

# Preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories in language education

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This paper reports on a multi-site case study of work-integrated learning (WIL) in language teacher education. Using learning trajectories as a lens for understanding the connection between the workplace and campus-based learning, this study explores what preservice teachers learn from real-world work experience. The data used for this study comprised semi-structured interviews. The interviews engaged preservice teachers, and workplace supervisors involved in WIL programs for preservice teachers teaching English in Vietnam, and Chinese in Australia. The findings of the study show that preservice teachers make progress in learning transformation, engage in reciprocal learning with peers, and contribute to learners' authentic learning experiences. The results highlight the features of preservice teachers' learning trajectories including work readiness, critical thinking skills, and insights into working with learners of diverse backgrounds. The study has implications for research in initial teacher education programs, employability, internationalization of higher education, and equity/inclusivity.

Keywords: Work-integrated learning, work readiness, learning transformation, peer learning

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Disruptive trends in higher education change the nature of teaching and learning, including academic knowledge and educational values gained through on-campus formal education combined with off-campus, workplace-based modes of professional learning (Hamilton et al., 2018). Work-integrated learning (WIL) experiences such as internships or practicums organized by the university, engage students with work experience in industry and community organizations (Jackson, 2018). WIL has been implemented in university education as an outcome of curriculum reform to develop students' work readiness (Loughland et al., 2021; Patton, 2017). WIL integrates industry experience with education, aiming to develop students' professional capabilities for their anticipated workplace (Jackson et al., 2017). Taylor and Govender (2017) contend that "WIL does contribute to increasing employability, enabling future graduates to enter the workplace confidently... [and in this way] WIL does not just lead to employment, it results in a path to better employment" (p. 117). In WIL, authentic learning activities have been used to develop graduate capabilities and assess workplace learning (Kaider et al., 2017). Activities focus on learning through real-world, complex problems, and problem-based activities (Manley et al., 2022; Theelen et al., 2022). In recent studies on WIL, researchers have indicated that this work-learning connection contributes to students' work skills, work readiness, and employability (Ferns et al., 2019; Patton, 2017; Pham et al., 2018; Smith & Worsfold, 2015; Tran & Soejatminah, 2017). Beyond producing work-ready graduates by providing students with professional learning opportunities, workplace networking, and social connections (Ferns et al., 2019), WIL contributes to students' multi-disciplinary skills, non-technical capabilities, career self-management, and self-awareness (Jackson, 2017). WIL refers to the integration of academic knowledge and work-based experiential knowledge in higher education and vocational education, involving a partnership between industry, community, university, and students (Barends & Nel, 2017; Ferns et al., 2022; Morley, 2018; Oliver, 2015; Thomson et al., 2017). WIL includes service-learning, work-based learning, community engagement, cooperative education, teacher practicums, placement, professional experience, professional practice, internship, workplace learning, industry-based learning, project-

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based learning, and fieldwork education, all of that involve real-world learning (Harfitt & Chow, 2020; Salter, et al., 2021; Singh & Nguyễn, 2018; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2016). In teacher education, WIL provides preservice teachers with an opportunity to critically reflect on their professional learning, learn through the guidance of mentors, and build relationships with supervising teachers who take on the role of mentor (Loughland et al., 2021). WIL approaches vary depending on the local and global contexts, stakeholders' needs, and partnership involvement (Fleming & Hickey, 2013). In higher education, WIL seems to challenge course designers in incorporating the goals, pathways, and the "structures and durations [of WIL] to fit with diverse student needs" (Jackson, 2018, p. 26) for students' workplace learning.

## WORKPLACE LEARNING TRAJECTORIES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In teacher education, preservice teachers are exposed to professional learning through models including internships, micro-teaching, field experiences, and mentoring (Du Plessis, 2019; Fischetti et al., 2022; Grima-Farrell et al., 2019). Language teacher education in diverse, dynamic, and ever-changing contexts (Nguyen, 2019) is becoming critical. Specifically, learning and practicing professional teaching standards and engaging with the curriculum (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011; Call, 2018) are enhanced but challenged by the connection between preservice teachers' real-world experience and disciplinary knowledge which "distinguishes a professional language teacher from someone who, simply by birthright, speaks the language" (Johnson, 2016, p. 123). In doing so, the preservice teachers engage in the learning and thinking process of workplace learning trajectories. Workplace learning trajectories identify "students' learning as a continuum of increasing understanding over time" (Wilson et al., 2013, p.104). For Ngonda et al., (2022), learning trajectories entail "a learning goal for the student, levels of thinking and acting, and instructional activities that promote the required progression" (p. 82). In teacher education, workplace learning during internships under mentorship, facilitates the preservice teachers' work readiness (Batholmeus & Pop, 2019; Jakhelln & Postholm, 2022). Workplace learning trajectories in WIL engage preservice teachers in transitions from campus-based learning to real-world experience through work-based pathways (Barends & Nel, 2017; Jakhelln & Postholm, 2022; Jung, 2022). Such transition is identified as transformative learning or a holistic experience capturing preservice teachers' personal and professional learning (Damianakis et al., 2020).

This study explores preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories including their understanding and achievement (Wilson et al., 2013), and what they learn from real-world work experience regarding their learning transformation (Kim et al., 2018; Liu, 2015; Mezirow, 2000). Key stakeholders that enable and contribute to workplace learning trajectories in teacher education, and foster preservice teachers' learning outcomes include education providers, industry, community, mentors, and preservice teachers (Batholmeus & Pop, 2019; Jakhelln & Postholm, 2022). Regarding WIL partnerships, Jeffries and Milne (2014) claim that students' intellectual development, professional capability development, and interactions with others remain largely unrealized, as does dialogical communication with stakeholders in WIL (Nguyen, 2022). Thus, preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories in language education have been overlooked. This paper focuses on exploring preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories in becoming language teachers.

This study focuses on teacher education WIL programs for English and Chinese language students, which makes an important contribution to real-world teacher education and preservice teachers' experiences, to enhance the professional standards of graduate teachers (AITSL, 2011). This study researched preservice teachers' engagement and performance in language teacher education, which contributes to the economic agenda to maximize Australia's relationship with Asian countries

including China and Vietnam, through opportunities to reinforce language and research capabilities. The following research questions were addressed:

1. What do preservice teachers learn from real-world work experience during WIL programs teaching English in Vietnam and Chinese in Australia?
2. What are the features of preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is part of a larger project investigating WIL in language teacher education in Australia and Vietnam. The research project was reviewed and approved by the university's research ethics panel (H11783). The qualitative study reported in this paper was undertaken as a multi-site case study (Bishop, 2010; Yin, 2014). Data for this study were collected from a WIL program in English language teacher education in Vietnam and another WIL program in Chinese language teacher education program in Australia. These two WIL programs have the common aim of extending preservice teachers' professional learning through teaching languages. Specifically, WIL for the English language education program took place in community settings in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, and WIL for the Chinese language education program was organized at primary and secondary schools in Sydney, Australia.

Preservice teachers and workplace supervisors involved in two WIL programs, one in Vietnam (Table 1) and another in Australia (Table 2), participated in the semi-structured interviews. These research participants were selected based on their knowledge and experience in the WIL programs involved in this research.

TABLE 1: Profiles of participants with pseudonyms in Vietnam (*n*= 9).

Types of participants	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age range	Languages	Duration of interview
<b>Preservice teachers</b>	Duong	M	18-30	Vietnamese, English	57'
	Liêm	M	18-30	Vietnamese, English	35'
	Nga	F	18-30	Vietnamese, English	51'
	Phụng	F	18-30	Vietnamese, English	46'
	Thịnh	M	18-30	Vietnamese, English	33'
	Thuận	M	18-30	Vietnamese, English	40'
	Trung	M	18-30	Vietnamese, English	43'
<b>Workplace supervisors</b>	Kim	F	31-45	Vietnamese, English	57'
	Ly	F	31-45	Vietnamese, English	57'

TABLE 2: Profiles of participants with pseudonyms in Australia (n= 9).

Types of participants	Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age range	Languages	Duration of interview
<b>Preservice teachers</b>	Cheng	M	22-30	Chinese, English	50'
	Lili	F	22-30	Chinese, English	53'
	Meihua	F	22-30	Chinese, English	56'
	Peizhi	F	22-30	Chinese, English	58'
	Tajon	M	22-30	Chinese, English	51'
	Xiu Ying	F	18-30	Chinese, English	69'
	Wanqing	F	31-45	Chinese, English	59'
<b>Workplace supervisors</b>	Andrea	F	31-45	English	60'
	Christine	F	31-45	English, Chinese	65'

In this study, the research participants who are preservice teachers of English in Vietnam are called the English cohort in the WIL program. The participants in the WIL program in Australia focusing on preservice teachers’ professional learning in the Chinese language are referred to as the Chinese cohort. Vietnamese preservice teachers are part of the English cohort in this study. They were enrolled in the Bachelor of English degree and participated in the WIL program at a vocational school and a shelter for orphaned children in Ho Chi Minh City. The preservice teachers of the English cohort were required to teach English during their workplace learning experience as a formal credit-bearing requirement of the degree.

In the Chinese cohort, preservice teachers are from China. Some students are enrolled in a Masters degree and others in a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education. The PhD and Masters students were undertaking research focusing on Chinese language teaching and were required to undertake WIL as part of their degree. Thus, they were sent to local public primary and secondary schools where they learned to teach spoken Chinese language to school students. While engaging in their workplace learning, these Chinese-background preservice teachers were expected to undertake school-based research as part of their study.

The source of evidence used in this paper comes from semi-structured interviews (Evangelinou-Yiannakis, 2017). Before the research interviews were undertaken, literature on workplace learning was utilized to shape the semi-structured interview questions. The interviews were also extended through the use of probing questions to explore issues raised by interviewees in more detail, including requests for additional explanation, definitions of the key terms they used, and additional sources of evidence.

The first phase of interviews engaged 18 participants and was conducted in Vietnam. The second phase of interviews undertaken in Australia involved 16 participants. The preservice teachers and workplace supervisors in the English and Chinese cohorts were invited to participate in the research via email. Of those who were emailed, some confirmed their agreement to take part in the research, while others replied with questions about the study. Accordingly, the participants were provided adequate information about the project to voluntarily participate without coercion.

The interviews were conducted with the participants’ consent to share the information with the assurance that they would remain anonymous. Pseudonyms were used for all research participants to comply with ethical requirements. The interviews conducted in both countries were transcribed verbatim. For data collection in Vietnam, the participants who speak Vietnamese as their primary

language were interviewed in Vietnamese for in-depth data collection. The data were transcribed before being translated into English.

For data analysis, six key steps were employed to facilitate the process of creating a comprehensive and meaningful account of interview data (Table 3). These steps included data immersion, coding, creating categories, identifying counter-evidence, generating themes, and theorizing (Green et al., 2007). These data-driven analysis techniques were employed systematically to report on the most significant findings, and to avoid the taken-for-granted outcomes and predetermined views of doing research.

TABLE 3: Data analysis process.

Steps	Tasks undertaken
<b>Transcription and translation</b>	Listening to audio recordings of interviews Translating
<b>Open coding</b>	Identifying statements Highlighting key words Labelling data with units of meaning (codes)
<b>Categorization</b>	Looking for related codes Grouping codes related to the same issues
<b>Counterevidence</b>	Finding contradictions and exceptions Color coding
<b>Theme identification</b>	Grouping codes for higher level
<b>Theorizing</b>	Explaining the instance of educational phenomena being discussed Using existing social theory to make meaning of themes

*Note.* Adapted from “Generating Best Evidence From Qualitative Research: The Role of Data Analysis” by J. Green, K. Willis, E. Hughes, R. Small, N. Welch, L. Gibbs, and J. Daly, 2007, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 31(6), p. 545-550. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-6405.2007.00141.x>. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

## FINDINGS

The findings of this study showed how preservice teachers engaged in their workplace learning in becoming language teachers. Three themes emerging from data analysis include learning transformation, learning from peers, and contributing to authentic learning experiences. Each theme will be presented in turn. The findings section is followed by a discussion on students’ workplace learning trajectories using the relevant literature in WIL and language teacher education.

### *Learning Transformation*

Learning transformation in this study, refers to a process of changes in preservice teachers’ worldviews as an outcome of shifting from university to workplace learning settings and activities. The findings of this study show that WIL engaged preservice teachers in workplace learning that enabled a learning transformation about their prospective teaching career, resulting in a change in their mindsets. Evidence shared by one student of the WIL program in Vietnam clarified how this learning transformation occurred:

I found that this program [WIL for teaching English] requires students’ [preservice teachers] responsibilities and commitment with clear working objectives. It is unlike what many people

may mistake participating in this [WIL program] as expressing “I can offer money or what I have” as in charity activities (Phụng, preservice teacher).

Preservice teachers’ learning transformation is identified in perspectives shared by Phụng, who attested that preservice teachers developed their critical thinking regarding the relationship between workplace and on-campus education. For Phụng, participating in WIL provided preservice teachers with an understanding of teaching tasks involving responsibilities and commitment to attain their working and learning objectives. Phụng added that preservice teachers’ experience in teaching English to children with a disability in the community is more helpful and impactful than donating money, food, or providing other support. As such, the WIL experience in this study enabled preservice teachers to develop their critical thinking and professional attitude when working in community settings.

The preservice teachers learned about the connection between the workplace and on-campus education. In addition, they gained an understanding of sociological issues such as equity, education, and healthcare in the society where they live and work. Two preservice teachers shared their perspectives on the impact of economic status (wealth versus poverty) on educative outcomes: “From these shelters, I have more understanding of the wealth and poverty in society, and what our society lacks and needs. I understand that there are still many people that need help.” (Du, preservice teacher) and “I learned how to serve and communicate with different communities. I had more insights into people with disabilities, the rich and the poor in society.” (Vân, preservice teacher)

Evidence from the English cohort in this study shows that preservice teachers from rich families learned that as professional teachers, they are expected to work with various learners including children with disabilities and orphaned children, which means they might be expected to work with charitable or religious non-government organizations. WIL provided Vân with learning transformation through her reflections on how WIL prepared her for a teaching role, along with diverse pedagogies underpinned by various educational philosophies previously learned.

Through the international WIL experience, preservice teachers broadened their worldview and professional learning to global settings. Learning how to teach Chinese in the local context of Australia, preservice teachers gained global insights into becoming teachers for learners of diverse backgrounds in other countries. The following excerpts shared by a student in the Chinese cohort and a workplace supervisor in the English cohort indicate a local-global link as their transformational learning:

I learned some professional skills from the [Australian] local teachers, which opens my mind to teaching jobs in other countries. Here [in Australia] they encouraged preservice teachers to study very well to improve their learning with their interests. With questions raised, Asian [school] students always wait for the correct answers from the teachers, but here the local teacher will post a question and offer them open answers, not one correct answer, just make their ideas broaden or open their minds... (Tajon, preservice teacher).

This [WIL] program is a good opportunity for the preservice teachers to experience the teaching profession with learners of various ages, psychology, emotions, learning capability and backgrounds. Teaching also demands the preservice teacher’s capabilities of dealing with all the above features of learners... (Hoa, workplace supervisor).

A transformation in Tajon’s professional learning occurred when he engaged in real-world teaching activities and settings. He learned how the classroom teacher engaged school students and how those students interacted with the teacher in the classroom. Tajon learned the difference between the

educational culture in Australia and the one in which he had been schooled in Asia, which might provide him insights into learning to become a global teacher and make him more globally employable. Learning how to teach both locally/globally includes understanding who the learners are. Hoa, a workplace supervisor in the English cohort added that WIL helped preservice teachers know their types of learners, which was also shared by Tajon (Chinese cohort) in his professional learning. The findings of this study indicate that WIL provides preservice teachers with experience, learning transformation, and readiness for working with various learners of diverse backgrounds and characteristics.

#### *Reciprocal Learning From Peers*

Reciprocal learning from peers in this study involves preservice teachers learning from each other and shared learning between preservice teachers and their English learners. Evidence from this study shows that WIL provides preservice teachers with a vehicle for learning from the learners in the community with whom they work. A workplace supervisor in the English cohort shared that WIL enabled motivation and learning between the preservice teachers and English learners:

The preservice teachers inspire these learners. They shared why they study English as their major, and why they go and teach at this vocational school. They are of similar ages. They trust and inspire each other easily. The learners admire and question why these preservice teachers are as old as them but can do whatever they like and for their ambition (An, workplace supervisor).

For the workplace supervisor An, peer relations between preservice teachers and their learners who were of a similar age, was identified-in this study. The learners at a vocational school seemed to trust the preservice teachers who they considered as peers, which inspired them to learn.

While teaching, two preservice teachers from the English cohort acknowledged their learning from the students to whom they taught English:

We just use the word “help” in teaching English to these young people in the community because they are as old as us. They may know other things than us such as making cakes and dishes. They showed us how to do it (Liên, preservice teacher).

I learned from young people simple things they do every day such as how to fold blankets properly and nicely. They also showed me how to cook sweet soup and shared with me some tips for making it delicious (Phụng, preservice teacher).

These preservice teachers acknowledged that they learned from their learners whom they regarded as peers. However, an issue regarding the reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationship involved in peer learning warrants consideration. Some of these preservice teachers of the English cohort such as Phụng and Liên, worked to help a group of young people with disabilities learn English. In turn, these preservice teachers learned beyond expectations, advancing professional capabilities and gaining valuable insights into life skills through peer collaboration. A defining feature of peer learning is that the preservice teachers became aware that these young people with disabilities are equal to them as both parties have important worthy characteristics. An important lesson for preservice teachers is that they can learn from those whom they educate. As peer relations developed, English cohort preservice teachers learned how to engage students in learning English and improving outcomes for the young people in the community. In addition, the preservice teachers acknowledged that young people with disabilities possess knowledge and skills from which they could also learn. As such, reciprocal learning needs to be recognized and valued among human beings.

A preservice teacher from the Chinese cohort shared her learning from her younger peer who is also a preservice teacher in the same cohort. They both participated in WIL as part of their doctoral studies:

I find it more productive after having a research chat with my friend than a formal meeting with my supervisor. She is younger than me. We speak the same language, which is not English, so we can communicate easily in our language and talk about how we understand doing research. We just keep talking and sharing and I do not hesitate to ask questions or for advice from her (Lili, preservice teacher).

The excerpt shared by Lili explains how she engaged in learning through peer collaboration via research chats with her friend who was also undertaking a PhD. In this particular context, the relationship between these two doctoral candidates of different ages enhanced learning through peer interaction as both were simultaneously engaged in teacher research education through WIL for teaching Chinese. Here, peer learning refers to the learning from which a PhD. candidate can benefit. Lili was willing to share her knowledge and learn about research skills from a friend despite the differences in their ages.

The similarity in age provides just one dimension for which there are grounds for learning from peers. For instance, the divergences in language abilities provide the preservice teachers who speak Mandarin in Australia or those in Vietnam who speak English with the knowledge to share with young people who want to learn these languages.

#### *Contributing to Authentic Learning*

Authentic learning experiences in this study refer to preservice teachers engaging students in learning activities and immersion in the real-world learning environment to gain experience, knowledge, and skills (Chiu et al., 2018). Authentic learning activities were used to foster learners' engagement rather than for enhancing academic achievement. Contributing to authentic learning experiences for learners was a part of preservice teachers' workplace learning. The findings of this study reveal that in learning how to teach Chinese to Australian school students, the preservice teachers partly contributed to their learners' authentic learning experiences during their WIL placement. In the following excerpt, a workplace supervisor clarified how the preservice teachers helped learners' in developing their language skills through real-world activities:

It's challenging for the children to practice Chinese by saying *Ni hao* in class but when they see a young Chinese face in the school walking around with me, in class, or in the playground ... that is invaluable access to schools and the reasons why the school is happy to keep going with the program because it is wonderful having a present extra Chinese people here to help our students practice to feel like the Chinese language is a real live language, and not something we study in the book (Karen, workplace supervisor).

For the workplace supervisor, Karen, the preservice teachers as Chinese native speakers gave school students an opportunity to directly access learning environments by communicating with them while also delivering Chinese language lessons in class. In doing so, these Chinese preservice teachers learned about the learning attributes of Australian school students who are studying Chinese as an additional language.

Regarding authentic learning experiences, an excerpt shared by a male preservice teacher, Wanqing who indicates that by organizing a learning activity where students learned to make Chinese dumplings, he could help school students learn how to speak in Chinese in this activity: "I can make

some practical things to contribute to teaching local students about language and culture. During one term, I helped the local teacher conduct some Chinese cultural activities such as making dumplings” (Wanqing, preservice teacher).

While cooking is not in the Chinese language curriculum in Australia, the preservice teacher Wanqing admitted that he could make a contribution to teaching Chinese at schools when engaging learners in authentic learning experiences of Chinese language through cooking activities. By providing their learners with an opportunity for real-world learning, the preservice teachers could make some progress in professional learning including organizational skills, communication skills, time management, and knowledge of teaching resources to help facilitate learning and knowledge acquisition.

Evidence from the English cohort in Vietnam, indicates that the preservice teachers engaged young learners in the community learning English by using authentic activities. A workplace supervisor at a vocational school in Vietnam, Lan, attested that the English preservice teaching cohort made a key contribution to engaging young learners in learning English and developing speaking and listening skills through authentic learning experiences and language games and other activities:

These students [preservice teachers] made a positive contribution to our school. With their teaching activities, our school students learned English skills including speaking, listening and language games. Actually, our curriculum at this school just focuses on grammar and reading (Lan, workplace supervisor).

Given that the vocational school focuses on grammar and reading, the preservice teachers helped highlight the need for including English speaking and listening skills to the vocational school curriculum. The professional learning of preservice teachers of the English cohort could also be strengthened with insights into student-centered approaches, pedagogy, and curriculum in language education for the vocational school.

Technology was one of the tools that preservice teachers used to support authentic learning for school students. One workplace supervisor, Andrea, acknowledged that preservice teachers in the Chinese cohort contributed to authentic teaching/learning activities by making use of the ever-advancing information and communication technology, especially the internet:

These preservice teachers came with new ideas and high technology, with pop music from China, or the latest Internet games in China, and the children mainly like that. The preservice teachers offered fresh new ideas to my teaching. We worked collaboratively over time as they became more confident. They contributed to discussions about what we can do with games, activities or with the design, or use of PowerPoint, and contributed more to the teaching resources (Andrea, workplace supervisor).

Building on prior knowledge, preservice teachers used relevant technology resources and connected them with classroom activities to give school students authentic learning experiences. With guidance from workplace supervisors regarding ideas for classroom activities, the preservice teachers of the Chinese cohort generated teaching/learning resources using their knowledge of Chinese music and games. They also learned more about professional teaching skills in engaging school students in real-world problems solving.

This study found that preservice teachers made progress in learning transformation, reciprocal learning from peers, and contributing to authentic learning experiences during WIL. The results highlight the features of preservice teachers’ learning trajectories including their work readiness, critical thinking

skills, and insights into working with learners of diverse backgrounds. The study indicated that preservice teachers attain their intended goals for workplace learning and make worthy contributions during their professional practicum. They also develop deep, constructive, and meaningful learning that goes beyond simple knowledge acquisition and shifts their views of the world of work which includes education, work, and contributions to the workplace.

## DISCUSSION

This research aimed to explore preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories in English and Chinese language education. The findings of this study show that preservice teachers acquired professional acumen, and achieved their personal goals for workplace learning (Batholmeus & Pop, 2019). Specifically, preservice teachers reached a deeper level of thinking skills during workplace learning in teaching English and Chinese languages, took responsibility for their learning, engaged in reciprocal peer learning, and contributed to designing authentic learning activities for learners at the workplace. The results affirmed previous findings related to the value of WIL in equipping students with work-readiness capabilities (Jackson, 2018; Pham et al., 2018) and maximizing employability outcomes (Ferns et al., 2019).

This study expands on previous research in WIL regarding "who is doing the learning and under what circumstances" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 7), and addresses the gap in the literature on preservice teachers' learning transformation. Learning transformation is driven by preservice teachers' shift in thinking through experience working with diverse learners exhibiting a range of abilities and disabilities (Damianakis et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2013). Specifically, working with orphans in a WIL program at a vocational school in Vietnam prepared the preservice teachers for working with learners with different educational needs. In this study, evidence from the English cohort in Vietnam shows that preservice teachers learned to question the "validity of a long-taken-for-granted meaning perspective" (Liu, 2015, p. 145) of the causes and solutions to the problems in education posed by wealth and poverty. In making progress in their workplace learning trajectories through teaching skills, preservice teachers' levels of critical thinking and professional practice (Ngonda et al., 2022) reveal learning transformation (Damianakis et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018) in distinguishing ability/disability, family/orphan status, and wealth/poverty leading to reflectively informed professional teaching activities. Learning in WIL programs brings to the fore the hierarchical relation constructed around ability and disability, wealth and poverty, and educated and uneducated. Learning transformation challenges or negates ideas that have been very close to the center of students' conception of themselves as knowers. Mezirow (2000) holds that learning transformation begins with critical analysis of unexamined presuppositions and progresses to action "based upon the resulting insight" (p. 8). Learning transformation in WIL necessitates a change in students' worldview in which preservice teachers are provided with opportunities to experience and observe new phenomena to challenge the prevailing assumptions they have learned (Abery et al., 2015). WIL helped preservice teachers prepare for the diversity of workplace colleagues, learners, teaching environments, and the people they are required to work with.

The value of reciprocal learning with peers evident in this study suggests that professional networking opportunities are valuable for preservice teachers' professional development. This study extends the existing literature on peer learning (Pålsson et al., 2017; Riese et al., 2012) by highlighting cross-age learning between the preservice teachers studying a PhD. in the Chinese cohort and the shared learning between preservice teachers and learners as peers in the English cohort. The findings of this study show "a move from learning in which a hierarchical relationship is assumed, to a reciprocal relationship" (Meschitti, 2018; p. 2). Learning through informal interactions (Sampson & Cohen, 2001) between preservice teachers and learners as peers in this study enabled preservice teachers to be co-inquirers

and co-problem-solvers in their learning trajectories for work-life skills. Previous research addressed cross-peer learning where older peers who are assumed to be more knowledgeable and experienced benefit younger learners through the lens of mentoring and scaffolding, rather than knowledge co-producing with peers (Silverman et al., 2017). Findings acknowledge preservice teachers' diversity of capabilities developed through WIL, negating the taken-for-granted assumptions of age hierarchy in cross-peer learning where younger peers learn from older colleagues. This study highlights the value of both independent learning and mutual learning (Havnes et al., 2016). Mutual benefits are gained through cross-age learning between older and younger students working and learning from each other (Silverman et al., 2017) and develops preservice teachers' understanding over time (Wilson et al., 2013) thereby enhancing learning trajectories. This learning approach provides preservice teachers with insights into possibilities for mitigating these relations of power in their learning trajectories.

Existing literature on WIL shows that authentic learning activities develop graduate capabilities that are evidenced through assessment (Kaider et al., 2017). The results of this study added to the literature that the preservice teachers contribute to creating authentic learning experiences for their learners during their workplace learning trajectories to help the learners "immerse themselves in the learning environment to gain knowledge and skills through their own experiences" (Chiu et al., 2018, p. 337). The findings indicate that WIL in language teacher education contributes to preservice teachers' professional knowledge and their progression through authentic learning activities to adapt to teaching diverse learners. The findings also highlight the collaboration among stakeholders including the university, schools, and community in arranging authentic learning activities (Theelen et al., 2022) that benefit both WIL preservice teachers and learners. Monitoring these authentic learning activities in WIL may challenge the responsibilities and workload recognition for relevant staff and schoolteachers involved in the university-community partnerships (Ferns et al., 2022; Nguyen, 2022). Due to the complexity of partnerships in teacher education (Jakhelln & Postholm, 2022; Nguyen, 2022), engaging all stakeholders to fully support preservice teachers' workplace learning trajectories is worthwhile but seems to be critical. The results bring into a discussion about and open up critical inquiry for embracing changes in curriculum and policy for the trend of diversity in teacher education and also in the internationalization of higher education.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that workplace experiences advance preservice teachers' employability. The preservice teachers attained their professional practice goals and made good progress in their workplace learning trajectories including learning transformation, reciprocal learning from peers, and contributions to creating authentic learning activities for their learners. Key features of their learning trajectories were demonstrated in their development of work readiness, critical thinking skills, and insights into working with learners of diverse backgrounds and abilities. The study highlights some implications for using authentic learning in higher education and implementing WIL in communities where the recipients are vulnerable groups. Other implications include potential research into equity/inclusivity, educational research collaboration between university-school, and university-community.

Sampling in this study is a limitation because all participants were from WIL language teacher education. However, the evidence from the two research sites offers diverse perspectives of participants, which helps compose the picture of WIL in higher education and reduces the bias generated by similar information shared by the participants. Another limitation was that the evidence sources were mainly semi-structured interviews. Future research would be valuable by collecting evidence from fieldwork,

observations, and preservice teachers' reflections on their work experience for more insights into their workplace learning trajectories at other levels of education and disciplines.

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