



Report on the 'Developing Catholic Identity for PSTs: faith companion mentoring during final school professional experience' Project

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Executive summary

The purpose of this pilot project was to evaluate the potential benefits of having an external Faith Companion mentor for pre-service teachers in Catholic school settings. The pilot included the researcher/university coordinator, BCE Faith Companion, four pre-service teachers, their supervisors and the Principal at one Catholic school. The pilot project spanned a 6 week period and addressed the following research questions:

- how can a partnership between a university, school and faith companion contribute to PSTs' sense of themselves as teacher professionals in a 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 longevity in the profession?

The findings illustrated the benefits, as well as areas that can be strengthened in a Faith Companion mentoring partnership program. A summary of each key finding, which also identifies benefits is outlined below:

Key finding 1- All PSTs experienced growth in relation to their understanding of spirituality in Catholic schools

All PSTs experienced growth. The areas of growth included:

- a deeper understanding of what Catholic schools focus on;
- ability to critically reflect on Catholic faith and personal spirituality;
- ability to integrate faith into curriculum areas;
- understanding of the pastoral care aspect of Catholic schools;
- understanding the importance of the concept of community in Catholic schools

Key finding 2 – The Faith Companion guided students and their supervisors and helped them critically reflect on spirituality

The findings demonstrated the ways the Faith Companion opened space for deep reflection and critical thought about their own spirituality, the variety of Catholic faith expressions and what it means to teach in a Catholic school. Some of the key ways the Faith Companion encouraged this reflection was through shared narrative and the use of strategic and probing questions.

An added, and unexpected, outcome from the pilot project was the impact on the supervising teachers. The reflective questioning style used by the Faith Companion during the group meetings allowed them to engage with multiple perspectives on faith, and encouraged them to think critically about their own faith and their identities as teachers in a Catholic school context.

Key finding 3 – The Faith Companion Program may help PSTs transition into Catholic (and Faith based) settings

The Faith Companion Program provided PSTs with understandings of Catholic settings that could help transition into these settings as a teacher. Specifically relating to clearing any

misconceptions, relieving pressure and anxiety, and opening the potential to desire and access Catholic schools as an option for employment.

Key finding 4 – What does it mean to be a teacher in a Catholic school – “this is so different depending on which school you’re in”

The findings suggest there can be significant variability across Catholic schools in relation to the visibility of the Catholic faith in the whole school and classroom contexts. While this was observed, it is important to consider contexts of change in schools, as was also identified by the Principal and supervising teachers, as this can impact the ways faith is visible (or not) in schools.

Key finding 5 - An extended period of time in the program and schools would strengthen the benefits

All participants suggested more time would increase the benefits for everyone. It was suggested that an extended period of time would allow the PSTs to encounter more faith-based events and activities, more time to reflect on gaps in knowledge, and greater opportunities to engage with multiple voices across the university, school and BCE contexts.

Key finding 6 – Further support for supervising teachers in the program would strengthen the benefits

Some of the PSTs suggested having supervising teachers who were able to engage in dialogue about spirituality would have helped them in this program. The supervising teachers also identified a desire, sparked by their involvement, to have more mentoring, space and time to engage with their own spiritual journey. One also felt some professional learning on mentoring the PSTs and university assessment requirements would have been helpful.

Key finding 7 – Partnership Programs are important in aligning systems and knowledge: “that partnership is absolutely integral”

All participants argued that the partnership between ACU, BCE and Catholic schools was important. The reasons stated were:

- it provides greater alignment between university, BCE and Catholic school expectations;
- it is a unique partnership that distinguishes ACU from other universities, due to the faith cross over between the university, BCE and Catholic schools;
- it allows dialogic knowledge and cultural exchange between the educational settings and the PSTs;
- it has potential for growth to more year levels in the degree, which would enable gradual development in understanding Catholic faith and spirituality.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations coming out of this pilot project, some of which are being used in planning and implementation for the 2020 project.

- Extend the school experience for PSTs to allow more engagement with the various events and celebrations of faith;
- Incorporate more contact opportunities with the Faith Companion;
- Incorporate more structured reflection and spiritually formative opportunities, which may include utilising online tools like blogs;
- Incorporate more interaction with school APRE (which a longer placement experience allows);
- Provide both professional learning and spiritually formative experiences on spirituality for PSTs;
- Provide more connection between university, BCE and supervising teachers, including mentoring/working with adult learners professional learning;
- Provide more connection between the Faith Companion and supervising teachers;
- Explore the role of the Faith Companion and develop a role statement;
- Extend the program to other cohorts in the education degree to allow gradual development across PST degrees. There will need to be dialogic discussion between stakeholders to consider how to do this;
- Set up a steering committee/working party with representatives from the Catholic schools, BCE and ACU to evaluate the partnership program and make recommendations. If the projects extends to include cohorts across the ACU degree, a student representative would also be beneficial.

Introduction and context

Background

This report outlines the findings from the 2019 pilot project 'Developing Catholic Identity for PSTs: faith companion mentoring during final school professional experience' with a small research grant funding from the Brisbane Catholic Education office. This project focused specifically on strengthening PSTs' understanding of Catholic spirituality, mission and identity and aligned with the BCE priority to develop and maintain an employment force, while supporting schools and staff in BCE's priority area of sustaining Strong Catholic Identities.

Australia is becoming an increasingly secularized society, creating challenges for Catholic institutions 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. Most recently of these, 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 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, older 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 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 will provide 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 ‘Faith Companion’ who will help PSTs 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 into their own pedagogical expertise in Catholic schools. It will also strengthen the university’s Catholic partnerships and provide pre-service teachers with an authentic, contextualized and embedded Catholic experience reflecting the goal of ACU as an authentic Catholic University. As has been indicated in preliminary data from interviews in the ACU/BCE pilot project currently underway, 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 Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) report and researchers in the field advocate for school-university partnerships that assist in transitioning PSTs from university programs to the teaching profession (TEMAG, 2014; Allen, Howells, & Radford, 2013; Grudnoff, Haigh & Mackisack, 2016). The project leader’s work in university-Catholic system partnerships while

based in Victoria, suggests 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 (publications under review). 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 Faith 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 abilities to include these perspectives into their discipline area, their own spiritual awareness and growth and assess the partnership structures used to develop PST professional skills needed for transitioning into work (particularly in the Catholic sector) as a practising teacher.

This pilot research project concentrated on the mentoring aspect of PST experience, in particular mentoring around what it means to teach in a Catholic school, Catholic identity and developing one's own spiritual identity. To do this, a partnership was developed between the university researcher, one BCE school and a 'faith companion' from the BCE. The diagram below represents the integral relationships between all contexts. This team worked with four final year PSTs before, during and after their professional experience to address the following research questions:

- how can a partnership between a university, school and faith companion contribute to PSTs' sense of themselves as teacher professionals in a 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 longevity in the profession?

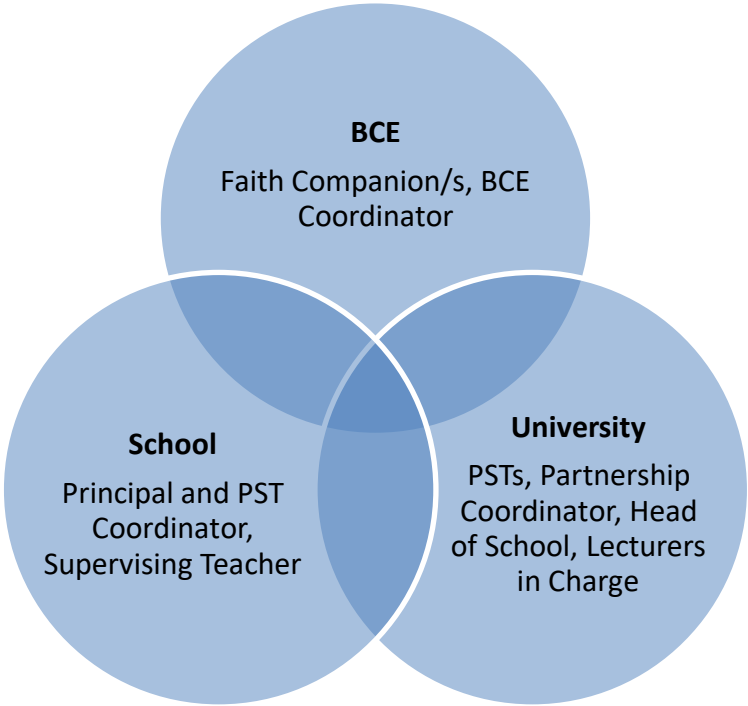


Figure 1: The integral relationship between all parties in the Faith Companion Mentoring Project

The role and approach of the Faith Companion is pivotal and requires some specific mention with regard to the parameters of the role in this pilot. In sustaining Catholic identity within the contemporary landscape, formation, in particular, spiritual and theological formation, is now widely accepted as the lodestone. 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 Faith 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 teaching in a Catholic school both nurtures and sustains the teaching vocation itself (Downey, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Neal, 2000; Rolph, 1991; Simone, 2004).

Thus, in this pilot project, the faith companion 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. It is a relational, process and person-oriented role, companionship the pre-service teacher in their own meaning-making and community context.

Methodology and data

Methodology

Qualitative Intrinsic Case study

Due to the pilot nature of the project and small number of participants, the research utilised qualitative intrinsic case study methodology (Bhattacharya, 2017; Stake, 1995) and a professional becoming conceptual lens (Gutierrez, 2016; Scanlon 2011).

As part of the intrinsic case study method, various forms of data were collected over a 6 week period in Semester 2, 2019. The data was in the form of one on one interviews and faith mentoring sessions, focus groups, and researcher observation. The triangulation of this data across the project and through the multiple voices, developed an understanding of the impact of a 'faith companion' for the four PSTs, and their supervising teachers. The interviews were designed to act as a conversation, or what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) call the 'inter-view' process. The focus groups were run by the Faith Companion with all PSTs and their supervising teachers. The one on one mentoring sessions were run by the Faith Companion. The researcher ran the one on one interviews and observed both the focus group sessions and the one on one faith mentoring sessions. The interviews, focus group sessions and one on one faith mentoring sessions were transcribed by an external agency, and then member checked by the participants.

The Participants

4 Master of Teaching (MTeach) PSTs

4 supervising teachers

1 BCE employee (faith companion)

1 Principal

The PSTs were in their final placement, which included a four week block in the school. There were a variety of religious backgrounds in the four participants, with one identifying as Catholic, one identifying as Sikh and two as non-religious. From the non-religious PSTs, one had attended Catholic school in their own schooling, and had family working in Catholic schools. This is summarised in the chart below:

PST	Religious Affiliation
Andrew	Catholic
Arju	Sikh
Kelly	Non-religious
Helen	Non-religious, attended Catholic school and family working in Catholic schools

There was a similar spread with the supervising teachers, with two identifying as Catholic and two non-religious. As the focus is on the PSTs, the affiliations of the supervising teachers are not provided in more detail.

Data collection

Data Collection occurred across several stages. These are outlined below:

Stages of Data Collection

First stage - Prior to professional experience in schools

- 20 minute interview with PST participants prior to contact with Faith Companion,
- 20 minute interview with Faith Companion
- Faith companion meet with each PST prior to professional experience for 20 minutes (principal researcher observation);
- Faith companion and university lecturer meet with PST supervisors and principal to discuss project (recorded discussion);

Second stage - During Professional Experience

- Faith companion visits school each fortnight, spends 20 minutes with each PST and then 30 minute group session with PSTs and supervising teachers
- Record one on one session between Faith Companion and PST (+ principal researcher observation)
- Record group session between Faith Companion, PSTs and their supervisors (+ principal researcher observation)
- 20 minute one on one interview with PSTs

Final stage - After Professional Experience

- Faith companion meet with each PST (principal researcher observation + recorded session)
- Interview with Principal
- Interview with each supervising teacher
- Interview with faith companion

Data analysis approach

For the purpose of this project report, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012) was used to code the transcriptions from the interviews, focus group and one on one faith mentoring sessions. Thematic analysis allows the identification, analysis and reporting of themes that arise from transcribed data. Across the data and voices, patterns and themes emerged which provided an understanding of the key impact areas of the project. These are outlined in the 'Key findings' section.

Ethical considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the Universities HREC and from BCE Research office. The Faith Companion's role at BCE was taken into consideration when designing and implementing the research project to avoid conflicts of interest.

Limitations

As this was a pilot, only one school and 4 PSTs were a part of the study. This limits the data to a small cohort. The intention of the research was not to generalise to a larger population, but rather to develop an initial understanding of the impact a Faith Companion may have in assisting PSTs' developing understanding of faith and working in a Catholic setting. The data from the pilot project was sufficient to meet the goals of the research.

Key findings

After analysing the transcripts, there were multiple recurring themes relating to the impact of the project, and improvements that would increase impact in future implementations of the Faith Companion model. Overall the analysis identified seven key findings relating to;

- the PST's growth in understanding the context of Catholic schools;

- the PST and supervisors' development of critical reflection skills around spirituality;
- the importance of recognising the differences between Catholic school settings and their engagement with faith;
- the critical importance of effective mentoring for longevity in teaching and the role a faith companion can play in assisting the transition into Catholic settings;
- the need for the program to be extended in length of time;
- the need to provide support mechanisms and training for supervising teachers; and
- the importance of partnership programs in aligning systems for strong pre-service and in-service teacher outcomes.

Key finding 1- All PSTs experienced growth in relation to their understanding of spirituality in Catholic schools

The PSTs in the program all experienced growth to varying degrees. In a conversation with the Faith Companion, the needs of the PSTs, and their potential for growth was clear from the first encounter. She stated "*the enormous diversity of where they were really struck me, struck me early. But that was good. I think it was good because we could – you could really see*". The initial conversations with the PSTs prior to their experience in the pilot school provided a baseline to see their growth, with the Faith Companion saying "*it made it easier to see if there were any changes, and it made it easier to see whether the engagement with them was effective or not, in terms of where they were. Because really, they were needing quite different things*". This initial assessment allowed the Faith Companion to target the individual mentoring support in line with the PSTs' needs in relation to their understanding of spirituality in Catholic schools.

The PSTs' own critical reflections during and after the project also illustrated their levels of growth. Andrew was very passionate about spirituality expressing the belief that "*faith encourages that deeper level of reflection in relation to the world*", and that "*religion might be one of the most important issues in the world right now*". When asked if he felt the project had deepened his understanding of what it means to teach in a Catholic school, his response was "*yeah, big time*", particularly due to the space provided to critically discuss faith based issues and ideas with the Faith Companion, which is discussed in Key Finding 2. He felt that he could integrate faith into his curriculum area and that the pastoral care duty of the school was the most critical aspect of Catholic schools, saying "*you can weave it in and get students to ask questions, how it relates to religion, and what not... what it should look like is not dodging those questions*", and "*it needs to be way more pastoral care than it is teaching.... That's where it's important*". His passion for supporting his students' spiritual growth and reflection was clear in the initial interview and became more clearly articulated as the project progressed. The Faith Companion described this growth as "*deepened reflection that was already there. Deepened, not a little bit, deepened greatly. Took it to a different level*".

Arju initially expressed a concern about her limited understanding or experience with Catholic Faith and Catholic schools. She was hesitant to apply for the project as she thought she would

need to be Catholic, “most of us I would say, hesitated to realise that even if we know that we don’t need to be Catholic we still hesitated sometimes to apply”. As she moved through the project, her confidence grew with her stating in an interview “I was like, I can do this”. She also began to find synergies between her own faith and the Catholic mission of the school. She began to understand that

Catholic identity is the soul of a Catholic school which guides the values and teaching process in the school. For example, I knew that there are people who welcome all, who love all, but they pay so much attention to wellbeing, so through pastoral cares, through prayers and things like that.

She also began to explore cross curricula connections between her discipline area curriculum and spirituality, and identified the way the project helped her make those connections, saying

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, it’s always that we don’t think like this. This project I think made me think, that’s why I could do these things.

Arju’s interest in the operation of a Catholic school, encouraged through this project, also helped her feel comfortable to ask her supervisor questions. Her supervisor came to the realisation that their role not only includes assisting PSTs in the discipline area, but also what it means to be in a Catholic school:

Arju, she was always asking questions about, “What’s happening now? What’s happening now?” So, it even made me take a step back and think about, ‘Oh, yeah, I can see that they actually don’t know why we’re doing all this’. So, definitely made me more aware that when I have a PST in the future I should get them all comfortable with the Catholic surroundings if they don’t know what that is and they’re not experienced with it.

Arju’s growth was significant considering the short period of time in contact with the Faith Companion and school. The Faith Companion noted “it opened up the whole world for them” as she mentored Arju through her understanding of what it means to teach in a Catholic context.

Kelly was also hesitant to join the project initially as she had no experience with Catholicism or Catholic school settings, and thought she had to be Catholic to teach in a secondary Catholic school. Once in the project, she found the mentoring she received from the Faith Companion, her supervising teacher and the university coordinator meant she could “get that extra bit of feedback...there was a closer connection”. She also 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.

Kelly was enthusiastic and very open to learning about Catholicism and spirituality. She was at the beginning of her learning journey in this space. The Faith Companion noticed that the project helped Kelly develop “*a further openness, so that in a Catholic school, she will be someone who can be nurtured and taken forward*”. By the end of the project, Kelly listed Catholic school contexts as her priority setting in her search for teaching jobs, as she felt welcomed and wanted to continue her spiritual learning journey.

The fourth PST, Helen, did not seem to experience as much growth as the other three, and the Faith Companion felt that Helen had difficulty engaging with the program “*from the get go*”. The researcher also observed some resistance during the mentoring sessions to reflect deeply on faith and Catholicism. Helen also stated at various points that she felt her understandings of Catholic settings was sufficient. While some resistance was observed by the Faith Companion and researcher, Helen did state in the final interview that she felt the experience overall “*solidified the understanding that I have about the Catholic identity in Catholic spirituality*”, and her interpretation of what defines a Catholic school context is “*the school’s culture as a whole and how they operate with their students in terms of trying to create an environment that’s very supportive*”. While creating a supportive environment is the aim of all schools, which tends to make this statement generic and not identifying specific growth in understanding of Catholic specific settings, Helen’s statement identifies her own perception of growth.

Key finding 2 – The Faith Companion guided students and their supervisors and helped them critically reflect on spirituality

A key element driving this partnership project is the role of the Faith Companion in guiding and mentoring the students through the experience. The Faith Companion also incidentally provided support to the supervising teachers, leading to a future recommendation for more support of school staff working with PSTs (see Key Finding 7).

The PSTs, supervising teachers and Faith Companion all reflected on the ways the mentoring process enabled critical reflection on working in a Catholic setting and spirituality. The PSTs reflected on the ways the Faith Companion enabled them to think deeper and more often about spirituality. For example Andrew stated the Faith Companion 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*”. He also stated that he enjoyed the conversations as they were

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 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 for my teaching profession, but just in general as well.

Both Arju and Kelly expressed similar sentiments as Andrew. Arju stated

The Faith Companion asked me questions, made me think more about what a Catholic school, what is teaching in a Catholic school mean. What should a Catholic teacher do? Things like that, it was the questioning. When I sent her my reflection notes and then we had a conversation with her where she explained to me what makes a Catholic school

different from other schools and what should I expect if I start teaching in a Catholic school.

And

The Faith Companion really helped me. I was thinking in the direction and now I'm clear. You can follow your faith as well as teach the values of the Catholic community to the students, I think you can do that. For someone like me it was spiritual, that's why I'd want to.

Kelly also valued the style of questions and dialogue in the Faith Companion mentoring sessions stating:

It was just a way of opening up my dialogue with what I think about what Catholic faith is. She wasn't giving me answers. She was just making me broaden my opinions or voicing my opinions of what Catholic faith is. I think that helped.

All three PSTs strengthened their abilities to critically reflect on Catholic faith and Catholic school settings, as well as spirituality in a larger context. They attributed this growth to the guidance provided by the Faith Companion.

Andrew also suggested that having the Faith Companion allows consistency in faith-based mentoring across PST experiences in Catholic settings:

the faith companion is obviously a lot easier to handpick, but your mentor teachers, the amount of discrepancy across the board. That's probably unreliable, but I also argue that they're not necessary. It's not necessary that your mentor teacher is the person that guides you spiritually, because the chances are that they're not going to, whereas you could still have that faith companion, and you can tell your supervising teacher, "I've got a faith companion", and that you're trying out things, and every supervising teacher's always happy to do that.

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.

These statements highlight the significant impact the Faith Companion had on the PSTs' experiences in a Catholic school setting and beyond. They expressed the view that a Faith Companion, external to the school, allows them to ask questions they may not feel comfortable to ask their supervising teacher, and be prompted to think deeper. The Faith Companion enabled the PSTs to engage with local, national and global contexts of Catholicism and spirituality in a way that most likely would not be possible with their supervising teachers.

The supervising teachers also reflected not only on the opportunities for their PSTs to critically reflect on spirituality, but in addition how this short experience also helped them. A common theme across the supervising teachers was the way the group discussions allowed both the PSTs and supervising teachers to engage with multiple perspectives about Catholicism and spirituality:

I think it was useful looking at other people's perspectives on Catholic identity in a school where it's not discussed much, it's not really openly discussed in the staffroom apart from maybe Monday morning briefings...it's refreshing to hear someone else's view or their experiences, you go I actually can relate to that...when the Faith Companion was here asking us questions, those probing, guiding questions helped reflect. You were actually thinking well, where's that sit with me, those faith based situations.

I did like the group meetings because you were able to discuss what everyone was thinking and feeling and then the praccies as well were able to have that shared experience with what was going on. No. Definitely with the other teachers in the room, I learned stuff from them that I had never heard of before. So, it was a good experience to be able to open up because we don't really have staff have time to sit down and talk about those sort of things. So, it was good to have the opportunity being in a different setting to do that.

she's [the Faith Companion] a very important part of it of the process and that her bringing us all together and then posing those discussion questions and leading the discussion was really where it became noticeably a different prac.

The supervising teachers enjoyed hearing their colleagues speak about faith and spirituality, and being provided with prompting questions and guidance on a topic that does not appear to be commonly discussed beyond the "Monday morning briefings".

The Faith Companion also commented on the usefulness of the group meetings;

group sessions are an opportunity for the PSTs to hear the journeys of the supervising teachers. I think that was really valuable. That was probably the only – because they [the supervisors] didn't share it with those PSTs, clearly, at any other times. So, I think it was a good opportunity for them to hear, with us there as mediators, facilitators, to hear how they answered some of those questions.

One supervising teacher also commented on the multiple levels of support provided in the project through having both the Faith Companion for faith mentoring, as well as the Academic Coordinator who supported the students in their final placement teacher performance assessment task (GTPA) and provided feedback on classroom teaching:

I like that you came every week as well. That gave students something to make sure they were on it every week and ready to go rather than it's just a one-time supervising teacher comes and helps... So, two came in together which was good.

The extra support integral to this partnership model from both the Faith Mentor and Academic Coordinator enabled the PSTs to reflect more deeply and critically on spirituality as well as their teaching pedagogies. An added bonus was the opportunity for the supervising teachers to also deepen their reflection on spirituality and how to work with PSTs in Catholic school contexts.

Key finding 3 – The Faith Companion Program may help PSTs transition into Catholic (and Faith based) settings

At the beginning and end of the project the PSTs were asked which setting they would prefer to work in. Initially two stated the Catholic sector as their preference, and the other two were leaning towards state based contexts. By the end of the project, all four stated their preference would be Catholic contexts, with one stating “*I just feel a lot more open to even working at a Catholic school. I feel a lot more open to that now*”. They were also asked if they felt the Faith Companion program may help them with their transition into a Catholic setting, and if it may assist with longevity in the career. Arju’s response suggested a strong belief in the potential of the program to help transition and longevity:

Yes of course, because during the year I had some misconception. If you start your career with those misconceptions then all those things that we were having before, then you feel more pressurised.

And Kelly felt providing the program for PSTs, rather than waiting until they were in the profession, was important for longevity “*having more professionals involved in your experience is only going to increase your longevity, in my opinion*”. She also felt the program affords PSTs more choice and understanding of their choices:

I think it would open up more avenues for people, especially if they knew these things. The earlier the better, I think, because I closed myself off, not purposefully, but just because I thought I didn’t have what was required to be in a Catholic setting.

Kelly expressed the desire to be in Catholic settings from the beginning of the project as she aligned with the strong pastoral care and community connections. She felt disempowered initially due to her lack of understanding of the Catholic faith, and had “*closed*” herself off. This lack of agency is not a positive way to start the profession for PSTs. The Faith Mentoring project can help PSTs to feel confident in and connected to Catholic school contexts.

Andrew also agreed that Faith Companions can assist in the transition. In addition he provided a cautionary consideration relating to continued support once in a school. He stated:

there’s two points. One, yes, because they’d be able to do what they’re supposed to do better. However, will that be, one, encouraged by the school, like seen to be an important part of the school? And, two, would that fit in with the rest of the culture within the teachers is another question.

Overall these PSTs found the experience provided them with experiences and understandings that they felt would help them transition into a Catholic school setting. They also felt these experiences would assist with filling what are sometimes significant gaps in understanding what

it means to be a teacher, and more specifically a Catholic school teacher, in the first year, hence reducing stress and anxiety.

Key finding 4 – What does it mean to be a teacher in a Catholic school – “this is so different depending on which school you’re in”

Andrew’s critical reflection noted in Key Finding 3 leads into Key Finding 4. Several of the PSTs, and some of the supervising teachers, identified variability in the visibility of faith in Catholic schools and two of the PSTs spent considerable time with the Faith Companion trying to grasp an understanding of what the key differences are in the everyday operation of a Catholic school compared to a state school.

Andrew was very passionate about the importance of a Catholic school embracing and displaying faith and spirituality. He argued:

It needs to look like the teacher values not just Catholic identity, but spirituality in general, and that it is shown in your teaching... you need to have the education of your own spirituality, and plus the spirituality across different religions

He compared his experiences across his Catholic school placements and found there to be great variability saying “this is so different depending on which school you’re in”. He suggested in one setting

It just didn’t seem to be anything there. If I walked in there, not knowing if it was a faith-based school or not, I wouldn’t be able to tell you. I’d think it’s just a public school.

His experience in another Catholic setting was quite different:

They modelled to the students the importance, and what you can use out of it. So, one school, because the teachers were so strong with it, [they were] that model to the students.

As Andrew already had a strong connection to his faith, and a passion to engage in deep critical reflection on spirituality, he found a stronger connection to Catholic settings in which there was an embedded and sustained focus on faith.

Both Arju and Kelly struggled at times to understand the difference between Catholic schools and non-faith based schools. Kelly expressed the need to see evidence of the differences, and how it influenced whole school as well as everyday practices, particularly when observing and conversing with her supervising teachers and other teachers:

You know when we were asking 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.” I found that really strange considering a lot of the teachers were saying, “If we’re welcoming graduate teachers into the fold they need to buy into the culture,” was what

was being said a lot. Then it just seemed like it transitioned into, that's how you would transition into any other school.

Arju's critical reflection illustrated a wider and proactive perspective on ways to find the Catholic identity and mission of a school. Her comment suggests a teacher needs to be aware of the resources around them, and utilise them:

a Catholic school they provide you with a framework, now it's up to you how you take the values, how you take on things, and then how you incorporate those within your teaching and how you pass those values to your students.... 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.

The support of an external Faith Companion allows PSTs to critically reflect on the experiences they have, or perceived gaps. A Faith 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.

The perspectives of the supervising teachers and Principal provided context around the changing culture of the school as they are creating a more visible connection to faith and the Charism of the school. The Principal commented on the changes she was making in the school since her recent appointment, stating:

I came into a school, where I felt our Catholic identity was quite secondary to other things, and so I've tried to do your visible signs. There's been a big focus on our Mercy Charism. The staff as well. We had a Mercy sister in a couple of times, to work with the staff, and one day with the girls as well, our leaders. I'm trying to ramp it up to embed it further.

The supervising teachers also noted the visible changes and stronger focus on the Mercy Charism.

for a period of time when I first started there wasn't really a Charism or we didn't touch into it. Since [Principal] come on board though, it's touching back in with those mercy base and bringing that Mercy Charism back in... When you come in you're trying to change a culture it's a gradual process.

I think that for this school that we are going on a little bit of a journey of strengthening that catholic identity. So, when I first come here, I actually was, like, actually, it's not really catholic. It's more there's spirituality and it is a social justice and that, that's doesn't belong just to be catholic, that's with I think anyone with some sort of belief and just about being a good person. That all fits into that. I'm finding now, probably, there is a bit more of that leaning towards what it is to be a – what is the catholic identity of the school and who is Catherine McAuley and what does she mean to us and, probably, I do feel like I've got a bit of gap there in my knowledge.

While the PSTs identified variability, it is important to keep in mind a school's context and the journeys both staff and students have in those contexts. It also illustrates the need for leaders

to have the strength and courage required to guide staff in community, whole school and class level engagement with faith and Charism of the school.

Key finding 5 - An extended period of time in the program and schools would strengthen the benefits

Across all participants in the study there was resounding agreement that an extended period of time in which the PST could engage with their school and the Faith Companion would strengthen the PSTs' deep understanding of what it means to teach in a Catholic school, and spirituality. The Principal reflected on the project and her conversations with the supervising teachers suggesting to "*lengthen it. I think all the teachers said it was too short*". Both the PSTs and supervising teachers provided more detail around why it was too short and in what ways a longer experience could be helpful. For example Arju wanted "*more time with the faith companion*", and Kelly felt more time in the school would help her discover her gaps:

If I was in a setting for an extended period of time where I need to get to know the school and the students and what it's about, then I would be able to develop questions that I want answered in the context of the school.

Kelly also highlighted the importance of having experiences across the whole school year, rather than mid-term or half a term in a school, "*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*". Lengthening the time would allow the PSTs to engage more with the Faith Companion, attend more spiritual and significant events at the school, and view important routines such as the start of year professional learning, spiritual retreats and setting of expectations.

The supervising teachers suggested a more extended time would strengthen the PSTs' connection to the school, their space for reflection and discussion and their overall development as a teacher:

And, that connection then will be stronger because they might time their day that one day they come in on Grade 8 reflection day or they might come in on a sport carnival day or an assembly day where we're celebrating things or the feast day of Catherine McAuley... they only really get eight weeks in the classroom before we go and even though they've got their other degree and everything, all the life experience we go here's eight weeks, let's jump into a team.

I think the big blocking factor there too is just how quick the prac is. When it's only four weeks, you're really focused on getting what needs to be done done in terms of hitting your criteria, collecting your data...so, it kind of makes it hard for them to also be focused on this other aspect I suppose.

One supervising teacher provided suggestions about what could be done in the extended time saying:

if we had of had a longer time or even something that we were asked to do specifically in between the meetings...if the PSTs are given a more explicit target of what they need to do...they're just given prompts as – so, we – what we want you to do is ask your teacher about these things 'cause I didn't really hear anything from Kelly about how she

was feeling about in Catholic school again until those meetings. It didn't come up in conversation so maybe if they were prompted to raise the issue...I mean, again, it does come back to that short time and about feeling comfortable 'cause it does take a week for you – I'm sure for them to settle in and feel really comfortable

She also suggested an extended period of time would be even more beneficial if the PSTs were able to start their experience early in the year, and continue moving back and forth between university and the school:

I think that's where there are benefits to coming – to doing a prac in a school early on and then going back to uni and then coming back to the same school even later on in the year that you can invest a bit more time in, okay, well this is what didn't work so well or this is really what I needed to work on so when I go back I get another go at it instead of just feeling like, that didn't work very well.

Having the opportunity to move between university and the school across multiple points of the schooling year allows the PSTs to “invest a bit more time” in the reflection process. It also allows them to engage with multiple voices across both the school and university context to deepen their reflection on practice. This is particularly important in the final year of study, as the PSTs can begin the process of transitioning from pre-service understandings of teaching, to early career understandings of teaching.

The Faith Companion also noted the desire to extend the experience for this cohort of PSTs, as this would provide more opportunities for the Faith Companion to connect with the PSTs, and more time for the PSTs to reflect on questions and concerns:

it would have been good to see more of it, more of them, see them more often. Or have, even though the option was open to contact me at any time, they didn't choose to do that. Now, that would be part of just being overwhelmed. They did twice, two of them. And, that was genuine and it was open. It was about their questions, so, that was great.

Across all participants in the study there was agreement that the experience was too short, and an extended time across the whole year with engagement at both school and university would significantly help all in the program. This was the most significant recommendations expressed by the participants.

Key finding 6 – Further support for supervising teachers in the program would strengthen the benefits

During the interviews, particularly the final interviews, some PSTs raised concern about the level of engagement with faith or understanding of spirituality in the supervising teachers. Andrew was most reflective about this concern, however made it clear that “*that's not to say they aren't a good teacher*”. He had an expectation that teachers in Catholic or any faith based setting would have reflected on faith and have some level of spirituality, arguing:

I thought that almost a prerequisite of teaching within a faith-based school is you have to have some level of spirituality. Some sort of outlook on the world that is going to have some sort of religious component behind it, but you don't have to believe in God. You don't have to believe in Jesus. You don't have to believe in anything other than the fact that there's something deeper than, "I wake up in the morning and I go do this." You know what I mean? There's got to be a reason why you're doing it. You need to have that, because, that's what distinguishes it between you and every other school.

He saw this as an important differentiation between faith based school settings and non-faith based settings. He went on to identify the kinds of issues that can arise and consequences for students if teachers do not have connection, or have had time to explore their spirituality:

In relation to being a teacher in a faith-based school, I didn't think they had the level of depth that they needed in their own spirituality. They kept talking about, "Well, we do prayer in the morning." Well, cool. From what I saw, the students felt like it was a chore. It was a chore like, "Do I have to do it this morning?" It had no meaning behind it whatsoever. You'd be able to promote it that they do, but you have to find something that they'll engage in. I think largely, a lot of the opinions that were coming up was talking about I'm not Catholic, so I don't understand really. So, I don't really incorporate that. It's not about being Catholic. It's about being spiritual.

For Andrew, he not only hoped for a supervising teacher to have expertise in their curriculum area, but also in a faith setting to have views about spirituality and incorporate engaging ways for their students to explore faith and spirituality. He was not concerned about a particular religion, but felt the supervising teachers should have some connection to spirituality. For him, this was a critical element distinguishing faith based settings from other schools, and it was something that attracted him to teaching in faith based settings.

There was also acknowledgement by some of the supervising teachers and the Principal that they would have liked to be more involved, and that there should be some mentoring available for the supervising teachers. As the program progressed, many suggested they would like to have the space and time to explore their spirituality, be more involved in the program, have more involvement from religious teachers in the school and to explore mentoring for PSTs in general, with one saying "*Just anything to help us help them always. And, there's always new things to learn and everything changes all the time*". Another reflected on having greater involvement in the program for herself and other religious staff at the school:

Supervising teacher: I don't know, it felt like an add on at times rather than that integration.

Researcher: Yeah. So, one thing we thought about, there wasn't a lot of connection with you guys, with supervising teachers.

Supervising teacher: Well, even with – are we getting involved in the program as well or the campus minister becoming involved and I know those four weeks we might have had these spirituality things where we had a retreat or we had a reflection day or there was opportunities for them to see faith in action rather than just teachers who may not necessarily even be religion teachers or be involved in that aspect as much. Whereas you have that campus minister, the APRE or religion teachers, even.

The Principal also reflected on additional opportunities for staff to be involved in spiritual conversations, and their own involvement:

I wanted the opportunity for some staff, to be able to have conversations should they choose, and an opportunity to dip into that aspect of their life, and not feel threatened by that.

I would like to just put the time in my calendar and actually get engaged more deeply. I feel like I've missed out.

The Faith Companion commented on the need for additional support for the supervising teachers relating to spirituality, companioning in a Catholic school and what that means and may look like. She suggested “*there’s probably a bit of work there*”.

It would appear the feedback from the PSTs, the supervising teachers, the Principal and the Faith Companion suggest a desire for more opportunities for supervising teachers to be involved in the project in a greater way, including mentoring around spirituality and working with PSTs to mentor them into Catholic school settings.

Key finding 7 – Partnership Programs are important in aligning systems and knowledge: “that partnership is absolutely integral”

School, university and system collaborations are not possible without shared visions and clear partnership goals. This particular partnership between ACU, BCE and a Catholic school was viewed as “*absolutely integral*” in aligning expectations about the knowledge and skills required in the teaching profession, particularly in a Catholic school setting. The Principal felt the partnership provided “*a great opportunity, to tap into each other’s expertise and potential*”. The PSTs also saw the value of the partnership. Kelly viewed the partnership as “*something unique that ACU can offer to its students*” and Helen believed “*that kind of faith mentor companionship and the partnership between ACU in that kind of capacity is definitely something I feel like people would benefit quite strongly from*”. Andrew 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.

Despite the short duration of the pilot project, the PSTs benefitted from the partnership and could envisage the future potential of the project for other ACU PSTs.

The supervising teachers also identified several advantages coming out of the partnership, such as making critical reflection on teaching in Catholic schools a focus, connecting the supervisors to university assessment requirements, and creating stronger connections between university work and “*the reality*” of school settings. The three comments below from three supervisors provide a snapshot of their views on these elements of the partnership:

I think it's a useful partnership because it gets us thinking about what we're actually doing in the Catholic school. So, sometimes in the midst of all, everything that gets lost along the way, so it brings us back to think, 'What are we doing?' and was it making us a Catholic school? Are we still back to our roots and are we still making sure we're doing these things to give us that identity? So, I definitely think that's a good starting point that this whole big project has started to make us think about. So, if more people could be involved in that, have a conversation on a wide scale, that's definitely something that could improve the school mind.

the PSTs are looking to get into schools, so certainly the connection is worth maintaining. Even in terms of when you talk to us about the data they had to collect and everything like that, I had no idea about the change, what the new system was or anything. All I had to draw on was my previous experiences, and then my previous experiences with PSTs.

thinking back to my experience when I was at uni, there was a big disconnect between university life and then teaching. And, even though the lecturers were all ex-teachers and the tutors were ex-teachers, but still that doesn't prepare you for the reality of it. And, prac does a lot in order to prepare you for that, but it's still a jump to going to first year in a classroom. So, I feel like anything that kind of lessens that jump would be a big benefit.

The supervising teachers identified the multifaceted benefits of the Faith Companion partnership project, in that the connection allowed dialogic interactions between staff from the university and faith leaders at BCE. This is very different to the standard short visit by a tertiary supervisor, who is usually a sessional staff hired purely for the purpose of supporting the PST during their placement block.

The Faith Companion 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.

But even more so, growing them to be all that they can possibly be and fulfilled in themselves and having a sense of the why and the who of what they're doing, as well as the what and the how. So, that's how we explain both of those – so, I explain both of

those dimensions. The professional being the what and the how, and the formation being the who and why.

The Faith Companion viewed the partnership as critical, and saw the immediate benefits from the pilot project, as well as envisaging the future potential for greater collaboration.

Key conclusions

The purpose of this pilot project was to evaluate the potential benefits of having an external Faith Companion mentor for pre-service teachers in Catholic school settings. The findings have illustrated the benefits, as well as areas that can be strengthened. A summary of each key finding is outlined below:

Key finding 1- All PSTs experienced growth in relation to their understanding of spirituality in Catholic schools

The growth across the PST cohort varied not only in level of understanding, but also the ways of understanding Catholic settings. The growth expressed by PSTs and observed in the PSTs by the other participants in the project included:

- a deeper understanding of what Catholic schools focus on;
- ability to critically reflect on Catholic faith and spirituality;
- ability to integrate faith into curriculum areas;
- understanding of the pastoral care aspect of Catholic schools;
- understanding the importance of the notion of community in Catholic schools

It was encouraging to see growth in the PSTs in these areas considering the short length of the pilot partnership project.

Key finding 2 – The Faith Companion guided students and their supervisors and helped them critically reflect on spirituality

The Faith Companion was the core interest of this pilot project. It was important to evaluate how a Faith Companion may be able to guide and support the PSTs during their experience in Catholic schools. The findings from this pilot project demonstrated the ways the Faith Companion opened space for deep reflection and critical thought about teaching in a Catholic school and spirituality. Some of the key ways the Faith Companion encouraged this reflection was through the use of strategic and probing questions. The PSTs appreciated the dialogic exchanges with an experienced leader in Faith and Companionship.

An added, and unexpected outcome from the pilot project was the impact on the supervising teachers. Their comments suggest the reflective questioning style used by the Faith Companion during the group meetings allowed them to engage with multiple perspectives on faith, and encouraged them to think critically about their own faith and their identities as teachers in a Catholic school context.

Key finding 3 – The Faith Companion Program may help PSTs transition into Catholic (and Faith based) settings

The PSTs comments suggest the Faith Companion Program provided them with understandings of Catholic settings that would help transition into these settings as a teacher. Specifically the kinds of areas helping the transition related to clearing any misconceptions, relieving pressure and anxiety, and opening the potential to access Catholic schools as an option for employment.

Key finding 4 – What does it mean to be a teacher in a Catholic school – “this is so different depending on which school you’re in”

The comments from some of the PSTs and supervising teachers suggested that there can be significant variability across Catholic schools in relation to the visibility of the Catholic faith in the whole school and classroom contexts. While this was observed, it is important to consider contexts of change in schools, as was also identified by the Principal and supervising teachers, as this can impact the ways faith is visible (or not) in schools.

Key finding 5 - An extended period of time in the program and schools would strengthen the benefits

The most significant feedback coming through the interviews on ways to improve the program related to the length of the program. All participants suggested more time would increase the benefits for everyone. It was suggested that an extended period of time would allow the PSTs to encounter more faith based events and activities, more time to reflect on gaps in knowledge, and greater opportunities to engage with multiple voices across the university, school and BCE contexts.

Key finding 6 – Further support for supervising teachers in the program would strengthen the benefits

Some of the PSTs suggested having supervising teachers who were able to engage in dialogue about spirituality would have helped them in this program. The supervising teachers also identified a desire, sparked by their involvement, to have more mentoring, space and time to engage with their own spiritual journey. One also felt some professional learning on mentoring the PSTs and university assessment requirements would have been helpful. The findings from this pilot suggest further support for the supervising teachers in deep reflection on spirituality and mentoring adult learners would be helpful.

Key finding 7 – Partnership Programs are important in aligning systems and knowledge: “that partnership is absolutely integral”

All participants argued that the partnership between ACU, BCE and Catholic schools was important. The reasons stated were:

- it provides greater alignment between university, BCE and Catholic school expectations;
- it is a unique partnership that distinguishes ACU from other universities, due to the faith cross over between the university, BCE and Catholic schools;
- it allows dialogic knowledge exchange between the educational settings and the PSTs;

- it has potential for growth to more year levels in the degree, which would enable gradual development in understanding Catholic faith and spirituality.

Overall, this pilot project provided significant findings in relation to the benefits of a Faith Companion partnership between ACU, BCE, Catholic schools and PSTs. The findings suggest PSTs and supervising teachers can experience significant growth in their understandings of what it means to be a teacher in a Catholic school, their ability to critically reflect on spirituality, and ways to enact faith into their own classrooms and the whole school setting.

Recommendations

There are several recommendations coming out of this pilot project, some of which are being used in the 2020 planning and implementation stage.

- Extend the school experience for PSTs to allow more engagement with the various events and celebrations of faith;.
- Incorporate more contact opportunities with the Faith Companion;
- Incorporate more structured reflection opportunities, which may include utilising online tools like blogs;
- Incorporate more interaction with school APR (which a longer placement experience allows);
- Provide a professional learning or formative experience on spirituality for PSTs;
- Provide more connection between university and supervising teachers, including mentoring/working with adult learners professional learning;
- Explore the role of the Faith Companion and develop a role statement;
- Extend the program to other cohorts in the education degree to allow gradual development across PST degrees. There will need to be dialogic discussion between stakeholders to consider how to do this;
- Set up a steering committee/working party with representatives from the Catholic schools, BCE and ACU to evaluate the partnership program and make recommendations. If the projects extends to include cohorts across the ACU degree, a student representative would also be beneficial.

The feedback from this project has already had an impact on the next implementation. The Faith Companion Partnership project has been extended to include experiences across the full school year, including the faith and professional learning days prior to school start up at the beginning of the year. The PSTs will attend their school once a week in addition to their scheduled official placement blocks. Due to the extended experience in 2020, the Faith Companions will have greater contact across the whole year with the PSTs, and more contact with them during their school experience, enabling greater opportunities for deep reflection.

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