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## **Do Preservice Teachers Believe They use the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers to Inform Their Professional Learning?**

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*Abstract: Professional standards for teachers are being used around the globe to educate, certify, promote and regulate the ongoing professional practice and learning of teachers. In Australia, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), in part, aim to support the professional learning of teachers from the Graduate to Lead Teacher career stages. Preservice teachers have been identified as being positive about the APST, and their uptake with the standards at the Graduate level appears to be increasing over time. However, our research shows that preservice teachers are not making the connection between the APST and their professional learning. This paper will present seminal research detailing trends in preservice teacher use of the APST aligned to their professional learning within the theoretical and practical components of their study.*

### **Introduction**

Professional teaching standards have been implemented in many countries around the world as a quality assurance mechanism (Call, 2018). In 2011, Barack Obama provided federal incentives to entice regulatory bodies in the United States to implement teaching performance standards (Toch, 2016). In 2012, the UK established a national set of standards to assess the performance of preservice and employed teachers, with the national inspectors of schools charged with overseeing "...the extent to which the Teachers Standards are being met when assessing the quality of teaching in all schools" (Department of Education, 2014, p.1).

During this timeframe, the Australian Federal Government established the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) and tasked it with "the single biggest priority" of developing and implementing a national set of teaching standards. It was determined that these standards would serve as performance indicators and provide a quality assurance mechanism that would increase public confidence in teaching (AITSL, 2011, p.72). Through a process of stakeholder collaboration, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) were developed to assess and appraise preservice and in-service teachers across four career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Accomplished and Lead Teacher. AITSL identified that the intentions for the APST were to: i) guide reform of the accreditation of initial teacher education programs of study; ii) form a part of teacher registration processes; iii) underpin the transition of teachers between each of the career stages; and iv) inform the professional learning of teachers (AITSL, 2013). The fact that three of these four aims are regulatory in nature shows that the focus of AITSL's professional standards agenda is weighted in favour of regulation rather than responsiveness. The message to educators was

clear: professional standards for teachers were being implemented as a way for governments to manage and oversee teacher accountability and performance (Sachs, 2016).

In Australia, the APST were touted as the solution to educational issues. Yet as far back as 1998, Darling-Hammond asserted that teaching standards would not provide a magical solution to educational issues. Others argued that the implementation of teaching standards can lead to the downgrading of other important dimensions within teaching (Hargreaves, 2000). More recently, Tuinamuana built on this understanding of teaching standards with research identifying that teachers admitted to “playing the game” of the teaching standards agenda to pacify their leadership team, and that teaching standards, and the consequential levels of accountability, have resulted in depressed standards of learning and teaching quality (2011, p.78). Some researchers have gone as far as to argue that the introduction of professional standards as a regulatory mechanism has had a de-professionalising effect and has reduced the quality of teaching (Alexander, 2010; Leonard, 2012).

Regardless of the potential consequences to teachers and teaching, AITSL stated that the implementation of the APST focussed on regulation in the initial stages to ensure uptake (AITSL, 2016a). Clearly, for the APST to be successful, they required teacher engagement, but Ingvarson (2010) argued that this process is hindered by the connection between teaching standards, accountability and compliance. Sachs (2016) identifies the implementation of the APST as a regulatory mechanism as an opportunity missed, as their potential “to be a catalyst for professional learning is not being realised” (Sachs, 2016, p.417). However, aligning standards more closely to professional learning also has its critics. As pointed out in Timperley’s background paper for AITSL: “A potential problem with using standards as the basis for professional learning...is that they may come to be seen as a series of boxes to be ticked.” (Timperley, 2011, p.5). Conversely, the problem with using professional standards as a basis for accountability may simply result in different boxes being ticked.

### **Accountability in Initial Teacher Education**

In Australia, the accountability discourse provided the rationale for introducing professional standards for teachers within Initial Teacher Education (ITE). In 2014, the then Federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, stated that “there is evidence that our education system is not up to scratch...standards are too low at Education institutions – everyone passes” (Pyne, 2014). His response to this perceived issue was to establish the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG). TEMAG was tasked with identifying ways in which “...initial teacher education in Australia could be improved to better prepare new teachers” (TEMAG, 2014, p.1). In 2014, TEMAG published its report on the state of ITE in Australia. This report, *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*, placed emphasis on the need to enact transformational change, including 38 recommendations spanning ITE program accreditation through to preservice teacher assessment. The key proposals for enabling transformational change within ITE included: a strengthened quality assurance process; the integration of theory and practice; and a robust assurance of classroom readiness. Importantly, the TEMAG report also highlighted “inadequate application of the standards” and emphasised the “sense of urgency to immediately commence implementing actions to lift the quality of initial teacher education” (TEMAG, 2014, p.5). The 38 recommendations within the TEMAG report were heavily weighted towards compliance mechanisms.

As a consequence of the TEMAG recommendations, AITSL developed a set of Program Standards for ITE. Whilst these ITE Program Standards and the APST requirements

are set nationally by AITSL, they are approved at a State or Territory level by regulatory authorities through stringent accreditation processes. ITE providers are required to complete lengthy and rigorous accreditation and reaccreditation processes for each ITE program of study against AITSL's Program Standards. Within this process, every facet of a program of study is documented against the Program Standards, which are explicitly linked to the APST. During the accreditation process, ITE providers must identify "where each Graduate Teacher Standard is taught, practised and assessed" (AITSL, 2016b, p.6). The Program Standards provide the minimum standard expected for program accreditation and consequently, the minimum standard for the graduate teacher. The recommendations within the 2014 TEMAG report have had a direct impact on ITE programming and accreditation. But they have also had direct consequences for preservice teachers who are required to use the APST throughout their program of study.

### **Preservice Teachers and the APST**

TEMAG recommendation number 25 states that "higher education providers assess all preservice teachers against the Graduate level of the Professional Standards" (TEMAG, 2014, p.33). In Queensland, the authors' location, preservice teachers are required to prove they have met the APST at the Graduate Level, within various scenarios throughout their ITE program of study, to qualify as a teacher. One scenario in which preservice teachers must demonstrate that they have met the APST is within their university-based assessment items. Throughout their program of study, preservice teachers undertake courses that are aligned to the APST. The assessment tasks within these courses enable preservice teachers to demonstrate that, over their entire program of study, they have successfully achieved all the APST. These assessment tasks feature in ITE program accreditation processes, where ITE providers must submit evidence of preservice teacher performance and evidence of graduate outcomes. This evidence must include a demonstration of "preservice teachers' positive impact on student learning" (AITSL, 2019, p.9).

A second scenario occurs during the mandated Professional Experience (PEX) placements in schools. During these PEX placements, preservice teachers are assessed against the APST. Importantly, in their final PEX they are assessed against most of the APST within the Final Professional Experience Report (FPER). During this final PEX preservice teachers must demonstrate that they are at or above the Graduate level to pass. The Supervising Teacher, usually the classroom teacher in which the PEX is being undertaken, is the primary assessor of the FPER. Moderation of this assessment is carried out by representatives from the ITE provider.

The final scenario in which preservice teachers must demonstrate that they have met the APST at the Graduate level is via the recently mandated Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) within their final PEX. This assessment requires preservice teachers to demonstrate their ability to plan, deliver and assess student learning within a context specific sequence of lessons. The regulatory authority in Queensland, the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT), has placed great significance on this assessment as a quality assurance mechanism, describing the TPA as a way to ensure "classroom ready teachers in all Queensland schools and build high standards for the future of the profession and quality of student outcomes" (QCT, 2019). These quality assurance assessment tasks, which are underpinned by the APST, have positioned preservice teachers at the forefront of the APST implementation process.

In the years since the implementation of the APST, AITSL has undertaken two stakeholder surveys, the first in 2013 and the second in 2015. In the publication of the 2015

survey results, AITSL identified that preservice teachers were the most positive sub-set of all the stakeholder groups about the APST. Preservice teachers were also found to be the most likely stakeholder group to implement the APST (AITSL, 2016a) because they perceive the APST “to be valuable to them and to have a greater impact on their practice when compared to other educators” (AITSL, 2015, p.2). The 2015 AITSL survey also noted that preservice teachers had high levels of confidence in using the APST as part of their learning at university and during their PEx. Because of this insight, AITSL recommended that the preservice teachers’ knowledgeable position could be leveraged for the improvement of experienced teachers’ APST awareness (AITSL, 2016a). However, AITSL’s surveys offer only a limited understanding of preservice teacher use of the APST. AITSL does not offer information about the extent of this use or provide any evidence that preservice teachers are using the APST as AITSL intended them to be used, namely, as a framework to guide professional learning. Preservice teachers may appear to be knowledgeable about the APST, but it is unclear what this level of knowledge is, and how they apply it to their practice. If preservice teachers’ awareness of the APST is to be used to leverage APST awareness amongst existing teachers, then the extent of their APST use as a professional learning tool needs to be considered.

### **The APST and Professional Learning**

In Australia, the alignment between professional standards and professional learning is no more evident than in the document entitled the *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (AITSL, 2018). This document makes it clear that a teacher’s work is underpinned by the APST. Specifically, it makes explicit connections between the APST being the foundation of a teacher’s professional learning and the outcomes of their students as “successful, confident and creative, active and informed citizens” (AITSL, 2018, p.4). Whilst the connection between a teacher’s use of professional standards and improved student outcomes has not been proven, this charter is underpinned by this assumption.

The charter spells out that AITSL, as an agency of the Australian Federal Government, views professional learning as a venture in the collaboration of teachers, school leaders, systems leaders and policymakers. Yet, the charter fails to reference ITE or preservice teachers. This is a significant omission. It demonstrates an inconsistency in the messages about preservice teacher professional learning, no more so than when we consider that it was AITSL itself who identified that preservice teachers could play an important part in the leveraging of the APST as a professional learning tool for their more experienced counterparts (AITSL, 2016a). This issue also highlights the chasm between learning to be a teacher and learning as a teacher. It presents a disconnect in preparing teachers to be life-long learners and in demonstrating, to preservice teachers, how professional learning works in practice.

If preservice teachers are to help promote the aims of the APST among experienced teachers, they need to have high levels of APST awareness prior to graduation. They need to know about the APST, connect them to their practice and apply them to their own professional learning needs and experiences. They need to use the APST as a professional learning tool, as well as a mechanism to assist them in navigating their professional trajectories from the very start of their professional learning journey within ITE programs of study. However, little is known about preservice teacher use of the APST for professional learning.

Research specifically relating to preservice teachers and the APST can be seen in the work of Hudson et al. (2016). This research offered early and valuable insight into preservice teacher perceptions of specific APST descriptors. Here, the researchers reported that final year preservice teachers identified gaps in their teacher preparation aligned to specific APST descriptors due to, in part, a lack of experience of these APST during school-based experiences. Curwood and O'Grady (2015) made the connection between preservice teacher identity and professional learning, while Wrench and Paige (2020) asserted that practitioner inquiry is integral to the professional learning of preservice teachers. While Egeberg et al. (2016) highlight the connection between professional standards and developing the classroom management practices of teachers and preservice teachers. Generally, it is the ongoing professional learning of qualified teachers that has received investigation (Hudson et al., 2016; Mockler, 2013; Mockler, 2020).

Whilst the literature on professional standards and professional learning is wide-ranging, the research specifically connecting preservice teachers, the APST and professional learning is limited. Furthermore, it is not evident within the literature how preservice teachers use the APST in relation to their own professional learning, and if their approaches to professional learning align with AITSL's intentions for the APST. In light of this gap in the literature, this paper will provide an analysis of the extent of preservice teacher use of the APST for professional learning. In particular, we will identify trends in preservice teacher perceptions of the extent of their use of the APST as a professional learning tool.

## **Research Design**

### **Methodology**

This research took place at a regional university in Queensland, Australia. The focus of our research was on identifying trends in preservice teacher perceptions of the extent of their use of the APST as a professional learning tool. The analysis of trends can provide insight into the extent to which preservice teachers may be likely to use the APST in the future. Using case study methodology, we set out to determine trends in the perceptions of groups of preservice teachers at each year level within four-year Initial Teacher Education programs of study during 2015, 2016 and 2017. Individual perceptions were not tracked. For our case study, a quantitative methodology was adopted using Repeated Cross-sectional Study Design. This methodology supports the identification of trends within groups over time (Rafferty et al., 2015). Convenience sampling was adopted, with time and place boundaries being set around this single case.

### **Data Collection**

Surveys are an efficient method to determine individual perspectives to better understand cohort trends (our aim in the study) and to enable comparisons to be made between the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of participants (Katz, 2015; Woodcock, 2011). The development of a survey, similar to that used by AITSL, also enabled comparisons to be made to the AITSL survey results. An online survey platform was used to develop, duplicate and disseminate the survey and to obtain consent. Three factors were taken into account in the design of the data collection method: i) a consistent annual data collection period to provide reliability within the research context; ii) a strategic concern not to impact on preservice teachers workload during potentially busy or stressful periods, such as during peak assessment times; and iii) a limited time frame to enhance participation rates and

encourage the completion of the surveys. On average 12.94% of preservice teachers undertaking a four-year ITE program of study in Primary or Secondary education, at the regional Queensland university, participated in the surveys (see Table 1).

Year of Research	Year of Study	Participant Rate Population Size		
		<i>n</i>	<i>n%</i>	<i>N%</i>
2015	First	30	32.60	4.03
	Second	10	10.86	1.34
	Third	22	23.91	2.95
	Fourth	30	32.60	4.03
<b>Total n</b>		<b>92</b>	<b>30.36</b>	<b>12.35%</b>
2016	First	27	22.13	3.52
	Second	16	13.11	2.08
	Third	45	36.88	5.86
	Fourth	34	27.86	4.43
<b>Total n</b>		<b>122</b>	<b>40.26</b>	<b>15.89%</b>
2017	First	44	49.43	5.30
	Second	23	25.84	2.77
	Third	7	7.86	0.84
	Fourth	15	16.85	1.80
<b>Total n</b>		<b>89</b>	<b>29.37</b>	<b>10.71%</b>
<b>Total N</b>		<b>303</b>		<b>12.94%</b>

Table 1. Participation Rates

Ensuring ethical compliance, preservice teachers were not required to provide identifiers for participation in the survey which allowed for authentic participant responses (Creswell, 2009). The surveys were part of a larger research project and twelve questions out of thirty-five were pertinent to the research being reported here. The first question in the survey used an APST Awareness Continuum as a means of identifying preservice teachers' perceptions of the extent of their use of the APST set against AITSL's intentions for its use. The APST Awareness Continuum is a modified version of the Asia Literacy Continuum (Grainger, 2014; Grainger & Christie, 2016), and is used in this study to categorise skills, actions and knowledge to define a continuum of capability (see Table 2).

APST Unaware	APST Aware	APST Informed	APST Experienced	APST Expert
I do not know anything about the APST.	I know about the APST, but I have not used them.	I rarely/sometimes use the APST to inform my teaching goals. I know their purpose and how they relate to teaching.	I often use the APST to guide my teaching goals and I have begun to evidence them as part of my practice.	I always use the APST to track my teaching goals. I know my achievements at the graduate level, and I use them to guide my future practice.

Table 2. APST Awareness Continuum

The APST Awareness Continuum contains five continuous intervals, from *APST Unaware* to *APST Expert*, and documents the depth and breadth of APST awareness. The continuum reflects AITSL's professional learning aims and provides the means for preservice teachers to rate their awareness of the APST. It also serves as a guide for a preservice

teacher’s professional learning in ITE; as a means of reflecting on their current competencies; as a way of informing their future practice; and, as a pathway to measure their advances in their teaching knowledge, practice and engagement. The intervals between points on the continuum are not presumed to be equal, but rather portray a rank order (Jamieson, 2004). The discriminating differences between the criteria within the APST Awareness Continuum relate to frequency and type of use. Akin to the Asia Literacy Continuum, the APST Awareness Continuum recognises that preservice teachers who have not used the APST can still have a level of APST awareness and can therefore be recognised as *APST Aware*. Survey participants were asked to read through the APST Awareness Continuum and then identify their level of APST awareness.

The other pertinent questions used within this research adopted five-category response options to enable preservice teachers to rate their experiences and or perceptions (see Table 3). Five of these questions used unipolar endpoints from *Never* to *Always*, and Six questions used bipolar endpoints from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. As with the APST Awareness Continuum, the intervals between these category responses are not presumed to be equal but rather, are portrayed as a rank order.

Never to Always	To what extent do you use the APST in Lectures?
	To what extent do you use the APST in tutorials?
	To what extent do you use the APST during PEx?
	To what extent do you use the APST in assessments?
	To what extent do you use the APST for professional learning?
Strongly disagree to Strongly Agree	I am positive about the APST.
	I would like my lecturers to embed the APST into lecture content.
	I would like my tutors to embed the APST into tutorial content.
	I would like to learn more about the APST.
	I would like to attend additional APST support sessions.
	I believe that the APST is important to my teaching career.

**Table 3. Survey Questions**

## Results and Discussion

### Data Analysis

SPSS was used to organise the survey data after each iteration of data collection. Independent variables of the academic year (2015, 2016 and 2017) and preservice teacher year level in a program of study (first, second third and fourth) were included. For coding purposes, dependent variables with Likert categories and APST awareness responses were assigned a number, ‘*Never/Unaware/Strongly Disagree*’ being 1 and ‘*Always/Expert/Strongly Agree*’ being 5. The data for each question was recorded separately in SPSS and then cleansed to remove incomplete responses. Cronbach’s Alpha was used to determine the Alpha reliability coefficient for the questions relating to preservice teacher use of the APST in scenarios (.823) and for questions relating to preservice teacher attitudes to APST use (.906). Both were revealed to be *Good*. Descriptive Statistics (Crosstabulation and Frequencies) were utilised to analyse the data at the end of the three-year data collection period. Mean scores and percentages were used to identify trends over time.

### APST Awareness Level Trends

Analysis of the mean scores for all preservice teachers throughout the research demonstrated an upward trend in the APST awareness levels of preservice teachers from



those in their first to those in their fourth year of study (see Figure 1). Predictably, preservice teachers were least APST *Aware* in their first year of study and most APST *Aware* in their fourth year of study. APST Awareness levels were statistically significantly different between Year One and Year Three ( $p < .001$ ), One and Four ( $p < .001$ ) and Two and Four. ( $p < .001$ ). The least growth in APST awareness levels occurred between the second and third years of study with no statistical significance identified between these year levels. Overall, the results indicate little growth in APST awareness from the First (APST *Aware*) to the Fourth Year of study (APST *Informed*).

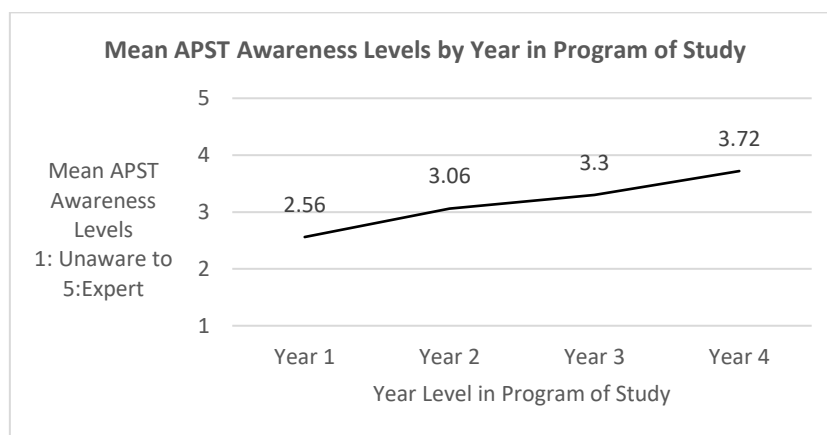


Figure 1. Preservice Teacher APST Awareness Trends by Year Level in Program of Study

Of the preservice teachers who participated in the APST awareness question, 7.6% identified as APST *Unaware* in 2015 (see Table 4). This reduced to 0% of preservice teachers identifying in this category by 2017. The fact that no preservice teachers identified as APST *Unaware* by 2017 indicates an upward trend in APST uptake. Similarly, the AITSL 2016 Final Report on the implementation of the APST also identified an upward trend in APST uptake (AITSL, 2016a). A contributing factor to this upward trend is that there has been a continuous increase in institutional APST awareness in the post TEMAG era. Institutional awareness has been driven by high levels of regulatory approaches attached to ITE program accreditation and reaccreditation against Program Standards. A consequence of greater APST alignment within programs of study has been an increase in the visibility of the APST to preservice teachers and their subsequent exposure to them within their courses and assessments.

However, APST uptake does not indicate the extent of preservice teacher use of the APST. Regardless of increased institutional APST awareness within the regional university where this research took place, we have identified that whilst there is an upward trend in APST uptake, there was a downward trend in preservice teachers identifying in the APST *Expert* category. Only 36.9% of preservice teachers perceived themselves to be working at APST *Experienced* or above. This percentage is strikingly similar to the AISTL survey in 2013, where 37% identified as being at the *Highly Knowledgeable* or APST *Expert* level. In 2015, 7.6% of preservice teachers in our research identified in the APST *Expert* category, with this percentage reducing to 2.2% by 2017. This information coupled with the downward trend in preservice teachers identifying as APST *Unaware* indicates a downward trend at the extreme levels of APST awareness (*Unaware* and *Expert*). The downward trend at the *Unaware* and *Expert* categories has resulted in an upward trend at the APST *Informed* level, which saw an upward trend from 23.9% in 2015 to 52.8% in 2017. When aligned to the APST Awareness Continuum descriptor, the APST *Informed* level indicates that preservice

teachers know the purpose of the APST and how the APST relate to their teaching, but they are only using the APST *Rarely/Sometimes* to inform their professional learning.

Yr.	Study Yr.	N	M (/5)	SD	% respondents				
					Unaware	Aware	Informed	Experienced	Expert
2015	1st	30	2.50	1.00	20.0%	26.7%	36.7%	16.6%	0.0%
	2nd	10	3.1	.87	0.0%	30.0%	30.0%	40.0%	0.0%
	3rd	22	3.4	.95	4.6%	13.6%	22.7%	54.5%	4.6%
	4th	30	3.9	.75	0.0%	3.3%	23.3%	53.3%	20.0%
2016	1st	27	2.33	1.00	25.9%	25.9%	37.0%	11.1%	0.0%
	2nd	16	3.06	.85	6.1%	12.4%	50.0%	31.2%	0.0%
	3rd	45	3.24	.64	0.0%	11.15	53.3%	35.6%	0.0%
	4th	34	3.67	.58	0.0%	0.0%	38.2%	55.9%	5.9%
2017	1st	44	2.86	.66	0.0%	29.5%	54.5%	15.9%	0.0%
	2nd	26	3.04	.70	0.0%	21.7%	52.2%	26.1%	0.0%
	3rd	7	3.28	.75	0.0%	14.3%	42.9%	42.9%	0.0%
	4th	15	3.60	.73	0.0%	0.0%	53.3%	33.3%	13.3%
TOTAL		303							

**Table 4. APST Awareness levels by year of research and year in program of study**

The overall results of this research indicate that preservice teacher APST awareness levels appear to languish at the APST *Informed* level ( $m=3.28$ ,  $SD.1.06$ ). Whilst this result demonstrates a positive trend towards improved APST use, the *Informed* level of APST awareness reflects the lowest level of APST *use* on the APST Awareness Continuum. The lower levels of APST awareness indicate either no awareness or awareness of the APST but not use.

#### Preservice Teachers' Use of the APST

Preservice teacher perceptions of their APST use within various scenarios provides valuable insight into their connections to the APST. A lack of connection to the APST is visible within lectures, tutorials, PEx, assessments and for professional learning (see Table 5). When preservice teachers were asked about their use of the APST within lectures, 18.8% identified that the APST were *Often* (17.5%) or *Always* (1.3%) embedded within lecture content, and 71.6% identified that they *Rarely* or *Sometimes* use the APST in lectures. Interestingly, these figures do not align with what preservice teachers indicate as their desired use of the APST, with 73.2% of preservice teachers stating that they would like lecturers to embed the APST into lecture content (see Table 5). Similarly, preservice teacher survey results showed a disparity between preservice teacher use and desired use of the APST in tutorials. Just 23.3% identified that they *Often* (21.5%) or *Always* (1.7%) use the APST in tutorials, whilst almost 76% desire use of the APST in this scenario.

These results indicate that preservice teachers are either not using the APST consistently in these contexts, or they are not aware when APST are embedded within the scenario. As previously stated, in Queensland, ITE providers must demonstrate that they provide opportunities for preservice teachers to be taught, have practice with and be assessed against the APST to ensure program accreditation. But there is no requirement that preservice teachers are made explicitly aware of the connection between these opportunities and the APST. AITSL states that time needs to be given to engage with the APST, interpret them,

develop a common language, engage in positive conversations around the APST on a personal and professional level, and identify aspirations aligned to the APST (AITSL, 2016a). For preservice teachers to be able to increase their APST awareness levels, they will need to be aware of when they are interacting with the APST within their courses. This conclusion is further validated by the fact 26% of preservice teachers who participated in the surveys stated that they *Never* or *Rarely* use the APST in these scenarios.

Survey Question		N	M	SD	% respondents				
					Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
To what extent do you use the APST in/for	Lectures?	303	2.89	2.47	9.25	25.1%	46.5%	17.5%	1.3%
	Tutorials?	303	4.04	.89	6.9%	19.5%	50.5%	21.5%	1.7%
	PEX?	303	3.39	1.21	9.9%	10.9%	29.0%	30.0%	19.8%
	Assessments?	303	3.21	.97	7.6%	9.9%	41.6%	35.0%	5.9%
	Professional Learning?	303	3.23	1.05	7.9%	11.25	42.4%	27.4%	10.9%

Survey Question		N	M	SD	% respondents				
					Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
I would like my lecturers to embed the APST into lecture content.		303	3.98	0.90	0.0%	7.3%	19.5%	40.9%	32.3%
I would like my tutors to embed the APST into tutorial content.		303	2.91	0.86	0.0%	6.6%	17.5%	40.6%	35.3%
I would like to learn more about the APST.		303	4.10	0.77	0.0%	1.05	22.45	41.6%	35.0%
I am positive about the APST.		303	4.07	0.73	0.0%	0.0%	23.4%	45.2%	31.4%
I would like to attend additional APST support sessions.		303	4.04	0.82	0.3%	3.6%	19.1%	44.9%	32.0%
I believe that the APST is important to my teaching career.		303	4.28	0.76	0.0%	0.7%	16.8%	35.6%	46.9%

Table 5. APST in Scenarios

Whilst our research has identified that preservice teachers perceive low levels of APST use, conversely, we have also identified that preservice teachers' attitudes towards the APST are high. When asked if they are positive about the APST, 76.9% of preservice teachers indicated that they *Agree/Strongly Agree* with the question. Predictably, 84% ( $M. 4.11. SD. 0.65$ ) of preservice teachers who are in their third and fourth years of study are the most positive about the APST when compared to those in their first and second years of study, with 63.3% identifying as *Agree/Strongly Agree* ( $M. 4.04. SD. 0.81$ ).

These results lead us to confidently assert that preservice teachers perceive that the APST are not visible enough in their lectures and tutorials, and importantly, they want the APST to be more visible. Our research also highlights that there is a window of opportunity, within the third and fourth years of study, where preservice teacher positivity and interest can be harnessed to improve their APST awareness. We advocate that teaching, learning and assessment explicitly support preservice teacher APST awareness prior to the fourth year of study, to enable preservice teachers to have the opportunity to reach APST *Expert* levels by graduation in an openly supported way.

### The APST within PEx

It is understood that educators learn new knowledge in the environment in which they work (Elmore, 2004). For preservice teachers, new knowledge is provided and acquired within ITE courses and their PEx placements in schools. Preservice teachers identified that the scenario with the most APST use was during their PEx, with 49.8% of preservice teachers identifying that they *Often/Always* use the APST within this scenario. Whilst this result indicates that almost half of preservice teachers regularly know and understand the connection between their PEx and the APST, more than half do not see the link. Furthermore, 20.8% of preservice teachers identify that they *Never* or *Rarely* using the APST during their PEx. These percentages are a cause for concern because it is during the PEx that a preservice teacher's abilities are graded, by the supervising teacher, against specific APST descriptors. It is the supervising teacher's role to complete the PEx report and provide a copy to the preservice teacher, including feedback on their professional capabilities. Yet, many preservice teachers indicate that the feedback they receive from their supervising teachers is not linked to the APST and that supervising teachers misunderstand what the APST descriptors mean (Loughland & Ellis, 2016). Through giving feedback to preservice teachers using the APST language, supervising teachers could assist in driving the professional learning of preservice teachers against the APST throughout the PEx. Preservice teachers may then come to view the APST as a tool to guide their professional learning rather than to simply judge their capabilities at the end of their time in school.

As our results identify, 82.5% of preservice teachers know and understand the importance of the APST to their teaching career. This high regard for the importance of the APST could be advantageous within the PEx context as we know that preservice teachers also have a high regard for what they learn on a PEx experience (Adoniou, 2013; Hastings, 2010). Combining the APST with the PEx could have powerful outcomes and supervising teachers must play a significant role in this process. Yet, if supervising teachers are not using the APST at *Expert* levels, then preservice teachers will not experience authentic use of the APST in the school context, they will not learn the processes involved in authentic professional learning and they will not be encouraged to use the APST to guide their professional practice. When preservice teachers experience this form of disconnect, they adopt practices that reflect what they perceive to be current practice in the schools rather than best practice (Allen, 2009).

Traditionally, the preservice teacher has been positioned as the novice or protégé who is the sole learner in the PEx (Bloomfield, 2009; Ethell & McMeriman, 2000; Keogh, 2005; Patrick, 2013; Sternberg & Horath, 1995). Yet, if supervising teachers are less knowledgeable about the APST than the preservice teacher, then the roles in this instance are reversed. Wrench and Paige (2020) argue that preservice teacher professional learning should involve collaborative relationships rather than an expert/novice relationship, although this position may be a challenging one for some supervising teachers to navigate. As previously stated, AITSL recommends that preservice teachers' knowledgeable position could be leveraged to improve the APST awareness of experienced teachers (AITSL, 2016a). However, enabling this to occur sensitively within this high-stake environment is paramount.

Furthermore, if we recall, almost half the preservice teachers surveyed stated that they do not regularly use the APST during their PEx and over half (53.65%) stated that they only *Rarely* or *Sometimes* use the APST for professional learning. These two figures indicate that they feel disconnected from this reporting and feedback process and that the PEx is not seen as a professional learning opportunity. Within the PEx context, the APST are used as an assessment mechanism that is *owned* by the supervising teacher. Through this process the APST are used as a reporting mechanism rather than a professional learning tool and using

professional standards in this way is regulatory rather than transformative (Sachs, 2016). This leads to a disconnect between preservice teachers and the ownership of their professional learning. Ironically, this perception is not aided by the fact that the Final Professional Experience Report (in Queensland) exempts assessment against the only three APST descriptors that relate explicitly to professional learning (APST 6.1, 6.2 and 6.4). This exclusion is an opportunity missed. As already stated, as many preservice teachers and their supervising teachers believe that the PEx is where preservice teachers learn the most about teaching (Adoniou, 2013; Hastings, 2010), then it would be valid to emphasise the learning taking place on PEx as professional learning.

The disconnect between preservice teachers and professional learning is further highlighted within the aforementioned *Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders* (AITSL, 2018), which articulates that a teacher's work should be underpinned by the APST and that the APST should form the basis for professional learning decisions. The 2016 AITSL stakeholder survey shows 65% of teachers are using the APST in some capacity (AITSL 2016a) and our research indicates 80.9% of preservice teachers were also using the APST, but only a disappointing 4% of preservice teachers were using the APST as AITSL intended. As shown in our research, preservice teachers want to become more APST aware, with 76.9% articulating that they would be prepared to attend additional support sessions to improve their APST awareness. The desire is evident, but the opportunity is uncertain. The lack of connection between the APST, professional learning and the PEx experience is an opportunity missed. This connection would highlight the importance of the synergistic relationship between preservice and in-service teachers, where collaborative professional learning between these two levels of educators could exist in the school context during the PEx.

Additionally, AITSL's 2016 *Final Report – Evaluation of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* identified that experienced teachers were less knowledgeable about the APST than preservice teachers (AITSL, 2016a). Whilst not all supervising teachers would be categorised as experienced or highly skilled teachers, a great many would be. In fact, the APST for Highly Accomplished or Lead Teachers state that teachers at these levels should provide opportunities for preservice teachers to engage in quality placements and support preservice teachers to analyse the APST to improve their classroom practice (AITSL, 2012). Currently, there is no formal training for supervising teachers in Queensland, and teaching children in the classroom is a very different endeavour to that of teaching a preservice teacher (Loughran, 2006). Supervising teachers are rarely given the opportunity to engage in training for the role of supervising a preservice teacher and they typically draw on their own experiences, as a preservice teacher, to guide their supervising role (Nielsen et al., 2017). It is this role that needs to be better defined and given greater significance. Supervising teachers play a critical role in the development of preservice teachers and they need to be considered as a crucial actor within ITE. They need to be trained for the role and play a part in the “collective enterprise” of preservice teacher education (Nielsen et al., 2017, p.363) and supported to develop their own levels of APST awareness. Hudson et al. (2016) has shown that teachers require time to discuss the standards in relation to their practice. Yet, a lack of time and money have been identified as inhibitors of professional standards, because this lack of time and resources hinders teachers and school leaders professional learning opportunities (Doecke, et al., 2008; Jackson & Nietschke, 2018; Jensen et al., 2014).

Hattie (2009) provides a solution, stating that schools need to become professional learning organisations with a focus on developing “a culture that values continuous learning where teachers, as well as students, can feel safe to admit gaps in knowledge and understanding” (Hattie, 2009, p.239). However, we would argue that preservice teachers also need to be included, and explicitly catered for, in this transformative professional learning

culture. With just 49.8% of preservice teachers in our research identifying that they *Often/Always* use the APST during PEx, it would be logical to bolster use in this area of their program of study. In this way, preservice teachers and their supervising teachers could work with the APST openly, and collaboratively, and most importantly, in context.

## Conclusion

AITSL has identified that preservice teachers are using the APST to some degree, that they are positive about its place in their teaching journey and there is an upward trend in APST use by preservice teachers (AITSL 2016c). AITSL believe that these factors support preservice teachers being used to leverage the APST "...to improve the engagement of more experienced teachers" (AITSL, 2016a, p.15). However, our research has also shown that several years after their implementation, the use of the APST by preservice teachers does not match their intended use. We have shown that 53.65% of preservice teachers who participated in this research had yet to articulate that the APST featured more than *Rarely/Sometimes* in their decisions around their professional learning and future practice. Preservice teachers voiced, and demonstrated, that during this period they were entering the profession as *APST Informed*, showing that they had not made the leap from knowing about the APST generically to practising them on an individual level. This result indicates that the way in which the APST are used at the Graduate Career Stage does not require preservice teachers to use the APST as AITSL intended.

It is not enough to assume that the trend in APST uptake by preservice teachers will translate to preservice teachers using the APST as AITSL intended. If we want preservice teachers to be drivers of transformational change within the teaching profession, then we need to address the ways in which the APST are used by and with preservice teachers to inform their professional learning. The current Honourable Minister for Education, Alan Tudge recently set out his agenda for Australian education, with a focus on teacher quality and ITE, "through the provision of high-quality professional development" (Tudge, 2021). In light of this renewed educational focus on ITE and our research findings, we call for AITSL and state regulators to recognise preservice teacher learning as professional learning, especially relating to the learning that they undertake during their PEx in schools. We also advocate for preservice teachers to be included in the professional learning support mechanisms that are afforded to teachers at higher career stages, as a means of encouraging closer connections between the learning of preservice teachers and the learning of teachers. The implementation of professional learning collaborations between preservice teachers and supervising teachers could provide the necessary opportunities to improve preservice teacher and supervising teacher APST awareness. School leadership teams play a pivotal role in the successful implementation of the APST. Timperley (2011) asserts that it is the approach of school leadership that will ultimately enable or disable teacher engagement with the APST. This is true, not only for their paid employees but for the preservice teachers who engage in learning experiences within their schools. It is in this environment that the development of preservice teacher APST awareness can be optimised rather than simply leveraged as suggested by AITSL (AITSL, 2016a).

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