Editorial

Challenges for Pedagogical Effectiveness in an Ever-Changing Education Landscape: Conceptualisation of Pedagogical Mobility and Flexibility as a Context-Consciousness

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1. Introduction

The challenges to maintaining pedagogical effectiveness in an ever-changing education landscape not only turn focus on the professional development of teachers and their teaching practices but also emphasise the preparation of pre-service teachers and their skill development to practice pedagogical flexibility and mobility while focusing on context-consciousness [1]. Preparedness for classroom demands involves a sound knowledge foundation built on content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, as discussed by Shulman [2,3]. These two types of knowledge receive significant attention in education across the globe, although they might be labelled in various ways. However, we argue that pedagogical knowledge often only gets a *quick touch of the brush*, even though teachers' pedagogical effectiveness and awareness in an ever-changing education landscape can change the learning culture within classrooms. The purpose of this Editorial is to turn focus to the careful conceptualisation of a much overlooked, but highly influential, professional knowledge sphere of pedagogical knowledge. Unfortunately, pedagogical knowledge is often mentioned when Shulman's work is discussed but with an *add-on* discourse, while the key focus mostly falls on content and pedagogical content knowledge. We argue that pedagogical mobility and adaptability should seize teachers', pre-service teachers', and educational leaders' awareness, creating a sensitivity towards the needs within a specific learning and teaching context and environment and the capacity to adjust teaching and leadership practices and strategies accordingly. We suggest that teachers' and especially pre-service teachers' preparation emphasise skills to adjust and implement targeted pedagogies to benefit classroom students. Van Manen [4,5] emphasises the *art of teaching*, which includes the tone and tact of teaching practices captured in the *language* and thoughtfulness of pedagogy [4,5].

This Special Issue offers a range of research discussions from international contexts focusing on context-conscious teaching practices, and an in-depth understanding, perceptions, and enactment of pedagogical mobility and adjustability. We argue that pedagogical mobility calls on teachers', pre-service teachers', and educational leaders' capacity to adjust teaching and leadership practices and strategies according to the needs within a specific context and environment. Van Manen [4,5] underlines the language and thoughtfulness of pedagogy, the *art of teaching* that *involves* the tone and tact of teaching practices as the voice and deep reflection of pedagogical reasoning in classrooms [4,5].

Society has experienced a myriad of changes, transforming how people view the world they live in and how they live their lives. New frontiers are constantly being explored, driven by technological advances and evolving needs. Currently, teachers are preparing their students for careers that do not even exist yet. At the same time, it seems as if the

world has shrunk. Globalisation has brought about school classrooms filled with learners from different cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities, meaning teachers need to adapt their pedagogies to create culturally sensitive, inclusive environments.

While many may feel as if the COVID-19 pandemic brought our world to a standstill, forcing us all to reconsider everything taken for granted before, teachers may disagree. The pandemic forced education stakeholders to adapt teaching practices faster than ever before. However, it also magnified the great divide between the affluent and poor in terms of access to education. During the pandemic, affluent countries quickly adapted to the delivery of education, ensuring education continues. The other side of the coin is true for the poor. In many instances, education has grounded to a halt, leaving students in dire need as opposed to their counterparts living in affluent countries.

As one considers the effects of globalisation and digital transformation, but also the great divide between third- and first-world countries, it becomes clear that the current education landscape is a constantly changing, evolving world in need of malleable practitioners who can keep up with the requirements of their students. While in some countries the need for pedagogical mobility may be driven by the fast-changing society along with new digital developments, in other countries, pedagogical mobility may be a priority in teacher training as the differences between poor and affluent schools call for the need for new teachers to adapt to the environment in which they find employment.

Teachers in practice, and those in training, must be able to adapt their techniques, methodologies, and strategies to meet the ever-evolving and diverse demands of modern society. In this rapidly changing education landscape, a reluctance to explore pedagogies beyond familiar, usual, and comfortable pedagogical reasoning can be detrimental to effective teaching and learning. Quality learning and effective classroom and behaviour management are significant concerns that need careful pedagogical flexibility and adaptability.

2. The Literature Supports an Understanding of the Spatial Effect of Pedagogical Mobility

Lim et al. [6] claimed that the "pedagogy of the teacher is realized through the combinational deployment of modalities and semiotic resources, which can include gesture, gaze, images and movement, alongside with language" [6]. We argue that pedagogical mobility is sensitive and relates to knowing which modalities and semiotic resources are best suited to a specific context, situation, and space. To emphasise spatial awareness as a fundamental principle of pedagogical mobility, we turn our focus to fine-tuning pedagogical decisions and reasoning.

Tchoukaleyska et al. [7] drew attention to the fact that pedagogical mobility is a "process of fine-tuning" teaching and can stimulate in-depth conversations as well as the collaboration and commitment "of all partners to experiment with new approaches" [7]. Potapchuk [8] emphasised and linked the need for pedagogical adaptability or mobility as "an orientation to the individual" which requires innovative development of potential, openness, and "professional flexibility, mobility of a specialist" [8]. In addition, Potapchuk [8] underlined that professional training is required to adjust pedagogical systems to support students' learning progress.

However, taking risks with new teaching practices and exploring the theoretical framing of flexible, fluent, and mobile strategies and approaches involve careful planning and guidance. Forsling and Tjernberg [9] discussed intentions and objectives to overcome and remove identified barriers to classroom students' development as a process of pedagogical flexibility. Pedagogical mobility and adjustability determine fit-for-purpose solutions to complex teaching and learning environments. In agreement with Bronfenbrenner and Evans [10], as well as Tudge et al. [11], we argue that the specific context, bioecological systems, and students' lived experience should direct pedagogical decisions. Forsling and Tjernberg [9] underlined the influence of strategic professional development and learning on inclusive pedagogical practices as opportunities for in-service learning and collaboration.

We argue that the learning and teaching cultures of schools are informed by sound pedagogical structures underpinned by adjustability. In this vein, Kwok [12] claimed that schools' pedagogical strategies or the type of instruction or pedagogical flexibility that they offer to inform classroom management and engaging lessons will influence the decisions of early-career teachers to stay at a specific school. This pedagogical mobility or flexibility includes interactive lessons and tasks that allow students to explore problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. We argue that teaching philosophies inform teachers' openness to explore pedagogical mobility and flexibility to benefit students' learning needs. Furthermore, educational psychology may inform pre-service teachers about how learning takes place and how an individual learns.

Arcila Hernández et al. [13] discussed pedagogical tools as sources of great potential to stimulate engagement, accountability, and equity in classrooms. They argue that pedagogies are embedded in evidence-based educational theories and practices with implications for a variety of learning approaches. We argue for awareness and context-consciousness to adjust pedagogical approaches to ensure flexibility to offer students the best-suited pedagogy linked to their needs and with respect for their specific contexts. Pedagogical mobility and adjustability develop a positive learning culture to support student performance, school retention, consistency regarding attendance, and a sense of belonging in the learning environment.

3. Content of this Special Issue

As stated previously, this Special Issue aims to offer a variety of research papers from various parts of the world endeavouring to highlight the need for the adjustment of teaching and leadership practices and strategies according to context. There is little doubt that the 21st-century classroom requires teachers, in-service or in-training, to adapt to the unique circumstances posed by the times we find ourselves in. Through professional development, in-service teachers can improve their ability to adapt to the requirements of the 21st-century classroom, and tertiary institutions are responsible for ensuring they deliver new teachers sensitive to pedagogical flexibility and mobility.

As authors, we argue that pedagogical mobility requires awareness by teachers regarding the best-suited modalities and semiotic resources to use within a specific context and that developing this sensitivity and knowing relies on finely tuned pedagogical discussions and reasoning. Thus, during the training of pre-service teachers, it is important to instil the Latin etymological origin of education—*educere*—within the repertoire of young teachers [14]. *Educere* refers to leading young minds, teaching the youth to think, question, and develop critical, creative, and problem-solving skills that will enable pre-service teachers, and their future students, to understand and tolerate their differences and to jointly find solutions to the problems that humankind faces [14]. Within the context of education considered to mean *educere*, Petersen et al. [15] propose that teacher training programmes should be experiential, including practical and authentic learning moments to equip pre-service teachers to the challenges posed by societal issues. Botha et al. [16] have a similar mindset.

While the study conducted by Botha et al. [16] reports on a limited number of participants from one institution in South Africa, it is unique as the researchers focused on identity development and self-authorship of first-year students, while all other research studies on this topic focused on participants near to or at the end of their studies. Botha et al. [16] infer that the process of becoming a teacher starts long before the pre-service teacher's first class or teaching practice period. Lived experiences, local knowledge, and pre-existing relationships all play an important role in the development of a professional identity. The researchers propose that in-training teachers start their teaching studies with an immature and naïve pre-professional identity. To guide students in the development of a professional identity, the authors recommend that (1) students are exposed to intentional disruptions during their studies to challenge them to critically evaluate thinking and opinions while making sense of experiences; (2) teacher educators acknowledge the importance

of modelling and consider their own teaching practices; and (3) teacher educators link learning to real-world experiences to bridge the theory–practice gap, while (4) providing holistic support to students.

In his article, De Beer [17] reports on excursions as immersion pedagogy to enhance self-directed learning (SDL) in pre-service teacher education. While the aim of immersion pedagogy is the development of SDL, the experiential learning opportunity created by the excursions offers an unconventional learning space for first-year pre-service teachers to reflect on their personal biases and their professional development—a disrupted learning opportunity as proposed by Botha et al. [16]. The learning space created allows for a better, more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the education profession. A clear bridge of the theory–practice divide is provided by the innovative use of immersion pedagogy. Oluk [18] joins Botha et al. [16] and de Beer [17] in highlighting the pivotal role that teacher educators play in connecting theoretical understanding with the practicalities of the modern classroom.

There is little doubt that teaching practice is a central component of preparing students for the real world of teaching. Du Plessis [19] points to the crucial role that teaching practice plays in teacher education and how essential it is to combine theory with practice. As is the case with Botha et al. [16] and de Beer [17], du Plessis [19] argues that the pedagogical mobility of future teachers can be enhanced through focused pre-service programmes (encouraging critical reflection through disruption) and teaching practice. Well-planned and aligned programmes, which include structured teaching practice, allow for students to be guided to navigate diverse educational settings and adjust their strategies and approaches accordingly. Again, the important role of mentor teachers and collaboration between the role-players is highlighted.

A second argument offered by the authors of this Editorial pertains to the attention paid to pedagogical knowledge. We argue that the importance of pedagogical knowledge is often downplayed despite the integral role that pedagogical effectiveness and awareness play in establishing a learning culture in a classroom. In their article, Kyi et al. [20] report on a case study design aimed at analysing and comparing pre-service teacher education policies and programmes in three Asian countries using a Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. While their research pointed to general trends and patterns in the training of pre-service secondary school science teachers, the researchers also uncovered the best practices and unique qualities within the policies and programmes of the various countries. More importantly, in terms of TPACK, it was found that all three countries provided limited exposure to it, while the researchers emphasised that providing sufficient and balanced knowledge of TPACK is essential to ensure that pre-service (science) teachers are equipped for the pedagogical mobility required by the 21st-century classroom. Despite the focus on the pedagogy related to the integration of technology into the classroom, it can be argued that the research findings provide support for the authors' argument that the need for a strong underpinning of pedagogy is often overlooked or undervalued.

From the aforementioned, little doubt arises that well-planned teacher training programmes focusing on pedagogical knowledge alongside pedagogical content knowledge are imperative in ensuring that in-training teachers join the profession with the necessary awareness of a need for pedagogical flexibility and mobility. In perusing the articles within this Special Issue, the position of in-service teachers and the demands that 21st-century classrooms place on them to critically reflect and adapt the strategies they use become clear.

Since the dawn of the 21st century, Artificial Intelligence has become a prominent subject, but the launch of the Generative Pretrained Transformer, or ChatGPT, in November 2022 caused quite a stir and elicited many a debate within the higher education environment. Moving beyond the world of higher education, Van den Berg and du Plessis [21] report on a qualitative study utilising document analyses to investigate the usefulness of generative language models, such as ChatGPT, to in-service, as well as in-training, teachers. Their findings illustrate that these AI tools open access for all to retrieve lesson plans. However, the

authors caution that users need to critically evaluate the material generated for limitations and biases. ChatGPT and other similar tools cannot and do not replace teachers; they are merely tools to support and enrich teaching and learning.

Razmjoee et al. [22] focus their study on the need for adjustments during assessment for students with disabilities. While their study focuses on Australian students, much of what is reported by the authors may be relevant to similarly situated students and teachers across the world. The study clearly points to the benefits of pedagogical mobility for students with disabilities to make assessment tasks assessable through effective and appropriate adjustments, levelling the playing field for such students.

In their article, Dempsey and Mestry [23] expand on the following facts:

- A constant pedagogical challenge remains the translation of teacher experiences into explicit learning contexts for learners;
- Teachers are only effective if they are prepared for possible changes and can adapt quickly to changes in conditions;
- The COVID-19 pandemic made pedagogical mobility crucial as teachers had to adopt an introspective view of their pedagogical practices and make changes to their teaching strategies to create engaged meaningful (virtual) learning environments for learners.

The authors report that COVID-19 forced teachers to become digitally literate and apply new technologies to ensure access to a variety of resources and activities for learners. The participants of their study indicated shortcomings on the part of school management and education authorities. However, collaboration and knowledge sharing with peers and community members, as well as adopting a trial-and-error approach, allowed learning to continue. The authors advocate for less generic CPD programmes, calling for CPD programmes focused on addressing the needs and interests of teachers while taking the unique contexts of the schools they teach at into consideration.

In diverse learning contexts, the application of educational psychology becomes crucial as it enables educators to understand and address the unique cognitive, emotional, and cultural factors influencing students' learning experiences. Mampane [24] argues in her article that planning for teacher education necessitates academic experts in the field of education to lead the design and advancement of the curriculum and knowledge for prospective educators. While educators may not be experts in psychology, they must possess substantial knowledge and insight into human development and the process of learning.

Pedagogical mobility and flexibility are integral to teaching. They have always been important but the unique challenges that the teachers of the 21st century face make it more important than ever. There is a definite duty of institutions training teachers to ensure that when in-training teachers enter the world of teaching, they are prepared for the challenges that they will face; they must also ensure that teachers' ability to adapt according to context is well founded. From the various papers discussed above, challenges and gaps in understanding pedagogical mobility have become clear.

4. Challenges and Gaps in Understanding Pedagogical Mobility: Careful Guidance and Management of Flexibility and Adjustability

There is little doubt that education is one of the single most important areas of a child's life, requiring teachers to always remember the integral role that they play in moulding and forming the lives of the learners in their care [25]. A clear understanding of what it means to be a teacher who confidently enacts pedagogical mobility with a passion to explore, adjust, and change teaching practices and strategies when needed cannot be negated. The learning needs of classroom students should guide and direct the fundamental principles, structural and cultural underpinnings, and policy decisions to strengthen initial teacher education across borders. National and transnational partnerships and collaboration are vital to consistently improve the elements of initial teacher education. The editors of this Special Issue aimed to highlight the following in the Issue:

(a)   A focus on the integration of theory and practice as a process of collaboration and partnership between schools and higher education (HE) providers. Strong collaboration between schools and providers of initial teacher education (ITE) forms sound foundations and a well-prepared next-generation teaching workforce.

(b)   Reforming ITE to stay current and accommodate the changing learning and teaching context and diverse needs within these contexts.

(c)   Concerns about the capability of teachers and pre-service teachers to effectively lead a positive learning culture towards enhancing student performance and outcomes.

(d)   Indications of poor practice in some ITE programmes not only influence the preparedness of graduating teachers for the teaching profession but also have implications for attrition rates of early-career teachers. Not all initial teacher education programmes equip graduates with the content knowledge, evidence-based teaching strategies, and skills that they need to respond to different learning needs while maintaining a healthy (emotionally, socially, culturally, and cognitively) and safe environment for their learners to belong, explore, and confidently take risks within this guarded learning environment.

(e)   Maintaining quality teaching within an education landscape impacted by teacher shortages, out-of-field teaching practices, large student cohorts, and challenging trauma and behaviour guidance and regulation.

(f)   A clear pedagogical understanding of the value of exploring what the 'art of teaching' might look like within a specific context and how to carefully explore, implement, and construct strategies to enact targeted pedagogical principles.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the most influential aspect of solid and well-grounded teaching is the theoretical sound reasoning of pre-service and in-service teachers as the foundation of lesson planning and classroom practices. Pre-service and in-service teachers need to develop thorough alignment between pedagogical knowledge and their professional identity as teachers. Teachers' unique integration of a sound theory to practice planning for a specific subject area, year level, and context forms a *secure and safe* framework for their teaching that will allow them to explore various teaching strategies.

It is necessary for ITE providers, educational psychologists, and schools to work together, creating a well-structured approach across a range of classroom situations, for example, reflecting on mentoring models that work best in a specific context, fit-for-purpose support for in-service and pre-service teachers and the development of skills to engage in ongoing critical reflection of their own practice, pedagogical reasoning, and adjustability. Such collaboration may lead to in-training teachers gaining a better understanding of the world that they are about to enter, breaching the theory–practice gap, while in-service teachers may gain new ideas and knowledge from a new generation who sees the world differently.

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