

Chapter 3

An Essential Service? An Appreciative Study of Preservice Teachers' Reflections of Teaching During COVID-19



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Abstract The sudden impact of the government introduced health measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic is reshaping all elements of society, including initial teacher education. International research has examined the effects on teachers, teaching, and students. But, there is a gap considering the impact on preservice teachers. This qualitative study investigates the experiences of 55 South Australian preservice teachers after completing their final practicum during the first six months of 2020. The study adopted Cooperrider and Srivastava's Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle and reports on stage 1 of the cycle to discover preservice teachers' views on education Beyond COVID-19. The researcher analysed the data following Braun and Clarke six-phase thematic analysis procedure. Two overarching themes emerged focusing on preservice teachers' perception of their values and strengths. The implications of the analysis extend earlier research supporting emphasis on teacher resilience and calls for more research on preservice teachers' experiences.

Keywords Curriculum and pedagogy · Professional development of educators · Teacher education · Teacher wellbeing

3.1 Introduction

As preservice teachers (PST) across South Australia prepared for the final professional experience placement for their initial teacher education (ITE) at the start of 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Australia on 25 February 2020. Fifteen days later, on 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as a pandemic (Coronavirus disease [COVID-19]—World Health Organization, 2020), disrupting life and the professional experience of countless PSTs across the world. As Azorín (2020) notes, teachers may paradoxically feel caught between the blistering speed of imposed change due to the transition to online learning and inertia. Harris (2020) asserts that the shock of COVID-19 is 'upending

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the modern world’; as individual nations grapple with the ongoing waves of disruption at a systems level, the international research and classroom-level discourse appear to be split between the call for educational renewal and survival (Ellis et al., 2020).

Bailey and Schurz (2020) argue that COVID-19 is potentially creating a human resources crisis in schools requiring ‘... new pedagogical imperatives, teachers and teacher educators need to be learners themselves, modelling the “adaptive expertise” we would wish to develop in our student-teachers’ (Mutton, 2020, p. 3). The World Bank (2020) and Sokal et al. (2020) contend that teachers’ resilience and the resolve of students, teachers, schools, and educational systems are being tested. Both Blundell et al. (2020), Darling-Hammond and Hyler (2020) and Darling-Hammond and Melnick (2020) note that the pandemic has heightened awareness of the existing educational attainment and access inequalities. It has accelerated progress in ways that initially may not have been foreseen as noted by Donitsa-Schmidt and Ramot (2020) study of PST experiences in Israel during the first wave of the pandemic and Robinson and Rusznyak (2020). While there are emerging publications teachers perspectives during the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a shortage of research on the perspective of PSTs.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to address a gap in research on COVID-19’s impact on PSTs during wave 1 of the pandemic. In South Australia childcare, early childhood education and primary and secondary schooling services were defined as essential services for essential workers. It investigates South Australian PSTs’ reflections of professional experience to explore PSTs experiences during such extraordinary disruption and how they coped. The study adopts the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s (AITSL) definition of professional experience as ‘the component of an initial teacher education program in which pre-service teachers develop and demonstrate their skills in the classroom’ (AITSL, 2018, p. 2). The study reports on the findings of the discovery stage of the 4-D cycle of the appreciative inquiry method. Three central research questions frame the study, how do PSTs describe the impact of COVID-19’s on professional experience? How do PSTs’ describe their values during this time? How do PSTs describe their strengths during this interruption?

3.2 ITE and Professional Experience

The aim of professional experience is to give PSTs the chance to ‘practice the work of teaching’, to ‘relate the practice to knowledge and understanding they are developing in their program’, and to ‘demonstrate a positive impact on student learning’ (AITSL, 2018, p. 2). Flores (2020) argues that teaching is recognised as a complex profession. It requires PSTs to develop discipline-specific knowledge, pedagogical skills, and pedagogical strategies to establish a supportive learning environment and enable student learning and growth. Darling-Hammond (2017) claims the most effective

strategies to improve teacher learning including recruiting high-performing participants into programs that secure competitive salaries, a systematic link between theory and practice, and explicit induction models for new teachers focusing on skill development. Yet, early COVID-19-related research presented by McKinsey & Co and Azevedo et al. (2020) at the World Bank supports the claim that education itself is experiencing a significant shock at the rapid change, and one with multigenerational implications across health, economy, and learning.

As the waves of COVID-19 ebbed and flowed, schools and teachers were impacted, as summarised by Azevedo et al. (2020) in their comprehensive analysis for the World Bank highlighting the devastating impact this may have on the educational outcomes of children. As Reimers and Schleicher (2020) establish, a first in-school goal has been to maintain learning continuity and diminish the impact of the rapid transition to online learning. Examples of teachers' approaches to online teaching and learning are documented by Carrillo and Flores (2020). This has raised an important question as PSTs observe first-hand the inequity of access to online learning between and across schools and systems (Hall et al., 2020). Like other professions, ITE programs were impacted across the world (Assunção Flores & Gago, 2020). Kidd and Murray (2020) highlight the impact of the pandemic on the final teaching practicum of PSTs across England as schools were closed. In a small-scale study, Kidd and Murray (2020) call for rethinking and reframing the traditional practicum to explore the role of online learning and teaching more systematically, warning that the practicum may need to be reimagined given the likely ongoing disruption. Several ITE programs were suspended or transitioned to online learning; some accredited programs were changed to manage the situation (Carrillo & Flores, 2020).

3.3 South Australian ITE Professional Experience and COVID-19

South Australia was successful in managing COVID-19 cases, experiencing a total of 857 cases of COVID-19, with the majority reported during wave 1 from 20 March to 20 April 2021 and a state wide seven-day lockdown in July 2021 due to the Delta variant (Government of South Australia, 2021). Based on the advice of the South Australian Chief Public Health Officer the South Australian Department for Education concluded schools, preschools, and 'early childhood facilities were low risk environments for COVID-19 and should remain open' during wave 1 of COVID-19 (Government of South Australia Department for Education, 2020). As the shock-wave of COVID-19 may impact the preparation of the future teacher workforce, it is important to consider PSTs' perspectives. This present case study examines PSTs' perceptions of themselves, their values, their teaching, and the strengths they feel they displayed during their final professional experience during COVID-19 in South Australia.

3.4 Reflection

Teaching is a dynamic, complex profession and demands reflection in the achievement of positive student learning outcomes. Churchill et al. (2019) assert there is an assumption that teachers know how to reflect and appreciate the exact meaning of reflection between teachers. The benefits of reflection for teaching are reported by Lutovac and Assunção Flores (2021), who investigate the role of failure during ITE, and Roberts et al.'s (2021) study of PST experiences during the final practicum. Various scholars have created models to facilitate reflection—for example, Dewey's teacher dispositions of open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and responsibility, and Brookfield's (2017) reflective practice cycle proposing four stages of reflection. Given the disruption of ITE during the first wave of COVID-19, the study was interested in finding out how PSTs reflected on what is life-giving during the disruption of the pandemic. The iterative nature of reflection during ITE is part of the path towards constructing, reconstructing, being, and becoming during teacher professional practice.

COVID-19 provides PSTs with an unusual opportunity for reflection as they grapple with the being and becoming of teaching by drawing their values and strengths. When life beyond COVID-19's immediate shockwave is imagined, it provokes the question of what the broader education community can learn from collective experiences. Given that educators have been required to transition to different modes of learning, rethink the way that they are teaching and re-evaluate individual school's strategies and priorities, it is possible to argue that there is a wealth of experience that has taken place which should be systematically captured for future events (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020).

3.5 Research Questions

The present study asks:

Research Question 1: What was the experience of PSTs during this unprecedented period?

Research Question 2: What enabled their ability to navigate their professional experience placement during the pandemic?

3.6 Methodology

3.6.1 Appreciative Inquiry

This qualitative study adopted a phenomenological approach as described by Yin (2003) investigating COVID-19's disruption within the context of professional experience during the teaching practicum. It adopted a constructivist worldview as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) as participants made sense of the world by the meaning they place on their interactions, culture, and context (Crotty, 1998). The appreciative method required the researcher to identify an affirmative topic to structure the study. Recently, Cooperrider and Fry (2020) argued the case for adopting the appreciative inquiry method during the COVID-19 pandemic. They asserted that while appreciative inquiry may not appear to have synergy with the trauma-informed practices needed during a pandemic, it may serve as an approach that revealed innovation, resilience, and adaptation. As illustrated in Fig. 3.1, Cooperrider and Srivastava's (1987) the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle has four steps:

- Discover—focusing on the best of what is;
- Dream—inviting participants to imagine the future and envisage what might be;
- Design—considering what the ideal should be; and
- Destiny—asking how to empower participants.

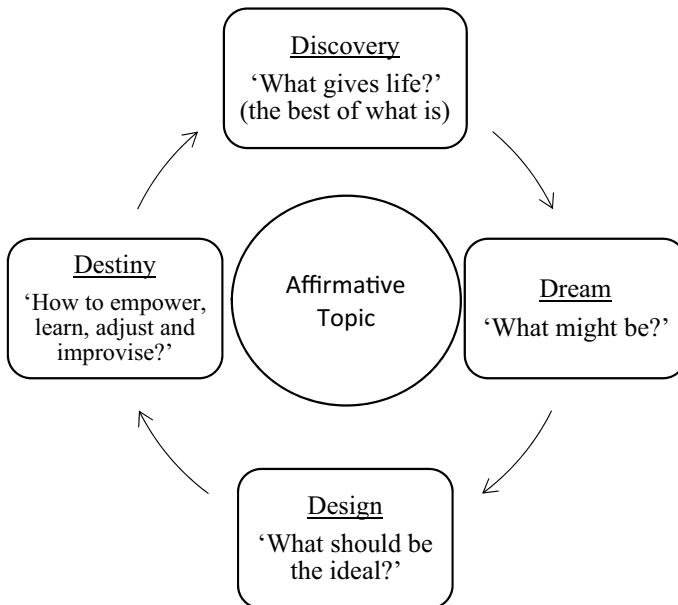


Fig. 3.1 The AI 4-D Cycle (Adapted from Cooperrider et al., 2008, p. 34)

The first step was the discover phase, which focused upon appreciating what was the best within a particular phenomenon. This was followed by the design phase, which determined what that principal ideal could be to solve the dream and discover phases and co-construct this. The last step was the destiny phase, which looked at creating a sustainable model to address the particular investigation (Cooperrider et al., 2008).

While the study adopted the entire 4-D Cycle, this article focused on the first stage and described COVID-19's impact on PSTs during their professional experience due to the richness of data. The affirmative choice topic created by the researcher framed the 4-D cycle and survey questions was 'Education Beyond COVID-19'. The research design followed the protocol described by Cooperrider et al. (2008, pp. 35–126). The survey instrument was based on earlier research by Cooperrider et al. (2008), Waters and White (2015), and White (2020). There was a total of 10 questions and two sections. Section one included categorical questions involving details pertaining to participants' teaching area during their professional experience, gender, degree(s) studied, and teaching specialisation(s). Section two included four blocks of open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were designed with a statement to the participants and then an invitation to reflect on their most recent teaching placement and respond. These questions aligned to the first three stages of the 4-D cycle as developed by Cooperrider: Discover—appreciating the best of what is.

Table 3.1 outlines the questions posed to participants. Two open ended questions were asked of the participants inviting them to reflect on the professional experience, the questions focused on inviting participants to reflect on their values during this time.

3.7 Recruitment of Participants

Purposive sampling as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018) was adopted for this case study, in which 174 students were enrolled in their final year of a Bachelor of Teaching (double degree) and Master of Teaching specialising in teaching the middle and senior years. Participants recorded they were teaching English, History, Mathematics, Psychology, and Biology. These participants were on their last professional experience placement before graduation and were invited to take part in the case study. Seventy of these participants completed their final professional experience during the first wave of the pandemic despite federal and state government restrictions on physical distancing. Fifty-five participants volunteered and consented to take part in the anonymous study. Of these, 60% were fourth-year Bachelor of Teaching and 40% were Master of Teaching candidates at a South Australian University.

Table 3.1 Questions

4-D Cycle	Questions
Discover	<p><i>Discover Question 1:</i> We are experiencing an unprecedented period in education. We are interested in some of the things you value—especially, about yourself, your teaching, and your school. Reflecting on your most recent teaching placement, please respond to the following questions. What are the things you have valued the most about yourself? What are the things you have valued about the nature of your work? What are the things you have valued about the school?</p> <p><i>Discover Question 2:</i> Reflecting on your most recent teaching placement, please respond to the following questions. What has been unexpected about your school's response to date? What's been the most memorable learning and teaching experience to date? What strengths were you and your colleagues showing to date? What have you been telling yourself about your learning and teaching to date?</p>
Dream	<p><i>Dream Question 3:</i> Imagine yourself teaching when COVID-19 is over. We have a vaccine, and the pandemic is finished</p> <p>What might teaching look like? What might most in schools?</p> <p>What is really great about the way you work together with your team?</p> <p>What might the structures and/or systems support this? How might teachers and students be interacting with each other?</p>
Design	<p><i>Design Question 4:</i> Imagine yourself teaching when COVID-19 is over. We have a vaccine and the pandemic is finished. Based on what you've learned during your most recent teaching placement respond to the following questions</p> <p>What should be the ideal learning environment?</p> <p>Describe any possibilities in learning, teaching, and education we haven't imagined?</p> <p>What smallest change will make the biggest impact on learning and teaching? Who is affected?</p>
Destiny	N/A

3.8 Data Collection

Participants volunteered to complete the anonymous survey online via Qualtrics after their final professional experience placement. Data were collected over fifteen days between 15 July 2020 and 30 July 2020 once PSTs completed their placements. All participants volunteered and provided consent for the data to be used. Where participants mentioned names or places, data has been anonymised.

3.9 Data Analysis

All data for the study was analysed by the researcher. The researcher analysed data according to Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 87) six-phase thematic analysis. The researcher familiarised themselves with the data by reading through line by line from a randomly selected response. Then analysis focused on how the participant was

Table 3.2 Example of coded transcript

Response	Codes
<p>What I most valued about myself was my resilience, which I wasn't aware I really had. I hadn't been in a situation where people were openly disrespectful to me and I had to come back day after day and face them, and some of the classes were really difficult to manage because of poor behaviour, often directed at me. At the start of the placement, I didn't understand the level that the students were at with their understanding, but over time I got to know the students as individuals on a personal level and could cater more to their specific needs in the way I presented things to them. This was more difficult in larger classes, but it was good to see the way that I could engage even students who didn't think much of themselves. What I valued most about the school was the way that the school cared about students and gave them opportunities to succeed</p>	<p>PST values PST identifies 'resilience' Teacher identity PST values Strength of openmindedness Teacher identity Building relationships PST flexibility Teacher identity PST values PST's assumptions PST values</p>

making sense of COVID-19's impact on their professional experience. The initial coding process focused on each participants' emotions, interaction with self, the role of the teacher, and their rationalisation for actions, based on the process designed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Corbin and Strauss (2015). Initially, as illustrated in Table 3.2, this coding focused on the meanings behind the data. The process created initial codes: character, flexibility, relationships, resilience, and strengths. Initial codes paralleled participants language 'I have valued my resilience, persistence and independence', character, 'adapt things to get closer to the level of the students', flexibility, 'making a positive impact on the future generation is the most pivotal thing a person can do', relationships, 'What I most valued about myself was my resilience', resilience, and 'I think it's a privilege and quite rare for teachers to be inspired by their students', strengths. To establish intra-rater reliability data was coded over two different periods. Next, the researcher searched for two emerging themes linked to the discover questions as shown in Table 3.3. Two overarching themes emerged: values and strengths and these were chosen as the final names for the themes. Definitions developed for analysis are seen in Table 3.4 values and focused on the participant's judgement belief adapted from Frischer and Hänze (2020) and strengths focused on the participants' identification of pre-existing qualities that arise naturally, feel authentic (and) are intrinsically motivating to use adapted from Brdar and Kashdan (2010, p. 151).

3.10 Ethics

The study design, data collection process and instrument were reviewed and approved by the University of Adelaide's ethics committee (Approval Number H-2020-065).

Table 3.3 Two codes with data extracts (direct quotations)

PST's values	PST's strengths
The things I have valued the most about myself are my hard work and dedication to completing my placement and degree early. I am incredibly prideful of my achievements on placement. The things I have valued the most about the nature of my work are my ability to teach, interact, and inspire young curious-minded individuals my resilience, persistence, and independence in this highly unpredictable time. During the postponed time, it was up to me to stay in control of my work and to keep calm, which has put me in good stead while on my placement as it is largely self-driven and independent while mentor teachers are writing reports and marking exams
I have valued that the pandemic did not impact my ability to connect and teach students. The dependence upon technology was exciting and widened my skill set. I think my greatest ability is understanding students and knowing how to communicate and push them to reach their potential	... resilience of myself to keep pushing forward with an extremely challenging task of keeping up to date with my teaching load, while dealing with the stress and anxiety I was feeling from such an uncertain time in my life ... I never felt that I was being asked to do too much, even though I found it very overwhelming at times

Table 3.4 Definitions for two overarching themes

Theme	Definitions of selected themes
Theme 1: PSTs values	Focused on the participant's judgement belief what was important during placement (adapted from Frischer & Hänze, 2020)
Theme 2: PSTs strengths	Focused on the participants' identification of pre-existing qualities that arise naturally, feel authentic (and) are intrinsically motivating to use (adapted from Brdar & Kashdan, 2010, p. 151)

3.11 Limitations

As this is a qualitative case study, one of the limitations was the sample size and the profile of the participants. Furthermore, during the data collection process, it may have been beneficial to have conducted focus group interviews after the practicum. The researcher decided as the researcher did not want to interfere with the final practicum and the volatility of the pandemic's disruption on teaching in school.

3.12 Findings

During the coding process, it was clear that PSTs were grappling with the development of their professional identity, their role in the classroom, and their professional practice. Simultaneously, several PSTs commented on how the COVID-19 pandemic was influencing the way that they thought of, felt about, and valued the profession.

3.13 PST Values

A theme across all the responses classified focused on the flexibility of PSTs during their professional experience placement. Flexibility may be viewed as an important and desirable characteristic in teachers during the pandemic and this was clearly seen as a significant strength to possess. For example, a male Master of Teaching Mathematics and Science PST reflects:

I valued the resilience of myself to keep pushing forward with an extremely challenging task of keeping up to date with my teaching load, whilst dealing with the stress and anxiety I was feeling from such an uncertain time in my life. I valued that teaching has no boundaries, and is able to be done across technology. [MTeach; mathematics, science; male]

As many PSTs experienced the stop–start nature of schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility became an important skill. Another noticed the importance of flexibility in responding to feedback during their professional experience. The vital role that schools can play in creating a safe, supportive, and consistent learning environment for students during traumatic events was noted by this student. For example, a PST teaching English notes the skill of being able to respond to the evidence provided by mentors and students in their classes to improve their professional practice:

I have valued my ability to be flexible, think on my feet and not be overly critical on myself or expect too much. I value the importance that’s been placed on education throughout the pandemic. I appreciate the fact that for some students’ school is a great place for to be and they wanted to continue to be there during the pandemic. [English]

A female Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Arts History and Psychology PST reflected on the flexibility and consistency she needed to show in her communication and open-mindedness with colleagues. This PST noted the immediate disruption at the start of her professional experience when, as a result of the state government’s restrictions in response to the pandemic, schools were preparing rapidly for online learning. In the South Australian context, teachers were confronted with preparing for online delivery. This was not necessarily needed because of the fluctuation in the number of COVID-19 cases. She highlights the need to reflect and coach herself to engage with the opportunities presented to her during her professional experience, observing:

My school had a full week of online learning, which was not unexpected given the COVID-19 situation, but unexpected for a normal teaching placement experience. The most memorable learning and teaching experience to date was teaching my Year 8 Care Group class and integrating mindfulness into my teaching. The key strengths displayed were flexibility and consistent and positive communication between students and colleagues. [BTeach/BA, history, psychology; female]

Another PST teaching English during their final professional experience placement noted that online learning was rapidly deployed in their school. This PST found that

the challenges faced by many schools are incremental in the process of introducing online learning management systems. Here they note the flexibility required to be able to sustain the engagement of year seven students and focus upon the steps required to plan for and implement effective learning and teaching. Once again, the PST describes an interior coaching dialogue to help manage the complexity of the issue, noting:

Of course the COVID-19 situation forced the hand of schools to transform online. What was unexpected from my perspective was how quickly everything changed back to normal. My most memorable teaching experience was teaching to [year] 7 students during the crisis. Because of this both myself and colleagues had to be flexible with our teaching structure. [English]

A male Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Mathematics and Computer Science PST commented upon the internal dialogue that happens during teaching where flexibility is illustrated by the PST in checking in with their lesson plan, goals, and objectives to maintain effective learning and teaching. Additionally, this PST notes his anticipation that schools would be closed and then needing to reimagine his professional identity as an essential worker during the first wave of the pandemic. He writes:

I expected the school to be closed to be honest, but it remained open and we used webcams to record all classes for students ... The strengths we showed was our ability to still teach online and in class at the same time. [BTeach/BMathsComSci; mathematics, STEM; male]

Teaching is widely recognised as a highly relational profession. The dynamic between teacher and taught is critical in developing a safe and supportive learning environment and progressing learning outcomes. Throughout this case study, PSTs commented upon the importance of establishing these relationships. At times, a PST can have difficulty setting up relationships with students given the duration of professional experience. PST's responses to this element of the questions emphasised their flexibility. For example, a female Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Arts History, Languages, and Psychology PST notes:

I have valued my flexibility, my ability to foster positive and professional relationships with the staff and students at the school and how I sought out opportunities that benefited myself as a pre-service teacher as well as the school/staff/students ... I value the creative and collaborative nature of my work. [BTeach, BA; history, languages, psychology; female]

An English, geography, and history PST noted the energy that can be drawn from student and teacher interaction. During this PST's final placement, they noticed that the challenges that were presented to them inspired their willingness to focus upon the development of their professional practice. Here, the PST was able to comment upon their willingness to find out how students learn and to develop greater mastery around the content and how they teach, particularly with regard to strategies for effective learning and teaching. They comment:

The students inspired me. The adversity some of them face should not be experienced by any child. Yet they come to school each day and defy the odds placed upon them ...Some only have themselves to rely on and struggle some days, but that's expected. I think it's a privilege and quite rare for teachers to be inspired by their students. [English, geography, history]

As COVID-19 disrupted all elements of university degrees and professional experience, one of the significant traits that emerged was the resilience of PSTs. While resilience has been identified as a desirable characteristic in early career teachers before the pandemic, this trait has emerged, from the perspective of the PSTs in this case study, as an essential element to developing and implementing effective learning and teaching. In many of the PST responses, individuals were surprised by the depth of resilience that they had within themselves. It was through the disruption and trauma caused by the pandemic that this characteristic emerged. For example, a female Master of Teaching PST on a music placement says:

I have valued my ability for taking initiative, being able to take everything in my stride and adapt to the changing environment and situations, as well as my ability to take risks and be kind, generous, respectful and understanding. I valued greatly the support, friendliness, caring and understanding staff and students and the beautiful environment the school was in ... [MTeach; music; female]

Another female Master of Teaching student completing an English teaching placement noted the joy and excitement she experienced during her professional experience placement. Here, she commented on her resilience and ability to show independence as she focused upon developing effective learning and teaching and classroom activities for her students. This participant noted the importance of collegiality and networking with her other PSTs, who could supply commentary on the experiences she was having. She says:

I have valued my resilience, persistence and independence in this highly unpredictable time. During the postponed time, it was up to me to stay in control of my work and to keep calm, which has put me in good stead while on my placement as it is largely self-driven and independent while mentor teachers are writing reports and marking exams. I have valued the people around me and the people at school who have been extremely helpful and patient, and those other friends and PSTs who help debrief and vent about stressful issues. [MTeach; English; female]

3.14 PST Strengths

During the coding process, elements of participants' character identity and character development emerged in response to the discover questions. Throughout the participants' responses, it is evident that they are able to identify and comment upon the development of what they described as their professional identity. Here, participants were able to comment upon nuanced strengths that supported their goal to be able to

be effective teachers that have a positive impact on student learning outcomes. For example, a female Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Arts PST teaching English and history writes:

I value kindness, loyalty and empathy about myself ... The things I have valued at the school have been the relationships built with colleagues and the incredible collaboration of the entire middle school office I've worked in. [BTeach/BA; English, history; female]

Biology, STEM, Earth, and environmental science PST noted their ability to remain flexible and demonstrate empathy towards the culture and context of the students in their classes. In this response, the PST is able to illustrate the complex factors that link between student experience and their character to connect with effective learning and teaching, for example, saying:

Ability to adapt to blended delivery of content. Ability to assist students in understanding the global events from a scientific point of view, allowing students to process the vast amounts of information to become informed citizens. [Biology, STEM, Earth & environmental science]

A female Bachelor of Teaching and Bachelor of Science PST who was on a biology and chemistry placement during the pandemic noted her ability to teach in dual mode, with students present in her classroom and learning online. The PST showed her willingness to learn during this time and maintain an open-minded and positive-oriented mindset to improve the quality of her teaching. She notes her vulnerability in the development of her professional identity during this placement, writing:

Unexpectedly, the school allowed for student teachers to persist, while being a good thing, it was difficult and challenging to continue teaching in an online environment. Most memorable learning and teaching experience to date would be using Microsoft docs for students to interact with one another while students had been at home and some were in class to effectively communicate with each other. Strengths shown by my colleagues have been staying consistent and trying to maintain positive during this time. [BTeach/BSc; biology, chemistry; female]

For some of the PSTs, the disruption of the pandemic highlighted their employability; for example, a female mathematics and biology PST on her placement revealed how she was employed soon after. She notes the reflection required to grow from mistakes and develop more effective learning and teaching experiences for her students, writing:

The most unexpected response I achieved from the school was that the school was so happy with my performance that they were willing to hire me before registration and pay a TRT additionally to be present in the classroom until I obtained registration. My most memorable learning and teaching experience centred around my development of content specific pedagogical terms and the creation and implementation of activities within my classroom to introduce topics. [BTeach/BSc; biology, mathematics; female]

3.15 Discussion and Conclusions

This case study presents new knowledge pertaining to PSTs as it examines their experience throughout this juncture in their professional development and in the context of the unprecedented disruption of the pandemic. It offers a unique insight into the professional experience of PSTs in South Australia, which was one of the few places in the world where university teaching placements could continue during the first wave of the pandemic (Government of South Australia Department for Education, 2020). While it is too early to consider the long-term benefits of continuing with professional experience during the pandemic, there are several potential benefits pointed out by participants which may be considered when discussing a strength orientation to challenges and adversity. The advantage of an appreciative inquiry case study is that it encourages participants to consider the strengths they are experiencing and noticing in others (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020). These characteristics may not necessarily appear in other methodologies. Appreciative inquiry, as a deliberate strength-based methodology, thereby encourages participants to consider a strength orientation to challenges and adversity. In discussing the potential implications of the case study, it is possible to argue that PSTs can identify benefits in the COVID-19 disruption. Positive outcomes can be found in their professional experience. The participants note greater knowledge and understanding of the development of their character and an increased opportunity to demonstrate flexibility, enhance professional relationships, test much-needed resilience, and reflect upon the significance of their strengths in the context of preparing lessons for effective learning and teaching.

3.16 PSTs' Values

As noted in the introduction and background to this case study, there is a dearth of literature discussing the perspective of PSTs. Investigating their thoughts and feelings during the pandemic is an important step in helping ITEs develop future programs. When considering research question 1, the PSTs found the depth of their discipline knowledge put them at a significant advantage in being able to prepare quickly and flexibly in providing a diversity of classroom experiences for students. They commented upon their ability to be flexible in their planning and reflection of their teaching during the pandemic. This ability to be able to reflect upon the impact of their professional practice is a factor in the development of graduate-ready teachers. Furthermore, the pandemic and being able to continue with their professional experience during this time provided PSTs with significant and diverse learning experiences as part of their growing professional identity. An advantage readily identified by participants was that this would provide examples for PSTs to draw upon to articulate the impact of their professional practice when applying for teaching

positions in the future. All participants commented upon the depth and breadth of collegiality shown by teachers, mentors, and other PSTs during the pandemic. The pandemic revealed that PSTs felt uncertain during this period. Numerous participants commented upon the need to reassure themselves that their professional experience placement would conclude successfully and equipped them for future challenges ahead in their employment. The volatility caused by COVID-19 and the rapid changes for parents and caregivers added another layer of complexity for PSTs, who were required to empathise with students and their families (Flores, 2020).

3.17 PSTs' Strengths

When reflecting on research question 2, The PSTs in this sample had minimal exposure, if any, to the concept of strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) during the ITE. All participants were able to describe what they believed were the strengths they exhibited during their professional experience. Many participants commented upon their ability to draw upon their love of learning, creativity, and perseverance to be able to establish and maintain positive learning environments for the classes they were teaching. The results gleaned from the participants reinforce the significance of relationships and networks to support early career teachers. It underscores the potential for highly effective and graduate-ready teachers. Many participants commented upon their ability to be able to transition between face-to-face teaching, online teaching, and blended pedagogies. This suggests their flexibility and consistency in persevering in the face of the adversities they encountered during their professional experience, which may be seen as an advantage for their future careers. All the participants noted that teaching is a profoundly human experience and that, to learn effectively, it was necessary to recognise the emotions, thoughts, and feelings of the students in classes to prepare them for learning. This finding is important as it paves the way for the ongoing integration of a wellbeing framework that specifically introduces PSTs to wellbeing concepts such as resilience, character development, empathy, and other wellbeing topics. These findings support the proposition that ITE is well-positioned to integrate wellbeing more systematically into the development of professional experience to prepare PSTs to become graduate-ready.

3.18 Conclusions

A year after data collection with multiple vaccines developed, the new COVID-19 delta variant disrupts Australia with rolling border closures, lockdowns in South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria. While COVID-19 may be a once-in-a-100-year event, I argue that the experiences gained by PSTs during their

Table 3.5 Summary: Implications for teachers of wellbeing education

Implications for Wellbeing and Professional Practice
1. Universities should include discussion about the role of wellbeing, character, and resilience should be included in initial teacher education programs
2. Initial Teacher Education providers should develop evidence-informed strategies to better prepare preservice teachers to be classroom ready
3. When the <i>Australian Professional Standards for Teachers</i> are revised wellbeing should be included in the standards

professional experience raise unresolved issues of being and becoming a teacher. Themes related to PST values and strengths may be translated to other disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, bushfires, or widespread displacement due to war and famine. Rolling school closures in South Australia and varying approaches to managing the pandemic lockdown in schools across the state added to the complexity of professional experience. The analysis of data collected during the discover stage confirms that resilience plays an integral part in the development of a PST's professional identity. This finding supports pre-pandemic research on teacher and PST resilience by Beltman (2021), Mansfield and Beltman (2019), Mansfield et al. (2020), and White (2020) on initial teacher education, and White's (2020) examination of PSTs' attitudes towards character and wellbeing. PSTs are the future pipeline of each nation's teaching workforce. We might learn from the ongoing shockwaves of COVID-19 and PSTs' experience to enhance the learning, professional experience, and progression of graduate-ready teachers during this period, which is a crucial issue to be explored in more depth (Table 3.5).

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