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## **Influences on Preservice Writing Instruction during the Secondary English as an Additional Language Practicum in Australia**

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*Abstract: Informed by a sociocultural perspective on second language teacher education, the present qualitative study investigates three preservice teachers' (PSTs) writing instruction during the English as an Additional Language (EAL) practicum in Australian secondary schools in relation to the multidimensional context of the practicum and the PSTs' personal backgrounds. Sources of data included individual interviews with the PSTs and their school mentors, lesson plans and recordings, teaching materials, the PSTs' self-reflections, and analysis of the schools' EAL programs. Data analysis revealed that the main factors shaping PSTs' writing instruction included the EAL programs at the schools, school teachers and the mentors support, EAL students' background, proficiency levels and responses to tasks, and the PSTs' knowledge, prior education and work experiences. Based on the findings, the paper discusses implications for enhancing the quality of EAL teacher education, especially for promoting productive coursework and placement experiences for PSTs.*

**Keywords:** *Practicum, writing instruction, EAL, TESOL, secondary, Australia*

### **Background**

It has been well established in the second language education literature that speaking and writing play an important role in second language learning. Swain's influential output hypothesis argues that speaking and writing (i.e., producing language) constitutes an important part of second language learning (Swain, 1985; 2005). Similarly, from a language curriculum design perspective, Nation (2007) argues that learning to use language productively through speaking and writing constitutes one of the four strands of a well-balanced language course. Given the importance of writing in the language curriculum, the topic of English language students learning to write has been well researched (Dobao & Blum, 2013; Riazi & Rezaii, 2011; Storch, 2005; Tare et al., 2014; Zhang, 2016); however, little is known about teachers learning to teach writing (Lee, 2010).

Recent research in second language teacher education have encouraged the field to shift from a focus on learner and learning to a concern for teacher learning (Ellis, 2010; Waters, 2005), which can be seen in a substantial body of research on teacher cognition (Borg, 2011). Within the growing scholarship on teacher learning in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), a limited number of studies investigate in-service teachers' professional learning through writing instruction (Kaur, 2014; Lee, 2010; 2013). A few other studies examine PSTs' attitudes, experiences and beliefs in relation to prospective writing instruction (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Norman & Spencer, 2005). The limited body of research on preservice TESOL education shows that a lack of explicit focus on

preparing PSTs for the skills needed for teaching writing appears to be a feature of preservice TESOL education (Hall & Grisham-Brown, 2011; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Studies in the United States and Hong Kong identified limited attention paid to preparing PSTs for writing instruction in preservice TESOL programs (Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Lee, 2010). Similarly, a study conducted in Vietnam reveals that PSTs are under-prepared for writing instruction as they enter the teaching practicum (H. T. M. Nguyen & Hudson, 2010).

While the studies above have touched upon the area of preparing PSTs for writing instruction, none of them examines the ways in which preservice TESOL teachers actually teach writing during the practicum as they learn to become teachers. Understanding how PSTs teach writing during the TESOL practicum and factors influencing this process would potentially inform teacher education institutions in developing preservice teacher education programs that meet the teaching needs of PSTs. This is because the practicum is one of the most influential parts of preservice TESOL teacher preparation. Engagement in the practicum experience enables preservice TESOL teachers to learn the practical knowledge and skills needed to become effective teachers (Faez & Valeo, 2012; Farrell, 2008; Graves, 2009).

There is now a growing body of research on the TESOL practicum experiences, which takes into account important issues such as teacher identity development (Haniford, 2010; Trent, 2013), emotional experiences (Benson, 2012; de Courcy, 2011), and mentoring relationships (Gan, 2014; Gao & Benson, 2012; Yuan & Lee, 2014). These studies offer valuable insights into the various personal and contextual aspects of PST learning. However, in identifying issues for subsequent research in second language teacher education, Borg (2011) raises the concern that the field currently lack understandings of the various processes involved in the language teaching practicum. Particularly, there is a dearth of research on PSTs' instructional practices during the TESOL practicum.

TESOL practice as constructed in the Australian secondary school context places writing at the centre of teaching and learning. Current study designs for senior levels in Australia (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014) require students to write across a range of different genres, which in this paper are conceptualised as "broad rhetorical patterns such as narratives, recounts, arguments, and expositions" (Hyland, 2007, p. 153). Within the curriculum context, it is common practice for these skills to be progressively developed as EAL students move through more junior levels of schooling, and preservice EAL teachers are often involved in planning and delivering lessons on writing. Given the above mentioned importance of writing in language education and the necessity to understand preservice writing instruction during the practicum to inform EAL teacher education, the present qualitative study seeks to understand preservice EAL teachers' activity of teaching writing during the EAL practicum in Australian secondary schools. Specifically, it examines the following research questions:

1. How did the PSTs teach writing during the EAL practicum in the Victorian secondary school context?
2. What factors influenced the PSTs' practices in writing instruction?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The literature on second language teacher education suggests that personal histories and sociocultural context have powerful influence on PST learning (Golombek, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Singh & Richards, 2006). Researchers have called for a consistent conceptual framework for conceptualising teacher learning in a way that takes into account the complexities of teacher learning (Borg, 2006; Cross, 2010). To this end, a sociocultural theoretical framework to underpin research on situated language teacher learning has been

advocated by a number of researchers (Cross, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011a). Within a sociocultural framework, genetic method (Vygotsky, 1978) and activity theory (Engeström, 1987) appear to be particularly useful for supporting research on teacher learning because they offer a powerful theoretical tool to understand teachers' cognition in relation to contextual and personal factors. Genetic method, which places historicity at the centre of the overall methodological and analytical design of research into everyday human behaviour (Vygotsky, 1978), supports an approach to research that “seeks to explain the situation by tracing its origins and evolution” (Engeström & Sannino, 2010, p. 7) rather than simply describing immediate aspects of the present form of human activity. Activity theory (Engeström, 1987) offers a powerful analytical framework which takes into account the multidimensional nature of human activity and the systemic relations between different aspects of the activity including personal histories, sociocultural factors, and their origins. Such a framework enabled the study to investigate the preservice writing instruction practices as being shaped by the PSTs' personal histories and the EAL practicum context

Informed by the combined genetic method–activity theory framework, this study takes an explanatory approach to researching the preservice EAL writing instruction activity rather than a mere description of it. The research has potential to provide systematic implications for PST preparation (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010) in promoting factors that foster effective professional learning during the EAL practicum and overcome challenges to this process.

## Method

### Research Settings

The two types of research sites for this study include Greystone University (pseudonym) and three secondary schools, all in metropolitan Melbourne, Australia. Greystone University offers a graduate entry preservice program with a number of secondary specialisms, including EAL. Teacher candidates choose a combination of two specialist teaching areas, and the present study was concerned with PSTs who had EAL as one of the two methods. In completing the program, EAL PSTs take four units in general education, two related to teaching Languages other than English (LOTE), one related to second language teaching, one related to teaching EAL and two practicum rounds, each lasting five weeks. The first round includes a three-week EAL practicum, and the second round includes a two-week EAL practicum. Data collection for this study took place during the two weeks of EAL teaching in the second round. Table 1 summarises information about the three participating schools:

Schools	Type of school	EAL program
Redwood Secondary College	Co-educational public school	EAL targeted support classes
Greenfern Secondary College	Co-educational public school with an English language centre	New Arrival Program before EAL students transition to mainstream schooling/ EAL targeted support classes
Bluerock Grammar school	Private girls' day and boarding school	EAL targeted support classes

**Table 1: Participating schools**

**Participants**

Research permission was obtained from the participating university and schools. Ethics approval for this research was granted by the university’s Human Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. With written informed consent, six voluntary participants were involved, including Frank, Kate and Maria as PSTs and Mr Scott, Ms Weston, and Ms Davies, who were the PSTs’ mentors respectively (All names are pseudonyms). Table 2 and 3 summarise information about the PSTs and mentor teachers respectively:

<b>PSTs</b>	<b>Gender/ Age</b>	<b>Practicum school</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Background</b>
Maria	Female/ Aged 27	Bluerock Grammar School	EAL/SOSE <sup>1</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-native English speaking background</li> <li>• about 20 years of English language learning</li> <li>• a Bachelor degree in Chinese study</li> <li>• lived in Australia for three years, first time in an English speaking country</li> </ul>
Frank	Male/ Aged 31	Redwood Secondary College	EAL/ Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ESL/bilingual background; born and grew up speaking English together with his first language</li> <li>• a Bachelor in Business Management, a Cert III in Pastry and Baking</li> <li>• lived in Australia for five years</li> </ul>
Kate	Female/ Aged 27	Greenfern Secondary College	EAL/LOTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an English native speaker from outside Australia</li> <li>• a Bachelor degree in an Asian language</li> <li>• lived in Australia for three years</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Preservice teacher participants**

<b>Mentor teachers</b>	<b>PST/School</b>	<b>Background</b>
Ms. Davies	Maria/ Bluerock Grammar School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a university degree in teaching ESL and English</li> <li>• taught EFL at high school and university in Italy, business English, as well as English at home</li> <li>• taught EAL and VCE at the school for two years</li> <li>• had mentored six student teachers</li> </ul>
Mr. Scott	Frank/ Redwood Secondary College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a degree in TESOL</li> <li>• had been teaching EAL for 17 years in Hong Kong and Australia</li> </ul>
Ms. Weston	Kate/Greenfern Secondary College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a degree in EAL teaching</li> <li>• taught overseas before starting teaching at the school three years before</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Mentor teacher participants**

This paper was drawn from a larger project that examined the professional experience of EAL PSTs in Victorian secondary schools. Accordingly, the PSTs were selected based on the criterion that they were placed at Victorian secondary schools for EAL teaching. Selection of the schools and school mentors was contingent on selection of the PSTs. Once we had selected the PSTs based on the criterion above, we sought permission for research from the schools where they were placed. The schools then assisted us in recruiting the mentors through a voluntary and written informed consent process.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

<sup>1</sup> SOSE stands for Studies of Society and Environment

Interviews are one of the most useful ways of interacting between researchers and participants to gain an understanding of the participants' activity and their interpretation of it (Merriam, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In this study, each PST participated in three individual semi-structured interviews, which lasted approximately 60 minutes each and were audio-recorded. The first interview gathered information about their personal histories. The second interview was a stimulated recall interview aimed to elicit the PSTs' interpretations of their preservice writing instruction experiences based on their self-audio-recorded lessons and lesson plans as primary stimuli. The third interview elicited the PSTs' reflections on their EAL writing instruction during the practicum and further interpretations of their practice and thinking. The PSTs were also required to produce a written reflection on their teaching at the end of each lesson as part of her practicum requirements. In addition, during a school visit for an interview with the mentors, the first author had an informal conversation with each PST in which they reflected on their practicum experience. The interviews and written and oral reflections were used as primary sources of data. Moreover, an interview was conducted with each mentor to gather information about the school's profile, their background, beliefs, and perceptions of the relevant PST's practicum experience. The PSTs' lesson plans and teaching materials, together with the school's EAL programs were also used as data. In addition, each PST was provided with a voice recorder to record their lessons, and the lesson recordings were used as first hand data as well as stimuli for the stimulated recall interviews.

Verbal data were first transcribed by the first author and checked by the participants where they volunteered to do so. After that, data from all the sources were analysed using qualitative content analysis strategies, which involves an in-depth line-by-line analysis of data transcripts and focuses on the content rather than linguistic features of the data (Merriam, 2009). This approach to data analysis was adopted because it enabled the study to conduct a holistic and comprehensive analysis of the complex sociocultural experience of EAL writing instruction (Kohlbacher, 2006). Findings were reported in the following section with the use of codes to indicate the sources of data. For example, M.IN.1 refers to the first interview with Maria, K.R refers to Kate's reflections, F.LR.1 refers to Frank's first lesson recording, and S.IN refers to the interview with Mr Scott.

## Findings

Data analysis revealed that during the EAL practicum, all the three PSTs focused on teaching writing as a major part of their preservice teaching. Within writing instruction, they used a number of teaching strategies. The study found that a range of personal and contextual factors interplayed in shaping the PSTs' writing instruction to EAL secondary students. The main influential factors included the EAL program at the school, member of school communities, past research, mentoring, EAL students' background and proficiency level, university coursework, and the PST's knowledge, prior education and work experience.

### Focus on Teaching Writing and Influential Factors

Analysis of data shows that all the three PSTs focused on teaching writing to EAL students, and there are similarities and differences in the factors influencing this focus on writing. Kate reflected on her lessons and identified writing as the main emphasis:

*The majority of the lessons were really about understanding how those texts were put together and breaking them down, and also making sure that [...] every lesson involved a lot of speaking, listening and reading as well as writing. So, although the*

*end product was writing, I tried to use all the different macro skills in the lesson and I think in a way the main emphasis was comprehension of how those texts work. (K.R)*

This excerpt reveals that although Kate appeared to cover all the macro language skills in her lessons, great emphasis was placed on teaching EAL students how to write. Several factors were found to influence Kate's focus on teaching writing, one of which was the freedom and flexibility that the school's open EAL curriculum allowed for, as Ms Weston said,

*We choose topics that we want to do. We have a lot of freedom in designing our own units of work. (W.IN)*

The main curriculum requirement was coverage of topics in content areas, and the teacher had the freedom to choose how to deliver this. In addition, Kate noted the influence of the English Language Centre Coordinator's perspective on the importance of writing in developing English proficiency:

*It was partly something that actually the Coordinator was saying at the PD [professional development] that there's quite a lot of research now suggesting that actually doing more writing really is what pushes the English level up. (K.R)*

It appears that as an experienced and senior member of the staff and with the support of research, the Coordinator's perspective had an influential role in guiding Kate's practice.

Furthermore, Kate's decision to spend more time teaching writing was also shaped by her understanding of the need to prepare the students for meeting the curriculum demands in mainstream school:

*For me, it's basically they have to do huge amounts of writing next year. And a lot of the students they're going into Year 10 and 11, and the curriculum demands are so heavy. The content is so heavy. They have to write so much. And [...] it wasn't with the text types I wanted them to write them, not just so they could write them but so they could understand how they were put together and how they worked, particularly with factual and creative writing, they're going to have novels that they have to study, and they're going to have to read lots of factual texts, particularly in Science and History. So [...] I was hoping by writing it they would improve their writing but they'd also be able to understand how those texts were put together more. [...]. I think in a way the main emphasis was comprehension of how those texts work so when they go next year to the college they'll be able to handle it better because I think it can be quite a struggle for some of them when they go up next year. (K.R)*

The excerpt shows Kate's understanding of the curricular context in which her EAL students were moving towards Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in Year 10 and Year 11. She understood that they had to be prepared to cope with heavy curriculum loads, especially in terms of writing and reading of literary and factual texts in other VCE subjects. In order to prepare her students for this critical transition, Kate wanted them to be able to write as well as to understand how different text types are structured. Believing that by learning how to write these text types, students would develop both the ability to write and the ability to decode texts for better understanding, she chose to focus on teaching narrative and factual writing.

Also focusing on writing instruction, Frank spent much of his preservice teaching time on teaching descriptive writing and creative writing. He used different activities in his teaching of writing, some of which included writing one question to find information about the PST, writing about where students came from and what they would like to do when they finish school, writing about challenges students faced when they first came to Australia, writing a description of the mentor teacher, writing about friendship, and writing about a fairy tale. These activities fell into three major groups, namely introductory and diagnostic writing, creative writing, and descriptive writing.

Data also revealed contextual factors at different levels that influenced Frank's focus on writing and the types of writing activities he facilitated. At the school level, this was mediated by the school's broad curriculum, as the mentor teacher noted:

*We also have a curriculum that I've only broadly told Frank about and said that I just want them to learn writing, so he's come up with a number of really innovative activities to teach them writing. (S.IN)*

According to this excerpt, the broad school curriculum placed a focus on writing; therefore, the school expected Frank to mainly teach writing during his practicum. At the class level, Frank's two weeks on practicum needed to fit into the class's program for the term, where the students had been scheduled to go to the Art Gallery and write a description of a painting. This explains why Frank spent time preparing the students for this task through a number of descriptive writing activities:

*Right now he's told me that they're going to go to the Art Gallery and they're supposed to write a descriptive piece about a painting. So that's why I'm doing a lot of description writing and descriptive activities, creative activities, so that they can get used to writing stuff. (F.R)*

Another prescheduled activity for the students was to write a digital story (i.e., a story in the form of a PowerPoint presentation) or an essay for a competition during National Literacy and Numeracy Week. This appears to have driven Frank's teaching activity as shown in the following extract:

*This week we've been doing the National Literacy and Numeracy Week, so I'm getting the students to talk about their friends and friendship. There is a competition that they're supposed to write either a digital story or an essay. So I've gotten them to try doing that. (F.IN.2)*

Similar to Kate and Frank, Maria also focused on teaching writing during the EAL practicum. Specifically, as identified in the data from lesson plans and teaching materials, most of Maria's lessons covered writing, either essay writing combined with paragraph writing or narrative writing with an emphasis on paragraph writing. This focus was explained by Maria in the stimulated recall interview excerpt below:

R: *It seems that you focused quite a lot on writing because all the four lessons were on writing.*

M: *Well, actually my mentor wanted me to teach writing skills. I wouldn't..., that wouldn't be my choice. [...] but I had to adjust to what my mentor wanted from me, so like it's just the way I had to do it. [...]*

R: *So why do you think she wanted to focus on teaching writing?*

M: *Well because it's the skills the students need to learn for upcoming years. Especially Year 10, year 11 and year 12 will be like VCE studies and stuff, so they would have to do a lot of essay writing and that's really useful skills. (M.IN.2)*

Despite sharing with Frank and Kate a common understanding of the importance of developing EAL students' writing skills to prepare them for meeting the mainstream curriculum demands, teaching writing "wouldn't be my choice" in Maria's words. Rather, Maria considered the focus on writing instruction as an imposition by the mentor. This finding shows that Maria had developed an understanding of the curriculum context of EAL teaching; however, she was yet to proactively implement teaching that was responsive to this context.

### Writing Instruction Strategies and Influential Factors

Sharing a focus on writing instruction, Frank, Kate and Maria exhibited different approaches to teaching writing. Kate's approach involved genre-based writing instruction with a focus on structure of texts and differentiated instruction. Frank used personalised and individualised instruction where he was able to use the students with personal backgrounds and interests as resources for genre-based writing instruction and to cater for their individual differences. Maria tackled essay and paragraph writing with the support of structural templates such as a Topic-Evidence-Evaluation-Link (TEEL) framework and graphic organisers. This section reports on the teaching strategies used by the PSTs and factors influencing the use of these strategies. Note that while in this paper genres are conceptualised as broad rhetorical patterns, such as narratives, arguments, and expositions (Hyland, 2007), due to the multiple ways the term is defined in the literature, the participants referred to the term 'genres' with slightly narrower meaning such as science fiction, adventure fiction, and horror fiction, which may be classified under narratives as conceptualised in this paper. However, data were reported verbatim.

#### *Kate's Focus on Structure of Texts and Differentiated Instruction*

The data show that Kate's understanding of the mainstream curriculum demands and her students' varying levels motivated her to teach text structure and use differentiated instruction. Firstly, Kate's understanding of the text types that students were going to work with in their later years influenced the way she taught writing lessons. She reportedly chose to focus on writing narratives and information reports with both of her classes because these were the two main genres they would need in preparation for their studies in subjects such as Literature, Science and History. This shows that Kate made a decision to use a genre-based approach to teaching writing, which has been positively appraised for enabling teachers to "ground their courses in the texts that students will have to write in their target contexts" (Hyland, 2007, p. 148). She reflected back on this:

*So basically, I wanted to talk about factual texts and have both classes produce an information report and then I wanted them to talk about creative texts and have each class produce a story. (K.R)*

Apart from an emphasis on teaching narratives and information reports, the data also show that Kate placed great focus on teaching the structure of these two writing genres, which is considered as the principle of genre-based writing instruction (Hyland, 2007).

*I rushed through some of the other things. I rushed through the genres because I thought, OK, genre's important, but, you know, I can tell them everything I want to about, you know, science fiction or mystery detective stories, but if they don't know the structure of the story, there's no point of me giving them the information because they won't be able to use it when they write a story. (K.IN.2)*

The extract above illustrates how Kate rushed through information that she thought would not be useful without the students knowing the structure of texts so that she could spend more time teaching text structure.

Kate noted a number of factors shaping her decision to focus on the structure of texts. First of all, Kate acknowledged her prior school experience as an influence on her decision to focus on teaching text structure:

*My impression was that the structure of the story was really important. I guess when I was at school and we had to do narrative writing, I always found it really difficult. And I remember that for factual text types, you were taught very clear structure. For example, in Science, you know, it'll be like, you know, your hypothesis, your method,*

*your list of equipment. But I remember for anything creative like poetry or story writing, [...] we were sort of getting an impression because it was creative you could do what you like and that there wasn't much of the structure. (K.IN.2)*

This comment illustrates that, having learned how to write in different genres at school, Kate found that factual texts such as information reports are less challenging because she was taught very clear structure. However, she remembered finding creative writing such as narratives more difficult because less attention was paid to teaching its structure. With that experience, Kate attributed great importance to teaching the structure of a narrative text; and therefore, decided that the students should learn the structure before they learn other aspects of narrative writing. The finding that Kate's personal histories play an influential role in the pedagogical decisions lends support to past research that involves writing teachers (Norman & Spencer, 2005).

Secondly, Kate took into consideration the proficiency background of EAL students in designing her unit of work, as she recalled in the following excerpt:

*I think that for EAL students particularly, creative writing can be really difficult because how do you know where to start and especially if you don't have much language at your disposal, how can you make sure that at each stage of writing you're going to be owning and counting language that you can handle. So I thought that by outlining the structure, it would make it really clear for them before they started. [...]. And I think that, you know, good planning is what makes good writing for even all students. And I think that if you know the structure really clearly, that's where you start, that's how you scaffold starting writing. So I think I decided that they had to have the structure before they started doing anything else. (K.IN.2)*

There are two points made by Kate in this excerpt. The first point is that creative writing could be really challenging for EAL students whose language proficiency levels might not have met the task demands. Therefore, the teacher could reduce the level of task difficulty by teaching them the structure of text before letting students embark on the writing task. This is well supported by the literature on language teaching methodology which emphasises the importance of pre-teaching to bring the task within the students' experience (Nation, 2012). Kate's second argument is that good planning is an important factor in good writing, and by providing the students with a structure, the teacher offered them the scaffold they needed for good planning, and thus a better chance for good writing. This belief is in line with findings of past research on planning and task performance in second language learning (Ellis, 2005) that she might have engaged with during her teacher education and research.

Not only supported by theories and research, Kate's scaffolding strategies for teaching writing was also commended by the mentor teacher. Ms Weston said:

*From what she taught them, they've learnt what she was teaching them, which was narrative writing and it was very well-scaffolded and they learnt how to do that. [...] So yeah, I think it was well-done. She did a very good job actually. (W.IN)*

The data show that within the genre-based approach to teaching writing, Kate used a number of strategies in teaching the structure of texts, one of which was text annotation:

*Quite a few times I would annotate a text. We did annotate a text together on the board or I would annotate a text and show them the annotated text to show how it fits together, what the structure was. I was pointing to some other kinds of language that was being used, that kind of thing. (K.R)*

Teaching two different level groups the same curriculum, Kate reportedly used differentiated instruction to make her lessons suitable for the students' different levels. In the following excerpt, Kate elaborated on several instructional strategies that she used across the two level groups:

*We started by talking about different kinds of stories, and I showed them, we went over different genres of stories, say science fiction, horror, the kinds of words you might find in them, the kind of characters you might find in them. We talked a lot about that. Then I gave them pictures, and I had four different pictures that were sort of interesting, and they had to get into groups of two or three and they had to write down as many words on a big piece of paper as they could that they associated with that picture, what the picture made them think of. They had to use nouns, verbs, and adjectives and any phrases as well that they wanted to use. And then after they brainstormed all of those, they sort of showed each other and looked at the different words that people had come up with, the different phrases. And then they had time in their groups. They had to use those words to create an introduction to a story. (K.R)*

The extract above reveals how Kate invariably started her lessons on narrative writing with both the two level groups. It began with a theoretical presentation and discussion of the different types of narrative writing. This was followed by group brainstorming of vocabulary associated with the pictures that Kate provided and group construction of an introduction to a story based on the given pictures and the vocabulary brainstormed. These activities are examples of scaffolding incorporated into a learning cycle used for genre-based writing instruction (Gibbons, 2009; Hyland, 2007; 2008).

Kate continued in her reflection below to elaborate on the strategies she used in delivering and adapting her lessons for the different proficiency levels:

*For the lower group, they just had to create an introduction. I didn't give them any specific things they had to do because they're real beginners and they're just getting to grips with the language. But for the more advanced group, I did the same activity but they had to pick a genre. I gave them three genres: adventure, horror and sci-fi. They had to pick a genre and they had to write the introduction to the story in that genre. And generally with the high level class, [...] there were more criteria that they had to fulfil like, you know, you have to use an adverb, you have to use an adjective and that kind of thing. (K.R)*

This extract pinpoints the different strategies that Kate used for the advanced and beginning students. The key adaptation was that Kate made it more flexible for the beginning students in choosing how to write the introduction while she incorporated more criteria that the advanced group had to meet in doing the same task. In this way, she gave the lower level students more choices to make in doing the task and made the task more challenging for the advanced students, a strategy supported by (Nation, 2000).

Our analysis of the reflections, lesson plans and teaching artefacts shows that several teaching resources were found to mediate Kate's instruction on narrative writing. Both lessons with the advanced and beginner students were mediated by PowerPoint slides, the different types of narrative writing and stimulus pictures. The excerpt above also reveals that Kate adapted her use of these tools and artefacts between the two groups of students in the later part of the lessons. Specifically, these tools, together with language concepts and items (e.g., adverb, adjective), were used more strictly with the advanced students during the group writing activity to make the writing task more challenging for them. The beginner students, on the other hand, had more freedom in their group writing activity. As Nation (2000) explains, when students do not have to follow strict requirements, the task will be less challenging for them to complete.

Reflecting on her writing instruction, Kate appeared to be content with her teaching and its outcome, as explicated through her observation of her students' performance. She said: *And the kids really loved that activity. They really enjoyed that lesson. They wrote some great stories. And yeah at the very end as well when they had to write a story on*

*their own, it's like a final assessment task, they did a really good job on that, and I was really impressed about what they came up with. So that was good. (K.IN.3)*

As discussed before, during the practicum Kate taught the same content to two EAL classes, one beginners and one advanced. This variation in levels was purposefully selected by Ms Weston to give Kate an opportunity for learning to adapt to different English proficiency levels, as the mentor noted:

*I thought I'd give her the opposite ends of the spectrum [...]. So I thought it'd be better for her to have same age groups who have got, who are going to the same place next year. They're all going to Year 10 or VCE [...]. I think it's really good for her to see.... I asked her to do pretty much the same materials. Well, she chose what she wants to teach the writing skills, and so I wanted her to do that with both classes so that she would have to learn how to adapt. [...] and she did it really well. (W.IN)*

This illustrates that Ms Weston's mentoring strategy was the principal factor that shaped the opportunity and need for Kate to adapt her teaching to suit these two groups of students. Given this opportunity, Kate was encouraged to experiment with the strategies she learned before and developed her teaching skills through this process.

### ***Frank's Differentiated and Personalised Writing Instruction***

Like Kate, Frank appeared to respond well to the curriculum needs as seen through a genre-based approach to writing instruction (Hyland, 2007) where he focused on narrative and descriptive writing. Frank similarly took a differentiated approach (Haley & Austin, 2014) to writing instruction, which was shown through his varying expectations of students' performance:

*I would tell students to write a story based on something and [...] the better students will write stronger stories whereas the weaker students at least they got practice to write a story, so it's that sort of practice that I want them to get. And the better students they get to practice writing with their vocabulary, using new words that they have, things like that. (F.R)*

*The students who are good at writing, I get them to write on the board so they're happy to do that. And then students who are not so confident in writing, I will get them to write on the paper and record stuff by themselves. (F.IN.2)*

In these excerpts, Frank reportedly varied his performance expectations to engage students of different abilities in performing at their own pace (Gibbons, 2009). An important factor that played an influential role in shaping how Frank catered for his students' varied levels of ability was his mentor teacher's feedback, which was mentioned in the interview with his mentor as follows:

*I think Frank has got to pitch his lesson to meet those wide range of abilities. I assume that would be true in every school, while particularly our school where we do have that range. Even though some students have been here nearly two years, they still remain very weak especially in writing and reading. So yeah, I'm talking to Frank constantly about doing those very basic things. (S.IN)*

However, what was more distinctive was Frank's highly personalised approach to writing instruction. This was revealed through his use of EAL students' personal experiences as resources for learning to write. Nation (2012) advocates this strategy for its capacity to bring the task within the learner's experience and make learning more meaningful and relevant to them. In this study, Frank asked the students to write about where they came from and their plans when they finished school as a way to get to know the students and where they were on the assessment scale.

*What I would like you to do is to write about one paragraph and you tell me where you are from and what you would like to do when you finish school. Could be anything, anything you like to do when you finish school. (F.LR.1)*

For creative writing, Frank used a number of strategies to develop students' ability to write creative pieces based on their personal experiences. In one of the activities he asked each of the students to bring a favourite fairy tale, write about it and share it with the class. In another activity his students wrote a short story about friendship. Frank also organised a game called *Story Cubes* in which he rolled the dice with pictures on them. The students would tell a story using the pictures and then write a creative piece at home based on the story they told. According to Frank, all of these story-writing activities were creative, personalised and therefore interesting to the students, as he noted:

*They have to think of a story to write and to tell somebody else. [...] So they put in pictures whatever. It becomes very personalised and something that they would like to do other than 'Oh, I'm going to write an essay of 200 words and I'm done with it.'* (F.IN.2)

Besides the purpose of developing the students' creative writing, the activities also served diagnostic purposes because, in Frank's words, they "enabled me to see their level on the curriculum, on the chart" (F.R).

In response to the curriculum demands in the area of descriptive writing, Frank organised two main activities, both of which were highly personalised. The first activity was describing a best friend. Frank talked about the activity during the stimulated recall interview:

*For their homework tomorrow, I'll get them to think about their best friend and how they describe their best friend and why this person is their best friend. Or if they don't have a best friend, what would they look for in a best friend. (F.IN.2)*

The second descriptive writing activity involved describing the mentor teacher. Frank reflected on this activity:

*And then we did another activity, we had to describe somebody. So I said, 'OK. Why don't you describe Mr Scott?' I divided the class into three groups and I said, 'OK the group that describes Mr Scott the best gets a point.' So you know they were describing all the good things about Mr Scott. They say, 'Oh you know, he's pretty tall. He has white hair. He has brown eyes.' And I said, 'Oh these are very good descriptors. You know you can use them next time.' They go, 'Oh yes yes. He has nice personality. He's...' You know, and then Mr Scott was just, like, feeling very good about himself, which is very good. Yeah. So you know that's an activity I felt went very well. First the kids they picked it up and then ran with it. So and everybody was contributing something to the list. So that's good. (F.R)*

According to Frank's reflection and the lesson recording, this activity went really well. There were several factors contributing to the success of this activity. First, by choosing the mentor teacher as the person to be described, Frank was able to make the activity enjoyable to both the students and the mentor, who was observing the lesson. Second, the students knew Mr Scott very well as their teacher, and with his presence, the learning was brought within the students' personal experience, and some of the learning burden was lifted (Nation, 2012). This enabled the students to focus on their language use, and they were able to use a range of vocabulary in their description. Moreover, by organising it as a group work activity and incorporating a competition element to it, Frank made the activity fun and engaging, and the students were all motivated to contribute to their group project.

*Maria's Use of Structural Templates in Teaching Writing*

Similar to Kate, Maria also focused on teaching structure of texts. She used a number of planning and writing templates to assist the students in learning to write an essay, a story, and a paragraph. The use of structural template is an effective way to provide scaffolding for second language writers (Gibbons, 2009). Maria seemed to use the internet as the principal source of teaching resources:

R: *Can you say a little about how you actually prepared for your lessons?*

M: *Well I basically did like internet research. [...]*

R: *So where did you get the TEEL framework from? Is that something from [university]?*

M: *Well, actually I had never heard of TEEL before I spoke to one of my colleagues, like a student from [university], who used to be a student teacher with the same mentor. So I called her just before my placement and spoke to her like for ideas and hints for me or what to do. She mentioned TEEL. I'm like "No idea what TEEL is" but anyway I Googled it up. (M.IN.2)*

Maria also reportedly felt that TEEL was helpful in teaching paragraph structure, but she was less confident in the application of the template:

R: *So was it helpful in teaching writing?*

M: *Yeah, it was really helpful. TEEL is like it was really structured, [...] but I don't know if you actually would do it the same way when you do actual writing. [...] Like, it's a bit more freedom in actual writing than it is in TEEL. (M.IN.2)*

Maria's reflection revealed that she was not satisfied with her use of the TEEL framework, which she blamed herself for not explaining it clearly:

*And it seems that girls don't quite get the TEEL structure and that it could be different and I didn't quite explain it well, so we would need to work on it again. (M.R)*

In addition to the TEEL template, Maria also used graphic organisers in teaching students how to plan for their essay and story, again unsuccessfully. For example:

*That activity where they had to write their plan on their graphic organizer, I think I could've done a better job in terms of just maybe [...] dividing them into a few areas because there were 6 boxes instead of 4, it was quite confusing for them. (M.R)*

Maria's reflective comments above and the mentor's comments below revealed that neither of them was satisfied with Maria's use of the teaching resources. The mentor said:

*There was a sheet that she brought in to explain how to do TEEL, for example, and she said "OK guys, let's go through the vocabulary" and some of the kids didn't know some of the words and I don't know if she actually knows what the words were. So at that point, you know, I had to like I actually say that's what it means, and that's not good. (D.IN)*

It can be inferred from the data presented above that Maria's unsatisfactory application of the planning and writing templates in teaching writing was largely influenced by her lack of experience with the templates either in her teacher education course or in her previous education, and her lack of a full understanding of the resources. The following excerpts also revealed the EAL students' role in contributing to this unsuccessful use of the template.

*Not all the girls gave me their homework before this lesson, so I had to adjust to that and think on my feet. (M.R)*

Lesson plan analysis showed that in this particular lesson, Maria had planned to have the students analyse and improve their writing homework using the TEEL structure. However, the students had not all completed their homework, and Maria did not have enough writing samples to conduct the activity, which resulted in a change in the lesson plan that Maria had not prepared for.

## Conclusions and Implications

The study gained empirical findings that support the view that contextual and personal factors are crucial for understanding language teachers' professional learning (Cross, 2010; Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011b). This section summarises the findings and discusses the implications the study has for an effective EAL teacher education experience, including the practicum, which supports PSTs in developing their ability to teach EAL and especially second language writing.

This study found that all the three PSTs focused their preservice instructional activity around teaching writing, and this was shaped by a number of factors. For Frank, influential factors included the school's broad curriculum for EAL, class learning programs, and Frank's knowledge of the students' backgrounds. For Kate, these factors included the freedom and flexibility offered by the school's open EAL curriculum, a senior staff member's perspective on the importance of writing supported by research findings, and Kate's understanding of the need to teach EAL students writing to prepare them for studies in other areas of the secondary school curriculum. Maria's focus on writing instruction was mostly influenced by the mentor's imposition, which in turn was found to be influenced by the mainstream curriculum demands for writing competence among students.

Writing instruction and its link to the mainstream curriculum were found to be emphasised across the three different types of secondary school involved. This emphasis corresponds to the curriculum requirements outlined in the *Victorian Certificate of Education: English and English as an Additional Language Study Design* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2014). Therefore, the study recommends that EAL teacher education courses consolidate the writing instruction pedagogy component of their coursework in terms of both quantity and quality. PSTs should be given adequate opportunities to engage with and develop a range of effective strategies and materials for EAL writing instruction so that PSTs' confidence in teaching and handling emergent pedagogical issues, which was evident in Frank and Kate's experience but lacking from Maria's, could be enhanced.

The findings also showed that the PSTs used a range of writing instruction strategies to varying degrees of success, and a number of factors appeared to influence this. Frank's instruction revealed differentiation and personalisation, which appeared to be effective and responsive to the students' needs and backgrounds. Kate's choice of the genres was largely influenced by her knowledge of the genres that her students needed to learn in other subjects. Her focus on teaching the structure of these genres, however, was jointly driven by her prior experience in learning to write at school and the proficiency levels of her students. Kate's differentiated writing instruction was self-perceived as successful and commended by her mentor. Maria's use of planning and writing templates in teaching writing was on the other hand less successful due to her lack of a full understanding of the teaching materials and the students' low homework completion rate which caused an unprepared change in lesson plan. These teaching strategies, situated in their contexts, could serve as a catalyst for PSTs and teacher educators of EAL in developing suitable strategies for their own contexts.

We found that a good knowledge of the contexts and curriculum requirements of EAL teaching, including information such as the EAL and mainstream curriculum and the learners' backgrounds and abilities, played an influential role in Frank and Kate's professional learning through EAL writing instruction. While Frank and Kate's teaching was more responsive to the context and more successful, Maria was yet to show this capability. Past research indicates that as a result of the lack of contextual knowledge, PSTs encounter challenges that are counter-productive to their professional learning (M. H. Nguyen, 2014). This knowledge has also long been regarded an important domain of the knowledge base of second language teaching (Richards, 1998). Especially, in the Victorian EAL context, EAL students come

from a wide range of economic, cultural, educational and linguistics backgrounds and EAL education varies in duration, curriculum and delivery mode (Department of Education and Training, 2013). Therefore, it is recommended that preservice EAL programs provide rich opportunities for PSTs to learn about the contexts of EAL teaching and develop strategies to conduct context-responsive teaching.

Finally, Kate was unusual in the level of deep reflection which she brings to her work, and Kate's explicit awareness of her own learning history was an invaluable resource. These were found to have positive impact on Kate's learning of EAL writing instruction, and should therefore be promoted. However, research has found that developing teachers' ability to reflect effectively on their practice is challenging (Al-Hassan, Al-Barakat, & Al-Hassan, 2012) and teachers are often not provided with adequate instruction to understand and develop their reflective practice (Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011). Therefore, the study suggests that, while more explicit focus on how to teach writing is a necessary precondition for a successful teaching practicum for TESOL PSTs, the development of PSTs as reflective practitioners, able to make connections between their own past learning and their present teaching activities, is equally important. It is also suggested that PSTs' beliefs formed from their learning histories be examined during teacher preparation course because these beliefs serve to filter new information and influence their learning during coursework and the decisions they make in their teaching (Norman & Spencer, 2005).

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