



> **Spiritual and Pedagogical  
Accompaniment (SPA)  
Program 2019–2021**

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A quote graphic featuring two hands reaching towards each other against a sunset background. The hands are silhouetted against a warm, orange and yellow sky. The quote is centered between the hands. The background shows a dark, silhouetted landscape with a red diagonal shape at the bottom.

“

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

”

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## > Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

Overall, there was significant reporting of increased active engagement and greatly increased engagement across all categories surveyed relating to Catholic understandings. For some PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. These were:

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

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

contexts and the teaching profession. The SPCs were highly valued by the PSTs, and were successful in mentoring the PSTs' understanding of the teaching profession and Catholic schooling contexts.

### > THEME 2 – IMPACT OF PROGRAM ON PSTS' LEVELS OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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

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

The one day a week and block experiences were of great importance in assisting the PSTs to develop their understanding of the teaching profession, begin to feel welcome at the school and the teaching profession and understand the culture of the school. It was also important for their beginning understanding of Catholic school settings.

Leadership staff in schools as well as supervising teachers play a key role in PSTs' understanding of the teaching profession. The survey results suggest the majority of PSTs feel that school staff are either very important or significantly important to their understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to the school. For a small number of PSTs, understanding the difference between a Catholic school and other settings was raised as an issue.

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

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

- 2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area;



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

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

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

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

More than 70% of the PSTs ranked high importance in the project's strengthening their professional identities; their ability to meet and exceed in the APSTs and understanding that teaching goes beyond everyday classroom activities/interactions. Of the remaining variables, over 80% ranked 'understanding of Catholic school settings' and 'understanding the requirements of the GTPA' as high importance, and over 75% ranked 'ability to successfully complete the GTPA' as high importance. They also suggested the partnership enabled a support network to develop between the PSTs in the program and contextualisation of university units into practice. A small number of PSTs did not have benefit in relation to their GTPA, which will require strengthening of support mechanisms around this area.

### > **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

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

# > Introduction and Context

## > INTRODUCTION

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

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

## > BACKGROUND

Australia is becoming an increasingly secularized society, creating challenges for Catholic institutions (and other faith-based organisations) in general, and Catholic education in particular, to meet core missional, vocational and cross-curriculum dimensions of their *raison d'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). 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 BCE for a spiritual formation of staff project aligns with a number of ACU’s strategic priorities and addresses concerns raised by Gleeson and O’Neill, and others. This project provides an innovative and distinctive teaching and learning formative experience within the Catholic Intellectual teaching tradition for pre-service teachers (PSTs) by providing targeted mentoring support through a ‘Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion’ who assists PSTs to understand the Catholic intellectual tradition, re-contextualised Catholic world-views and make meaning of their own ways to incorporate these views into their own growth and pedagogical expertise in Catholic schools. It also strengthens the university’s Catholic partnerships and provides pre-service teachers with an authentic, contextualized and embedded Catholic experience reflecting the goal of ACU as an ????. The data across 2019–2021 indicates that this authentic experience in Catholic settings is desired by pre-service teachers, and 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 in QLD and Victoria, suggests that developing a strong connection between universities and school; providing additional school experiences in addition to their formal placement blocks; and incorporating more supportive mentoring structures, can strengthen PSTs’ connection to the teaching profession (Gutierrez & Nailor, 2020; Gutierrez & Kostogriz, 2021). Additional support mechanisms can be provided to assist pre-service teachers in transitioning to Catholic schools, including support to explore one’s spirituality and faith and what this means in a Catholic setting. There is little data available on the effectiveness of this holistic model of mentoring for pre-service teachers in Australian Catholic schools. These partnerships require evaluation to understand their impact on pre-service teachers’ awareness and confidence with Catholic Intellectual traditions, their ability to include these perspectives into their discipline area, their own spiritual awareness and growth, and assessing the partnership structures used to develop PST professional skills needed for transitioning into work (particularly in the Catholic sector).

This research project concentrates on the mentoring aspect of PST experience, which includes enhancing mentoring around spirituality, curriculum and intellectual/reflexive engagement with educational research and theory. It also examines the intersection of educational systems to deliver effective ITE partnership models. The partnership between the university researcher, BCE, BCE schools, Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions and other universities, creates high levels of complexity for successful system operation and maintenance. Figure 1 is a simplistic representation of the integral relationships between all contexts. It is important to recognise partnerships as being a part of a “fabric of relations” (Alhadeff-Jones, 2008, p. 64) and a dynamic intersection of human interaction between and among systems including “interconnected actors, shaped by spatial and historical contexts” (Fransman et al., 2021, p. 331), hence Figure 1 represents relationships between key parties, while Figure 2 visually represents the complexity of the fabrics of this partnerships and the border crossing that occurs.

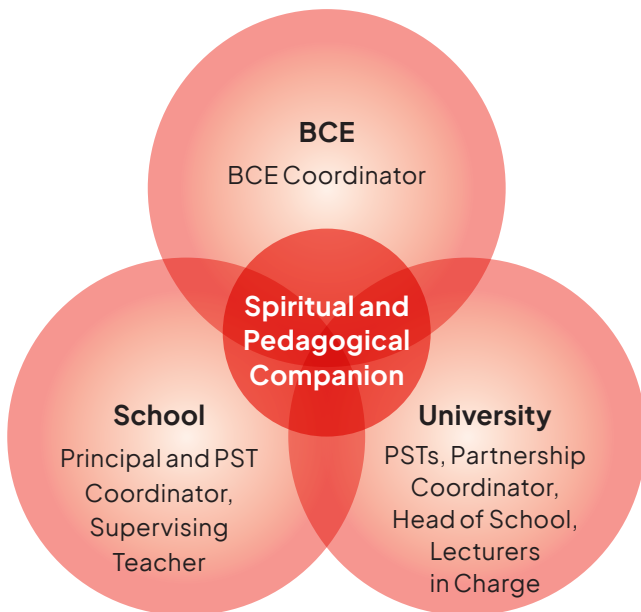


Figure 1: The integral relationship between all parties in the SPA Program



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

The role and approach of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion is pivotal and requires specific mention regarding the parameters of the role. If spiritual formation in the Christian Catholic tradition is essentially about 'growing people', in an holistic way, respectful of where people are at, connective to role and context, and that this happens in community, then we need to be intentional about providing effective formation at every point along the journey of the Catholic school educator. The Companion for the pre-service teacher is critical to that arc of personal and professional growth (Gowdie, 2017). In the exploration of reflective practice in the spiritual domain, research shows us that systematic and personal

reflection about professional practice both nurtures and sustains the teaching vocation itself (Downey, 2006; Hunt, 2021; Neal, 2013; Rolph, 1991).

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



# > Methodology and data

## > METHODOLOGY

### Qualitative Intrinsic Case study and Quantitative survey data

The research team worked 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 applied to join the partnership project, and we accepted varying numbers across 2019–2021 (see table below). 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, anonymous journal entries and a classroom observation template (Bhattacharya, 2017; Stake, 1995). Due to COVID 19 and increasing numbers of PSTs, and for developing a broader understanding of program impact, a longitudinal REDCap survey tool was introduced in 2020. With the inclusion of this survey tool, the project became mixed method with both quantitative and qualitative data. The survey data represented in this report only includes those PSTs who completed the survey (n=25). Some PSTs only partially completed the survey, 21 completed all sections of the survey. As our cohort numbers increase, our survey analysis will become even more compelling (final year participant numbers in SPA in 2022 have increased to 47, with an undergraduate second year cohort of 12).

### The Participants (2019–2021)

A full list of participants in this program from 2019–2021 is included in the Appendices (Appendix 1). Below is a summary overall of the number of participants in the program from 2019–2021:

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:

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

Table 1: Summary of Religious Affiliation across the 2019–2021 cohorts

### Participant reasons for joining the program

Our participants reported a number of reasons for their interest in the program. These have been collated and summarised below:

- 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
- 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 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
- Recorded Zoom group sessions
- Observations of classroom practice (written data)
- Two Professional Conversations (written data)

## Final stage – After Professional Experience

- Survey distributed to PSTs
- Interview with sample of PST
- Interview with sample of Principals
- Interview with sample of supervising teachers
- Interview with each faith companion 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 interviews, zoom focus group meetings and written responses in the survey. Thematic analysis allows the identification, analysis and reporting of themes that evolve from data. Across the statistics and voices, patterns and themes emerged which provide an understanding of the key impact areas of the project. Due to the depth of the survey responses, this report mostly focuses on the survey data. In most cases the interview data provided similar, if not the same, information. In some instances there were gaps. The interview data has been used to fill data gaps. These are outlined in the 'Key findings' section. Any names used within the report are pseudonyms.

### Quantitative data

For the purpose of this report, we used a range of analyses including paired samples (Student) T-Tests where we used a range of analyses including paired samples (Student) T-Tests to test the hypothesis that the pre- SPA program results differed significantly from the post- SPA program results for each participant in the program. Wherever possible, we converted the T-Test statistic into a standardized effect size known as 'Cohen's d', which compares the average score on each pre-intervention measure with the average score on each post-intervention measure by estimating the difference between the statistical means. Results can thus be interpreted in standard deviations of 'effect' (see Table in next section). Though we did not utilize a true experimental design, we interpret our preliminary findings under the assumption that changes in the measures used herein are attributable, at least in part, to the SPA program's effect on the participants. It is also worth applying a degree of caution with these quantitative findings as the sample size was small, which often restricted the types of analysis we were able to consider, and therefore may not generalize to a broader population of PSTs.

All y-axes have been adjusted to aid in interpretation by scaling the increments in relation to the region and size

of the effect; though, most scales were presented to participants in Likert-scale form ranging from 1 (lower) to 5 (higher) in relation to five key themes:

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

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

### Cohens effect size\*\*

Significance	Value
Small	0.2
Medium	0.5
Large	0.8

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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

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

\*\*Cohen (1988) suggested using these effect size thresholds to aid in the interpretation of results, but also stressed the importance of doing so in the broader context of the quality of the data and implementation context.

## > Key findings

After analysing the various forms of data, there were multiple themes relating to the impact of the project, and improvements that would increase impact in future implementations of this model. The quantitative analysis was categorised into five main themes, with various findings within these themes;

- 1) Impact of the program on PSTs' Catholic and Spiritual Literacy;
  - a) PSTs experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings;
  - b) PSTs had increased employability and preparedness for the profession and preferred to get a job in a Catholic setting;
  - c) Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion experiences contribute to PSTs' understanding of Catholic school contexts and the teaching profession.
- 2) Impact of program on PSTs' levels of anxiety about the teaching profession;
  - a) Significant reduction in PST anxiety levels about block placement and their first year of teaching.
- 3) Impact of the program on PSTs' sense of belonging to the profession and preparedness;
  - a) One day a week of Professional Development helped prepare for their block placement and connect to their Catholic school context and the teaching profession;
  - b) Leadership staff in schools as well as supervising teachers play a key role in PSTs' understanding of the teaching profession.
- 4) Impact of the program on PSTs' self-reported competency related to the APSTs and teaching skills;
  - a) PSTs were able to exceed in many of the APST Graduate Standards;
  - b) PSTs in partnership programs have greater engagement with their schools during unexpected crisis;
- 5) Partnership growth and impact on systems across the 3 years
  - a) Successful and sustainable partnership programs require support and careful modelling, however the evidence demonstrates the valuable impacts

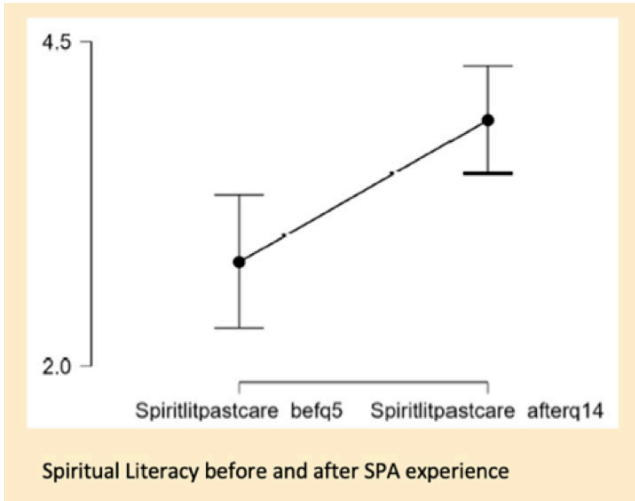
### > THEME 1- IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' CATHOLIC AND SPIRITUAL LITERACY

#### 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 were included in the survey to assess PSTs' Catholic literacy:

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

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



Catholic and Spiritual Literacy (increased)

Medium to Very Large effects before vs. after program (range of effects: Cohen's  $d = 1.2$  to  $.45$ ,  $p < .001$  to  $.12$ )

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

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

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

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

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

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

As the PSTs began to explore Catholic Identity and have discussions with their Spiritual and Pedagogical Companions, a small number struggled at times to understand the difference between the Catholic school they were placed in and non faith-based schools. Some suggested they wanted to see more evidence of incorporating Catholic identity in their schools and classrooms. For example:

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

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

While this was the case, many others discussed opportunities to engage with staff such as the APRE and Catholic Identity resources, which the program and schools directed them to:

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

*the school gave me multiple opportunities to get involved in the religious life of the school and it was fantastic to see the involvement and engagement of the vast majority of students (2021)*

The support of an external Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion can provide a bridge between the PSTs' interpretations and the workings of Catholic settings. It is also particularly important to have consideration for schools as they go through periods of change and



managing pandemics, and, as identified by one PST above, the resources may be available but underutilised. The recommendations include suggestions on ways to strengthen the SPA model to increase visibility of Catholic Identity in schools for PSTs.

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

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

**Table 1: Employment settings (from available data)**

School Setting	Number of PSTs
BCE school (8 employed at SPA school)	14
Rockhampton Diocese	2
Toowoomba Diocese	1
Archdiocese of Brisbane RI Catholic school	4
Interstate Diocese (Broken Bay)	1
Northern Territory Christian School	1
QLD state school	2
Remote school (state)	1
Maternity Leave (returned to home country)	1

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

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

*he said "I've never had a first year teacher articulate the things that she was talking about in terms of using data*

*to change pedagogy or to track performance of kids and just these things'. He said that 'the kids who are coming through this are far in advance from other first year teachers coming out.'*

And

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

The PSTs across the cohorts also reflected on their experience during the interviews and compared themselves to their peers, their gaps prior to the program and how it has helped them understand how to manage their first years of teaching. In the pilot year the program began 2 weeks prior to their official placement block, and included their placement block and a few weeks of follow up reflection work. The PSTs, supervising teachers, principal and SPC highlighted the need for the program to be longer, and to enable PSTs to engage with their schools across the year. One PST stated *"that's important too, to see the beginning to the end. I've yet to see a whole term through. Next year will be a surprise for me"* (2019). This aligns with existing research around the benefits of extended experiences with schools (Gutierrez & Nailer, 2020). The program in 2020 expanded the experience in the school to one day a week across 6–12 months (depending on Course Completion date), their official placement block, with support from their SPC, university and Diocese across this period. The data from the 2020 and 2021 cohort illustrate the benefits of the extended program for final year PSTs:

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

*I think I am more prepared than I would have been to go into the profession...I am a lot more prepared for what the profession actually is, rather than just going for a four-week block. I never met a Deputy or Principal in my first block...if I did two more of those four week blocks, I would have no information whatsoever...this year has been a wealth of knowledge. (2020)*

*I don't see myself wanting to leave teaching...the program has shown me, I've been there long enough at the school and talked to first year teachers at that school, when you get your position don't take on too much, here's some pitfalls to be aware of...at the end of this program you are yes I want to be a teacher, way more solidified. (2021)*

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

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

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

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

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		2	9	13			2	8	12

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

The PSTs' comments provide further details about the ways the SPC assisted their understandings in these areas. In the 2019 pilot, one PST stated that the SPC guided him to reflect on "the importance of spirituality. Second, what it looks like, three, the impact of it. So, even having a chance just rebounding off thoughts...but also learning from her as well". They were particularly grateful to have someone with knowledge and experience of BCE systems and resources:

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

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

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

One of the supervising teachers also commented on the usefulness of having an external voice who had a deep understanding of faith and spirituality:

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

**Theme 1 Summary**

Across the data from 2019–2021, the evidence suggests the SPA program has contributed to greater understanding and engagement with Catholic and spiritual literacy and 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 the SPC, university coordinator and Catholic Diocese, have been the contributing factors to this success. Some areas can continue to be enhanced and strengthened for future implementation, such as the areas identified as weaknesses for some PSTs in Catholic literacy and increasing the visibility of Catholic vision and mission in schools. These areas will be discussed at the regular ThinkTank and Dioceses/ACU meetings.

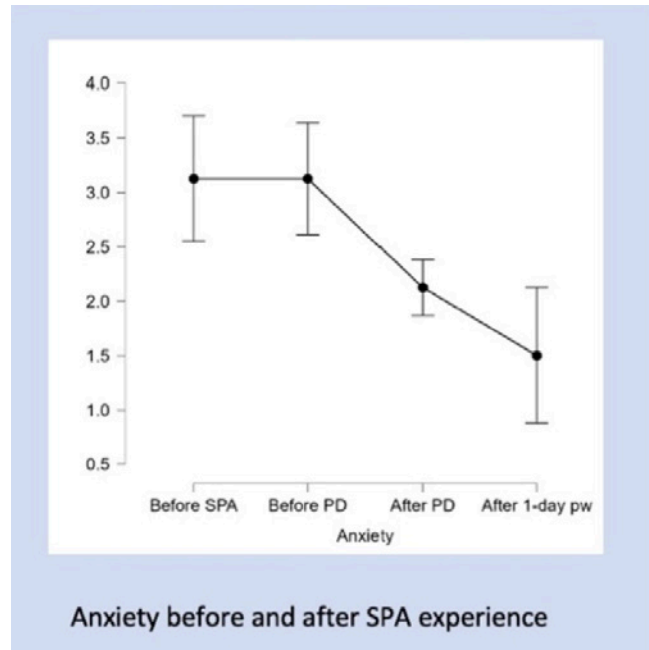
## > THEME 2 - IMPACT OF PROGRAM ON PSTS' LEVELS OF ANXIETY ABOUT THE TEACHING PROFESSION

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

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. From 2020, 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 & Naylor, 2020). The analysis from the survey indicated that across the 2019-2020 data, the PSTs were initially experiencing high

levels of anxiety. The graph below shows the shifting level of anxiety as the PSTs had more experiences with their schools.



This data collected from cohorts across 2020-2021 indicates a very large effect in decreasing anxiety before versus after PSTs engagement in the SPA program (range of effects: Cohen's  $d = 1.6$  to  $1.1$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

In addition, the comment data from the survey and interviews provided a more detailed picture of why there was a significant shift in levels of anxiety. Several spoke about the welcoming nature of the staff in their schools and the support:

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

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

*I was very lucky that my coordinator at the school organised an immersive teaching experience for these one-day experiences. This was particularly valuable for helping me to understand the culture of the school and to further my teaching experience. (2021)*

*In comparison to when I started the program, my anxiety levels are not as high after completing my practicum... throughout this year, I had experienced some tough personal situations which it was great to receive the support and understanding of my mentor teacher, SPA companion, and the school. It actually showed me the type of support I would receive as a teacher, for all teachers have an identity outside of school, and they wear many hats in the professional context. I believe this year was a tough year for me in my personal life, however I was shown the support you could receive with the right team. Life doesn't stop, it's how you overcome it and with who is on your journey (2021)*

They also discussed the ability to 'acclimatise' to their class and develop a strong relationship with their supervising teacher:

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

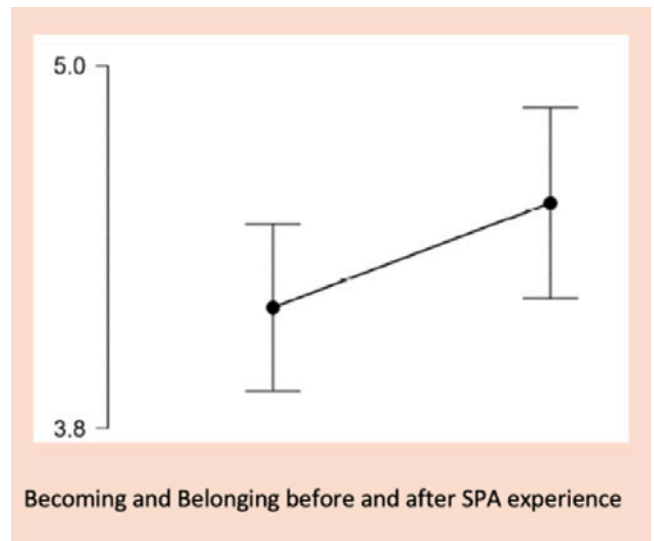
*The 1 day a week experience was very important to building relationships with students and connecting with staff. It also allowed for additional planning and training time in preparation for practicums. (2021)*

## 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 'demolish all the nerves'. 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 indicated a small to medium effect before and after the program relating to the PSTs' sense of becoming and belonging to the profession.



*Becoming and Belonging*

Results showed a small to medium effect indicating an increase in becoming and belonging before vs. after program (Cohen's  $d = .325$ ,  $p < .05$ )

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

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

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

In addition, the survey provided more detailed understanding about components of the partnership and how they helped, including the one day a week experience, the block placement, the SPC mentoring, and the support from school staff, especially those in leadership roles. These are discussed in the following sections.

## The one day a week and block placement experiences

The PSTs were surveyed during their one day a week experience and then after their block placements. The one day a week experience provided an important segue for the PSTs as they began to connect to their students,



schools and staff in the schools. The table below suggests the one day a week experiences were of significant or great importance in assisting the majority of 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 foundation understanding of Catholic school settings (although for one PST, this area was not ranked very high). The PSTs were also given the opportunity to include self-defined categories and rank them. A pattern is evident across these self-defined categories around the area of developing relationships. This correlates with feeling welcome at the school and understanding the culture of the school.

**Table 3: 1 day a week, importance in understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to their school (1 = no importance, 5 = of great importance) data point during final block placement.**

Area	1	2	3	4	5
developing your understanding of the teaching profession			2	9	14
developing your understanding of Catholic school contexts		1	5	8	11
helping you feel welcome at the school			3	9	13
helping you understand the particular culture at your school			2	9	14
helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession			6	7	11
Relationship with peers (self defined category)					1
Relationship with students (self defined category)					1
Professional relationships (self defined category)					1
Building relationship with students (self defined category)				1	
Helping to understand students (self defined category)				1	

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

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

Activity	1	2	3	4	5
developing your understanding of the teaching profession				4	18
developing your understanding of Catholic school contexts			2	8	12
helping you feel welcome at the school		1		7	14
helping you understand the particular culture at your school		1		7	14
helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession		1	1	6	14

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

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

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

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

*is that I have built strong relationships with my students before my nine-week block begins. They all know me a teacher, and have begun to understand the person I am as a teacher. I also know my students and their characteristics. (2019)*

*It was a fantastic opportunity to develop relationships with students before the block placement commenced. It also allowed you to wrap your head around school procedures and the programming of particular days (ei. school assemblies, well-being Wednesdays etc) (2021)*

Many also discussed how the one-day a week experiences helped them feel welcome in the school, and allowed them to engage with activities that made them feel a part of the school community:

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

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

### The impact of the Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion

The Spiritual and Pedagogical 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 below indicates the impact of the SPC at two data points, during the one-day a week experiences, and at the end of the block experience.

**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.**

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	3	8	13		1		6	15
helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession		1	3	8	13	1		1	6	14
helping you understand the particular culture at your school	1		6	5	13	1		1	6	14
reducing levels of anxiety about your school experience		1	3	8	13			1	7	15
Understanding and applying restorative justice practices (self defined)					1					

In most categories (except culture of the school), 84% of the PSTs rated the SPC as very successful or quite successful in the categories listed. During the second data collection point, this increased to 94% across all categories listed. Unfortunately, again the same PST who ranked low in the other categories, also ranked their SPC low at both data points and left no comments to indicate their reasons. Considering this was the only PST ranking low at the second data point, overall this aspect of the project is highly successful.

The interview and survey comment data suggested 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:

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

*SPA mentor made himself available to come in on multiple occasions and observe my teaching. He*

*was far more considerate of context and teaching expectations, and gave constructive and relevant feedback, more so than previous placement 'mentors', was good to have an established connection, rather than a random university worker turn up out of the blue.*

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

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

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

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 SPC scaffolded PSTs' abilities to pause and consciously reflect.

### Impact of school and leadership staff

The survey included two 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 table below).

**Table 7: How school staff have contributed to understanding of becoming a teacher and connecting to school (1 = no importance, 5 = of great importance)**

Area	First data point					Second data point				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Developing your understanding of the teaching profession			4	11	10	1	1	6	14	
Helping you feel welcome at the school	1	4	8	12		1	3	5	13	
Helping you understand the particular culture at your school			5	11	9	1	2	5	14	
Helping you feel welcome to the teaching profession	1	3	8	13		1	3	4	14	
In reducing levels of anxiety about your school experience	1	6	9	9		1	2	7	12	

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

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

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

Staff	Number of times mentioned
Supervising Teacher	19
Other teaching staff (particularly in same year level/CPA area)	14
APRE	10
Assistant Principal	8
Principal	4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Principal was also mentioned by the PSTs in the survey. In addition to the survey, the interview data with the PSTs, Companions, Supervising Teachers and Principals emphasised the importance of Principal support for the program, the school staff involved and Catholic Identity.

*The Principal is always checking in and making sure that I have everything that is needed. (PST, survey, 2020)*

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

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

*I guess I learnt, what I probably suspected [in relation to promoting Catholic Identity], and what I probably knew too, it was dependent on the school culture, the leadership team and the mentor teacher and I observed that happen to a Primary PST ... who had a fantastic school and her catholic identity was actually blossoming out (Companion, 2021)*



One principal also mentioned in their interview the importance of the principal, and other leadership staff, in the selection of school mentors, demonstrating their role in ensuring PSTs are provided with strong support networks:

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

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

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

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

### Summary for Theme 3

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

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

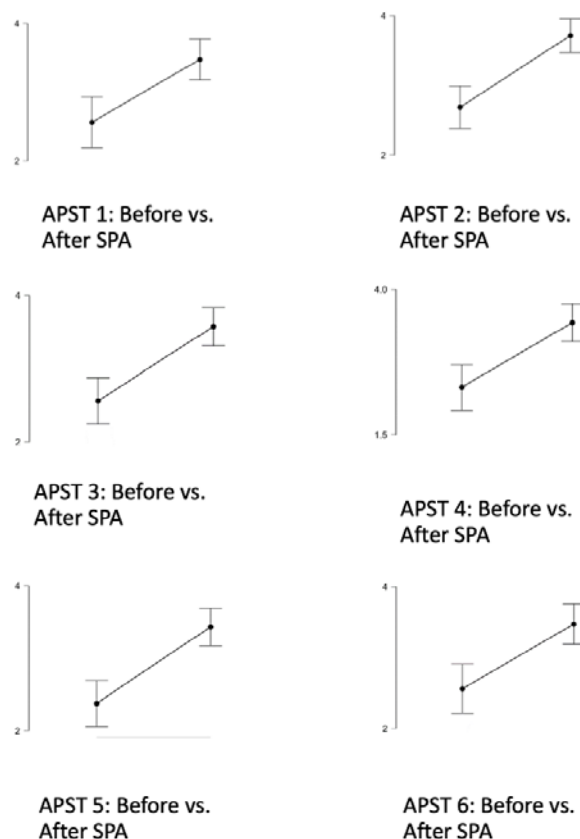
the university. Improving professional learning around andragogy and mentoring and developing more effective communication systems will assist with this area.

### > THEME 4 – IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PSTS' SELF-REPORTED COMPETENCY RELATED TO THE APSTs AND TEACHING SKILLS

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

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

#### Medium to very large impact on self-reported APST competencies from beginning to the end of SPA program



It can be seen that across all standards the PSTs indicated significant increases in self-reported competency in the APSTs.

When examining the end-point survey in more detail (see Appendix 3) 53% of the PSTs felt they exceed the requirements across the focus areas and 44% felt they met the focus areas. The remaining reported they had ‘just met’ the standard focus areas. No PSTs reported that they had not met any of the focus areas. Across the standards, PSTs only checked meeting or exceeding in 18 of the 33 focus areas. The focus areas that had over 70% of PSTs reporting exceeded were:

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

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

There are areas that require reflection and consideration for future implementation of the program. Overall, there appeared to be a pattern across the focus areas indicating the PSTs felt least confident with their knowledge around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects and concepts, working with parents/caregivers, and a small concern around

inclusivity/differentiation. These areas have been highlighted in the mentoring training sessions and will be strengthened in communication channels with stakeholders.

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

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 confirming and sharing with all parties involved. 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 Faith Mentors 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 led and engaged 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. The PSTs spent time exploring the value of these meetings in their interviews, and a sample of their thoughts about the experience is below:

*It was good to chat to the SPC. Not necessarily just about religion, but also that reflection process. How do you reflect, and stuff like that. I think the importance of having those deeper conversations. It doesn't have to be about your feelings. It's not about feelings. It's about the deeper conversations that get you to think a bit wider, a bit more deep. I think that was a really good thing. Not only my teaching profession, but just in general as well. (2019)*

*I liked the layout of it, the meetings and how it worked. Rather than what you get normally, which is like someone comes in and watches you and goes here's what you did good and here's what you did bad, here's some ideas, ok, bye...[the professional conversations] were so much more on the level like we were all equal... it really was a peer conversation, it was so good and I got so many great ideas, I would set goals instantly and they weren't like ridiculous goals...I found it way better than any university supervising visit I ever had...(2020)*

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

Feedback from Companions and PSTs suggest stronger communication to prepare PSTs for the professional conversations would be useful. In 2022 the university coordinator ran a webinar for PSTs, Companions and supervising teachers dedicated to the Professional Conversations. The team has also booked a professional videographer to record a start point and end point professional conversation, which will be accompanied with a completed professional conversation note sheet (using the template) and will be uploaded to the SPA website.

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

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

**Table 10: Were you able to continue to engage with your school?**

Yes	No	Undecided
7	1	1

The survey asked the PSTs to expand on the ways they continued to be involved, which is provided in Table 11. The PSTs were provided with a list of activities and then allowed an 'other' response category. Several provided

examples of additional ways they were involved. Only one PST was not able to continue to engage with their school and the stated reason was due to "family/personal problems".

**Table 11: Which of the following were you able to do during the COVID 19 isolation period?**

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

It was encouraging and uplifting to observe the support and flexibility provided to the PSTs during the COVID lockdown and beyond. Many PSTs reported both personal and professional growth during this period of time and were incredibly grateful to their schools for the support.

Some comments from the PST about this period of time included:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, during this time the SPC role was incredibly important to support each PST trying to negotiate a complex and difficult space. They demonstrated flexibility and shifted their support to phone or zoom meetings. Again, the comments from the PSTs were positive and grateful for this support as is shown in the example comment below:

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

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

support as COVID continues to disrupt schooling and has transformed the use of technology in schooling.

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

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

The findings from the survey suggest most of the PSTs found great value in the partnership program across several variables. The table below includes the PSTs' views on how the partnership program assisted them in strengthening various elements of being a teacher in the Catholic sector. Overall, the project received a rating of 4.41 out of 5.

**Table 12: How important was this partnership project in strengthening your (1=no importance, 5 = of great importance):**

Activity	1	2	3	4	5
Sense of Professional Identity as a teacher			1	4	16
Understanding of Catholic school settings		1	2	8	10
Ability to meet the Graduate APSTs			1	5	15
Ability to exceed in the Graduate APSTs			2	3	16
Understanding of the requirements of the GTPA	2		2	4	13
Ability to successfully complete the GTPA	2	1	1	5	11
Understanding of the teachers' role beyond the classroom				4	17

Across the variables listed, more than 70% of the respondents ranked great importance in the project's strengthening of their professional identities; their ability to meet and exceed in the APSTs and understanding that teaching goes beyond everyday classroom activities/interactions. Of the remaining variables, over 80% ranked 'understanding of Catholic school settings' and 'understanding the requirements of the GTPA' as high importance, and over 75% ranked 'ability to successfully complete the GTPA' as high importance. It is important



to note, that two and three out of the 21 who responded to this section of the survey rated the project as low in strengthening their understanding of the GTPA and how to successfully complete the GTPA. This indicates for these PSTs, the support structures were either not implemented correctly, or were not effective. This increases the need to find ways to engage more PSTs and supervising teachers in mentoring professional learning, and further develop an improved implementation of the professional conversation model.

The survey comments and interviews highlight the aspects of the partnership that were of value to the PSTs. A 2019 PST felt strengthening the alignment between ACU, BCE and Catholic schools would be “hugely beneficial”, and was something that could distinguish ACU as a Catholic University. He stated:

*alignment, or more efficient alignment would obviously be hugely beneficial...if you're doing a teaching degree in a different university that has no faith component whatsoever, you're not necessarily spiritual yourself. How do you have the skills in order to do that? Where's your knowledge on that stuff coming from? You can have no idea about religion whatsoever, but still get a job in that school...[this partnership is important] because you need to have that level of knowledge, and having more contact with you. Obviously that's a huge advantage. That partnership is absolutely integral. (2019)*

The 2019 SPC expressed great passion about the partnership, and the potential for future growth, expressing the belief that the partnership project “is a key new piece in what I'd call an arc of formation across the career of anyone in Brisbane Catholic Education”. She felt the partnership allowed the gradual development of the Catholic teacher from those critical years of pre-service through to an experienced teacher. She saw the program as helping the longevity of teachers in the profession:

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

The comments from the survey and the interviews from 2020 and 2021 cohorts connect and strengthen this evidence:

*The project has really been a boon in helping me feel confident and prepared for my upcoming practical*

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

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

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

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

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

This program increased PSTs' confidence and connection to the profession, particularly to Catholic school settings. For the majority of PSTs, this program gave them an edge, made them feel like a 'real' teacher, and greatly assisted transition into their first year of teaching.

An additional benefit of the partnership program was the support network created between the PSTs in the program, who were from a variety of courses. They were connected through the PD days at their schools, the mentoring day across the schools, and the focus group zoom meetings. Several commented on the importance of this network for them, with one PST stating:

*I found it difficult to find friends at university doing the MTeach as most of the courses were online. From being in this program, I have gained so many contacts and my 'critical friend' in Deborah and also Larry to chat about things that are a cause of stress or unknown. (2020)*

For this PST, her experience in the teaching degree had been one of isolation. This was exacerbated due to the COVID impact of shifting everything online. This partnership provided a space for her to connect with peers for friendship and professional conversations.

The interview conversations also highlighted the partnership benefits for contextualising university units into practice. The development of this partnership model was influenced by the concept 'living curriculum' (Marshall & Wilson, 2012). A living curriculum is a student-centred approach encouraging enquiry, problem solving, including linking theory to practice, and emphasises learning as a continuous cycle. It values learner agency and autonomy, as well as collaborative and reciprocal learning. This partnership allows a PST to expand their enquiry beyond the professional experience unit that is utilised as the main conduit between the university and school experience. The PSTs were also able to make connections between content and assessment in other units across the two semesters. One PST stated

*it was great to put it all in context, 100% gave it context, I understand now...you can use the language because you understand what they actually mean in practice, rather than like I pass this uni course but I am just going to get it. (2020)*

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

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

## > KEY CONCLUSIONS

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

### Theme 1 – Impact of the program on PSTs' Catholic and Spiritual Literacy

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

The majority also experienced increased engagement in Catholic understandings. Overall, there was significant reporting of increased active engagement and greatly increased engagement across all categories surveyed relating to Catholic understandings. For some PSTs, particular areas were still a challenge. These were:

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

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

- knowledge and experience of BCE systems and resources
- having an external support person, especially leading their professional conversations, provided an additional experienced voice and helped them to feel more at ease about placement experiences
- scaffolded the PSTs' critical reflexivity skills

### Theme 2 – Impact of program on PSTs' levels of anxiety about the teaching profession

There was a significant shift from high levels of anxiety before the PSTs' involvement with the partnership to

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

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

The one day a week experience helped PSTs' prepare for their block placement and connect to their Catholic school context and the teaching profession; The one day a week experiences were of great importance in assisting the PSTs to develop their understanding of the teaching profession, begin to feel welcome at the school and the teaching profession and understand the culture of the school. It was also important for their foundation 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. The Assistant Principal, APRE and other staff in the year level and CPA areas were also mentioned as having a significant impact on feeling welcome in the school, and providing learning experiences. The Principal was the next most important staff member 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. For a small number of PSTs, understanding the difference between a Catholic school and other settings was raised as an issue, and will be discussed at project meetings.

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

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

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

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

In addition, the formative assessment tool, 'professional conversations', developed for the partnership were highlighted by PSTs and the Companions as a highly significant distinguishing feature that separates the formative feedback provided in this partnership model as compared to standard professional experience blocks. Another finding from the 2020 project was that the majority of PSTs were able to continue to engage with their schools in various ways during the COVID 19 shutdown of schools. The examples provided by the PSTs are identified in the report. Many PSTs reported both personal and professional growth during this period of time and were incredibly grateful to their schools for the support. In addition, the Faith Companion role was incredibly important due to the support they provided to each PST. The Faith Companions demonstrated flexibility and shifted their support to phone or zoom meetings. The comments from the PSTs were incredibly positive. The understandings from this period were applied to the online capacities of the SPA project for 2021 and future years.

### **Theme 5 – Partnership growth and impact on systems across the 3 years**

More than 70% of the PSTs ranked high importance in the project's strengthening their professional identities; their

ability to meet and exceed in the APSTs and understanding that teaching goes beyond everyday classroom activities/interactions. Of the remaining variables, over 80% ranked 'understanding of Catholic school settings' and 'understanding the requirements of the GTPA' as high importance, and over 75% ranked 'ability to successfully complete the GTPA' as high importance. They also suggested the partnership enabled a support network to develop between the PSTs in the program and contextualisation of university units into practice. A small number of PSTs did not have benefit in relation to their GTPA, which will require strengthening of support mechanisms around this area.

Overall the evaluation of the SPA 2019–2021 data provided significant findings in relation to the benefits of a spiritual

and pedagogical partnership between ACU, BCE, Catholic schools and PSTs. The findings suggest PSTs have significantly decreased levels of anxiety, feel more connected to their schools and the Catholic sector in general, are provided greater opportunities to explore links between theory and practice, and overall feel much more prepared for the teaching profession. By the end of the program, they have developed a sense of belonging in the teaching profession, and the ability to express their understandings in sophisticated ways. The partnership program delivers significant benefits to the PSTs, and can continue to grow and improve. In 2022 the program grew significantly to include 47 final year PSTs across three universities, 12 second year PSTs from ACU, and a regional model in the Toowoomba Diocese. The recommendations for continued improvement are provided in the final section for this report.

Recommendation	2021 Reflection	2022 Implementation	2023 Planning
<b>Provide a professional learning or formative experience on spirituality for PSTs</b>	An overnight Spiritual Retreat is being offered to the PSTs and Companions (had to be cancelled due to COVID)	This ran in 2022 and received highly positive feedback.	Advertise more widely to encourage higher levels of participation.
<b>Provide greater mentoring for new SPCs joining the project as it expands</b>	Email templates and meetings were conducted with new Faith Mentors	A lead Spiritual and Pedagogical Companion was brought into the project to provide additional leadership and support  Regular meetings each Term with SPCs to provide support around documentation, expectations, mentoring and partnership work were run.	Provide a calendar at the commencement of the year with half day PD/project meetings each Term for Companions and Diocese representatives.
<b>Set up a Leadership Think Tank</b>	Commence Leadership Think Tank in Sem 2	The Leadership Think Tank had limited attendance in 2022. Suspected overload of school staff due to ongoing COVID issues.	Strengthen membership of the Leadership Think Tank and have some in person meetings. Advertise through the new membership database and report on the meetings through this forum.
<b>Extend the program to other cohorts in the education degree to allow gradual development across PST degrees.</b>	Discuss at Leadership Think Tank models for third year undergrad and first year MTeach	After consultation with all stakeholders it was decided to pilot a 2nd year undergraduate program	Pilot 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.



Recommendation	2021 reflection	2022 Implementation	2023 Planning
<b>Develop cross-institutional partnerships for Brisbane and rural connections</b>	Commence conversations with other universities	Piloting final year program in cross-institutional partnership program with USC and QUT.	Strengthen connection with USC and QUT – discuss research options (eg. ARC Linkage grant).
<b>Develop support mechanisms to address gaps identified in Key Finding 5 around Catholic Understandings</b>	Discuss at Leadership Think Tank	Piloting Signum Fidei program with undergraduate 2nd years. Introduced workshops for final years around Catholic identity, and workplace run by BCE.	Utilise membership database to report on research findings to schools. Meetings bringing together Diocese, school leaders and supervising teachers to discuss findings around Catholic Identity.  Strengthen links to Signum Fidei program, pilot with 1st year MTeach who are not completing GCRE.
<b>Develop support mechanisms to address gaps identified in Key Finding 7 around the APSTs</b>	Discuss at Leadership Think Tank	Modified Professional Conversation template, supervision templates, and observation templates for clearer connection to APSTs  Record a model professional conversation with documentation completed for sharing  Run a professional conversation workshop	Utilise membership database forum to advertise the professional conversation model  Run in-person mentoring training to increase up-take of professional learning  Develop an App for SPA mentoring training  Strengthen training for Companions on preparing schools and PSTs for professional conversations  Strengthen professional conversation workshop and run twice a year
<b>Improve communication between schools and the project</b>		Developed a SPA website to host all information and the mentoring PD.	Pilot a membership database to enable messages to be more regular, engaging and relevant for SPA members. Continue improvements to SPA website to include more PD opportunities and Alumni section.  Host formal meetings with principals (new and existing), eg. breakfast or dinner events

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 project had a three year agreement between ACU and BCE, with BCE funding confirmed and increasing for the next three years, Toowoomba Diocese confirmed and expanding, and negotiations with other QLD Diocese is ongoing. In addition, SPA program negotiations are commencing for other campuses of ACU. The benefits of the program are significant for the PSTs, the Catholic school sector and the teaching profession, and the continued support is a testament to its success so far.

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# > Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Participant Details (All ACU for 2019-2021 PST cohort)

Year	Participant	Degree	Total Number
2019	PST	Mteach (Sec)	4
2019	Supervising Teacher	N/A	4
2019	Companion	N/A	1
2019	Principal	N/A	1
2020	PST	Mteach (Sec)	4
2020	PST	BTeach (Primary)	3
2020	PST	BTeach (Secondary)	2
2020	Supervising Teacher	N/A	9
2020	Companion	N/A	2
2020	Principals	N/A	7
2021	PST	Mteach (Sec)	10
2021	PST	BTeach (Primary)	8
2021	PST	BTeach (Prim/EC)	4
2021	PST	BTeach (Secondary)	1
2021	Supervising Teacher	N/A	23
2021	Companion	N/A	5
2021	Principals	N/A	14

## 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



## Appendix 3

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.			11	10
1.2 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of research into how students learn and the implications for teaching.			11	10
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	12	8
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	13	6
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.		2	9	10
1.6 Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of legislative requirements and teaching strategies that support participation and learning of students with disability.		1	13	7
2.1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the concepts, substance and structure of the content and teaching strategies of the teaching area.			6	15
2.2 Organise content into an effective learning and teaching sequence.			4	17
2.3 Use curriculum, assessment and reporting knowledge to design learning sequences and lesson plans.			6	15
2.4 Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.		3	13	5
2.5 Know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching areas.			7	14
2.6 Implement teaching strategies for using ICT to expand curriculum learning opportunities for students.			6	15
3.1 Set learning goals that provide achievable challenges for students of varying abilities and characteristics.			7	14
3.2 Plan lesson sequences using knowledge of student learning, content and effective teaching strategies.			7	14
3.3 Include a range of teaching strategies.		1	6	14
3.4 Demonstrate knowledge of a range of resources, including ICT, that engage students in their learning.			6	15
3.5 Demonstrate a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to support student engagement.			10	11

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.		2	9	10
3.7 Describe a broad range of strategies for involving parents/carers in the educative process.		3	12	6
4.1 Identify strategies to support inclusive student participation and engagement in classroom activities		2	8	11
4.2 Demonstrate the capacity to organise classroom activities and provide clear directions.			7	14
4.3 Demonstrate knowledge of practical approaches to manage challenging behaviour.			13	8
4.4 Describe strategies that support students' wellbeing and safety working within school and/or system, curriculum and legislative requirements.		1	12	8
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	10	10
5.1 Demonstrate understanding of assessment strategies, including informal and formal, diagnostic, formative and summative approaches to assess student learning.		2	8	11
5.2 Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of providing timely and appropriate feedback to students about their learning.			9	12
5.3 Demonstrate understanding of assessment moderation and its application to support consistent and comparable judgements of student learning.		1	9	11
5.4 Demonstrate the capacity to interpret student assessment data to evaluate student learning and modify teaching practice.		1	9	11
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	14	6
6.1 Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers in identifying professional learning needs.			11	10
6.2 Understand the relevant and appropriate sources of professional learning for teachers.			12	9
6.3 Seek and apply constructive feedback from supervisors and teachers to improve teaching practices.			4	17
6.4 Demonstrate an understanding of the rationale for continued professional learning and the implications for improved student learning.			10	11





“

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

”





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