



# ACU

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

## > **Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) Program 2022**

**Funded by Brisbane Catholic Education,  
Toowoomba Dioceses  
and Australian Catholic University**

**Australian Catholic University | June 2023**

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“

Teaching is not a job.  
It's a lifestyle.  
It permeates your  
whole life.

Dr Jill Biden

”

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## > Executive Summary

This report accompanies the 2019–2021 Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) Program Report (<https://acuspaprogram.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACU-SPA-evaluation-report.pdf>) with updated information using the 2022 findings about the impacts of the program on pre-service teacher preparation for the profession. It also includes greater links to a variety of stakeholder voices about the impact of SPA across the life of the program. The SPA 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 PSTs having greater involvement with their SPA school, stronger connection to the SPA school Diocese, more support across their experience from the university through the university coordinator, and support across their experience from a Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion. The research questions for the project include:

- how can a partnership between a university, system/s, school, and spiritual and pedagogical 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 their development in the APSTs, and transition to the profession; and
- what impact does this relationship have on PSTs' views about their longevity in the profession?

The 2022 findings, and deeper exploration of voices across the life of the program, illustrate the benefits, as well as areas that can be strengthened in the SPA program. A summary of the key findings under six themes is outlined below with more detailed discussion provided within the report.

### > THEME 1 – IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' CATHOLIC AND SPIRITUAL LITERACY

Aligning with previous year trends, the majority of PSTs from 2022 went into a faith-based setting, and a significant number 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 a small number of PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. These were:

- 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 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.

Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs' understanding of Catholic school contexts and the teaching profession. The Companions 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, by the end of the program, 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 significantly reduced their levels of anxiety about heading into the final block placement, and their first year of teaching.

### > THEME 3 – IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE PROFESSION AND PREPAREDNESS

The one day a week and block experiences assisted 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.

In addition to the Companion, 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.

#### > **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:

- 2.2 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;
- 3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies;
- 3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies;
- 3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement; and
- 5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.

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.

In addition, the formative assessment tool, 'professional conversations', developed for the partnership were highlighted by PSTs and the Companions as a useful formative feedback tool preparing PSTs for reflection on the APSTs and for 'real-life' teaching conversations.

#### > **THEME 5 - IMPACT ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL STAFF**

While the SPA program is focusing on PST outcomes, it has become evident through conversations with leadership staff that the program also has an impact on schools and school staff. This includes the PSTs being able to assist in a more integrated way compared to PSTs on shorter blocks with events such as athletics carnivals, musicals and liturgies. The PSTs were also valued for their recency with research and theories on education.

#### > **THEME 6 - REFLECTION ON THE REGIONAL MODEL**

Overall, the Regional pilot was successful even with the initial impacts of COVID. The PSTs were able to connect with their school at the start of the year, and the two PSTs involved in the program are now employed at the Catholic regional school.

#### > **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are several recommendations coming out of this pilot project, some of which are being used in implementation for the 2023 program and planning for 2024 (dependent on funding).

- Explore ways to strengthen employment options for recommended SPA graduates, especially for regional BCE and Queensland Dioceses;
- Explore ways to increase regional SPA registrations;
- Increase options for BCE spiritual retreat connections for PSTs as this provides an opportunity for PSTs to explore spirituality and connect to BCE's mission;
- Explore funding to connect a PhD student to the project, preferably from a SPA school (can be part-time). This will strengthen research outcomes, and include SPA stakeholders in the research. This can be supported with an ARC Linkage grant application and/or Industry scholarship (please see <https://www.acu.edu.au/research-and-enterprise/higher-degree-research-hub/partner-with-us/industry-scholarships-for-phd-students>);
- Survey Alumni participants about the impact of the program on their transition and views of longevity in the profession. Keeping connections with the SPA Alumni will encourage their support as supervising teachers in the future;

- Develop a handbook for Companions and short videos to support new Companions;
- Develop a one page flyer for Principals and Supervising Teachers about the SPA program that is available online and sent to schools;
- Strengthen ThinkTank group to enable reflection on gaps identified through the research findings;
- Collect data from 2nd year and 3rd year cohorts on the impact of the program for them when entering as a 2nd year PST;
- Evaluate templates provided for school level Companion support of SPA PSTs. Update and simplify if needed;
- Develop an App for online components of SPA mentoring training for use with face-to-face training, and for those who cannot access the face-to-face training;
- Connect to the ACU Faculty of Theology and Philosophy to the SPA team (ACU and BCE) to strengthen all PST access to professional learning around Catholic Identity and spiritual literacy concepts and theories;
- Strengthen training for Companions on preparing schools and PSTs for professional conversations;
- SPA Coordinator and Dioceses Project Coordinators together visit SPA schools in 2023/2024 for feedback and evaluation purposes;
- Develop a short quantitative survey for SPA leadership staff and supervising teachers to evaluate their perspectives on the impact of SPA;
- Host formal in person meetings/forums with principals (particularly for new and potential), eg. breakfast or dinner events;
- Create awards for most engaged SPA PST, most supportive supervising teacher and most supportive SPA school to recognise the work and commitment by PSTs and their schools.



# > Introduction and Context

## > INTRODUCTION

This report accompanies the 2019–2021 Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment (SPA) Program Report (<https://acuspaprogram.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ACU-SPA-evaluation-report.pdf>) with updated information using the 2022 findings about impact of the program on pre-service teacher preparation for the profession. It also includes greater links to a variety of stakeholder voices about the impact of SPA from across the life of the program. The SPA program focuses on strengthening PSTs' understanding of Catholic spirituality, mission, professional identity, and teaching practices. The name was amended in 2021 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, in 2020 a small BCE research grant and has since received Brisbane Catholic Education funding from 2021 onwards. In 2022 the Toowoomba Diocese provided funding to pilot a regional model. The program 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 PST's having greater involvement with their SPA school, stronger connection to the SPA school Diocese, more support across their experience from the university through the university coordinator, and support across their experience from a Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion.

The aims of the program are 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; and
- maintain 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 2022 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. In addition, the program expanded in 2022 for ACU PSTs to include a second year program. These second year PSTs continue connected to the program in their third year, and then engage in the embedded final year program in their final year of university.

The research questions include:

- how can a partnership between a university, system/s, school, and spiritual and pedagogical 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 their development in the APSTs, and transition to the profession; and
- what impact does this relationship have on PSTs' views about their 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'être* 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). Gleeson et al. (2018) compared Queensland Catholic teacher perceptions to teachers in USA Catholic schools and found that in both contexts there has been a steady decline of Catholic students attending Catholic schools

(with two of every 10 children being Catholic in the late 1990's), a decline in religious teachers, and closures of Catholic schools. These schools have had to adapt to their environments to ensure schools remain open, attract funding, and attract quality teachers who are committed to faith education. Teachers in Australian Catholic schools are remunerated with similar income to the state schools, however this is not the case in the USA where they receive significant lower income. Australian Catholic schools are in part funded by Federal and State governments, which is not the case in the USA.

In addition, recent Australian census data (2021) suggests an increase in the Australian population reporting 'no religion' (38.9%), up from 30.1% in 2016. Christianity was the most common religion with 43.9% of those nominating as religious identifying as Christian, a drop from 52.1% in 2016. While the Catholic faith is the largest Christian denomination (20% of population) there has been a decrease since the 2016 census (23%). The data also indicated that affiliation with Christian religions was more often the older generation (average age 47), while younger generations affiliated more with 'no religion' (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/cultural-diversity-census/2021>). There has also been a movement, particularly in the younger generation, towards engaging with concepts of spirituality, but not necessarily through organised religion (Hunt, C., 2021). Erlandson (2000) coined the acronym SBNR, meaning Spiritual But Not Religious, to describe this phenomenon.

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), the elements that seem to operate favourably 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 Catholic Dioceses for a spiritual formation of PSTs 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' (referred to as '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 PSTs with



an authentic, contextualized and embedded Catholic experience reflecting ACU's mission and core values. The data across 2019–2022 indicates that this authentic experience in Catholic settings is desired by pre-service teachers, and is identified as an aspect of the teaching degree at ACU which sets it apart from other universities.

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 across the last ten years, 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 & Kostogriz, 2020; Gutierrez & Nailor, 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. A secondary benefit of the program that has become evident is its impact on supervising teachers' critical reflection about Catholic Identity and spirituality, their development as mentors for PSTs, and principals' reflections on the ways their school promotes Catholic mission. The partnership between the university

researcher, the Catholic Dioceses and schools involved, Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions and other universities, creates high levels of complexity for successful system operation and maintenance. Figure 1 (see next page) 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). Figure 1 represents relationships between key parties, while Figure 2 visually attempts to represent the complexity of the fabrics of these 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.

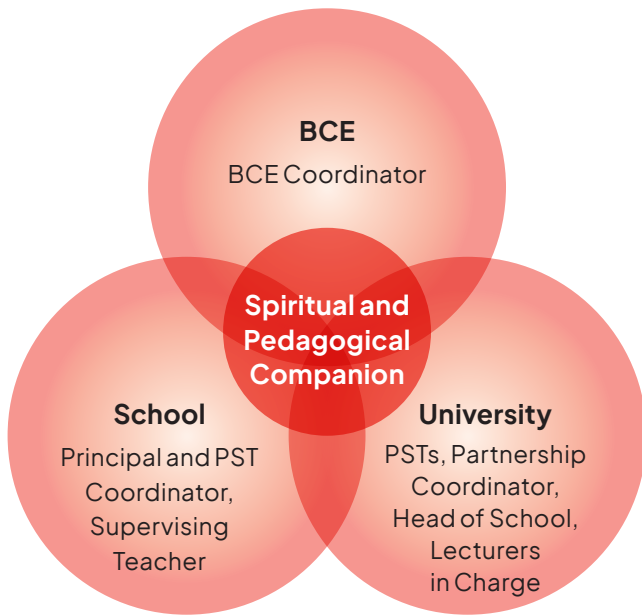


Figure 1: The integral relationship between all parties in the SPA Program



Figure 2: A possible visual representation of the SPA partnership complexity



# ➤ Methodology and data

## ➤ METHODOLOGY

### Qualitative Intrinsic Case study and Quantitative survey data

The research team work with pre-service teachers before, during and after their professional experience in a school. Due to limited school placement spots, and to allow PSTs the choice to participate, PSTs apply to join the partnership project, and we have accepted varying numbers across 2019–2022 (see table below). In 2022 a number cap was decided by BCE for future applications, being 40 final years and 20 second years (with some flexibility in final year numbers if 2nd year numbers are not met).

The methodology used to evaluate the impact was in the form of a qualitative intrinsic case study, including professional mentoring conversations, focus group interviews, individual interviews, whole of SPA meetings, and classroom observations (Bhattacharya, 2017; Stake, 1995). In 2020 Due to COVID 19 a longitudinal REDCap survey tool was introduced. This anonymous survey was introduced due to increasing numbers of PSTs, and for developing a broader understanding of program impact. With the inclusion of this survey tool, the project became mixed method with both quantitative and qualitative data.

### The Participants

A full list of participants in this program from 2019–2022 is included in the Appendices (Appendix 2). Below is a summary of the number of participants in the program from 2022 and 2019–2021:

#### 2022

Final year PSTs	35 (33 in BCE)
Second year PSTs	13 (all located in BCE schools)
Companions	13 (12 for BCE schools, one for Toowoomba Diocese school)
Principals	29 (from 28 BCE schools and one Toowoomba Diocese school)

A variety of religious backgrounds were supported, which is summarised in the chart below (please note, this information is from the final year cohort survey so not all PSTs are represented).

**Table 1: Summary of Religious Affiliation across the 2022 cohort**

Religious Affiliation	Number
Catholic	20
Christian	2
None	2
Lutheran	1
Anglican	1
Hindu	1

#### 2019–2021 (All BCE Diocese, all final year PSTs)

PSTs	40
Supervising Teachers	40
Companions	8 (some across multiple years)
Principals	22 (some across multiple years)

The PSTs were in their final placement, which for this program included a one day a week visit and block placements varying from four to nine weeks (depending on their degree). A variety of religious backgrounds were supported, which is summarised in the chart below (please note, this information is from the survey so not all PSTs are represented). For a yearly breakdown, please see the Appendices:

**Table 2: Summary of Religious Affiliation across the 2019–2021 cohort**

Religious Affiliation	Number
Catholic	15
Non-practicing Catholic	1
Anglican	2
Christian	1
Methodist	1
Sikh	2
'Spiritual'	1
None	2

### Participant reasons for joining the program

Our participants reported a number of reasons for their interest in the program. The 2022 responses have been collated and summarised below. These responses reflect the 2019–2021 data, including statements that mirror previous cohort statements:

- To connect with Catholic Identity and Catholic perspectives in schools;
- Be a part of a Catholic school community across a whole year of schooling;
- Aiming to teach in a Catholic or faith-based setting;
- Getting to have an embedded experience in a school setting that reflects their own religious values;
- Gain a deeper understanding of whole school procedures, practices and processes and the needs of students through longitudinal experience in school.

## > DATA COLLECTION

Data Collection in 2022 occurred across several stages:

### Stages of Data Collection

#### First stage – Prior to professional experience in schools

- Survey distributed to PSTs
- Recorded Zoom group sessions

#### Second stage – During Professional Experience

- Survey distributed to PSTs
- Observations of classroom practice (written data)
- Two Professional Conversations (written data)

#### Final stage – After Professional Experience

- Survey distributed to PSTs
- Evaluation Feedback sought from principals and PSTs via email
- Interview with Companions and Group interviews

## > 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 zoom focus group meetings and written responses in the survey, email evaluations and professional conversation data. Thematic analysis allows the identification, analysis and reporting of themes that evolve from data. Across the data voices, patterns and themes emerged which provide an understanding of the key impact areas of the project, and areas for project modification. Any names used within the report are pseudonyms. Triangulation of the findings is achieved in multiple ways.

First, the data is across multiple data sources, including the longitudinal survey (which includes both quantitative and qualitative data), professional conversations, meetings and interviews. Second, the data is across multiple participants, including the PSTs, the Companions, leadership staff at the schools and the supervising teachers. Finally, the data is compared across cohorts across years, allowing consistent patterns and anomalies to be identified.

### Quantitative data

The survey data represented in this report include those PSTs who responded to the survey in 2022 (n=27), and compares to the pattern of data across the 2020–2022 cohorts. Some PSTs only partially completed the 2022 survey, 20 completed all sections of the survey. This represents a response rate of 77% and full completion rate of 57%. Fosnacht et al. (2017) argue that surveys with sample sizes below 500 require 20–25% response rates for confident analysis. We et al. (2022) argue that as the participant cohort decreases (eg. less than 100 participants), response rates will increase, with a maximum recorded case in their systematic review of surveys sitting at 72.7%. In consideration of time poor PSTs completing the survey, a 77% response rate is exceptional. As our cohort numbers increase, our survey analysis has become more reliable and valid when collated across cohorts (n=52), with a very high response rate when compared across survey research contexts.

Several quantitative methods were used to analyse the survey results. Whenever results from before the SPA program were compared to results after the SPA program, we used a paired (Student's) t-test. This allowed us to test the hypothesis that there exists a significant difference between the pre-SPA versus post-SPA scores. Additionally, we used a repeated measures one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare results over multiple timepoints (e.g., pre-SPA, during-SPA, after-SPA) and across different cohorts (e.g., 2022 mid-year cohort vs. 2022 full-year cohort). As with the t-test, the one-way ANOVA results enable us to test the hypothesis that there exists a significant difference between the pre-SPA versus post-SPA scores, but unlike the t-test, the ANOVA results provide the additional benefit of testing these differences across multiple groups and timelines.

These results were tested and interpreted under the assumption that the SPA program causally and favourably influenced the key outcomes measured throughout the survey. To aid interpretability, we scale results from our statistical analyses along standardized distributions known as Cohen's d. The Cohen's d compares the distribution of scores on each pre-intervention measure with the standardized scores on each post-intervention

measure by providing an estimate of the difference in standard deviation units. Results using Cohen's *d* can thus be interpreted as a standardized effect size (see Table 1).

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. Professional standards
5. Partnership growth and impact on systems

Our results across these themes assume that increases to the participants' scores were attributable to the success of the program, with the exception of the 'Anxiety' theme, where negative results (i.e., lower scores) indicate a reduction in anxiety, which is deemed to be a desirable effect and remains a core goal of the SPA program. The magnitude of the SPA program's success (or lack thereof) will be interpreted in proportion to the size, direction, and significance of the effect in standardized units (Cohen's *d*). To test the significant of these results, we use 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 repeatedly applied to the population from which the sample was drawn. The larger the Cohen's *d* and the lower the p-value is below the prespecified significance threshold of .05, the more likely the result will be interpreted as reflective of the true effect of the program. To further assist in the interpretability of these results percentage scores are included such that they represent the relative proportion of the change in scores before vs. after the SPA program. Readers may notice that, for some results, the largest Cohen's *d* effect size does not correspond to the largest percentage change score. The reason is because a Cohen's *d* effect size has been statistically standardised to account for the variability in the participant responses. The more variable the responses, the smaller the Cohen's *d* and vice versa. Percentage change scores do not account for variability of the responses across the preservice teacher cohorts. Therefore, it remains possible for the largest Cohen's *d* effect sizes to correspond to the second, third, fourth etc. largest percentage change scores when comparing pre vs. post SPA program.

Finally, before inspecting results, we urge readers to exercise a degree of caution when drawing inferences about the quantitative findings as the sample size is small and is therefore more likely than larger sample sizes to produce statistical 'flukes' that can be misleading. We

attempt to offset this limitation by asking readers to interpret the results in an integrated manner where general trends are compared across various themes and cohorts. If the positive trends are observed across a broader range of themes (e.g., Professional Standards, Belonging, and Spiritual Literacy), readers could draw stronger inferences based on this corroboratory evidence compared to results that showed isolated trends across these themes. Appendix A combines and compares results from the present 2022 cohort with results from previous years (2020 and 2021) to help verify and validate any trends. If results tend to be replicated across multiple years of the program, we can be increasingly confident that they are not statistical artifacts and are instead valid and reliable indicators of the positive influence the SPA program has had on the PSTs.

**Table 3: Cohens effect size**

Significance	Value
Small	0.2
Medium	0.5
Large	0.8

### ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics approval was obtained from the University's HREC, BCE Research office and the Toowoomba Diocese Research office.



## > Key findings

After analysing the various forms of data, there were multiple themes relating to the impact of the project. These most often aligned with the themes from previous years as there are consistent patterns emerging across the cohorts about the impact of the SPA program. Each cohort's data provides ideas around improvements that would increase impact in future implementations of this model, these are also included in the findings. Overall, the analysis was categorised into six 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 Catholic settings 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;
  - b) Reduction in PST anxiety level around teaching RE or embedding it into their teaching area.
- 3) Impact of the program on PSTs' sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness;
  - a) The one day a week experience 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 achieve an 'exceed' category in many of the APST Graduate Standards;
  - b) PSTs in partnership programs have greater engagement with their schools during unexpected crisis;
  - c) Some areas of APSTs have smaller increase than others, suggesting areas requiring attention.
- 5) Impact of the SPA program on schools and staff in schools
- 6) Reflection on the Regional model

### > THEME 1- IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' CATHOLIC AND SPIRITUAL LITERACY

#### PSTs experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings

The 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 have been included in the survey from 2020–2022 to assess PSTs' Catholic literacy:

1. Understanding the values and ethos of the Catholic school;
2. Understanding the mission of the Catholic Church;
3. Understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school;
4. Understanding that Catholic schools are places of prayer and can encourage and participate in prayer in classes, staff and student meetings;
5. Understanding how to establish positive relationships including connections with parents, engagement in the pastoral care of students and supporting their spiritual and moral development;
6. Understanding how to articulate the Catholic identity of the College/school;
7. Understanding the positive anthropology of the human being as the foundation for all Catholic education and pedagogy;
8. Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese;
9. Understanding the commitment to religious education and the spiritual formation of students and staff;
10. Appreciate the role and influence they have as teacher and person through their teaching, actions, personal and interpersonal character and outlook.

#### Survey Data – Quantitative findings

Overall, the PSTs reported significant increases in their active engagement across all survey items included in the Catholic and Spiritual Literacy theme. The graphs below show the impact on PSTs' growth before and after the program illustrating an increase of  $d = 0.39$  to  $1.86$ , and were highly significant ( $p < .01$  for all statistical tests). This suggests that the SPA program had medium to very large

effects across each item in the Spiritual Literacy domain for 2022. To put this into percentage terms, we saw an average relative improvement of 32.06% across the entire range of survey items in the theme of Catholic and Spiritual Literacy.

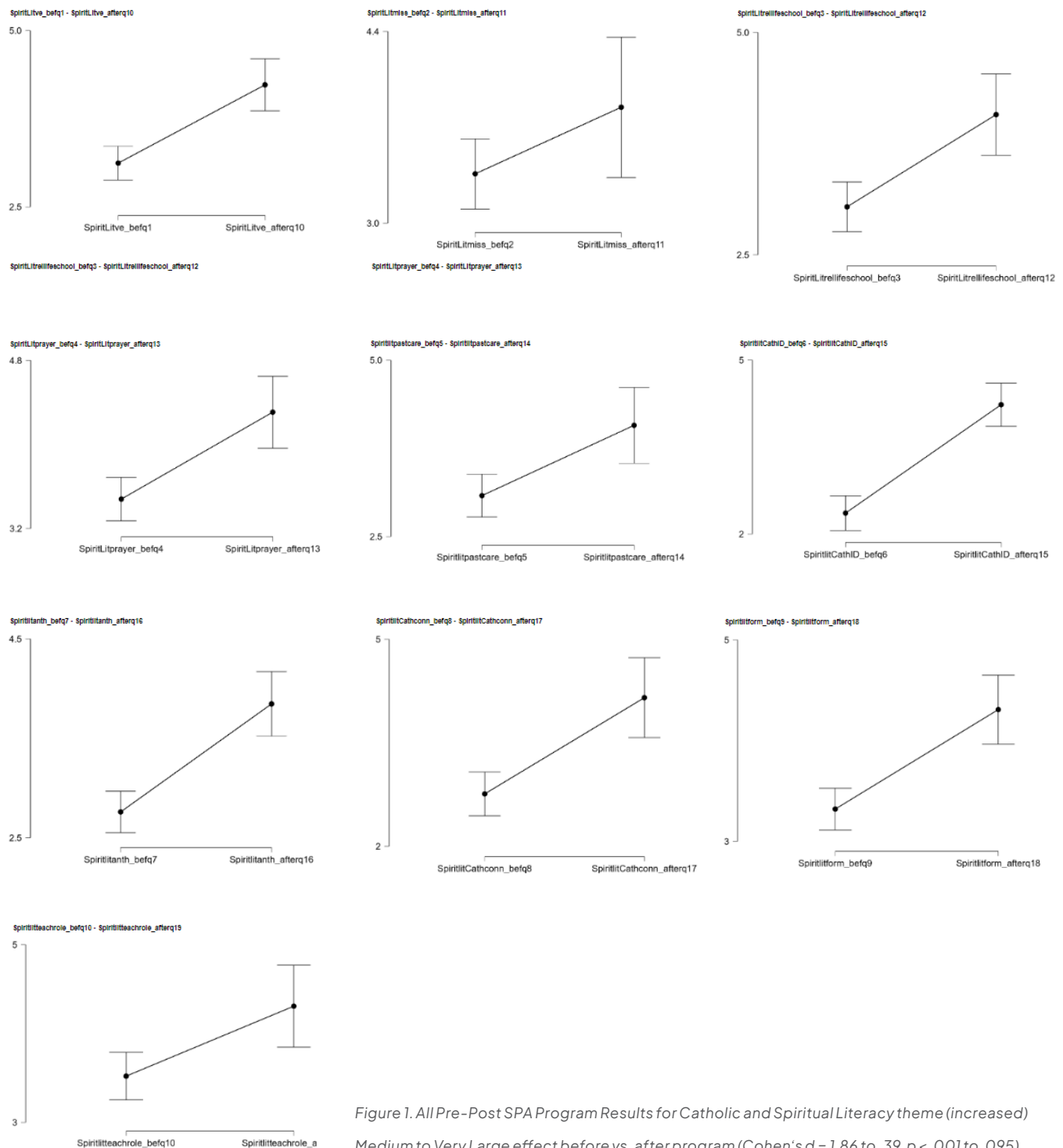


Figure 1. All Pre-Post SPA Program Results for Catholic and Spiritual Literacy theme (increased) Medium to Very Large effect before vs. after program (Cohen's  $d = 1.86$  to  $.39$ ,  $p < .001$  to  $.095$ ).

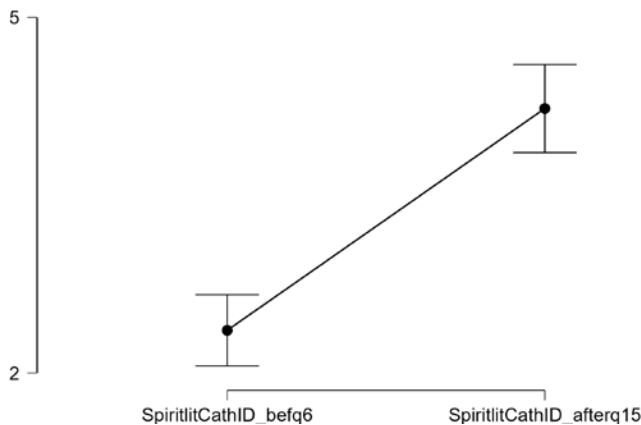


Figure 2. Example of results from one of the items in the Catholic Identity and Spiritual Literacy theme – Understanding how to articulate the Catholic identity of the College/school before and after the program

For the variable item in Figure 2, which asked participants “how this project has helped you to engage with and embrace the culture of the Catholic school and the particular vision for the Catholic school educator?”, the standardized effect, Cohen's *d*, is 1.86 (very large) and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This equates to a 79.30% increase in PST scores before compared to after the SPA program for this area of Spiritual Literacy and Catholic identity.

When comparing across cohorts, the 2019–2021 Evaluation Report results indicated the following areas remained a challenge for some PSTs by the end of the project:

- 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).

In the 2022 survey, two respondents marked the majority of variables in the mid-range (3/5), and three as low (2/5). These PSTs were unable to attend the PD days, and one did not attend the first week of school (due to COVID). While this was the case, both PSTs reported an increase in their understanding from the beginning of the project. When comparing across the 2022 cohort, the dominant areas that ranked in the mid-low range for a small number of PSTs were:

- Understanding the mission of the Catholic Church (5 ranked as 3/5);

- Understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school (4 ranked as 3/5);
- Understanding how to establish positive relationships including connections with parents, engagement in the pastoral care of students and supporting their spiritual and moral development (2 ranked as 3/5, 1 ranked as 2/5);
- Understanding the positive anthropology of the human being as the foundation for all Catholic education and pedagogy (2 ranked as 3/5, 2 ranked as 2/5);
- Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese (2 ranked as 3/5, 1 ranked as 2/5).

When looking across the 2020–2022 survey data, the common variables in the low-mid range are:

- understanding the sacramental, liturgical, ritual and prayer life of the school (9/48 ranked low-mid); and
- Understanding the connection between the school/college, their local parish and the Archdiocese (11/48 ranked low-mid).

The data allows us to reflect on ways that the partnership could enable stronger growth in these areas. In 2022 the SPA cohort entering in their second year of their degree were offered places in the ACU Signum Fidei program. The Signum Fidei program includes three modules that focus on Catholic life and practice; faith formation and ministry in Catholic schools; and youth mission experience. The Signum Fidei program is available in a contextualised way for 2nd year PSTs in the SPA program (that is, they can complete some components in the context of their SPA school). In addition, BCE offered an optional spiritual retreat for PSTs in 2022 to develop a greater connection between PSTs, their faith formation journey and the mission of BCE. Due to COVID, some of the 2022 PSTs were unable to attend the school based professional development hosted by their schools at the commencement of the year, which included their spiritual retreat day/s. This may have impacted some of the responses in the 2022 year. The influence of these days was noted by another PST in the survey “I think it is very important for preservice teachers in the SPA Program to take part in any type of Staff days/Professional development days. This can help the preservice teacher get an understanding of how the school runs and the values and the ethos of the school.”

Considering two areas have repeated across cohorts from 2020–2022, it is important to continue discussion on ways

to strengthen PSTs' understandings of the religious life of the school and connections between the school, their local parish and Archdiocese. Possible ways to strengthen these areas are addressed in the recommendations for the project section of this report.

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

Across the qualitative data PSTs identified ways they incorporated Catholic Identity and spirituality into their teaching. The survey responses indicated that one PST felt their understanding of Catholic Identity and spirituality were already very well formed. They stated:

*I have been working in a Catholic school outside school hours care for 6 years in varying roles of responsibility (e.g. Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator and Educator) and I feel that this has built my understand of life in a Catholic primary school. In particular, the role of prayer, relationships between various stakeholders and the role of the parish within the school are areas I feel I have engaged in regularly.*

This PST had ranked 5/5 for all variables in the survey except for "understanding how to establish positive relationships including connections with parents, engagement in the pastoral care of students and supporting their spiritual and moral development", which they had ranked initially as 3/5. By the end of their experience, all variables were ranked as 5/5, indicating the SPA experience had addressed their one area of perceived weakness.

Other PSTs who thought they had a good understanding of Catholic schooling felt their understanding increased through the program:

*I went to two Catholic schools so I understood some aspects but not from a teacher's perspective.*

*Before joining this program I believe I had a fair understanding of the Catholic identity and the culture of Catholic Schools and the vision of a Catholic school educator however, it was not as well rounded as it is after being a part of the SPA program.*

In the professional conversations, multiple PSTs, and their supervising teachers identified areas of religious life of the school, Catholic Identity and spiritual formation that the PSTs were engaged with in the schools. Some examples raised in the conversations are listed below:

- Discussing spiritual development with staff members
- Creating class preparation on prayer

- Involvement in Mercy Day and Bishop's Inservice Day
- Attending mass at local Catholic Community (regional Diocese)
- Meditation
- Embracing God's will and loving nature and showing this with those in my community e.g. elderly neighbours.
- Loving myself and others
- Care for creation – reuse, less plastic, getting back out into Nature – is where I feel closest with myself and with God – can think and breath
- Participating in prayer in PC of a morning
- help design the liturgy, write the prayers, set up / organize the sacred space and prayer table and practice the students who were leading the liturgy.
- Engaging in prayer every morning
- Modelling prayers of intercession
- Drawing on references to Good Samaritan Story with students' everyday experiences
- Engagement in school feast day
- Professional Learning in school charism with school founders, Canossian Sisters
- Greater understanding of school vision and charism – serving the poor and community
- Alleluia Eggs- students have created ways they can show courage, honesty, forgiveness and love to others in the classroom, outside the classroom and outside of school.
- Observed Story telling- School Principal demonstrated a way of engaging students in parables using story telling.
- Observed Mini Liturgy with APRE (Lent, discussing what lent is with small groups of students)

The Pre-service teachers also reflected on their own faith journeys and how it intersects with their role as a teacher in a Catholic school. For example, one PST identified their place as a role model in a Catholic school setting:

*In a Catholic school environment students grow and learn in an environment that nurtures the gospel values of respect, compassion, inclusion and justice and actively engages in Catholic Social Justice teachings such as dignity of the human person, and solidarity. As a role model for these values, I will be best placed to assist students to reach their full potential.*

Another reflected on the links between their university theology studies and their school experience:

*Recently I did a unit on the Eucharist at uni (theology based unit). Relate it back to prac and how I am understanding the true message of the parables and how to relate that back into kid friendly language.*

And another PST reflected on integrating Catholic social teachings into her secondary teaching area (which was not RE):

*I was able to strengthen my understanding of the Catholic social teachings and really integrate into the curriculum that I was teaching in the classroom. I believe it also helped me grow as a person, as I was able to reflect on my spirituality and understand how important that actually is in a school, which I think a lot of students miss out on that part or don't get to see the value that it can have, integrating that into the curriculum.*

As part of the SPA program, we encourage PSTs to make links between their university studies, Catholic Social teaching, and practice (no matter what their discipline area is). It is encouraging to see PST reflections such as these.

A third felt their increasing religious knowledge was helping them to engage their students as they went on a learning journey together:

*Growing my religious education knowledge is also powering me forward in my spiritual journey as I am learning along with the students and understanding ways to engage students in religious education whilst demonstrating the intricacy of faith and how our everyday actions reflect God's love.*

PSTs also reflected on the impact of the program on their personal spirituality journey. The statements below from four separate 2022 PSTs are samples reflecting similar sentiments across the majority of the PST cohorts:

*Being part of the religious life of the school in such a practical way, has given me opportunities to explore my own spirituality and seeing how people like Mary MacKillop are still so relevant today - especially in my life as an educator.*

*Reflecting on my own experience has caused me to be reflective of my own spirituality. Gives greater understanding to why you go to mass and the purpose, more than going through steps.*

*I am growing in my spiritual journey through being at my SPA school. I envisage my spiritual journey to follow*

*the same values and show compassion, wisdom, integrity and hope in my everyday actions and reflect on these values when I feel challenged and out of my comfort zone.*

*I accompanied staff and students to the Cathedral for the Mass today held by the Archdiocese. I found it a very moving experience and wonderful to see so many there who shared their love for Mary MacKillop and the Sisters of Saint Joseph.*

These PSTs were able to make links between their experiences in their SPA schools, and with the support of the school staff and their Companion, strengthen their own spiritual identities.

APREs also noticed the impact of the increased engagement with the religious life of the school, commenting on the religious scaffolding that occurs for PSTs while they are in their Catholic school setting. Two APRE comments are below:

*It's given them an extended period of time in a Catholic institution. It allows the preservice teacher to plan with the teachers around the religious life of the school. It allows them to see those events unfold and be immersed within the community during those events. I think it also allows them to see teachers' faith in action, and I think that's really important too because we do our best, you know, every day to mirror the mission and actions of Christ, and I think that is a real difference within a Catholic setting, it allows the preservice teacher to be immersed in that role for a longer period of time, so when they are looking at work within a Catholic school, they're more ready for a position.*

*Sometimes on a prac, you won't get to necessarily see those [religious life of school] important parts. The expectation in a Catholic school is that you're part of that. You know how to lead prayer in the classroom. You know how to help support students in a liturgy or a mass. So, our students that have been with us since the beginning of the year, have been able to be a part of all those daytoday, week-to-week and all the big events in the religious life of the school.*

Another further commented on the opportunity for PSTs to reflect and connect with their own faiths:

*They get to live a little bit of their own faith and connect with their own sense of spirituality within the domains of the Catholic and Lasallian faith.*

The comments by APRE's echo the PSTs' feedback about the opportunities the SPA program provides to engage in



an extended experience in the religious life of the school, and the support provided by staff in the school to do this.

Other PSTs identified some of the challenges they faced when trying to engage with the religious life of the school. One identified their own time limitations, and suggested schools should place more expectation on staff to attend community prayer:

*I was happy to be involved with Pastoral Care, camp, charity drives and staff Twilights. I would have loved to have been more involved in the Prayer life of the school. I feel I may have been too busy but wanted to go. Community Prayer at my new school is an expectation which is good for me, and I need to learn to be more organised so that I can attend.*

Two discussed the steep learning curve when teaching religion, or preparing for religious events such as liturgy:

*This is the first time I've had to teach religion, [it was] very daunting, even though I grew up in Catholic schools, it's completely different having to teach it. I find myself second guessing what I'm teaching and trying to make sure I'm not saying the wrong thing.*

*It was all a steep learning curve and I didn't realise how much preparation needs to go into liturgies / prayers to make them relevant for the students.*

While these events were steep learning curves, these PSTs discussed the support of staff such as their supervising teacher, the principal and the APRE who scaffolded their preparation, and provided encouragement.

Overall, the PSTs in the SPA program were encouraged to engage in the religious life of the school and reflect on their own spiritual journey. They increased their spiritual literacy through discussions with staff at the school and their SPA Companions, connecting university studies to their practical experiences, and attending professional learning events (such as the ACU/BCE Mentoring Day, Twilight professional learning events and Spiritual Retreats). The survey data suggests their spiritual literacy significantly increased across all included variables from the commencement of the SPA program to their finish date with the program.

### **PSTs had increased employability, preparedness for the profession and preferred to get a job in a Catholic setting**

The PSTs who completed the program across 2019–2022 were asked to provide details of employment after their time in the SPA program. From the 75 participants,

we obtained data from 47. Of the data available, 72% confirmed employment in a Catholic Dioceses, 83% in a Catholic setting, and 85% in a faith based setting. Twelve confirmed employment in their SPA setting, including the two PSTs who were a part of the Toowoomba Diocese pilot. This is extrapolated in the table below:

**Table 4: Employment settings 2019–2022 (from available data)**

School Setting	Number of PSTs
BCE school (12 employed at SPA school)	27
Rockhampton Diocese	3
Toowoomba Diocese	3
Archdiocese of Brisbane RI Catholic school	5
Interstate Diocese (Broken Bay)	1
Northern Territory Christian School	1
QLD state school	4
Remote school (state)	2
Returned to home country	1

In the survey and interviews, many 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. Three PSTs highlighted the significant benefit of the program for “getting a job in BCE”, “preparing for getting a job” and “preparing for job readiness”.

The leadership staff in schools indicated an interest in employing SPA PSTs in their school, as they knew the PSTs better and were able to spend their extended time in the school preparing them for the particular school context. Even if they were unable to employ the PST, it meant they could act as referees and make balanced judgements in recommendations. One Deputy Principal stated:

*we get a better sense of who they are as a – as a person and who they are as a teacher. So, when it does come to that time where they're looking to seek permanent employment somewhere, we feel very confidently that we can make a judgment and a recommendation to their potential employer.*

Feedback from principals across the years has included some frustration over employment systems and wanting

to be able to confirm contracts sooner. Some principals were unable to provide a contract for employment before PSTs took on a position in other schools. This formed a part of the stakeholder partnership discussion, and efforts have been made to help streamline this process, as well as provide opportunities for SPA PSTs to apply for BCE and Catholic Dioceses positions.

### Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs' understanding of Catholic school contexts

The Companion is an integral component of this partnership. Experienced Companions in this role interacted with the PSTs along their whole SPA journey via email, voice calls, video calls, face to face meetings, classroom observations and formal professional conversation meetings. The PSTs and their Companions have first contact late in the year prior to their SPA experience. They then continue to companion the PST until they graduate (which includes those who enter in their 2nd year of the program). In an interview with a Companion, she described and defined what the role means to a PST:

*young people want someone who will be a spiritual companion, a companion along their spiritual journey. Someone who's a bit like a witness, enthusiastic, humble, authentic, and most of all, compassionate, and who will be with them as they explore their own spiritual identity. So, we do that in lots and lots of ways, but I think the most important point of our companionship or our accompaniment is it's steady and it's reassuring... our aim is to provide opportunities when you're in the school to be able to ask your questions about your spiritual identity and journey, your concerns, to be able to give voice to those, and your surprises, and to be able to do that in an atmosphere or environment that's safe and supportive for you. Nothing is imposed. Everything is an invitation. And, the companion, your companion will honour your questing, your enquiring, your searching and your questioning.*

Survey data from this project highlights the successful contribution the Companions 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. Table 5 illustrates, for the majority of PSTs who finished the survey (84%), the Companion was very or highly successful in contributing to their understanding of, and belonging to, their Catholic school setting.

**Table 5: 2022 cohort – How Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion mentoring experiences contributed to understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to their school (1 = no success, 5 = highly successful).**

Area	First data point					Second data point				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
developing your understanding of Catholic school context		1	1	10	9			3	5	11

One of the PSTs' comments provided a deeper understanding of how the Companion assists with PSTs' spiritual reflection and growth:

*spiritually and as part of this program, I have – I have grown a lot more spiritually as well and that's something that I discussed with my companion and that I've noticed from – from where I started to where I am now, and the connections that I can make in my own faith as well and having that companion there when we had a discussion about where my thoughts were and how I was feeling and thinking, she kind of helped open that up and put the right words out for me to understand as well.*

The Companions provided an experienced and reflective voice for the PSTs as they developed their understanding of the events occurring in their Catholic school setting, how to engage with the Catholic mission of their school and Dioceses, how to incorporate their understandings into their classroom, and how to make links with their own spiritual journeys.

### Theme 1 Summary

The evidence in this theme mirrors the 2019–2021 Evaluation report further deepening the finding that the SPA program has contributed to greater understanding and engagement with Catholic and spiritual literacy and has increased the likelihood of PSTs seeking employment in a Catholic or faith based setting. 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 their Catholic school setting, their Companion, the 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.

## > 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

The SPA program aims to provide a level of support that helps PSTs transition from their pre-service experiences to having full, unsupervised control of their own classes. It also aims to help them prepare for Catholic and faith-based settings through critical reflection of their own spirituality, and learning more about Catholicism and mission work. As argued by Hunt (2021), creating a clear connection between critical reflection, spirituality and professional identity can improve one's well-being and feelings of belonging.

A number of program elements have been designed to assist with a reduction in PST anxiety, and the results from the data indicate these are having a significant impact. The partnership model includes the PST visiting their school in Nov/Dec prior to the partnership year, attending the professional development days prior to the start of the school year in January, volunteering one day a week leading up to the PSTs' block placement/s, their block placements, and then continued one day a week engagement until the end of their course (either July or December). The survey data demonstrated a significant drop in PST perceptions of anxiety after joining the partnership, attending the PD days at the beginning of the year, and the one day a week experiences. It has been noted that PSTs can experience significant levels of anxiety leading up to and during the initial stages of their block placement periods (Gutierrez & Nailor, 2020). The analysis from the survey indicated that 2022 data mirrored the 2020–2021 survey data in that the majority of PSTs were initially experiencing high levels of anxiety, which reduced after the PD days and spending 1 day a week at their schools. The graph below shows the shifting level of anxiety as the PSTs had more experiences with their schools.

Overall, the survey data demonstrated a significant drop in PST perceptions of anxiety about the teaching profession after joining the partnership, attending the PD days at the beginning of the year, and the one day a week experiences. As PSTs had more experiences with their schools and were provided support through the SPA program, we saw consistently large declines of  $d = -0.91$  to  $-0.99$ , and these results were highly significant ( $p < .001$  for all statistical tests). The graph below illustrates the declining

trends across various timepoints in the SPA survey, with a downward slope from left to right of page indicating a reduction in the PSTs anxiety before compared to after the SPA program in 2022. To put this into perspective, we saw an average relative decline in PST self-reported of  $-40.44\%$  across the entire range of survey items in the theme of Anxiety about the teaching profession.

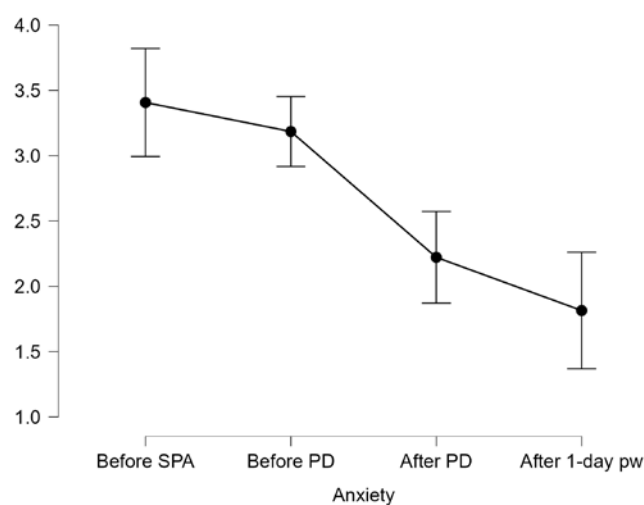


Figure 3. Example of ANOVA results from the Anxiety about the Teaching Profession Theme Across key SPA Program Milestones.

Figure 3 shows a moderate to large effect throughout the model of multiple timepoints (repeated measures ANOVA,  $F(3) = 17.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = 0.401$ ). These results further strengthen the veracity of these findings because they show stepwise pattern of decline in scores on the anxiety-related items following each key milestone in the SPA program. If such a decline in anxiety was simply due to the ongoing exposure of the PST to their schools, then one would expect a more gradual and perhaps less dramatic decline in scores over time.

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

While the survey represented significant changes, there was one response in the survey that indicated the one day a week experience can be variable depending on the readiness of the school to take them:

*My school did not have a timetable prepared for me to follow during my first week or most of term one. This lack of preparation made me extremely anxious to attend the first week and my scheduled day after that.*

This contrasts with other statements suggesting the PD days and the 1 day a week experience was invaluable and reduced their anxiety about the placement block and their remaining time in their school:

*I did not feel anxiety at all in relation to placement.*

*The weekly visits let me be free of anxiety by providing a wide range of opportunities to be involved in teaching and learning opportunities in diverse classroom environments.*

*These professional development days have been invaluable in allowing me to develop a deeper understand of the values, mission and ethics of the school. I felt so much more prepared entering into the first week of school having learnt about the school's faith, in particular. Meeting all the school staff before commencing the first week of school greatly reduced my anxiety of not knowing anybody and learning staff's names.*

*It [the PD days] was a great experience and one of the reasons that I wanted to join in this program.*

One PST identified themselves as an 'anxious person' and that the experiences helped them to be supported through their anxieties about heading into schools:

*When you are an anxious person, generally, these experiences can be extremely difficult. While I am still rather anxious about the "everyday" of school life, I have found that with a little bit of courage and support from other teachers, this experience can be what you make it. Thanks to the welcoming nature of everyone I have spoken with and own willingness to enquire, I have found myself in a variety of difficult classroom experiences, excursions and sports days, and there are still opportunities to engage further. I'm still fairly anxious, but I feel more supported and welcomed than I have on some previous placements.*

Across the cohort, these initial experiences with their Catholic school setting helped to induct them into the school, meet staff, meet students and have experiences across the life of a school that helped to begin their understanding of the larger picture of school life.

### Significant reduction in PST anxiety levels about teaching in a school before SPA program and after SPA program

The PSTs were also asked at the end of their SPA experience to rank their anxiety levels about heading into a school for teaching. Again, the results from the 2022 cohort mirror the 2020–2021 cohorts in that the change in self-reported anxiety levels before and after engaging in the SPA program are significant.

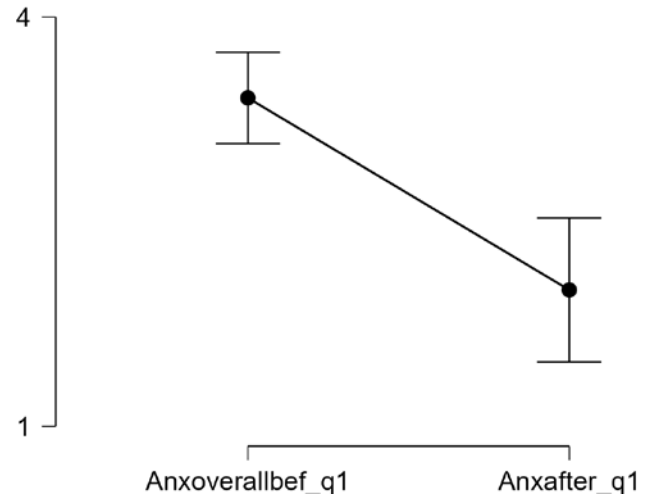


Figure 4. Example of results from one of the items in the Anxiety about the Teaching Profession theme.

As is represented in figure 4, the standardized effect, Cohen's  $d$ , is  $-0.99$  (large) and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This equates to a 41.30% decrease in PST scores before compared to after the SPA program for anxiety about the teaching profession. Overall, this data collected from cohorts across 2022 indicates large effects in decreasing anxiety about the profession before versus after PST engagement in the SPA program (Cohen's  $d = 0.99$  to  $0.91$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

The comment data from the survey and interviews provided a more detailed picture of why there was a significant shift in levels of anxiety. One PST's comments in this section of the survey stated:

*Has been amazing! Everyone should do it !!!*

In an interview, one PST identified classroom management as one of the things that made her the most anxious about heading into a classroom setting. She felt the program provided opportunities to build her confidence, develop strong relationships with students and behaviour management strategies:

*as a pre-service teacher, that made me the most nervous in a classroom setting. With the SPA program, because I was able to be involved with the school over a long period of time, I was able to build my confidence and self-belief that I could implement some behaviour management strategies...also, because the students had a relationship with me and I was able to build that relationship with the students, it felt like a real situation*

*where I could use that to my advantage and for my strategies, and also, with my consistency.*

This PST found the 'real situation' of schooling that SPA provided enabled her to overcome her greatest anxiety around managing classrooms.

In another focus group interview, a PST discussed with her supervising teacher how the supervising teacher's support helped her understand how to look after her well-being and mental health, and to recognise the support of the community in a school:

*You've definitely supported me all the way through, which has been fantastic. And, I have learnt a lot of you know, values. Things that you don't learn at school, like your mental health and wellbeing. And, spirituality and that community. That sense of community in the school as well and outside of school. I think you've really shown me what that's like.*

In the same conversation the supervising teacher identified what she saw as some of the benefits of the program in assisting PSTs with anxieties that she had when she first started teaching:

*I think too, myself coming out of University, the scariest thing is the first day of school. Parent teacher interviews. All of those things that the mentorship program has given you the opportunity to experience, I think that's invaluable.*

The supervising teachers can relate to the PSTs and across the life of the program many have commented on the importance of the extended experiences in the school in helping lower anxiety about transitioning into the profession

## Theme 2 Summary

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 empowered the PSTs to address and experience aspects of being a teacher that created anxiety. This impacts positively on their well-being and feelings of belonging in Catholic school settings as well as the teaching profession, which is discussed further in the next theme.

## > THEME 3 - IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE PROFESSION

The SPA program invites PSTs to develop a strong connection to the teaching profession. This includes developing their confidence about who they are becoming as a teacher, and understanding all elements of what it means to be a teacher (not just within a classroom). The survey data suggested insignificant impact around PSTs sense of belonging to the school and the profession. The graphs included in this theme show the SPA program impact on strengthening the PSTs' sense of belonging before and after the program with small but non-significant increases across items ranging from  $d = 0.14$  to  $0.32$  ( $p > .05$ ). This suggests that the SPA program, in most instances, had a small to medium effect across the items in the Belonging and Becoming domain for 2022. To put this into percentage terms, we saw an average relative improvement of 7.53% across the entire range of survey items in the theme of Belonging and Becoming. This data did not align well with the qualitative data in the survey, professional conversations, or interviews. In 2022, the survey team reassessed the variables and structure of the survey and made significant changes to provide clearer instructions and variables for the 2023 SPA cohorts in the hope that the quantitative and qualitative data become better aligned in cohorts moving forward. We will assess this when analysing the 2023 data. While this is the case, it is still important to present the 2022 quantitative survey data, and this is split into the impact of the Companion and of the SPA school/school staff, which is discussed in the following two sections.

### The impact of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion

The Companion provides support in the form of informal and formal conversations around Catholic identity and mission, spiritual development and pedagogical advice. They also visit the PSTs during their placements to observe their teaching, and hold the formal conversations at the school with the PSTs and their supervising teachers. The table and graph below indicates the combined impact overall of the Companions.



**Table 5: How SPC mentoring experiences contributed to understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to their school (1 = no success, 5 = highly successful). First data point early in year, second data point during final block placement, using data from completed survey responses.**

Area	First data point					Second data point				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
developing your understanding of the teaching profession	1		4	4	8			1	6	10
helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession		1	2	3	11			1	3	13
helping you understand the particular culture at your school	1	1	3	6	6			3	5	9

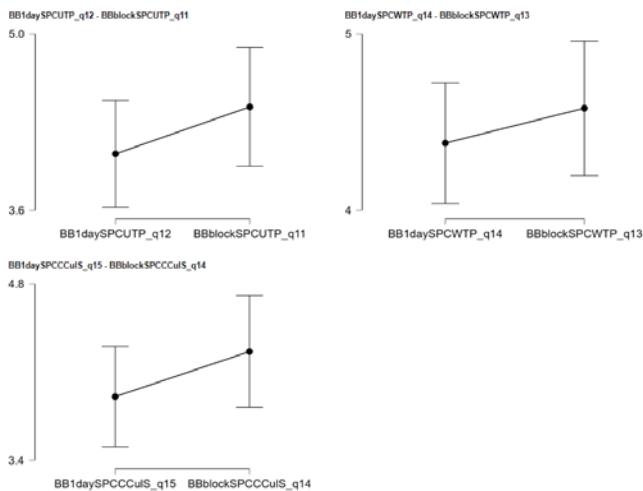


Figure 5. Results from SPC items in the Belonging and Becoming Theme: Before vs. After the SPA Program (increased) theme.

Note. For these items, the standardized effects, Cohen's *d*, ranged from 0.27 (far left), 0.14 (middle), 0.32 (right). None of these results were statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

As can be seen in the table, there was a shift from early in the year to the second data point. By the commencement of the final placement block, 94% of the PSTs rated the Companion as very successful or quite successful developing their understanding of the teaching profession and helping them feel welcome to the teaching profession. 82% of the PSTs ranked the Companion as very successful or quite successful in helping them understand the particular culture at their school. By the

second data point no PSTs were ranking Companions in the low rankings.

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

The interview and survey comment data reflected similar sentiments discussed by PSTs from 2019–2021. The 2022 cohort of PSTs valued having an external support person, especially leading their professional conversations, as they provided an additional experienced voice and helped them to feel more at ease about placement experiences:

*Having my SPA companion really gave me that extra level of support and, especially having those professional conversations with her, really helped me to develop who I am as a teacher and what I can expect to experience when I'm out there as a graduated teacher. If I had any questions or concerns, she was always there and available for me to call. And, in the classroom, she gave a different perspective to what my mentor was seeing as well, so that was really beneficial and I really leaned on her during times when, I suppose, I was struggling to find the balance.*

*My Companion has been fabulous. She has made herself available to me to ask her questions and to engage in discussions with her.*

Another important skill also raised by PSTs across the life of the program so far, is that the Companions scaffold their 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 comment below suggest the Companions help them during this stage of their reflective journeys:

*I think with – with the companion coming in, she's definitely helped us think more critically and reflect a lot more as well. And, it's been commented you know, some of the questions that requires a lot of deep thinking, and just nutting out you know, the information that's going be helpful as part of our journey as teachers. As a graduate teacher. And, you know that reflection.*

Reflexivity, not only on practice, but also on identity, may be a key to well-being and sustaining a career in the teaching profession. The comments from the PSTs in this program suggest the Companions scaffolded PSTs'

abilities to pause and consciously reflect.

### Impact of school and leadership staff

The survey included four points of data collection on the impact of school staff on the PSTs' understanding of what it means to be a teacher, and particularly in the context of a Catholic school (see graphs below).

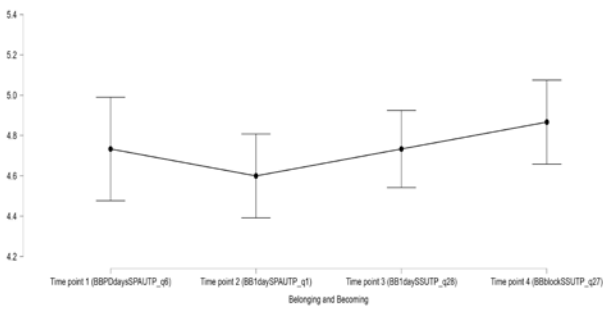


Figure 6. Repeated Measures One-Way ANOVA 1. Comparison of Preservice Teachers' Sense of Belonging and Becoming Across Timepoints 1 to 4 (2022)

Figure 6 shows results from the repeated measures ANOVA for the following item “developing your understanding of the teaching profession”, with the first point asking about the contribution of the PD days, the second point relating to the 1 day a week experience, the third point relates to the block placement experience and the fourth point is after their block placement. As can be seen, the change at each time point is very minor, with statistically insignificant changes to report on.

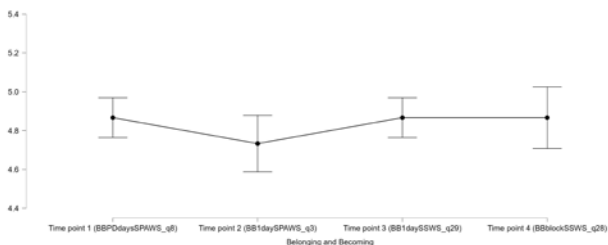


Figure 7. Repeated Measures One-Way ANOVA 2. Comparison of Preservice Teachers' Sense of Belonging and Becoming Across Timepoints 1 to 4 (2022)

Figure 7 shows results from the repeated measures ANOVA for the following item “helping you feel welcome at the school”. Again, there are insignificant changes to report across the time periods.

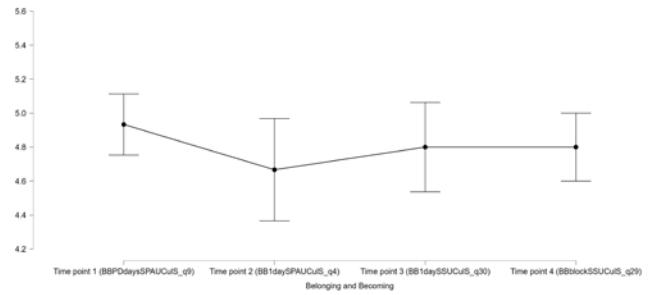


Figure 8. Repeated Measures One-Way ANOVA 3. Comparison of Preservice Teachers' Sense of Belonging and Becoming Across Timepoints 1 to 4 (2022)

Figure 8 above shows results from the repeated measures ANOVA for the following item “helping you understand the particular culture at your school”. Again, there are insignificant changes to report across the time periods.

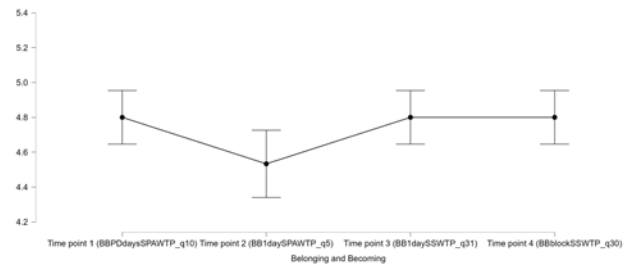


Figure 9. Repeated Measures One-Way ANOVA 4. Comparison of Preservice Teachers' Sense of Belonging and Becoming Across Timepoints 1 to 4 (2022)

Finally, figure 9 above shows results from the repeated measures ANOVA for the following item “helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession”. Again, there are insignificant changes to report across the time periods.

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

#### Becoming a part of the school community

A common theme amongst the 2022 PSTs related to their feelings of being valued and welcomed into their school:

*I feel welcomed and valued in my partner school.*

*I felt more comfortable and I felt valued, I suppose, as a member of the school. And, that really helped me to then, as I said earlier, develop my confidence and feel comfortable.*

Many suggested the support provided and feeling welcome in their schools meant they felt comfortable approaching a wide range of staff in the school to seek advice, guidance, feedback as well as support to collect data and materials required from their practice for university assessment tasks:

*having those levels of support was extremely beneficial and just knowing that you have people that you can talk to and – for advice and guidance and feedback, was not something that I could get from a shorter block.*

*I found that I was far more comfortable reaching out to teachers in other year levels and leadership staff having been part of the SPA program, which assisted me in completing my QTPA [Queensland Teacher Performance Assessment].*

The comments from the 2022 cohort were also visible in the 2019–2021 cohorts. The majority of PSTs in the program feel like they are of greater worth to the schooling community as they too are invited to become a part of that community.

An impact of being valued and having time to increase their interactions with a greater number of staff across the school creates a feeling of the PST as being more than a guest. Rather, for both the PST and the school staff, they feel more like a staff member who is involved in all activities of the school. This is a common theme across the data from 2019–2022, and the use of the concept ‘staff member’ or ‘part of the staff’ is apparent across all stakeholder language. This can be seen in the comments below by a PST, Deputy Principal, APRE and supervising teacher:

*I have truly been embraced by my partner school as a member of staff. It has allowed me to develop not only professional relationships with the leadership team and my mentor teacher, but also other teachers and school officers from other grades within the school. I never feel anxious about asking questions or volunteering for roles because I know that I am regarded as a fellow staff member. (PST)*

*they are seen as just any other staff member. It's not that sort of badge of a pre-service teacher. They're very much a part of the community. And, I think that's really – that – from a leadership point of view, that's absolutely the real benefits of a program like this, because they – they feel valued, and we – we also gain from their experiences as well along the way. (Deputy Principal)*

*They really feel like they're part of the furniture and part of our family and, I think we'll always have that ongoing connection with them. (APRE)*

*the school really embraced her as well, as much as she embraced the school. She was part of the school assemblies, the school mass, everything really, and knew everything that was going on. (Supervising teacher)*

Another concept apparent in these statements are the way schools ‘embrace’ the PSTs and PSTs ‘embrace’ their schools. This is a concept that relates to Catholic social teaching, in the sense that we develop our connections as a community and embrace all to live in harmony and love with each other. It creates links between spirituality and looking after each other’s well-being.

In an interview, one of the Companions summarised that level of support and the notion of embrace through the words ‘wrap themselves around you’ that are a key to the SPA program:

*I think that is one of the keys to this program, that you belong to a community who wrap themselves around you from the beginning of the year right through not just the school, ACU, BCE, your mentor, your companion, and we're there to support you. (Companion)*

The way the program is designed to try to provide multiple layers of support across a wide range of voices. This aim is reflected in the Companion’s statement above.

While many PSTs, staff in schools and Companions praise the value of this program for their understanding and connection to Catholic school contexts, some comments from PSTs suggest, for varying reasons, that this was not the experience they had. For example, due to COVID, several PSTs were unable to connect with their schools at the start of the year, and it created issues in the first few months of school. One PST stated:

*Covid was a major issue at my school as I am sure it was at all schools. Due to there being between 12–20 teachers off a day due to covid it was a difficult task to accommodate me at the school. Which I understand.*

Many PSTs, Companions and principals emphasise the importance of the PD days and the first week of school to help PSTs meet staff, understand the values and mission of their school, and form an initial bond with the students in their class/es and their supervising teacher. Many schools made an extra effort to connect their PSTs online to the PD days which were pivoted due to COVID. As one PST stated:

*I found that my school was able to pivot very quickly and effectively with the sudden changes due to COVID-19. I was able to be involved in all professional development days and attend the full first week of school, both of which were invaluable experiences.*

As we move out of the impact of COVID lockdowns, we hope to see all PSTs being able to engage again with the PD days and first week of school.

One PST appeared to have a negative start to their school year, and their overall survey results suggested the experience did not achieve the hoped outcomes. Their comments about their early experiences with their school were:

*My school did not have a timetable prepared for me to follow during my first week or most of term one. This lack of preparation made me extremely anxious to attend the first week and my scheduled day after that.*

And that the one day a week experiences were not as they had hoped in relation to understanding concepts around becoming a teacher:

*due to the disorganization of my placement school, I feel that I have not yet been able to develop my understanding of these concepts.*

At later points in this PST's survey, they commented positively on the support they received from their Companion, the university coordinator, and the Head of Teaching and Learning at their school, however their final rankings in the becoming and belonging section of the survey included the lowest ranking available for "sense of professional identity as a teacher", "ability to meet the Graduate APSTs", "ability to excel in the Graduate APSTs" and "understanding of the teacher's role beyond the classroom". One other PST also ranked the APST and teacher role beyond the classroom variables low, yet had positive comments about their supervising teacher, the university coordinator and the way the school made them feel welcome. They ranked their sense of professional identity at 5/5. While this is a small number of PSTs, and they did include comments on some positive outcomes of the program for their becoming and belonging, it is important to reflect on these variables, especially the APSTs, which are discussed further in Theme 4.

### The role of staff in the schools

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 PSTs were asked to list staff who were important in helping them feel welcome to the school and played a key role in developing their understanding of the teaching profession. Staff listed most in the responses were:

**Table 8: Important school staff in the program**

Staff	Number of times mentioned
Supervising Teacher	13
Other teaching staff (particularly in same year level/CPA area)	7
Principal	7
APRE	5
STIE (Support Teacher Inclusive Education)	4
PLL (Professional Learning Leader)	4

As outlined in the Companion and APRE comments below, the PSTs in this program have opportunities to work with numerous staff and community members:

*each preservice teacher meets and gets to know and work collaboratively with anyone in the school who is supporting their students. So, it could be primary learning leader, could be the head of department in a secondary, could be the campus minister, speech therapist, the community elder from the First Nations community. It could be the support teacher inclusive ed. Whoever is there who knows the students and can help the preservice teacher as they teach and help engage those learners. (Companion)*

*being able to work with myself during Religious Education planning, they look at how the Religious Education can be entwined into the other areas and domains of teaching. So, they're working with the primary years learning leaders. When they're taking the children over to Mass, they get to meet Father and immerse themselves within that spiritual domain. Here we have our Lasallian leaders as well, which is our Lasallian Charism. So, they do get to work with a variety of different people within the community, and also having a connection to our sustainability and environment. They work with our Indigenous brothers and sisters. They're very lucky to have such a diverse range of people to work with. (APRE)*

A key staff member in the school is the PST's supervising teacher. This is the person who they will spend most of the SPA experience with, so is vital to helping them develop their understanding of the teaching profession (especially in a Catholic setting) and the skills required, as well as encouraging the PSTs to develop their sense of identity as a teacher professional. Not surprisingly, the PSTs'

supervising teacher was the most mentioned important staff member with comments from PSTs such as:

*My supervising teacher has been great throughout my placement with constant guidance and feedback.*

*My supervising teacher has truly gone above and beyond to ensure I felt welcomed into the classroom and the school. I was essentially treated as a co-teacher and this allowed me to gain a true insight into the teaching profession.*

*Supervising Teachers - provided incredible opportunities for me that I have not experienced before (excursions, school involvement, assembly participation, etc.), feedback and guidance.*

*My supervising teacher has been an excellent mentor, helping me with development in areas that will benefit me the most when in the profession, providing me with actionable constructive feedback and being very welcoming into the school community.*

*My supervisor has been instrumental in my development. She allowed me the space to take on the role of teacher and act in the role of teacher. This enabled me to mark all the criteria for my placement (every single standard) as achieved. I am so grateful.*

In most cases, the supervising teacher was welcoming, provided space for exploration of teaching pedagogies and skill acquisition, and assisted them with understanding the bigger picture of schools as communities.

The Principal, APRE, learning support and other staff were also mentioned as having a significant impact on feeling welcome in the school and providing learning experiences. The PSTs were able to engage with many staff across the school, including close support from leadership staff. PSTs comments include:

*Principal, APRE and my supervising teacher were all referees on my resume and helped significantly in placing a job in another BCE school.*

*The Principal, STIE, PLL and the other prep teacher have all been extremely helpful while on block placements. All did regular check ins, offered advised, and worked with me to assist the diverse learners in the class.*

*The teaching staff made me work in a welcoming environment and tried to support me as if I had been a registered teacher working at the school.*

*I found that the PLL, STIE and APRE were particularly influential in my experience as they were more than*

*willing to share their time and knowledge whenever I had questions.*

*Engaging with the educators every day is empowering me on my spiritual journey as everyone is so friendly, welcoming, encouraging and supportive. especially the Principal - from the start has been so lovely and helpful and has provided me with so much information which is building my confidence and pushing me to be a better educator and person in my day-to-day life.*

Having access to leadership staff and the learning support officers provided PSTs with a stronger understanding of the interrelationship between various staff who work in a school. It is encouraging to hear PSTs speak about the relationships they developed with leadership staff, as often in short placement blocks it is not possible to connect in this way due to time restrictions.

### Summary for Theme 3

When combining the quantitative and qualitative data for most PSTs found the school staff supportive and welcoming across the whole school. 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 2022 the intention was to run this PD face to face, however due to COVID it had to be pivoted to Online. The mentoring PD is discussed in further detail in Theme 5.

The project team has reflected on the impact of this for the program and offered both face-to-face and Online training in 2023. To further increase communication loops between PSTs, Companions, schools and Dioceses, the SPA program is trialling the use of a membership database in 2023. 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 APST AND TEACHING SKILLS

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

Both the quantitative and qualitative data from 2022 of the SPA program indicate a substantial impact on the PSTs' competency related to the Australian Professional



Standards for Teachers (APSTs) and their teaching skills. This was also evident in the 2020 and 2021 survey results. The PSTs were asked to reflect on how well they met each of the APSTs at the Graduate level using a four point scale before entering the program and then again at the end of their SPA experience. The scale included 1=still developing; 2=just met; 3=met; and 4=exceeding. The graphs below show the impact on PSTs' growth before

and after the program illustrating a very large increase of  $d = 1.28$  to  $2.62$ , and were highly significant ( $p < .001$  for all statistical tests). This suggests that the SPA program had very large effects across each item in the theme on APSTs (graduate) for 2022. To put this into percentage terms, we saw an average relative improvement of 41.90% across the entire range of survey items that asked PSTs to rate their competencies across the each of the APSTs.

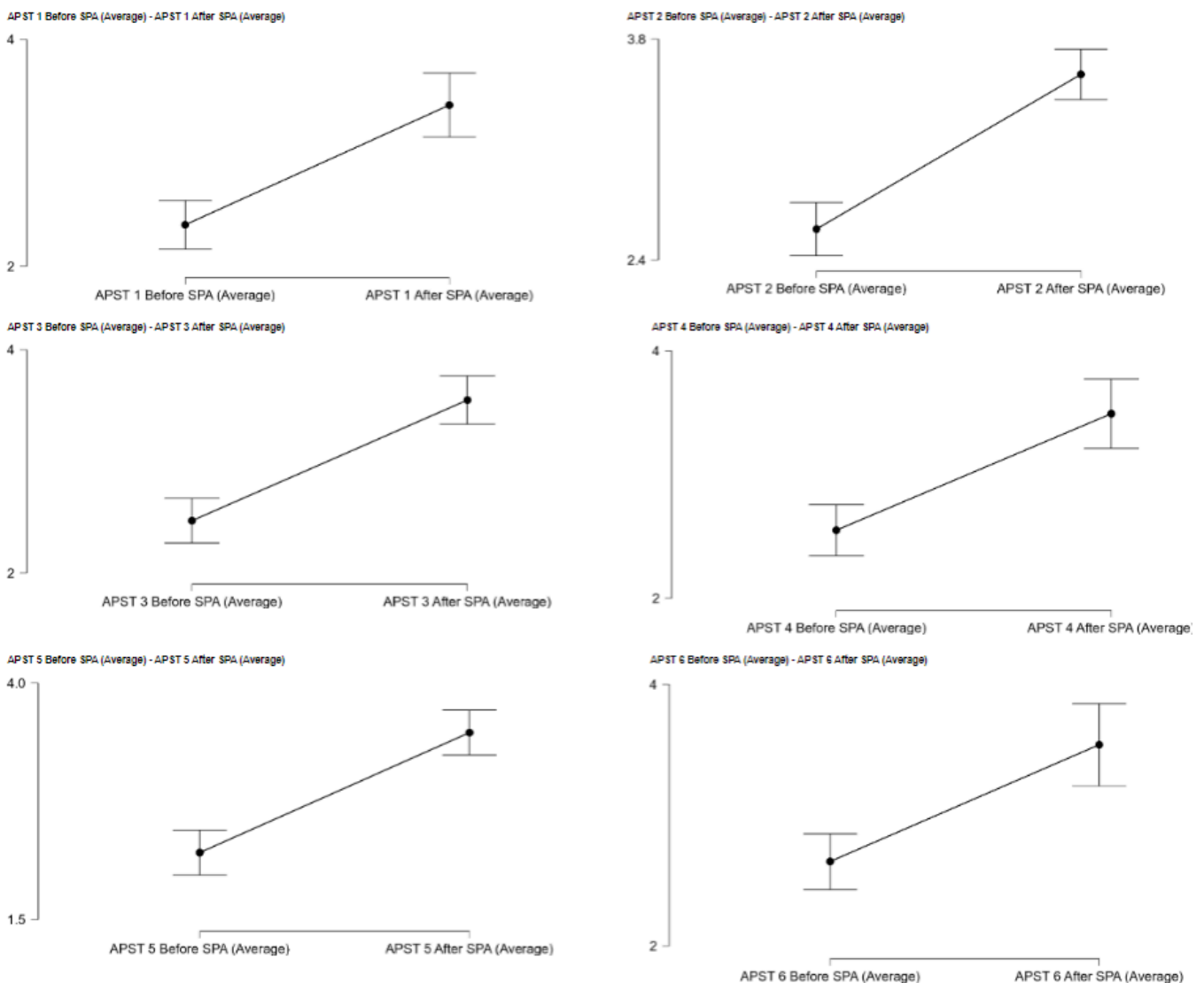


Figure 7. All Pre-Post SPA Program Results for the PSTs' Self-Rated Competency Across each of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (increased)

Very Large effect before vs. after program (Cohen's  $d = 1.28$  to  $2.62$ ,  $p < .001$  for all statistical tests).

The APST with the largest growth was APST2: Know the content and know how to teach it. For this item, the standardized effect, Cohen's *d*, is 2.62 (very large) and statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This equates to a 37.74% increase in PST scores before compared to after the SPA program for APST2 (Know the Content and How to Teach It).

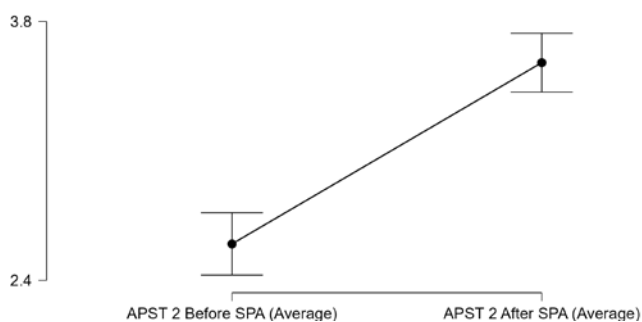


Figure 8. Example of results from one of the items for APST2.

When examining the end-point survey in more detail (see Appendix 3) the results are similar to the 2020 and 2021 data. On average 54% of the PSTs felt they exceed the requirements for some APSTs, and 43% felt they had 'met' the standard focus areas. No PSTs reported that they had not met any of the focus areas. Across the standards, focus areas that were selected with meeting or exceeding amounted to 23 of the 33 focus areas, which is an increase on previous years. The focus areas that had 69% and over of PSTs reporting exceeded were:

- 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;
- 3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies;
- 3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies;
- 3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement; and
- 5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.

All from Standard 2 overlap with the results from the 2020 and 2021 surveys. The additional areas listed are

new areas categorised as 'exceeding' by the majority of PSTs. The next highest focus area "6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices" was ranked as exceeding by 62% of participants. 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'. Those that did select 'just met' did so only for a small number of the focus areas.

There are areas that require reflection and consideration for future implementation of the program. Overall, the focus areas receiving a ranking of 'just met' for more than one PST (2) were:

- 1.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds; and
- 2.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

These two focus areas also had the smallest number in the 'exceeding' column. When comparing this result across the years of SPA, there is a clear pattern indicating PSTs feel least confident with their knowledge around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects and concepts. In the 2022 cohort, there was a more balanced view around competencies of working with parents/ caregivers (1 'just met', 6 'met' and 6 'exceeded') than in the previous years. In addition, all PSTs indicated 'met' or 'exceeded' for focus areas requiring consideration of inclusivity/differentiation, which was identified with some PSTs in previous year cohorts as an area requiring work.

### Looking deeper using the qualitative findings

Some of the PST, Companion, and school staff comments provide an insight into the broad range of experiences that help PSTs meet and exceed the standards in this program. One PST discussed their involvement in communicating with parents/caregivers and families:

*because I was involved over several months, I was able to experience being involved with parents and carers so, I actually had the opportunity to email families and give them feedback on how their child was doing. I was able to be involved in the mother and daughters garden party so, where the mothers came for Mother's Day and the students were getting it all ready and talking to the parents and seeing how the teachers also interact with them and what a nice community it*

*felt like. And, it was also with phone calls and I was able to involve myself in the student learning conferences, where the parents and the students and the teachers come together online and discuss student outcomes and how they're doing and some feedback, which was really great to experience.*

This PST was able to experience a wide range of contexts in which teachers engage with and report to parents/caregivers. These events allowed the PST to observe events that were building relationships, rather than just witnessing quick parent interviews. As stated, the PST was able to witness the “nice community”, and a more relaxed environment of interaction.

Other voices discussed the various ways PSTs engage that help them successfully achieve and exceed the APSTs. One Companion stated:

*You're learning about how to plan and implement effective learning and teaching, you're learning how to assess, how to provide feedback, how to moderate, and report.*

The school staff also discuss the way the program enables PSTs to see the life of a teacher across a semester or year, which allows them to have a more realistic sense of what it means to be a teacher, and concentrate in a holistic way on developing their graduate competencies. For example, a supervising teacher argued:

*by being here in January for our professional development days, where we've introduced, say, for example, a new writing program, a whole school writing program, she's been able to dip in and out of that during her time at the College, and actually see the growth and the benefits that – that are taking place in the students' writing, and – and then also benefiting by experiencing that particular professional development and, you know, the coaching that goes with it along the way. So, it's – so it's many layered in that respect. And, we know that, you know, teaching is a profession that – that does have, you know, a certain workflow. We have our very busy times and then things ease off for a little bit. So, it gives a bit more of a realistic sense of what working as a teacher is like when that is your permanent job and you do that for the entire year.*

A Deputy Principal echoed the supervising teacher's sentiments. They suggested that in short placements PSTs can get ‘bogged down’ in operational aspects of school life, however in the SPA program they instead are able to move beyond those and focus on developing their teaching skills:

*I would suggest that there are many operational parts of a school that you can get bogged down in when you're there for just a short time. You know, how do I mark the roll? Where do I find first aid? You know, all of those nitty gritty things that are super important in being in a new working environment, they become second nature to you over that period of time and you can really focus on the core business of being a great teacher.*

### **Additional Support Mechanisms such as Formative Assessment Tools and mentoring approach enhanced PSTs' reflection on APSTs and their development as a teacher**

Another critical component of this partnership model is the formative assessment tools designed by the program coordinator and collaboratively improved with the team of Companions and BCE leadership staff. These tools include observation templates, initial feedback on areas relating to the APSTs in consultation with the PST and their supervising teachers, and a two-stage professional conversation process. All of these documents were discussed with the PST and their supervising teacher prior to placement. They provide formative support and goal setting as PSTs move through the placement and into the job interview process. The ‘professional conversations’ were highlighted by PSTs and the Companions as a highly significant distinguishing feature that separates the formative feedback provided in this partnership model versus standard professional experience blocks.

Professional conversations aim to ‘develop skills in the critical analysis of practice, vision and beliefs, and in the ongoing formative evaluation of teaching and learning’ (Leonard, 2012, p.48). The partnership project template utilised the APSTs and GTPA (final capstone assessment) criteria “as a set of cues for critical investigation and evaluation, and not simply as a set of competencies to be displayed and observed.” (ibid). PSTs lead and engage in constructive discussion with their school mentor, university representatives and leadership mentors. This formative tool aligns seamlessly within a living curriculum model. It is, however, resource heavy and time consuming, meaning it can be difficult for universities to take up on a larger scale. Depending on the support provided by the Companion and supervising teacher, it can also be demanding on the PSTs as they decide what they want to focus on and go about the task of collecting evidence that they can receive feedback on during their meetings.

The PSTs' exploration and reflection on the APSTs was evident in their professional conversations. One PST

developed a reflection sheet to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses across all focus areas in the standards. She brought this sheet to the professional conversation to discuss and receive feedback. Another dedicated time in the professional conversation to reflect on her strengths and weaknesses in APSTs 1, 2 and 3. One PST discussed how she was keeping a table of the APSTs and examples from her practice in a column next to the focus areas. She also discussed how she was focusing on ways to combine content descriptors and teach more than one concept per lesson. Below are two more examples of PSTs who focused on specific areas that demonstrated their growth in relation to the APSTs:

#### PST 1

- Significant growth in understanding how the classroom operates on a daily and weekly basis;
- Willingness to take on feedback to improve practice;
- Greater understanding of the reasons behind teacher practices;
- Learns from mentor teacher's practices and then modifies class systems to enable them to work for her;
- Experience of volunteering one day a week has ensured greater growth in teaching practices and knowledge of students and how they learn;
- Good understanding of how a Catholic school works and the story behind the school;
- Able to see how the values of Catholic teaching support positive student behaviour.

#### PST 2

Opportunity to reflect on challenges eg.

- Students chatting and not coming back to task when asked.
  - > Working on letting students discuss the topics (think, pair, share)
  - > Get them moving/ hands on activities.
- Being able to move on during lessons, veer away from lesson plan.
  - > Need to move on if class isn't responding.
  - > Differentiate for students who aren't engaging.

The professional conversations provide a space for PSTs to receive advice and feedback from multiple voices. It also provides a safe space to practice preparing for and

leading conversations about their practice. As one PST stated *"the professional conversations were a great experience. They provided an excellent opportunity for me to practice for my QTPA panel interview"*.

Companions and Supervising teachers also commented on the professional conversations as a tool for formative learning, preparation for real life teaching conversations, and as a 'lovely' opportunity to meet and chat. A Companion stated:

*We've had students say it's helped with their interviews. So, because they are able to talk about all of that, and they're not afraid to talk about it with peers and colleagues and other educators. They learn very quickly that what happens in their classroom is everybody's business. We all are there to help and share the wisdom, and I think those professional conversations are amazing.*

One of the supervising teachers also emphasised the supportive environment:

*it was a support, you know, and it was – it was a conversation among myself as her mentor and also with her Companion. And, I suppose there's – there's that extra support as well. You know, and it's also a second opinion – I found it was – it was definitely worthwhile. And, you leave that conversation with, something to go on, something to work on for the next, couple of weeks or the next couple of months. So, there is always room for improvement and there's always something to grow on, and I felt that the Companion really helped us with that.*

And another identified the importance of having that time set aside for a conversation:

*it was a conversation, and it was always a lovely, you know, time to just sit and meet and chat about what was going well and what needed to improve.*

While it can be difficult to find time in the busy school day to 'sit and chat', these conversations are critical for the PSTs to engage in a supported reflexive process. This space enables the Companion and supervising teacher to provide scaffolds, pastoral care, and suggestions for future action to the PSTs.

Feedback from Companions and PSTs suggest continued communication to prepare PSTs and supervising teachers for the professional conversations are important. In 2022 the university coordinator ran a webinar for PSTs, Companions and Supervising Teachers dedicated to

the Professional Conversations. To ensure Companions, PSTs and Supervising Teachers could see a professional conversation in action, a mock professional conversation was recorded by a videographer and uploaded onto a shared program site. In addition, the template was updated and some minor elements removed. Feedback recently received suggests further refinement of the template would be useful to simplify the instructions for PSTs, Companions and Supervising Teachers.

### > THEME 5 - IMPACT ON SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL STAFF

While this program focuses on PST development, across the years multiple impacts have been discussed by the various staff in SPA schools. These have mostly been commented on by leadership staff in the schools, for example one Deputy Principal stated:

*the benefits are for everyone involved, not just the student coming from the university, but also our students here and our staff as well.*

Another Deputy Principal felt knowing the PSTs were going to be regularly in their schools enabled them to plan for their presence and that they could assist in school activities:

*it's been great, because I've been able to plan for their presence here and include them in – you know, if it's an athletics carnival or – or another significant event at the college, in terms of our staffing of a day like that, we know that we can rely on that person to be here and be involved, and – and not just be there on a – you know, observing what goes on, but actually be in – in the activities and in it with the students and in it with – with their colleagues here.*

An APRE commented on how the PSTs brought new ideas to their schooling community, and the ways staff in their school could engage in dialogue about concepts the PSTs were learning at university:

*They've [PSTs] also brought new ideas to our community. So, it's been great for our teachers to stretch our thinking and see different ways of being in the classroom. For some of us, it's been a while since we've been in the classroom [as in university]. And, to be able to have that two-way conversation and dialogue, and it's really enhanced our students' learning as well as our teachers' learning. APRE*

It is encouraging to see the reciprocal nature of the relationship between the school staff and the PSTs. This valuing of the PST deepens their connection to the school and their opportunities for learning.

To develop a greater understanding of the impact of the program on schools and school staff, data will be collected in 2023 from school staff which will include a focus on the impact of the program on schools.

### Mentoring Day PD

Due to COVID, the Mentoring PD was pivoted to fully online, with a live event at the end. In total, a combination of 19 PSTs and Supervising Teachers completed the training. Out of these, only four responded to evaluation survey. When compared to numbers at the face to face session for 2023 (in excess of 50), 19 is a low number of attendance. In 2022 the feedback from those who responded was overall very positive with most selecting strongly agreed that the modules were engaging and helped them reflect on the material. In addition some commented that the 'Spirituality and Religion' module "provided an opportunity for deep reflection", that the Mentoring Theories module "aligned well to current ways of working with others", and that the breakout sessions in the 'Live' module "were a great opportunity to connect with others and hear their story". Some feedback for improvements included ensuring no material is doubled up from the introductory and advertising material in the module, and allow more time in the breakout rooms for reporting back on what was achieved.

### > THEME 6 - REFLECTION ON THE REGIONAL MODEL

In 2022 the SPA program expanded to the Toowoomba Dioceses and a regional model was piloted. Two PSTs were placed in a regional school within the Toowoomba Dioceses. The regional model includes attendance at the school for the PD days and the first week of school at the commencement of the school year, connecting to the Supervising Teacher and if possible the class on a regular basis via online video communication prior to their block, completing their final placement block in their regional school, and then continuing to connect via virtual tools until they complete their degree.

Due to COVID, the PSTs in the 2022 pilot were able to attend the PD days and the first week of school, however only students of emergency workers were at the school. The PSTs commented on this in their survey responses:

*Because I am placed in [Regional Town] I had to commit for the two weeks no matter what they looked like. The PD days went ahead as normal but the first week of school was postponed so only the children of*



essential workers were allowed at school. However, it was definitely still very beneficial to go out and experience this, I took away so much.

*I was able to attend the first week of school but there were no students in classrooms (other than essential worker's children). This changed the experience for me as I was traveling from Brisbane to [regional school].*

The online connection during the year was successful for one of the PSTs, who was able to use Zoom to connect and present small teaching activities for her class. The other PST did not have as much success and commented that the "video calls have been difficult due to my uni schedule and work as I save for my trip to Roma". It seemed finding the time to connect was a barrier for this PST, not use of technology. As the virtual connection was utilised by one PST, this will continue to be an option explored in the regional models.

Both the Companion and the Principal provided feedback on the program. The Principal commented on the structure of the SPA program and the benefit of having accommodation next to the school:

*We are very happy with the current structure for [Regional School] whereby we have the SPA participant in the first two weeks of school and then a placement in either Semester 1/2. Students like the experience of setting up a classroom and the associated routines. The lengthy block also allows for engagement in spiritual and extra-curricular activities to compliment the classroom experience. The house has been excellent and that it supports a lengthy placement plus also organising housing at the beginning of the year.*

Having the nearby accommodation has been an incredible resource and support for the PSTs who can walk to school and share a space with other PSTs for support. The Companion is closely connected to the regional community and provides opportunities for the PSTs to become a part of the school and local community through activities such as attending the races, staff social dinners and tours. The Companion also highlighted the importance of the first two weeks:

*they have witnessed how a teacher sets up a classroom at the beginning of the year and that is paramount. Those two weeks at the beginning of the year are fantastic.*

She also commented on the significance of providing space for PSTs to get to know the school and community before their placement block, particularly for regional settings where anxiety about new settings and communities is heightened:

*They've never driven outside of Brisbane very far, so to deal with all of that, let alone meeting new staff, becoming part of a community. Umm, where the SPA program is ideal. All of that's been taken care of. They knew. Know the teaching community. They know how the school operates. They have been involved in the social aspects and sporting aspects of the Community...So much of that anxiety is taken away, and they can focus on what they're paid to do, teach kids, get to know kids, develop a relationship instead of having to, you know, cope with all of that other stuff.*

Completing a placement in a regional or rural setting can be daunting for any teacher, let alone PSTs. Having the initial contact with the Companion and Principal prior to heading to the school, then first two weeks of school in which there is no pressure to have to teach a class and they can become comfortable in the regional context, followed by regular contact with the Companion and their supervising teachers has a significant impact on their anxiety and connection to the school and town.

The impact of this approach was apparent in an anecdote the Companion shared about meeting the PSTs parents at a social event once the PSTs had transitioned into their teaching positions at the school:

*We had a race meeting and the girls were attending and their parents came up to me and hugged me and kissed me like I was the long lost member of the family. For all that I had done for their daughters in establishing them in their school, but also taking away all the fear factor and them going in knowing and being comfortable. And then easing into their classroom without all of these other worries and things that they had to deal with. So that to me is the real story of the charism of a Catholic school.*

This captures the hoped intention of this program, providing support, pastoral care and opportunities for PSTs to connect successfully to the teaching profession and surrounding community, and doing that by putting the charism of a Catholic school into practice.

Both PSTs in the pilot ended up accepting employment positions in their regional Catholic school. They stated that they enjoyed the country experience in a group conversation "we loved our time in [regional town]", "country towns are an amazing way to experience things in schools and outside in the community that you wouldn't get to in Brisbane". The PSTs continue to be connected to the Companion who is currently supporting more PSTs in the regional Catholic school that they are employed at.

They have engaged with the lifestyle of a small country town and formed strong relationships with the community within and beyond the school.

## > 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 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 significantly reduced their levels of anxiety about heading into the final block placement, and their first year of teaching.

### **Theme 3 – Impact of the program on PSTs' sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness**

The one day a week and block experiences assisted 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 the PSTs', their supervising teacher was the most mentioned important staff member. Other teaching staff, the Principal, the APRE, and various learning support leadership staff were also mentioned as having a significant impact on feeling welcome in the school, and providing learning experiences. Other staff and the Principal were the second most important staff mentioned by the PSTs in the survey. The extended time in the schools enables PSTs to seek support and learn from a variety of leaders and staff within the school context.

### **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:

- 2.2 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;
- 3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies;
- 3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies;
- 3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement; and
- 5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.

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.

In addition, the formative assessment tool, 'professional conversations', developed for the partnership were highlighted by PSTs and the Companions as a useful formative feedback tool preparing PSTs for reflection on the APSTs and preparing them for 'real-life' teaching conversations. 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 Companion role was incredibly important due to the support they provided to each PST.

### **Theme 5 – Impact on schools and school staff**

While the SPA program is focusing on PST outcomes, it has become evident through conversations with leadership staff that the program also has an impact on schools and school staff. This includes the PSTs being able to assist in a more integrated way compared to PSTs on shorter blocks with events such as athletics carnivals, musicals and liturgies. The PSTs were also valued for their recency with research and theories on education.

### **Theme 6 – Reflection on the Regional Model**

Overall, the Regional pilot was successful even with the initial impacts of COVID. The PSTs were able to connect with their school at the start of the year, and the two PSTs involved in the program are now employed at the Catholic regional school.

> **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendation	2022 Reflection	2023 Implementation	2024 Planning
<p><b>Increase numbers attending the BCE lead Spiritual Retreat</b></p>	<p>In 2021 a spiritual retreat had been planned (the first time running this event). It had to be cancelled due to COVID. The Spiritual Retreat in 2022 was very positively received by those who attended. Approx 2 Companions and 8-9 PSTs attended. The aim for 2023 is to increase these numbers as this is an important event for PSTs faith formation and connection to BCE.</p>	<p>The retreat is planned for the middle of the year. Registration numbers are significantly higher than 2022.</p>	<p>Advertise more widely to encourage higher levels of participation. Explore if there are links between attending the retreat and employment in BCE schools – does the retreat increase PST’s feelings of connection to the Dioceses?</p>
<p><b>Track employment status of PSTs and remain connected to Alumni PSTs</b></p>	<p>This year the project coordinator started to track employment status for the PSTs that had provided their personal information.</p> <p>SPA graduate names were provided to BCE HR for employment opportunities.</p> <p>Several Alumni SPA PSTs were nominated for ECT awards at the BCE Awards night.</p>	<p>Reflected on ways to increase responses from PSTs about their employment. Included a field in the application survey for personal email contact details. This will increase the ability to follow up with PSTs at the end of 2023 and start of 2024.</p> <p>Added Alumni to the membership database.</p> <p>Created an Alumni survey and will be interviewing selected Alumni SPA cohort.</p> <p>Recommend continued work with BCE HR for employment opportunities for Principal recommended SPA graduates (suggestion – set up a short survey for Principals about SPA graduates, send early to meet employment timelines).</p> <p>Recommend planning for an Alumni event in 2024.</p>	<p>Plan an Alumni event to remain connected to the SPA Alumni.</p> <p>Strengthen employment options for successful SPA graduates. Explore ways to attract SPA PSTs to hard to staff BCE and Regional Dioceses SPA schools.</p>

Recommendation	2022 Reflection	2023 Implementation	2024 Planning
<p><b>Provide greater mentoring for new SPCs joining the project as it expands</b></p>	<p>A lead Companion was brought into the project to provide additional leadership and support about the role.</p> <p>An admin person was brought into the project to support with university processes.</p> <p>Companion feedback has suggested both staff have provided invaluable support in understanding the role and trying to navigate university systems.</p> <p>Regular meetings each Term with Companions to provide support around documentation, expectations, mentoring and partnership work were run.</p> <p>A video template of a mock professional conversation was created to support Companions, PSTs and supervising teachers.</p>	<p>The Lead Companion has had one on one conversations with new Companions. Companions completed professional learning for tertiary supervision processes (provided by the university) and induction to the SPA program meetings. Companions have attended the Mentoring PD day, which included 'Meet Your Companion' lunch for PSTs.</p> <p>The admin officer has updated university process support documentation and developed an online space for Companions in the new membership database.</p> <p>Feedback on the video template of the mock professional conversation has been positive.</p>	<p>Provide a calendar at the commencement of the year with half day PD/project meetings each Term for Companions and Diocese representatives.</p> <p>Develop one handbook for Companions which includes information for new Companions about university systems, checkbox with what needs to be completed, templates, contacts, meeting dates and processes.</p> <p>Record short videos going through the processes and templates.</p>
<p><b>Set up a Leadership Think Tank</b></p>	<p>The Leadership Think Tank had limited attendance in 2022. Suspected overload of school staff due to ongoing COVID issues.</p>	<p>Strengthen the Leadership Think Tank and pilot some in person meetings to see if attendance from school stakeholders improves (could rotate through clusters). Advertise through the new membership database and report on the meetings through this forum.</p>	<p>Reflect on in person meetings. If not successful explore other ways to increase online attendance from school-based stakeholders.</p>
<p><b>Extend the program to other cohorts in the education degree to allow gradual development across PST degrees.</b></p>	<p>After consultation with all stakeholders it was decided to pilot a 2nd year undergraduate program for ACU PSTs. This program runs in second semester.</p>	<p>Piloting a 3rd year connection year for ACU PSTs- no placements in SPA schools, just connection with their Diocese. Continue engagement with Signum Fidei. Only 3rd years who entered during 2nd year. These PSTs are invited to general professional learning sessions such as well-being and employment in BCE.</p> <p>Collect data from the 2nd and 3rd year cohorts</p>	<p>Reflect on data collected from 2nd and 3rd year cohorts to strengthen the program for these cohorts.</p> <p>2022 entry 2nd year PSTs will be in the final year SPA program. Collect targeted data from these PSTs about the impact of the program across their experience.</p>



Recommendation	2022 Reflection	2023 Implementation	2024 Planning
<p><b>Extend SPA program to other Catholic Dioceses (regional and interstate)</b></p>	<p>Considering the impact of the SPA program, negotiations with Queensland regional Dioceses commenced in 2021. Toowoomba piloted in 2022.</p>	<p>In 2022 Toowoomba Dioceses expanded to 2 regional schools.</p> <p>Cairns Diocese is piloting the model.</p> <p>Negotiations with Canberra and Adelaide Dioceses commenced.</p> <p>Recommend SPA stakeholders deliver submit an abstract to the GRACE (Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education) international research colloquium to be held in Perth in Jan 2024 to share findings about SPA to the international Catholic Educator community.</p>	<p>Recommend strengthening the regional models in Toowoomba and Cairns.</p> <p>Recommend piloting models in Canberra and Adelaide.</p> <p>Recommend SPA stakeholders deliver shared presentation at the GRACE (Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education) international research colloquium in Perth in Jan 2024 to share findings about SPA to the international Catholic Educator community.</p>
<p><b>Develop cross-institutional partnerships for Brisbane</b></p>	<p>Piloting final year program in cross-institutional partnership program with USC and QUT.</p> <p>BCE Catholic Director indicated Gold Coast schools were interested in SPA and asked if a connection with Griffith University could be explored for 2023 intake (2024 cohort).</p>	<p>USC and QUT continued with the program and participant numbers are stable from these universities.</p> <p>Griffith university was contacted, some staff changes. Negotiations with Griffith are paused at the request of BCE.</p> <p>Some concerns have been raised by Companions and the PSTs themselves about their Catholic literacy due to not having access to ACU university units.</p> <p>Recommend working with BCE and Faculty of Theology and Philosophy to develop short professional learning videos for the SPA resources site.</p> <p>Recommend recommencing negotiations with Griffith university to expand SPA to Gold Coast schools.</p>	<p>Continue strengthening options that enable cross-institutional PSTs to access professional learning around Catholic Identity and spiritual literacy concepts and theories.</p>

Recommendation	2022 Reflection	2023 Implementation	2024 Planning
<p><b>Develop support mechanisms to address gaps identified in Theme 1 around Catholic Understandings</b></p>	<p>Signum Fidei program was piloted with undergraduate 2nd years. After stakeholder discussion reflecting on the program it was decided that the Signum Fidei would be an optional program for SPA ACUPSTs. The requirement moving forward is for SPAPSTs to attend the BCE designed spiritual retreat as it aligns with BCE missions and ideals.</p> <p>Introduced workshops for final years around Catholic identity, and workplace run by BCE.</p>	<p>Signum Fidei is available as an option for 2nd and 3rd year SPAPSTs.</p> <p>BCE Spiritual Retreat has been included as a required element for PSTs – registrations have increased.</p> <p>Recommend working with BCE and Faculty of Theology and Philosophy to develop short professional learning videos for the SPA resources site.</p>	<p>Continue strengthening options that enable PSTs to access professional learning around Catholic Identity and spiritual literacy concepts and theories.</p>
<p><b>Develop support mechanisms to address gaps identified in Theme 4 around the APSTs</b></p>	<p>Modified Professional Conversation template, supervision templates, and observation templates for clearer connection to APSTs</p> <p>Recorded a model professional conversation with documentation completed for sharing</p> <p>Ran a professional conversation workshop</p>	<p>Continue support provided in 2022 and advertise the templates and models through the membership database.</p> <p>Brainstorm with BCE stakeholders and at ThinkTank ways schools work with PSTs in the areas identified as gaps. Some PSTs marked these areas as exceeding, which suggests many schools are supporting PSTs to achieve in these standards.</p> <p>Share findings with SPA schools in a presentation to help disseminate the information.</p> <p>Strengthen training for Companions on preparing schools and PSTs for professional conversations</p> <p>Revisit Professional Conversation template to simplify and enhance further the gaps identified by PSTs.</p>	<p>Develop an App for SPA mentoring training to enable more accessible and engaging content for all supervising teachers.</p> <p>Reflect on professional conversation data to see if the gap areas are addressed in the professional conversations.</p> <p>Evaluate professional learning options offered in SPA to see if gaps are being addressed, or can be strengthened with mini-PDs.</p> <p>Explore funding to connect a PhD student to the project, preferably from a SPA school (can be part-time). This will strengthen research exploration of these gaps, and include SPA stakeholders in the research. This can be supported with an ARC Linkage grant application and/or Industry scholarship (please see <a href="https://www.acu.edu.au/research-and-enterprise/higher-degree-research-hub/partner-with-us/industry-scholarships-for-phd-students">https://www.acu.edu.au/research-and-enterprise/higher-degree-research-hub/partner-with-us/industry-scholarships-for-phd-students</a>)</p>

Recommendation	2022 Reflection	2023 Implementation	2024 Planning
<p><b>Improve communication between schools and the project</b></p>	<p>Developed a SPA website to host all information and the mentoring PD.</p> <p>Signed on to a recognised and highly reviewed membership database system at the end of 2022.</p>	<p>Commenced utilising the functions of this membership site.</p> <p>Registration processes for Mentoring Day PD and other professional learning/SPA events have been easier to track and evaluate. Sharing of resources also more streamlined and accessible for all members.</p> <p>Recommend hosting formal meetings with principals (especially new and potential), eg. breakfast or dinner events, to present on the SPA program.</p> <p>Recommend SPA university coordinator and Dioceses project coordinators visit current SPA schools.</p>	<p>Recommend continuing with the membership database system.</p> <p>Recommend creating awards for engaged SPA PST, most supportive SPA supervisor and most supportive SPA school. This will recognise the work and commitment by the PSTs and their schools.</p> <p>Recommend visits to some SPA schools by SPA university coordinator and Dioceses project coordinators</p>

The SPA program is in a continual state of critical reflection and change. The complexity of the ways the various components interact requires frequent updating to meet the needs of all stakeholders, and the aims of the program. The program has a three year agreement between ACU and BCE with 2023 being the final year for this 3 year period. The Toowoomba Dioceses expanded in 2023 to two regional schools, and negotiations with other QLD and interstate Dioceses is ongoing. As this report illustrates, the benefits of the program are significant for the PSTs, the Catholic school sector and the teaching profession. In partnership, the program can be further enhanced and improved to continue to provide impactful outcomes for PSTs and the profession.

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## > Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Professional Video Marketing material 2020, 2022 and sample professional conversation

#### 2020

##### Primary PST

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453959667/0aa6f24243>

##### Secondary PSTs

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453970403/859825639d>

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453968794/021647f909>

##### School Leader

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/453972626>

##### Faith Companion

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453967739/aa53c2cdbc>

##### BCE Director of Catholic Identity

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453962789/297b25b10f>

##### BCE HR Officer

<https://vimeo.com/user36828324/review/453964566/c5f7415837>

#### 2022

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | An explanation

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593953085?h=9a2c7a8d10>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Secondary PST

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593985041?h=5754c68a21>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Supervising teacher and Primary PST

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593575254?h=1f1110cc17>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Companion

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593638016?h=2adfc754d5>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Supervising Teacher and Deputy Principal (Secondary)

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593979741?h=a05a25d6a6>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Assistant Principal Religious Education (Primary)

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593641413?h=1a24e38fe1>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | BCE Director of Catholic Identity

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593951119?h=70f544336f>

##### Spiritual and Pedagogical Accompaniment Program | Talent Attraction BCE HR

<https://player.vimeo.com/video/593636910?h=c61bbcf1e4>

##### Sample Professional Conversation video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rwQigKN5ZA>

## Appendix 2 – Faith Data from the Longitudinal Survey

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

Year	Faith	Number
2019	Catholic	1
	Sikh	1
	None	2
2020	Catholic	4
	Non-practicing Catholic	1
	Anglican	1
	'Spiritual'	1
	None	2
2021	Catholic	10
	Christian	1
	Sikh	1
	Methodist	1
	Anglican	1
	None	2
2022	Catholic	20
	Christian	2
	None	2
	Lutheran	1
	Anglican	1
	Hindu	1

## Appendix 3 – APST End point survey results

Rank how you felt you met each of the Graduate APST focus areas (this does not need to reflect your QPERF) 1=still developing, 2=just met, 3= met, 4=exceeding

APST focus area	1	2	3	4
1.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students and how these may affect learning.			6	7
1.2 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.		1	5	7
1.3 Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.		1	5	7
1.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.		2	8	3
1.5 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of strategies for differentiating teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities.			7	6
1.6 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements and teaching strategies that support participation and learning of students with disability.			7	6
2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area.			6	7
2.2 Organise content into an effective learning and teaching sequence.			2	11
2.3 Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans.			3	10
2.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.		2	7	4
2.5 Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas.			6	7
2.6 Implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students.		2	3	9
3.1 Set learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying abilities and characteristics.			6	7
3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies.			4	9
3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies.			3	10
3.4 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of resources, including ICT, that engage students in their learning.			6	7
3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement.			4	9

APST focus area	1	2	3	4
3.6 Demonstrate broad knowledge of strategies that can be used to evaluate teaching programs to improve student learning.		1	8	4
3.7 Describe a broad range of strategies for involving parents/carers in the educative process.		1	6	6
4.1 Identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities			6	7
4.2 Demonstrate the capacity to organise classroom activities and provide clear directions.			6	7
4.3 Demonstrate knowledge of practical approaches to manage challenging behaviour.		1	6	6
4.4 Describe strategies that support students' wellbeing and safety working within school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.			6	7
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.		1	5	7
5.1 Demonstrate understanding of assessment strategies, including informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative approaches to assess student learning.			7	6
5.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of providing timely and appropriate feedback to students about their learning.		1	7	5
5.3 Demonstrate understanding of assessment moderation and its application to support consistent and comparable judgements of student learning.			6	7
5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.			4	9
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		1	6	6
6.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.			6	7
6.2 Understand the relevant and appropriate sources of professional learning for teachers.			7	6
6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.			5	8
6.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the rationale for continued professional learning and the implications for improved student learning.			6	7

**Appendix 4 – Combining Results for Spiritual Literacy and Catholic Identity from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

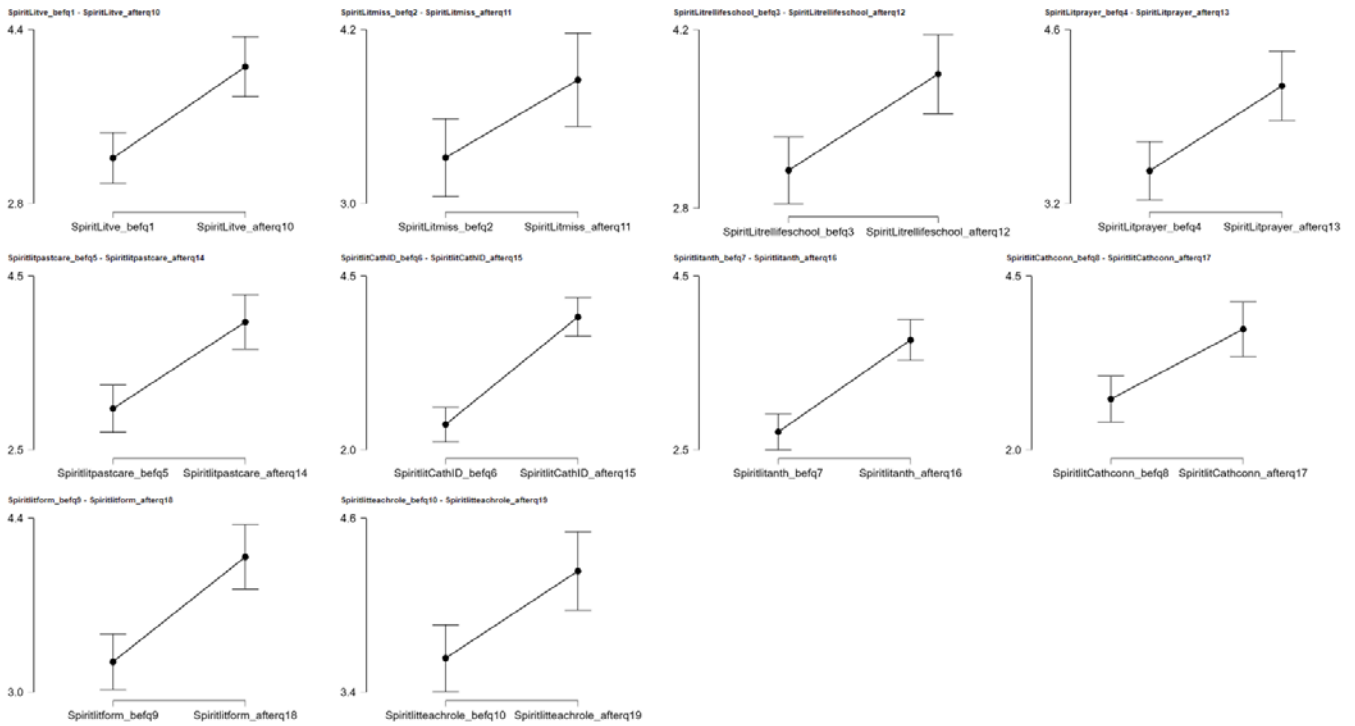


Figure 1. Theme 1. Spiritual Literacy and Catholic Identity.

**Appendix 5 – Combining Results for Anxiety About the Teaching Profession from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

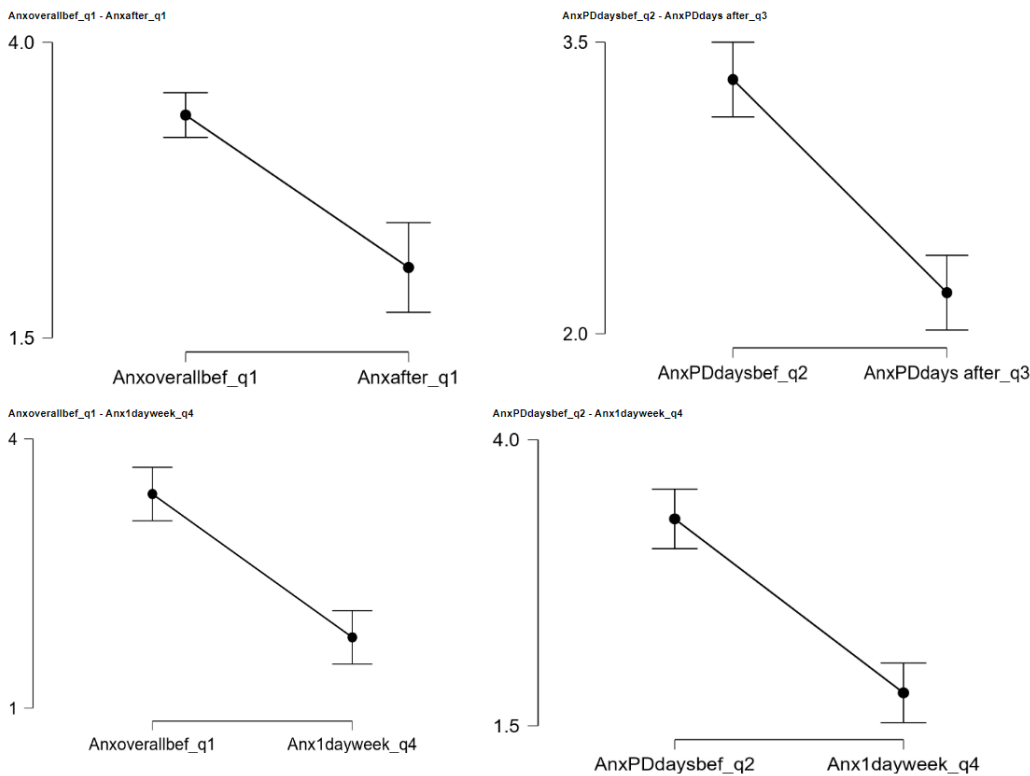


Figure 2. Theme 1. Anxiety About the Teaching Profession.



**Appendix 6 – Combining ANOVA Results for Anxiety About the Teaching Profession from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

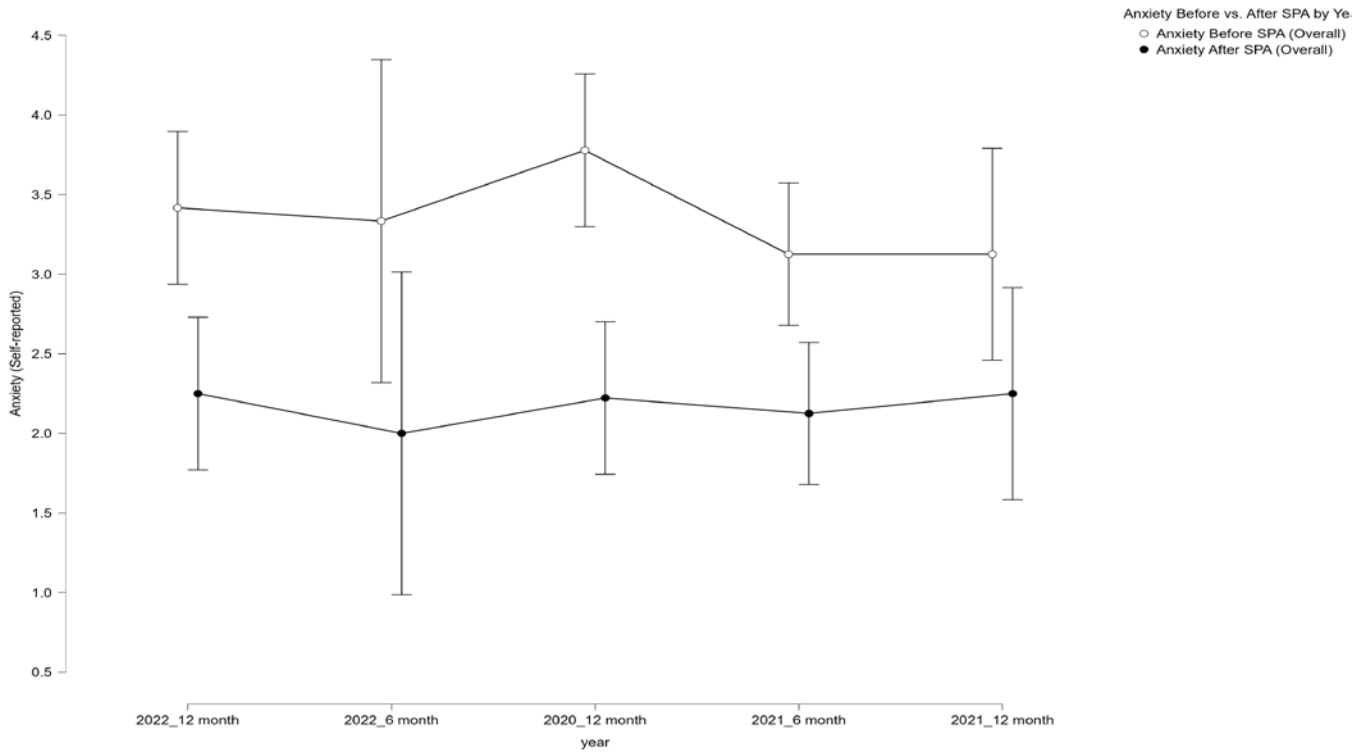


Figure 3. ANOVA Results for Anxiety About the Teaching Profession from 2020 to 2022.

**Appendix 7 – Part 1 of 5: Combining Results for Belonging and Becoming from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

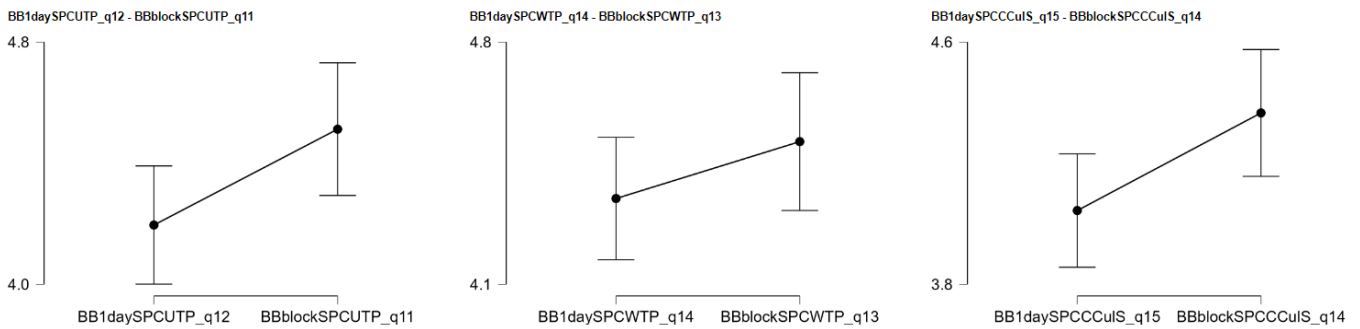


Figure 4. Theme 3. Belonging and Becoming.

### Appendix 8 –Part 2 of 5: Combining Results for Belonging and Becoming from 2020, 2021, and 2022.

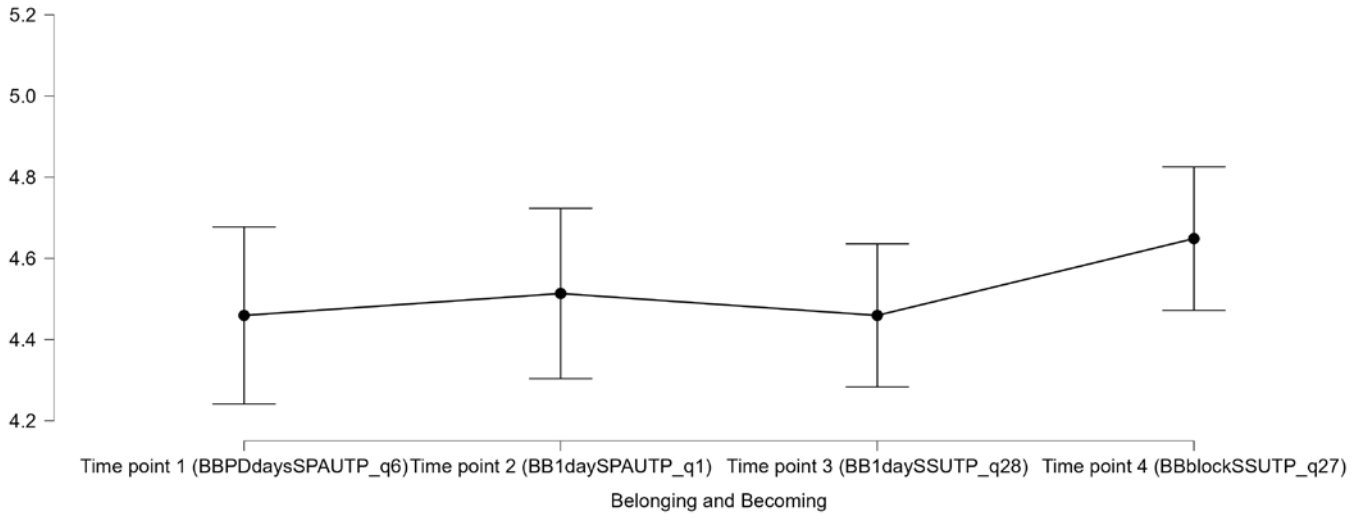


Figure 5. Theme 3. Belonging and Becoming.

### Appendix 9 –Part 3 of 5: Combining Results for Belonging and Becoming from 2020, 2021, and 2022.

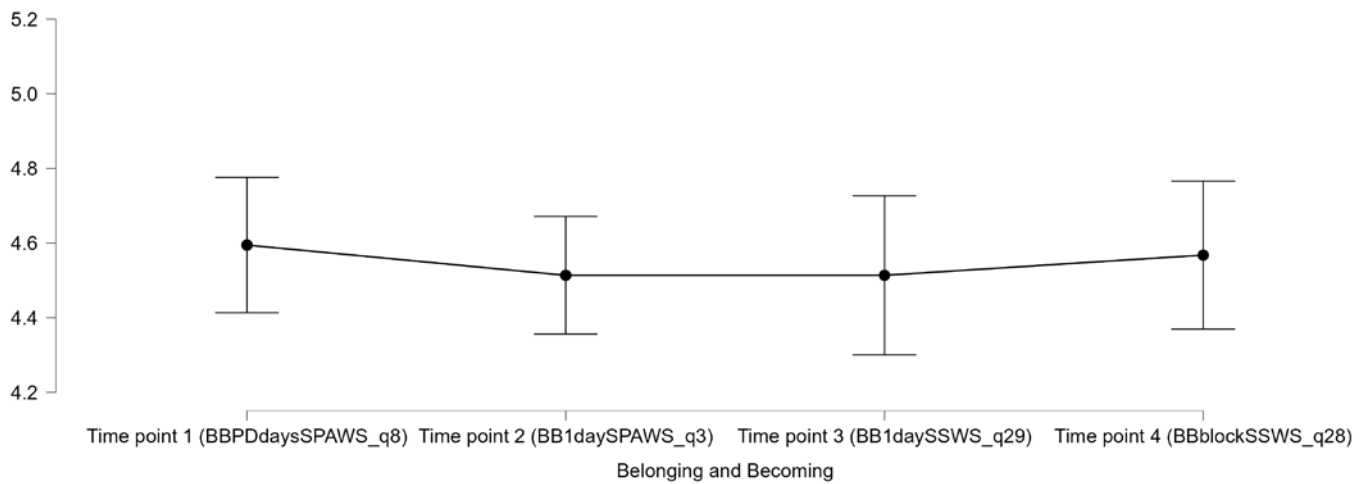


Figure 6. Theme 3. Belonging and Becoming.

**Appendix 10 –Part 4 of 5: Combining Results for Belonging and Becoming from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

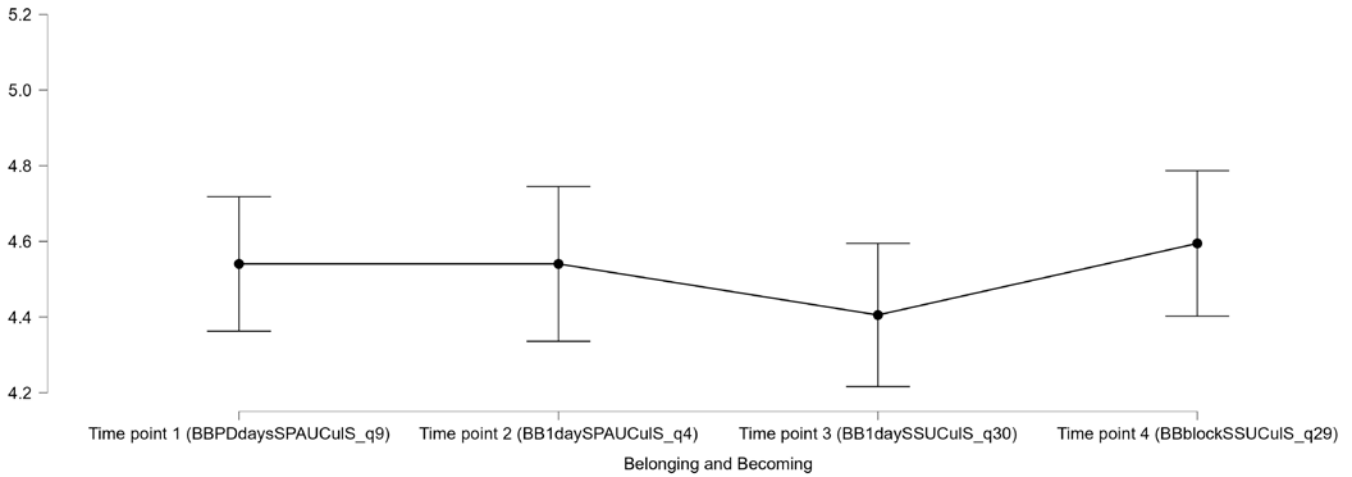


Figure 7. Theme 3. Belonging and Becoming.

**Appendix 11 –Part 5 of 5: Combining Results for Belonging and Becoming from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

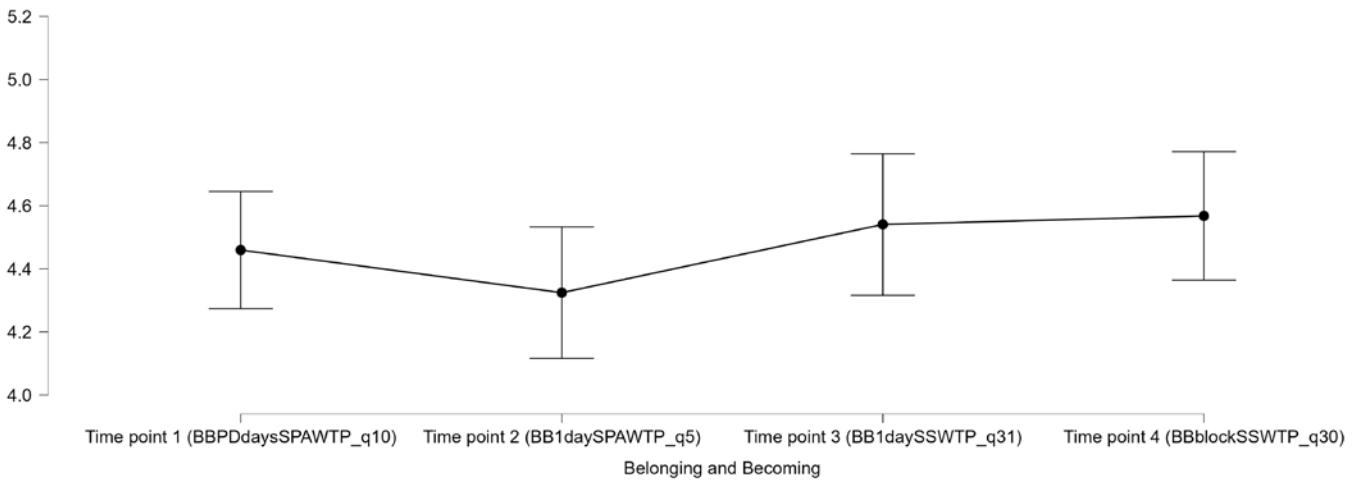


Figure 8. Theme 3. Belonging and Becoming.

Appendix 12 – APST 1. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 1 from 2020, 2021, and 2022.

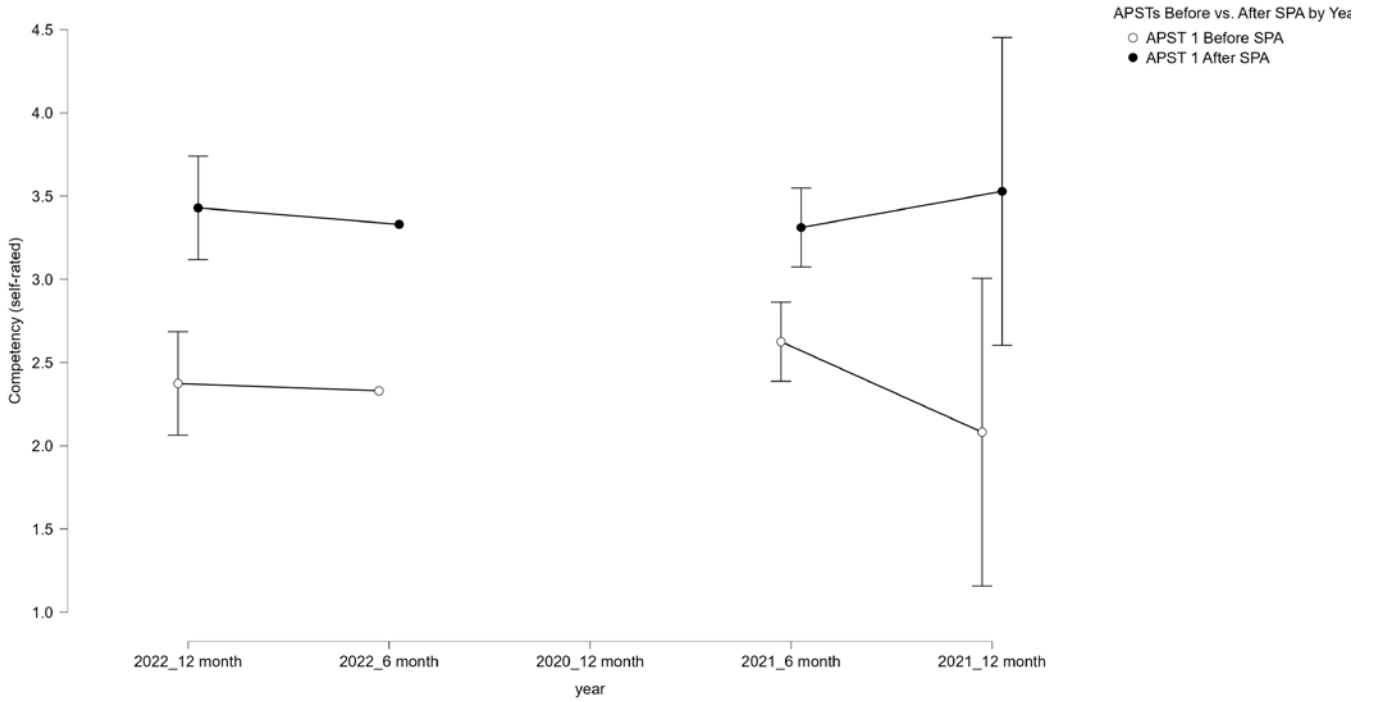


Figure 9. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis

Appendix 13 – APST 2. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 2 Descriptive plots from 2020, 2021 and 2022.

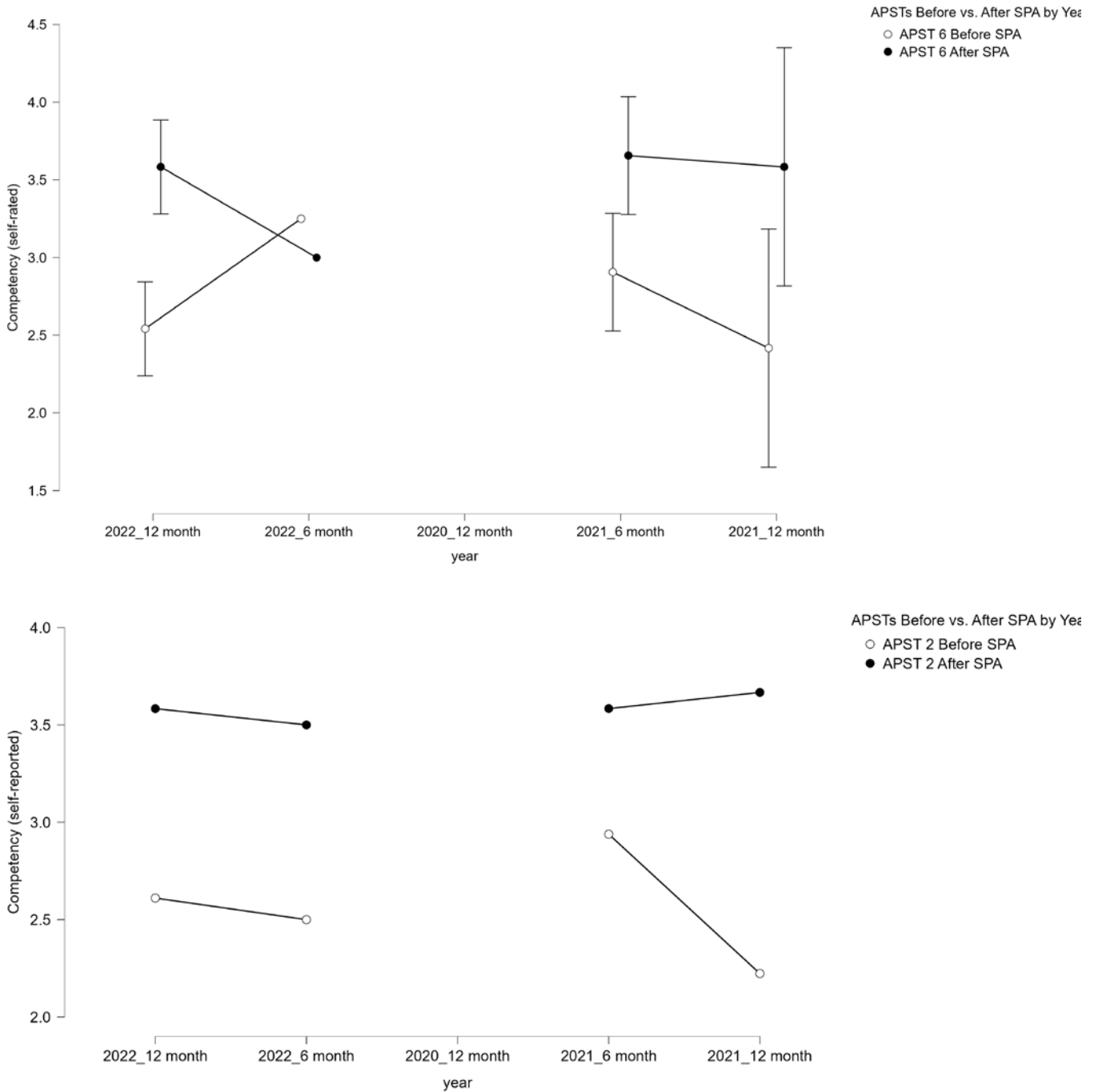


Figure 10. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis



**Appendix 14 – APST 3. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 3 from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

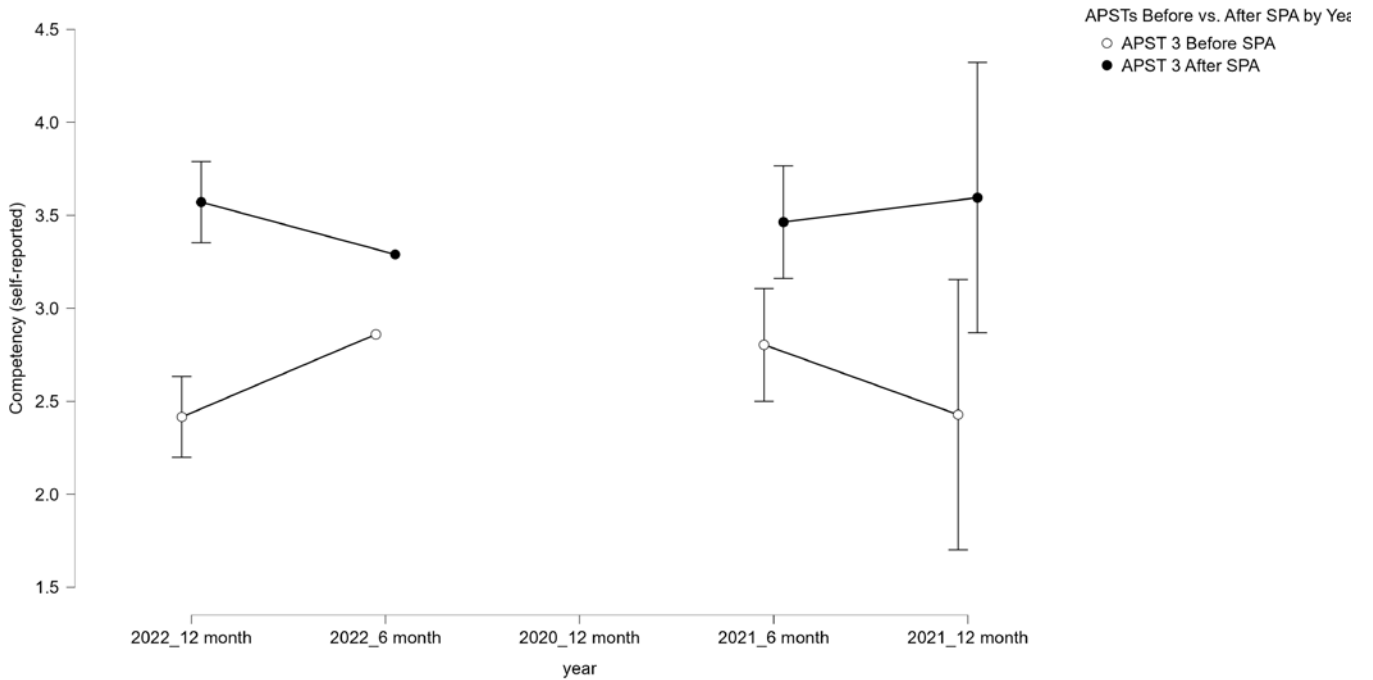


Figure 11. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis

**Appendix 15 – APST 4. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 4 from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

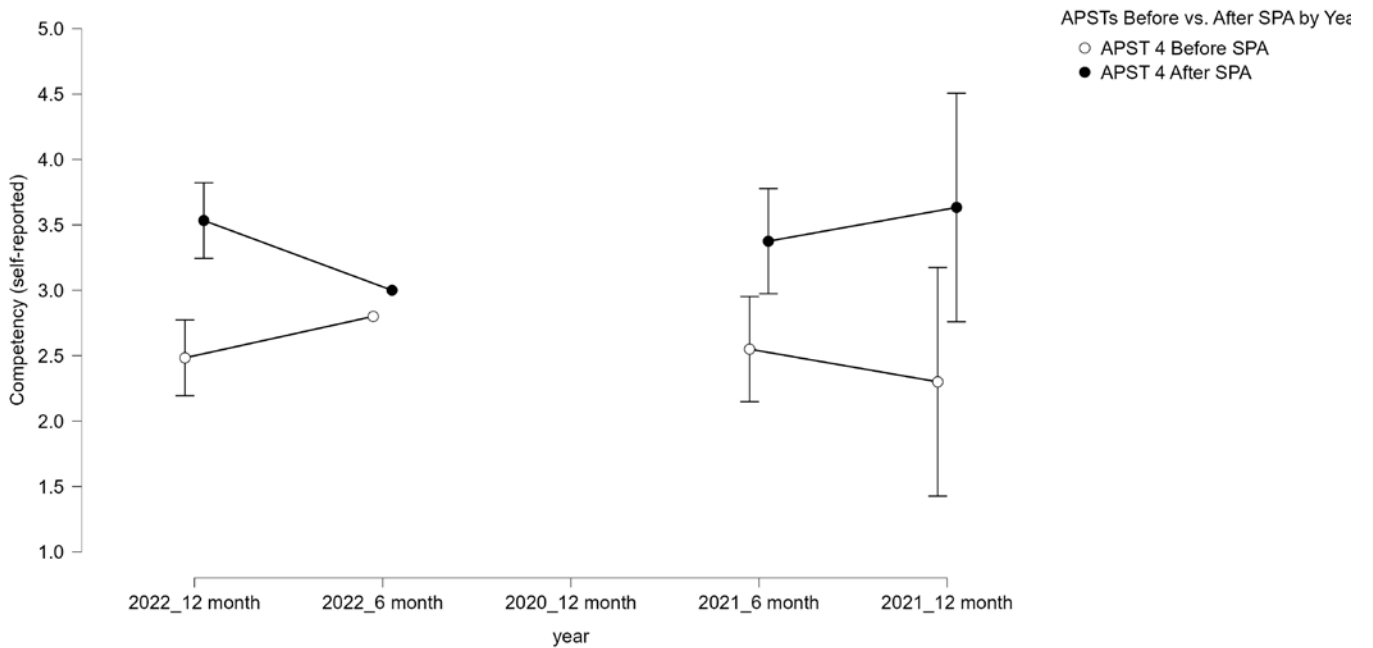


Figure 12. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis

**Appendix 16 –APST 5. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 5 from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

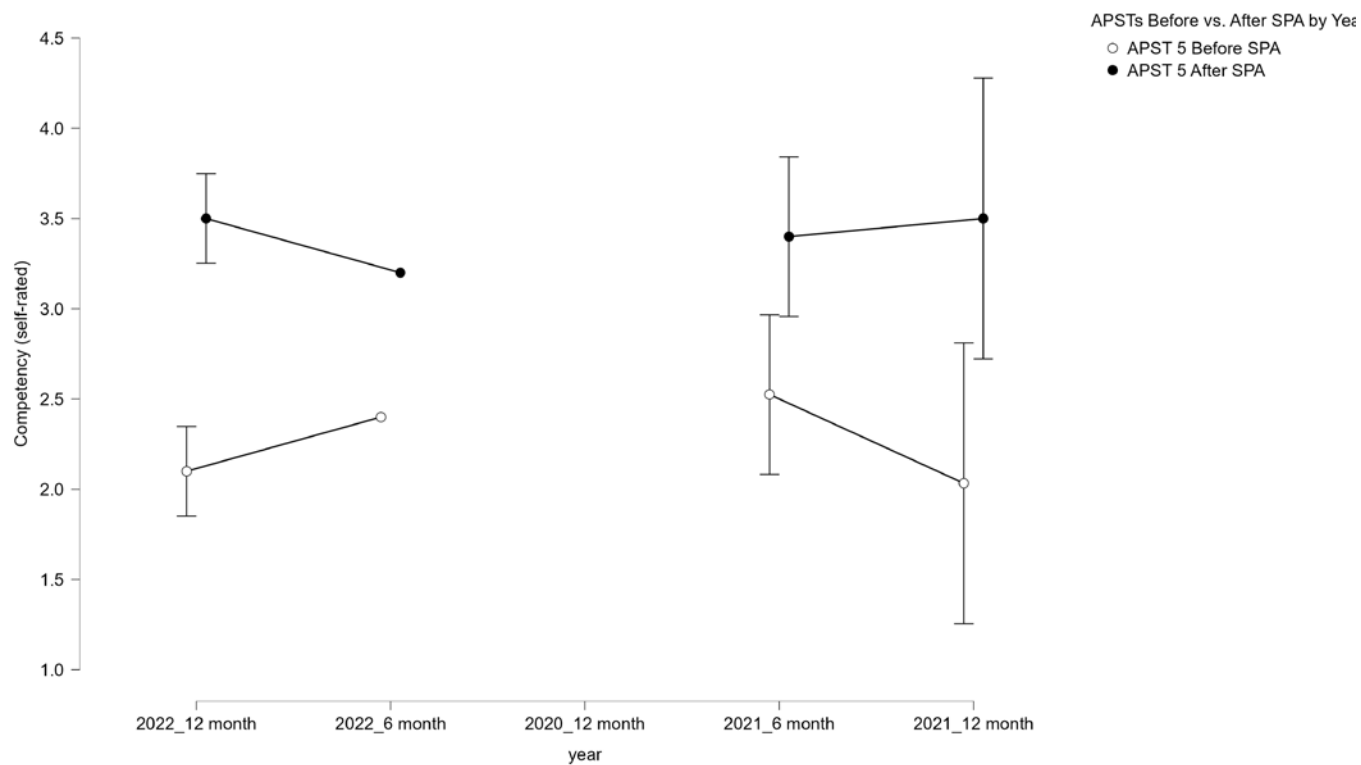


Figure 13. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis

**Appendix 17 –APST 6. Combining ANOVA Results for APST 6 from 2020, 2021, and 2022.**

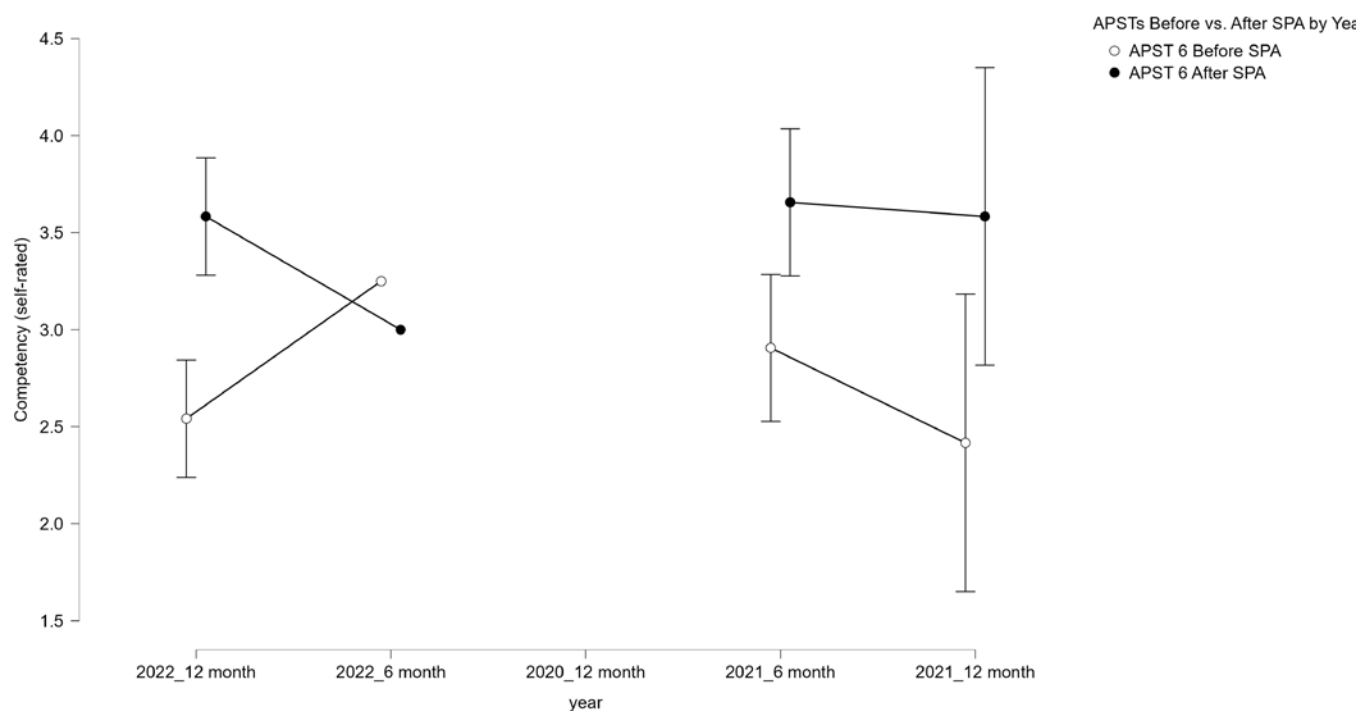


Figure 14. Results for the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs).  
 Note. Sample size for 2020 (12 month cohort) was too small to include in the ANOVA analysis







“

You just have to have  
the guidance to  
lead you in the right  
direction until you  
can do it yourself.

”





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