Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) Program 2019–2021

Funded by Brisbane Catholic Education and Australian Catholic University

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“The best teachers are those who show you where to look but don’t tell you what to see.”

— Alexandra K Trenfor
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Theme 1: Impact of the program on PSTs’ Catholic and Spiritual Literacy

Theme 2: Impact of program on PSTs’ levels of anxiety about the teaching profession

Theme 3: Impact of the program on PSTs’ sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness

Theme 4: Impact of the program on PSTs’ self-reported competency related to the APSTs and teaching skills

Theme 5: Partnership growth and impact on systems across the 3 years

RECOMMENDATIONS

REFERENCES
This report outlines the findings from the Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) Program from 2019-2021. This program focuses on strengthening PSTs’ understanding of Catholic spirituality, mission, professional identity, and teaching practices. It aligns with the Brisbane Catholic Education (BCE) priority to develop and maintain an employment force, while supporting schools and staff in BCE’s priority area of sustaining strong Catholic identities. The model includes greater involvement with their SPA school, and the support across their experience from a Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion. The research questions for the project include:

- how can a partnership between a university, school and faith companion contribute to PSTs’ sense of themselves as teacher professionals in Catholic settings;
- what impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views and understandings about teaching in a Catholic setting; and
- what impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views about their longevity in the profession?

The findings illustrated the benefits, as well as areas that can be strengthened in the SPA program. A summary of the key findings under five themes is outlined below with more detailed discussion provided within the report.

**THEME 1 - IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS’ CATHOLIC AND SPIRITUAL LITERACY**

The majority of PSTs went into a faith-based setting, and several were employed by their SPA school. The PSTs reported feeling more prepared for the profession, which influenced their job application and interview stages. The majority had a preference to find employment in a Catholic setting. Overall, there was significant reporting of increased active engagement and greatly increased engagement across all categories surveyed relating to Catholic understandings. For some PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. These were:

- understanding the values and ethos of the Catholic school;
- understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school; and
- understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese.

Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs’ understanding of Catholic school contexts and the teaching profession. The SPCs were highly valued by the PSTs, and were successful in mentoring the PSTs’ understanding of the teaching profession and Catholic schooling contexts.

**THEME 2 - IMPACT OF PROGRAM ON PSTS’ LEVELS OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE TEACHING PROFESSION**

There was a significant shift from high levels of anxiety before the PSTs’ involvement with the partnership to minimal and no levels of anxiety after completing the PD days and one day a week experience in their schools. Overall, the PSTs suggested having the opportunity to slowly ease into the school community, get to know the culture of the school, the needs of the learners and develop a relationship with their supervising teacher over a long period of time ‘demolish[ed] all the nerves’.

**THEME 3 - IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS’ SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE PROFESSION AND PREPAREDNESS**

The one day a week and block experiences were of great importance in assisting the PSTs to develop their understanding of the teaching profession, begin to feel welcome at the school and the teaching profession and understand the culture of the school. It was also important for their beginning understanding of Catholic school settings. Leadership staff in schools as well as supervising teachers play a key role in PSTs’ understanding of the teaching profession. The survey results suggest the majority of PSTs feel that school staff are either very important or significantly important to their understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to the school. For a small number of PSTs, understanding the difference between a Catholic school and other settings was raised as an issue.

**THEME 4 - IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS’ SELF-REPORTED COMPETENCY RELATED TO THE APSTS AND TEACHING SKILLS**

The data indicated from the starting point of the project to the end of the project, PSTs’ competency with the APST standards significantly increased. Overall, there were a significant number of focus areas that many PSTs felt they excelled in by the end of the program, with the strongest focus areas being:

- 2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area;
- 2.2 Use a variety of teaching strategies suitably for the content area;
- 2.3 Plan and provide effective teaching strategies; and
- 2.4 Reflect on student learning and adjust teaching strategies accordingly.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE TEACHING PROFESSION

- How can a partnership between a university, school and faith companion contribute to PSTs’ sense of themselves as teacher professionals in Catholic settings?
- What impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views and understandings about teaching in a Catholic setting?
- What impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views about their longevity in the profession?

SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE PROFESSION AND PREPAREDNESS

- How do PSTs feel about the teaching profession and their sense of belonging?
- How do PSTs feel about the teaching profession and their sense of belonging?

APSTS AND TEACHING SKILLS

- How do PSTs feel about their teaching skills and competencies?
- How do PSTs feel about their teaching skills and competencies?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- How do PSTs feel about the teaching profession and their sense of belonging?
- How do PSTs feel about the teaching profession and their sense of belonging?
ACU EVALUATION REPORT OF SPA PROGRAM

THEME 5 - PARTNERSHIP GROWTH AND IMPACT ON SYSTEMS ACROSS THE 3 YEARS

More than 70% of the PSTs ranked high importance in the project’s strengthening their professional identities; their ability to meet and exceed in the APSTs and understanding that teaching goes beyond everyday classroom activities/interactions. Of the remaining variables, over 80% ranked ‘understanding of Catholic school settings’ and ‘understanding the requirements of the GTPA’ as high importance, and over 75% ranked ‘ability to successfully complete the GTPA’ as high importance.

They also suggested the partnership enabled a support network to develop between the PSTs in the program and contextualisation of university units into practice. A small number of PSTs did not have benefit in relation to their GTPA, which will require strengthening of support mechanisms around this area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are several recommendations coming out of this pilot project, some of which are being used in planning and implementation for the 2022/23 terms of the program.

• Pilot a 3rd year connection year for ACU PSTs
• Strengthen cross-institutional connections including research options
• Pilot a membership database to enable messages to be more regular, engaging and relevant for SPA members.
• Continue improvements to SPA website to include more PD opportunities and Alumni section.
• Utilise the membership database to report on research findings to schools and SPA processes.
• Run meetings bringing together Dioceses, school leaders and supervising teachers to discuss findings around Catholic Identity.
• Strengthen links to Signum Fidei program, pilot with 1st year MTeach who are not completing Graduate Certificate of Religious Education.
• Bring back in-person mentoring training to increase uptake of professional learning and develop an App for online components of SPA mentoring training
• Strengthen training for Companions on preparing schools and PSTs for professional conversations
• Share professional conversation model and run a workshop on the process twice a year
• Host formal in person meetings/forums with principals (new and existing), eg. breakfast or dinner events
INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings from the first three years of the Faith Companion Project (2019/2020), changed to the Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) program in 2021. The name was amended to recognise the interweaving nature of spirituality across all subject areas, the multi-faith context of students and teachers in Catholic schools, and the support the Companions in the project provide to the PSTs in both spirituality and pedagogy. The program was piloted in 2019 with a small teaching and learning development grant from ACU, and has since received Brisbane Catholic Education funding from 2020 onwards. The aim of the program is to strengthen pre-service teachers’ (PSTs’) understanding of Catholic spirituality, mission and identity; create strong links between university systems, Catholic school systems, and schools; enhance mentoring around spirituality, curriculum and intellectual/reflexive engagement with educational research and theory; maintaining a strong employment force and retention of teachers by improving the transition from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs to the first year of teaching. A major component of the partnership is the inclusion of a Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion who guides the PST through their extended experience in a Catholic partner school. The school and cohort numbers have expanded each year and in 2021 the project became cross-institutional with Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) opening the program to their PSTs. The program is also being piloted in the Toowoomba Diocese with a regional based model. In addition, the program has been expanded for ACU PSTs to include a 2nd year program. The research questions include:

- How can a university, Catholic school system/s, schools and Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions partnership contribute to PSTs’ sense of themselves as teacher professionals in Catholic/faith-based settings;
- What impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views and understandings about teaching in Catholic/faith-based settings; and
- What impact does this relationship have on PSTs’ views about longevity in the profession?

BACKGROUND

Australia is becoming an increasingly secularized society, creating challenges for Catholic institutions (and other faith-based organisations) in general, and Catholic education in particular, to meet core missional, vocational and cross-curriculum dimensions of their raison d’etre as Catholic schools. A number of studies since 2002 (including McLaughlin, 2002; Hughes, 2007; Mason, Singleton & Webber, 2007) have focused on undergraduate and graduate teacher perceptions of faith, spirituality and church. Gleeson and O’Neill (2017), surveyed a large cohort of ACU pre-service teachers and teachers practising in Catholic schools and raised concerns relating to teachers’ levels of theological literacy, particularly young teachers, and pre-service teachers’ commitment to “faith-based purposes and characteristics of Catholic schools”. (p. 66). The continuing implications of these findings for Catholic education staff suggest that graduates coming into the Catholic education system, and graduate teachers entering Catholic schools, appear to have little sense of a Church connection or parish culture and even less sense of allegiance to Church teaching or the ecclesial dimension of their role. The reasons for the diminishing decline in Church affiliation are endemic and deep-seated, suggesting issues of fundamental meaning-making. For some time now, researchers have identified this as the source of crisis in the institutional Church.

In addition, the teaching profession is at a crossroads with pressures around performative teaching measurements (Gore et al., 2022), pandemics and other crisis (Oxley & Ashbury, 2022), mental health concerns for teachers, students and society (Kim et al., 2022), and teacher shortages (Mason, 2015). This is not endemic to Australia; it is an international phenomenon (Ovenden-Hope, 2021). To support the professional capacities of those coming into the teaching profession, a new approach is required that enables them to connect at a holistic level to the profession. This needs to be at a level that respects their identity formation not just as a part of a workforce, but as an important contributor to the future society and as someone who is critically reflexive about the world and their place within/beyond it. It also needs to recognise the changing face of both organised religion and a world in which many are spiritual, but not connected to an institutional form of religion (Hunt, 2021).

In trying to identify what is needed to nurture young adults (Gen Y/Millennials and iGens) to develop “a mature commitment in a tentative world” (Parks, 2011, p. 171),
Elements that seem to operate favorably towards such a commitment, and in a variety of combinations, include contact with: “community adults who model commitment; service opportunities; mentors and critical experiences in college or graduate school” (Parks, 2011, p. 6). In addition, the research identified ‘habits of mind’ nurtured in a healthy community dynamic that characterise this development. They are:

- dialogue
- interpersonal perspective taking
- critical systemic thought
- holistic thought (Parks, 2011)

Within this dynamic, mature mentors and the wider community have a unique role. The findings demonstrated that for the 17–30 year olds (representing a significant number of the cohort preparing for teaching or in their early teaching years), strategic mentorship is influential. In Queensland, a priority of the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (BCE) is to develop and support staff and Catholic schools to incorporate Catholic perspectives into curriculum and promote re-contextualised Catholic world-views. Partnering with BCE for a spiritual formation of staff project aligns with a number of ACU’s strategic priorities and addresses concerns raised by Gleeson and O’Neill, and others. This project provides an innovative and distinctive teaching and learning formative experience within the Catholic Intellectual teaching tradition for pre-service teachers (PSTs) by providing targeted mentoring support through a ‘Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion’ who assists PSTs to understand the Catholic intellectual tradition, re-contextualised Catholic world-views and make meaning of their own ways to incorporate these views into their own growth and pedagogical expertise in Catholic schools. It also strengthens the university’s Catholic partnerships and provides pre-service teachers with an authentic, contextualized and embedded Catholic experience reflecting the goal of ACU as an 

Encouraging a strong teaching force in Catholic schools requires an approach that supports and encourages pre-service teachers (PSTs) to understand what it means to teach in a Catholic school, including bringing Catholic perspectives into their teaching. The recent review into ITE (DET, 2022) and previous (eg. TEMAG, 2014) along with researchers in the field advocate for school-university partnerships that assist in transitioning PSTs from university programs to the teaching profession (Allen, Howells, & Radford, 2013; Grudnoff, Haigh & Mackisack, 2016). The project leader’s work in university-Catholic system partnerships in QLD and Victoria, suggests that developing a strong connection between universities and school; providing additional school experiences in addition to their formal placement blocks; and incorporating more supportive mentoring structures, can strengthen PSTs’ connection to the teaching profession (Gutierrez & Nailor, 2020; Gutierrez & Kostogriz, 2021). Additional support mechanisms can be provided to assist pre-service teachers in transitioning to Catholic schools, including support to explore one’s spirituality and faith and what this means in a Catholic setting. There is little data available on the effectiveness of this holistic model of mentoring for pre-service teachers in Australian Catholic schools. These partnerships require evaluation to understand their impact on pre-service teachers’ awareness and confidence with Catholic Intellectual traditions, their ability to include these perspectives into their discipline area, their own spiritual awareness and growth, and assessing the partnership structures used to develop PST professional skills needed for transitioning into work (particularly in the Catholic sector).

This research project concentrates on the mentoring aspect of PST experience, which includes enhancing mentoring around spirituality, curriculum and intellectual/reflexive engagement with educational research and theory. It also examines the intersection of educational systems to deliver effective ITE partnership models. The partnership between the university researcher, BCE, BCE schools, Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions and other universities, creates high levels of complexity for successful system operation and maintenance. Figure 1 is a simplistic representation of the integral relationships between all contexts. It is important to recognise partnerships as being a part of a “fabric of relations” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2008, p. 64) and a dynamic intersection of human interaction between and among systems including “interconnected actors, shaped by spatial and historical contexts” (Fransman et al., 2021, p. 331), hence Figure 1 represents relationships between key parties, while Figure 2 visually represents the complexity of the fabrics of this partnerships and the border crossing that occurs.
The role and approach of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion is pivotal and requires specific mention regarding the parameters of the role. If spiritual formation in the Christian Catholic tradition is essentially about 'growing people', in an holistic way, respectful of where people are at, connective to role and context, and that this happens in community, then we need to be intentional about providing effective formation at every point along the journey of the Catholic school educator. The Companion for the pre-service teacher is critical to that arc of personal and professional growth (Gowdie, 2017).

In the exploration of reflective practice in the spiritual domain, research shows us that systematic and personal reflection about professional practice both nurtures and sustains the teaching vocation itself (Downey, 2006; Hunt, 2021; Neal, 2013; Rolph, 1991).

Accordingly, the SPA program has an approach that meets the individual wherever they 'are at'; uses narrative in a reflective praxis to help the individual make meaning of their own spiritual journey and connecting points to the Catholic school faith context and the teaching profession. It is a relational, process and person-oriented role, companioning the pre-service teacher in their own meaning-making and community context.
Methodology and data

Ú METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Intrinsic Case study and Quantitative survey data

- Professional in-school immersion and ommnitual survey data
- Prior to placement (PSTs), during school placement and post-master placement
- PSTs = Pre-service Teachers, O = On-site, ICQ = In-charge of Catholic
- O = no O, C = Catholic
- Some PSTs participated in multiple years
- Data collected through interviews, observations, journal entries, and surveys
- Data analysis involved thematic coding and content analysis

DATA COLLECTION

Stages of Data Collection

First stage - Prior to professional experience in schools
- PSTs = Pre-service Teachers, O = On-site, ICQ = In-charge of Catholic
- Some PSTs participated in multiple years
- Data collected through interviews, observations, journal entries, and surveys
- Data analysis involved thematic coding and content analysis

Second stage - During Professional Experience
- PSTs = Pre-service Teachers, O = On-site, ICQ = In-charge of Catholic
- Some PSTs participated in multiple years
- Data collected through interviews, observations, journal entries, and surveys
- Data analysis involved thematic coding and content analysis
DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH

Qualitative data

For the purpose of this project report, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012) was used to code the transcriptions from the interviews, zoom focus group meetings and written responses in the survey. Thematic analysis allows the identification, analysis and reporting of themes that evolve from data. Across the statistics and voices, patterns and themes emerged which provide an understanding of the key impact areas of the project. Due to the depth of the survey responses, this report mostly focuses on the survey data. In most cases the interview data provided similar, if not the same, information. In some instances there were gaps. The interview data has been used to fill data gaps. These are outlined in the ‘Key findings’ section. Any names used within the report are pseudonyms.

Quantitative data

For the purpose of this report, we used a range of analyses including paired samples (Student) T-Tests to test the hypothesis that the pre- SPA program results differed significantly from the post-SPA program results for each participant in the program. Wherever possible, we converted the T-Test statistic into a standardized effect size known as ‘Cohen’s d’, which compares the average score on each pre-intervention measure with the average score on each post-intervention measure by estimating the difference between the statistical means. Results can thus be interpreted in standard deviations of ‘effect’ (see Table in next section).

Though we did not utilize a true experimental design, we interpret our preliminary findings under the assumption that changes in the measures used herein are attributable, at least in part, to the SPA program’s effect on the participants. It is also worth applying a degree of caution with these quantitative findings as the sample size was small, which often restricted the types of analysis we were able to consider, and therefore may not generalize to a broader population of PSTs.

All y-axes have been adjusted to aid in interpretation by scaling the increments in relation to the region and size of the effect; though, most scales were presented to participants in Likert-scale form ranging from 1 (lower) to 5 (higher) in relation to five key themes:

1. Spiritual Literacy
2. Anxiety
3. Belonging
4. Competency
5. Partnership growth and impact on systems

The general ‘rule of thumb’ when interpreting findings is that increases to the participants’ scores were attributable to the success of the program and the magnitude of this success was proportional to the size and significance of the effect, measured in standardized units (Cohen’s d) and using conventional ‘p-values’ which may be thought of as the probability of the present results occurring in the sample even if no such effect were to truly exist if similar interventions were applied to the population from which the sample was drawn. The larger the Cohen’s d and the lower the p-value, the more likely the result will be reflective of the true effect of the program if it were to be used in the broader population of PSTs from which the sample was drawn. One exception, however, was the questions pertaining to ‘Anxiety’ where larger scores at the beginning indicate ‘higher’ anxiety, which is typically an undesirable outcome, and was therefore targeted by the program in the hope of reducing the baseline scores recorded before the commencement of the SPA program and/or the weekly school experience sessions. Therefore the success of the SPA program would be proportional to the extent that Anxiety scores before vs. after the program are reduced.

Cohens effect size**

| Value | DOM | 
|-------|-----|   |
| 0.2   | Small |   |
| 0.5   | Medium |   |
| 0.8   | Large |   |

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval was obtained from the University’s HREC and from BCE Research office. The Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions were employed by ACU to ensure no conflicts of interest with the main stakeholders. All participants were anonymised during the data collection stage.

* Unlike the other dimensions used in this survey, which were rated from 1 to 5, the theme of ‘Competency’ was rated from (lower) to 4 (higher) in relation to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).

** Cohen (1988) suggested using these effect size thresholds to aid in the interpretation of results, but also stressed the importance of doing so in the broader context of the quality of the data and implementation context.
After analysing the various forms of data, there were multiple themes relating to the impact of the project, and improvements that would increase impact in future implementations of this model. The quantitative analysis was categorised into five main themes, with various findings within these themes:

1) Impact of the program on PSTs' Catholic and Spiritual Literacy:
   a) PSTs experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings.
   b) PSTs had increased employability and preparedness for the profession and preferred to get a job in a Catholic setting.
   c) Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs' understanding of Catholic school contexts and the teaching profession.

2) Impact of program on PSTs' levels of anxiety about the teaching profession:
   a) Significant reduction in PST anxiety levels about block placement and their first year of teaching.

3) Impact of the program on PSTs' sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness:
   a) One day a week of Professional Development helped prepare for their block placement and connect to their Catholic school context and the teaching profession.
   b) Leadership staff in schools as well as supervising teachers play a key role in PSTs' understanding of the teaching profession.

4) Impact of the program on PSTs' self-reported competency related to the APSTs and teaching skills:
   a) PSTs were able to exceed in many of the APST Graduate Standards.
   b) PSTs in partnership programs have greater engagement with their schools during unexpected crisis.

5) Partnership growth and impact on systems across the 3 years:
   a) Successful and sustainable partnership programs require support and careful modelling, however the evidence demonstrates the valuable impacts.

Key findings

PSTs experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings:

- PSTs were asked across two points (start and end) in the longitudinal survey about their growth and engagement in various areas of Catholic understandings. The following variables were included in the survey to assess PSTs' Catholic literacy:
  - Understanding the values and ethos of the Catholic school;
  - Understanding the mission of the Catholic Church;
  - Understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school;
  - Understanding that Catholic schools are places of prayer and can encourage and participate in prayer in classes, staff and student meetings;
  - Understanding how to establish positive relationships including connections with parents, engagement in the pastoral care of students and supporting their spiritual and moral development;
  - Understanding how to articulate the Catholic identity of the College/school;
  - Understanding the positive anthropology of the human being as the foundation for all Catholic education and pedagogy;
  - Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese;
  - Understanding the commitment to religious education and the spiritual formation of students and staff;
  - Appreciate the role and influence of you as teacher and person through your teaching, your actions, your personal and interpersonal character and outlook.

Overall, the PSTs reported significant increases in their active engagement across all categories. The graph below shows the impact on PSTs' growth before and after the program illustrating significant and generalized increases in all dimensions of their Spiritual Literacy (range of effects: Cohen's d=1.2 to .45, which equates to very large to medium effect sizes).
Catholic and Spiritual Literacy (increased)
Medium to Very Large effects before vs. after program (range of effects: Cohen’s $d = 1.2$ to $.45$, $p < .001$ to $.12$)

Note. The ‘dots’ in the line plot above represents the ‘average’ (statistical mean), the ‘whiskers’ on either side of the dots represent the 95% confidence intervals, and the ‘line’ connecting each separate dot represents the direction change in average results before compared to after the SPA program.

The survey results also indicated that for some PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. The three areas that scored the lowest for these PSTs included “understanding the values and ethos of the Catholic school” (5/21 ranked low-mid), “understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school” (5/21 ranked low-mid) and “Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese” (8/21 ranked low-mid). The data allows us to reflect on ways that the partnership could enable stronger growth in these areas. Possible ways to improve in these areas are addressed in the recommendations for the project section of this report.

Across the survey written responses and interviews, PSTs identified ways they incorporated spirituality and Catholic Identity into their teaching, for example:

In some of the lessons I talked about spirituality and things like that. Talked about sharing, talked about loving others, so yes, I think my experience was mathematics but you could still find opportunities to teach those things to students. We don’t think about this. This project I think made me think, that’s why I could do these things. (2019)

In addition, the program enabled PSTs who had not considered teaching in a Catholic setting to develop a stronger understanding of the benefits of the system, for example one PST stated:

I’ve never been in a Catholic school before so it was great to see just how it operated, how it was different from state schools. There’s definitely a sense of comradery in a Catholic school. Everyone seems to be a lot closer. It seems like more of a tight knit community which is nice to see. That’s not the experience I had as a prac teacher previously or as a student. It’s opened my eyes to my options as to where I’m going to next year. I feel less restricted now that I’ve had this insight. I don’t feel like I’m going in blind. I see it is very welcoming and open to all people of all backgrounds. (2019)

You know when we were asking [supervising teachers] for actual evidence of what they do, they weren’t really coming up with anything. They were drawing blanks and didn’t have their own examples of how they practice the faith except for, “It’s compulsory once a year for us to do that.” (2019)

I did not sense a significant commitment to Catholicism within my school, it always felt like an afterthought and something they had to do because they were a Catholic school, and not something they truly believed in. (2021)

a Catholic school they provide you with a framework.... I was focusing on the contribution of a few teachers and ignoring some other things. The school has provided you with everything, the resources, they are offering you staff prayers, everything, it’s choice if you want to go. A lot of things depend on you, how you react. (2019)

the school gave me multiple opportunities to get involved in the religious life of the school and it was fantastic to see the involvement and engagement of the vast majority of students (2021)
PSTs had increased employability, preparedness for the profession and preferred to get a job in a Catholic setting.

The 40 PSTs who completed the program across 2019-2021 were asked to provide details of employment after their time in the SPA program. Of the data available, 81% confirmed employment in a Catholic setting, with the remainder being employed in other settings (including faith-based). Eight confirmed employment in their or another SPA setting. This is extrapolated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Setting</th>
<th>Number of PSTs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BCE school (8 employed at SPA)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockhampton Diocese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toowoomba Diocese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archdiocese of Brisbane RI</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interstate Diocese (Broken Bay)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory Christian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD state school</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote school (state)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity Leave (returned to</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>home country)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the final interviews, PSTs expressed a preference to teach in a Catholic school. The employment results indicate successful placement of the graduates into Catholic and faith-based school settings.

The PSTs and SPCs also suggested the program better prepared PSTs for the profession, which made them more attractive candidates for principals, particularly for the Catholic sector. One SPC acted as a referee for several of the PSTs in 2021 and provided feedback from an interviewing principal (not a SPA partnership school):

He said “I've never had a first year teacher articulate the things that she was talking about in terms of using data to change pedagogy or to track performance of kids and just these things”. He said that “the kids who are coming through this are far in advance from other first year teachers coming out.”

Also “these two young women were really stand out interviewees, over and above any other graduate and often experienced teachers”, and he has been interviewing for decades! He was overwhelmed by their knowledge and understanding of the context of Catholic education; could speak about the Catholic identity of a college and how it nourishes them and how they would hope to be able to contribute. They could articulate clearly their philosophy of learning and teaching, he was very impressed.

The PSTs across the cohorts also reflected on their experience during the interviews and compared themselves to their peers, their gaps prior to the program and how it has helped them understand how to manage their first years of teaching. In the pilot year the program began 2 weeks prior to their official placement block, and included their placement block and a few weeks of follow up reflection work. The PSTs, supervising teachers, principal and SPC highlighted the need for the program to be longer, and to enable PSTs to engage with their schools across the year. One PST stated “that's important too, to see the beginning to the end. I've yet to see a whole term through. Next year will be a surprise for me” (2019). This aligns with existing research around the benefits of extended experiences with schools (Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020).

The program in 2020 expanded the experience in the school to one day a week across 6-12 months (depending on Course Completion date), their official placement block, with support from their SPC, university and Diocese across this period. The data from the 2020 and 2021 cohort illustrate the benefits of the extended program for final year PSTs:

Comparing experience to other PSTs I realise they have no idea because they have only been there for four weeks, I've been there for a whole year, like the knowledge gap is huge… I feel that in the first year or two of teaching I will be so much more ready and prepared for it. (2021)

I think I am more prepared than I would have been to go into the profession… I am a lot more prepared for what the profession actually is, rather than just going for a four–week block. I never met a Deputy or Principal in my first block... If I did two more of those four week blocks, I would have no information whatsoever... this year has been a wealth of knowledge. (2020)
I don’t see myself wanting to leave teaching...the program has shown me, I’ve been there long enough at the school and talked to first year teachers at that school, when you get your position don’t take on too much, here’s some pitfalls to be aware of...at the end of this program you are yes I want to be a teacher, way more solidified. (2021)

By the end of this program the 2019-2021 PSTs felt more prepared for their first years of teaching, with many saying they felt like they were heading into their second year of teaching. The principal’s comment provides evidence that the skills and experiences practiced by the PSTs in this program connect them to the teaching profession academically, professionally, and personally. This connection leads to a better chance of longevity in the career.

Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion (SPC) experiences contribute to PSTs’ understanding of Catholic school contexts

The SPC is an integral component of this partnership. Experienced Companions in this role interacted with the PSTs along their journey via email, voice calls, video calls, face to face meetings and formal professional conversation meetings, which occurred at the beginning and end of their final official placement block.

Survey data from this project highlights the successful contribution the SPCs made to the PSTs’ understanding of Catholic schooling contexts across the year. Data was collected during two separate stages of the project to ascertain the longitudinal impact. The first data collection point occurred after the one-day a week experiences, and the second at the end of the partnership project. The table below illustrates, for the majority of PSTs (88%-90%), the SPC was very or highly successful in contributing to their understanding of, and belonging to, their Catholic school setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>First data point</th>
<th>Second data point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>developing your understanding of Catholic school context</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: How Faith Companion mentoring experiences contributed to understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to their school

(1 = no success, 5 = highly successful).

My SPC has been excellent. Her knowledge of teaching and of the BCE curriculum and her willingness to share have been invaluable. At the beginning of the year my SPC and I spent some time on the phone and she directed me to the BCE web site and the curriculum page and how they have integrated the Australian curriculum Catholic teaching. (2020)

The SPCs were so knowledgeable about BCE resources as well as the staff across multiple schools. Their ties to various schools and the community as a whole really helped when answering questions and giving advice/suggesting resources. (2020)

Having the conversations with the SPA companion really helped unpack my thinking and gain a deeper insight in being part of a Catholic school and my own spiritual journey. The leaders of the school who obtained a copy of the profession conversations were quite impressed with the how detailed these conversations were. (2021)

I think the benefits were that they were able to have somebody else to talk to rather than just me, that they could ask if they didn’t feel comfortable asking me a certain question about – and they didn’t want to offend the school or something like that, they had this third party outside that they could connect to. So, that was definitely a benefit and it gave them, as I’ve been saying, a deeper understanding of what it means to be in a Catholic school. I know I would’ve benefited from that back in the day. (2020)
ACU EVALUATION REPORT OF SPA PROGRAM   2019-2021

The extended period of time in their Catholic SPA school, and the model's design to include a Community of Practice style of support across the year from the SPC, university coordinator and Catholic Diocese, have been the contributing factors to this success. Some areas can continue to be enhanced and strengthened for future implementation, such as the areas identified as weaknesses for some PSTs in Catholic literacy and increasing the visibility of Catholic vision and mission in schools. These areas will be discussed at the regular ThinkTank and Dioceses/ACU meetings.

THEME 2 - IMPACT OF PROGRAM ON PSTS’ LEVELS OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE TEACHING PROFESSION

Significant reduction in PST anxiety levels about block placement after attending PD days and 1 day a week experience in school

Being able to experience the staff days has really given me a foundation to take with me into my 1st year of teaching. The school treated us as new staff and gave us so much support and help in becoming part of the community. (2020)

Thoroughly enjoyed attending the staff days prior to the school opening up. Was interesting to be involved in the PD days and see the organisation of the curriculum. The schools have been so welcoming towards me and I feel like another member of the staff rather than a pre-service teacher. I feel much more confident completing my final prac being a part of this partnership. (2020)

I was very lucky that my coordinator at the school organised an immersive teaching experience for these one-day experiences. This was particularly valuable for helping me to understand the culture of the school and to further my teaching experience. (2021)
In comparison to when I started the program, my anxiety levels are not as high after completing my practicum... throughout this year, I had experienced some tough personal situations which it was great to receive the support and understanding of my mentor teacher, SPA companion, and the school. It actually showed me the type of support I would receive as a teacher, for all teachers have an identity outside of school, and they wear many hats in the professional context. I believe this year was a tough year for me in my personal life, however I was shown the support you could receive with the right team. Life doesn’t stop, it’s how you overcome it and with who is on your journey (2021).

As a Primary Ed student the weekly visits absolutely demolished all the nerves and anxiety that I had before. They allowed me to really develop a strong and communicative relationship with my supervising teacher so that I was kept in the loop the whole time, this allowed me to hit the ground running once it came to the block practicum. (2020)

The 1 day a week experience was very important to building relationships with students and connecting with staff. It also allowed for additional planning and training time in preparation for practicums. (2021)

The one day a week and block placement experiences

Theme 2 Summary

The survey data indicated a small to medium effect before and after the program relating to the PSTs' sense of belonging and belonging to the profession. Results showed a small to medium effect indicating an increase in becoming and belonging before vs. after program (Cohen's d = .325, p < .05)

Becoming and Belonging

Many PSTs commented on their overall feelings about the program and how it helped them connect and prepare for the profession:

My participation in this program has successfully equipped me to be a classroom teacher. I have really enjoyed my time in this program and feel like a valued part of my placement school. (2021)

I really felt I was able to integrate with the school and truly experienced what it would be like to be at the school. Having the opportunity to experience most areas of teaching, from obtaining data, collaborating with staff, knowing students and watching them grow, knowing what to do from the start of the school year, being part of the staff meetings and various school events, meeting parents, reports, and interviews. (2021)

The one day a week and block placement experiences

- Ac, Cu, Mn, Fe, Ni, Zn, Al, Si, Na, K, Mg
- As, Se, Cd, Pb, Hg, Ag, Au, Pt, Pd
- S, P, Cl, Br, I, N, O, F
- Fe, Cu, Zn, Cd, Pb, Hg, Ag, Au, Pt, Pd
- H2O, CO2, H2SO4, HCl, HNO3
- C, H, O, N, S, P, Cl, Br, I
- H2, CO, CH4, C2H4, C2H6, CO2, H2O, N2, O2, CO2, H2S, CH4
- H2O, CO2, H2S, CH4, C2H4, C2H6, CO2, H2O, N2, O2, CO2, H2S, CH4
Table 3: 1 day a week, importance in understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to their school (1 = no importance, 5 = of great importance) data point during final block placement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>developing your understanding of the teaching profession</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing your understanding of Catholic school contexts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you feel welcome at the school</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>AC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you understand the particular culture at your school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional relationships (self-defined category)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with peers (self-defined category)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with students (self-defined category)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationship with students (self-defined category)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping to understand students (self-defined category)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey after the block placements cemented the importance of their school experiences throughout this partnership model. As can be seen in Table 4 below, for the majority of PSTs, the block placement was very important for all areas.

Table 4: How Block Placement contributed to understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to your school (1 = no importance, 5 = of great importance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>developing your understanding of the teaching profession</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing your understanding of Catholic school contexts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you feel welcome at the school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you understand the particular culture at your school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is an increase across all categories as the PSTs practiced a sustained block experience with their schools. It appears one PST did not feel their school provided the kinds of support they were hoping in relation to feeling welcome at the school, understanding the school culture and helping to feel welcome to teaching. This is where the SPC and university coordinator can assist to help bridge the gap and to facilitate a stronger relationship with the school. There are systems and processes in place throughout the program to develop strong communication lines between the schools, PSTs, Dioceses and the university, however it appears one PST may not have had the welcome and supportive experience that the other PSTs had. Unfortunately, this PST provided no feedback to indicate why they selected these ratings in this section. As was raised in Theme 1, and visible in the results of this section of the survey, more work can be done to increase the visibility of Catholic identity, mission and spirituality for PSTs in the school settings.

The comments that were provided in the survey illustrate the PSTs' valuing of the embedded experience across the partnership, and they highlighted the importance of having extra time in the school to understand the teaching profession. One PST stated that the experience “has really embedded for me that teaching is the profession for me” (2020).

Several PST comments relate to the importance of that time in helping to build relationships, understand their students and transition into their block placements:

The most important thing to me about this one day a week (or in my case, two half-days so that I get to spend more time following my year 8 classes through)
The impact of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion

I have been welcomed into the school community and have been encouraged to be involved in the life of the school as far as possible with the way the year has gone so far. Along with the staff days I assisted at the swimming carnival alongside my 1 day a week visits to the school.

I have found the teachers are more welcoming as I am there every week rather than just being there for a block placement. A lot of teachers have offered to have me come into their classrooms to see different types of classrooms.

The SPC bought an extra level of outside understanding, and the professional conversations allowed them to provide extra information and ideas that I might not have considered. (2020)

SPA mentor made himself available to come in on multiple occasions and observe my teaching.
was far more considerate of context and teaching expectations, and gave constructive and relevant feedback, more so then previous placement 'mentors', was good to have an established connection, rather than a random university worker turn up out of the blue.

Another important skill that the SPCs scaffold in the PSTs is critical reflexivity. Critical reflexivity is a necessary skill for survival and effective teaching/learning in the teaching profession. It is especially important for those in faith-based settings as there is a need for teachers to reflect on and represent the mission of the school in their own teaching and professional being as a teacher in that school. They also need to reflect on their own spirituality and how this impacts their connection to the school, community and the world. The comments from the PSTs suggest the SPCs helped them during this stage of their reflective journeys:

The SPA program has allowed me opportunities to stop, breathe, reflect and evaluate my teaching with a supportive, understanding and encouraging team to ensure I am continuing in the right direction, building confidence in myself and my teaching and reflecting on my formation of faith. (2020)

I think the SPC puts a big focus on catholic identity that can get swept away in hectic school life. Having the support or even just the questioning of catholic identity makes you reflect and reassess what you have been doing. In the reflection - you find that you have been engaging in the community and catholic identity of the school, but it hadn’t been actively in your mind. (2020)

Impact of school and leadership staff

The numerical data in the survey suggested a slight change between the first data collection point and the final in relation to the importance attributed to school staff. At the first data collection point, 80% of PST participants ranked the school staff as having a ranking of 4 or 5 in the of great importance range. In the second data point this increased to 85%. The results suggest the majority of PSTs feel that school staff are either very important or significantly important to their understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to the school. The data suggests for one PST their value of the school staff decreased across their time in the school, this PST left no comments in the survey to indicate why.

The qualitative data for this section of the survey provided more significant understanding of how the staff were important and who were considered key staff members for this program by the PSTs. The Staff listed most in the responses were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>First data point</th>
<th>Second data point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing your understanding of the teaching profession</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you feel welcome at the school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you understand the particular culture at your school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In reducing levels of anxiety about your school experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Important school staff in the program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Number of times mentioned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervising Teacher</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other teaching staff (particularly in same year level/CPA area)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Principal</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, the PSTs' supervising teacher was the most mentioned important staff member with comments from PSTs such as:

My supervising teacher has been a wonderful mentor who has taught me so much about being a quality teacher. She has really ignited my passion for teaching and motivated me to want to be the best teacher I can be and help students to discover their full potential. (2019)

My supervising teacher has been the most helpful mentor in comparison to all of my previous ones. As I get to spend the whole year with him, I get to fully experience why he teaches the way he does. In a three-week practicum, I found that I did not see the ‘full picture’ at times. There are times when students won’t cooperate and sometimes (as I have learnt with my mentor) – “you just hold in there”. My supervising teacher has taught me so much about being a teacher and has not sugar-coated it. (2020)

My mentor teacher was always supportive and approachable. She welcomed me from day one of the program, and I really felt like part of the team, part of the year level unit. The collaborative partnership with both classroom teachers really did make me feel like part of the team, if I had an idea they would listen, and they treated me like a teacher. (2021)

My mentor has been more than I could have asked for. For the first time on a placement, I feel comfortable to trial anything I want with kids in a judgement free zone. I feel like a co-partner, and not a prac student. I have become very comfortable alongside him teaching (in this program, we often teach parts each naturally as we are similar in that regards). (2020)

The Assistant Principal, APRE and Other staff in the year level and CPA areas were also mentioned as having a significant impact on feeling welcome in the school and providing learning experiences. PSTs comments include:

The APRE was fantastic, gave me a diverse timetable on the 1 day a week to offer wide array of teaching and learning experiences, provided me with opportunities to get involved in the school, PD days, year 12 retreat, sport days, school masses, gave me the best possible experience of the totality of the school life. (2021)

The Principal was also mentioned by the PSTs in the survey. In addition to the survey, the interview data with the PSTs, Companions, Supervising Teachers and Principals emphasised the importance of Principal support for the program, the school staff involved and Catholic Identity. The Principal is always checking in and making sure that I have everything that is needed. (PST, survey, 2020)

And I think they [PSTs] probably feel more connected to even the leadership team, they are not squirrelled away. They would regularly pop in... that’s something good, they could say ‘Hi [Principal name]’. If they are here for four weeks, you don’t know them. (Principal, 2020)

Feedback from the pre-service teachers is that they felt comfortable being able to talk to the leadership staff whereas other placements they would not even be a blimp on the radar. (University Program Coordinator, 2020)

I have worked closely with the Head of Religion, and the APRE who have guided me and been willing to have conversations and answer any questions that I have had. (2019)

The Assistant Principal and my Supervising teacher. They were always able to provide me with help, and were very aware of including me in PD days and whole school activities. The AP went above and beyond to help me get access to BCE systems to help my placement. (2020)

I have found that the school staff across all levels have been very welcoming and encouraging of me in the partnership. All of the leadership and staff are willing to share their knowledge and experience and provide encouragement and guidance where necessary. (2020)

The Assistant Principal was more than I could have asked for. For the first time on a placement, I feel comfortable to trial anything I want with kids in a judgement free zone. I feel like a co-partner, and not a prac student. I have become very comfortable alongside him teaching (in this program, we often teach parts each naturally as we are similar in that regards). (2020)
One principal also mentioned in their interview the importance of the principal, and other leadership staff, in the selection of school mentors, demonstrating their role in ensuring PSTs are provided with strong support networks:

Principal: I think as a Principal you know whether they will be good mentors or not.

Program Coordinator: So the Principals are really important in making sure that...

Principal: Yeah you are choosing the person but they need to choose not just anybody. (2020)

Other staff mentioned included the librarian (2), Literacy Leader (1), HOD RE (1), HOD CPA/Curriculum (3), Head of Learning/Primary Learning Leader (4), Chaplain (2), teacher support officers (3), graduate teacher for GTPA (1) and Speech Therapist (1). The extended time in the schools enables PSTs to seek support and learn from a variety of leaders and staff within the school context.

Summary for Theme 3

When combining the quantitative and qualitative data for this theme, most PSTs found the school staff supportive and welcoming across the whole school. In the future, the project can aim for more PSTs ranking in 4/5 by the endpoint of their experience. A contributor to assisting supervising teachers in working with adult learners is the mentoring program run collaboratively by the Diocese representatives and university coordinator. In 2019 and 2020 this was run face to face. Due to COVID, a quick switch to fully online had to occur in 2021, and this was then updated to be more engaging modules, with a ‘Live’ session, hosted on a more accessible website designed for the SPA program. The attendance rate for the multi-mode modules and ‘Live’ session did not reach as many supervising teachers and PSTs as the face-to-face sessions.

The project team has reflected on the impact of this for the program and will be exchanging the ‘Live’ session for a face-to-face event in 2023. In addition, more collaboration with school leaders and supervising teachers will occur to ensure higher attendance, and further discussion with leadership staff and the Diocese to consider approaches to strengthen connection with their school. The university coordinator is trialling a membership database for 2023 to allow more effective communication channels with schools. This theme requires shared responsibility across leadership, school-based mentors, Companions, other staff in the school and the university. Improving professional learning around andragogy and mentoring and developing more effective communication systems will assist with this area.

THEME 4 – IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS’ SELF-REPORTED COMPETENCY RELATED TO THE APSTS AND TEACHING SKILLS

PSTs were able to exceed in many of the APST Graduate Standards

Both the quantitative and qualitative data from the last three years of this project indicate the impact of this model on PSTs’ competency related to the APSTs and their teaching skills. The graphs below map the changes in self-reported competency related to the APSTs for the surveyed cohorts. The PSTs were asked to reflect on how well they met each of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: Graduate before entering the program and at the end of their experience.

Medium to very large impact on self-reported APST competencies from beginning to the end of SPA program
When examining the end-point survey in more detail (see Appendix 3) 53% of the PSTs felt they exceed the requirements across the focus areas and 44% felt they met the focus areas. The remaining reported they had 'just met' the standard focus areas. No PSTs reported that they had not met any of the focus areas. Across the standards, PSTs only checked meeting or exceeding in 18 of the 33 focus areas. The focus areas that had over 70% of PSTs reporting exceeded were:

• 2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area;
• 2.2 Organise content into an effective learning and teaching sequence;
• 2.3 Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans;
• 2.6 Implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students;
• 3.4 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of resources, including ICT, that engage students in their learning;
• 6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.

It is promising that no PSTs felt they were still developing in any areas, and very few felt they were in the category of 'just met'. In addition, 81% of the PSTs reported excelling in focus area “6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices”, which illustrates the strength of the mentoring focus in this program. In the comments section of the survey one PST wrote “my QPERF document [final professional experience reporting document] had mainly Es (exceeding) due to this partnership. I also was able to be involved in NCCD processes and extended moderation of student work from Term 2-4” (2020) and another wrote “My participation in this program has successfully equipped me to be a classroom teacher” (2021), highlighting their success due to the program.

There are areas that require reflection and consideration for future implementation of the program. Overall, there appeared to be a pattern across the focus areas indicating the PSTs felt least confident with their knowledge around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects and concepts, working with parents/caregivers, and a small concern around inclusivity/differentiation. These areas have been highlighted in the mentoring training sessions and will be strengthened in communication channels with stakeholders.

Additional Support Mechanisms such as Formative Assessment Tools and mentoring approach enhanced PSTs’ reflection on APSTs, GTPA and their development as a teacher.

It was good to chat to the SPC. Not necessarily just about religion, but also that reflection process. How do you reflect, and stuff like that. I think the importance of having those deeper conversations. It doesn’t have to be about your feelings. It’s not about feelings. It’s about the deeper conversations that get you to think a bit wider, a bit more deep. I think that was a really good thing. Not only my teaching profession, but just in general as well. (2019)
I liked the layout of it, the meetings and how it worked. Rather than what you get normally, which is like someone comes in and watches you and goes here’s what you did good and here’s what you did bad, here’s some ideas, ok, bye...[the professional conversations] were so much more on the level like we were all equal... it really was a peer conversation, it was so good and I got so many great ideas, I would set goals instantly and they weren’t like ridiculous goals...I found it way better than any university supervising visit I ever had...(2020)

the professional conversations offer a structured rather than casual conversation...and writing my GTPA was I talked about this in my professional conversations, I’ll just write about it now, it made it a lot easier because you had already talked about it. (2020)

PSTs in partnership programs have greater engagement with their schools during unexpected crisis

During the 2020 year of implementation, schools shut down for a significant period of time. For many universities this was during the scheduled block of placement for a large number or PSTs. This meant many universities cancelled placement blocks and had to reschedule (some rescheduled to the following year). A positive benefit of this program was that the majority of PSTs were able to continue to engage with their schools in various ways (see Table 10 below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. able to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continued communication with supervising teacher (either email, zoom or face to face)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing/helping to prepare powerpoints</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining lists of students who have been completing tasks and emailing parents using templates for those who had not completed tasks</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring students' work online</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending meetings with staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assisting students who were unable to keep up with the online work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing quizzes and tests such as Kahootz</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching in an online platform</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Teacher Interviews</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically being at the school and being involved in the process - whether it was through looking after the students that were at the school, or witnessing online meetings and the new procedures that were installed.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing chapter readings and recording for students.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was encouraging and uplifting to observe the support and flexibility provided to the PSTs during the COVID lock-down and beyond. Many PSTs reported both personal and professional growth during this period of time and were incredibly grateful to their schools for the support.
Some comments from the PST about this period of time included:

I learnt about patience – both with students and with the technology. Adaptation – in the curriculum and how it can be delivered.

Personally: Allowing me to grow confidence and to demonstrate that there is a reason why I am here - I have often struggled with the idea of 'am I actually going to be a good teacher'.

Listening to and empathising with the concerns of others was also an area of growth.

There were also regular focus group zoom support meetings available for the PSTs during the COVID lockdown period which included the Program University Coordinator and the SPCs. The majority attended all meetings, and all managed to get to some of the meetings. The PSTs suggested that these meetings were incredibly valuable for them as is indicated by some of the comments included below:

Just hearing from others who shared their experiences was helpful. Also the University Program Coordinator’s leadership, especially in the issue of whether or not we could still physically attend the school was invaluable.

The whole team running this program was very supportive throughout the COVID experience.

Finally, during this time the SPC role was incredibly important to support each PST trying to negotiate a complex and difficult space. They demonstrated flexibility and shifted their support to phone or zoom meetings.

Again, the comments from the PSTs were positive and grateful for this support as is shown in the example comment below:

My SPC was extremely supportive and helpful as a grounded voice for myself during these unknown times and after also. She offered support through the phone throughout the year, then face to face after COVID restrictions ended.

The 2020 COVID situation was emotionally, personally and professionally difficult. The staff involved in the SPA Program went above and beyond to provide additional support mechanisms to ensure PSTs continued to feel connected to their schools and the mentoring benefits of the program. It enabled a smooth transition back to school for the PSTs once the lock-down restrictions eased and has provided a model for both online and face to face support as COVID continues to disrupt schooling and has transformed the use of technology in schooling.

**THEME 5 – PARTNERSHIP GROWTH AND IMPACT ON SYSTEMS ACROSS THE 3 YEARS**

Successful and sustainable Partnership Programs require support and careful modelling, however the evidence demonstrates the valuable impacts

Just hearing from others who shared their experiences was helpful. Also the University Program Coordinator’s leadership, especially in the issue of whether or not we could still physically attend the school was invaluable.

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and first year as a teacher. Even though we had a pandemic, the communication and ‘life-line’ the project provided helped lower anxiety and stress throughout the ordeal. Having help in understanding how the catholic ethos is expressed within classrooms and school communities will give me a definite edge when applying for jobs in the future (2020).

The overall thing of the program as a whole is light years different between any other prac that I have had. (2020)

I am so thankful I did this program and I worked with the Parish priest because you are not told how much catholic connections you need to be able to enter the Catholic system...In the long run it has helped me to know when I gradually progress as a teacher to have so much experience to incorporate myself into all of the masses and spiritual identity in the school. (2020)

Just reiterate, again to you, the amazing experience I’ve had with this program and how confident I became. I felt like I was one of the staff. I was sending all of the other teachers in my domains all the resources that I was making to help them out and marking. I was speaking to all of my friends in the same degree as me...they just couldn’t believe that I had done all of that extra stuff, you know, having that relationship and confidence to be making resources, emailing it to all the other staff and just becoming really involved. (2020)

I am definitely a lot more confident in applying various strategies into my classroom and how to prepare myself as a teacher and the various roles I may have beyond the classroom. (2021)

I see the PST as another key piece, so, I see it as critical, as the beginning of what we do. So, what we would do in the pre-service – in this program, I would see as flowing into what happens for them in their first, second, third year. And, of course, one of the things we’re looking at would be sustaining and keeping our teachers past that five year, three to five year barrier. (2019)

I found it difficult to find friends at university doing the MTeach as most of the courses were online. From being in this program, I have gained so many contacts and my ‘critical friend’ in Deborah and also Larry to chat about things that are a cause of stress or unknown. (2020)
For this PST, her experience in the teaching degree had been one of isolation. This was exacerbated due to the COVID impact of shifting everything online. This partnership provided a space for her to connect with peers for friendship and professional conversations. The interview conversations also highlighted the partnership benefits for contextualising university units into practice. The development of this partnership model was influenced by the concept 'living curriculum' (Marshall & Wilson, 2012). A living curriculum is a student-centred approach encouraging enquiry, problem solving, including linking theory to practice, and emphasises learning as a continuous cycle. It values learner agency and autonomy, as well as collaborative and reciprocal learning. This partnership allows a PST to expand their enquiry beyond the professional experience unit that is utilised as the main conduit between the university and school experience. The PSTs were also able to make connections between content and assessment in other units across the two semesters. One PST stated it was great to put it all in context, 100% gave it context, I understand now…you can use the language because you understand what they actually mean in practice, rather than like I pass this uni course but I am just going to get it. (2020)

The university content and assessments for this PST were no longer viewed as something to get a pass mark for, instead he was able to make meaningful connections between theory and practice, and trial immediate implementation. This cemented his understanding of the theories and encourages continued exploration into his future teaching career.

Finally, as the partnership project has evolved, system alignment and collaborations have occurred to strengthen the impact of the program across systems. Some examples that have come out of collaborative reflection on the 2019-2021 data have been the introduction of the 2nd year program for PSTs, which includes the cross-Faculty partnership to offer the Faculty of Philosophy and Theology Signum Fidei program to these PSTs; the development of overnight Spiritual Retreats for PSTs, their supervising teachers and Companions; the collaborative development of online mentoring modules; the development of a SPA website; recruitment processes for the project which include utilising BCE’s online interview recording programs; opening the program cross-institutionally to University of Sunshine Coast and Queensland University of Technology final year PSTs; and piloting a regional and remote model for regional Catholic Diocese across Queensland.

**KEY CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment project is to enhance pre-service teachers’ preparedness for teaching in Catholic school settings, as well as provide a space to explore their spirituality. The findings of the evaluation have illustrated the benefits, as well as areas that can be strengthened. A summary of each theme is outlined below:

**Theme 1 - Impact of the program on PSTs’ Catholic and Spiritual Literacy**

- The majority of PSTs went into a faith-based setting, and several were employed by their SPA school. The PSTs reported feeling more prepared for the profession, which influenced their job application and interview stages. The majority had a preference to find employment in a Catholic setting.

- The majority also experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings. Overall, there was significant reporting of increased active engagement and greatly increased engagement across all categories surveyed relating to Catholic understandings. For some PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. These were:
  - understanding the values and ethos of the Catholic school;
  - understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school; and
  - Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese.

- Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs’ understanding of Catholic school contexts and the teaching profession. The SPCs were highly valued by the PSTs, and were successful in mentoring the PSTs’ understanding of the teaching profession and Catholic schooling contexts. Some specific areas identified were:
  - knowledge and experience of BCE systems and resources
  - having an external support person, especially leading their professional conversations, provided an additional experienced voice and helped them to feel more at ease about placement experiences
  - scaffolded the PSTs’ critical reflexivity skills

**Theme 2 - Impact of program on PSTs’ levels of anxiety about the teaching profession**

- There was a significant shift from high levels of anxiety before the PSTs’ involvement with the partnership to
Theme 3 - Impact of the program on PSTs' sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness

Overall, the PSTs suggested having the opportunity to slowly ease into the school community, get to know the culture of the school, the needs of the learners and develop a relationship with their supervising teacher over a long period of time 'demolished all the nerves'.

Theme 4 - Impact of the program on PSTs' self-reported competency related to the APSTs and teaching skills

The data indicated from the starting point of the project to the end-point of the project, PSTs' competency with the APST standards significantly increased. In the end-point survey, the PSTs were asked to reflect on how well they met each of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers: Graduate. Overall, there were a significant number of focus areas that many PSTs felt they excelled in, with the strongest focus areas being:

- 2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area;
- 2.2 Organise content into an effective learning and teaching sequence;
- 2.3 Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans;
- 2.6 Implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students;
- 3.4 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of resources, including ICT, that engage students in their learning; and
- 6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.

Overall, there appeared to be a pattern across the focus areas indicating the PSTs felt least confident with their knowledge around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects and concepts, and working with parents/caregivers.

In addition, the formative assessment tool, 'professional conversations', developed for the partnership were highlighted by PSTs and the Companions as a highly significant distinguishing feature that separates the formative feedback provided in this partnership model as compared to standard professional experience blocks.

Another finding from the 2020 project was that the majority of PSTs were able to continue to engage with their schools in various ways during the COVID 19 shutdown of schools. The examples provided by the PSTs are identified in the report. Many PSTs reported both personal and professional growth during this period of time and were incredibly grateful to their schools for the support. In addition, the Faith Companion role was incredibly important due to the support they provided to each PST. The Faith Companions demonstrated flexibility and shifted their support to phone or zoom meetings. The comments from the PSTs were incredibly positive. The understandings from this period were applied to the online capacities of the SPA project for 2021 and future years.

Theme 5 - Partnership growth and impact on systems across the 3 years

More than 70% of the PSTs ranked high importance in the project's strengthening their professional identities; their
Recommendation 2021 Reflection 2022 Implementation 2023 Planning

Provide a professional learning or formative experience on spirituality for PSTs

An overnight Spiritual Retreat is being offered to the PSTs and Companions (had to be cancelled due to COVID) This ran in 2022 and received highly positive feedback. Advertise more widely to encourage higher levels of participation.

Provide greater mentoring for new SPCs joining the project as it expands Email templates and meetings were conducted with new Faith Mentors A lead Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion was brought into the project to provide additional leadership and support. Regular meetings each Term with SPCs to provide support around documentation, expectations, mentoring and partnership work were run. Provide a calendar at the commencement of the year with half day PD/project meetings each Term for Companions and Diocese representatives.

Set up a Leadership Think Tank Commence Leadership Think Tank in Sem 2 The Leadership Think Tank had limited attendance in 2022. Suspected overload of school staff due to ongoing COVID issues. Strengthen membership of the Leadership Think Tank and have some in person meetings. Advertise through the new membership database and report on the meetings through this forum.

Extend the program to other cohorts in the education degree to allow gradual development across PST degrees.
Recommendation 2021 reflection 2022 Implementation 2023 Planning

Develop cross-institutional partnerships for Brisbane and rural connections

Develop support mechanisms to address gaps

Key Finding 5 around Catholic Understandings

Develop support mechanisms to address gaps

Finding 7 around the APSTs

Improve communication between schools and the project
Lesley Scanlon (Ed.), 'Becoming' a professional: an interdisciplinary study of professional learning. (pp. 13–32), Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer.


## Appendices

### Appendix 1

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### Appendix 2 - Faith Data from the Longitudinal Survey

*Note: this information is from the research survey (2020–2021), so not all participants are represented*

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### Appendix 3

**APST focus area**

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<th>APST focus area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual</td>
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<tr>
<td>characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn</td>
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<tr>
<td>and the implications for teaching.</td>
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<td>1.3 Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the</td>
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<tr>
<td>learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural,</td>
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<td>religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.</td>
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<td>1.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture,</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.5 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of strategies for differentiating</td>
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<tr>
<td>teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range</td>
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<tr>
<td>of abilities.</td>
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<td>1.6 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements</td>
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<td>and teaching strategies that support participation and learning of students</td>
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<td>with disability.</td>
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<td>2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and</td>
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<tr>
<td>structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Organise content into an effective learning and teaching sequence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning</td>
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<td>sequences and lesson plans.</td>
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<td>2.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal</td>
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<td>and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.</td>
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<td>2.5 Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their</td>
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<td>application in teaching areas.</td>
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<td>2.6 Implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning</td>
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<td>opportunities for students.</td>
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<td>3.1 Set learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying</td>
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<td>abilities and characteristics.</td>
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<td>3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and</td>
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<td>effective teaching strategies.</td>
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<td>3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies.</td>
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<td>3.4 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of resources, including ICT, that engage</td>
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<td>students in their learning.</td>
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<td>3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to</td>
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<td>support student engagement.</td>
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### APST Focus Area

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Demonstrate broad knowledge of strategies that can be used to evaluate teaching programs to improve student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.7 Describe a broad range of strategies for involving parents/carers in the educative process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities.</td>
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<td>4.2 Demonstrate the capacity to organise classroom activities and provide clear directions.</td>
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<td>4.3 Demonstrate knowledge of practical approaches to manage challenging behaviour.</td>
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<td>4.4 Describe strategies that support students' wellbeing and safety working within school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.5 Demonstrate an understanding of the relevant issues and the strategies available to support the safe, responsible and ethical use of ICT in learning and teaching.</td>
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<td>5.1 Demonstrate understanding of assessment strategies, including informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative approaches to assess student learning.</td>
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<td>5.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of providing timely and appropriate feedback to students about their learning.</td>
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<td>5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.</td>
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<td>5.5 Demonstrate understanding of a range of strategies for reporting to students and parents/carers and the purpose of keeping accurate and reliable records of student achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.</td>
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<td>6.2 Understand the relevant and appropriate sources of professional learning for teachers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the rationale for continued professional learning and the implications for improved student learning.</td>
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</table>
"You just have to have the guidance to lead you in the right direction until you can do it yourself."