means to be a teacher. This critical stance was able to be applied at a course-level in a range of forums using the lived IPE experience as a strong platform from which to make sense of and articulate understandings of learning and teaching using a global lens. Collaboration also emerged across both cohorts as being a general capability that was brought to the fore through the IPE program and had meaningful implications for how both teacher educators and pre-service teachers collaborated with each other through their course-level interactions.

#### 4.7 Reflecting on Practice: Teacher Educator Reflections

A key takeaway from IPE for the teacher educators was stronger and more nuanced connections with pre-service teachers. In living and teaching alongside pre-service teachers for three-week blocks at a time, there are numerous, ongoing opportunities to get to know them as future teachers as well as humans. For most of the teacher educators, this connection shone a light on the numerous elements that pre-service teachers’ juggle and grapple with as they strive to become a teacher, which is represented by the following quote.

*This is perhaps the pivotal factor. I have gained an immense understanding of my [pre-service teachers’] needs and the factors that influence them. Sitting alongside them brings home the daily pressures they face in regard to family, finance, employment and their personal lives.*

The impact of understanding the “multidimensional aspects of being a pre-service teacher” has led many to become “more compassionate as a teacher educator”. This realisation has influenced how the teacher educators relate to pre-service teachers at a course-level by reinforcing what it is that matters as an educator and how that can be enacted in a university context. The quote below surfaces the ways in which one teacher educator applied their learning from the IPE to their practice.

*While I don't get to know the details of [their lives] with other [pre-service teachers] I teach at <<name withheld for review>>, I now realise what could be the case, and have come to understand how important it is to get to know my [pre-service teachers] as much as is possible/practicable. Communication and relationships are at the core of teaching. I already knew this but being involved in IPE has highlighted just how important they are and has given me the confidence to relate to [pre-service teachers] at home in a more open way.*

Another impact of IPE on practice was the opportunity for teacher educators to be exposed to learning and teaching outside of their areas of expertise as a result of mentoring a wide range of pre-service teachers. This exposure invigorated the teacher educators to think differently about their subject areas and what this meant at a course level. For example, one teacher educator reflected that “[IPE] has made me step back and rethink my approaches to learning and teaching within the academic and [professional experience] units”, while another highlighted that “‘out of field mentoring’ [has] heightened [my awareness of my] tacit knowledge and so I now better articulate the tacit knowledge [in my courses] when appropriate”.

One teacher educator articulated that their interactions with IPE prompted them to ‘flip’ their learning and consider the experiences of international students, who have come to Australia to study, within their courses. This sentiment is clarified in their quote, “I feel my IPE experiences now put me in stronger position to support our international students getting ready for [school] placement in Melbourne”.

#### *4.8 Reflecting on Practice: Pre-Service Teacher Reflections*

Overwhelmingly, the pre-service teachers identified that their IPE boosted their “confidence in [their] ability to teach” and provided them with “a sense of confidence (as though [they] know what [they’re] talking about!) when discussing ideas in [their] courses”. There was a sense that their learning abroad had a significant impact on the ways that they thought about and experienced education, which resulted in opinions and insights that they felt increasingly confident about sharing with their peers.

This increased confidence led many of the pre-service teachers to bring a new ‘lens’ to their perspectives about learning and teaching. At a course-level, these new insights presented themselves as a curiosity and a questioning of their understandings of pedagogical practice as well as their own practices. The following quote exemplifies this sentiment:

*I think the simplest way to describe the impact IPE has had on the rest of my [academic] experience [in terms of] my education courses is that it has stretched and extended my thinking. It has made me more critical!*

Finally, one pre-service teacher reflected that the IPE had resulted in them seeking to be more collegial in their courses by recognising the impact that “meaningful discussion within the [course] tutorials” had on their learning and growth as a future teacher. They identified that since their experience abroad they found it “enriching to hear another person’s perspective”.

#### *4.9 In Summary: Reflecting on Practice at a Course-Level*

Teacher educators and pre-service teachers alike noted that, on reflection, their involvement in IPE had supported them in being more collegial in their courses. For the teacher educators, this meant being increasingly mindful of their students’ lived experiences and for the pre-service teachers, there was an awareness of being more open to a variety of perspectives and insights into education. Increased confidence in their identity as a teacher and increased criticality of what it means to be a teacher punctuated the pre-service teachers’ reflections in terms of how the IPE impacted their subsequent coursework experiences. The teacher educators valued their increased exposure to a range of pedagogical practices outside of their usual field of expertise, which permeated how they approached their courses. There was also an increased mindfulness about the experiences of international students in their courses as a result of applying their own lived experience of ‘otherness’ in the IPE context.

## **5. Discussion**

While there is a significant body of research documenting the value placed on IPEs by participating pre-service teachers and teacher educators, anecdotally IPEs are still often misunderstood and underappreciated in terms of their relevance to the requirements and attributes needed for locally based teachers and teaching (Cruikshank & Westbrook, 2013). This research intended to surface an understanding of local relevance through an exploration driven by the following research question: *What value do international professional experiences have at a course-level?* In the Australian context, ITE programs are made up of a combination of education, curriculum and pedagogy, and discipline studies courses with professional experience opportunities embedded across the program lifespan (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), 2015). Programs are

rigorously accredited against a set of national program standards every five years by the teacher regulatory authority in the relevant state and/or territory (AITSL, 2015). Individual courses play a critical role in preparing successful teacher graduates as they provided the required 'bridge' to support pre-service teachers in making the necessary links between education theory and classroom practice (Ingvarson et al., 2014). In this study, pre-service teachers and teacher educators, who had participated in an IPE, were asked to consider what influence this experience had on their course-level learning and teaching. Three common themes emerged to characterise the ways in which IPEs added value to ITE courses:

- 1) Role of context;
- 2) Enhancement of general capabilities; and
- 3) Strengthening of reflective practice.

These themes will be unpacked in further detail, in relation to the research question, below.

### *5.1 Contextualisation*

Goodwin (2010) identified contextual knowledge as one of the five knowledge domains required in quality approaches to contemporary teaching practice. In this instance, IPE moves pre-service teachers outside of their comfort zones, largely due to the unfamiliarity of the learners and the learning environment and provides a lived experience that requires them to think differently about educational contexts. From the perspective of the pre-service teachers in this study, it was in these moments that elements of their coursework came to life and started to make more sense, particularly in relation to concepts connected with diversity and difference. This finding aligns with recent research from Author (2022) highlighting that IPEs open up new ways of thinking about and articulating understandings of learning and teaching that are often not easily achieved in local school contexts. Although, this learning is certainly applicable to local settings, particularly in regards to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity of students in Australian classrooms. Care does need to be taken with this conclusion, however, as this does remain a more urban-centric experience of schooling with rural and remote settings remaining, by and large, more homogenous in their cultural and linguistic representations (Burridge & Chodkiewicz, 2008). This study also showcased the ways in which the IPE context shaped how pre-service teachers connected with their burgeoning teacher identity, which again mirrors findings from similar global mobility research (e.g., Tangen et al., 2011). The teacher educators in this research missed an opportunity to consider the possible contextualisation of their IPE involvement in their course-level teaching by instead focusing on pre-service teachers, particularly around increased attractiveness in a globalised workforce. These considerations signal a shift in the notion of context by considering it in a much broader sense to better incorporate the roles that activity and culture have in the learning process; a construct more attune with Brown et al.'s (1989) conceptualisation of situated cognition. This insight suggests that in fact it is the intersectionality and reciprocity between locally based course level knowledge development and globally situated practical experience in ITE programming that may hold an important function in the preparation of future teachers.

### *5.2 General Capabilities*

The identities of teachers and teacher educators, alike, are ever evolving (Bechard, 2017; Hahl & Mikulec, 2018). Opportunities to engage in new contexts and environments has a significant impact on the ways in which the nature of teaching and the work of teachers is understood (Fitzgerald & Bradbury, 2023). It is in these moments of discomfort and challenge where meaningful personal learning takes place, and a strong sense of purpose can be forged (Fitzgerald & Bradbury, 2023). In the context of this study, IPE provided both pre-service teachers and teacher educators with an opportunity to think differently about themselves and their educational work based on lived experience. Locally, these experiences became a 'resource' or 'currency' that was drawn upon to inform and be further interpreted through formal assessment. As a result, assessment started to take on a more authentic quality as a tool for sense making. From the perspective of the teacher educators, they were able to design and use assessment to elicit meaning, value and changed thinking from the IPE. While for the pre-service teachers, assessment enabled them to 'drill down' into the IPE experience to examine what they learnt and why it mattered in terms of their development as future teachers. Equally, particularly for the pre-service teachers, it was the personal skills that they developed through the IPE that were most useful in effectively managing assessments, such as knowing how to navigate collaborations, being more resilient through discomfort, and working efficiently with reduced personal resources. This insight positions assessment in a somewhat different light than usual with a shift away from accountability and measurement (DeLuca & Bellara, 2013) to considering assessment as a way to authentically connect with self and others. Through the lens of situated cognition, learning is viewed as occurring within a context that enables experiences to be considered as meaningful and relevant rather than abstracted or removed (Khoshroodi et al., 2020). While some situated learning theorists often consider that knowledge does not



transfer well across contexts (MSU, 2005), this study opens up some consideration to how assessment can be enacted as a tool for making sense of learning and a vehicle to successful transfer learning to different settings.

### 5.3 Reflection

Encouraging reflective practice and developing graduates who will become reflective practitioners is a corner stone of ITE (Collin et al., 2013). This imperative homes in on the development of pre-service teachers' ability to critically examine their own teaching and the impact their practices have on student learning outcomes (Kuswandono, 2012). In the context of this study, the IPE encouraged both the teacher educators and pre-service teachers to develop a more expansive view of reflection, in terms of what they might reflect on and why. For the pre-service teachers, this was as a direct result of their broadened perspective around what education can look like and what it means to be a teacher. While for the teacher educators, it was an enhanced understanding of who their pre-service teachers are and what they bring with them to enhance and enrich ITE. At a course-level, the overall result was an increased empathy for different ways of being, knowing, and becoming, which is evident through peer-to-peer interactions and connections between pre-service teachers and academics, particularly when cultural and linguistic differences are evident. The lived experience provided by the IPE was an important stimulus for reflecting deeply on both education and elements of shared humanity in cross-cultural contexts. This finding has significant implications in terms of shifting ITE from being somewhat transmissive and transactional in nature to being more transformative through appreciating the "whole learning person [and] how [they] connect with [them]selves, others and the world" (Hagvall Svensson et al., 2020, p.1). In turn, this insight further interrogates the concept of situated cognition by suggesting that while learning is deeply rooted in context (Brown et al., 1989) that there are opportunities to effectively translate these lived experiences to different social situations, people, and places. Linking IPE to the locally based experiences situated within coursework provides a vehicle for applying evolved world views in ways that enrich familiar contexts.

## 6. Conclusions and Implications

It is widely accepted that international professional experiences are inspiring and affirming for pre-service teachers and teacher educators alike, but they are also much more than this. Through this paper, we have argued the merit of these experiences in developing holistic educators and that they significantly add value to ITE programs, which was the research question informing this study. While there are concerns about the applicability of this approach to 'learning about teaching' into local contexts, this research highlights that these opportunities can have an influence at a course-level as part of an ITE program in three key ways. We found that:

- 1) Understandings of particular educational concepts and pedagogies explored through ITE coursework, such as diversity and differentiation, were strengthened as a result of lived experience;
- 2) Coursework, particularly assessments, provided a vehicle for better understanding the learning that took place abroad and what it means in practice at a local level; and
- 3) Lived experiences of different educational settings provide a stimulus for reflection as part of coursework-based discussions and activities, which ultimately influenced identity formation and sense of self as a 'teacher' or 'teacher educator'.

As a result of these findings, this research offers a direct challenge to notions of situated cognition and the idea that it can be difficult for knowledge to be transferred across contexts. This work, as positioned within teacher education, suggests that an international educational experience enhanced both pre-service teachers and teacher educators learning at a course-level, but also influenced identity and practice. It is important to note that this transfer does not, however, happen by osmosis, chance, or sheer luck. There was certainly a level of either self-driven or externally encouraged activation in making sense of the experiences abroad in the local context, although the extent of this was not ascertain through this particular study, which now provides some scope and direction for further exploration into this area. Importantly, this work highlights that ITE coursework and programming, more broadly, can provide an 'anchor point' in which to ground international professional experiences with the intention to subsequently inform meaningful learning and connections in local educational contexts.

While this work is very much situated in a teacher education context, there are learnings that could be applied more broadly to create stronger ties between opportunities abroad and local situations for other learning areas in higher education (e.g., business, engineering, nursing, etc.). These considerations include:

- Being explicit in finding ways to connect coursework and the international experience with assessment forming a natural vehicle for building on and linking these meaningful and authentic learning experiences;
- Making time for the discussion and reflection that enables the sharing of new insights, so that others can be

exposed to this learning and that equally this learning can be challenged and considered in a different setting; and

- Leveraging this opportunity to bring theory to life through these unique experiences and to inform the development of personal professional identity.

International professional experiences have the potential to not only enrich personal lives but inform, shape, and enrich professional identity in ways that stretch well beyond global borders. While this research shows that the learning from these opportunities can have applicability in local contexts, care and due consideration must be given to ensuring that the right conditions are created at course-level to meaningfully make these links in practice.

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