

**Students' and teachers' perceptions of Year 12
religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria:
Implications for curriculum**

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

This research study aimed to explore and describe students' and teachers' perceptions of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools in Victoria in light of theoretical concepts of religious education. It sought to discover how appropriate these programs were in meeting the needs of today's students and achieving the aims of religious education for senior secondary students in Catholic schools in Victoria. The purpose was to propose guiding principles that could inform a review of Year 12 religious education curriculum in Catholic schools.

There were two broad areas of investigation to this study: the theory and the practice of religious education in Catholic schools, with special attention given to the Year 12 programs. With the first area, there was an examination of religious education theory as revealed in the literature. This was concerned with the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools. Different approaches to religious education were explored and their strengths and weaknesses for senior secondary programs were highlighted. In addition, recent approaches to teaching and learning at the broader curriculum level were investigated to highlight possible relevance to religious education. Thirdly, the theory of and approaches to religious education were considered in relation to some aspects of the context of contemporary classrooms.

The second area was an investigation into current practices in the compulsory or core Year 12 religious education programs since these were accessed by all or most students in Catholic schools. Eleven schools were involved in the study. They were drawn from the four dioceses in Victoria and were chosen because they displayed certain characteristics which were seen as representative of the wider range of Catholic schools. In order to gain an insight into classroom practices, three sources of data were collected from these schools and examined. Firstly, through the use of questionnaires and interviews, data was collected on students' perceptions of their experiences in their religious education program. Secondly, questionnaires were used to gather information on the teachers' experiences of the program, their perceptions of their students' experiences and their background in religious education. Teachers' perceptions were used as a point of comparison with students' perceptions. Thirdly, religious education documents were examined and analysed to discover their aims and objectives, the content and topics included and their assessment strategies.

In general, the various approaches (in terms of content and method) to Year 12 religious education classroom programs in Catholic schools in Victoria either emphasized cognitive

learning or it focused on affective learning. With the former, an intellectual study of religion through a study of different religious traditions was offered which, it was hoped, would lead to an increased understanding and appreciation of the subject. With the latter, more attention was given to the personal dimension in religious education in terms of interpersonal and intrapersonal learning.

The findings of this research study indicated that, in the perceptions of a majority of students, the religious education programs were not meeting their needs. This raises the question of the pertinence of the aims for senior secondary religious education as proposed in curriculum guidelines for Catholic schools in Victoria. The findings, therefore, suggest a need for a review of such programs in Catholic schools. The study concluded with the proposal of thirteen guiding principles that could inform the development, implementation and evaluation of future Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools. The principles, drawn from key insights from both the theory and current practice of religious education, could have relevance for Catholic school administrators, policy makers and religious education teachers. In addition, other areas were identified which could be useful for further investigation to enhance existing knowledge in this field of study.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education in Australian Catholic schools has been the subject of much interest and debate over the past thirty years. This has been inspired by factors such as reforms that were introduced at the wider school curriculum level which were a response to new knowledge about the learning process; a focus on the individual student's growth and development; significant developments in technology and the widespread influence of the mass media, and the recognition that late-twentieth century Australian society had developed a multi-cultural and multi-faith identity. At the more specific subject level, there has been much discussion about the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools which has been determined by various contexts and understandings of the subject. Different perspectives in religious education have provided the basis for the various approaches that have been adopted in Catholic schools. This has been particularly obvious in senior secondary programs where both a faith and an educational perspective have influenced the different approaches to the subject at the classroom level. Different emphases have been given to these areas in various religious education guidelines from different dioceses, and also in different State accredited courses. The evolution of state religious studies courses can be understood as a process in which these courses sought to establish an educational identity to contrast them with courses in denominational schools (Crawford & Rossiter 1994).

In Victoria, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), a State accredited course, was introduced for the two final years of secondary schooling in the early nineties and it had an effect on the types of religious education programs that were offered at Year 12 in Catholic schools. This was the final year of secondary schooling in Victoria. Two VCE studies, *Religion and Society* and *Texts and Traditions*, were related to the field of religious education. These units had a cognitive emphasis which focused on the dimension of knowledge in religious education, and they were offered to senior students

as part of their religious education classroom program in many Catholic schools. However, in response to religious education guidelines from the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne (CEO, Melbourne), most schools which offered VCE religion studies units also included other activities in their programs over the school year. Some of these were reflection days, retreats and liturgies, which aimed to provide opportunities for students to reflect on personal and faith issues. Such learning activities were often part of the broader religious education program offered in Catholic schools and they were influenced by a faith perspective. As such, the classroom program was usually supplemented with these out-of class activities. Thus, many Catholic schools in Victoria combined VCE units in religion studies for their classroom program and used them in conjunction with other school-based programs which included activities that emphasised the personal and faith dimension of religious education.

The problem to be investigated

The purpose of this research study was threefold:

- to review the literature on theory and approaches to religious education to identify appropriate characteristics for senior secondary programs;
- to survey Year 12 students and teachers' regarding their perceptions of current practices in religious education to determine if the perceived needs of senior secondary students were being catered for, and if the objectives of the program, as stated in curriculum documents and guidelines, were being achieved.
- to propose guiding principles that could inform a review of Year 12 religious education curriculum in Catholic schools in Victoria.

In order to achieve this purpose, the study examined the literature in religious education to determine the nature and purpose of the subject in Catholic schools. Further, it considered current issues in education and the context of contemporary classrooms to identify any aspects that may have had relevance for the religious education program.

Finally, it investigated the perceptions of a number of students and teachers of their Year 12 religious education programs in Victorian Catholic schools. What students and teachers had to say about their experiences in the classroom was seen as a vital part of such a study:

Student views of school life provide a different perspective on school effectiveness than can be obtained from achievement measures ... There is evidence of a link between favourable views of school life and the adoption of a deep approach to learning. It is not suggested that student views of school environments replace achievement outcomes as criteria for school effectiveness. Rather, it is argued that if they are incorporated as part of a constellation of indicators a more comprehensive conception of schooling may be captured. From research that takes a multidimensional view of schooling, it will be possible to understand better the ways in which what happens in classrooms and schools shapes student outcomes (Ainley 1995, p. 14).

This study focused on the core or compulsory religious education program offered at Year 12 in Catholic schools in Victoria, that is the programs that were experienced by most students in Catholic schools. As such, it did not concentrate on elective or optional units in religious education since those units were accessed by only a few students who had chosen to study them. The VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 were the units which were most often included as part of the compulsory Year 12 religious education program (see Chapter 2, p. 111).

This research study, therefore, has concentrated on two types of classroom programs which, in this work, have been referred to as VCE/school-based and school-based programs. With the first, schools were included whose classroom religious education programs had a cognitive basis. These focused on a study of religion; they included VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2, and they involved formal assessment based on the completion of work requirements. Such programs were complemented by a school-based component which included non-classroom activities that focused more on affective learning experiences, such as, school liturgies and reflection days. With the second, the

religious education classroom programs were school-based; in general, they had a particular emphasis on personal and faith issues, and both timetable structures and assessment activities tended to be more informal.

The main objective of this research study, therefore, was to identify, from a review of the literature, the elements that were appropriate for senior religious education. Secondly, it aimed to discover whether, in students' and teachers' perceptions, current religious education programs were appropriate in meeting the needs of contemporary senior students and in achieving the stated objectives of religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria. The findings were expected to be useful in further reviews of senior secondary religious education programs.

In light of the findings from the review of the literature on the theory of and approaches to religious education, the following six sub-questions were articulated.

Did the Year 12 religious education program:

1. increase students' interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion;
2. offer a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition;
3. increase students' interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives;
4. provide students with learning experiences that have the potential to enhance their faith and spiritual development;
5. offer content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society, and
6. achieve appropriate status and recognition of its specific contribution to the broad Year 12 curriculum?

The research approach

As mentioned, there were two broad areas to this investigation. Firstly, the theories of and approaches to religious education in Catholic schools were examined, with particular attention given to senior secondary religious education. Secondly, a survey and analysis

was made of students' and teachers' perceptions of current practices in senior religious education in Catholic schools in Victoria. Accordingly, this work is divided into two sections.

Section One examines the theory of religious education as discussed in relevant literature. To begin with, an investigation into the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools was undertaken in Chapter 1. A synthesis of this highlighted that a requirement for senior religious education programs in Catholic schools, as discussed in Church and other relevant documents, was the provision of a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition. Such a study was expected to promote learning in both the cognitive and affective domains, both of which could lead to increased knowledge, interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition, and which could encourage the development of faith and spirituality. Thus, there was emphasis of the personal and faith aspects of religious education within a religious tradition.

In addition, the literature also revealed the importance of studying religion as a subject in its own right because, as a specific form of knowledge, it could make a unique contribution to education. Additionally, the plurality of many classrooms in Catholic schools had implications for the content of the religious education classroom program. Thus, the value of studying different religions, rather than focusing only on the Catholic faith tradition, was recognized. One intention was to increase students' interest in and understanding of different religions and to increase their appreciation of the role of religion. An additional benefit, which was hoped for, was that a study of different religions would increase students' interest in learning about their own faith tradition. The state-based courses promoted a cognitive emphasis in order to, among other things, enhance students' understanding of religion, and possibly, its role in society.

A further aspect of the religious education program related to its ability to offer meaningful, relevant and intellectually challenging learning experiences to Year 12

students. As such, consideration had to be given to the developmental needs, interest and concerns of senior adolescents. This had implications for the selection of content, teaching strategies and the use of resources to promote an effective delivery of the program.

Consideration was given to the fact that an improved delivery of the program could have the potential to increase the status of religious education in the context of the broader Year 12 curriculum.

The features of the classroom program, referred to in the preceding paragraphs, are discussed in the second chapter. This was achieved through an examination of recent influences and approaches to teaching and learning. Additionally, religious education guidelines were investigated since they provided the basis for the development of some aspects of the senior religious education programs involved in the study. Different theories of human development were also discussed to determine their relevance for the development of content, teaching strategies and resources in religious education programs which would cater for the needs and interests of senior students. This highlighted the need for the program to cater for individual learning in the subject.

Finally, in the concluding chapter to Section One of this work, the context of contemporary classrooms and the implications for religious education are discussed in light of the findings from the review of the literature undertaken in the first two chapters.

Section Two of this study investigates the current practices in Year 12 religious education in Catholic schools. In order to gain an understanding of classroom practices, data was collected at the end of the 1995 academic year from three sources. Firstly, information was sought on the perceptions of students of the religious education program. In addition, their teachers' perceptions of the religious education program were also examined. Finally, curriculum documents of the programs were analysed.

Chapter 4 discusses the research methodology, the design of the research instruments and the analysis of the religious education curriculum documents of participating schools. Survey research was chosen as the most appropriate method to obtain the required information and both questionnaires and interviews were the instruments used. Eleven Catholic schools were involved in the study. Each displayed one or more of the characteristics that identified them as being representative of the broad range of Catholic schools, that is, type of principal, the regional factor and the sex factor, as in single-sex or coeducational. The three sources of data were collected from these schools. Ultimately, 227 students and 11 teachers responded to the questionnaires and 10 students were interviewed.

The questionnaire was designed to draw upon the students' perceptions of the Year 12 religious education program. Since the focus of the study was on students' experiences of the program, the teachers' perceptions of the program were used for comparison with students' perceptions. The responses to both the students' and teachers' questionnaires are presented in Chapters 5 and 6.

The second part of the data collection involved structured in-depth interviews with some of the students who had responded to the questionnaire. These responses are presented in Chapter 7.

Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the findings and their implications. Thirteen guiding principles were proposed that should provide a sound basis for the development of effective Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools. In addition, relevant areas that provide potential for further research were recommended.

In this work, the terms 'Year 12 students', 'senior students' and 'senior adolescents' have been used interchangeably.

The significance of this study

Despite ongoing discussions and developments in the field of religious education, there remains some level of debate about the most appropriate approach (in terms of content and method) for senior secondary religious education programs in Catholic schools. This is evident by the different approaches to the classroom program contained in religious education guidelines from eight dioceses around Australia (de Souza 1997). To date, there has been no extensive academic research in Victoria that has examined the learning and teaching experiences in Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools to determine their appropriateness for senior secondary students. While some schools may have informally evaluated their religious education programs and, as a result, introduced changes to the structure and design of their programs, detailed records of these valuable, educational experiences were not made available systematically. Despite the fact that such experiences may have been mirrored across many schools, they have remained isolated learning experiences for those involved. Further, the findings of such evaluations could be flawed if they have not been conducted in an appropriate format. Discussing such a situation in New South Wales, Chesterton et al. state:

Schools generally have set up RE evaluation policies which tend to be more informal than formal in nature: such policies not always being well-known by the RE staff; a heavy emphasis on the use of assignments and classwork for evaluation data; a reliance on impressionistic evaluation rather than comprehensive and systematic procedures; a focus on evaluating some but not all the elements of the curriculum; and the playing of a central role of the REC in curriculum development. It appears, thus, that while schools have followed the general imperative of establishing processes to evaluate their RE curriculum, the nature and scope of such processes are tending to fall short of what was expected at the system level (Chesterton et al 1993, p. 19).

Given the dearth of evaluation studies in religious education programs in Catholic schools, this research study provides guiding principles for a comprehensive review of senior secondary religious education curriculum in Catholic schools which could inform the development of future programs.

SECTION ONE

Religious education in Australian Catholic schools: Contexts and approaches

The nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools has been the subject of much interest and discussion. Contributors to the field operate out of varied contexts and concerns which reflect different understandings of the nature and purpose of the subject. The contemporary Australian context has been influenced by the cultural, political and technological changes which have impacted on education. Equally, Australian religious educators have been affected by accelerated changes in educational theory and practices in religious education and by the growing pluralism in theologies in the Catholic Church (Welbourne 1997). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that there is little agreement concerning the nature and purpose of religious education. This creates a compelling problem for educators trying to find the most appropriate approach for religious education school programs.

This first section of the work focuses on the approaches (in terms of content and method) to and contexts of religious education in Catholic schools. Chapter 1 investigates various understandings of the nature and purpose of religious education in Australian Catholic schools before and after Vatican II. Different approaches and their appropriateness for senior religious education are also discussed. In Chapter 2, contemporary educational approaches to learning are examined and religious education curriculum guidelines are reviewed to determine their influences on existing classroom practices at the senior secondary level in Catholic schools in Victoria. Chapter 3 discusses the context of

contemporary senior secondary classrooms in Catholic schools in light of the findings from the literature review and explores the implications for religious education.

Chapter 1

The nature and purpose of religious education in Australian Catholic schools

This chapter discusses the nature and purpose of religious education and the various contexts and concerns out of which different understandings of the subject have emerged. It explores:

- the context within which, what is now referred to as, the traditional approach in religious education operated in Australia and which determined the purpose of religious education in Catholic schools in the pre-Vatican II years;
- formative factors that have determined the nature and purpose of religious education over the past thirty years in Australian Catholic schools;
- origins of the terminology used to describe two perspectives – faith and educational – from which religious education is viewed, and
- features of the different approaches to religious education in the past three decades that have been drawn from the two perspectives: faith and educational.

The era of the Catechism

In the late nineteenth century, the Catholic school system was established in Australia as an education system separate from that of the State. While it served to give Catholics a sense of identity and mission, its prime goal was to preserve the faith of Catholics (Flynn 1979). The Catholic school:

was based on the right to give religious instruction (as it was then termed) in the schools, so that education in faith came to be identified with the schools from the beginning. Second, it was based on the concept of the integration of faith and life ... Finally, it presented a strong commitment to the Catholic school as the primary institutional means of awakening, nourishing and developing the faith of the young (Flynn 1979, pp. 54-55).

From the beginning, therefore, the purpose of the Catholic school was to educate Catholic children in their faith tradition. Accordingly, religious instruction became an essential feature of Australian Catholic schools, and the approach to religious education which evolved aimed to provide an education in faith for Catholic students through the authoritative teachings of the Church's doctrines. This approach remained relatively unchanged from the late 1800s to the 1950s and was based on students memorizing answers to theological questions found in the catechism of the day. Australian versions of the catechism first appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century and were usually based on the Irish or French version (Ryan & Malone 1996, p 36). The *Green Catechism* was replaced in 1962 with the new *Australian Catechism* (for a discussion of the different versions of the Catechism see Rummary 1975, pp. 12-15). The catechism consisted of four parts - the creed, commandments, sacraments and prayers - and there was an emphasis on matters of authority and obligation. Apart from the catechism, Bible history and Church history were studied and throughout the day a variety of formal prayers were recited (Rossiter, 1981a). Through the year, various devotional practices, such as the celebration of Mass on special occasions, the offering of novenas, praying the rosary and benediction were included as part of the religious education program and, usually, annual retreats were held for secondary students.

Rummary (1975), a pioneer amongst religious education theorists in Australia, described the approach based on the Catechism as 'magisterial' where the teaching was authoritative and proclaimed the message of the Catholic Church. Rossiter (1981b) used the term 'doctrinal' because the teaching was based on Christian doctrine which formed the content of the catechism. Lovat (1989) labelled it 'Specific' or 'Dogmatic' and

described the approach as 'faith-forming'. The most common teaching method used was the question and answer format which was consistent with the methodology of other subjects at that time. However, with its focus heavily on rote learning of the Church's teachings, the traditional approach operated on the assumption that 'to know' was 'to believe' which was more likely to produce 'a group of "knowers" who might or might not be "believers"' (Rummery 1975, p. 6). Thus, it failed to distinguish between the shared faith and life of the Church and the personal faith of the believer. It seemed to assume that Church attendance was an expression of personal faith and did not appear to recognise that it could have been an act of conformity to prevailing practices (Rummery 1975, p. 6).

The kerygmatic approach

A shift of direction in religious education began to take place in Europe after World War II and eventually filtered through to Australia. As early as 1936, Josef Jungman, an Austrian Jesuit, pointed out that the doctrinal and moral teachings, that had dominated Catholic teachings, had served to obscure the 'Good News' of the Christian message (Rummery 1975; Flynn 1979; Rossiter 1981b). Jungman argued that the traditional methods in religious learning and education had become ends in themselves and had camouflaged the true meaning of Christianity and God's Revelation to the human person. In the 1950s, other European theologians argued for changes to liturgy and to theological understandings of the Church, the effect of which was to give liturgy and scripture a more central role to the life of the Church (Ryan & Malone 1996). As educators became more aware of some of the problems related to the learning-by-heart process of the traditional approach, they were inspired by Jungman's writings which maintained that there should be a return to an emphasis on the sources of the Christian proclamation of salvation in the Bible and Christian tradition. Drawing on the Greek words '*keryx*' meaning a herald, and '*kerygma*' meaning a message, the new approach became known as kerygmatic since its focus was on proclaiming the kerygma, the Good News of

salvation. Interest was renewed in the role of the Bible and liturgy in Catholic religious education, and Christ and personal faith became the centrepiece as the kerygmatic approach set out to proclaim the 'Good News'. The Bible, liturgy, doctrine and witness were four important aspects of the approach.

The kerygmatic approach became accessible to Australian educators in the 1960s. At first, it was viewed enthusiastically by many teachers as an exciting improvement on the traditional approach (Rummery 1975; Hamilton 1981a) as many teachers found themselves reading passages from scripture for the first time. However, some difficulties with the approach gradually emerged. One of these was that teachers were not always trained for the teaching of religious education and did not have an adequate understanding of the key concepts (Rummery 1975). Also, teachers often had little formal training in scripture studies and, since the Bible was an integral part of the kerygmatic approach, this became problematic. Another matter of concern revolved around the response of students who found the biblical content repetitious and which they could not relate to their perceived needs and interests (Rossiter 1981a, p. 114). Finally, the kerygmatic approach operated on the assumption that the religious education class was composed of a group of believers. It 'presumed an initiation to Christian life, a commitment to the faith, and an involvement in liturgical life' (Rossiter 1981a, p. 114). This was not always the case with students in Catholic classrooms of the 1960s (Rossiter 1981a) which meant that, in time, religious educators were faced with negative student reactions. These tensions were further compounded by the advent of the Second Vatican Council.

Teachings of Vatican II (1962 – 1965): Implications for religious education

Any discussion of the developments in religious education over the past thirty years needs to be placed against a backdrop of the aftermath of Vatican II. There were many significant changes introduced which had far-reaching implications for Catholic education.

Understanding of Christian Revelation

Following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) there emerged changed perceptions and practices in the Catholic Church which stemmed from a broader understanding of Christian Revelation. The teachings contained in one of the fundamental documents of Vatican II, *The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum* (ed. Abbott 1966), were that Divine Revelation is essentially an on-going process which God initiates. The only source of Divine Revelation is God and the human person receives such Revelation through the scriptures and through the traditions of the Church. Therefore, Revelation:

Is a manifestation by God - primarily, of Himself ; secondarily, of His will and intentions - granted to particular men at particular times. Every single such communication from God is part of a larger pattern, is destined ultimately for the good of all men (ed. Abbott 1966, p. 108).

From *The Renewal of the Education of Faith*, (REF) a translation of *Il rinnovamento della Catechesi*, published in February 1970 by the Italian Episcopal Conference, comes the following statement:

The deeds, the signs and the words whereby God has intervened in the history of men are all closely linked to one another and they have been God's way of inviting and calling men to union with Himself. Together they constitute the whole of Revelation (REF 1970, #102).

Thus, the teachings of the Catholic Church focused on Jesus Christ as the centre point of all Revelation - 'to see Jesus is to see His Father' (ed. Abbott 1966, p. 113). Following Vatican II, Moran (1966), a religious educator from the United States, described Revelation as 'a personal communion of knowledge, an interrelationship of God and the individual within a believing community' (1966, p. 13). Nichols (1978), a British theologian, writing a decade later, supported this when he said, 'God's Revelation is grasped by men in a personal act' (1978, p. 64). Yet another interpretation was offered by

McBrien (1994) in his treatise on Catholicism where he described Revelation as 'the self-communication of God' (1994, p. 265), a process that is initiated by God and one we can recognize and accept because we have this 'radical' capacity to be open to the presence and action of God in our history and in our personal lives. Since both the individual and the faith community are identified in these interpretations, Revelation can be both personal and communal.

According to McBrien, there were two aspects in the process of Revelation. The first was the message, that is, God's communication with us and the second, since there was always a mediator, the instrument through which the communication was passed. For example, it might be a person, thus, 'Christ is Revelation' (p. 265), or it might be a product such as the Bible or a dogma of the Church (1994):

The mediating product of God's self-communication is revelatory in that it brings about and witnesses to the individual's or community's experience of God. Christ always remains the supreme moment of Revelation, both as process and as product, because in Christ alone God's self-communication totally transforms the mediator, so that the mediator and the mediated are one and the same. Christ is not only our 'go-between' with God. He is also 'very God of God,' to cite one of the ancient creeds. Christ is at once the one who mediates for us and the divine reality which is mediated to us (McBrien 1994, p. 265).

Revelation, therefore, was recognised as a two-way process that involved God as the giver and the human person as a consciously willing receiver. If Revelation is to mean anything to the modern world, it can only continue to exist in a current, personal, living relationship that the human believer has with God in the context of the believing community.

Revelation and religious freedom

Another conviction that emerged from the Council was contained in the document, *Declaration on Religious Liberty, Dignitatis Humanae* (ed. Flannery 1996), which

acknowledged that individuals had the right and the freedom to search for God and eternal truths in their own way and to bear the responsibility that allowed them to follow the path they found:

The Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom ... the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself (ed. Flannery 1996, pp. 552-3).

Another radical move for the Catholic Church, which came from Vatican II, was the acceptance of other forms of worship among people from different nationalities and cultures. This was contained in the document *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate*, (ed. Flannery 1996):

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. It has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from its own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men and women ... The Church, therefore, urges its sons and daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, together with their social life and culture (ed. Flannery 1996, pp. 570-1).

The transformed thinking evident in the above statements, that is, the relationship between Revelation and personal freedom, its implications for a life-long religious education and the recognition by the Church of other faith traditions, had significance for the Catholic community. They developed altered notions of the role of the Church in their lives which had an impact on their religious practices. This also had implications for the religious education programs in Catholic schools. Catholic educators, recognising that religious education provided the central core around which the life of a Catholic school was based, strove to understand and teach these changed understandings in effective classroom programs. Given the complex nature of the subject and the diversity of views and understandings of its purpose, it is not surprising that there has been as much dissension as agreement about what should constitute the nature and essential purpose of a religious education program.

Religious education in Catholic schools: Catechesis and evangelization

Religious education in Catholic schools has traditionally been seen as an essential part of the mission of the Church. Its nature and purpose were drawn from within the faith community and, as such, was an education in faith, that is, the objective was to increase knowledge, understanding and practice of the faith tradition with a desire to promote personal faith development. This has been explicitly expressed in Church documents since Vatican II, for instance in *Religious dimension of education in the Catholic school: Guidelines for reflection and renewal* (RDECS), where the school was seen as a 'pastoral instrument' of the Church, an instrument that could become 'more effective in proclaiming the Gospel and promoting human formation' (1988, #31). The following statement from the RDECS illustrated this thinking:

The Catholic school is one of these pastoral instruments; its specific pastoral service consists in mediating between faith and culture: being faithful to the newness of the Gospel while at the same time respecting the autonomy and the methods proper to human knowledge (RDECS 1988, #31).

At this point it is necessary to distinguish between the respective contributions made by the Catholic school and the classroom religious education program to the religious education of the students. At the broader level, an education in faith has a wider application and includes such elements as school liturgies, whole school assemblies, community work and programs promoting social justice, the relationships between all members of the school community and so on. The classroom religious education program is but one element and its prime function is to educate the student in knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition. It becomes the channel through which the teachings of the Church can be made accessible and its role in the education in faith complements that provided more widely by the whole school.

Given that an education in faith has traditionally been the primary purpose of the broad religious education program in Catholic schools, it is important to examine the meaning of 'faith' in this context. According to the General Catechetical Directory (GCD), a Church document published by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in 1971:

Faith ... can be considered in two ways, either as the total adherence given by man under the influence of grace to God revealing himself, (the Faith *by which* one believes,) or as the content of revelation and of the Christian message (the Faith *which* one believes). These two aspects are by their very nature inseparable and a normal maturing of the Faith assumes progress of both together (GCD 1971, #36).

The two elements of faith that have been discussed here refer to both the act of faith, that is, the faith response that determines beliefs, values and actions; and to the content of faith, that is the knowledge of the content of faith. Dykstra (1990) illustrates this more clearly when he states:

Faith is deeply related to belief. Faith also connotes profound trust, confidence, and loyalty. It is an affair of the heart as well as of the mind. Commitment and action are also dimensions of faith. Faith has to do with a person's fundamental orientation in life (p. 246).

The values and actions of a person, therefore, are determined by their beliefs and commitments, that is, their faith, and such a belief is enhanced by knowledge of the content of that faith. Thus, the mission of the Catholic school, in its role whereby it fulfils the 'prophetic ministry' of the Church, is to make the content of the message of faith:

intelligible to men of all times to convert to God through Christ, that they may interpret their whole life in the light of Faith ... that they may lead a life in keeping with the dignity which the message of salvation has brought them and that Faith has revealed to them (GCD 1971, #37).

Further, in the more recent *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) (1997), there is an explicit recognition that 'by deepening the knowledge of the faith, catechesis nourishes not only the life of faith but equips it to explain itself to the world' (1997, #85). Thus, both the cognitive (knowledge) and affective (action as a result of commitment and belief) are vital aspects of religious education that need to be addressed.

Traditionally, there have been two aspects of an education in faith. These are evangelization and catechetics. *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* (REF 1970) was used as a reference point to establish the principles of catechesis in Australia. The document used the terms 'evangelization' (#25) and 'catechesis' (#30), as well as the terms 'pre-evangelization' (#26) and 'pre-catechesis' (#31) quite specifically when discussing the appropriate catechetical process for different stages of readiness. Thus, the REF recognised that it was necessary to have a variety of educational approaches in order to take into account the needs of different age groups and their different life-situations:

The point of reference which will determine the value of the whole process of educating in faith is the reality of life here and now. The daily situation of the Christian, his vocation, his mentality of faith, his communion with Christ in the Church, his place in the world, and his eternal destiny (REF 1970, #162).

Evangelization is 'that first announcement of salvation to someone who, for various reasons, has no knowledge of it, or does not yet believe it' (REF 1970, #25). Catechesis, however:

Is intended for those who have made, even implicitly, the fundamental choice of Christ and His Church. It is at the service of men. It takes into consideration their actual stages of Christian growth, their crises and their spiritual progress. It meets them as they are by a variety of means and methods suggested by the competent pastoral authority or the experience of those who are adults in the faith (REF 1970, #31).

Therefore, 'catechesis' was the term used for the education of the newly baptised adult into the life of the Christian community. Later, when it came to be commonly used for the education in faith process beyond the catechumenate, it continued, by its nature, to belong within the community of believers.

The General Catechetical Directory (GCD), also recognised that there was an interdependence between evangelization and catechesis that arose from both their nature and practice. Responding to the pluralistic values of contemporary society, it suggested that:

In times past, the cultural tradition favoured the transmission of the Faith to a greater extent than it does today; in our times, however, the cultural tradition has undergone considerable change, with the result that less and less can one depend on continued transmission by means of it ... some renewal in evangelization is needed for transmitting the same Faith to new generations ... Christian faith requires explanations and new forms of expression so that it may take root in all successive cultures (GCD 1971, #2).

Nichols (1978) believed that the catechetical process, 'assuming a faith, however, dormant or troubled', should be part of religious education (p. 26). He argued that catechesis should 'aim at a Christian vision of human life as it is and could be' instead of focusing on specific 'Church' topics or events (p. 26). However, Nichols acknowledged that the dual purposes of evangelization and catechesis overlap and, consequently, the terms 'pre-evangelization' or 'pre-catechesis' could be used. Speaking of religious education in the pluralist classrooms of Britain in the seventies, he said:

Some of the powerful forces which influence children as they grow up today smother the idealism, the sense of mystery and of humanity's needs for salvation which usually motivate the response of faith. Often it is necessary to prepare the ground by trying to develop these human qualities. Especially in difficult social areas this may prove to be a long and arduous task. This pre-evangelization is, in the secularised world of today, an important part of religious education (1978, p. 16).

More recently, Ryan and Malone (1996) described two distinct functions provided by catechesis and evangelization in religious education. The catechetical process places emphasis on the sharing and the ongoing development of faith and it assumes that the context consists of a community of believers who are attempting to live their lives according to the Catholic faith tradition. With the evangelical process, on the other hand, the emphasis or goal is to proclaim the Christian Gospel in such a way that students may

be led to believe in it as the Word of God and accept it in their lives. Gascoigne (1995) elucidated his understanding of the evangelization process when he described its primary task as being one that leads to an understanding of the Gospel as 'an ultimate and saving word about human existence' (p. 279). He argued that for this to happen the life-situation of the human person, including their values and experiences, must be taken into account. Thus, we need 'to foster a Christian identity that will give preeminence to the saving and liberating power of the Gospel by interpreting its words in and for the diversity of human contexts' (Gascoigne 1995, p. 279).

Catechesis, then, has generally provided the basis for the various approaches drawn from the 'education in faith' perspective that have been developed in Catholic schools over the past century. However, the writings since Vatican II, as discussed above, on catechesis and evangelization acknowledge the different but necessary aspects they both contribute to an 'education in faith' approach. Given the compulsory nature of religious education in Catholic schools, it cannot always be assumed that classrooms today are filled with groups of students who believe in and are committed to the Catholic faith tradition. Moran (1970) described young people in the sixties as being unable to accept the Christian religion without first being provided with the opportunity to make some comparison with other faith traditions. Rummery (1975), endorsed this view when he presented a case for religious education in a pluralist society. More recently, Crawford and Rossiter (1988) reiterated the problem when they described teenage culture and the perception many young people have that they do not belong to the Church. Given this situation, the catechetical process would have limited application in the multi-faith and multicultural classrooms of late twentieth-century Australian society. In recognition of this feature, Macdonald (1988) stated:

In a particular Catholic secondary school situation, where teachers decide that catechesis is not appropriate or possible, education in faith may be expressed as evangelization so as to enable youth:

- to consider the human quest for meaning in life;

- to reflect on human experience in the light of various meaning and values systems;
- to develop a seriousness about human values;
- to become aware of the different belief systems within the community;
- to explore the different dimensions of religion;
- to develop a sensitive understanding of the religious systems by which people live, including Christian, non-Christian and traditionally non-religious systems, and
- to develop a critical understanding and appreciation of Christianity and of the Catholic faith tradition in particular (1988, p. 36).

Thus, in listing a number of different aspects related to the human search for meaning, Macdonald made it clear that, depending on the circumstances, education in faith can assume the forms of both catechesis and evangelization in today's classroom. Ryan and Malone (1996) also argued that there were appropriate times for adopting the evangelization process for specific groups in religious education in a Catholic school. Certainly, the evangelization process would appear to serve a distinct need in Catholic schools today, performing a function in the pluralist classrooms that goes beyond that provided by catechesis.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the traditional orientation for religious education in Australian Catholic schools was towards an education in faith and that the two aspects of an education in faith, evangelization and catechesis, both had a role to perform. Through the evangelization process, those students who have not yet been exposed to the Christian gospel, could be offered opportunities to hear it and invited to interpret its relevance to their daily lives. Thus, students may make an initial response, whether this be in a shifting of attitude, belief or action. However, if within the classroom, there are students who make up a 'believing community' in that they share their religious beliefs and practices, the catechetical approach will help such students to further develop their faith.

However, while this traditional orientation remains the central feature of religious education in Catholic schools, an educational perspective in religious education has evolved over the past thirty years where more attention has been given to the cognitive dimension of the study. Initially, such approaches were developed in State schools and did not have, as their primary aim, the education of believers in their own particular faith tradition. Instead, they focused on the general education of the student and incorporated a study of religion as a subject in its own right. However, when religious education programs in Catholic schools were guided by an educational perspective, it was recognized that such programs had the potential to enhance students' knowledge and personal response to their own faith tradition (Hull 1984).

To sum up, the different approaches (that is, the content and methods) to religious education which have been adopted for use in Catholic schools in Australia, have been drawn from a faith orientation and an educational orientation. Varying opinions have been offered on the nature and purpose of religious education depending on the particular orientation from which the different approaches are drawn. In an attempt to understand the ensuing debate, an examination of the terminology used in religious education is necessary.

Faith and educational perspectives in religious education

Much of the current debate relates to the term 'religious education' and the differences pertaining to the two fields of study - Religion and Education. Moran (1970), whose early writings had a significant influence on many Australian religious educators, argued that the traditional religious education programs or catechetics in Catholic schools were a 'cross-breed' that did not emerge from two distinct schools but rather 'from the aim of confessional groups to indoctrinate' (Moran 1970, p. 14). He suggested that, in order for religious education to gain any credibility in its own right, it would need to move away from this intent. Instead it should focus on the development of a new area of study which

drew on theology and sound educational theory, the former providing the method and the latter providing the content (1970, p. 21). Thus, Moran was interested in putting catechesis into an educational framework.

Moran (1970) argued that the crisis in the catechetical movement at that time, which derived from the fact that, in practical terms, the role of the Church had little meaning in modern society, created a demand for courses in religions other than Christianity. He proposed an ecumenical aspect for religious education which, he believed, had links to past approaches (catechetical) but completely transformed them in that it did not necessarily afford Christianity a normative position. He asserted that the aim of ecumenical education was the same as education, that is, 'the lived truth of the humanized world' (Moran, 1970, p. 85) and that his approach would lead to 'experience-centred' religious education that should be taught in an intellectually challenging framework which is free from a proselytizing approach. He said that, of its nature, religion should 'bring the emotional and the rational into an intelligent union but a study of religion that would accomplish this feat presupposes that much else has been studied' (1970, p. 85). Given this determination, Moran argued that it would be impossible to introduce a study of religion to younger students and that education in religion, for example, a course in comparative religions, should not be embarked on until students reach the maturity levels of senior secondary or university education. He claimed that his approach did not 'prescribe that people must accept a religious belief and ritual but that this issue ought to be intelligently dealt with in education' (1970, p. 85). Such a program should aim to extend the understanding of students so that if they make their choice to live by a particular religion or not to live by it, the choice would be an informed and intelligent one (1970, p. 119).

Drawing on Moran's writings, Rummery (1975) presented a detailed analysis of a range of approaches in catechesis, including the traditional approach, the kerygmatic approach and the life-centred approach and followed this by exploring their relevance to the

teaching of religion in the pluralistic society of the 1970s. He suggested that the purpose of catechesis is to create dialogue and action between believers, and this group-sharing of their faith should lead to an enhancement of their personal faith. However, the difficulty of using this approach in a classroom which contains a diversity of beliefs is, at once, obvious. Rummery's contribution to the literature was significant in that it extended Moran's discussion on the relationship between the traditional approach of an education in faith and the broader concept of religious education as contained in a phenomenological approach (1968, 1973a, 1978) (see pp, 50-55 of this work for a fuller description of Smart's work). Rummery compared the catechetical approach with four other methods of approaching a study to religious education, that is, 'teaching that, education in, teaching how and teaching about' and placed the catechetical approach within these (Rummery 1975, p. 157).

According to Rummery's descriptions, the first approach, the 'teaching that', was closest to the catechetical approach. This involved teaching fundamental Christian truths to people who shared the same beliefs. The second approach referred to 'education in religion' where the intent was to transmit a distinct form of knowledge (religion) without bias, so that no particular faith tradition was given more emphasis than another but there was enough depth to avoid superficiality. The third approach, 'teaching how', was based on the phenomenological approach as devised by Smart (1968, 1973a, 1978) which recognized religion as a form of knowledge and emphasized understanding so that individuals could make informed choices. The final approach, 'teaching about', was similar to the third one but was problematic because it lacked the emotional and experiential aspect of religion, that is, it denied aspects that related to the actual nature of the subject. It focused on the cognitive component and could be reduced to a mere factual study (Rummery 1975, p. 157).

Rummery made it clear that the aims of the traditional catechetical approach and the others were separate in that the latter incorporated a cognitive and intellectual approach

which was quite distinct from the indoctrination or conditioning approach of the former. While the former depended on teaching and sharing activities amongst believers, the others did not necessarily require a commitment or a sharing of beliefs from either the teacher or the students. The strength of the phenomenological approach lay in its intent which was to attempt to teach religion more openly without expecting any allegiance to a particular faith tradition. While this is a more appropriate approach for an adolescent whose developmental stage is still at the point of exploration and experimentation rather than commitment, it raises the question of its suitability in a confessional school. A further question is whether catechesis, which is confessional in its approach, has any compatibility with the phenomenological approach which is non-confessional. Rummery suggested that there could be a point of convergence between the two, the latter stressing understanding, empathy and experience of religion viewed in multi-dimensional fashion and the former, at some stage, culminating in a dialogue of believers. He presented the theory that 'catechesis may logically crown the phenomenological approach which, by its nature, prepares for and remains open to faith' (Rummery 1975, p. 181) which is a real strength in a multi-faith society. This was an aspect of the phenomenological approach that was recognized as having some value for religious education in Catholic schools.

While both Moran's (1970) and Rummery's (1975) studies were written in the seventies, they still have implications for this research study. Moran's (1970) theory questioned the 'readiness' of secondary students for a course that focused on a comparative study of religions. He based his argument on the fact that students must be adequately prepared in earlier years and this cannot be assumed. He also acknowledged the pluralistic nature of America's youth and the need for a religious education program that took this factor into consideration. Both these factors are relevant to Australian religious education in the nineties. Rummery (1975) described religious education that combined elements of catechesis with an approach that had a broader educational focus which gave greater emphasis to the cognitive aspects of the subject. The former viewed the subject from a

faith standpoint and the latter from an educational standpoint. These two dimensions, religious education from a faith perspective and religious education from an educational perspective, which had an intellectual base, are essential aspects of current programs in Catholic schools.

Rossiter (1981a, 1983, 1985) also described two distinct perspectives to religious education, that is, education in faith and education in religion. However, Rossiter clearly recognised that there was an interrelation between the two perspectives and claimed that they were not mutually exclusive (1981a, p. 5). According to Rossiter, education in faith, that is, an approach to religious education from a faith perspective, referred to a broader application in religious education than that defined by Moran. While its primary purpose was directed towards 'better understanding of, and deeper personal faith in,' a particular faith tradition (1981a, p. 4), the transmission of the faith was not confined to teaching activities within the formal curriculum. It also included liturgical and pastoral activities which were shared by the school community and there was an implicit religious influence of the school's social life which required the teacher to be a committed believer. This approach was most common in religious or church schools and assumed the recipients formed a community of believers (1981a, p. 4). Rossiter, therefore, recognised that the formal classroom religious education curriculum was just a part of the broader, informal curriculum of the Catholic school which contributed to the religious education of students.

The other perspective, 'education in religion', provided a basis for an approach that was more concerned with 'knowledge, understanding and affective appreciation of religion than with "faith development" and "faith responses" of pupils' (Rossiter 1981a, pp. 4 - 5; Crawford & Rossiter 1985, p.45). The general framework in which this approach resided arose from the educational process and it made no assumptions about the religious beliefs of either the teacher or the student. It recognised religion as a distinct field of study that would make its own contribution to the general education of the student and, as such, it would take on historical (history of religions), sociological (the role and

influence of religion in society) and psychological (an understanding of human behaviour and its links to religious motivation) aspects (Lovat 1989, pp. 51 - 58). It focused on activities contained within the formal curriculum and it was characterised by its intellectual approach to the study. It did not grow out of the concerns of a community of faith but was seen as a subject that could make a valid contribution to the secular curriculum, in its own right, just as any other subject would. Such an approach grew out of the developments in secular schools in Australia which wished to incorporate some studies of religion into their programs (Crawford & Rossiter 1985).¹

(See pp. 59-63 of this work for a more detailed discussion of Crawford and Rossiter's approach).

In the years following the publication of Rossiter's thesis on the two perspectives, many religious educators in Australia appeared to misinterpret his argument regarding their interrelationship. Thus, an artificial polarity was assumed between the two which served to diminish the value that the two perspectives had for religious education in Catholic schools. Rather erroneously, certain presumptions were made about the faith development potential of some learning activities over others. In practice, some educators, in their attempts to develop a more intellectual program, over-emphasized the cognitive aspects of the program to the detriment of essential affective elements in religious education. Equally, programs that focused on affective learning sometimes failed to recognize the contribution that learning in the cognitive domain could make to the promotion of personal faith. There is a need, then, for educators to recognize the interrelatedness of religious education from a faith perspective and religious education from an educational perspective, and that their aims need not be at variance with one another but, indeed, have the capacity to share similar objectives.

¹ For instance, in South Australia, Religion Studies became a compulsory subject in State schools. This was supported and informed by post-graduate courses in Religious Studies at the University of South Australia.

The two perspectives described above, that is, faith and educational, have determined the different approaches to religious education in Catholic schools in the past three decades (see Figure 1).

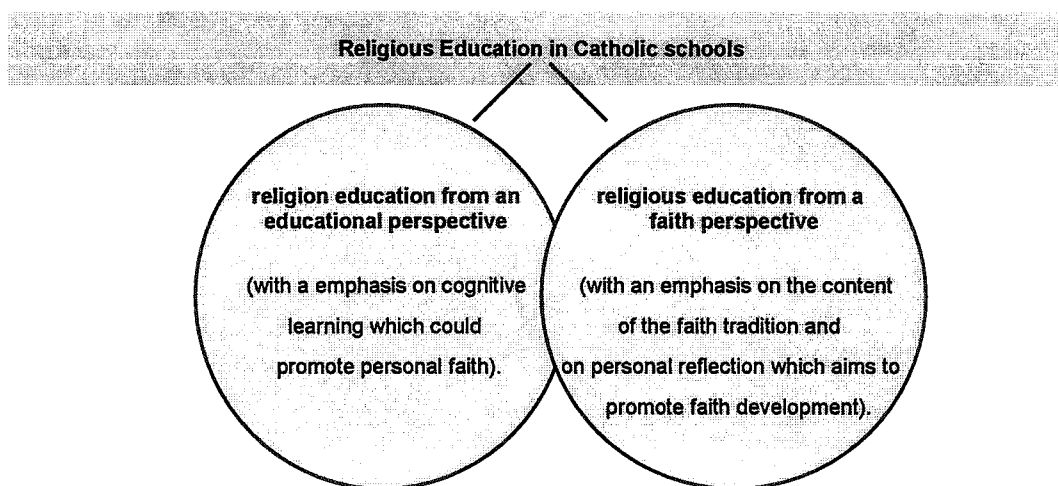


Figure 1: Different perspectives in religious education in Australian Catholic schools.

The knowledge component of the first included a study of the religious tradition but gave greater emphasis to the personal and faith aspects of religious education, that is, learning in the affective domain. The second focused more on the cognitive aspect of the subject but recognized that increased knowledge could enhance the students' personal faith.

The terms 'perspective' and 'approach' are used frequently in this research study, therefore, a definition of each to ensure clarity of communication is necessary. One definition of 'perspective' offered in the *Macquarie Dictionary*, 3rd edition (1997) is 'a mental view'. A further explanation, offered in the Australian edition of the *Collins Cobuild – English Learner's Dictionary* (1994), is 'a particular way of thinking about something'. This is the meaning of the word 'perspective' as it is used in this work. According to the *Macquarie Dictionary* 3rd edition (1997), one definition of 'approach' is 'the mode of access to a subject of study or discussion'. Thus, for purposes of this work, the word

'approach' is used as that which relates to the content and method adopted for a particular program.

To sum up, 'perspective' is used in the broader sense of looking at religious education from a particular viewpoint while 'approach' is used more specifically to discuss the particular method used to study the subject.

An investigation of the different approaches that have been influential in Catholic education follows. This will:

- discuss them in chronological order;
- place them in their original geographical contexts, and,
- evaluate their appropriateness for senior secondary students in Australian Catholic schools in terms of content, methodology, relevance, and the expectations of Catholic education.

As previously discussed, Rossiter (1981a, 1982) used the definitions 'education in faith' and 'education in religion' for two perspectives which determined the different approaches to religious education in Australian Catholic classrooms. He placed the catechetical and life-centred or experiential approaches in the former and existential and phenomenological approaches in the latter. Moore (1981) also used the broad headings 'education in faith' and 'education in religion' to categorise different perspectives in religious education that emerged in the last two decades. Under the former he included 'confessional models' (catechetical approach) and 'neo-confessional models' (life-centred approach), under the latter he incorporated the 'existential models' and 'scientific models' (including the phenomenological, historical and typological approaches) (1981, p.159). Lovat (1989), also distinguished between faith-oriented and educational perspectives. He used the terms 'Specific or Faith-forming models' (which included dogmatic catechetics, life-centred, shared praxis approaches) and 'Inter-faith models' (including historical, psychological, sociological, phenomenological and typological approaches). The former

referred to approaches to religious education that were drawn from a faith perspective and the latter to approaches from an educational perspective (1989, p.1). He then proposed a new 'integrated model' which he called the Critical model (1989, p. 47) (See p. 57 of this work for further discussion on Lovat's approach).

The different terms referred to in the preceding paragraph highlight the need for dialogue between educators to determine a consistent use and interpretation of language used in religious education. Terms, such as, 'faith-forming' could be misinterpreted unless they were clearly shown to be expressions of intent rather than achievement. The terms 'education in faith' and 'education in religion' as they have been drawn from the literature are used to describe the intentions of different approaches to religious education. Thus, the first is used for approaches that have a faith orientation, that is, the intention is to promote knowledge and understanding of a faith tradition. The second is for those approaches that have an educational orientation, that is, the intention is to study religion as a subject in its own right. In a secular educational system, while there is recognition that such a study could lead to faith development, this is not its primary intention. However, in a religious educational setting, the intention is to increase knowledge and understanding of religion, in particular, the faith tradition, and the hope is that this may lead to personal faith development.

The term *faith development* is used in this work to refer to the enhancement of religious knowledge and beliefs related to the Catholic faith tradition (Rossiter 1998, p. 20). 'It refers to the ongoing growth that takes place in a person's religious life across the course of the life span' (Dykstra 1990, p. 247). *Spiritual development*, in this work, has a much broader application. It refers to the spiritual dimension of life which can, but does not necessarily, include a religious aspect related to a specific faith tradition:

It is a sense of relatedness to that which is beyond the self yet approachable. For some, the spiritual is around or within the self. This may be personal or nonpersonal, named God, power, or presence.' (Cully 1990, p. 607).

Spirituality, therefore, is seen as that essence that gives meaning to the lives of students, which influences their 'beliefs, commitments, values, attitudes and dispositions to behave in particular ways' (Rossiter 1996c, p. 3). Given the above interpretations of faith development and spiritual development, these two terms are treated as separate entities in this work.

Religious education from a faith perspective

Life-centred and experiential approaches

The life-centred approach in Australia, which Rummery (1975), Rossiter (1981a, 1982), Moore (1981) and Lovat (1989) described, grew out of the new understanding of Revelation that was discussed earlier, and it was supported at the broader educational level by insights from humanistic psychologists (for example, Frankl 1963; Rogers 1961, 1969; Maslow 1968) which focused on personal interaction and inspired curriculum theory in the seventies and eighties. These had major implications for educators who turned their attention to the individual student's abilities and experiences and to learning processes that aimed at personalising and humanizing the individual. In religious education, the students' experiences and lifestyles became the point of focus for classroom discussions. This was drawn from Church documents of that period. For example, a statement from the *Renewal of the Education of Faith* (REF 1970) suggested:

It is not always possible to begin with Divine Revelation especially now in our age. It is often necessary to move from life situations of the faithful in order to prepare them gradually to listen to the Word of God and to offer Him the obedience of faith (1970, p. 136).

Religion teachers drew on the daily experiences of their students in their attempts to show them how they could enrich their lives through Gospel teachings. Thus, the students' own situations, their needs, interests, hopes and problems provided one resource for the content of the lesson. As a result, class discussions became a useful teaching technique. Understandably, the content was usually relevant to the students which served to increase their interest in the subject.

The life-centred approach presumes that faith is a gift to be awakened and allows room for the personal response of the individual. While not avoiding specifically religious material, the approach tries to depth the religious dimension of everyday life and bring this process ultimately to a focus on a personal relationship with Christ and the Christian way of life (Rossiter 1981a, p. 115).

Goldman, an advocate of the life-centred approach in Britain, argued that, while it did not ignore that religion could be taught in the same way as other subjects, that is, a body of knowledge and facts to be learned, religion was 'a way of life to be lived, not a series of facts to be learned' (1965, p. 6).

The approach Goldman proposed was specifically directed to religious education in Government schools (Goldman 1965, p. 3). It assumed that religion was intrinsic to human life and therefore added meaning to every aspect of living. Its goal was to encourage in students a sensitive appreciation and involvement in the religious tradition.

At first, religious educators were enthusiastic about this new approach. They found that their students, including senior adolescents, who had previously been critical of religious education classes, were now interested in participating. Class discussions became a popular teaching method which could have contributed to the initial success of this approach (Rummery 1975). Certainly, the thrust of renewal from Vatican II and the teaching of Revelation and catechesis that followed would have been significant factors in the development of the life-centred approach. In reaction to the pre-Vatican II model, its focus on relating to the student in a personal way made the life-centred approach

relevant and appealing. Combined with this was the feature of 'practical existentialism or the here and now-ism' (Rossiter 1981a, p. 115) which was prominent in the Australian culture of the day and which encouraged teachers and students to make religious education more relevant to their everyday personal lives.

Another factor that contributed to the success of the life-centred approach was its congruence with other educational thinking at the time which had also become more focused on the development of the individual, on the search for meaning and values and which had a high regard for personal freedom.

However, despite the initial euphoria that surrounded the adoption of the life-centred approach, serious problems eventually emerged and its supporters became disillusioned (Flynn 1979; Rossiter 1981a). One of these related to the very factor that had contributed to its early success, that is, the use of class discussions as its main teaching technique:

One of the acknowledged problems with life-centred religious education is the tendency to rely too much on discussion. Some teachers find that discussions may fail to go beyond human experience. Some educators feel that in the interest of making RE relevant to life, too much in the way of social problems and human relations are included in the RE curriculum at the expense of religious content. A further difficulty arises where a life-centred approach in senior classes appears to compromise the possibility of any serious academic study of religion (Rossiter 1981a, p. 116).

Thus, the methodology adopted in the life-centred approach was very subjective and it became problematic as it required resources and levels of creativity that often stretched beyond the capabilities of the average teacher.

Another concern that was raised in relation to the life-centred approach was the apparent conflict between theory and practice. In theory it aimed for religious freedom amongst students. In practice its concentration on students' personal experiences could be seen

as an attempt to change their attitudes and values. Thus, students could feel that this was an invasion of their personal and 'psychological' space (Rossiter 1981b, p. 26):

On the surface, the more open teaching/learning style, characteristic of Life-centred catechesis, gave the *impression* of greater freedom, as did its attention to the 'subjective/qualitative' and its general student-centredness ... while *appearing* to be democratic, it can apply an even greater measure of *control* than when the 'objective/quantitative' is the focus of learning ... at least then evaluation is only concerned with correct *answers*, whereas evaluation of the 'subjective/qualitative' aspects of learning normally centres, at least in part, on the displaying of correct *attitudes* as well. *What is to be judged as a 'correct' attitude will depend very much on the teacher's viewpoint and underlying intentions* (Lovat 1989, p. 27).

In spite of some of its positive qualities, the life-centred approach, as with other faith oriented approaches, often assumed that students shared religious beliefs and values, and it focused on the transmission of the Christian faith tradition. While this might fulfil the expectations of religious education in Catholic schools, it can pose a problem for today's schools, one which can be intensified at the senior secondary level. At this stage, students are often beginning to be critical of traditional beliefs and behaviours in their quest to find and establish their own identities. This can lead them to explore different value systems in their individual search for meaning which can mean that there are patterns of widely differing beliefs existent in any given class.

The experiential approach was often seen as part of the life-centred one. In fact, they are so closely interrelated that some educators prefer to make no distinction at all between them (Flynn 1979; Rossiter 1981). The word 'experiential' was used by Smart (1968, 1973a,) in relation to what he saw as one of the most fundamental aspects of religion, that of personal experience. This approach drew on the direct personal experience of those involved in the study, that is, the educative religious experiences were gained through the learning activities which provided the educational data.

The similarities of this approach to the life-centred one meant that they shared similar strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, while the extensive use of personal experiences made the experiential approach both relevant and interesting to the students, educators felt that an over-reliance on personal experience to provide the educational material created an imbalance in the religious program (Rossiter 1981a, p 117). Another aspect of the teaching approach was that, since it usually began with the premise that there was no dichotomy between religious experience and ordinary experience, it:

placed considerable stress on students being encouraged to deepen their awareness of everyday experience (that is, of Shared Human Experience) as a way of encountering both the 'raw material' from which religious concepts are made and the 'ultimate questions' to which religions address themselves (Grimmitt 1987, p. 1980).

The guidelines for religious education published by the Melbourne archdiocese in the seventies used the experiential approach. These guidelines had a significant influence on religious educators in other parts of Australia because they were the first to provide a clear statement of the process by outlining the teaching and learning strategies that were involved. (Ryan & Malone 1996). The subsequent revised guidelines in 1984 and 1995 continued to emphasize the experiential approach. For example, the process in the guidelines were as follows:

1977 - sharing experience, focusing reflection, Christ experience, life synthesis (CEO, Melbourne 1977),

1984 - extend and deepen students' experience, reflect on the religious dimensions within their experience, to know appropriate forms of personal and group response, to correlate this with the lived and written experience of the People of God (CEO, Melbourne 1984),

1995 - experience shared, reflection deepened, faith expressed, insights reinforced (CEO, Melbourne 1995).

To sum up, the strengths of the life-centred and the experiential approaches are identified as follows:

- i. The content had the potential to be meaningful and relevant since it attempted to draw on the students' direct life experiences. This aspect was expected to promote students' interest in class activities.
- ii. There were contemporary elements in the educational approach since the teacher and students entered into a kind of partnership in the sharing of individual experiences and learning from one another.
- iii. Class discussions were useful learning tools since they offered opportunities for students and teachers to share and learn from each other. However, careful preparation was essential if its effectiveness as a learning experience was to be secured and the privacy of students needed to be protected at all times so that they did not feel pressured to reveal sensitive issues with which they were uncomfortable.
- iv. The focus on the individual was in line with other contemporary educational philosophies.

The negative aspects were:

- i. The informal discussions, which were the usual learning activity, often became repetitive and uninformed so that no real learning took place. They often lacked intellectual challenge and had limited content because they largely drew on students' experiences.
- ii. There was some tension between the freedom that was apparently given to students while pressure was being applied for them to 'share' their experiences.
- iii. There was an imbalance of content with no distinction made between religious and 'ordinary' everyday experiences.

As can be seen, while the life-centred and experiential approaches have made valuable contributions to senior religious education because of their capacity to provide relevance and interest to students. However, in practice they have been limited in their ability to

address other appropriate aspects for the subject at this level, for instance, in including a knowledge component or a historical or critical perspective and so on.

Shared praxis approach

Shared-Praxis was introduced by Groome (1980) in the United States and has continued to be developed through the eighties (Groome 1991). It was well received in Australia as indicated by its influence in the development of religious education guidelines through the eighties and into the nineties, for example, the Parramatta Guidelines, *Sharing our Story: Religious education curriculum* (CEO, Parramatta 1992). Shared praxis referred to a process that was practised by groups of people who came together voluntarily to share their Christian faith, and to reflect critically on, and apply their faith tradition to, their everyday lives. Groome developed his praxis approach from the educational theories of critical theorists such as Habermas and Freire (Groome 1980, pp. 172 - 177) and makes reference to the faith developmental theories of Fowler (1980, pp. 66 - 73). By placing his approach to religious education in the framework of both contemporary educational theory and theological understandings, Groome raised the credibility of religious education as a subject in the general curriculum. He offered a religious education model which combined the intention to educate in faith with sound educational and theological links. As such, it provided a useful basis for the development of programs in Catholic schools.

Groome argued that religious education should aim to empower people in their search for the transcendent. Thus, it should raise their spiritual awareness and develop a consciousness that rises beyond their physical world and enable them to give expression to it. It should be 'a deliberate attending to the transcendent dimension of life by which a conscious relationship to an ultimate ground of being is promoted and enabled to come to expression' (Groome 1980, p. 22).

Groome asserted that his approach derived from his own Christian background and he described it as 'a group of Christians sharing in dialogue their critical reflection on present action in light of the Christian story and its Vision toward the end of lived Christian faith' (1980, p. 184).

There were five stages in the learning process of the shared-praxis model which were: naming present action, critical reflection, dialogue, the Story and the Vision that arises from the story (Groome 1980). Translating this into practice meant that first a topic was chosen and studied in terms of what it meant to students in their present lives. This was followed by a critical reflection of the situation, the questions 'why', 'what' and 'how' were asked. The third stage encouraged participants to share their reflections where the process involved both talking and listening to each other. The fourth stage examined what the scriptures and Christian tradition said about the topic and how this related to present practice. The fifth stage aimed at planning for future action to live as Christians, that is, faithful to the teachings of Jesus.

The praxis approach has had a significant influence on the development of some religious education programs in Australia. With the recent revision of some of the religious education guidelines, notably Melbourne and Parramatta which are both used in other dioceses, educators have suggested the need for more creative and dynamic approaches to religious education which are consonant with the intent of the 'critical reflection' aspect of the shared Christian praxis process (Bezzina, Gahan, McLenaghan & Wilson 1996). In his later writings, Groome alternately refers to praxis as a 'meta-approach' (1991, p. 280); a 'framework' and 'style of ministry' (1991, p. 296) which lead Bezzina et al. (1996) to argue that Christian shared praxis cannot simply be seen as a pedagogical method or strategy but that it is more appropriate to regard it as a framework, that is, a basis upon which programs can be developed.

Groome's praxis approach has continued to be developed during the intervening ten years to the stage where a pre-step, a 'focusing activity', was incorporated into the process (Groome 1991, p. 155) which emphasized its link to the life-centred approach. The intention of the focusing activity was to focus students' attention on their own lives, their immediate environment and the world in which they live. They were encouraged to reflect on their relationships with their families, peers and their local and international communities. This served as an introduction to the 'generative theme' (Groome 1991, p. 156) or topic of the learning experience or unit of work and 'engaged the attention of students, providing motivation for learning that is participative and dialogical' (Bezzina et al. 1996, p. 3). Thus, it provided opportunities for introductory activities that prepared for and lead into the first two steps of the process, that is the naming of and critical reflection upon present praxis:

Religious Education, for Groome, is an enterprise of *information* and *formation* that empowers people to transform themselves and their world. The present *praxis* of students is defined by Groome as referring to their whole way of being as people who act and are acted on and so Shared Christian Praxis accordingly focuses on all aspects of the students' activities and the world in which they live. For Groome, praxis has active, reflective and creative aspects:

- active - developing consciousness (Movements 1, 3);
- reflective - developing critical consciousness (Movements 2, 4);
- creative - exploring and expressing a new consciousness and the way of being in the world (Movements 4, 5)

(Bezzina et al. 1996, p. 4).

Bezzina et al. also suggested that, with its emphasis on active partnership and dialogue between teachers and students, Groome's approach to the teaching and learning in the praxis model appeared to have overtones of contemporary classrooms, that is, teachers and students could leave behind their traditional roles and instead 'learn to be partners by being partners and so move away from dependency and passivity in both learning and living' (1996, p. 5). This was another positive aspect of the approach since it established further links between teaching and learning in religious education to contemporary teaching and learning approaches in other curriculum areas.

Despite the positive aspects of the praxis model for religious education, particularly those outlined by Bezzina et al. (1996), there have been some concerns regarding Groome's shared praxis approach. One of these was voiced by Rossiter (1987, p. 16) when he suggested that in the fourth stage, where students were expected to recall the Story, there is a presumption that students have a knowledge of the origins and history of the Christian story. This could prove to be inaccurate and has implications for the judgements and decisions for future action that are made in the fifth stage.

Rossiter (1987) also claimed that, in this model, there was an overt emphasis in the teaching process that failed to take into account the non-classroom factors that encouraged personal faith development. The expectation was that students would be encouraged to make judgements followed by further action about every topic they explored within the classroom. 'There is a danger that this may artificially contract judgement and decision-making from their broader place in the life-cycle into a narrow "tokenism" in the classroom', a 'tokenism' which colours their response, where students may attempt to 'come up with the right answers', ones that they assume the teacher wants to hear, that is 'another new "hoop" the teacher wants them to jump through' (Rossiter 1987, p.16). This factor called for a sensitive handling of topics which would allow students a freedom to respond to the Gospels in their own way and in their own time, a time-frame which was not necessarily confined to the classroom period of study. Implicit in the above statement is a suggestion that an inexperienced handling of the material, which could happen, could result in the above undesirable outcome, as described by Rossiter.

Raduntz (1994) questioned whether the shared praxis approach concerned itself with social justice (1994, pp. 9-13). She explored the relationship between Groome's social setting, that is, an educated, middle-class, white American background, with the probable social setting of likely participants in shared praxis. She referred to the widening gap

between the theoretical concepts of Christian faith and its translation into practice in contemporary life, a gap which hinders the Church from fulfilling its prophetic mission. Raduntz argued that the problem with the model lay in:

Groome's failure to recognise not only the formative influence of the social milieu and its dominant ideology on his own and participants' consciousness but also its potential to generate issues relating to injustice and inequality (Raduntz 1994, p. 13).

This factor also led Raduntz to question the links between critical pedagogy and shared praxis. The former 'provided participants with the tools to critique and address the injustices of their society through political transformative action' and this would include close scrutiny of the Church and its traditions. However, Raduntz asserted that the shared praxis approach did not fulfil this aim as students were not encouraged to question or be critical of the Church's views. McLaren (1986) further argued that it was difficult to reconcile teachings of social justice with the contemporary Church:

the efforts of Catholic schooling in helping the poor and oppressed are spiritualised away when Catholic values themselves are invisibly linked to a culture of domination and exploitation (1986, p. 184).

Another issue related to the use of the praxis approach in the classroom was the fact that Groome recommended that, ideally, learning should take place in small groups numbering about twelve students as this was the most effective environment to promote the levels of trust necessary for reflection, shared dialogue and action (1980). This is not feasible in the ordinary school classroom which often averages thirty students in junior and middle secondary classes and between twenty to thirty students in senior secondary classes. Under the circumstances, it is questionable whether the open and trusting atmosphere that is a vital part of the approach can be inspired in an average sized classroom. Bezzina et al. (1996) acknowledged the problem but argued that the model can be adapted to take this feature into consideration. They cited the review of *Sharing our Story* (the Parramatta religious education guidelines), conducted by Malone, Chesterton, Ryan & Macdonald (1996) where the findings suggested that praxis was

identified as a major strength of *Sharing our Story* and that its approach provided teachers with a sense of security. An associated weakness, also identified by the review, was the 'tendency for teachers to see it as a lock step approach' and 'a lack of understanding of the Critical Reflection movement and/or difficulty in implementing it' particularly for the inexperienced teacher (Bezzina et al. 1996, p. 10).

From these findings it would seem that the guidelines possibly provided a kind of 'security blanket' for some teachers who relied on the safety provided by a 'lock step' approach which did not require any real risk-taking or levels of creativity and resourcefulness that perhaps they did not have. As discussed earlier, in contemporary classrooms in Catholic schools, it is sometimes expected that religious education will be taught by most teachers which can mean that some have a limited background and/or enthusiasm for the subject. As such, effective teaching and learning using the praxis approach can be seriously affected.

An obvious problem with shared-praxis is the one that has been raised in relation to confessional models. Groome emphasized that his approach was only appropriate for Christian religious education classes and suggested that its applicability was wider than the school classroom. In fact, this would appear to be its strength, that is, its use in catechesis classes for groups of *voluntary, committed* youths or adults. The fact that the approach is devoted to the Christian tradition and Christian scripture raises questions about its suitability for use in the average classroom. As previously discussed, in the current Catholic school situation, neither assumption can be made that the classroom is indeed a 'faith community' nor that it is a voluntary group. Instead, many classrooms today are composed of students who come from different backgrounds and who are at different stages of faith development. Indeed, the problems relating to the multi-beliefs of students, immediately create the difficulty of using such an approach to obtain its desired outcomes. As such, it would seem to be inappropriate to merely concentrate on the study of one religion to the total exclusion of others. Equally, there appears to be little evidence

that the praxis approach takes note of the teachings of Vatican II in relation to world religions. Such an oversight is surely an issue in a pluralist society such as Australia.

In attempting to override this argument, Bezzina et al. (1996) posed the argument that the classroom could be seen as 'a faith community, but one marked by diversity' (p. 18). They acknowledged that senior classrooms did have students who were not voluntary participants and who could 'lack faith' but questioned whether 'a lack of faith precluded anyone from participation in praxis' since 'in a very real sense shared Christian praxis provided an invitation to a deepening of faith, no matter what their starting point' (p. 18). They further argued that since it cannot be assumed that everyone in the group has faith, it would be most appropriate to treat the group as if it had none and to leave the formation of faith to other aspects of school or parish life. Such an approach has implications for the development of closer links between the classroom teacher and school with the wider faith community if it is to achieve some success.

The above discussion merely serves to highlight the deep complexity of the problem that faces religious educators in senior classrooms, one which is not wholly answered by the praxis approach. Many senior religious education classes in Catholic schools contain students who may be openly hostile to any implication that the learning activities aim to provide opportunities to develop faith. This highlights a problem for shared-praxis in terms of an appropriate approach to senior religious education. Additionally, while the process of the approach is educationally sound, its restricted content is problematic in the context of contemporary senior classroom in Catholic schools. Finally, in practical terms, the application of an approach intended for a small, voluntary group of believers to the larger, religiously diverse, compulsory classroom setting has inherent problems. Even today, a resolution of the above issues is constantly being sought by religious education teachers.

To sum up, the strengths of shared praxis are:

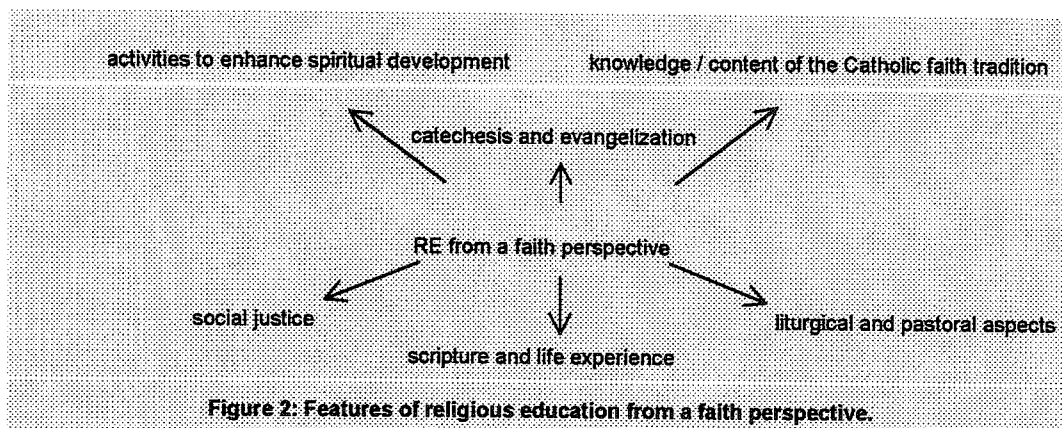
- i. It adopted cooperative teaching strategies, and through its critical reflection activity, challenged the cognitive abilities of students.
- ii. It provided a step-by-step format which was of assistance to teachers.

The negative aspects were:

- i. The step-by-step process led to a fairly rigid use by many teachers who ignored its ability to be flexible in its presentation in the classroom.
- ii. Its application to contemporary senior classrooms is problematic
 - because of its exclusive focus on Christianity;
 - because it requires that the program should operate with a small voluntary group of believers, and
 - because its fifth stage, requiring the participant to commit to future action, is inappropriate within the confines of a secondary school classroom.

Despite the valuable features of this approach, it needs to be modified and extended if it is to be used as an appropriate program for senior religious education in Catholic schools.

Drawing on the above discussion, it would seem that the intention of approaches to religious education that had a faith orientation was to offer students opportunities to develop knowledge about the faith tradition and to include opportunities for reflection on personal and faith issues (see Figure 2). It was hoped that this would lead to further development of their personal faith and commitment to the faith tradition thereby fulfilling one of the requirements of Catholic education.



Religious Education from an educational perspective

As mentioned earlier, most approaches concerned with religious education from an educational perspective grew out of efforts to include a study of religion in school curricula in government schools (see Rossiter 1981a, p. 5). Crawford and Rossiter (1994) argued that the evolution of state religion studies programs could be understood as a process in which such programs sought to establish an educational identity to contrast them with religious education in denominational schools. Crawford and Rossiter (1994) considered that in this quest for an educational identity, the educators who developed the state courses wanted to define them over and against denominational courses, making questionable assumptions that differences in purposes flowed into differences of process and differences in outcomes in the students. Thus, to avoid any question that the state courses might be the same as denominational courses designed to initiate pupils into a particular religious faith tradition, educators of state courses tended to eschew the potential influence of these courses on the spiritual development of students, except in a very general way.

Initially, state religious education programs had limited influence on the development of programs in Australian Catholic schools. In time, however, their capacity to be consistent with the objectives of religious education in Catholic schools was recognized. Two such programs, the existential approach with similarities to the life-centred and experiential approaches, and the phenomenological approach, did influence the development of units of religion studies in Australia, including the VCE *Religion and Society* units in Victoria which were adopted in senior Catholic classrooms. Thus, they are included in the following discussion.

The existential approach

Grimmitt (1973), a British theorist in the field of the existential approach, suggested that religion has both implicit (existential) and explicit (phenomenological) aspects. The former relates to the 'feeling side of religion which provides the basis and the justification for the existence of "religious" as opposed to other types of concepts' (1973, p. 93). The latter is the understanding and expression of religious concepts at a more intellectual level. As was the case with the life-centred and experiential approaches, Grimmitt believed religious education should focus on human experience. However, Grimmitt's approach differed significantly from the life-centred and experiential ones in that it did not aim to encourage religious commitment. Instead, Grimmitt argued that the ultimate questions about life and death lie at the heart of religion and religious commitment and students should be given the freedom to explore these questions at their own pace and in their own context. At the core of the existential approach were 'depth' (Grimmitt 1973, p. 54) themes, that is, the students' immediate situations and experiences provided the subject matter. The aim was to give students opportunities to examine these more closely to discover new dimensions within them. Moore (1982) suggested that, with Grimmitt's approach, 'religions were the surface data, the observable and the institutionalised forms through which people respond to ultimate questions, questions of depth' (1982, p. 120). If the study of these depth themes did not lead to religious commitment, it should lead to

an understanding and sensitivity of the deep human concerns with which religion is involved. He said:

the essential core of religion is not its overt, explicit phenomena. It is its engagements with the fundamental mystery of the human condition, the mystery of the human sense of the infinite and experience of finitude. It is this mystery that leads to the ceaseless quest for infinite meaning, to locate the finite self within the infinite. Thus the characteristic 'depth' questions underlying all religions are such questions as "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "Is death the end?" "Has life any meaning beyond the transient now?" etc. Its characteristic sentiments are thus the sense of awe, wonder, mystery and the restless quest of the human spirit to escape mere transience (Moore 1982, p. 120).

This approach, therefore, sees religion as an explicit expression of the human search for meaning. It is to be found at the very core of human existence and, as such, its value to education and the justification for including it in a school curriculum lies in its ability to offer a unique and distinctive way of knowing.

As mentioned above, the existential approach is closely related to the life-centred and experiential approaches in that it reflects on human experience in an effort to understand the religious dimensions of life. However, it moves beyond the Christian perspective of life themes and places them in the wider framework of all religions thereby attempting to promote religious tolerance and respect. Thus, it represents a development of the phenomenological approach in that Grimmer uses the content of phenomenology and the methodology of the experiential. This approach is quite relevant for post-Vatican II religious educators in Catholic schools, given the increased interest in and recognition of religious pluralism. Its main thrust lies in the fact that it recognises that religion provides a distinctive way in which people organize and interpret experience. In this respect, it has close links with the educational concepts of the time which theorized that there were seven 'forms of knowledge' and that each provided a 'distinct way of knowing' (Hirst & Peters 1970, pp. 68-69; Hirst 1974, pp. 84-92). Hirst and Peters argued that the modes and experience of each form were quite specific in character and were quite different from one another. Among the seven forms they categorized, which included religious

education, the implication was that the methodologies of each were only useful to the specific forms of knowledge from which they were derived. Thus, the modes and experiences in science, for example, bore no relation to those in religion. As such, each form of knowledge should be included in the curriculum for its own distinctive 'way of knowing'. It was this theoretical concept that influenced the emergence of both the existential and the phenomenological approach to religious education.

As with the life-centred approach, the existential approach relied on the teacher to draw on the students' experiences to create the subject matter for the lessons. Thus the teacher acted as a kind of 'reference point, with *huge* responsibilities for creating an atmosphere conducive to reflection, dialogue, and growth' (Lovat 1989, p. 21). Once again, this expectation placed on teachers was a significant problem if the teacher lacked an adequate background and teaching experience in the subject. The other issue for educators was the fact that the subject material was sometimes restricted to the personal experiences of the participants (as with the other two related models) although there was encouragement to draw on the wider communal experience as well. When this occurred, it became a serious impediment in the attempt to run a well-balanced program.

The phenomenological approach

The phenomenological approach was similar to that of the existential approach in that it viewed religion as a distinct way of ordering and interpreting experience thus leading to a distinct form of knowledge. However, Smart (1968, 1973a) argued that, while there was a distinction between the implicit and explicit aspects of religion, as identified by Grimmer, they could not be treated as separate identities. Smart's phenomenological approach sought to enter into an empathetic study of religion which aimed to provide an insight into the experiential dimensions of the particular religion that was being studied, that is, one attempted to understand what it felt like to be an adherent to the particular faith, Muslim, Buddhist and so forth. In order to gain this understanding, we needed to 'capture this

"aliveness", find the people in action: in other words, we must "plug into" the phenomena which make up the religion' (Lovat 1989, p. 65). Smart explored six dimensions of religion: doctrinal, mythical, experiential which formed the cognitive domain and ritual, social and ethical which formed the expressive domain (Smart 1973a) and these provided a structure upon which the foundations of the educational approach could be developed. His aim was to study religion as a distinctive way of knowing, therefore, through an exploration of different religious traditions the basic elements of the religious way of knowing became apparent. The phenomenological approach, while focusing on an understanding and knowledge of different religions, did not require an acceptance or commitment to them.

One of the strengths of this approach was that it provided educators with criteria which could be assessed in religious education. With earlier approaches, there was some concern about what could or should be assessed in religious education. The traditional approach which depended on students providing the right answer from the catechism assessed the students' knowledge accordingly, usually restricted to the level of recall. However, when the main aim of religious education was to educate in the faith tradition, assessment became a problem since it was confined mainly to the affective or the personal domain and was seen as an infringement of a student's right to respond freely. By introducing the concept of a phenomenological approach to the study of religion, Smart provided teachers with a methodology which allowed them to assess students' achievements in the study of religion which did not require an intrusion into the area of their faith or lack of it. Smart's approach made it possible to assess students' intellectual skills rather than their level of religious commitment (Habel & Moore 1982).

One possible concern about the phenomenological approach for educators in confessional schools relates to the fact that since each religion was given emphasis in its own right they might have felt that their own faith tradition would be devalued. This was significant in Catholic schools where handing on the faith tradition was an essential

feature of religious education. Smart anticipated this concern and argued that his approach could be adopted in confessional schools because if a study of different religions was planned with care, the above mentioned situation would not arise (Smart 1968, Ch. 5).

However, there are some factors that arise from this assertion, which relate to the teaching of religious education using this approach. Firstly, it assumes that all teachers will have a background in studies of world religions and in religious education methodology, and therefore will be able to competently handle the demands of conducting in-depth studies of different religions. In many Catholic schools there is an expectation that most teachers will be expected to teach religious education, and while there are larger numbers of teachers today who are trained to do so, there are still some teachers who are not appropriately qualified in the subject. Additionally, they may not have a specific interest in teaching religious education. There were no figures available from the CEO, Melbourne to further clarify this point but informal discussions with religious educators from several different schools confirmed this situation.

Secondly, Smart's claim ignores the fact that many teachers in Catholic schools have had little exposure to religions and cultures other than their own, particularly since they come from a generation when the classrooms from their own school-days were predominantly filled with Irish and/or Italian Catholics. This is supported by recent figures indicating that the average age of teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria was forty-one (CEO, Melbourne, 1997). This background does not put such teachers in an appropriate position to attempt to view and understand other religions 'from the inside' as the approach demands.

With reference to the student's position, it is interesting to note Grimmitt's change of stance in a later publication (1987). He argued that it was unrealistic to expect students to explore religions through the eyes of those who were adherents when such a study did

not relate to their needs and was outside their own experiences. The above reference to the age of teachers implies that the same could be said of them, although to a somewhat lesser degree, given their added maturity and life experiences. It is questionable whether a teacher, who is not an adherent of a particular religion, is able to present an understanding and appreciation of that religion from the point of view of one who is an adherent.

The other factor related to teaching is raised by Lovat (1989) when he pointed out that, in a normal school situation, teachers were unlikely to have the necessary access to people and places of other faith denominations, even if they tried to include a certain number of excursions and the use of good resources into their program. This necessarily results in a limited exposure to the elements that make up different religions. The attempt, therefore, to try to experience the emotional response and passion that a religion might inspire in those who believe in it is problematic, given the confines of the ordinary classroom situation.

There is also some tension apparent in Grimmitt's discussion on the value of the phenomenological approach. On the one hand, he stated that it was 'a natural and necessary part of any attempt to study religions in the classroom' (1987, p. 165), and on the other, he pointed out the conflicting nature of the phenomenological approach and educational enquiry. He said:

the descriptive and non-evaluative nature of phenomenological study is incompatible with the critical and evaluative nature of educational enquiry. For pupils to gain personally from the study, education must enable them to relate what they learn to their own experience and to become aware of the ways in which their own perceptions of what they are studying influence their understanding. This is precisely what the use of the phenomenological method.... cannot permit because it infringes its requirement that procedures for studying religion are neutral (Grimmitt 1987, p. 45).

It needs to be noted that the phenomenological approach in religious education has been widely practised in Britain since it was first introduced in 1971, therefore, there has been sufficient time for the incongruent nature of the above methods of enquiry to become clearer (Greer 1988, p. 13). There are still those who support its ideological basis but problems have continued to emerge in its practice over this time. Thus, while Grimmitt (1994) continued to propose that religious education should replace 'ideological enclosure' with 'ideological exploration' by providing pupils not just with 'multifaith religious education' but with 'inter-faith religious education' (1994, p. 138), he had to acknowledge the theological problem 'of reconciling the particularity of each religious tradition with the universality of religious truth' (1994, p. 140). He concluded that:

Faith communities find it extremely difficult to accept that the educational value which a study of religions provides cannot be released by the use of a simple transmission approach conveying information about religious beliefs and practices. Nor can they accept that religious education's potential for contributing to the development of better community relations cannot be realised by limiting the intention of the study to that of trying to replicate in pupils the sort of understanding of a religion that someone who is an adherent to it has (1994, p. 141).

Finally, as a basis for curriculum structure for religious education, Grimmitt himself, in his later writings, pointed out that the descriptive and non-evaluative nature of the phenomenological method was incompatible with the educative process whose character stems from critical enquiry and analytical dialogue (Grimmitt 1986). Further, he argued that, with the phenomenological approach:

For the purpose of study, all religious views and beliefs are judged to be 'truth claims' of equal value. This conception of religious education, which is informed by what we might call an ideology of 'Religious Equality' or 'Religious Neutrality', accepts, therefore, that the relativisation of religious values and beliefs (i.e. treating them as equal claims to truth) is an inevitable consequence of studying religions within a secular educational context (Grimmitt 1986, p. 6).

Implicit in this statement is the problem that exists for Catholic schools regarding the attitude towards other religions. Macdonald (1995) offered definitions of three different

attitudes that can be adopted by believing Christians towards other religions. The first is 'exclusivism' and where a person is convinced that their particular religion is the only true one. Such a person does not accept the validity and truth of other religions. The second attitude is 'inclusivism' where a person believes their religious tradition is the true one but that there are others that share similarities with theirs. Some of these may be other Christian denominations or non-Christian religions. The third attitude is 'pluralism' where a person will accept that all religions are valid and true. Therefore, different people from different cultures may choose a different religion to search for that ultimate meaning which gives their life a purpose. The second of these attitudes, that is, inclusivism represents the official view of the Catholic Church:

While the Catholic Church upholds that belief in and commitment to Jesus are central to religion, there are many religions (certainly other Christian ones, but also non-Christian religions) which hold much in common with it. This is inclusivism (Macdonald 1995, pp. 50-51).

The confessional nature of the Catholic school determines that its overall approach to religious education should be to educate primarily in the knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition. The declaration from the Second Vatican Council noted that the characteristic that made a Catholic school distinctive is:

Its religious dimension which was reflected in a) the educational climate, b) the personal development of each student, c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith (RDECS 1988, pp. 7-8).

Following this, the phenomenological approach could be at variance with the above concept since its objective is to have a value-free approach to the study of religion and to study each religion with similar depth as if each is valid and true. This feature, therefore, creates some problems for its adoption as the only approach to religious education in Catholic schools. Ideally, some strengths of the phenomenological approach that relate to the study of different religions could be combined with elements from a faith oriented

approach that would allow for reflection on personal faith and spirituality. This would be more appropriate for senior students in Catholic schools and is one that is consistent with the intent of some religious education programs in Catholic schools.

The typological approach and the integrated approach

Two approaches to religious education that are drawn from the educational perspective are the typological approach (Habel and Moore 1982) and the integrated approach (Lovat 1989). Both these approaches have had limited influence on the development of religious education programs in Catholic schools and, therefore, are only treated briefly here.

The typological approach which was devised by Habel and Moore (1982) in South Australia was a refinement of Smart's phenomenological approach and it incorporated teaching strategies based on a step-by-step approach. Like other approaches with an education in religion perspective, it included a study of the phenomena of different religions but it differed from other approaches by placing much emphasis on the 'home tradition' of the student (Habel & Moore 1982, p. 121). The argument offered was that students needed to first know and recognise religious phenomena (for instance, beliefs, sacred stories and texts, rituals) in their own faith traditions and this could lead to a better understanding of these phenomena in other faith traditions. Habel and Moore argued that this feature would make it attractive for use in both confessional and non-confessional schools. Despite this claim and its sound educational basis, there would appear to be some doubt about how appropriate the typological approach would be for religious education in Catholic schools. Its emphasis on studying the elements of a religion as a way of understanding that religion ignores the spiritual and personal dimensions that are essential features of religion. Finally, the aims of the typological approach do not coincide with the purpose of religious education in Catholic education, as discussed earlier, and

this raises questions regarding its suitability as the only approach to religious education in Catholic schools.²

Lovat (1989) drew on the developments in modern social education in an attempt to define an integrated approach to religious education. He proposed a Critical Model which combined the methodology of the typological approach as described by Moore and Habel (1982) and the critical reflection step of the praxis approach of Groome (1980). Lovat believed that the critical reflection stage was a serious omission in the process of the typological approach and that it was a necessary addition for an appropriate approach to religious education. By combining elements of the two approaches, Lovat believed that his Critical Model would be accessible to a wider variety of religious educators, from confessional and non-confessional schools alike. He argued that a Critical Model allowed students to freely respond to the invitation of faith development and that it had the capacity to allow students to 'discover the Gospel as an ultimate and saving word about human existence' and to 'facilitate a new and more relevant conception of Catholic identity' (Angelico 1997, p. 58). Drawing, as it did, on social education, a Critical Model of religious education also encouraged students to study social and other topical issues while 'retaining a *distinctive place* for the religious aspect of life and culture' (Lovat 1989, p. 89). Lovat believed this made religious education more relevant to students. While some schools in New South Wales have used the Critical Model (Lovat 1991) it has not been adopted widely in Victoria.

Despite the arguments in favour of both the above approaches, the questions raised earlier in relation to the phenomenological approach remain relevant when deciding their appropriateness for use in senior Catholic classrooms. They clearly have, as their focus, an educational perspective rather than a faith oriented perspective and although they

² It must be noted that some aspects of the typological approach were influential in the structure of the VCE *Religion and Society* study. Thus, while its exclusive use in Catholic schools would be problematic, part of its methodology is useful for religious educators in Catholic schools.

may have the potential to facilitate the faith development process, this is not their intention. Thus, they would appear to have some limitations as an exclusive application in Catholic schools.

One possible drawback with both these approaches is the emphasis on the 'home tradition'. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the context of contemporary classrooms raises serious questions as to whether many senior students identify with a faith tradition in any meaningful way. As such, it would be difficult for a classroom teacher to determine an appropriate replacement for the home tradition in the processes described for each of these approaches, that is, what would be the most appropriate starting place in the process? Certainly, the teacher would need to modify and adapt the process to suit the needs of the students which, in itself, could become problematic in the hands of teachers inexperienced and/or untrained in the subject.

Over the past thirty years, there has been a tendency for religious educators in Catholic schools to look beyond the faith oriented approach which had some problems for application in contemporary classrooms, particularly in relation to the lack of religious freedom and the insularity of the approach. Religious educators also recognised the need to establish religious education as a credible subject, one that compared favourably with others in the curriculum. In an attempt to address these issues, some educators began to approach the study of religious education from an educational perspective, that is, they focused on the development of a serious academic study of religion. This latter approach, however, was not sufficient in itself to answer the needs of religious education in Catholic schools, namely, the transmission of the faith tradition. As a result, religious educators in Church schools moved towards an approach which was drawn from both an ecclesial and educational perspective. Such a program combined an intellectual study of religious phenomena, usually from the context of the 'home tradition', with further opportunities for spiritual development through religious activities such as prayer and liturgy, reflection days and community service. The significant implications of the growing cultural and

religious pluralism of Australian society meant that this approach was seen as desirable by many religious educators in Catholic schools since it incorporated a study of different religions and attended to the transmission of the faith tradition.

As discussed earlier, Rossiter was one educator whose early writings described such an approach (1981a, 1981b, 1981c, 1983, 1985). Rossiter argued for two components to religious education in Catholic schools which were drawn from the educational and the faith perspectives. Firstly, a compulsory component which incorporated a study of religion and secondly, a section that focused on faith-sharing activities and which was offered on a voluntary basis (1985).

Once again, there is a presumption here that some learning activities have the potential to promote faith while others do not. Such an understanding could lead to the inclusion of certain learning activities over others in the mistaken belief that the former would be more appropriate in securing the desired outcomes, that is, promoting faith development. Certainly, this is a feature of the approach that Rossiter proposed and while such claims would need to be verified, they are beyond the scope of this thesis.

It is important to note Rossiter's emphasis that there is an interplay between these two perspectives. He noted the shift of the context of catechesis from the school towards the wider pastoral ministry of the Church, that is, to within the broader community of faith and believed that the Church had too great a tendency in the past to depend on schools to be their principal agency of evangelization (1981c, p. 162). He suggested that closer attention needed to be paid to the nature of the catechesis/religious education relationship and argued that:

A clearer differentiation between religious education and catechesis could foster more authentic and creative development of both aspects ... a revision of the foundations for religious education in Catholic schools would not want to exclude catechesis but would want to critically determine the possibilities and limitations for "faith-sharing" within the matrix of a

more educational role for religion in the school ... a creative tension or dialectic between faith-oriented and educational concerns is needed. It is ironic that a "creative divorce" might be the very thing needed to promote more catechesis, as well as more authentic catechesis, sponsored by the Catholic school, rather than an uncritical lumping of all activities together under the cover-all, "catechetics", which may not always be authentic catechesis or good education (1981c, p. 163).

Rossiter (1981c) argued that there was a need, therefore, to reformulate the theory of religious education for Catholic schools which would acknowledge the limited scope for catechesis in the classroom (p. 164). While it was important for the school's religious education program to educate in religion and specifically in the Catholic faith tradition, it also needed to provide some opportunities for pastoral catechesis. It was expected that the latter would complement the former (p. 164). Rossiter suggested there was:

a need for more emphasis on an educational rather than on a faith-developing paradigm for the classroom curriculum. This curricula emphasis need not detract from the use of a more faith-oriented paradigm for other aspects of religious education such as community building, liturgical life, retreats, voluntary youth groups and pupil-teacher relationships (1981c, p. 168).

In a later publication, Crawford and Rossiter once again, emphasized the complementarity of catechesis and the teaching of religion:

The classroom religion period is the place for the teaching of religion (or religious education in the narrow senses), Catechesis is more appropriately taken up in voluntary commitment groups and at retreats. Classroom religious education complements and prepares for catechesis. (Crawford & Rossiter 1985, p. 40).

However, there have been some differences of opinions amongst Catholic educators in relation to Rossiter's call to separate catechesis from religious education in the classroom. Fahy (1992) pointed out that Rossiter's contention, that an academic study of religion should be taught in the classroom while catechesis was to be reserved for voluntary out-of-classroom commitment groups, was not congruent with the traditional ideas of catechesis and religious education:

Indeed the nature of faith as personal knowledge of God ... and integral dependence on knowledge categories makes an approach that seeks to dichotomise faith away from knowledge a suspect one, at least in the Catholic tradition (Fahy 1992, pp. 96-7).

Fahy also disagreed with Rossiter's (1983) claim that in an approach from an education in religion perspective, religious faith and commitment should neither be presumed or required of teachers or students. He said:

One should not distinguish Christian faith away from other traditions for Christianity holds, in common with every other tradition, the hope of a coming Reign of God. In world religions courses one needs to stand within one's own tradition and seek points of comparison and confrontation with other traditions. It is a dual knowledge and faith-depthing process. Because Christ is the focus point for the ultimate drawing together of all religious traditions, Christian faith and Christian education understand themselves in universal terms (Fahy 1992, p. 96).

Indeed, it was argued earlier that, given the different backgrounds and levels of faith that may be found in contemporary classrooms, it may be more appropriate for religious education to develop an evangelizing role rather than a catechetical one. It would be difficult to meet the requirements of religious education in a Catholic school if the classroom program was to neglect this. Restricting activities that promote faith and spiritual development to voluntary groups could mean that some students are denied the opportunities to experience such occasions. While activities that are specifically designed to promote a particular faith tradition may be seen as a form of indoctrination by students and therefore rejected by them, the personal and spiritual dimensions of religion must be addressed by the classroom program. Further, the close bonds formed between members of a senior class group may, in fact, create an intimate setting for activities that have the potential to enhance spiritual development and such opportunities should not be neglected.

Rossiter also warned against laying too great an expectation on the school's religious education program that it alone was responsible for the religious education of the

students and he pointed to the complementary roles of the home, church and school in religious education (1985, p. 1). This contention was supported by the later findings of Leavey et al. (1992), Fahy (1992) and Flynn (1993). In respect to Catholic schools, however, religious educators need to recognise that the classroom program is one part of the broader religious education program and its limitations are complemented by the broader, pastoral role in the religious education of students that are performed through other aspects of the Catholic school.

Murray (1992), in his critique of Rossiter's approach, acknowledges that Rossiter has had much support from other religious educators. However, he claims that 'on the debit side, Rossiter's approach to religious education has been the subject of such criticism that serious question marks hang over it regarding its suitability in any school, never mind "confessional schools"' (1992, p. 20). Murray then raises some points of concern and cites the writings of other educators to support his stance (p. 20). He offers the view that the 'pedagogical approaches' do not correspond to that of other subjects in the curriculum; that they can be said to 'promote a narrow view of the intellect'; that they appear 'to marginalise the importance of the role of the inductive processes'; and that the importance of the affective domain is played down (pp. 20-21). Murray also believes that Rossiter's insistence on the need for the teacher to be objective could be seen as 'mistakenly equating the teacher's faith witness with indoctrination' (p. 20). Finally, he argues that the approach suffers from a male bias and that it appears to 'dichotomise "knowledge" from "faith"' (p. 21).

However, an examination of the broad aims of religious education according to Crawford and Rossiter (1985) goes some way to refuting some of Murray's claims. For instance it is clear that they do focus on the inter-relationship of cognitive and affective learning, that is, their approach is drawn from both educational and faith perspectives. However, Crawford and Rossiter do perceive the classroom program as having a cognitive focus while the affective learning areas are addressed across the broad religious education

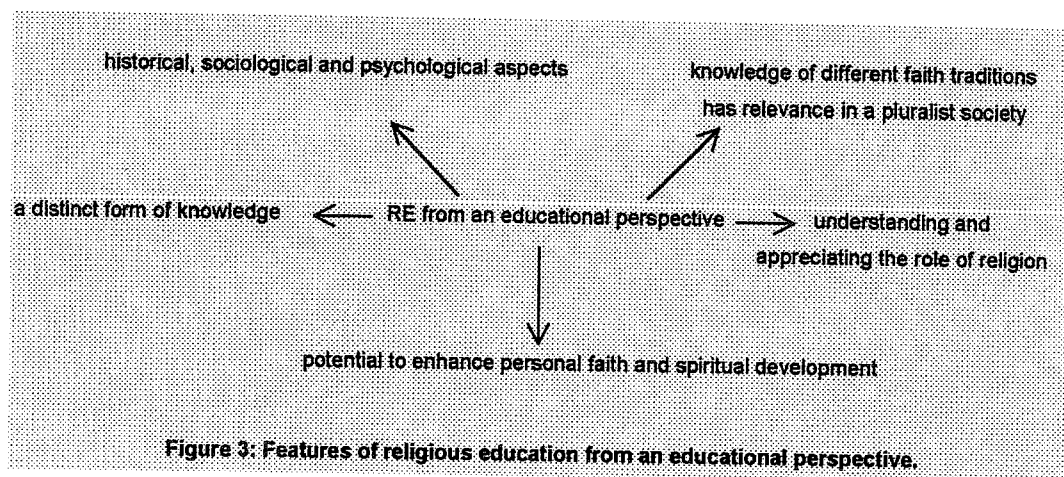
program where 'faith-sharing' activities were included. This insistence on some activities having more potential to be 'faith-sharing' than others is a possible weakness in the approach and does not sufficiently acknowledge the role of cognitive learning in the promotion of interpersonal and intrapersonal development. In brief, Crawford and Rossiter proposed the following aims for a religious education program in a Catholic school:

- it should promote knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Catholic faith tradition and also of other religions so that students can develop an empathy with people of other faiths;
- it should lead students to a better understanding of the role of religion and personal faith in their own lives and that of others;
- It should develop the necessary skills to allow students to undertake a study of critical inquiry related to aspects of religion and to religious and social issues so that they are better able to make informed, personal decisions relating to their own religious development; and finally,
- it should contribute to the personal development and faith maturation of the students (1985, p. 42).

The influence Rossiter has had on educators in Australia is indicated by Engebretson (1995) who cited her previous study of thirteen religious education coordinators where she discovered that the majority, in general, supported Rossiter's approach to religious education. There was only one aspect that most disagreed with and this related to the teacher's personal commitment, a point raised earlier in this work (see reference to Fahy 1992). Thus, it would seem that teachers in Catholic schools prefer an approach to religious education that has an interplay between faith and educational perspectives, that is, where both cognitive and affective learning are addressed.

Drawing on the above discussion it would seem that the approaches to classroom programs in religious education that were drawn from an educational perspective were initially offered in a secular school system where the particular intention was to educate students about religion. In such programs, there was no intention to encourage adherence to any religious tradition. These approaches had links with contemporary

educational theories and operated on the premise that religion, as a subject, provided a distinct way of knowing (see Figure 3).



The prime intention was to treat the study of religion as a particular form of knowledge thus it was seen as having a distinct and legitimate place in a senior school curriculum. In Catholic schools, approaches from an educational perspective had a broader knowledge base than programs that had a faith orientation and the intention was to offer students opportunities to learn about different religions. Supporters of such approaches argued that learning about other religions could also promote an interest in the student's own faith tradition, and further, that it could lead to further maturation of the student's personal faith. Nevertheless, there is insufficient evidence to support these claims, therefore, it would appear that religious education programs that depended solely on such an approach may not be suitable for Catholic schools.

Religious education and education for personal development

It is important to note an aspect of religious education that became more influential in the seventies. This was the greater attention given to the personal dimension in religious education. This emphasis emerged in education, at the wider level, but it also affected religious education classes both in Australia and overseas. Crawford and Rossiter (1988)

argued that interest in education for affective/personal development was stimulated by the growth in the area of humanistic psychology which suggested that small group discussions about personal matters could bring about personal change. 'It implied that feelings, attitudes and convictions are revealed and developed in an intimate personal setting' (Crawford & Rossiter 1988, p. 52). Terms, such as 'personalism' or 'education for personal change' had also been introduced into discussions on religious education (Crawford & Rossiter 1985, pp. 9-10, p. 60). The approach to education for personal change 'stressed the empowerment of young people' (Crawford & Rossiter 1985, p. 9). It sought to encourage them to take a more informed, responsible, active role in their own development, while recognising that external factors continued to play a part in shaping their lives.

In religious education, in particular, affective aims were seen as having priority over cognitive aims since one of the prime foci was the enhancement of a personal faith and spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter 1988). Indeed, at a time when Catholics, drawing on their new understanding of Revelation, were seeking to discover a more personal and reflective approach to their own faith and spiritual development, religious education teachers welcomed the views of humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1961, 1969), Erikson (1968, 1980) and Maslow (1968). Humanistic psychologists focused on the potential that all individuals have to develop as unique people who are self-directed and capable of setting goals, making choices and initiating action. Both Erikson and Maslow also described various stages of growth and maturity through which individuals develop, each stage being identified by specific characteristics which have implications for the development of learning programs. Therefore, the particular emphasis of the humanistic approach was the growth and development of the individual.

The relationship between personal development and religious education was also acknowledged in *The Renewal of the Education of Faith* where reference was made to

the fact that catechesis could have relevance for a person as he/she progressed through the different stages of life:

Each successive stage of human growth has its own special significance. It also plays a part in a person's progress towards maturity ... Errors or inadequate truths taught at a certain age, may have serious consequences for a person's human and Christian development ... At every stage of their development, Christians should have access to the whole of the revealed message, in a form and in terms that they can understand (REF 1970, #134).

Nichols (1978) asserted that religious education for young people should contribute to the process of emotional growth and should concern itself with improving the quality of personal relationships. He argued that adolescents were in search of their inner selves, one that 'depends on values, convictions and meanings' (1978, p. 39). As such:

catechesis must contribute to personal security, confidence and a sense of personal worthwhileness during the important years of adolescence. It must also offer or strengthen a conviction of personal destiny and vocation: that we are on earth to 'build an immortal soul'. In this way ... it should provide the dynamism and the unity of moral life (Nichols 1978, p. 39)

It can be seen that approaches to religious education from the faith perspective had focused on the experiences of the student, thereby addressing some aspects of personal development. More recently, with personal development receiving more recognition at the broader curriculum level (Grimmitt 1987; Greer 1988; Crawford & Rossiter 1991, 1993) there have been some writings on this aspect in the approaches to religious education that are drawn from the educational perspective. These have some pertinence to the discussion in this research study given the move in some Catholic schools to adopt an educational focus for their classroom programs.

Grimmitt (1987) offered some insights into the personal dimensions of an approach with an educational perspective. He drew on his experiences from teaching religion in secular British government schools with their pluralistic environment and suggested that both

religion and education contribute to the process of 'humanization' (p. 195). He proceeded to argue that religious education should address social, moral and spiritual aspects of personal growth. Grimmitt theorized that education in religion should have a humanising approach rather than a theological one since all 'religious' educators are essentially 'secular' educators who engaged in education as their prime activity even if theological insights have been used (1987, p. 258). Their main commitment was to the achievement of educational goals by way of a process which conformed to general educational principles. Grimmitt sought to establish a relationship between education and religion and found this problematic. He argued that neither could support a theory of a value-free method of study. Both were value-laden and, therefore, attempted to impose their own values on each other. However, he believed that human beings could not be value-free in their thinking:

Human beings have no alternative but to formulate beliefs about their nature and the nature of their human experience and to commit themselves to particular beliefs about themselves and their world by an act of faith. Holding beliefs or believing is therefore an essential constituent not only of meaning-making but of humanization itself ... the only alternative to belief for the human being is not unbelief but another belief (1987, p. 195).

Expanding on this, Grimmitt suggested that both religion and education recognised this trait in the human person since both contributed to its interpretation, that is, both contributed to the process of 'humanization'. Thus, it is precisely because religion and education were both 'interpretative' and 'humanizing' that they could enter into a relationship with one another (1987, p. 195).

Grimmitt (1987) proposed a curriculum framework for religious education which derived from an application of the theory that 'reality and human consciousness were socially constructed to an understanding of the process of humanization and the contribution beliefs and believing made to that process' (1987, p. 257). Human persons were shaped by their interactions with and experiences of others and by their internalization of facts, values, beliefs and attitudes, all of which were determined by their social, cultural and

ideological inheritance. Thus, they were moulded in the image of that reality, or that view of the human which was the norm for their times. However, humans needed to discover and embrace new visions which lay outside their cultural and personal histories.

Grimmitt (1987) described the special characteristics of religious education as its contribution to the development of human spirituality and spiritual development. He defined the former as 'a human capacity for a certain type of awareness - often called 'spiritual awareness' - which may be stimulated by religious consciousness but which is not contingent upon it' (1987, p. 125). Spiritual development, according to Grimmitt, was the 'activation of the human capacity for self-transcendence and movement towards a state of consciousness in which the limitations of human finite identity are challenged by the exercise of the creative imagination' (1987, p. 125). Grimmitt distinguished between spiritual development and religious development in that the latter provided a means by which human spirituality may be nurtured, moulded and given direction.

Grimmitt asserted that this is what religious education should be about, helping young people to transcend whatever factors were limiting their growth towards human maturity. Students should begin by exploring their own 'life-worlds' as the first step towards 'critical consciousness' and 'self-awareness'. Next, they should move on to a study of religions which should juxtapose the new content, that is, other religions, with the familiar content, that is, the content of the student's 'life-world'. By learning about different beliefs and values, students could use them as instruments to evaluate critically their own beliefs and values. By learning '*about* religion' they also learn '*from* religion' about themselves (1987, p. 141). Continued growth and understanding of a religious tradition is linked to greater self-knowledge and self-awareness. This, in turn, increases students' capacity to reflect on, evaluate and interpret their experiences which leads to personal growth and the development of religious, spiritual and moral awareness. As Grimmitt concluded, religious education should contribute to personal growth and human maturity by developing in students' growing self-awareness and self-knowledge.

It is necessary to note here that some of the premises Grimmitt voiced have caused concern amongst other educators (see Greer 1988). To begin with, nowhere does Grimmitt substantiate his claim that 'learning *from* religion' helps students to develop self-knowledge and the ability to be involved in personal decision-making (Greer 1988, p. 12). Further, Grimmitt identified the growth of subjects related to personal, social and moral education (PSME) in the British system and has acknowledged that some of the content and the proposed outcomes from such courses do overlap with religious education. He put a convincing case to support the study of religious education because of its unique contribution related to the development of spirituality but he did not clearly differentiate between the different concepts of spirituality, moral reasoning and religious feeling (Greer 1988, p 12).

Equally, when Grimmitt argued that the humanising approach is as appropriate for students who are adherents to a religious tradition as for students who are not, his position is weakened when one notes that his experience has been drawn from teaching religion studies in British state schools where religious commitment is not the focus. However, despite the secular context out of which Grimmitt's writings evolved, he has made some pertinent points about the personal aspects of an programs that have an education in religion perspective.

Crawford and Rossiter (1988) raised some pertinent points when they discussed the close links between education for personal development and religious education. They suggested that the aim of personal education was to 'educate young people to consciously choose a path to personal growth in which they value right actions for their own intrinsic sake rather than for fear of the consequences of a contrary choice' (1988, p. 55) and argued that there should be a cognitive basis for affective/personal learning in the classroom because:

an open, informative, critical inquiring study of religion will do more to develop faith and the other aspects of personal development, than any approaches which try to deal with these personal areas more exclusively and explicitly (1988, p. 58).

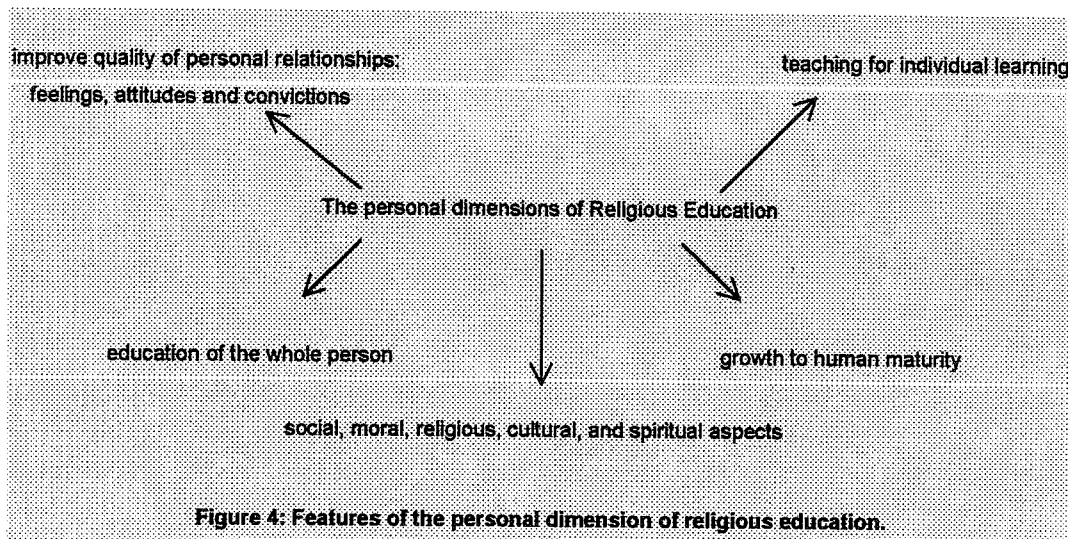
They were critical of those educators who tried to 'de-school' (Crawford & Rossiter 1993, p. 491) the religious education classroom in an attempt to make it more productive in the area of faith and personal development and argued that the error lay in not recognising the connection between the personal and the academic aspects of religion:

It is relevant to note that there should never have been that artificial dichotomy that some like to think exists between the academic and the personal dimensions of religious education - this faulty thinking is evident where academic study is linked just with 'knowledge', while more personal activities (even though hard to gauge) are said to promote 'faith development' (1993, p. 491).

Thus, Crawford and Rossiter highlighted an issue that was related to teaching for personal development in religious education, that is, the connection between cognitive and affective learning in religious education. It would seem that the close links between these two areas have not always been clearly identified or articulated. Indeed, if some areas in religious education are seen as contributing specifically to either the cognitive or affective domains, it may indicate a superficial understanding of such areas, thus it may restrict educators from exploring their uses and benefits further. The need to recognise the interrelatedness of cognitive and affective learning in religious education should be a priority amongst religious educators. An investigation into the potential of cognitive activities to promote development and learning in the affective domain could be useful, for instance, content and strategies which promote knowledge may also lead to interest in and appreciation of the faith tradition or to faith development. Also, strategies which aim to increase appreciation and involvement could lead to cognitive development, for instance, interest and participation in the subject may lead to further study and enlightenment. Without doubt, learning objectives should be articulated and designed with a clear recognition and understanding of the enhancing quality of this interwoven and complementary relationship.

One inference that could be made from the discussion on religious education which emphasizes personal development is that if a greater emphasis was given to personal development across the curriculum, there is much that can be learnt from programs that focused on the personal dimension in religious education. Also, there can be some overlaps between religious education and the broader curriculum which would give rise to the need for improved communication between subjects and across the curriculum. It meant that some religious education classes have included topics like drug education, sex education, life skills education and so forth. This enabled new links to be forged between Religious Education and other subjects in the curriculum, which sometimes have resulted in a team approach to the curriculum. Most of these programs focused on values education and included topics which aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle for students (Ryan & Malone 1996, p. 172). Thus, when included in the religious education program, these topics had the potential to help students to see important life issues within the context of a Christian vision of life. In the past decade, this trend has led to general curriculum statements for Australian secondary students including subjects for personal development. However, there is a distinct contribution that religious education makes to the education of an individual and it should be allowed to retain its identity and not become lost in a range of other personal development courses.

Drawing on the above discussion it can be seen that a focus on personal development was seen as a highly desirable aspect of senior secondary religious education programs. It was particularly beneficial and meaningful to students since their interactions and experiences with others helped them to internalize values, beliefs and attitudes which ultimately influenced their behaviour (see Figure 4 on p. 72). This was, indeed, a radical change from the rote-learning classroom of an earlier period.



Summary and significance for this research study

This section seeks to identify the key trends that influenced religious education programs in Australian schools as discussed earlier in this thesis, and to offer a synthesis of the findings which have implications for this research study.

To begin with, two distinct phases were identified in the development of religious education, pre-Vatican which provided the historical context, and post-Vatican II which led to contemporary developments. A significant feature of the first was the establishment of the Catholic school system which was established in Australia for the specific purpose of providing an education in the faith tradition for Catholic students. The initial approach to religious education which evolved operated at two levels: at the broader school level and at the classroom level. The classroom program was based on rote learning the teachings of the Church's doctrines by children who were part of the faith community. This traditional approach to religious education, an education in faith, which rested precariously on the assumption that knowledge and church attendance were an indication of faith, continued relatively unchanged for the first half of this century.

When the kerygmatic approach was first introduced to Australia in the early sixties, it gained popularity amongst educators who had discovered there were problems associated with the traditional approach in terms of its teaching method and its relevance for students at that time. An essential feature of the approach was the teaching of biblical material and this proved to be problematic because of the inadequate training of religious education teachers in this area. Additionally, the approach was focused on an education in the faith tradition to which students were expected to be committed. However, this was not always the case in classrooms in Catholic schools at that time.

Two elements of religious education from a faith perspective were identified: catechesis and evangelization. While catechesis provided the basis for the traditional approach in Catholic schools, its main focus was to continue the process of helping another person grow in faith within a community of believers. Thus, it assumed that the person had made the first act of faith. It was argued that such an assumption cannot be made about senior students in the pluralist climate of contemporary Catholic classrooms. Under these circumstances, evangelization, which is identified as preaching the Word of God to those who have not heard or responded to it, had a role to play. More specifically, students should be encouraged to respond to the message of the Gospel and interpret its relevance to their present lives. Thus, in the context of contemporary classrooms composed of believers and non-believers, there is a place for both elements.

The changed understanding of Revelation that came from Vatican II was seen as a life-long relationship that each human person has with God in the context of a believing community. It had serious implications for religious education programs in Australia. The renewed understanding of both the concept of religious freedom, that is, the right of each person to search for God in their own way and to accept the responsibility of their actions, and the acceptance of different religious practices also signalled a time for change. Different perceptions and practices of the Catholic Church and Catholic people followed and gave rise to much discussion and debate about religious education in Catholic

schools. The ensuing debate was drawn from different understandings of the nature and purpose of religious education.

Through a review of the literature, it was established that at the broader school level, all programs offered specific learning experiences which focused on personal and faith development. However, a variety of approaches to the religious education classroom program had been drawn from both faith and educational perspectives. The complementarity of the two perspectives was stressed thus highlighting the fact that aspects of both could enhance learning in religious education. It was in the intentions of different approaches, in terms of content and method, that certain emphases became apparent. With the former, while there was some focus on providing knowledge about the faith tradition, there was a significant emphasis on personal and faith issues. With the latter, a sound intellectual study formed the cognitive basis of the program and it was hoped that this would promote affective learning.

In particular, a favourable feature of a study of different religions was identified. It had relevance for contemporary Australian students given the diversity of their religious and cultural backgrounds. It was suggested that if students had increased exposure to different religions, there was a sound reason why they should be given opportunities to learn about these different religious traditions. Accordingly, this was a desirable feature of a senior religious education program in Australian Catholic schools.

Another aspect of an approach to religious education that had a cognitive focus was that it increased its status as a serious academic subject thereby giving the subject more credibility. This feature was seen as an appropriate requirement for senior religious education in Catholic school.

It was also noted that, in the past few decades, greater emphasis had been given to the personal dimension of religious education. This was a response, more specifically, to the

Church's teaching about Revelation since Vatican II, and more broadly, to the theories in humanistic and developmental psychology. The former aspect drew on students' personal responses and experiences and the latter focused on their social interactions and relationships. Crawford and Rossiter (1988) summed this up when they stated:

The various approaches ... were all concerned with finding a prominent place for the personal dimension. In different ways each of the new approaches sought to engage students at the more personal level (p. 27)

One feature of the above was that students were encouraged to involve themselves in discussions on social and ethical issues and a common aim was to address learning in the affective domain which included moral and spiritual development.

An issue that emerged from the preceding discussion is that educators have continued to be disturbed by the perceived problems that have emerged at the classroom level. Research and discussion on the topic continues today, as illustrated by the recent release of new religious education guidelines from several dioceses in Australia. The guidelines from the different dioceses are themselves evidence of the lack of unanimity about the most desirable approach, in terms of content and method, for religious education, particularly senior religious education (de Souza 1997). On the one hand, Melbourne (1995) drew on the experiential approach for their classroom program while Parramatta (1993) used the praxis approach. With the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in Victoria, a study in religion was also offered which was knowledge and skills based, and it has been used in conjunction with activities that focused on affective learning at the senior secondary levels. On the other hand, Sydney (1996) and Brisbane (1997) have adopted an outcomes-based approach with a strong cognitive focus for their classroom program, and incorporate a faith perspective at the broader level of religious education. The Board of Studies, New South Wales also offers a Study of Religion course in the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Both the VCE and HSC religion studies courses will be discussed in the next chapter.

To sum up, a review of the theory of and approaches to religious education in Catholic schools identified two complementary perspectives that have influenced the development of different programs. Approaches drawn from the faith perspective fulfilled the purpose of religious education in a Catholic school, that is, consideration was given to the role of the school as a faith community which was part of the vision of the Catholic Church. Approaches drawn from an educational perspective provided the subject with a broader knowledge base and recognized that religious education had a place within the broader curriculum because it provides a particular form of knowledge. Hence, its cognitive focus gave the subject a more credible status. Further, by including a study of different religions, its content had more potential to be relevant in pluralist classrooms.

Following this, it is proposed that within a framework that includes faith and educational perspectives, an approach to learning in religious education which recognises and addresses the interrelatedness of both the cognitive and affective domains should be ensured. Knowledge and experience drawn from an academic study of the Catholic faith tradition could be shown to be relevant and meaningful in contemporary situations with which students identify, thus addressing the personal, moral, social, religious and spiritual aspects of an individual's life. Additionally, students need to be able to access both knowledge and experience at different levels of cognition and maturity which means that each stage in the learning process is identified and a range of teaching strategies to promote successful learning is included. If students are adequately equipped with the necessary skills to understand the knowledge and concepts being introduced, it is more likely that the learning will inspire interest derived from the satisfaction of attainment. Given the unique nature of religious education, it is, perhaps, arguable that two levels in the affective domain could be identified (see Figure 5).

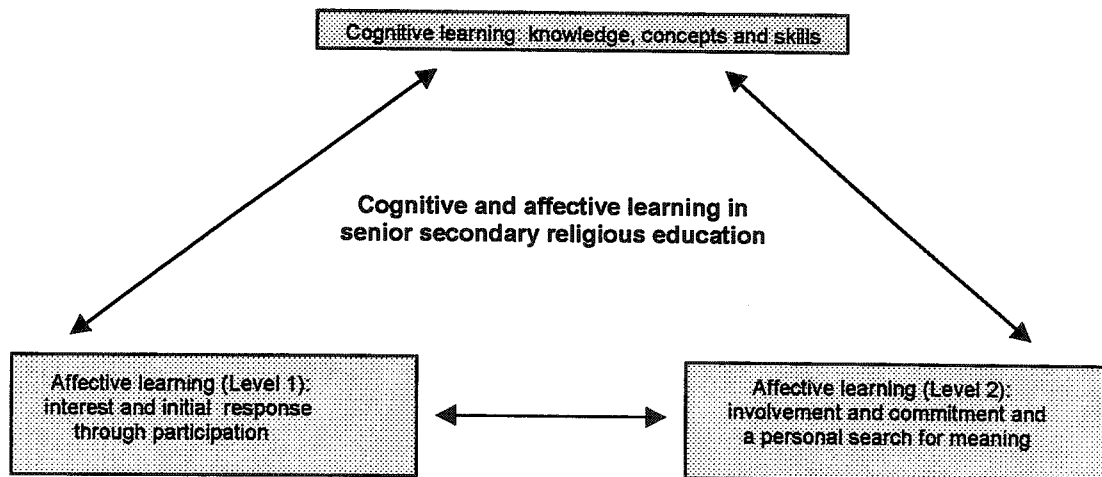


Figure 5: A curriculum model for senior secondary religious education.

The first objective, as with other subjects, would be stirring some interest and response from students to the content that is being presented. However, the religious education program should aim at going beyond the attempts to interest and elicit initial responses from students. They should seek to cultivate nurturing environments which allow for personal and spiritual growth and maturity and which may or may not lead to further involvement and/or commitment but which may assist students in their personal search for meaning. It would be essential to recognise that these latter outcomes are desirable rather than intended, thus, removing any sense of indoctrination, and retaining, instead, an atmosphere of hope, trust and individual freedom.

Activities which contribute to affective learning are often the more informal ones to which students respond positively, and which promote the personal dimension in religious education. However, it should be recognized that the learning process is essentially a continuous movement between the cognitive domain and the two levels of the affective domain discussed above.

This research study, then, presents this synthesis of the discussion in this chapter and argues from the foregoing that the above proposed curriculum model is appropriate for

senior secondary religious education. Additionally, from a description of different approaches described in this chapter the following features have been identified as being appropriate for senior secondary religious education:

- providing students with a sound knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition so that they can develop an appreciation of their heritage and discover its relevance to their present circumstances and practices.
- offering opportunities for students to develop their personal faith, such as, reflecting and meditating on passages from scripture and interpreting the relevance for their own lives, sharing in the preparation and celebration of class Masses, discussing issues in light of the Christian message, sharing in prayerful experiences and so on.
- including intellectually challenging content that provide a balance between knowledge of the tradition and students' experiences. This would have the potential to make the content more relevant and meaningful to students.
- promoting students' understanding and tolerance of people and practices from other religions and cultures and possibly enhance their learning in their own faith tradition.
- achieving a status similar to other academic subjects in the curriculum by recognizing its particular contribution to the broad education of the student.
- Addressing both the cognitive and affective domains by recognizing their interrelatedness and providing opportunities for students to become more informed about personal, moral, social, spiritual and religious issues. This may assist them to develop their own value systems in their growth towards human maturity (see Figure 6, p. 79).

Senior secondary religious education in Catholic schools	
Affective dimension	Cognitive dimension
* wider RE program complements classroom program and has a faith perspective	* a distinct way of knowing
* catechesis	* knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith tradition
* evangelization	* knowledge of and understanding other religions
* tolerance of other religious and cultural practices	* understanding the role of religion in society
* experiential	* relate Gospel to present circumstances
* has the intent of handing on the faith tradition	* appropriate for a pluralist society
* focuses on personal and faith issues	* has potential for promoting spiritual development
* focus on individual	* has the potential to improve the status of RE as a serious academic subject
* students more informed on social, personal, ethical and spiritual issues	
* social interaction and experience - relevant and meaningful	
* growth to human maturity	

Figure 6: Appropriate features of senior religious education in contemporary Catholic classrooms.

Drawing on the above, it is further proposed that five broad areas should be included in a senior secondary religious education program:

1. The inclusion of content which promotes students' interest in and tolerance of different religious traditions and increases their understanding of the role of religion.
2. The inclusion of sound academic content which increases students' level of knowledge of the Catholic Church, so that they may understand its relevance to their lives, which could lead to an interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition.
3. The inclusion of activities that have the potential to promote faith and spirituality.
4. The inclusion of content and learning strategies that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students given a) the multi-faith and multicultural nature of the student population which includes non-Churched students and b) the impact of technology and the media on today's students.
5. The achievement of an appropriate status, as perceived by students and teachers, in relation to other Year 12 subjects.

For purposes of clarity and to avoid any possible misinterpretation of terminology, in successive chapters of this work, different approaches to religious education will be identified according to the emphasis that they place on learning in the different domains, cognitive and affective. There are those approaches that focus on an intellectual study of the subject which, while they recognize the affective aspects of religious education, pay particular attention to learning in the cognitive domain. Thus, developing an intellectual understanding of the subject is given priority and is seen as one way of promoting personal faith. These will be referred to as approaches to religious education which have an emphasis on providing a sound intellectual study which promotes knowledge and skills, that is, learning in the cognitive domain.

In other approaches there may be a greater emphasis on affective learning which includes activities that promote the interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences (Gardner 1983, 1993). While these intelligences are discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (see pp. 104-107 of this work), at this point it serves to identify them as dealing with aspects of personal growth and development, that is, learning in the affective domain. In practice they translate into a particular focus on opportunities provided in the classroom program for students to discuss, pray and/or reflect on personal and faith issues. Such approaches will be referred to in this work as religious education with an interpersonal and intrapersonal emphasis, that is, learning in the affective domain.

Apart from the ongoing discussion and research in the specific area of religious education there are other factors that have contributed to and impacted broadly on developments in learning programs in secondary schools, including those for senior secondary students. The next chapter discusses contemporary directions and contexts in education which have had particular implications for senior religious education programs in Catholic schools. It also examines the curriculum documents in religious education from Catholic schools involved in this research study.

Chapter 2

Contemporary educational approaches to learning and curriculum guidelines for religious education: Implications for senior religious education programs

This chapter explores some aspects of approaches to learning and educational concepts that have had particular significance for learning and teaching in religious education. First, there is an examination of the significance of Erikson's (1963, 1968); Maslow's (1968) and Kohlberg's (1969, 1981) respective theories for the design of educational programs that attempt to address the developmental needs of senior adolescents. Fowler's (1981) and Flynn's (1985, 1986) stages of faith development and new theories related to intelligence and preferred styles of learning are also investigated for their relevance to senior adolescents. The impact of external factors on general educational programs for senior students is discussed and finally, curriculum documents that have provided a basis for Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools are examined. Included are the VBOS study design, *Religion and Society* since units from this study have been widely used as part of the Year 12 program, either as core or as elective subjects. Also examined are the *Guidelines for Religious Education of Secondary Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne* (CEO, Melbourne 1984) and the policy statement *Religious Education at Senior Secondary Level in the Catholic School* (CEO, Melbourne 1990). The former will be referred to as the *Guidelines* in the following discussion. Some reference will also be made to the revised *Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne: Senior Secondary*, (referred to as the *Revised Guidelines*) (CEO, Melbourne 1994) to note apparent changes in approach.

Many of the changes in the teaching and learning process that have occurred through the 1970s and 1980's were influenced by theories about the way the human person grows and develops (Rogers 1961, 1969; Erikson 1963, 1968; Maslow 1968, and others) which led to a greater focus on the individual. Rogers described 'significant, meaningful and experiential learning' (1969, p. 4) which had 'a quality of personal involvement, ... was self-initiated, ... was pervasive, ... was evaluated by the learner, ... and had meaning as its essence' (1969, p. 5). Roger's writings had some influence on the development of educational programs, including religious education as discussed in Chapter 1, where the learning became child-centred and recognition was given to the experiential factor being an important part of the learning process.

With this focus on the child, humanistic psychologists began to investigate the growth patterns of an individual and the effect this may have had on the learning process. One basic assumption was that there were a number of developmental stages that individuals move through in their growth to maturity and that each stage could be identified by certain characteristics. Two schools of thought dominated the field of developmental psychology – cognitive development and psycho-social development. The former focused on how individuals interpreted and made sense of the outer world according to their mental skills and abilities. Thus, their intellectual processes transformed their experiences into a form that they were able to draw on when they were confronted with a new situation or problem. Changes in these processes were linked to physical maturity which suggested that significant types of behaviour would be apparent at successive age levels. Psycho-social theories, such as those offered by Erikson, were based on the understanding that the individual's ego progressed through a series of inter-related stages. These are discussed below. Educators became interested in these developmental theories and the implications they had for the individual's learning process. However, there has been much criticism about aspects of developmental theories, for instance, the stages are not necessarily sequential, nor do they necessarily relate to specific age brackets. Further,

issues related to the impact of gender and culture on an individual's growth and development have also been examined (for instance, Gilligan 1982; Ochse & Plug 1986).

Despite the critics, developmental theorists have triggered much discussion related to the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies. They have also had a significant impact on curriculum documents in the past decade. *Frameworks* (Ministry of Education - School's Division 1988), the *National Profiles and Statements* (Curriculum Corporation 1993) and the *Curriculum and Standards Frameworks* (Victorian Board of Studies 1995) all have a strong emphasis on the need to cater for individual abilities and differences. This feature is also included in the revised *Guidelines for Religious Education for Students in the Diocese of Melbourne* (CEO, Melbourne 1995) which refers to the 'many ways of knowing' and the need for the teacher to draw on the students' individual experiences to create relevant experiences for the individual student (1995, p. 30).

Human development: Erikson and Maslow

Erikson (1963, 1968) identified stages in human development which resulted from the interaction between the individual's growth and maturity, intellectual and emotional development, and the succession of social roles that the individual experienced. These stages were recognized by educators as having some relevance for the design of strategies to enhance learning, for instance, how children think or how to cater for the different learning styles. Erikson formulated a theory of personality development drawn from psychoanalysis but took into account the social and cultural influences. His descriptions of personality development were based on the *epigenetic* principle (1968 p. 92) where he hypothesized that, similar to the way foetus development takes place at particular periods of time, personality forms as the ego progresses through a series of interrelated stages. In his view, personality development was a series of turning points or psychological crises, which he described in terms of dichotomies of desirable qualities and behaviours. He argued that people need to possess both the positive and the

negative qualities of each stage, but in order to adapt successfully to their social environment, it is necessary that the positive qualities are stronger. Erikson focused on psychosocial stages of ego development, in which a person has to develop new skills and relationships in order to function within different social contexts. More importantly, he believed that personality development was a life-long process which he referred to as the eight stages of the life-cycle. These were:

1. *Trust v mistrust*: In the early years, if an infant was not nurtured or properly cared for, they could become mistrustful and wary and this could be transferred into later stages in their dealings with others.
2. *Autonomy v doubt*: This was when toddlers became adventurous and wanted to experience the world. They needed support and guidance. Over-restriction, criticism and not allowing them to do things for themselves could lead to self doubt.
3. *Initiative v guilt*: This was early to middle childhood, a period when children tested their cognitive and motor skills. Their initiative and endless curiosity needed patience, support and some freedom. By allowing them to show some initiative their self-assurance could increase. Once again, too much restriction, impatience and control could lead to guilt when they did show some initiative. These feelings could also affect them in later life, for instance, different expectations that were gender based could lead to guilt if children wished to cross the gender barrier. An example of this would be when girls played football or boys played with dolls.
4. *Industry v inferiority*: This was a period from late childhood when there was a lot happening and children were extremely active, making and doing things. They asked more questions, sometimes quite sophisticated ones. Peer groups became more influential and they could reinforce feelings of confidence and security.
5. *Identity v role confusion*: This was the period of adolescence where the social world expanded and provided more exposure to different social contexts. Children had already developed a sense of identity from their previous experiences within the extended family network and they began to test it out in new situations. Their interests grew to include what was happening in the wider world, for instance, their interest in

political, religious and social issues developed. Social networks beyond the family became increasingly important as the adolescent attempted to find a place within them. When they had difficulty fitting in, role confusion could result. This could be a result of inadequate opportunities to develop social skills earlier or unresolved conflicts from earlier stages. For instance, if they had not learnt how to trust people, they may be unable to develop relationships which could lead to isolation or to further feelings of inferiority, and even guilt. Thus, their personal growth continues to be hindered. Sometimes, this could lead to excessive behaviour as the individual makes an extreme effort to fit into the group, or it could result in anti-social behaviour, that is, misbehaviour or delinquency, or anti-personal behaviour, that is, drug and alcohol abuse.

6. *Intimacy v isolation*: This was the period of early adulthood where there was a need to establish a close and committed relationship with another person. Failure to do so could, once again, lead to a sense of isolation.
7. *Generativity v Stagnation*: This was the period of middle age when a person was usually concerned with establishing and guiding the next generation, that is, having children and raising them. Adults could attempt to do this in productive and creative ways, for instance, through teaching, research, working towards securing the future for the next generation and so on.
8. *Integrity v Despair*: Integrity was being able to accept one's life as something that had to be. Despair occurred when a person was disillusioned with his/her life and felt that time was too short to begin again in an effort to gain integrity (adapted from Erikson 1963, Chapter 7 and Erikson 1968, p. 94).

Erikson's fifth stage would appear to be most relevant to senior secondary students when they are at a stage where they are beginning to develop their own sense of identity and becoming interested in the outer world in terms of political and social issues. Marcia (1980) who extended Erikson's work, also argued that adolescents needed to undergo an identity crisis in order to further their own psychological maturity. He suggested that this

may involve them in rejecting their parent's beliefs and values and moving towards an articulation of their own.

Maslow (1968; 1970), a humanist psychologist also offered a motivation theory relating to human growth based on need gratification which

is the most important single principle underlying all healthy human development. The single holistic principle that binds together the multiplicity of human motives is the tendency for a new and higher need to emerge as the lower need fulfills itself by being sufficiently gratified. The child who is fortunate enough to grow normally and well gets satiated and *bored* with the delights that he has savored sufficiently, and *eagerly* (without pushing) goes on to higher more complex, delights as they become available to him/her without danger or threat (Maslow 1968, p. 55)

Maslow suggested a hierarchy of human needs which, he believed, corresponded to the growth and maturity of the human person and that when basic needs, such as physical needs, were satisfied to some degree, other 'higher needs emerged' (Maslow 1970, p. 38). Maslow proposed the following five-level hierarchy of needs:

- physiological needs: hunger, thirst;
- safety needs: need to be safe, free of pain, danger, anxiety;
- belongingness and love: need for affection, to value and be valued as part of a group;
- esteem: need for recognition by one's peers, and
- self-actualization: need to develop one's potential, need to place long-term benefits to self and society before short-term pleasures, develops a sense of priorities among needs, need to know 'who am I?' (adapted from Maslow 1970, Chapter 4, pp. 35-58).

The esteem needs, as identified by Maslow, appear to correspond to features of Erikson's fifth stage where individuals are beginning to expand their horizons. Thus, peer groups can become instrumental in helping to contribute to an adolescent's sense of identity. If the process of searching for one's identity does lead to role confusion and if this becomes a pre-occupation of senior adolescents, educational programs, such as

religious education which includes aspects of personal development, should address this. Further, if religious educators wish to increase the interest levels generated by their senior secondary programs, they may need to recognize and articulate the needs of senior adolescents so that they can include content that is relevant and meaningful to their particular stage of development, for instance, current social issues. Equally, they may need to incorporate strategies that can utilize the influence of their peers which could have the potential of enhancing their learning. Finally, they may also need to recognize that, to enhance the personal development aspects which include religious and spiritual development, the teaching strategies should link cognitive and affective learning, thereby increasing the potential for the program to be both intellectually challenging and meaningful.

Other developmental theorists who have had relevance for religious education provided a 'stage-theory' framework drawn from their respective research studies in the United States. These theories were drawn from the cognitive developmental school of thought so that a stage was seen not so much as a predetermined set of life issues as a particular way of organizing experiences. The first was Kohlberg (1969, 1981) with his stages of moral development and the second was Fowler (1981) with his stages of faith development. While both theorists have had their share of critics, the fact remains that they have offered religious educators an 'unparalleled opportunity' to draw on their theoretical framework thus providing educators with a 'basis and structure for clarifying goals and pursuing realistic objectives in their programs' (DiGiacomo 1993, p. 66).

Moral development: Kohlberg

Kohlberg's (1969, 1981) cognitive-developmental theory, which focused on the general structures of moral judgement, has had some influence on approaches to religious education. He found that people matured in their moral reasoning by passing through several levels. Each of these levels is identified by the reasons that are given for

choosing between right and wrong. Thus, a level of reasoning is not decided by the action that is considered to be wrong but by the reasons given that determine whether the action is wrong. Kohlberg described three levels, each of which had two stages, in moral development:

Pre-conventional level

1. Orientation towards punishment - where one is deterred from doing something wrong because of the consequences that might occur, for example, punishment of some sort.
2. Reciprocity - where right action is when one seeks to satisfy one's own needs, and occasionally the needs of others.

Conventional level

3. Good girl-good boy orientation - where one seeks the approval of others for good behaviour.
4. Orientation towards authority - where doing one's duty, showing respect for authority and maintenance of the social order determines the right behaviour.

Post-conventional level

5. Social contract orientation - where the right action is determined by standards that have been accepted and agreed upon by the whole community.
6. Universal ethical principle orientation - where there is an orientation toward the decisions of conscience and toward self-chosen ethical principles that relate to justice, equality of human rights and individual human dignity (adapted from Kohlberg 1969, p. 376 and 1981, pp. 17-22)

Kohlberg's framework for moral development had some consequences for the teaching of Christian morality and provided a basis for the development of teaching programs in moral and ethical issues and social justice. It assisted educators in understanding the reasoning structures which influence people as they arrive at solutions to moral dilemmas. Kohlberg found that most adolescents reasoned at the third stage, the

conventional level, and tended to solve their moral problems with reference to something outside themselves.

However, Gilligan (1977, 1982) pointed out that Kohlberg's data was gathered from an all-male sample and that the post-conventional levels for female moral development were simply not examined. Gilligan argued that

differences arise in a social context where factors of social status and power combine with reproductive biology to shape the experience of males and females and the relations between the sexes (Gilligan 1982).

Gilligan (1982) found that there were contrasts between male and female moral-decision making and that girls, generally, were consistent in their knowledge and interest in human relationships. Moylan (1993) summarised the findings from further research that showed differences between the way male and female adolescents use their reasoning abilities (pp. 14-15). These suggested that most girls tend to be more personal in their reasoning, that is, they are at Kohlberg's third stage, whereas, boys may be more impersonal in their reasoning and so tend to move into the fourth stage earlier. Further, the findings indicated that it was unlikely that the decision-making of these adolescents would operate at an earlier or later stage. Gilligan (1977) found that adolescent girls were more concerned with trying to find solutions to moral problems that leave both parties satisfied (pp. 417-518). However, boys from the same age group were more objective in applying logic and justice to provide a satisfying outcome. Thus, these two levels of reasoning, that is, girls trying to find a solution without hurting anyone in the process and boys retaining a level of detachment in their process of moral reasoning, should not lead to the conclusion that adolescent boys are more advanced in their moral reasoning than their female counterparts. Rather, recognition should be given to the fact that their gender differences possibly determine their responses. This critique of Kohlberg's research suggests many areas for further study.

Generally, the third and fourth stages are the relevant ones when dealing with senior adolescents and the 'de-structuring and reconstructing' (Moylan 1993, p. 15) of the process can cause confusion and distress for them and for those significant others who are interacting with them, such as parents and teachers:

The kind of 'vacuum of moral reasoning' which occurs can manifest itself by the adolescent's appearing sceptical, negative, relativistic and by his or her appearing to revert to an earlier stage of self-centredness. By prodding adolescents beyond their predominant level of moral reasoning, parents and teachers may precipitate this condition (Moylan 1993, p. 15).

A criticism of Kohlberg's theory raised by Pell (1982) argues that Kohlberg was overly optimistic when he claimed a relationship between stages of thinking and action (1982, p. 9). Pell examines Kohlberg's early and later writings to discuss some contradictions that relate to this factor and concludes that for a 'variety of theoretical and empirical reasons' the relationship remains 'obscure' (1982, p. 9). Pell claims that stage progress, particularly in the first four stages, does not always ensure better moral performance and refers to Kohlberg's experiment in cheating where 80% of the principled subjects in the last level refused to cheat. Pell believes that Kohlberg puts great emphasis on the intellectual process but fails to recognise the role of human emotions in moral reasoning and action and, as such, the theory is 'seriously incomplete and possibly misleading' (1982, p. 9). He says:

there is no adequate explanation of the emotions as an essential constituent of human nature, or as a vital element in moral development, or as a potent force for disturbing the 'proper' relationship between particular judgement and particular action (Pell 1982, p. 9).

Another aspect related to the stages of moral development as discussed by Biggs and Telfer (1987, pp. 324-25) claimed that moral levels are affected by levels of conformity. Thus, students who successfully resist conforming to peer group pressure or to authority pressure to inflict punishment on someone else usually operate at a higher level, according to Kohlberg, than those who did conform. They also argued that cognitive

developmental theory does not provide all the answers, for instance, people do not consistently arrive at the same judgements across a variety of situations. They often are influenced by the circumstances governing the action or event. They also insist that judgement is only one of many determinants of behaviour. However, the cognitive structure is useful in classifying the different kinds of judgement that people make.

Shweder, Mahapatra and Miller (1990, p. 143) argued that using language to explain how an individual reasons and thinks was not always the most appropriate medium. They supported this claim with references to findings in developmental research which have indicated that the knowledge of concepts in children often comes before their capacity to articulate their self-reflective abilities. This is an important factor when we consider that Kohlberg's interview methodology depended on this very ability for his subjects to be self-reflective:

Those who study moral understandings with Kohlberg's moral dilemma interview have reduced the study of moral concepts to the study of verbal justification of moral ideas. The study of moral understanding has been narrowed . . . to the study of what people can propositionalise. That is dangerous because what people can state is but a small part of what they know (Shweder et al. 1990, p. 143).

Closely related to the above discussion is the claim that Kohlberg's theory has universal application. Certainly, there would be some behaviours that would be considered wrong regardless of the laws and practices of different countries. However, moral values, such as equality, freedom, the preservation of human life and so on, are not universally applied across cultural boundaries. Freedom of speech, for example, might reflect a particular perspective that is culturally specific. Equally, when birth control, abortion and homosexuality are contentious issues within a single country such as Australia, they would be even more difficult to resolve at a global level when a diversity of beliefs are involved. Given the pluralistic nature of Australian classrooms, religious educators need to be aware of these implications when they develop aspects of moral education in their

programs. This is particularly the case at senior secondary levels where students, inundated with mass media, have a heightened awareness of social, cultural, moral and ethical issues. Furthermore, the students are at an age where they are inclined to seek solutions to them.

Finally, two other writers Nucci (1982) and Turiel (1983) suggested that there may be some distinctions between the understandings of convention and morality. They claimed that conventional acts were only viewed as wrong if they broke an existing rule or an accepted standard. Moral violations, however, were seen as wrong regardless of laws and regulations (Nucci 1982, pp. 93, 119; Turiel 1983, Chapter 6). For example, the recent legislation in the Northern Territory which legalised the practice of euthanasia was still seen as morally wrong by many Australians despite its legal standing. The subsequent ruling by the Federal Government which overturned the Northern Territory legislation was a response to such thinking. This interpretation is different from that of Kohlberg who believed that even young children can differentiate between moral and conventional actions. For example, children who punch other children in the playground, with the deliberate intention of hurting them, know that their action is wrong even if they are not aware of a school rule that forbids punching. Religious educators need to be aware of these two opposing views on the understanding of conventional and moral actions. Both have validity and, depending on which view is supported, there are implications for the interpretation of Kohlberg's theory and its application to the classroom.

The above findings are ones that religious educators need to take into consideration when interacting with their students. Kohlberg's theory does provide a useful structure for programs in moral development. In particular, his use of the moral dilemma as a strategy in moral education can be a most effective tool for teachers. However, any attempt to encourage students in their passage to moral maturity needs much patience, careful handling and attention to language ability and cultural diversity. This is particularly

important for religious educators when they include values education and an attention to the personal dimension in their religious education programs.

Faith development: Fowler, Flynn, Leavey and others

Fowler's (1981) research sought to identify different stages of faith development. He and his associates conducted 359 interviews between 1972 and 1981 with people whose ages ranged from three and a half years to eighty-four years. While there was an equal representation of males and females among the subjects, they were heavily dominated by white Americans (97.8%) and Christians (81.5%) respectively. Other religions which were represented were Judaism (11.2%), Orthodox Christians (3.6%) and others not specified (3.6%) (Fowler 1981, p. 315).

Fowler (1981) concluded that there were six stages of faith development which followed a pre-stage he called 'Undifferentiated' (p. 121) which he linked to infancy. The six stages were:

1. *Intuitive-Projective Faith (Experienced faith)*: Young children copied the language and actions of adults close to them.
2. *Mythic-Literal Faith (Affiliative faith)*: At this point older children began to express beliefs that they had heard and began to act upon them.
3. *Synthetic-Conventional Faith (Conventional faith)*: Children in their pre-teen years began to be influenced by a wider network including their peers.
4. *Individuative-Reflexive Faith (Personal faith)*: Teenagers experienced the tension of choosing to stay with the known and familiar or developing their individuality and exploring unknown territory. Fowler claimed that this latter step was necessary for faith to continue to develop.
5. *Paradoxical-Consolidative Faith (Community faith)*: Young adults choose to live according to their own beliefs and commitments.

6. *Universalising Faith (Universal faith)*: This was the approach to mid-life and beyond when people focused on truths and what it means to be human. At this stage people were comfortable with their beliefs and could develop a commitment to change the world (adapted from Fowler 1981, pp. 119-211 and Fowler et al 1991, pp. 24-25).

Fowler did attempt to link specific age brackets with the six stages but conceded that stage attainment would vary from person to person. More importantly, he asserted that only a few individuals would reach the sixth and final stage, for instance, people like Mother Theresa or Gandhi.

From the above descriptions, it would appear that the third and fourth stages have relevance to teaching at senior secondary levels and that there is similarity between these stages and the ones described by Erikson and Maslow in relation to adolescence. Fowler's third stage should occur towards the end of childhood and, while it may only last to the late teens, it is quite possible that it might continue to a later age. DiGiacomo suggested that this stage was close to Kohlberg's third stage, the 'conventionally moral' person, and was an accurate picture of the 'kind of Catholic who dominated the pre-Vatican II church' (DiGiacomo 1993, p. 68). He followed this by observing that the 'new' Catholics that emerged in the wake of the Council had the characteristics of Fowler's fourth stage, the 'independent-reflexive' (1993, p. 68). The transition to this latter stage may begin in the late teens and is indicated by 'a newly autonomous perspective as the individual becomes less dependent on others to construct and maintain his world of meaning' (1993, p. 68).

Given the above observations, it would seem that the third stage has the most interest for religious educators since it is the most appropriate time, according to Fowler, that an informed and in-depth presentation of the faith tradition can take place. Francis (1988) claims that it is also at this stage that Fowler encourages the religious educator to 'recognise the importance of promoting growth in the capacity and quality of believing' rather than maintaining the lesson at the level of imparting information (p. 6). He says:

Christians would claim that knowledge does not equal faith, nor ... does psychological maturity equal spiritual formation. They are not opposed to each other ... but can work as partners in the quest for meaning, purpose and deliverance (Francis 1988, p. 6).

Thus, teachers should be sensitive to the needs of their students, most particularly at this stage, and create a setting where students have the personal freedom and opportunity to take a stance somewhere on a commitment/non-commitment continuum as the case may be.

One of the early criticisms of Fowler's theory relates to his definition of faith. Higgins (1983) argued that, according to Fowler's definition, faith for all people, not just believers, is a way in which they maintain a framework of meaning and value. Their interpretations, reactions and initiatives in life are drawn from this framework. Thus, Fowler put the beliefs of 'devout believers' and 'violent critics' on the same level and Higgins questioned the validity of this approach. He believed that, given Fowler's definition, the term 'faith' should be exchanged for the term 'commitment' (p. 119). If, on the other hand, the definition of faith was used to describe the 'binding of oneself to the transcendent, a relatedness to someone or something more than the mundane', this was the religious faith of true believers (Higgins 1983, p. 119). Since Fowler's representative sample was not restricted to such people and, in fact, contained 'Protestants, Catholics, Jews, agnostics and atheists' (Francis 1988, p. 4), Fowler's findings could be flawed and would need further investigation to eliminate this problem (Higgins 1983, p. 119). Francis supported this contention when he said:

from his model of faith development it is difficult to make appropriate distinctions between the faith of the religious believer, the atheist and the humanist, for in Fowler's eyes, all have faith and are found at all stages (1988, p. 6).

Francis highlighted a further problem with Fowler's sample in respect of it being truly representative since it contained people who were 'overwhelmingly white and largely

Christian' (1988, p. 6). Webster (1984) argued that there could be problems with Fowler's research method since it was unclear exactly which hypotheses were being investigated, whether they had a well-founded theoretical base and whether the semi-clinical interview was the most suitable instrument for testing them.

Another aspect of the sample used by Fowler related to the desirability, and indeed the necessity, of including non-Christian and non-Jewish believers in the sample. Ninety-six per cent of the sample were not only religious but of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (Higgins 1983). Since religious faith is not a prerogative of Christian and Jews, it follows that in the multicultural and multi-faith environment of late twentieth-century American, British and Australian society, a truly representative sample would need to include people from different faith traditions. Only then could the results could guarantee some degree of generalizability of the stages of faith development.

Higgins was also critical of Fowler's focus on faith as a 'kind of knowing' with his centre-point being the inner structure of faith. He referred to the fact that Fowler put his own focus on the 'structural character of faith-knowing' on a parallel with Piaget's focus on the 'patterns of thinking' and Kohlberg's focus on 'the forms and structures of thinking' (1983, p. 116), thereby emphasizing the cognitive aspects of the stages of faith rather than the affective:

Fowler himself seems to allow the cognitive to rule in his own approach by focusing on faith as a kind of knowing. Yet, he does this while announcing his understanding that knowing, feeling and valuing are inextricably fused in faith (Higgins 1983, p. 116).

This inequality of emphasis between the cognitive and affective aspects of faith development are a weakness of Fowler's theory. However, despite these concerns, he has provided educators with a framework upon which they can base further explorations into faith development.

Flynn (1985, 1986), a religious educator in Australia, explored the faith journey of 2,041 Year 12 students from twenty-five Catholic schools in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory during 1982 to 1984. The study attempted to determine whether characteristic patterns were associated with the faith of these young people and whether these were the result of drift or conscious decision.

Flynn found that there were six clearly defined patterns of faith amongst late-adolescents.

These were:

- i) *experienced faith* - the highly imitative faith of the young which is based on the observation and experience of significant others;
- ii) *conventional faith* - where adolescents are beginning to make a transition from their early faith patterns, which were dependant on external factors, to a more personalised faith;
- iii) *searching faith* - a time when the childhood forms of faith no longer provide meaning in the lives of adolescents and they begin a journey of searching faith;
- iv) *rejection of faith* - a rejection of the Church as an institution rather than as a community of faith and a period of rejecting authoritative figures such as parents, home, teachers and other significant people;
- v) *owned faith* - where adolescents are beginning to develop their own way of relating to God, thus, they are in the process of forming a 'personally owned faith', and
- vi) *personal faith in Jesus* - where adolescents indicated that they had a growing personal faith in Jesus and felt that their lives needed a 'transcendent dimension' and to be 'centred on God' in order for them to have meaning (1986, pp. 12-14).

Thus, Flynn found evidence that adolescents could be at any of the above stages but the stages themselves did not necessarily represent a progression, that is, movement from one to the next. The movement from childhood faith that was influenced by parents and home background to the owning of a more personalised faith has some parallels to Fowler's stage theory and other developmental theories that mark the progress of an individual's search for their own value system. These theories provide useful insights for religious educators who need to acknowledge that faith is not a static thing, it is a developmental process that requires a nurturing environment amidst other believers who can and will share their faith experiences. Thus, opportunities that provide senior

students with a level of freedom, flexibility, exposure and affirmation in their religious education classes have the potential to enhance their personal faith maturation and development.

Another application of Fowler's theory was the NSW study by Leavey, Hetherington, Britt and O'Neill (1991). The study involved 222 seventeen year-old female students from three schools and was designed to explore the characteristics of 'optimal' and 'minimal' types of Catholic students. The former referred to students with a strong personal religious orientation which was reinforced by their family background and the religious socialization goals of the school. The second group had little personal religious orientation with little reinforcement from their families. The focus was on five dimensions drawn from Glock and Stark (see Leavey et al. 1991, p. 5): ideological, intellectual, ritualistic, experiential and consequential. For purposes of the study, these were translated into: belief, knowledge, ritual, religious experience and moral behaviour respectively.

One of the findings from the study suggested that the religious socialization of the young, while it can be enhanced by the Catholic school, should not be seen as the prerogative of that institution. Instead recognition needs to be given to the other aspects of a student's life, in the wider community, that make significant contributions to the development of faith in a student. This is a factor that was noted earlier in this work and religious education teachers need to be aware of it so that they do not try to set themselves goals that would be impossible to achieve.

Another of the study's findings related to Fowler's stages of faith. Leavey et al. found that one-third of the students they interviewed were 'operating with limited competencies in logical and moral thinking, self-direction and perspective taking' (1991, p. 220). Therefore, the conclusions reached were that these seventeen year old students were at the mythic-literal stage, that is, Stage two. Two-thirds of the students were coded at

Stage three, that is, Synthetic-conventional faith. Thus, Fowler's suggestion that most teenagers would be moving from Stages three to four was not supported by Leavey et al. When making this comparison it should be noted that both Fowler and Flynn involved a much larger group of students than Leavey et al. Nevertheless, the latter study serves to highlight the fact that the diversity among students is not restricted to cultural and religious backgrounds, mental and physical ability or learning styles but also to stages of faith development.

In reference to the study by Leavey et al. (1991), Crawford and Rossiter (1993) discussed the problems associated with the fact that many educators have mistakenly used the term 'religious socialization' interchangeably with the term 'religious education'. They also claimed that there was some confusion in recognizing the differences between the classroom and the personal/community contexts. Thus, socialization can be regarded as the process whereby people absorb attitudes, values, influences, beliefs and behavioural patterns from their immediate social groups which includes family, teachers, peers, and in recent years, television. It is an ongoing learning process that draws on the personal and social environment. Education, on the other hand, is formally designed to help people learn to think, to know and to develop intellectual, technical and interpersonal skills which will contribute to their able functioning and future performance in society.

Leavey et al. (1991) related the terms 'faith mentoring' and 'faith sponsoring' to the process of religious socialization which has value in situations outside the classroom where a one-to-one relationship can be developed. However, its application in the religious education classroom is limited. Classrooms create an environment that can contribute to the socialization process but this is different from that produced through the relationship the individual has with his family and peers. Equally, the classroom religious education program can contribute to the person's overall religious education, including faith development, in ways which cannot be addressed by the family or the local parish. Thus, the two contexts, the interpersonal and the classroom, require different processes

which complement one another but must be recognised as separate entities. Crawford and Rossiter (1993) argued that:

one of the reasons why efforts to improve the effectiveness of classroom religious education have not been so successful has been a blurring of distinctions between religious socialization and education, and a blurring of the boundaries between different contexts. Although it is changing, Catholic school religious education is still labouring with the difficulties that came from thinking that faith development occurred almost exclusively through interpersonal processes . . . more attention should be given to educational interactions (pp. 493–494).

A different but related perspective was also offered by Crawford and Rossiter (1993) on youth spirituality. They felt it was important for educators to recognise that their students' apparent disinterest in religious education did not necessarily extend to spiritual and moral issues. Therefore, they suggested that an issues-oriented religious education program may contribute to the development of the students' spirituality. They described young adults as having a strong social conscience and as being much more interested and involved in current issues than their parents were at the same age. They argued that many young people, while they have lost the sense of what it means to have a 'Catholic' identity and that their faith is different from that of previous generations, it is a faith which moved in a secularised direction:

There is a greater proportion drawing on spiritual values and wide-ranging beliefs in a relativistic way to form their own personal, spiritual interpretation of life. This is part of a *privatisation of religion* (Crawford & Rossiter 1993, p. 499).

The argument for an issues oriented approach in religious education is supported by both Erikson's (1968) and Kohlberg's (1969) theories. Both referred to the interest senior adolescents display in the political, social, ethical and religious issues in society.

More recently, Crawford and Rossiter (1996) referred to this secular spirituality of young people which, they felt, had not been understood by religious education teachers. They

argued that senior adolescents preferred to turn to non-religious organizations to find the answers to some of the issues that concern them because, for them, religion no longer speaks with relevance or authority:

In their self understanding and self expression many youth are eclectic, drawing on elements in trans-cultural, trans-ethnic and trans-religious ways - the mass media, especially television, film and music are significant sources (1996, p. 133).

Rossiter (1996c) defined this secular spirituality as the beliefs, commitments, values and attitudes that determine a particular code of behaviour (p. 3). He suggested that the media was a formative influence on the shaping of young people's values, ambitions, hopes and fears and, indeed, their perception and understanding of the world. He concluded, therefore, that a study of film and television should be included in religious education programs which are aimed at developing moral and spiritual values and attitudes (1996c, 1996d).

Yet another important point made by Crawford and Rossiter was the fact that young people became resentful if there was any attempt to impose a particular religious identity or moral code. They preferred to be given access to a faith tradition just in case it could be of help to them in the future. However, it is a responsibility of the adult Christian community to ensure that students in Catholic schools are provided with a carefully structured program that gives them access to their cultural and religious heritage. This is supported by Nipkow (1991), as cited by Crawford and Rossiter, who put forward some ideas on the formation of religious identity. His conclusions based on his research findings suggested that individuals need to:

begin with an already established denominational religious identity before they can develop a more general ecumenical Christian identity, then with some sense of Christian identity, they may be able to learn from dialogue with other religions in ways that enhance their spirituality (Crawford & Rossiter 1993, p. 498).

The above findings have some significance for religious educators in Catholic schools since education from a faith perspective is a vital part of their programs. Educators need to recognize the different levels of faith their students may be experiencing and to understand the implications of the characteristics of each of these levels, as identified by the theorists, for the learning process. In particular, the findings support the case for students in Catholic schools to be provided with a good grounding in their faith tradition which could enhance faith, moral and spiritual development. Further, it is important that such a study at the senior secondary level should be designed for the maturity and intellectual levels of students so that they find it a challenging study.

Finally, while humanistic and developmental psychology by itself does not provide all the answers for religious educators, the theorists discussed above have made a valid contribution to the understanding of human development. Their work should assist religious education teachers to develop learning programs that acknowledge the varying stages of development that senior students may be experiencing. This has implications for the choice of content and strategies that are appropriated for these individual differences so that learning in the subject can be accessed at various levels.

Individual and mixed ability learning

While increased knowledge about the learning process has influenced educators to re-think their approaches to curriculum development, they have also had to respond to the increasing number of students, especially at senior secondary levels, that are staying on to complete Year Twelve. Larger classes have meant that there is greater diversity in students' background, ability and aspirations. As a result, content and teaching strategies have come under scrutiny and have been modified and/or refined according to the perceived needs of the students. Teachers have been given more freedom to develop school-based curricula, ones which are more appropriate to their student community. This is a move away from the centrally-prescribed curriculum of previous years. As a result

schools can offer programs that meet the special needs of their students and, in practice, it is quite possible for one school's curriculum to be very different from that of another school. In fact, as the marketing of education has become more competitive in the nineties, there are some schools who advertise their individual approaches as a drawcard to attract their 'clientele'.

A common feature of the educational approaches which have been developed across the curriculum is the acknowledgment of different styles of learning and the need to cater for mixed-ability learning. Teachers recognise that students often have different levels of prior knowledge and experiences and that there is a need to build on this. Much emphasis is placed on improving communication between student and teacher and promoting cooperation in learning, for example, some collaboration between students and teachers in what will be learnt and how it will be done. Students may be able to negotiate contracts which set out their individual goals. They are encouraged to develop skills in inquiry-learning and problem solving, to take risks and to learn from their mistakes. The aim is to provide opportunities where success is accessible to all students. The full intention is for students to become active in their own learning and for teachers to recognise that they can learn from their students.

As can be seen, the focus on the individual is a dominant characteristic of most teaching approaches today and can be summed up in the words of Dalton, one of the advocates for cooperative learning, who said:

the way to do this is by focusing on human growth and development, by building lifelong attitudes to learning, and by empowering learners to become what they can be - self-aware, reflective thinkers who know how to learn, who have a strong sense of self-worth and inner direction, who can take responsibility for themselves, and who have a sense of responsibility toward others. This is what empowering learners for the future is all about (Dalton 1992b, p. 2).

The sentiments contained in this statement are reflective of the late eighties and nineties when educators called for attention to be paid to the growth of the whole person. The preparation of individuals to become responsible, socially and morally aware people who contribute to the well-being of society and who take responsible action for the preservation of the environment is a desired outcome. There is some compatibility between such an outcome and the approaches to religious education, which focused on personal development, that were discussed earlier.

It is, undoubtedly, important for Religious Education teachers to recognise that their subject cannot exist in a vacuum and that their teaching and learning strategies also need to be developed in line with other subjects. While it is beyond the scope of this work to discuss some of these approaches, such as cooperative learning, accelerated learning and so on, in any detail, it is important to recognize that many of them place considerable importance on the partnership between teacher and student as a vital element in the learning process. In other words, teachers and students should share with one another and learn from one another. This is equally important in a religious education class where young people are more positive about a religious education program that enables them to 'co-produce meanings' when teachers and students are seen as equal partners 'in the exercise of co-production of religious meanings' (Angelico 1997, p. 54). If students' voices are heard and valued, the program has greater potential of becoming relevant to them, thus, increasing their sense of belonging. This, in turn, is instrumental in promoting their interest in and contribution to the subject.

Multiple Intelligences: Implications for religious education

More recently, Gardner's (1983, 1993, 1996), writings have attracted interest from educators. Gardner differentiated between eight distinct intelligences a) musical, b) bodily-kinaesthetic, c) logical-mathematical, d) linguistic, e) spatial, f) inter-personal, g)

intra-personal, and i) naturalist (this eighth intelligence was identified by Gardner in 1996). Gardner argued that MI theory had implications for schooling:

It is a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles. I would also like to introduce the concept of an individual-centered school that takes this multifaceted view of intelligence seriously (1993, p. 6).

Gardner's MI theory has provoked much discussion and has, in the past few years, begun to influence the development of learning programs in Australia. While, a detailed discussion of Gardner's theory is outside the focus of this research study, its implications for cognitive learning are as applicable to religious education as they are to other subjects. However, two of the intelligences identified by Gardner are particularly pertinent to the personal dimension of religious education. 'Inter-personal intelligence' is the ability to 'read' other people, for instance, what motivates them; how they work; how they feel and think; and knowing what would be the best way to work cooperatively with them. Intrapersonal intelligence is an inversion of the other in that it requires an individual to 'look inwards', to be able to know and understand oneself and one's feelings and responses and to be able to work with them.

Gardner (1993b, p. 9) acknowledged that whilst these two intelligences are 'not well understood, elusive to study, but immensely important' they 'pass the tests of an intelligence' (Gardner & Walters, 1993b, p. 25). The fact that these two intelligences relate to the individual's relationship to others (as in community) and the relationship to the inner self suggests that they share a common component with an approach to religious education that emphasizes personal development. Gardner and Walters acknowledged this when they said:

moral and spiritual intelligence serve as a reasonable candidate for an eighth intelligence, although there is equally good reason to consider it an amalgam of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence with a value component added. What is moral or spiritual depends greatly on cultural values; in describing intelligences we are dealing with abilities that can be

mobilized by the values of a culture rather than the behaviours that are themselves valued in one way or another (1993, p. 46).

Lazear (1991) is one educator who developed Gardner's MI theory for application in the classroom. In his discussion of the intra-personal intelligence, he argued that it involves a deep, insightful knowledge of the 'solitary self as part of a larger order of things' and that we intuitively know that our physical existence, with its accessories consisting of relationships, values and possessions, is temporal and therefore these 'are not an adequate measure or definition of who we really are at deeper levels' (1991, p. 144). He referred to the 'consciousness research' of today (1991, p. 147) and the technique utilised to create 'maps' of the development of human consciousness. This consisted of five distinct stages: body awareness (where the self is almost exclusively identified with the physical body and with the senses), emotional awareness (where self-understanding is primarily identified by the emotions and needs), mental/analytical awareness (where a full range of psychological, intellectual and conceptual activity develops), transpersonal awareness (where one sees one's life connected to and part of the larger patterns composed of people, nature and the universe) and spiritual awareness (which involves the development of complex belief systems, including religious beliefs and spirituality which tended to integrate and give meaning to one's experiences). It would seem, therefore, that Lazear supports the concept that there are links between spiritual awareness and the intelligences.

If we are to accept Gardner's theory that there are different intelligences, there could be a case to suggest that a moral and spiritual intelligence needs to be identified, because, whether it existed individually or as an amalgam of the sixth and seventh intelligence, it would still have a distinguishing value component added which would set it apart. This notion should be of interest to religious educators since it implies that the approach they adopt must provide a balance and address links between learning in both the cognitive and affective domain. The former could provide content and experiences that would

assist in the development of the latter which would incorporate attitudes, emotions, values, spirituality, morality, self-esteem and aesthetic sense (the interpersonal and the intrapersonal intelligence).

One of the implications of the preceding discussion relates to the increasing pressure on teachers today to keep up with new developments in education in order to constantly review and improve their delivery in the classroom. More importantly, these developments have significant implications for the creation of appropriate learning environments where students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds can obtain the most benefit from the study of their various subjects. With the plurality of beliefs in a religious education class this factor has some significance, particularly in Catholic schools where teachers are often expected to teach religious education despite having no training in the subject. Undoubtedly, in such circumstances, the teachers' knowledge, values, beliefs and attitudes are likely to affect their performance, and consequently, the learning that takes place in their classrooms. Their knowledge and understanding of the content of the subject, especially at senior levels given the demand for greater intellectual strengths, will have some bearing on the intended outcomes of the subject (Engebretson 1995). Therefore, there is a need for teachers, who find themselves in this position, to upgrade their qualifications in religious education and/or related areas. This gives rise to another problem confronting teachers today, that is, the impact of external agents on educational programs and therefore, on teachers, particularly at senior secondary levels.

The impact of external agents on the educational program

Apart from current research and learning theories that affect curriculum planning, agencies outside the educational arena can also play an influential role in the decision-making process in education. For instance, there have been significant developments in the early part of this decade, as a result of interest from key people in government, business and industry, which have had implications for school programs especially with

respect to their preparation of senior students for the workplace. Government funding was made available to explore related avenues, such as vocational education, which have resulted in pilot programs and professional development programs for teachers being financed through government grants. This is one example of how teaching personnel and the use of their professional time are influenced by outside bodies leaving little time for the development of curriculum areas that are deemed less fashionable or of lesser importance. If senior teachers have such pressures placed on them in addition to their teaching, correcting, conferencing, preparation and meeting schedules, they have little time or incentive to try to seek professional development in subjects like religious education. This is a significant problem when, as discussed earlier, there are still some teachers who have a limited knowledge and background in teaching religious education.

An aspect that emerges from the above discussion is the fact that, in recent years, schools have been targeted by government bodies and by industry as the means by which a desired outcome can be achieved, which was to improve Australia's chances to become the 'clever country'. The immediate impact of the government's interest in any specific educational area often leads to funds being made available so that professional development can be offered to teachers, for instance, in the areas of vocational education, civics or technology. There is, usually, an implicit expectation that practising teachers will avail themselves of the opportunities provided to improve their knowledge and efficiency in the delivery of the resultant programs. Thus, there is the additional pressure of accountability put on schools and teachers to meet the demands of these external agencies over and above their normal work programs. In Catholic schools, these also include pressures from parents, the parish priest or canonical administrators, the parish community and the Archbishop. With such demands on their time from external factors, it would not be surprising to find that teachers would have little time for thorough on-going, in-depth evaluations of their existing programs to determine their effectiveness in meeting the stated objectives. It is possible that, to some degree, religious educators are also affected by such factors so that evaluation strategies are not always efficient.

More importantly, time restrictions often mean that the results of such processes are not shared with other religious educators from other schools, thus, they remain isolated instances.

One initiative that was introduced in the 1990s in Victoria as a result of extensive reviews from within the educational sector, and which affected senior religious education, was the two-year Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). This program has had far reaching consequences for Years 11 and 12 students and has attracted much attention as evidenced by the ongoing criticism and discussion since the time of its implementation. The VCE was responsible for significant changes to the way learning programs were structured and for an increased breadth of subject offerings over the final two years of post-compulsory secondary education. The implications the VCE had for senior religious education programs is discussed below.

Background and Philosophy of the VCE

The VCE was an ambitious project that was designed to meet the needs of all students. It was meant to take the place of the different school-leaving certificates that had previously existed and aimed at providing all Victorian Year Twelve students with a common certificate. There were many innovations introduced with the certificate, some of which related to the different groups of subjects, which became known as fields of studies.

The introduction of the VCE in 1992 had significance for religious educators because, for the first time in the history of Victorian education, a subject in Religion Studies was included under the umbrella of Social Education. More importantly, it had the same status as the forty-three other studies that were offered, that is, it could be counted towards a University entrance score. Previously, the VCE had been a one-year course consisting of two levels of subjects. Group 1 subjects were considered more academic and the grades achieved in these subjects provided students with the score used for university entrance.

Group 2 subjects were accredited studies that were oriented towards the arts, personal development, vocational and business courses, and some lesser-used languages. Among the Group 1 subjects, *Biblical Studies* was a focused study of Scripture. There were a number of religious study offerings among the Group 2 subjects. Among these, *Peace and Justice* and *Personhood: A Christian Perspective* were some that were offered as a major part of the Year 12 religious education program in many Catholic schools and they commanded a fairly positive attitude among students (Crawford & Rossiter 1988, p. 79).

VCE: Relevance for senior secondary religious education

In the new VCE, Social Education was one of the thirteen broad fields of study. In this field two religious-based studies were introduced. *Texts and Tradition* was a fairly narrow, more specialised study of religion that focused on Jewish and Christian sacred texts. The second study, *Religion and Society*, as its name suggests, is a more generalised and descriptive study of the role of religion in society and in an individual's life. As with all VCE studies, there were four units for each of these two studies. In general, Units 1 and 2 were to be offered at Year 11 and Units 3 and 4, which were sequential, were to be offered at Year 12. However, much emphasis was given to the flexibility of the new VCE so that schools were encouraged to develop programs which had an appropriate mix of the four units offered over the final two years of secondary education. The end result was that most schools developed a range of approaches in their efforts to incorporate the new VCE Religion Studies into their Year 11 and 12 programs. Some schools taught Units 1 and 2 of *Religion and Society* spread over both the final years, that is, one each year. In some cases, VCE units were taught at Year 11 and a school-based religious education course was taught at Year 12. Some schools offered different combinations of the units in *Religion and Society* and/or *Texts and Traditions* as elective subjects over the two years. In many instances, *Religion and Society*, units 1 and 2 were included as a core subject

for senior students in Catholic schools. Certainly, larger numbers of students enrolled in these units as against the other religious studies units (see Table 1).

Table 1: Enrolment figures for VCE *Religion & Society* and *Texts & Traditions*

YEAR	<i>R & S</i> unit 1	<i>R & S</i> unit 2	<i>R & S</i> unit 3	<i>R & S</i> unit 4	<i>T & T</i> unit 1	<i>T & T</i> unit 2	<i>T & T</i> unit 3	<i>T & T</i> unit 4
1992	9887	8646	606	584	1866	1084	315	308
1993	9739	9305	661	661	1420	997	362	362
1994	8402	9052	1195	1195	1437	1454	430	430
1995	7935	8988	1664	1664	1581	1560	520	520

R & S = Religion and Society

T & T = Texts and Traditions

The 1995 figures are relevant to this study since the data was collected at the end of the 1995 school year.

Source: VBOS Research and Evaluation Unit 1998

As can be seen, while the numbers of students enrolled in VCE units 3 and 4 have increased in the past few years, a much greater number of students have been enrolled in units 1 and 2. This is supported by the latest figures in units 1 and 3 from 1998 (see p. 371 of this thesis). It must be also remembered that of these students that enrolled in units 3 and 4, many were Year 11 students which is a factor pertinent to the findings of this study.

Given the above figures, which suggest that more students experience the first two units of *Religion and Society*, often as part of their compulsory religious education program, this research study has concentrated on school programs that included these units in their Year 12 religious education program. Clearly one of the objectives of religious education teachers to include the *Religion and Society* unit as a VCE study was to raise the status of religious education in the eyes of the students and to give it some credibility by encouraging students to recognise its contribution to their education in the same way they recognised the contribution of other VCE studies. This understanding was reflected in an earlier statement by Rossiter when he was discussing the status of a Year 12 religious education program. He said:

the most appropriate 'slant' or 'context' for classroom religious education is to base it within an intellectual study - one that does not suffer by comparison with the cognitive challenges and study structures experienced by students in other subject areas (Rossiter 1987, p. 15).

The VCE was introduced in stages, with the full implementation taking place over 1991/1992. The studies were reviewed over the first few years and in 1994 new study designs for each subject were released by the Victorian Board of Studies (VBOS) for use in the 1995 academic year. In the introduction to the initial *Religion and Society Study Design*, the writers stated that the units of study were designed to enable students to 'develop understanding and respect for the perceptions of the participants in religious traditions. At the same time it seeks to promote open, critical and dispassionate inquiry' (VCAB 1990, p. 1). Engebretson (1991) elaborated on this when she referred to the *Religion and Society* units belonging to the Social Education field of study which were 'therefore sociological in focus'. She went on to establish links between Smart's phenomenological approach and the typological approach of Habel and Moore but asserted that the new study was much closer to the 'depth themes' approach as discussed by Grimmitt (1978, p. 9). Thus, there was an interplay between fundamental human questions, such as the search for meaning or loss and suffering and a reflection and analysis of the responses to them by different religions. The general aim of the phenomenological approach was that in a study of religion 'for the purpose of study, all religious views and beliefs were judged to be 'truth claims' of equal value' (Grimmitt 1987, p. 40).

VCE Religion and society

The VCE *Religion and Society* units were designed to be a study of religious traditions and their role in society and the decision to place it in the field of social education emphasised its sociological focus. In the *Course Development Support Material* (CDSM), that was produced to support teachers in the first few years of implementation, it was stated that the approach should not be confused with religious education or religious instruction, both of which required a confessional approach to the study of one religion (*Religion and Society CDSM* 1990, p. 1). Thus, there would appear to be a fundamental

difference between the intentions of the confessional approach of religious schools and the educational approach adopted in the VCE religious studies units. While the CDSM material was not reproduced after the 1994 review, it was influential in the planning of classroom lessons in the early years of the VCE and could, therefore, have had some lingering influences on aspects of classroom practice in senior religious education after 1994. The revised VCE *Religion and Society* units were the ones that were in use at the time of this research study. As such these are the ones that will be discussed here.

The broad aim of the revised *Religion and Society* study stated:

This study is designed for all Victorians interested in the great questions of life. It also seeks to develop understanding and respect for the perceptions of the participants in religious traditions by promoting open inquiry without bias towards any tradition in particular (VBOS 1994, p. 5).

In this Study Design, a tradition is classified as religious if it contains forms of belief and practice which originate from and lead to human recognition of an 'ultimate reality' and which are transmitted through believing communities (p. 5). The religious traditions are studied through eight different aspects: beliefs, myths and stories, sacred texts, rituals, symbols, social structures, ethics and individual religious experience (p. 5).

The units for the *Religion and Society* study are *Religion and Identity* - Unit 1, *Ethics* - Unit 2, *The Search for Meaning* - Unit 3, *Challenge and Response* - Unit 4. The four units are integrated by the theme of religious beliefs and fundamental values. They facilitate research into the ways in which religious traditions may impact on society which can result in continuity or change. In the first unit, religion and identity are studied within two different religious traditions and they are viewed from two perspectives, a collective identity and an individual identity respectively. Unit 2 is a study of ethics and moral decision-making in a pluralist society. Units 3 and 4 are sequential studies that focus on

an in-depth study of the search for meaning and the changes and challenges in a particular religious tradition (VBOS 1994).

Hobson and Edwards (1993), in their discussion on the specific educational aim that a study of religion fulfils in the curriculum, attempted to place it in the realm of liberal education. They suggested that there were six primary concepts that underpin liberal education theory: freedom, reason, justification, knowledge, moral autonomy and intellectual autonomy. In order to determine whether or not a course of study is likely to promote the qualities of liberal education, three broad criteria can be applied which are based on these six concepts:

- the promotion of critical and reasoned argument (critical rationality);
- the promotion of personal meaning and insight (personal transcendence); and
- the internal consistency of the ideas and knowledge upon which the course is based (epistemological coherence) (Hobson & Edwards 1993, p. 44).

Hobson and Edwards (1993) argue that there are three specific aspects of religion that are problematic when applying the above criteria:

1. doubts about whether religions actually contain justifiable beliefs about reality;
2. the problem associated with the fact that most religions lay claims to representing the sole truth, and
3. the question of whether the large number of competing religions makes it impossible to set one up as more or less true than another (1993, p. 44).

With reference to their discussion, Hobson and Edwards make some valid points on the *Religion and Society* study. They observe that the units are inclined to the more descriptive and sociological aspects of religious study but the element of critical inquiry is only developed clearly in the unit on Ethics. They lament the limited coverage since it is possible for students to emerge from the course having only studied one religion in depth. They acknowledge that the study design does suggest that it would be beneficial for students to undertake a wider study, however, there is nothing put in place to ensure this

happening. They include a particularly important consideration for religious educators in Catholic schools when they note that the main thrust of the study is to improve students' knowledge and understanding of the role of religion and its impact on people's lives. They argue, however, that it does not attend to the students' own position on ultimate issues and the role of religion in their own lives. Finally, they recognise that the present VCE studies of religion are a significant advance on previous offerings but question whether certain complex issues are being addressed adequately. These relate to the particular nature of religion which prompts basic philosophical questions about the 'validity of religious statements, the ethical acceptability of religious moral codes, and the role of the transcendent in informing the pupil's personal search for meaning' (1993, p. 44). They assert that if the course is to 'achieve its full educational potential' it must deal with these concerns.

The VCE and religious education in Catholic schools

There are other concerns amongst some teachers in Catholic schools which relate to the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the phenomenological/sociological approach as discussed in Chapter 2. One argument offered in the original CDSM (1990, p. 1) was that the study of religion could enhance the students' understanding of their own tradition as well as making them more appreciative of other religions. This assertion is of major importance for educators in Catholic schools, that is, whether the aims of the approach of the VCE religious studies units are consistent with the aims of religious education for senior secondary Catholic students. Another concern would be to discover if such a study would enhance students' understanding of their own faith tradition.

In fact, this latter point is referred to in the policy *Religious Education at Senior Secondary Level in the Catholic School* (CEO, Melbourne 1990). In the introduction to the statement, Fr. Doyle, Director of the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne, said that for senior religious education 'a narrow perspective solely on the use of VCE Social

Education Units (from which Religious Education classrooms programs may be developed) was undesirable' (Foreword, 1990). Thus, he advised that these units should be placed within the context of the wider curriculum which impinges on a student's religious education and that an appropriate use should be made of particular VCE units when they are adopted into the school's religious education program.

The effects of studying an academic religion study course: Some recent findings

Before moving on to the religious education guidelines from the Melbourne diocese, it is interesting to look at some recent findings in relation to the New South Wales Board of Study religion study course at Year 12. The Board of Studies in New South Wales offers a subject, *Studies of Religion*, in the Higher School Certificate course at Year 12. The aim is to promote an awareness, understanding and appreciation of the nature of religion and the influence of religious traditions on society and the individual. It arose out of 'the contention that religion should operate like any other curriculum area and be studied in an open inquiring environment' (McGrath 1996, p. 22). There is one section called Foundation Studies which allows for a study of five religious traditions. Each tradition is treated equally in terms of the way it is studied but appropriate learning experiences are expected to be used which cater for the distinctive nature of each (Beck 1996). This leads to a Depth study of a particular religious tradition or a cross religion depth study of two religions.

Malone (1996) conducted a study of the effects of the *Studies of Religion* on the attitudes of Year 12 students. Approximately 1900 students were involved in the study. A finding from the research indicated that 'the study of religion is not sufficient to ensure a change of attitude. The type of learning that involves the young person is more likely to affect their attitude' (Malone 1996, p. 16). This reference to the 'type of learning' is necessarily related to the type of teaching offered to the students and McGrath echoed this concern

when he said, 'one of the greatest challenges lies in the qualification and confidence of the teachers' (1996, p. 22).

However, Malone found that *Studies of Religion* did improve the status of religion in confessional schools. It also encouraged students to study their own religion more seriously and gave them a better understanding of the broader area of religion. McGrath (1996) supported this claim. From his experiences of working with teachers involved with *Studies of Religion*, he commented 'it calls for an open approach to learning about Christianity and other religious traditions' (p. 22) and argued that the open, inquiring classroom environment encouraged students to reflect more freely on their own beliefs and values.

Malone, on a final note, warned that religious schools must plan for their total religious education and pastoral care program to cater for the needs of all their students. McGrath, once again, agreed when he says, '*Studies of Religion* contributes best to Catholic Education only when a school finds equilibrium among the various interdependent elements of religious education' (1996, p. 25).

Both these views echo the directive from the CEO, Melbourne in relation to the VCE religion studies courses which suggests that approaches from an education in religion perspective is not suitable for use in a Catholic school unless it is offered as only one part of the total religious education program.

Goosen's (1996) study was another which examined the impact of the *Studies of Religion* course on the attitudes of students. In this case 337 Year 11 students from three schools were surveyed in 1992 and this was repeated at the end of Year 12 in 1993. The same survey was given to 203 Year 11 students from the same three schools in 1993 and repeated with them at the end of Year 12 in 1994. Two of the schools were coeducational

and the third was a boys' school. There were five main factors identified through the survey:

- the importance of religion;
- the value of religion;
- relativism;
- the influence of religion on life;
- the nature of religion.

The study found that for the three schools over the two years, there was no significant change for any one item. However, for value of religion, relativism and the influence of religion on life, there was a positive move, that is, an increase in the mean. For the other two items, the importance of religion and the nature of religion, the move was negative.

One point of interest was the finding that non-Anglo-Celtic students were more positive about the first item - the importance of religion - than were Anglo-Celtic students. Goosen suggests that this could be due to the fact that, for many of the cultures such students came from, religion was closely integrated into their lives.

The study also showed a significant difference between the responses related to gender. The girls' responses to both surveys were more positive about the value of religion than were the boys. At the end of Year 12 the girls also believed, more strongly than the boys, that religious beliefs influenced people's actions. This was a change from the beliefs they held at the beginning of Year 11. The boys, on the other hand, at the end of Year 12 felt more strongly than girls that religion should be open to public debate. Another gender difference in the responses related to relativism. Girls, in the first survey, indicated that they felt one religion was more important than another but, by the end of Year 12, they had become more relativistic, however, boys were relativistic from the start. Over the two years, the girls also started believing more strongly that religion was a private matter.

The general conclusion reached by Goosen was that the *Study of Religions* had effected some changes in attitude. It had influenced students to become more open to learning from other religions, especially if the course was studied as an optional subject. In other words, the degree of relativism of religions had increased amongst students. Goosen points out that this could be regarded as either positive or negative:

One outcome of this course is a movement towards the inclusivist pole on the relativism continuum for the conservatives and the opposite for the more relativistically inclined. Depending on where the students end up on the continuum, this outcome may or may not prove to be in opposition to the goals of particular (religious) schools and the expectations of the parents. This presents an aspect of the course that is more pastoral perhaps than academic in its implications. It is a sensitive issue. On the one hand we do not want to go back to the old exclusivist ways of seeing one's own religion as the only one with any truth or validity, but on the other hand, extreme relativism can nevertheless be a real problem for any students who are more or less committed to their religious denominations or faith (Goosen 1995, p. 39).

From these reports, it would appear that a study of different religions can be a positive experience in religious education. While it may not effect statistically significant changes in attitude, it can encourage students to become more interested in learning about and from other religions, including their own. The study of other religious traditions encourage students to become much more aware of people from other cultures and religions that form part of our society. It can inspire 'a sense of unity with our fellow human beings rather than invoking narrow and restrictive understandings of salvation in order to accentuate a sense of division and separateness' (Gascoigne 1995, pp. 269-70).

Religious education: The approach in the Melbourne Guidelines

The policy statement, *Religious Education at Senior Secondary Level in Catholic Schools* (CEO, Melbourne 1990), which was released in response to discussions on the implementation of the VCE religion studies units in Catholic schools, drew attention to the

Guidelines for Religious Education for Secondary Students (CEO, Melbourne 1984). The *Guidelines* quite explicitly emphasised that the ultimate purpose of the Catholic school was 'the proclamation of faith, the development of the whole person in Christ ... and the integration of culture and faith, and faith and life' (1984, p. 9). Drawing on the *Guidelines*, the policy statement proposed that aspects of an overall religious education program should consist of:

- formal classroom programs (which could incorporate the VCE units);
- informal, out-of-class activities relating directly to religious education;
- aspects related to religious education which might occur in other subject areas;
- school's structure, organization and pastoral care program, and
- social action (1990, pp. 2-3).

There is an indication here that the VCE religious study units should only be seen as a part of the overall senior religious education program as advised in the CEO's policy statement (CEO, Melbourne 1990). The statement also reminded educators that schools should not take on the sole responsibility for the religious education of students but must recognise that it is a life-long process and that the faith community and the family play complementary roles (1990, p. 1).

The policy statement merely complemented the *Guidelines* (1984) whose role was not prescriptive but aimed at helping religious educators develop their programs. In setting the context for religious education these *Guidelines* stated:

The Catholic Secondary school aims at the proclamation of the faith ... the development of the whole person in Christ who gives meaning to human life ... and the integration of culture and faith, and faith and life (CEO, Melbourne 1984, p. 9).

The definition of religious education, as presented here, first referred to catechesis as the term 'to be used for that form of ecclesial action which leads both communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith' and that 'when it is initiated by the Church, religious education is one form of this ecclesial action' (CEO, Melbourne 1984,

p. 9). Catechesis was seen as having a dual purpose, that is, to lead initial faith to maturity and to educate the true believer by means of a deeper and more systematic knowledge of the person of Christ and His message. The recommended method used in catechesis was to be considered in the context of 'fidelity to the Word of God', that is, Christ-centred, and 'fidelity to the human person', that is, student-centred (p. 10). The catechist was to be aware of the life-situation of the students, their individual circumstances and needs, and the pluralist community from which they come (p. 10). There was reference to the 'educational nature' of the subject which should 'provide both the experiences and information' and which should 'develop the skills required to reflect and respond' (p. 13).

It needs to be noted here that the new *Guidelines* was released in 1995 by the CEO, Melbourne. However, since this research study is an examination of 1995 Year 12 religious education programs which the revised *Guidelines* (1995) did not affect, there is limited scope for a detailed discussion of them. However, some of the changes which reflect the changing aspects of Australian society will be noted below. These are further indications of the ongoing study and discussion that continue to take place amongst religious educators to make their courses more relevant to their students.

The *Guidelines* (1984) was presented in a sequential structure which corresponded to the three levels of secondary education which aimed to take into account the stage of readiness of the students. Four concepts statements were expressed upon which units of work could be based (p. 23) and which included aspects of the cognitive and affective domains. These were Jesus, Revelation, Church and Response in the Spirit. Suggestions for teaching approaches, references and resources supplemented the text.

Generally then, the *Guidelines* (1984) supported religious education whose objective was to provide students with 'opportunities to deepen their reflection on the personal

experience of faith, to give expression to personal faith, and to reinforce personal insights into the experience of faith' (Collins 1995, p. 21).

Overall, the text of the Guidelines (CEO, Melbourne 1984) was steeped in theological references (1984, p. 13) and it suggested that teachers needed to be aware of the 'theological and educational principles which permeate these Guidelines' (p. 11). Given the fact that through the eighties, a large number of religious education teachers in Catholic secondary schools did not have formal qualifications in religious education or theology, as referred to earlier, the general presentation of the text was not user-friendly. It assumed a knowledge and interest on the part of the teacher which could not be guaranteed. It focused on a faith-oriented approach with extensive references to the catechetical method (1984, pp. 9-10). Teaching material was drawn from Church teachings, liturgy, scripture and life experiences (1984, p. 11-12). While advising the teacher to be aware of the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students (1984, p. 8), there was little guide on how opportunities could be provided to draw on the multi-faith component that was more than likely to exist in the classroom.

The revised *Guidelines* (1995) continued to the experiential method that was developed in the previous guidelines for religious education in the Melbourne Diocese, and which belonged within a strictly catechetical approach to religious education. It saw religious education as being:

faithful to the word of God and to the human person. This requires that its content be Christ-centred while its method be student-centred. Consequently, the methodology must integrate what we know of the nature of God with what we know of human life (Stewart et al. 1995, p. 19).

This experiential approach, therefore, sought to develop an awareness of, an understanding of, a response to and a celebration of the life of God the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Church and the wider world. It described the 'four awarenesses', which

were an essential feature: an awareness of self, an awareness of others, an awareness of the world, an awareness of the faith community (1995, p. 29).

This method was seen as a process of constant movement among the following elements, frequently returning to life experience and reflecting on it: experience shared, reflection deepened, faith expressed, insights reinforced. The teacher was expected to participate in this process with the students (1995, pp. 27-28).

While the *Guidelines* (1995) was a revision of the earlier version and retained many features of the previous ones, it articulated more clearly the changing context within which religious education is conducted. In relation to the social and learning contexts, it remarked on the necessity of understanding and respecting the diversity of cultural and religious traditions of students and their families (1995, p. 4). It noted that life experience had been at the core of catechesis in the Melbourne Archdiocese but it acknowledged that the life experiences of today's students have 'changed dramatically' over the last decade and that little can be taken for granted about the students, their beliefs and experiences (Stewart et al., 1995, p. 18). Referring to the four awarenesses, Stewart et al. claimed that the students' answers about their experiences were likely to be different from those of an earlier period and, with this in mind, they suggested that teachers should use their own knowledge of situations to choose the best way to help students 'name and nurture their awareness' (1995, p. 18).

Thus, catechesis or an education in faith remained the focus of the revised *Guidelines* (1995) with an acknowledgment of the pluralistic nature of contemporary classrooms and the implications for the teaching/learning process.

Summary and significance for this research study

This chapter examined some influential factors in education in the past three decades, both across the broad spectrum of secondary education and, more particularly, in senior secondary religious education to discuss their relevance for the subject (see Figure 7).

Some general and subject-specific factors affecting religious education in Catholic schools	Human development	Educational innovations and research findings
	▼	▼
	* theories of faith and moral development	*focus on individual learning and access to success
	*theories of personal growth and human development	* Multiple Intelligence theory
	* recognition of secular and religious spirituality	* approaches involving cooperative and group learning
	* aspects of contemporary teenage culture	*broad curriculum guidelines
		*religious education guidelines
		* relevant government policies

Figure 7: Some factors affecting religious education

The relationship between the personal growth of an individual and the learning process was explored. Different theories from the cognitive-developmental and psycho-social schools of psychology and their relevance for religious education were discussed and their limitations for application in pluralistic Australian classrooms were noted. In particular, the needs of senior adolescents and the implications this had for the development of senior secondary religious education programs were examined. If seventeen and eighteen-year olds are most pre-occupied with their search for identity and with the need for acceptance by their peers, it would seem that both the cognitive and personal dimension aspects of the religious education program should address these needs.

The influence of Fowler's (1981) work in faith development, and also the findings of Flynn (1985, 1986) and Leavey et al. (1991), were discussed and their implications for religious

education programs that were drawn from a faith perspective. In general, it was found that senior students could display characteristics that showed them to be at quite different levels of faith. Thus, developmental aspects need to be incorporated into religious education programs in terms of meeting students' needs through the choice of content and learning strategies. These could include the provision of an environment where students share their individual experiences in a non-restricting, caring and trusting atmosphere which could enhance their personal faith. A recognition that the classroom program is only one part of the wider religious education program provided by a Catholic school could lead to more realistic goals being set. Further, an acknowledgement that Catholic schools are not the only agents in the evangelizing process but play a complementary role to the religious socialization and education offered by the family and the faith community could lead to effective communication between the three groups.

An additional aspect that was discussed was that the spirituality of students in contemporary classrooms was not necessarily religious, that is, related to a religious tradition. The significant influence of the media on young people, and the role it played in the formation of their attitudes, values and codes of behaviour which could contribute to their spiritual development, was highlighted as an issue that needed to be explored. It was noted that if today's senior adolescents were more knowledgeable of and interested in social issues, as a result of their exposure to the media, there were some implications for the choice of content for their religious education programs. If, for instance, the answers students seek are not forthcoming from the Church or other religious authorities, there is a probability that they will have little hesitation in turning to non-religious sources to find the answers.

Different research studies (Malone 1996; McGrath 1996; Goosen 1996) indicated that while a study of different religions did not effect significant changes in attitude to different religions, it did appear to promote in some students an interest in a study of their own faith tradition. It was also found that students' interest in learning about different religions

was positively influenced if the subject was optional and it developed in students an awareness of the cultural and religious diversity that were features of contemporary Australian society (Goosen 1996). The point was made that such a study must be only part of the program in Catholic schools where a particular intention is to cater for faith and spiritual development (Malone 1996).

The stress placed on teachers today is further compounded in the case of religious education teachers in Catholic secondary schools because some of them have a limited academic background in the subject. It was suggested that this could have implications for the successful running of the programs. It would appear that there is a distinct need for on-going professional development programs for teachers in religious education.

The implications of contemporary approaches to teaching and learning and aspects of MI theory for religious education were highlighted. While the broad range of intelligences had implications for the development of cognitive teaching strategies in religious education, the two personal intelligences were particularly significant for those aspects of religious education that dealt with the personal dimension. It is important that religious education should not operate in a vacuum but should draw on current educational theory to improve the delivery of its programs. As such, the teaching and learning process should include strategies that cater for individual differences and mixed-ability learning.

Curriculum guidelines for senior religious education in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria and their implications for classroom practice were investigated. It was noted that religious education for senior adolescents should include faith and educational perspectives as both aspects are essential features of religious education in Catholic schools.

From the above summary it would seem that senior religious education programs may need to consider the following aspects (see Figure 8):

1. An acknowledgment of and response to characteristics of the particular stages of development of senior secondary students, especially in relation to their search for identity, their social needs and the diversity of their classroom experiences.
2. A consideration of the developmental needs of individual students in the choice of content and learning strategies, particularly in the area of personal, moral and spiritual development.
3. An acknowledgment that an individual's passage to personal growth and maturity requires careful attention to language ability and cultural diversity.
4. A provision of opportunities for students to understand the role of religion and learn about both their own faith tradition and other religions given the pluralist society in which they live.
5. A provision of a setting where students are free to take a stance on a commitment/non-commitment continuum, as the case may be.
6. A recognition that religious socialization can be enhanced by the Catholic school but should not be seen as the prerogative of that institution.
7. A recognition that students' apparent disinterest in religious education does not necessarily extend to spiritual and moral issues.
8. The inclusion of a study of current social issues in a free and non-threatening environment so that
 - students may learn the Christian perspective on particular issues while sharing ideas and opinions,
 - students may be better able to make informed decisions, and
 - students may find the content more meaningful and relevant to their lives in contemporary society.
9. The development of teaching and learning strategies in religious education that reflect, to some degree, the best practices in teaching and learning in other subject areas.

10. An effective use of the media as a learning resource in religious education, and
11. The provision of content and strategies that intellectually challenge students.

Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • addresses the developmental needs of individual students in terms of content, learning strategies and resources
Learning strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessible to different levels of ability • caters for cultural diversity and religious pluralism • allows for individual choices and decision making
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognises and addresses the need to establish links with other religious influences, such as, family and parish.

Figure 8: Aspects related to the content, learning strategies and resources for senior secondary religious education

It becomes clear that the above points can be located within the five broad areas that were identified as appropriate for senior secondary religious education at the end of Chapter 1 (see p. 79).

To conclude, the point has been made that educators today are confronted with different theories, at both the broader curriculum level and at the more specific subject level, about the most appropriate approach to take in the development of religious education curricula for senior secondary students. Ongoing review and discussion has been a necessary feature of the educative process since aspects of a learning program must reflect the changing needs and trends in society. At the same time, it must remain true to its specific nature. In terms of the classroom religious education program this has meant that:

- a) there is a need for constant review, revisions and innovations being introduced, and
- b) there is a need for encouragement of on-going professional development for teachers to ensure that they have the necessary knowledge, a clear understanding of their students' needs and the ability to cater for individual differences.

The following chapter will draw together the findings from this and the preceding chapter, concerning the nature and purpose of religious education in Catholic schools as identified in the literature, to articulate the research questions for this study. It will then explore these in the context of contemporary Year 12 religious education classrooms in Catholic schools.

Chapter 3

The context of contemporary senior classrooms in Catholic schools: Implications for religious education programs. Conclusions to Section 1

The first chapters of this work focused on the nature and purpose of religious education for students in Catholic secondary schools, particularly at the senior level. Through a review of relevant literature it was found that education in the faith tradition was a particular focus of the Catholic school. This has been explicitly expressed in many Church documents since Vatican II where the school has been seen as a pastoral instrument of the Church and the intention of the religious education program is to promote knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition. Further, two elements of an education in the faith tradition, catechesis and evangelization, have specific functions to perform in a religious education program within the contemporary Catholic school context (see pp. 20-24 of this work). This is especially relevant today given the pluralistic nature of classrooms in Catholic schools in Australian society.

From the literature it was noted that there were two levels at which religious education was offered in a Catholic school (see p. 18). One was at the whole school level which involved a pastoral dimension and which had a faith orientation. The religious education classroom program was one aspect of the school's broader religious education program and could take a more objective or cognitive focus.

Other approaches to religious education, that were originally developed in secular settings, were drawn from an educational perspective and focused on an academic study of religion (see p. 28). From the late eighties, religious education teachers in Catholic schools, in recognising the growing plurality of their classrooms, and in their efforts to

develop a more intellectually challenging subject, began to address the role of cognition in the learning activities. This has been particularly evident in the past decade at senior secondary levels. In Victoria this took the shape of the VCE (see pp. 109-116).

A further aspect of religious education was the attention given to the personal dimension (see pp. 64-72). This focus was attributed to both the Church's teaching on Revelation since Vatican II (see pp. 16-17) and new theories in the areas of humanistic and developmental psychology, where emphasis was given to the experiential nature of learning through social and personal relationships (see pp. 81-104).

While there were distinct emphases in the approaches to religious education that either emphasized the intellectual aspects of the program or focused on interpersonal or intrapersonal learning, some religious educators in Catholic schools recognised that they were strengthened by their complementarity. As a result, attempts have been made to refine and develop programs that contained a balance between cognitive and affective elements.

In noting the different approaches adopted in religious education, it was recognised that, despite valuable research and discussion that has been conducted in the field, educators still do not have all the solutions to the perceived difficulties that arise in the religious education class. Also noted was that the problems that emerge in the daily running of religious education programs are not isolated instances, nor are they confined to particular groups of schools.

Finally, a study of the different approaches and the subsequent study of broader contemporary educational approaches and guidelines led to an identification of five broad areas within which the desirable characteristics of a senior religious education programs were located (see p. 79). Thus, the main research question for this study was formulated

in an attempt to determine the appropriateness of current religious education programs in light of the discussion of religious education theory in the preceding chapters. It asked: Do the religious education programs meet the needs of today's students and achieve the aims of religious education for Year Twelve students in Catholic secondary schools?

From the main question, the following six sub-questions were generated:

Did the Year 12 religious education program

1. increase students' interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion;
2. offer a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition;
3. increase students' interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives;
4. provide students with learning experiences that have the potential to enhance their faith and spiritual development;
5. offer content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society, and
6. achieve appropriate status and recognition of its specific contribution to the broad Year 12 curriculum?

A rationale for these questions is presented below through an examination of each in the context of contemporary classrooms.

1. Increasing students' interest in learning about different religions and developing their appreciation and understanding of the role of religion in society

This question was included here because of its relevance to religious education in the contemporary context of multicultural and multi-faith Australian classrooms. Also, an acceptance of other religious traditions is implied in both the VCE *Religion and Society* study and the teachings of the Catholic Church since Vatican II. As has been recognized, VCE *Religion and Society* units were included by many Catholic schools as a dominant part of their senior religious education classroom programs. The broad aim was to enable

students to develop an understanding and respect for perceptions of adherents to different religious traditions by promoting open inquiry without any bias towards any tradition in particular. The teachings of the Catholic Church in the last quarter of this century also recognized the importance of accepting that there are different forms of worship and that people have the freedom to find God in their own way (see pp. 16-19). As noted earlier (pp. 116-119), recent research findings support the argument for an inclusion of a study of different faith traditions in senior religious education programs. They found that students have improved their attitudes to and understanding of different religions as a result of such study. Given the multicultural and multi-faith nature of Catholic classrooms and, at the wider level, of Australian society, this knowledge and understanding is particularly relevant for Australian students because of its potential to lead to greater harmony and tolerance among people.

It is suggested, therefore, that a desirable feature of senior religious education is that it should stimulate students' interest in different religions and promote their understanding of the role of religion in society. It should allow them to 'acknowledge other Christian denominations and religious traditions and allow for freedom of expression' (CEO, Melbourne 1995, p. 38).

- 2. Providing a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition, and**
- 3. Increasing students' interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives.**

A fundamental feature of religious education in a Catholic school relates to the inclusion of content which will provide students with a deep understanding of the essential aspects of the Catholic faith tradition. This can be described as 'the faith story of the Church, as it is revealed in Scripture, Tradition, liturgy and life' (CEO, Melbourne 1995, p. 29). It should try to:

relate all of human culture to the good news of salvation so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life, and about the human person. (RDECS 1988, pp. 81-82).

The beginning of theological education should provide the basis for religious education programs in Catholic schools and students should be provided with equitable access to their religious heritage (Crawford & Rossiter 1988).

DiGiacomo writes:

Catholic schools and youth programs must help turn out a new kind of Catholic for the 21st century: Christian humanists who have been effectively evangelized, who know their faith and are open to Gospel values. A new style of catechesis must evolve, if the next generation of Catholics is to be committed to church renewal and the transformation of society. It must be at once faithful to authentic Christian tradition, and attuned to the religious mentality of the young (1993, p. 12).

Finally, the document, *Tomorrow's Church*, released by the Archdiocese of Melbourne in May 1993, which discussed the shortages of priests in the future and the need for more involvement of the lay-person, also implied that our students of today, some of whom will be members of the Church of tomorrow, need to be well informed about their religious heritage.

What has emerged from the above situation is that many classrooms at the senior level are filled with students who are not regular church-goers which indicates that a catechetical model of religious education would not be sufficient in itself for such a group of students. In attempting to provide an answer to this, Crawford and Rossiter suggest that a study of religion should provide young people with:

information about religion and an experience of intellectual searching in the religious sphere which does not depend on the religious input or lack of it from the home. They may come to understand aspects of Catholic religious tradition, history, theology and practice which they might never meet elsewhere (1985, p. 2).

This has become a problem for religious educators, given the increased evidence of less interest and involvement of students in the institutional Church. The constant exposure they have to a variety of beliefs, practices and life-styles and their perceptions that the Church is out of touch with the times have led to their rejection of the Church's authority. Further, it provokes in them a sense of alienation. For many students, the Catholic school is Church where they feel a sense of belonging which they do not feel in the institutional Church (Angelico 1997). This is something that religious educators need to be aware of so they can draw on it to promote further learning about the faith tradition. If they are prepared to learn from their students even as they teach them, classroom practice will become a partnership between the teacher and students, a sharing of ideas, beliefs and experiences. If students should feel that, as members of the group, their opinions are valued, they may, in turn, be more receptive to learning from the teacher about the faith tradition which might lead to their increased involvement in the Church and faith tradition. Angelico (1997) suggests that if students:

are provided with the religious knowledge, concepts and insights which enable them to develop a Christian perspective to life and living or a philosophy of life ... they can readily see the influence of religion in the choices they make about their future (Angelico 1997, p. 52).

While the above statement reflects the intention of religious education programs in Catholic schools, it is unclear whether this objective is achievable. However, it may be true in some cases and it generates the second and third desirable characteristics of a senior religious education program. There is a need to develop programs that include serious content and activities that increase students' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition which may promote their interest and involvement in the tradition.

4. Providing students with learning experiences that have the potential to enhance their faith and spiritual development.

The traditional focus of religious education in Catholic schools in Victoria has been towards an education in faith, a catechetical model which stresses the faith development of students. It also acknowledges that evangelization is a part of the process 'since there is always an element of conversion in the life of faith' (CEO, Melbourne 1995, p. 13).

The philosophy that underlies the design of existing religious education programs in Victorian Catholic schools is based on the *Guidelines for Religious Education for Secondary Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*, 1984 and the revised guidelines, *Guidelines for Religious Education of Students in the Archdiocese of Melbourne: Senior Secondary*, 1995. A general aim in the first describes religious education as one form of catechesis which 'aims at leading communities and individual members of the faithful to maturity of faith' (CEO, Melbourne 1984, p. 9). In the later publication, it is stated that 'the central aim of the Guidelines is to help students develop a conscious, loving relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit' (CEO, Melbourne 1995, p. 27) and the suggested catechetical process contains four elements: experience shared, reflection deepened, faith expressed, insights reinforced.

Angelico (1997) found that students appreciated religious education programs that provided them with opportunities for prayer, meditation and reflection. Such occasions appeared to promote and enhance their spiritual and faith development. It encouraged them to act out their beliefs and convictions and helped them develop inter-personal relationships. They felt personally empowered by these experiences.

Religious education programs in Catholic schools should be informed by the above findings. They need to recognise the limitations of the classroom environment to promote future action, as implied in the 'faith expressed' aspect of the process. However, they

may ensure that content and/or activities are included which provide students with opportunities whereby they can live, learn and share experiences which enhance their personal faith and spiritual development, that is, the reinforcements of their insights. This is the fourth desirable characteristic of a senior program.

5. Offering content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society.

An essential element in the design of any educational program must be its relevance in meeting the needs of the students. This has been of genuine concern for religious educators, particularly in the case of the young adults who compose a Year 12 class today. They are a product of a society that is quite different to the one that existed twenty years ago. It is a society that has witnessed rapid changes which stem from technological advances; a concentrated exposure of media coverage; changing gender roles; high rates of unemployment, drug abuse, youth homelessness and youth suicide, and also, family breakdown, all of which have affected almost every sphere of life. Teenage culture today manifests itself in the lifestyles, beliefs and language of our youth. It is a culture which is foreign and unfathomable to the generation from which, very often, their parents and teachers come. This earlier generation of 'baby-boomers', who lived through Vatican II, Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon, the Vietnam war and accompanying moratorium marches, peace movements and youth cults such as hippies and the Flower People, and also, who read books such as Germaine Greer's 'The Female Eunuch', experienced exciting, but sometimes, confusing variations to their lifestyles. They developed different ideas, understandings and interpretations of most factors that affected them, including their religious practice and faith commitment. It is without doubt, that their views would have some influence on their children. This is supported by the findings of a study conducted by Flynn (1993) who says:

the influence of parents on students' religious development has not altered significantly ... it remains the single most decisive factor for a young person growing up Christian and Catholic ... students' perceptions of the influence of their parents were significantly more positive than in 1972 (1993, p. 293).

The fact that today's parents' experiences are very different to what parents experienced in the past is significant. They have been determined to raise their children in a more liberated fashion; they encouraged them to ask questions and to make decisions; and more importantly, they taught them that they had individual rights. They have also passed on to them their changed perceptions of the role of the Church in their lives.

According to DiGiacomo (1993), 'the great majority of young people see God not as Creator, Lord and Judge but as Friend, Lover and Companion' (p. 16). Indeed, it would not be surprising to find that many students today have a changed attitude to religion and God. Their view of God as a loving father tends to colour their religious beliefs and actions. Flynn (1993) reports that while nearly three-quarters of the 2230 parents who were involved in his study acknowledged that they had experienced times when they felt close to God, they believed that God helped to give meaning to their lives and they attended Mass, the figures were rather different for the 6000 Year 12 students that took part in the survey. Of these, only 34% were practising Catholics, 53% were non-practising Catholics and 13% were non-Catholics. However, while Flynn found that students today were much more unlikely to be regular Mass attendants, he also found that almost two-thirds of the sample believed that personal prayer had an enriching effect on their lives and that God heard their prayers and was there to help them.

While the response to personal prayer was positive, the fact remains that many of these younger people live in a sort of 'vacuum' as far as religious identity is concerned. 'The greater freedom and simplicity now evident in Catholicism seems to give the Church a somewhat amorphous and vague appearance' (Crawford & Rossiter 1988, p. 4). Students from such a background do not relate well to many current Church practices but

this could be a result of ignorance and a lack of understanding of how such practices evolved. While this supports the need for religious education programs to provide students with sound knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition, there are implications relating to the delivery of the classroom program. For the program to be effective, it needs to be relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging in order to promote learning in senior adolescents and to meet their specific needs.

The preceding discussion leads to another aspect that should be considered in meeting students' individual needs, that is, teaching and learning strategies that are appropriate for teenage students. Most students today have been inundated with multimedia programs from a very early age so that many have become passive recipients who need to be constantly entertained. They are easily bored and continually seek new and varied experiences which, they hope, will provide them with excitement. Through the media they have been exposed, at a superficial level, to a wide range of lifestyles and beliefs and have been encouraged to be critical of everything, regardless of whether their knowledge of the subject or situation is real or imagined. 'The extensive comparability shows that there are so many alternative ways of thinking and doing things that traditional ways lose their authority and compelling logic' (Crawford & Rossiter 1988, p. 5).

One of the side-effects of the impact of mass media is the rising level of peer pressure that young people experience today. Teenagers are exposed to so many different ideas and lifestyles through the content of television serials, 'soaps', music and entertainment shows, many of which send out a subtle message that this is the 'cool' way to live and be. As a result, today's young people develop their attitudes and values from these programs which make up a high percentage of their viewing and their parents or other significant adults tend to play a role of 'secondary "modifier" of a primary socialization mediated through television' (Rossiter 1996c, p. 3):

Films and television can colour the way young people see the world; they can shape their sense of self, ambitions and hopes for a happy and fulfilling life; and can influence their pattern of use of the environment, goods and money (Rossiter 1996c, p. 3).

Rossiter (1996c, 1996d) argues that the medium of film and television is an 'alternative', informal religious education which provides young people with a source of spirituality, that is, it helps them to develop beliefs and values, form attitudes and commitments and inculcates in them certain patterns of behaviour.

Adolescents are at a vulnerable stage in their development, that particular stage between childhood and adulthood, with its own specific characteristics that makes it distinct from other stages. It is only recently that educators have acknowledged the paucity of research in the area and that studies need to be undertaken to develop strategies to help students through these middle years (Eyres 1992; Department of Secondary Education (DSE) 1993). In their efforts to 'discover' just who they are, adolescents frequently rebel against the advice and practices of the people who have been significant in their lives up until this time. Their actions lead to confusion as they try to sort themselves out and isolate them from the safe and familiar. In an effort to counteract these feelings of uncertainty, they gravitate towards a pattern of conformity with their peers which translates into the wearing of certain fashion labels, listening to certain groups, being seen at certain places and so on. Crawford and Rossiter (1988) suggest that young people 'were open to manipulation by the life expectations projected by the media, television in particular' (p. 166). This puts them at the mercy of commercial enterprises which have been ever ready to exploit this tendency and which produce advertisements about exciting, glamorous people in exciting, glamorous situations wearing exciting glamorous clothes and apparently living the exciting, glamorous kind of life any 'cool' teenager would want. Eckersley (1997) comments on the impact of television advertising on young people when he says young people are portrayed as 'riding the crest of a wave of change - rushing into a dazzling, turbulent, high-tech future' (p. 243). He also suggests that their perspective on life is influenced by the image reflected in a lot of youth advertising. 'What

young people think . . . is wrapped up with questions about their favourite TV commercial, celebrities and whether they eat pizzas or use acne medication' (p. 243). Thus, teenagers' interests, fashions, music and even language are derived from television and other media outlets and the effort to conform can lead to immense stress and pressure on the youth of today and their negative views of the future. High teenage suicide rates, the increased number of bulimia nervosa and anorexia sufferers and youth homelessness are all symptoms of the problems associated with adolescence (Eckersley 1997).

It would seem, therefore, there is a need to recognise the impact of the media and technology and to use both mediums effectively to provide students with stimulating and meaningful learning experiences, ones which will guide them further along a path of self-discovery and development:

If film and television remain a central part of young people's alternative, informal, experiential 'religious education', then their school's formal religious education should give special attention to studies that will enable them to derive more sense and value from the former. Their school religious education should help them learn more wisely from their experience (Rossiter 1996c, p. 9).

Recent research suggests that some young people are 'materially indulged, but morally abandoned' and that the optimism and confidence about the future that they show can be deceptive (Eckersley 1997, p. 245). Part of the theologian, Gregory Baum's, keynote address on *Pluralism and Religious Identity* at the Biennial Conference of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada in 1987 is an apt summary of the current situation:

The relativism that dominates our culture is drawn from the market economy. There are no abiding values. People choose their values as they do their goods at the supermarket. Some people like this, others like that. It is all a matter of taste. There are no abiding standards beyond personal predilection, and hence there are no norms in terms of which we can judge society as a whole. Relativism of this kind is ultimately cynical. The final position is, 'anything goes'. Since we live in a market society, we are profoundly influenced by this sort of relativism. Political scientists speak of the 'commodification of values'. Everything

becomes a commodity; everything has a price, including human relations and happiness. If we find it on the shelf and have the money, we can purchase it. In our culture, we have witnessed the commodification of sexuality. Sex has become merchandised. Sex in advertising enhances sales, and sex in the entertainment industry increases profits.

We are also witnessing the commodification of religion. We turn to the spectrum of sects, cults and esoteric practices; choose our own religious style; pay for it with our own money; follow it as long as we like; and then move into another involvement. This market relativism is an ideology built into our mainstream culture. In my opinion, it is hostile to the great religious traditions (as quoted in Crawford & Rossiter 1988, pp. 6-7).

However, while Eckersley found that, generally, young people have quite negative views about the future, he also argued that:

their dreams for Australia are of a society that places less emphasis on the individual, competition, material wealth and enjoying 'the good life', and more on community and family, cooperation and the environment. Some expressed their wishes in terms of a greater recognition of the 'natural', 'human' or 'spiritual' aspects of life (Eckersley 1997, p. 247)

It would seem, therefore, that young people are searching for meaning in their lives. Religious educators need to be aware of their unique position to provide opportunities in their classes to assist students in their passage to self-discovery and personal faith and spiritual maturity. Certainly, in recent times, there has been a shift of focus in Catholic religious education classes to include the personal, social, moral and spiritual development of individual students, that is, the education of the whole person. This has drawn a positive response from students. Angelico (1997) found that students valued the personal development aspects of the religious education program because they believed it developed their abilities for future decision-making. They indicated that they found religious education classes therapeutic because they were able to relax and reflect:

The religious education curriculum is, therefore, considered by young people to be empowering when it facilitates holistic personal development, emphasizes the relevance of religion to their immediate world, builds a sense of community spirit and enhances inter-personal relationships. Most importantly, young people are positive about the religious education curriculum when it enables them to co-produce meaning, and when teachers treat

students as equal partners in the exercise of co-production of religious meanings (Angelico 1997, p. 54).

It is apparent, from the preceding discussion, that the religious education program can make a valuable contribution in meeting specific needs of students. Curriculum planners need to educate themselves about new developments in multimedia and technology which are essential elements for the functioning of contemporary society and which have impacted on students' beliefs, perceptions and subsequent behaviours. While students have been able to accommodate the rapid changes of the material world, they appear to live in a 'vacuum' that lacks basic human moral, religious and spiritual values. This is reflected in research findings indicating the negative perceptions of our youth and also in existing problems that directly relate to them (Eckersley 1997). This is an area that needs to be addressed, in part, by the religious education programs which, at the same time, acknowledges that the total solutions must come from the wider community and society. Thus, the program should include meaningful content which reflects or touches on students' life experiences, thereby allowing students to relate to it. In addition, the use of multimedia resources and up-dated technological equipment would increase the accessibility of the program to most students since they will be familiar with such exposure in other aspects of their education and in their personal lives.

One last factor that has implications for the design of learning programs specifically for senior students, is the increased retention rates. Many of these students would have gone into apprenticeships and the workforce in the past. However, with unemployment statistics hovering around double figures for most of the nineties and, with the push from industry for more vocational education being offered at senior school levels, more students today are completing Year 12 despite the fact that they do not wish to pursue tertiary studies. The fact that they have stayed on at school has meant that the composition of a senior class today is vastly different from one twenty years ago. This

changed situation has implications for the appropriate use of content and teaching strategies in these classrooms.

6. Achieving an appropriate status and recognition of the specific contribution of the religious education program to the broad Year 12 curriculum

One of the aims for including Religious Education in the Year 12 examination syllabus in past and current programs was to give the subject the same status as other final year subjects. It was seen as desirable for the subject to have credibility among students so that they would consider it as important as their other subjects. Crawford and Rossiter stated:

one of the most influential factors is the examination status of Religion. If Religion is not a subject which counts as much as the regular subjects in Years 11 and 12 - if it is not publicly recognised in fact as well as in theory as a legitimate area of academic study - then there will always be some problem with the way it is regarded by students (1988, pp. 102-103).

McGrath (1996) supported this argument when he referred to the *Studies of Religion* course offered in the NSW Higher School Certificate - "anecdotal reports of increased interest among students abound, not the least because the subject 'really counts now'" (1996, p. 23).

The above discussion highlights the desirability for a senior religious education program to be perceived by students as a subject which contributes a distinct form of knowledge and which offers an intellectually challenging study just as any other subject at Year 12 would.

In brief, the issues raised here indicate that close scrutiny needs to be given to the content and teaching strategies for teenagers today. Religious educators need to be aware of the growing tensions that produce, in senior students, a sense of disquiet and a lack of balance in their lives. Consideration must be given to the multi-faith, multicultural

and the multi-experiential environments of our classrooms and of society. Thus, a senior religious education program should include an intellectually challenging study of different religions and encourage an understanding of the role of religion in society. At the same time it should include a serious, academic study of the Catholic faith tradition and provide opportunities for personal faith and spiritual development. It should allow for the development of the whole person, that is, it must have meaning, relevance and interest for teenagers of a pluralist society. Students should be able to contribute to it and relate to what is being taught. Further, it should make use of contemporary learning and teaching strategies including the use of multimedia and technology. This should lead to a variety of learning experiences offered to students which should counteract any chance of the subject becoming boring, monotonous and repetitive; aspects which were reflected in some recent findings (Angelico 1997). There should be an avoidance of the imposition of beliefs which provoke resentment. Instead, students should be invited to respond but should feel free to make the choice.

A synthesis of the first section of this work reveals that the content and learning activities in a senior religious education program ensure that it:

- retains its integrity as a serious subject through which a sound knowledge of the teachings of the Catholic Church can be provided (see Chapter 1);
- recognizes the interrelatedness of cognitive and affective areas of learning in the subject (see Figure 5, p. 77);
- relates to developments at the wider level of educational research (Chapter 2), and
- reflects the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences and the varying levels of their knowledge, skills and interests, (see Chapters 2 and 3).

This synthesis of key elements in religious education curricula in Catholic schools within the context of contemporary classrooms (see Figure 9) will inform this research study.

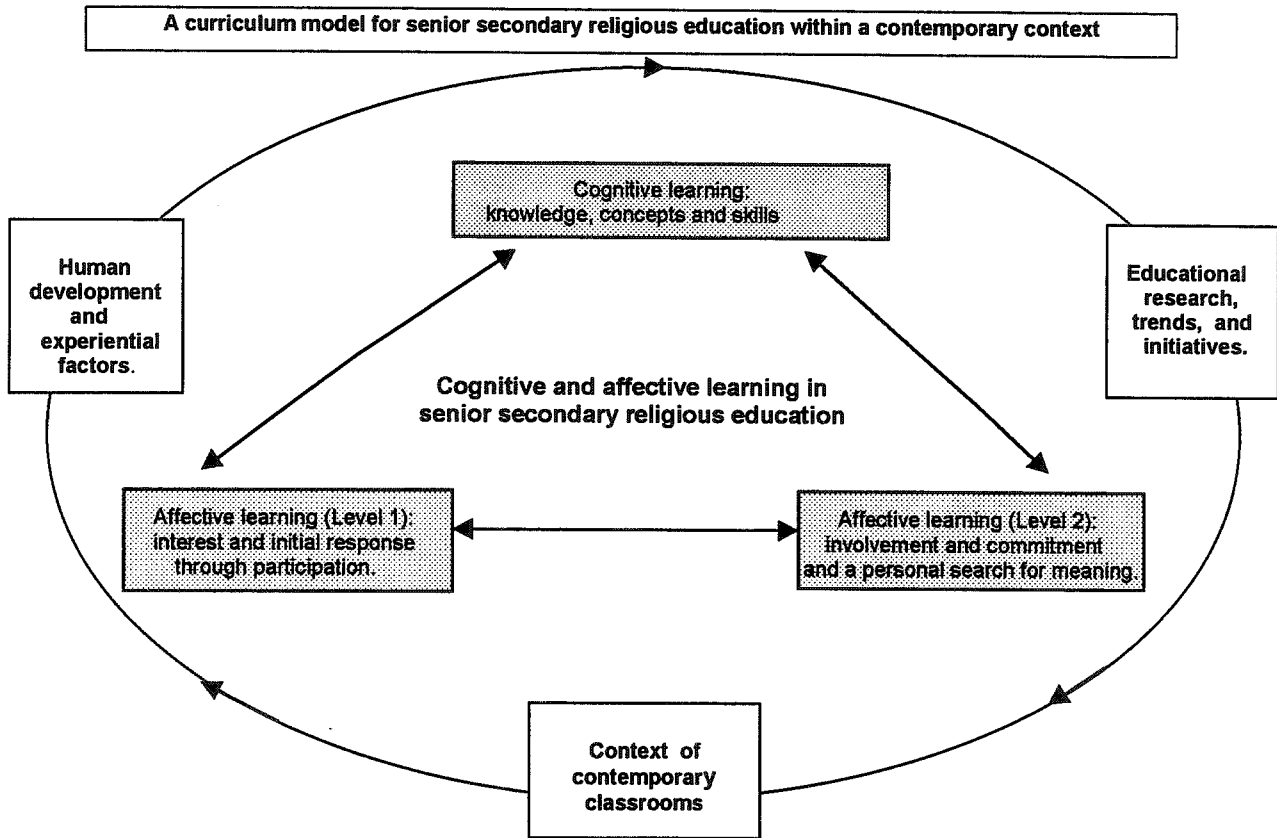


Figure 9: A contemporary context for a curriculum model for senior secondary religious education in Catholic schools.

The next section of this work examines students' perceptions of current practices in Year 12 religious education classes in light of the above discussion. The choice of research method; the construction of the instruments for data collection; the results of the analysis of curriculum documents, and the results of the questionnaires and interviews will be discussed. Finally, the findings of this research study and their implications for the theory and practice of senior religious education will be examined.

Section Two

Students' and teachers' perceptions of senior secondary religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria

The second section of this work focuses on current practices in senior religious education in Catholic schools through the investigation of students' and teachers' responses to existing programs and an examination of relevant religious education curriculum documents from schools involved in the study. Further, it explores the implications of these findings for future curriculum development at this level.

There are five chapters in this section. Chapter 4 focuses on the research methods, the construction of the research instruments and the data collection. The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters present the results of the questionnaires and the interviews respectively. The eighth chapter presents the discussion of the overall findings and their implications for future programs in Year 12 religious education in Catholic schools. It also proposes relevant areas for further research.

Chapter 4

Perceptions of senior religious education programs: An approach to data collection

This chapter discusses the research methods and their rationale, the choice and design of the research instruments used in the data collection, and the selection of the subjects. Key issues that have emerged in the teaching of religious education at senior secondary levels in the past thirty years in Australian Catholic schools were discussed in earlier chapters of this research study. The point was made that as yet, no one approach has been generally accepted over others as the most appropriate approach to religious education for senior students. From the ensuing discussion, certain features were identified as being appropriate for senior religious education programs (see summaries to Chapter 1 and 2 respectively).

These features provided the basis for the research questions for this study. The overall aim was to investigate Year 12 students' and their religious education teachers' perceptions of the religious education programs offered in the final year of some Catholic secondary schools in Victoria. The way this was explored was to quantify and describe some students' responses to their experiences in the program and to compare them with teachers' perceptions of their own and their students' experiences. The purpose of this study was to draw on these findings to inform future development, implementation and evaluation of senior religious education curricula.

This chapter, then, discusses the choice and rationale of the research methods and the construction of the research instruments that were used to discover Year 12 students' and teachers' perceptions of the religious education program.

Choice of research approach

The choice of research methods reflected the aims and aspirations of the research. Even though there has been considerable attention in educational research to participatory research (for instance, Kemmis & McTaggart 1993), to qualitative methods, including case studies (for instance, Hargreaves 1995), and ethnography (for instance, Eisenhart 1988), the main focus of this research is quantitative. This was necessary because of the scarcity of other general research in the area of senior religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria. While it may have been possible to collect appropriate data intensively in a few classrooms, it was decided to establish a broad profile of responses to create base lines for subsequent research. It was determined, therefore, to collect data by surveying responses from groups of students from a range of schools which were selected to represent various characteristics. This enabled an exploration of the characteristics of the religious education program, as perceived by students and teachers, an indication of the variation of programs between schools and the relationship between school types, program types and students' backgrounds with the perception of needs.

The data consisted of questionnaire responses supplemented by interviews to validate and elaborate these responses. In addition, there was an examination of religious education curriculum documents.

This research did not attempt to claim representativeness of the particular results to all senior secondary religious education programs in Catholic schools. Rather, it sought to identify key variables and program characteristics. It was hoped that these would inform

the development, implementation and evaluation of future programs. In addition, the results could be the basis for either future specific experimental research or focused qualitative examination of key constructs identified. In other words, this research seeks to identify the key issues, rather than resolving or explaining them.

Basically, the research sought to gather data from a significant number of students, and their teachers, from a range of school settings so that a broad impression of the perceptions and responses of students and teachers to the religious education programs could be determined. This was particularly critical since there have been few studies which addressed the needs of students for this curriculum area at this level.

Gathering data across a variety of settings helped to moderate the effect of the many variables which influence educational outcomes but which are not central to this study. Such variables include the personal qualities of the teacher, school demography, resources, community aspirations, regional job prospects, class size and so on.

The primary data source was a set of four questionnaires. Each student and teacher were required to complete one of the four. Survey research can be used 'to measure attitudes, opinions, or achievement - any number of variables in natural settings' (Wiersma 1995, p. 166). It is a relatively inexpensive way of reaching a reasonable number of people and as such it is widely used in this type of educational research (Wiersma 1995). It has been frequently adopted for use in other research studies in the field of religious and/or Catholic education (for instance, Fahy 1978; Flynn 1985; Macdonald 1988; Darmody 1990; Fahy 1992; Flynn 1993; Goosen 1994; Dorman 1996, and Stead 1996).

The questionnaires allowed direct access to the students and teachers whose responses were essential for the purposes of this research study. Through their responses, the respondents indicated their perceptions of behaviour, attitudes, learning and teaching experiences in the class. The responses also made it possible to determine the frequency

of particular behaviours, attitudes or experiences in the sample surveyed. The questionnaire was less intrusive than other research instruments and this was seen as desirable, given the age of the respondents.

The flexibility of a questionnaire and its structured format meant that it was relatively easy to use and it provided access to a reasonable sample thereby yielding more information. Even though Catholic schools are expected to follow the Catholic diocesan guidelines for religious education and, where applicable, the VCE study designs, they generally have a degree of freedom to adapt and develop their programs according to their situations and the needs of their students. In practice, this means that religious education programs may vary from one school to the next. It was expected that learning about different programs that operated in a number of schools would add to the overall picture and enhance this research study. Therefore, a questionnaire was the instrument chosen to gain a broad picture of classroom practice and behaviour. It was anticipated that the findings could point the way to further in-depth research.

It was recognized that questionnaires have limitations. These include the tendency to:

- reduce complex constructs to only those aspects which can be measured (MacDonald & Walker 1975);
- measure only extreme forms of variables (Dunkin 1976);
- ignore the importance of context (Shalock 1979);
- provide simplistic descriptions (Connole, Smith & Wiseman 1993), and
- lack representativeness where there are low response rates (Williamson, Karp & Dalphin 1977).

These concerns were specifically addressed in the design of the research and the particular instrument. Two elements of effective research are reliability and validity. Reliability is the extent to which the research is replicable and to which the methods,

conditions and results are consistent. Generally, two characteristics are (i) the extent to which a method or particular instrument, if used again with a similar population, would produce similar results, and (ii) the extent to which different parts of the same instrument might contribute to the overall result. The second characteristic is not relevant in this research since there is neither intent to produce an overall score nor to use the instrument to identify a single construct. Given that there is no attempt to claim that the instrument measures a single construct or variable, no measures were made of the 'test retest' reliability. In essence, the instrument contained a large number of separate items, each of which address particular research questions.

The first characteristic, replicability, is relevant in this case. The extent to which the items can be considered an accurate indicator of perceptions of respondents is highly relevant and is directly connected to the validity of the data collection. Aspects of validity which are relevant are whether the items address the research questions fairly, and the predictive nature of the items. These are each directly related to internal and external validity respectively. In this study, internal validity was taken to relate to the extent to which findings and data could be interpreted accurately, and external validity was interpreted as the measure of the extent to which findings could be generalised to populations and other groups. The research was much more focused on the first of these, that is, the accurate interpretation of results. Because of the specific nature of the constructs being studied, no claims were intended about the way that the results would generalise to other similar or related populations. More accurately, it was an attempt to identify issues for further study.

The key to the effectiveness of this research instrument is the extent to which it is internally valid which links to the issue of replicability. Of the three aspects of instrument validity, two – content and criterion validity – are relevant here, and another – construct validity – is not.

Content related validity is taken to refer to the extent to which the items chosen represent the field fairly, and are a reasonable sample of the set of possible items.

Criterion related validity is generally used to refer to a specific instrument such as content tests or single construct measures. To the extent that it refers to the predictive nature of the data produced, it is relevant here.

Construct validity can be based on logical or empirical analyses and, generally, is indicative of the extent to which the items contribute to an overall score. This is not relevant in this case since no attempt is made to extract individual variables other than where the items were specifically constructed to do that.

Essentially, the following steps were taken to assure the internal validity and hence to assure the content validity and aspects of criterion related validity of the instrument:

- items were selected to relate directly to the research questions;
- items were checked to make them clear and unambiguous;
- only one concept was addressed by any single item;
- leading questions were avoided;
- questions loaded with social desirability were avoided;
- questions that demanded personal or delicate information were avoided;
- only information that the respondent was able to provide was sought;
- the reading level was adjusted for the particular senior secondary students;
- items were made as short and simple as possible;
- specific numbers were sought whenever quantitative information was required;
- negative items and double negatives were avoided, other than specifically used as a check on response accuracy.

In particular, the variables forming the basis of the study were derived from the literature and the items were designed and checked to ensure a match with the constructs. In this research study, the reliance on participants' responses was a useful feature because the study was concerned primarily with perceptions of students and teachers of their experiences in the classroom. The fact that students' and teachers' perceptions might have affected the learning process was also considered worthy of investigation. It was planned that teachers would administer the questionnaires to their students during class time, thereby reducing the likelihood of them not being returned. Finally, other data-collecting techniques, such as interviews and an examination of curriculum documents, were used to complement the data collected from the questionnaires.

Four questionnaires were designed in consultation with other experienced researchers, and with reference to relevant literature on survey design (for instance, Borg & Gall 1989; Wiersma 1991; Oppenheim 1992; Foddy 1995). A study was also made of similar questionnaires used in other research studies (see p. 150 of this work). Every effort was made to eliminate careless, vague or superficial responses and detailed discussions were undertaken with other educators in the field regarding the selection of items. As a further check, all items were field tested with professional colleagues who were experienced in teaching Year 12 religious education. One group of colleagues completed the draft survey in group format and offered comments on the items during the process. Other colleagues were invited to comment specifically on the clarity, focus and relevance of particular items. This served two purposes. One purpose was to assure that the variables contained in the survey were valid, and were meaningful from a theoretical perspective. The other purpose was as a preliminary test on the clarity of the wording.

Finally, to check on the clarity of the wording and that the meaning was conveyed as intended, a pilot run was conducted with a small group of students, inviting them to talk out loud while they were completing the items and so identify any difficulties. A number

of items were changed as a result of this process. The piloting process is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In order to provide a triangulation of the data to ensure greater validity (for instance, Lather 1986), and to elaborate the details of the responses, selected student respondents to the questionnaire were also interviewed. These interviews sought to elicit complementary information on students' perceptions of their learning experiences, which was a major focus for this research study. The relative intimacy of the interviews, conducted on a one-to-one basis, had the potential to promote the level of communication between the interviewer and interviewee, which provided the researcher with a greater degree of insight and understanding. The interchange between the researcher and individual students allowed for questions, comments and observations on both sides that helped to clarify and elaborate some of the points that were being made. The interviews allowed the researcher to use a variety of questioning formats, for instance, students were asked to respond to questions, scenarios, pictures and so on. These different techniques were useful in gaining insights into the respondents' perceptions, particularly when they had difficulty clearly articulating complex concepts. In addition, the interviews were helpful in verifying the accuracy and reliability of the findings of the questionnaire. There was also less chance of respondents choosing to ignore an item, which could happen with responses to mailed questionnaires.

To further develop the triangulation, relevant Year 12 religious education curriculum documents were analysed. This analysis focused on the aims, areas of study (content) and teaching strategies for each program. Classroom programs, which were based on the VCE Religion and Society study design, shared common aims and objectives. However, schools with school-based programs were of particular interest because of their individual approaches (see pp. 181-192 of this work for a description of the programs involved in this study). Thus, a request was made to participating schools for a copy of

their documents to be sent to the researcher after the questionnaires had been conducted.

The selection of the participants

The respondents were drawn from pre-existing 'intact groups' (Wiersma 1995, p. 292) in the population, each having one or more characteristics that made them representative of a broad range of Catholic schools in Victoria. They came from 12 schools in the Victorian Catholic Secondary (7-12) sector. Schools were chosen to include one or other of the following characteristics as being representative of the broader school population:

- religious order schools
- coeducational schools
- regional colleges
- metropolitan schools
- single-sex schools (girls/boys)
- country schools

The schools in the sample were grouped according to the following categories:

- eight were metropolitan and three were country;
- five schools were coeducational, three were boys schools and three were girls schools;
- five schools had religious principals and six had lay principals.

From each school, responses were sought from one VCE class, and two Year 12 Religious Education teachers, one of whom included the Religious Education Coordinator. It had been anticipated that the average VCE class would include approximately twenty-five students each. In this way it was expected that approximately 300 students and 24 teachers, including 12 Religious Education Coordinators, would be included in the survey. However, the number of students that made up a single Year 12 class differed from school to school. Further, one school, despite agreeing to participate, did not return the questionnaires. Even after follow-up there was no response. In the end, from seven schools, one teacher per school responded. From two schools two teachers

per school responded. Two schools did not return the teacher questionnaires. The final numbers involved eleven schools which included 227 students and eleven teachers, some of whom were Religious Education Coordinators. Given the complexity of data collection from such respondents during their critical Year 12 studies, this sample was considered both meaningful and suitable for the purposes of this research.

Organization and process

Before the questionnaires were sent to schools, a letter was sent to the Director of Catholic Education in the Melbourne Archdiocese to request permission to involve nine schools in the study. One school from each of the other three dioceses - Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst - was also approached. Approval was also sought and granted by the Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University. As part of the requirements of the Ethics committee, Informed Consent forms were drawn up which explained the purpose of the questionnaire and the conditions under which the respondents were asked to complete it (Appendices E and F). Respondents were asked if they would agree to participate in the questionnaire and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were also advised that they could withdraw at any time and were provided with an address and phone number to contact in case they experienced a problem.

Religious Education Coordinators in the selected schools were approached early in Term 3, 1995, as they were the persons who would administer the survey. The researcher explained the purpose of the survey and sought information about the type of religious education program offered - a combined VCE/school-based course or a school-based course. A letter was then sent to the Principals in each of the schools two weeks before the end of Term 3, 1995, to introduce the researcher, to outline the purpose of the research and to request permission for the school to participate in the research study (Appendix G). Accompanying this was a letter addressed to the Religious Education Coordinator and another to a religious education teacher who were both invited to

participate (Appendices H and I). Also included in the package were thirty student questionnaires, two teacher questionnaires, and thirty-two Informed Consent forms to be completed by both students and teachers. All questionnaires and Consent forms were colour-coded. Two weeks were allowed for the surveys to be completed.

The timing of the data collection was vital. The Year 12 students and teachers were sent the questionnaires in the second or third week of October, a time in the school year when most Year 12 courses had been completed and students had begun revision programs for their final one or two weeks before the end of formal classes. In the case of religious education, when students finished their class work and work requirements, they had effectively completed their Year 12 religious education program. Only one school in the sample offered VCE Units 3 and 4 in religious education which meant that one class group of students had Common Assessment Tasks (CATS) for this subject.

After the collection of the data via the questionnaires, the Religious Education Coordinators from the three selected schools were asked to invite four students to attend an interview. This number was chosen in recognition of the length of time required for the interviewing process. The only requirement was that the students had been part of the class group that had previously responded to the questionnaire. Since the main focus of this study was the students' perceptions of the program, and since the teachers' responses were used just for comparison with students' responses, only students were included in the interviewing process. Care was taken to ensure that, between them, the selected schools displayed all the characteristics desired in the representative sample. One school was a metropolitan girls' school with a religious principal; the second school was a metropolitan boys' school with a religious principal; and the third school was a country coeducational school with a lay principal. Four students each came from two schools and at the third school, only two students attended the interviews. The final number of interviewed students was ten.

The interviews were designed to last for half an hour and were to be conducted on a face-to-face basis in the period following the return of the completed questionnaires. The researcher conducted the interviews over a five-day period and took care to retain consistency in the process. All interviews had structured questions and these were strictly followed. Extra time was permitted when questions and/or responses required more detailed explanation. With one exception, the approach to and format for each interview remained the same with the researcher guiding the process. In the one case, however, a student arrived early for the interview. As a result, one interview was extended for approximately forty-five minutes and included two students at the same time. For this interview, the researcher adopted the procedure whereby each student alternated between providing the first response to each question as it was asked. A distinct advantage of this combined interview was that, while each student had a chance to be heard first on every other question, they were able to gather their thoughts while they were waiting, which helped them articulate their ideas clearly. Another advantage was that the other student's response sometimes triggered a question for them or perhaps extended their own response.

The interviews, which were planned to follow the questionnaires, were conducted shortly after Year 12 classes had formally ended and the VCE exams were over. This was approximately eight weeks after the questionnaires had been returned. After the exams, the selected students were invited back to the school in the third week of December for the interviews. Although the data from the questionnaires and the interviews were collected at two different points in time, it was expected that most students' responses to the religious education program were unlikely to have undergone any major shift during the eight-week interval. Between the two collection points, all students had completed their Year 12 religious education program and, apart from twenty-one students who had to complete CATS for their Year 12 religious education program, most other students were focused on their CATS in other subjects.

An incident that occurred during the interviews at one school is described here since it has some relevance for the findings of this research study. A female student arrived for her interview accompanied by her boyfriend. She requested that he stayed in the room while he waited for her. At the end of the interview, he volunteered some information regarding his own experiences in Year 12 religious education in a neighbouring Catholic boys' school. His response will be discussed later in Chapter 7.

Overall, the responses from 227 student questionnaires and ten student interviews provided the raw data for this research study. The responses of the eleven teachers provided useful information in identifying the similarities and differences between the perceptions of teachers and their students in relation to the learning experiences in the religious education program over the year. They also provided valuable insight into the teachers' views of the program. Finally, the religious education curriculum documents supplied by the participating schools provided information about the particular programs that students experienced.

The construction of the students' questionnaire

For this study, four questionnaires were designed to gather the required data. These were based on the five learning areas which were identified as appropriate for senior religious education in the review of religious education theory and approaches in Section One of this work. There were two types of student questionnaires (S1 and S2), the first for the group of Year 12 students who combined some VCE units with a school-based religious education program and the second for the group of Year 12 students who had studied a school-based religious education program (Appendices A and B). For the same reason, there were two types of teacher questionnaires (T1 and T2, see Appendices C and D). Generally, in the case of the former group, schools offered VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 as a compulsory part of the classroom program, that is, the focus was on cognitive learning. The school-based offerings, with one exception, related to

affective learning experiences outside the classroom program and included special Masses and other liturgies, days of reflection, retreats and so on. The exception was a school that included a unit on prayer as part of the classroom program. Therefore, with this unit, there was an emphasis on learning in the affective domain. With the latter group, three schools offered school-based units that had a greater focus on affective learning and included activities related to personal development. The fourth school had a classroom program which had a strong cognitive focus. For these students, attention was given to affective learning in activities outside the classroom program. The structure of the school-based program for two schools in the latter group was based on seminar-days spaced throughout the year. See pp. 181-191 of this work for a full description of these programs.

The questionnaires were used to collect data on classroom experiences as perceived by students and teachers. They were sent to 227 students from the eleven schools contained in the sample.

All four questionnaires were divided into two parts. Part A focused on aspects related to different areas of study in the religious education program and aspects of the delivery of the religious education classroom program while Part B focused on relevant background information. The students' questionnaires contained 53 items in Part A and 12 items in Part B. The teachers' questionnaires contained 44 items in Part A and 18 items in Part B. The only variations in the statements were two items in S1 and S2 and three items in T1 and T2 which were specific to the different types of religious education programs: VCE/school-based or school-based. These are discussed later on p 165.

Part A of both the students' questionnaires (S1 and S2) was divided into five sections (see Appendices A and B). The aim was to discover students' perceptions of the effects of the religious education program. To this end, students were asked, as a result of their religious education program, to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a number of

statements. There were three groups of variables which related to the religious education program and to factors that may have influenced the responses: a) sixteen variables focused on aspects related to the different areas of study in the program, b) sixteen variables focused on aspects related to the delivery of the classroom program, and c) nine variables focused on background information. These are discussed below.

Aspects related to different areas of study in the religious education program

The first section of Part A addressed aspects of different areas of study in the religious education program. The variables were:

- A1: interest in different religions;
- A2: tolerance of different religious traditions;
- A3: an understanding of the role of religion;
- A4: knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition;
- A5. interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition;
- A6. importance of religion in their own lives;
- A7. faith development, and
- A8. spiritual development;

A1, A2 and A3 were drawn from three sources. The first came from the VCE Religion and Society study design which aimed at developing students' interest in and appreciation of different religions in society and an understanding of the role of religion in an individual's life. These programs had a cognitive focus as discussed earlier. The second came from the directions of the Second Vatican Council and from diocesan religious education guidelines. These emphasised the need for dialogue between the Catholic Church and different faith traditions and acknowledged that individuals have the right and freedom to search for God in their own way and to accept responsibility for the paths they choose to follow. The third was drawn from the recognition that these variables had relevance for a pluralistic society (see Chapter 1 a comprehensive discussion of the above points).

Accordingly, they were included as features for senior religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria.

A4 to A8 related more specifically to knowledge of the Catholic Church and religion; interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and importance of religion in students' lives; faith development, and spiritual development respectively. Accordingly, they are implicit and explicit in Church documents and religious education guidelines. One role of the Catholic school is to act as one of the evangelising and catechetical agents of the Church. While it is recognized that the culture of a Catholic school will include aspects that promote this role, religious education is in a unique position to enhance students' faith and spirituality as well as to develop their knowledge of the Church and the Catholic faith tradition. It is this vital feature of religious education in a Catholic school which was under scrutiny in the research study, and these four variables were included to obtain responses to this area.

This section of the questionnaire contained 16 items, all of which were preceded with the statement:

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response.

Using a five-point Likert scale, the choices were *strongly agree (SA)*, *mostly agree (MA)*, *undecided (U)*, *mostly disagree (MD)* and *strongly disagree (SD)*.

The statements contained in Items 1 to 4 in S1 (the VCE/school-based group) and Items 1 to 3 in S2 (the school-based group) related to an increase in interest in and tolerance of different religions and an understanding of the role and influence of religion in society as a result of the religious education program:

- Item 1 – I have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia.

- Item 2 – I have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions.

Items 3 and 4 were the only statements that were not common to the two students' questionnaires. These differences related to the types of religious education programs offered by the schools. In S1 they were specific to the aims of the VCE Religion and Society units and in S2 they came from the objectives as stated in both the religious education guidelines (CEO, Melbourne, 1984) and the policy statement for religious education for senior students (CEO, Melbourne, 1990).

In S1, these statements were:

- Item 3 – I understand how the beliefs of a particular religious tradition can influence the customs and practices of the people of that tradition.
- Item 4 – I have been able to develop an understanding of the importance of religion in the lives of many Australians from different cultural backgrounds.

In S2, Item 3 read:

- Item 3 – I understand how the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church have influenced the lives of Australian Catholics.

and Item 4 focused on knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition:

- Item 4 – I have a better knowledge of the Scriptures/Gospels.

This linked Item 4 from S2 to Items 5, 7, 8 and 14 which were common to both S1 and S2 and which focused on knowledge of and interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition:

- Item 5 – I have increased my knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition.
- Item 7 – I am more interested in attending Mass and/or other Church services.
- Item 8 – I am encouraged to become more involved in Church community and/or Christian youth groups.
- Item 14 – I believe that it is important that I continue to be involved in the Catholic Church when I leave school.

As mentioned above, all other statements were the same in both S1 and S2. Items 6 and 15 sought information about students' perceptions of the importance of religion in their lives:

- Item 6 – I have a greater understanding and appreciation of religion in my life.
- Item 15 – I believe that religious education is a life-long process and not just a part of schooling.

The next set of items dealt with faith and spirituality. As discussed in the first part of this work (see pp. 32/33), faith and spiritual development were treated separately in this research study. Given the plurality of contemporary classrooms, there was a need to acknowledge that faith development, which has been an element in the spiritual development aspect of religious education in Catholic schools, has generally been linked with the Catholic faith tradition. In this context, it cannot be assumed that it will have relevance for many senior students today. However, opportunities for faith development related to the Catholic faith tradition is an essential part of religious education for students who are adherents of the faith tradition and this should be addressed.

Additionally, recognition needs to be given to a spiritual dimension and a form of religious response in the lives of many young people in Catholic classrooms, which is not necessarily associated with a religious tradition. It can be the essence that influences their actions and values or it can be something for which they are searching to give their lives meaning. A secondary school teacher, who recently asked his students about the existence of God, reported on the responses he received:

The truth, whatever it is, is out there. Surely the universe didn't invent itself, they argue; someone or something must have lit the fuse for the Big Bang.

The human need to find first causes is remarkably strong among adolescents, but the church as purveyor of The Explanation has lost authority. Its teachings have drifted from their moorings. God exists, but who cares about the rest of the baggage (Wheat 1998, p. 13).

Religious education is one subject area where young people's spirituality and their search for meaning can be catered for. Accordingly, with these understandings of faith and spiritual development, they have been treated as separate variables for the purposes of this study.

Items 10, 11 and 16 asked for students' perceptions of their own faith development and commitment as influenced by the religious education program:

- Item 10 – My own faith commitment has been developed.
- Item 11 – I believe that it is important that I continue to develop my faith and relationship with God when I leave school.
- Item 16 – I believe that it is as important for senior students to study their faith tradition as it was for junior students because it helps senior students find meaning in their lives.

Items 9, 12 and 13 asked for students' perceptions of their own spiritual development as influenced by the religious education program:

- Item 9 - I understand my own spirituality.
- Item 12 – I have come to understand the great questions in life eg. Does God exist? Is there life after death?
- Item 13 – I believe that Jesus' teachings help to bring meaning to my life.

Item 13 was included in this group of items for spiritual development rather than in the previous group for faith development because of the broader application of Jesus' teachings to other Christian denominations and Orthodox religious traditions.

Aspects related to the delivery of the religious education classroom program

The second group of variables focused on aspects related to the delivery of the religious education classroom program. These were:

A9: interest in the subject religious education;

A10: meaningful content and teaching/learning strategies for today's students;

- A11: relevance of the religious education program to today's students;
- A12: religious education as an intellectually challenging subject;
- A13: the importance of religious education in relation to other Year 12 subjects;
- A14: attitude to religious education;
- A15: the variety of the activities and resources including class prayer and liturgies;
- A16: characteristics that students perceive as being desirable elements in a religious education program.

These variables were included because the most basic element of any educational program is that it should have interest, relevance and meaning for the students involved in its study. It should be intellectually challenging, include a variety of activities and resources and should be perceived as having a similar status to other subjects. These features were identified as desirable features of a senior religious education program in the first part of this work. Finally, students' attitudes to the subject and their perceptions of desirable characteristics for religious education were considered influential factors in the responses and were, therefore, included here.

Section 2 of the questionnaire contained Items 17 to 40. There was at least one positive and one negative statement used for each of these variables and the responses, once again, used a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The focus here was on aspect of the delivery of the religious education program. As such, it included students' attitude to and interest in religious education as a Year 12 subject, their learning experiences in the classroom and their perceptions of how important the subject religious education was in relation to other Year 12 subjects.

Items 17, 18, 19, 26 and 40 investigated students' perceptions of the subject's importance:

- Item 17 – RE is an important subject in Catholic schools.
- Item 18 – This year I give as much study time to RE as I do to my other subjects.
- Item 19 – RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools.
- Item 26 – I believe we should spend less time on RE each week/cycle this year.

- Item 40 – I believe that, in general, most students feel that Year 12 RE makes an important contribution to their development.

Items 20, 22, 27 and 29 focused on students' perceptions of their interest in the subject:

- Item 20 – I have found RE boring this year.
- Item 22 – Generally, in RE classes this year, students appear interested in class work.
- Item 27 – We do not usually study topics that have interest for senior students in Year 12 RE.
- Item 29 – I am usually interested in what we do in RE this year.

Items 21, 25, and 36 explored students' attitude to the subject:

- Item 21 – Most students do their homework and come prepared for RE class.
- Item 25 – Students often tend to ignore instructions and directions in RE classes this year.
- Item 36 – Usually, students are noisy and disruptive in RE class.

Items 24 and 39 asked if the subject was meaningful and relevant to students:

- Item 24 – RE classes have little meaning for me this year.
- Item 39 – The topics we have studied in RE this year were relevant to me at this stage of my life.

Items 28 and 31 referred to the intellectual challenge of the subject:

- Item 28 – This year most students find RE easier than other subjects.
- Item 31 – Most students find Year 12 RE a challenging and intellectually stimulating subject.

Items 23, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37 and 38 focused on the learning experiences of the students. Items 23 and 35 asked for responses to reflection days:

- Item 23 – Generally, students find that retreats/reflection days provide them with opportunities to reflect on their own faith commitment and spirituality.
- Item 35 – I believe that reflection days take out time that could be better spent on more important subjects.

Items 32, 34 and 37 queried the value of class masses and prayer:

- Item 32 – I believe that class masses provide me with an opportunity to develop my ability to pray.
- Item 34 – I believe that there should be more opportunities for class prayer in the Year 12 RE program.
- Item 37 – I believe that students find that class masses provide them with opportunities to become closer to God.

Items 30, 33 and 38 explored whether there was a range and variety of activities and resources used:

- Item 30 – I believe there is a good balance between written and practical activities in RE this year.
- Item 33 – I believe that usually there are not enough stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources used in RE classes this year.
- Item 38 – I believe that most students would prefer to have more varied activities in RE class than we usually have eg. Meditation.

Section 3, containing Items 41 - 47, also focused on aspects of the classroom program. However, in this case both open-ended and closed statements were used which provided some variety and an opportunity for less restriction and more flexibility in the responses.

Items 41 to 44 asked for responses to specific learning activities:

- Item 41 - Overall, I do/do not enjoy the discussions we have in RE this year because ...
- Item 42 - In general, I, personally, have/have not found Year 12 RE classes interesting because ...
- Item 43 - It is/is not important to have guest speakers in for the RE program because ...
- Item 44 - The class activities and/or experiences that have encouraged me to reflect on my own personal and/or spiritual growth were ...

Items 45 and 46 referred to gender differences related to interest and participation in the subject:

- Item 45 - I believe that, in general, girls/boys show more interest in RE because ...
- Item 46 - When we have reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class the girls/boys are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because ...

While Item 47 also concentrated on learning activities, a five-point rating scale was used ranging from *most helpful* to *least helpful*. Fifteen different activities were listed from 47a to 47o with a NA (not applicable) category was included for each. An opportunity to list any other activities that were not on the list was offered at 47p. The activities were:

- Item 47 -
 - a) discussions
 - b) Mass preparation
 - c) written assignments
 - d) oral presentations
 - e) community work
 - f) film/video
 - g) role play/drama
 - h) research activities
 - i) meditation
 - j) prepared talk/tutorial
 - k) retreats
 - l) pastoral programs for junior students
 - m) prayer, formal/informal
 - n) guest speakers
 - o) reflection days
 - p) other (please specify)

The fourth section, containing Items 48 to 50, focused on personal faith development:

Overall, my learning experiences in RE this year

- Item 48 - have/have not helped me understand the message of Jesus Christ
- Item 49 - have/have not helped me live out the message of Jesus Christ
- Item 50 - have/ have not helped me include prayer in my daily life.

These were framed in a closed statement format which required a choice of two responses. They were included towards the end of the questionnaire as they were more complex and possibly required deeper reflection. It was hoped that, having answered the earlier sections, students would have gone through a thinking process which would have developed an appropriate frame of mind to enable them to apply themselves to these

questions with the necessary depth and reflection. Students were invited to comment further at the end of this section, thereby, allowing for some freedom in the response.

The fifth and final section was a 'recommendation' section. It contained Items 51 to 53 and used an open-ended structure.

- Item 51 - What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?
- Item 52 - What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?
- Item 53 - What do you believe are the desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools? Please give reasons for your answer.

The less rigid format allowed respondents a degree of freedom to elaborate their views and to offer suggestions, based on their own perceptions and experiences, that would be appropriate in catering for the needs of Year 12 students.

With the exceptions of the two variables, interest in and tolerance of other religions, which had one statement each, all others had two or more statements. Given the personal nature of the variables that dealt specifically with faith and spiritual development, and with knowledge of and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition, only positive statements were used. However, for the variables dealing with aspects of the delivery of the classroom program, at least one positive and one negative statement was included for each. This meant that the responses to each of these related items could be correlated to determine the degree of association and their reliability.

Background of the respondents

Part B of the questionnaire focused on variables B1 to B6 which concerned the background of the respondents. Only information that was necessary to the research and which could have implications for the findings was included here:

- B1. Gender;
- B2. Religious affiliation;
- B3. Cultural background indicated by country of birth and parents' country of birth;
- B4. Frequency of Mass attendance;
- B5. School characteristic: principal;
- B6. School characteristic: region;
- B7. School characteristic: sex;
- B8. Type of religious education program studied, and
- B9. Teaching experience and qualifications (included in the teachers' questionnaires).

Items 1 to 8 in Part B related to gender, religious beliefs and practices, cultural backgrounds and the type of school the respondents attended. Items 9 to 12 sought to establish which units of study in religious education that the respondents were studying and the period allocation for both Religious Education and other subjects at Year 12:

The gender variable was included to explore any differences between male and female responses and was of particular interest since some students came from single sex schools and others came from coeducational schools. It meant that comparisons could be made between the boys' and girls' responses from both single sex and coeducational schools which could possibly highlight any differences that were affected by the school culture rather than by gender factors.

As was discussed in the first part of this work, some students in Catholic schools are neither Church-going nor practising Catholics. It was expected that this variable could

affect the responses given, therefore, questions relating to religious background and church attendance were included.

Given the pluralistic nature of the population of some of the schools included in the survey, information was sought regarding cultural background of the respondents and their parents to discover if this would have any bearing on some responses.

Finally, responses were sought that provided information on the school characteristics. Respondents were asked to indicate:

- if their schools had religious or lay principals;
- if their schools were coeducational, boys' or girls' schools;
- if their schools were metropolitan or country schools, and
- the time allocation for religious education during each learning cycle.

The inclusion of these last few variables was an attempt to determine if there was a possibility that school culture and environment could impact on individual responses.

Respondents were assured that anonymity was guaranteed and confidentiality would be maintained. This was an essential factor in the effort to elicit honest responses and impressions of the program.

Teacher questionnaire

As mentioned above there were two teachers' questionnaires T1, the schools with a combination of VCE/school-based programs, and T2, the schools with only school-based programs. Part A of both the teachers' questionnaires were divided into 4 sections and called for the respondents' observations of what effect, if any, the Year 12 religious education program had on their students' learning experiences, behaviour and attitudes. The first three sections corresponded to the same areas of focus as the first three

sections of the students' questionnaires. As with the students' questionnaires, the first two sections had closed questions using the Likert scale and use was made of both positive and negative statements for each variable. Section 3 used both the open-ended and closed question formats. Section 4 of the teachers' questionnaire corresponded with Section 5, that is, the 'recommendations' section of the students' questionnaire (See Appendices C and D).

Part B of the teachers' questionnaires sought background information about the respondents and was based on variables B1 to B6 as in the students' questionnaires. However, a necessary distinguishing feature related to the teaching qualifications and experience the respondents had in the area of religious education. This variable, B7, was included to see if there was any differences in students' responses to their programs and whether these differences could be correlated to differences in teachers' studies and specialization in religious education methodology.

Once again, the anonymity and confidentiality of the responses was maintained.

Piloting the questionnaire

The piloting of the questionnaire involved three Year 12 students and three Year 12 religious education teachers at a Catholic secondary school. After permission was granted by the Principal and Religious Education Coordinator, each student and teacher worked with the researcher on an individual basis. They were each given an explanation of the nature and aim of the research study and were asked if they agreed to take part in the pilot. Each was assured of confidentiality and told that these results would only be seen and used by the researcher to refine the questionnaire.

After the initial explanations, each student worked quietly and completed the task in approximately twenty-five minutes. The first and second students had questions relating

to two items and the third student asked for further explanation on four items, two of which were the same ones identified by the first two students.

For the final three items in Part A which were open-response type questions, two students declined to respond but the third spoke about the need to take into consideration the fact that not all members of the class were Church-going Catholics, or even Christian. This student felt that the religious education program did not really cater for the multi-faith nature of their classroom.

The two teachers involved in the pilot found the questionnaire interesting and the statements useful. One suggested that it was worth noting that the chaplains often play some part in what happened in the religious education program and this could create some tension if their views, as sometimes happened, were different.

The process used during the pilot allowed the respondents to ask questions on individual items and, at the end, to comment on the structure of the questionnaire. The purpose was to check for ambiguity, confusion and poorly prepared items. The feedback from this 'pilot run' was useful to the researcher and the suggested changes were used to finalize the instrument before it was sent out to schools for the collection of the data.

Design of the Structured Interview

The interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes and were conducted on an individual basis. This meant that students could offer their views and not feel constrained by the presence of their peers. Equally, their peers would not prompt their responses. All the interviews were taped and the researcher took brief notes as an added precaution. The researcher transcribed the interviews as soon as she returned from conducting them. Thus, while the interview was fresh in her mind, she was able to use her notes to assist in the transcription from the tape.

At the start of the interview, after the introductions, the researcher explained the purpose of the research study and assured the students that anything they said would be kept confidential and their identities would remain anonymous. This was followed by further details of the purpose and process of the interview. The process consisted of a list of the questions being given to the student to read as the researcher read them aloud from her page. Students were encouraged to ask for any points of clarification at any time and were advised that they could desist from answering any question at any time if they were not comfortable. At that point permission was sought to tape the interview.

The interview was divided into three parts with each part focused on one distinctive area of religious education. These focus points were linked to the areas that were investigated in the questionnaire. The aim was to discover the influence of the religious education program, if any, on students' perceptions of each of the following areas:

Focus 1 – the role and influence of religion and of the Catholic Church on their lives;

Focus 2 – opportunities for faith development, and

Focus 3 – the religious education classroom program.

The first group of questions, 1a to 1d, related to the first part of Focus 1, that is, the role and influence of religion. The objective was to gain students' perceptions of how a person could be influenced by their religious beliefs and to discover if their personal religious beliefs had been strengthened or influenced over the year as a result of the religious education program. The questions were:

1a. Do you feel that religion is an important part of society? Why do you think this is so?

1b. What do you think religion does for a person?

1c. Do you feel that religion has done anything for you? If yes, can you expand on this?

1d. Can you think of an example of how you see a person's behaviour being influenced by the teachings of his/her religion?

The second group of questions, 2a to 2d, attempted to elicit students' perceptions of the current and future roles of the Church from both a general perspective and from a personal one:

- 2a. What do you see as the future role of the Church in the life of Catholic people in Australia?
- 2b. What do you see as the role of the Church in your life? eg. Have you been encouraged to become more active in the life of the Church?
- 2c. Do you see a need for the Church in the twenty-first century?
- 2d. Do you think the role of the Church will change in the future? If yes, have you got any ideas about this?

The third pair of questions sought information on the students' understanding of 'Church' and 'religion'. In 3a, a more creative attempt was used to determine if the students had a different understanding of 'Church'. This approach was likely to provide a different perspective of students' understanding and this would enhance the information gained. Fourteen pictures were placed on the table, some of these had symbols that could be recognized as having religious significance, such as a large cross, Buddhist monks, a chalice, Church buildings and so on. Others showed a community in action, such as helping the sick or needy. Others were of people sharing a common purpose such as a family meal, a team of rowers and so forth. Finally, there were pictures of individuals engaged in an activity that could be presumed to be an expression of a particular gift or talent. Students were advised they could choose one or more of the pictures if it expressed their understanding of Church (see Appendix J). A descriptive phrase of each picture follows:

- a street procession, with people carrying banners bearing religious symbols and a large cross;
- a cricket batsman dressed in cricket whites;
- Buddhist monks sitting cross-legged in prayerful pose;
- a Right-to-Life rally with banners bearing the words 'Abortion kills babies';
- a mother and her baby;
- a team of rowers on a river;
- a large family group or group of friends enjoying a meal together;
- a member of the Salvation Army attending to a homeless person;
- an elderly musician, sitting on a bench playing his trumpet;

- a chalice;
- a person dressed in a nun's habit tending a sick person;
- three different types of Christian Church buildings;
- one person comforting a person in distress, and
- a small table with a chalice of wine, a plate of bread and a lit candle.

The second question, 3b, enquired whether students perceived any difference between 'Church' and 'religion'. The placement of this question was planned deliberately so that its response would not influence the outcome of the activity at 3a.

The focus of the second part of the interview was on faith development. There were eight questions, 4a to h, which included simple questions requiring a word or a sentence in response. Other questions were more complex and required students to discuss their reactions to particular situations. It was expected that their understanding of faith and faith practice would be indicated by their response. The questions were as follows:

- 4a. Give one word for 'faith'.
- 4b. What would you describe as an act of faith?
- 4c. Do you feel your faith has been enriched through your experiences in the RE program this year?
- 4d. Can you recall a particular experience or person which/who has strengthened your faith this year?
- 4e. Is there anything you have chosen to do this year because of your faith or beliefs? Is there anything that you have chosen not to do because of your faith or beliefs?
- 4f. You come into a room and you see that there are different groups of your classmates talking and laughing. However, you notice that one person is sitting by themselves, a bit of a loner. Who do you think you would go over to join – the person alone or one of the groups?
- 4g. Could you suggest a TV show that you watch in which you see examples of some Christian acts? Or acts that go against Christian beliefs?
- 4h. The class is having a test. You were at sport training/practice the night before and did not have time to study. Your friend says that you can copy off him/her as the marks are going to be counted towards your assessment. You know that there are a few students doing this as your teacher does not keep a strict watch. What do you choose to do?

Question 5 in this section used a similar format to 3a. It asked respondents to look at a collection of cards, each of which had a description of an action. The respondent was

asked to identify one or more of the actions listed if they perceived them to be 'acts of faith'. Once again, this format was used to stimulate and broaden students' thinking about their faith development so that a different perspective would be added to the responses provided. The following 'acts' were listed:

- attending Mass every Sunday
- praying out loud
- praying by myself every day
- praying by myself sometimes
- trying to convince someone else to be a Christian
- acts of compassion
- aspiring to be like someone who has lived by their beliefs eg. Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King
- proud to be a Christian
- feeling comfortable with your religious beliefs

The third part of the interview focused on the Year 12 religious education program. The first question here, 6a, asked for the respondent's perceptions of the attitudes of other students to a range of items related to the classroom program and 6b asked for a more personal response to the same items and 6c asked for a personal response to the program overall:

- 6a. Thinking back over the RE program this year, do you think most students found it
- intellectually challenging;
 - a successful learning experience;
 - an opportunity to encourage prayer;
 - interesting/uninteresting because of the topics;
 - interesting/uninteresting because of the resources used;
 - interesting/uninteresting because of the lack of variety in the activities used;
 - provided some occasions for students to reflect on and further develop their spirituality.
- 6b. What would your answer be to the above list?
- 6c. After your experience this year, do you feel that an RE program should be offered to Year 12 students? Can you give reasons for why you feel this?

Finally, Questions 7 to 9 asked for responses that indicated whether the program had offered opportunities for spiritual development, whether it had helped to provide them with

some answers to issues that concerned them and whether they had found the program effective in meeting their needs. Question 10 asked for any recommendations for improving the program:

7. As you face the next few years, do you feel that the RE program has provided you with the knowledge and learning experiences that has taken you nearer to understanding the meaning of human existence
8. Are there issues that concern you in your life at present? Did you find that the RE program helped you to come to a better understanding of these issues?
9. In one or two words could you sum up your impressions of how effective the RE program was for you this year?
10. If you had any advice to offer the RE teachers about improving the program what would you say?

Generally, during the interviews, the researcher maintained a friendly but professional approach and the students appeared to be quite interested and relaxed about taking part in the research. The fact that the interviews were timed so that they were about three to four weeks after the final VCE exams could have accounted for the more relaxed state of the students

Current Year 12 religious education programs of the schools involved in this research study

The third source of data was the curriculum documents of the religious education programs from schools involved in this research study. These are analysed below to identify (i) the objectives, (ii) the broad areas of study, (iii) the learning strategies and (iv) the methods of assessment that were included in the respective programs.

To begin with it is worth noting that all these schools offered VCE units 3 and 4 of *Religion and Society* and/or *Texts and Traditions* as optional subjects at Year 11 and/or 12. Therefore, some of those students from schools with school-based programs had, in fact, completed some VCE units in religion at Year 11. Having offered a serious academic study of religion at Year 11, these schools had chosen to offer a school-based program

that was not driven by external assessment and which could focus more on interpersonal and intrapersonal development.

It is worth commenting on the variation in the effort and detail that some schools had put into the writing of their religious education curriculum documents. In at least three cases where schools offered VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2, there were no written school documents that were made available to the researcher. The phone response was that the study design was used and, because of ongoing change and refinement, written documentation still had to be finalized. Another point in relation to these curriculum outlines was that, with the exception of one school, details regarding the school-based part of the course were not written into the document. The information about activities that were intended to promote faith development was given to the researcher by phone.

The fact remains that the curriculum outlines varied from a well-presented format which clearly stated the objectives, content, learning activities and assessment procedures to a general description of the program. It is of some concern that such wide variations can exist and it would be interesting to discover if curriculum documents of other Year 12 subjects would have had similar variations.

Seven schools combined VCE/school-based programs. Of these, four schools offered *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 (*Religion and identity* and *Ethics*) and one offered units 3 and 4 (*The search for meaning* and *Challenge and response*). These schools, therefore, shared the curriculum approach as suggested in the VCE study designs. The main differences between them related to the way in which they included activities that specifically emphasized faith formation such as liturgies, retreats and other opportunities that were intended for faith development which were additional features of their classroom programs. One school had a class offering *Texts and Traditions* units 1 and 2 (*Texts and justice in society* and *Narrative texts and traditions*) and one school had a class offering *International Studies* unit 2 (*Internationalism*) as part of their religious

education program. (It is important to note here that, while this school included *International Studies* as part of their religious education program, the unit was not, according to its original course outline, intended to promote learning in the area of religion studies.) Only the two previously mentioned units, *Religion and Society* and *Texts and Traditions* had a religion studies focus). Only one student studied *Texts and Traditions* units 3 and 4 (*Texts and the development of traditions* and *Texts and their teachings*), therefore, this will not be looked at in detail as its significance to this study is minimal.

The following is an analytical summary of the course outlines from the VCE *Religion and Society*, VCE *Texts and Traditions* and *International Studies* (VBOS, 1994) study designs and from the course outlines from the schools involved in the study.

VCE/school-based religious education programs

The broad aims for the VCE units of study were:

Religion and Society - units 1 and 2; units 3 and 4

There has been some discussion of the four VCE *Religion and Society* units in the early part of this chapter. The four units were linked by their common focus on religious beliefs and fundamental human values. They provided opportunities to investigate the interaction between a religious tradition and an individual or community which results in particular beliefs and corresponding behaviour and which may eventuate in continuity or change:

Aim: To enable students to understand the role and influence of religion in society through a) an exploration of individual and collective responses to religious traditions and b) the interaction and impact of social change on religious traditions.

Content: The structure and organization of different faith traditions, particularly, specific roles, rites, rituals and codes of behaviour.

Learning strategies:

- class discussions
- research activities and interviews
- guest speakers, viewing films and videos
- writing tasks, such as, reports, essays, written interviews, articles or profiles
- oral presentations including audio-visual and multimedia presentations.

Texts and Traditions - units 1 and 2

Aim: To enable students to develop an understanding of religious texts and their status, use and interpretation within a tradition, society and culture.

Content: The first unit focused on the theme of social justice and the second focused on narrative texts, that is, texts that relate to the actions and events in the lives of significant people.

Learning strategies:

- class discussions
- research activities
- viewing films and videos
- reading and writing tasks, such as, reports, essays, letter writing, articles
- oral presentations including audio-visual and multimedia presentations

International Studies, unit 2.

Aim: to examine these issues in light of basic principles of Catholic social teaching and the work of Church organizations in such matters. Two points of focus were chosen: international issues and organizations working on the international scene.

Content: Christian perspectives on peace and justice, explored matters of international importance such as war, revolution and peace; human rights; world poverty and the just distribution of wealth; and the use of the environment.

Learning strategies:

- class discussions
- research activities
- media programs
- writing tasks, such as, reports, essays, articles or profiles

Assessment: for all VCE units this was based on the satisfactory completion of up to four work requirements that were drawn from each study. In addition, for Units 3 and 4 which was a sequential study taken over the year there were three common assessment tasks (CATS) which were assessed according to set criteria for each. At least one of these was examined externally.

Schools that offered one of the above VCE subjects also stipulated that the classroom program included activities that addressed intrapersonal learning, such as, a class mass, reflection days, prayer, meditation and other liturgical celebrations at special times. Features, such as, whole school masses on special occasions and the Year 12 Graduation Mass were additional activities that focused on interpersonal and intrapersonal learning but were outside the classroom program. Schools either included a Year 12 retreat or a day of reflection. However, with one exception, there was no documentation available for the part of the classroom program that was intended to promote learning in the affective domain. Therefore, it is unclear how much time was actually spent on these aspects of the religious education program.

The exception to the above was one school which had a detailed unit on *Christian Prayer*. This unit was conducted over Term 1 and concluded with a three-day retreat at the start of the second term.

Aim: to enable students to understand spontaneous and formal prayer and to deepen the reflective aspect of their lives through a series of meditations.

Content: Forms of Christian prayer.

Learning strategies:

- prayer experiences
- reflections and meditations
- preparation and celebration of paraliturgies
- journal writing
- three-day retreat

There was no formal assessment for this unit.

Summary

From the above discussion it can be seen that schools, generally, offered a range of content in their programs which included an intellectual study of Christian and other faith traditions and texts, activities that developed an awareness of Christian perspectives and opportunities that provided opportunities for affective learning. However, it was apparent that not all these elements were given equal weight in each program. For instance, many of the schools which offered VCE units as part of their program had curriculum documents which focused on the content and strategies related to the completion of work requirements with little reference to other elements related to personal, faith and spiritual development. The lack of written information about these latter aspects of the program may imply that there was some informality in the way in which they were organized. One possible outcome of this process could have been a variation in the quality of different elements of the program. Only one school clearly presented documentation that included a unit on prayer and meditation, that is, interpersonal and intrapersonal. In other schools a retreat, a day of reflection, a class mass, meditation, reflection, and sometimes class

prayer, were some of the activities that comprised the school-based part of the program. It is possible, in such cases, that there was some reliance placed on the religious education program at the broader school level to provide opportunities for the development of affective learning. What is clear is that in these curriculum documents, more emphasis was given to the cognitive aspect of religious education.

The assessment for each of these above programs was also based on the cognitive domain; that is, it focused on VCE work requirements. There was no indication that any assessment of the affective domain took place except in the case of the school with the unit on prayer. In this latter case, students were asked to spend the last lesson of the unit writing some reflections in their journal on their experiences in prayer and personal development, that is, there was some informal assessment.

School-based religious education programs

In the case of the four schools with school-based religious education programs the documents were particularly important since their programs were individual and specific to the school. However, the variation of detail in the curriculum documents also extended to these school-based programs. With the exception of one school (S800), the outlines provided did not follow any particular curriculum structure. This could have been partly due to the fact that, while two schools had weekly timetabled classes (S800 and S1100), two schools based their religious education program on three seminar days throughout the year (S1000 and S900). However, one included a retreat at the beginning of the year, opportunities for weekly celebrations of the Eucharist and some community work over one term (S900). Even so, one school's planning was set out methodically and showed a clear intent (S900) while the other school was only able to provide the programs and handouts from two of the three days (S1000). The only information that was provided about the third day was the focus for the day and that the God Squad were the visiting guest speakers.

To sum up, of the four schools which offered school-based programs, two had three seminar days spread over the year. The other two had a classroom program with a period allotment each week. Key features of the programs for each school, beginning with the seminar programs, are discussed below.

School S800

This was a school-based unit which combined elements of Catholic teaching in social justice, personal development and features of the VCE *Religion and Society*, unit 2 - Ethics. The length of the unit was one semester.

Content:

Topics:

- Setting goals / Managing; Self-esteem; Life Maps - tools for self-discovery.
- Understanding ethics; understanding terminology; understanding ethical issues.
- Personal ethics; making moral decisions;
- Authority in ethics - Christian perspective/social justice;
- Faith development - lifestyle seminar: representatives of priestly, religious, single, married, covenant
- Understanding the Old Testament: Old Testament view of justice - God's justice/justice of men

Learning strategies:

- class discussions;
- research activities;
- viewing films and videos;
- case studies;
- reading and writing tasks, such as, reports, essays, letter writing, articles;
- oral presentations including audio-visual and multimedia presentations; and

- debates.

Also included but not documented were opportunities for

- prayer in the Chapel;
- liturgical celebrations on significant occasions; and
- retreat and faith development days.

Assessment: Based on the satisfactory completion of work requirements that were drawn from the unit's content.

School S900

This program was a collaboration between staff and student leaders.

Aim: To offer opportunities for personal development to enable students to explore and develop Christian values.

Content: Theme: Develop a set of values for life or lose direction.
The program consisted of a retreat for each homeroom followed by three seminar days and a community program spread over one term.

Topics:

- Retreat - Values - get some or get lost.
- Seminar 1 - Money and our values.
- Seminar 2 - Vocation: the personal meaning that can be found in responding to the deepest call inside yourself.
- Seminar 3 - Personal development, setting goals, motivation and overcoming difficulties.
- Community service program spread over one term

Throughout the year, as part of the wider school program, Year 12 students had a weekly Eucharist celebration built into their timetables which followed the liturgical year along with relevant themes.

Learning strategies:

- guest speakers;
- reflections and discussions;
- shared group experiences, and
- community work.

Assessment: No assessment. However, personal reflective strategies were included as part of the seminars.

School S1000

Aim: To provide opportunities for faith and personal development.

Content: In Term 1 the celebration of mass for the opening of the school year took place and no seminar day was planned. There was a day each in the other three terms.

Focus statements provided the theme for each seminar day.

- Day 1 - Focus 1: Our relationship with God.
- Day 2 - Focus 2: Who am I? Who is my God?
- Day 3 - Focus 3: Commitment and values, identity and relationships.

Learning strategies:

- group and personal prayer;
- use of readings and songs for reflections;
- large and small group work - discussions and sharing experiences;
- drama;
- ritualistic experience;
- liturgical celebration, and guest speakers.

Assessment: No assessment. Some written personal reflections were included.

School S1100

This program was built into the weekly timetable. It focused on faith and personal development.

Aim: To encourage students in the process of self-awareness and evaluation and to recognise that in order to know God we need to know ourselves.

Content: Topics

- The search for self
- Who is Jesus?
- Living Christianity
- The search for meaning in the world.

Learning strategies:

- group work with team teaching;
- class discussions;
- written tasks;
- guest speakers, and
- maintaining a journal and workbook.
- Students were introduced to strategies to manage time effectively and to employ methods to cope with stress.

Assessment: No assessment. Students were asked to provide a written response to the program.

Summary

Generally, as mentioned earlier, the schools with school-based religious education programs provided curriculum documents that ranged from well structured to loosely structured, and the content ranged from general to specific. In the case of the first two schools that offered seminar programs, one school's planning was set out methodically and showed a clear intent. The other provided the programs and handouts from two of the three days and mentioned the focus for third day which was given over to the God

Squad. The third school had a curriculum outline in the form of a report which was sent home to parents at the end of the year. It included a brief description of the topics, the learning strategies and the form of assessment. The fourth school had its program set out with clear objectives, content, learning strategies and assessment.

All schools included the general intention of educating students in the faith tradition. Two schools had a particular emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal learning, that is the affective aspects of religious education. However, the two schools with religious education as part of the weekly timetable had a definite cognitive focus.

There were no assessment strategies for the schools with the seminar programs. However, informal exercises involving some personal reflections were included. The schools with weekly programs included written assignments which focused on assessment in the cognitive domain.

Overall, while there were a range of learning activities used across schools, those schools with VCE programs tended to have written tasks leading to the completion of the work requirements as the dominant activity. Also, schools with included VCE based programs tended to be more focused on the cognitive rather than the affective aspects of learning in religious education and appeared to concentrate on the completion of work requirements.

Summary and significance for this research study

In this chapter the method of the research study, the selection of subjects, choice of research instruments and the time frame was discussed. Survey research methodology was chosen since it allowed access to a variety of groups studying a range of different programs for Year 12 religious education within Catholic schools. Various characteristics were identified which were representative of the broad range of Catholic schools and the

schools involved in the research study displayed one or more of these characteristics. The use of questionnaires and interviews allowed the researcher to gain directly from the students, information about the experiences within different programs which had helped to shape students' perceptions of the subject.

The three sources of data were i) students' perceptions and ii) teachers' perceptions of the programs, and iii) the schools' religious education curriculum documents. The focus of the study was on students' perceptions and both questionnaires and interviews were used to gather this information. The teachers' perceptions were used for comparison with students' perceptions of the classroom program. The broad aims, learning objectives and content of the different programs were also examined to determine those aspects which drew the most positive responses from students.

Schools were chosen that offered different types of religious education programs: VCE/school-based and school-based. Particular school characteristics that may have impacted on Year 12 students' perceptions of their religious education program were also identified. These characteristics were divided into three categories: principal, school-sex and region.

The collection of data, the construction and the piloting of the questionnaire and the design of the structured interview were described. The variables for the research instruments were drawn from the desirable characteristics for religious education programs as identified in the first section of the work. Different student and teacher questionnaires were used which related to the VCE/school-based or the school-based programs that were offered.

Finally, current curriculum documents for religious education from the 11 schools involved in this research study were examined. It was noted that five schools offered *VCE Religion and Society* units 1 and/or 2 at Year 12, with one school offering *VCE International*

Studies, unit 2 and one school offering *Texts and Traditions*, units 1 and 2. These schools also included a school-based program which, from the lack of documentation for this part of the program, appeared to be fairly informal and included some or all of the following: a retreat or days of reflection, a class mass, other liturgies, prayer and meditation. Only one of these schools had a documented unit on prayer which was conducted over one term. In practical terms, the curriculum documents from these schools appeared to emphasize knowledge and skills in religion education since much time was given to the completion of work requirements. On the other hand, three of the four schools, which offered school-based programs, had a particular emphasis on interpersonal and intrapersonal development. Only two of these schools also included a definite focus on cognitive learning.

Of concern was the wide variation in the curriculum documents that were provided. These ranged from quite informal to detailed formal curriculum outlines and raises questions whether such variation would be evident with the documentation of other Year 12 subjects. It is possible that the variation in the details provided in the documents may have reflected some inherent problems with the structure of the course or signified a variation in the quality of the classroom practice. It appears that achieving more consistency in the writing of curriculum documents in religious education should be a priority for educators.

In brief, it was found that:

- schools with VCE/school-based programs had an intellectual basis to their classroom programs which, as indicated by the curriculum outlines, promoted cognitive learning; they aimed to develop knowledge and skills. With one exception, the activities to promote affective learning were part of the wider religious education program, and
- three of the four schools with school-based programs had a greater focus on affective learning, that is, on personal growth and development. The fourth school intended to

address both cognitive and affective aspects in religious education but, as indicated by the curriculum outline, more emphasis was given to the former.

The findings of the data collected through the questionnaires and interviews will be presented in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5

Students' perceptions of aspects related to different areas of study in the religious education program: Responses to the questionnaires

The results from the items in Part A of the student questionnaires that focused on aspects of different areas of study in the religious education program are presented and analysed in this chapter.

Analysis of the results

In the previous chapter there was discussion of the construction of, and the validity of, the research instruments, the questionnaires and the interview. Of the two approaches used to determine the validity of instruments, one was through a logical analysis of content. This was a judgmental analysis and was verified by colleagues and other experts as a way of checking this. The other approach was through consideration of specific criteria. The consistency and coherence of various aspects of the questions were checked to ensure criteria related validity.

It was noted that the questionnaires were divided into two main parts, A and B. Part A contained open-ended and closed questions. The basic data were collected using Likert scales to indicate the degree of agreement to various statements. The Likert scale items are essentially nominal data but while the categories are in order, this does not assume equal intervals between the scores.

When associations between particular variables were sought, correlation coefficients were used as a way of describing the association between the responses to such items. Indeed, this is standard practice encapsulated in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS. Inc., Release 6.1, Standard version, 1994), program itself. Spearman's Rank Correlation (r_s) provides a better and more easily interpreted result for discussion.

The scoring used for the closed questions ranged from 5 for *strongly agree* to 1 for *strongly disagree*. A reverse scoring pattern was used for negative statements. Missing items and those that had an *NA* or '*Not-applicable*' were treated as missing.

For items 41 to 44 and 48 to 50, which required a choice of two or three responses, each category of response was coded with a number from 1 to 3. Thus, '*do*', '*have*' and '*is*' were 1 and '*do not*', '*have not*' and '*is not*' were 2. In items 45 and 46 the response '*girls*' became 1, '*boys*' became 2 and '*both*' became 3.

In item 47, students were asked to rate a list of possible class activities on a rating scale of 1 (*most helpful*) to 5 (*least helpful*). In this case the actual rating score was used in the final count. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

For open-ended questions the responses were coded and summarised. This process will be discussed later in this chapter.

For each item in Part B relating to the personal background of the respondent, the required responses fell into separate categories. Each of these categories was allotted a number code which assisted the process of analysis.

Presentation of the results

Once the scoring was completed the raw scores were entered into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS for Windows), software program (SPSS. Inc., Release 6.1, Standard version, 1994), which was utilised to generate the statistics for this research study. Frequency tables and box and whisker plots (referred to as box-plots in this work) were used to present summaries of the data. The latter are graphical presentations of a 5-number summary of the frequencies of the responses as shown in Figure 10:

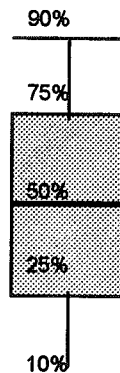


Figure 10: Box and whisker plot - graphical presentations of a 5-number summary of the frequencies of the responses.

An example of a box -plot (Figure 11) is shown below:

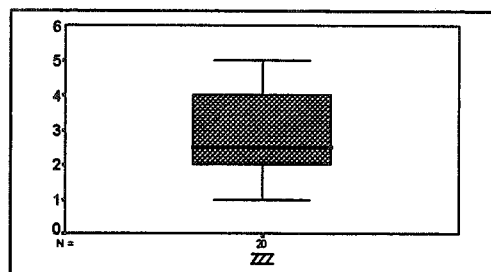


Figure 11: Sample of a box-plot.

The interpretation of the above box-plot is that 50% of the responses lie within the shaded box, that is, half of the responses ranged from 4 to 2. A whisker each rising and descending from the box represents the responses that fall into the top and bottom 15% respectively. In Figure 11, the top quarter of responses ranged between 5 and 4 and the lower quarter of responses ranged between 2 and 1. The highest and lowest values are indicated at the end of each line, that is, 5 and 1 respectively. The horizontal line through the shaded box represents the median which, in this case, is approximately 2.5. The number of responses is shown by the small figure outside the box. In this case there are 20 responses.

Box-plots have been increasingly used in educational research reports, for instance, in publications of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and the international journal, Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). As such, they were considered appropriate graphs to use in the presentation of data for this research study and will be used to present further information of significant results

Background data

As mentioned earlier, there were a total of 227 student responses from the eleven schools. The schools were identified with numbers from 100 to 1100 with a V or an S placed in front of the number to indicate those schools where the religious education program had consisted of a combined VCE religious studies/school-based course (V) or those schools where the RE program was purely school-based (S). In the discussion and analysis the eleven schools are referred to by these numbers (see Table 2 where schools are grouped according to school-based and VCE/school based religious education programs). Students were identified by numbers drawn from the school number, thus, students from school 100 were numbered 101, 102, 103, and students from school 200 were numbered 201, 202, 203, and so on.

Table 2: School sample indicating type of religious education program

S1000	S1100	S800	S900	V100	V200	V300	V400	V500	V600	V700
S = Schools with School-based RE programs.										
V= Schools with VCE and school-based RE programs										

Schools had characteristics belonging to one or more of the following categories: Principal (religious or lay); Regional (country or metropolitan); and Sex (coeducational, girls' or boys'). Table 3 shows the characteristics of each school:

Table 3: School Characteristics

School	Religious Principal	Lay Principal	Metro- politan	Country	Co- educational	Girls'	Boys'
S1000	*		*			*	
S1100	*		*				*
S800	*			*	*		
S900	*		*				*
V100		*		*	*		
V200		*		*	*		
V300		*	*		*		
V400		*	*			*	
V500	*		*			*	
V600		*	*				*
V700		*	*		*		

An unexpected observation from the data on school characteristics, as can be seen from the first two columns, is that four of the five schools with religious principals had school-based RE programs while the six schools with lay principals had a VCE/school based program. The reason for this finding was not obtainable from the data collected in this study but presents a distinct area for further study.

Table 4 shows the numbers of surveyed students who studied VCE units in religion and those who studied school-based programs. For this presentation and with all following presentations, the percentages have been rounded off to the nearest whole number.

Table 4: Student enrolments in different RE programs

RE program	Student numbers	%
VCE Religion & Society 1 & 2	83	37%
VCE Religion & Society 3 & 4	21	9%
VCE Texts & Tradition 1 & 2	23	10%
VCE Texts & Tradition 3 & 4	1	0%
VCE International Studies 2	20	9%
School - based	74	33%
missing	5	2%
Total	227	100%

The numbers here support the suggestion made early in this work that more schools offer, as core units at Year 12, VCE religion units 1 and 2 (103 students, this includes *Religion and Society* and *International Studies- Internationalism*) rather than Units 3 and 4 (21 students).

It is important to reiterate here that the VCE classroom program had a cognitive focus while the school-based programs gave more emphasis to affective learning. However, it was the intent of all schools to include opportunities for faith and spiritual development in the overall religious education program as indicated in their curriculum outlines. The achievement of these objectives will be examined later in the discussion of students' responses to the different variables.

The variable relating to the country of birth was included to discover if responses differed according to different cultural backgrounds related to the respondents' and their parents' countries of birth. Table 5 shows the number of students born in Australia and overseas:

Table 5: Students' country of birth

Country	No.	%
Australian born	191	84%
Born overseas	34	15%
Missing	2	1%
Total	227	100%

Thus, of the 227 students in the sample, 191 were born in Australia, 34 were born overseas and 2 did not respond to this item. These figures are further broken down according to school groups in Table 6.

Table 6: Students' country of birth according to school groups

School	Australian	%	Overseas	%	Total
S1000	19		5		24
S1100	13		2		15
S800	14		1		15
S900	17		9		26
V100	18		1		19
V200	18				18
V300	20		1		21
V400	21		1		22
V500	12		8		20
V600	26		4		30
V700	13		2		15
Total	191	84%	34	16%	225

The above figures show that of the three country schools, V200 had no students born overseas but the other two had one student each. Metropolitan school groups had one or more students born overseas with S900 and V500 having the largest numbers at 9 and 8 respectively. Initially, this may suggest little diversity amongst students' cultural backgrounds but Table 7 does not support this.

Table 7: Parents' countries of birth according to school groups

School	Mother		Father	
	Australian	Overseas	Australian	Overseas
S1000	3	21	4	20
S1100	9	6	9	5
S800	9	6	9	6
S900	7	19	6	20
V100	18		18	
V200	16	2	14	4
V300	14	7	16	4
V400	14	8	13	9
V500	4	16	3	17
V600	15	15	9	21
V700	9	6	9	6
Missing	3		5	
%	1%		2%	
Total	118	106	110	112
%	52%	47%	49%	49%

The results here indicate that approximately half the number of parents was born overseas. This could have had some effect on students' behavioural patterns and attitudes in relation to different cultural beliefs and experiences, particularly if it is noted that thirty-nine different 'countries of birth', ranging from Europe, Africa, USA, South America and Asia, were identified.

It is interesting to find that two of the country schools had a high percentage of Australian born parents. In the case of V100, 18 of the 19 parents were born in Australia and there was one missing response. However, from Table 5 we can note that one student was born overseas and it is possible that the missing response from the parents' country of birth data could be related to this student, that is, that there was at least one or both parents of this student born overseas. With the metropolitan schools there is a bigger multicultural influence. S1000, S900 and V500 had a higher number of both parents born overseas than in Australia and with V600, while the numbers of mothers born in Australia and overseas were equal, it had a larger number of fathers born overseas than those born in Australia. These figures are pertinent when considering the multicultural nature of the school population and any influence this feature may have on the responses of each of the participants. The discussion, which examines the responses to each variable, will take note of this.

Finally, responses to the variable identifying the religious affiliation and practices of students according to school groups are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Religious affiliation according to school

	S1000	S1100	S800	S900	V100	V200	V300	V400	V500	V600	V700	Total	%
RC	18	12	7	22	15	18	16	22	14	28	14	186	82%
OCD	2	2	6	2	4		3		4		1	24	10%
ORT	1	1		1						1		4	2%
NCR	1		1									2	1%
None	2		1	1			2		2	1		9	4%
Missing												2	1%

RC = Roman Catholic
OCD = Other Christian Denomination
ORT = Orthodox Christian
NCR = non-Christian
None = No religion

It can be seen that Catholic students vastly outnumbered any of the other groups, 186 compared to 24 Christians other than Catholic. There were 4 Orthodox Christians, 2 non-Christians, 9 with no religious affiliation and there were 2 students who did not respond to this item. These figures show that a significantly high percentage of students professed to be Roman Catholics. However, the large variation in the numbers representing different

religious traditions makes it difficult to draw conclusions about their influence on the responses. As such, this variable will only be included in subsequent discussions when the findings appear to raise some questions.

The above discussion relates to the students' backgrounds. In brief the findings indicated:

- there appeared to be a correlation between the 'principal' factor and the choice of VCE/school-based programs.
- there was a large number of students studying VCE units 1 and 2 in religion as compared to those studying VCE units 3 and 4; This would appear to support the contention that in many cases, the former units were included as part of the compulsory program.
- the majority of students were born in Australia but many had parents born overseas; and
- a large majority of the students professed to be Catholic.

The rest of this chapter presents and discusses the responses to the items contained in Section A of the questionnaire. The results are presented in the order in which they correspond to different sections in the questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, the variables upon which the items were based were drawn from the research questions outlined at the start of this chapter. These questions are reiterated at the start of the each discussion and links are made to the appropriate items. Frequency tables and box-plots are used to provide visual presentations of the data.

Responses to items in Part A - Section 1

All the items in this section were prefaced with the following statement:

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response.

The study of different religions

Four items in this section related to the first research question: Did the program increase interest in and tolerance of different religions and the understanding of the role of religion?

Items 1 and 2 were explicit expressions of interest in and tolerance to different religions. As such, the scores from these items were treated individually, the first indicating interest and the second showing tolerance.

- Item 1: I have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia.

Table 9 shows the overall response to Item 1.

Table 9: Distribution of responses showing interest in learning about different religions

Value	frequency	%
SA	12	5%
MA	79	35%
U	52	23%
MD	63	28%
SD	21	9%
Total	227	100%

A minority of students, 40%, agreed that the religious education program increased their interest in learning about different religions. Thirty-seven per cent were negative while 23% were undecided. Thus, the achievement of this objective was attained by a little over a third of the students.

From Figure 12 it can be seen that the spread of responses between school-based and VCE/school-based programs were similar with approximately 50% of the responses ranging from *mostly agree* to *mostly disagree*.

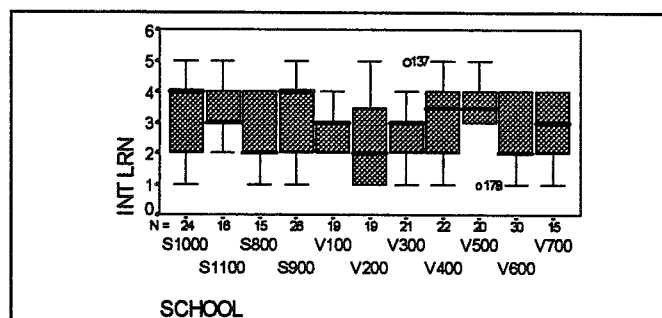


Figure 12: Students' perceptions of their interest in learning about different religions according to school groups.

This suggests that the different approaches to religious education had little influence on students' perceptions. The two schools with the highest median, S1000 and S900, had school-based programs, however, S800 and V200 which had a mix of school-based and VCE/school based had the lowest median. For the few schools, which had a more positive spread, the reasons for the variation would be worth exploring to identify relevant factors.

Two variables related to school characteristics, principal and regional, did not appear to influence the result. However, from Figure 13 it can be seen that the school-sex category did yield different results.

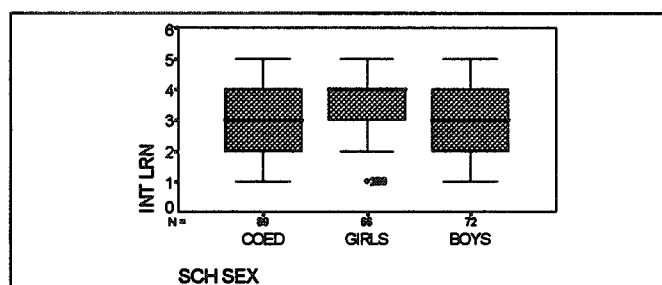


Figure 13: Students' perceptions of their interest in learning about different religions according to 'school sex' category.

Responses from girls' schools were more positive than responses from boys' and coeducational schools. These data were particularly interesting in light of the fact that there was no difference when the responses were compared according to gender. When

we consider that girls' schools yielded more positive results, it is possible that other distinguishing elements related to girls' schools could have affected the responses. Factors such as school culture, teachers and teacher behaviour, curriculum offerings and school administrative structures need to be examined to determine the nature of their influence in promoting students' interest in learning about different religions.

Figure 14 suggests that multicultural backgrounds can lead to a variation in students' interest in learning about religion.

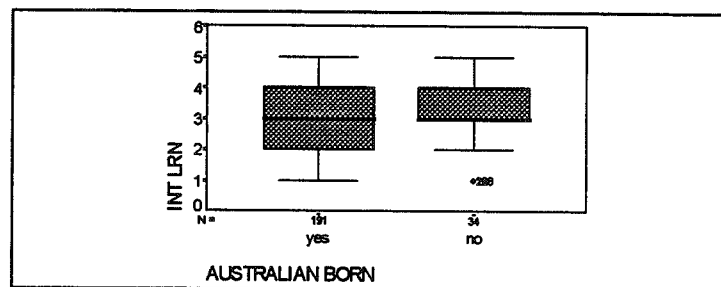


Figure 14 - Students' perceptions of their interest in learning about different religions according to Australian/overseas born.

While there was a large difference in numbers of students in the two groups, however, it is clear that the negative responses came predominantly from Australian-born students. The median was the same for both groups but the spread was more favourable for overseas born students. Further research is needed to establish if there is a relationship between pluralism in culture and pluralism in faith.

An unexpected aspect was that the spread of responses from the nine students with no religious affiliation was the same as those who indicated that they were Catholic or from other Christian denominations. It seems that the program did appear to influence these students and a closer investigation of influential factors may provide important information for curriculum planners in the subject.

Other results were:

- *International Studies* unit 2 was the only type of program which had a less positive spread, (all results that relate to this unit need to be examined in light of the fact that this unit was not based among the VCE offerings in religion studies, that is *Religion and Society* and *Texts and Traditions*);
- Religious affiliation did not appear to affect the result, however, the unequal representation of different faith traditions in the sample meant that it was difficult to draw conclusions from these results, and
- individual and families' religious practice did not appear to be influential factors.

The next item in the questionnaire sought information on students' perceptions of whether their tolerance to different religions had increased:

- Item 2: I have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions.

From Table 10, it can be seen that the overall response to Item 2 was more positive than the response to Item 1 (interest in learning about different religions).

Table 10: Distribution of responses indicating increased tolerance to different faith traditions

Value	Frequency	%
SA	42	19%
MA	109	48%
U	55	24%
MD	17	7%
SD	4	2%
Total	227	100%

In this case, 67% of students indicated that they had become more tolerant towards people of different faith traditions as a result of the religious education program while 24% were undecided and 9% provided a negative response. These figures suggest that the programs appear to be achieving a positive result in this area for approximately two-thirds of the students surveyed.

It is interesting to compare this result, increased tolerance towards other faiths, with the previous one, where less than half the students showed an interest in learning about different religions. An identification of factors that might have led to this difference could be useful to curriculum planners but it is outside the scope of this research study.

An examination of responses according to schools, as shown in Figure 15, indicates that there was a wide variation in the spread of responses implying a big difference between different school groups.

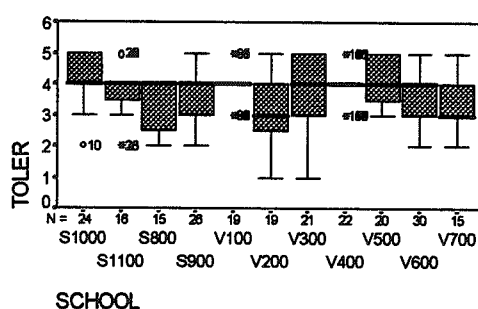


Figure 15: Students' perceptions of their increased tolerance of different faith traditions according to school groups.

Since the variation in the spread was not confined to either school-based or VCE/school-based programs and nine of the eleven schools had the same median, it is difficult to identify any particular approach to religious education as having influenced this response. However, it is clear that some school programs have been much more successful than others have at increasing their students' tolerance of other faith traditions.

Of the three schools categories, the 'principal' variable did not appear to affect the response to this item. However, Figure 16 shows a repeat of the earlier variation in responses according to 'school-sex'.

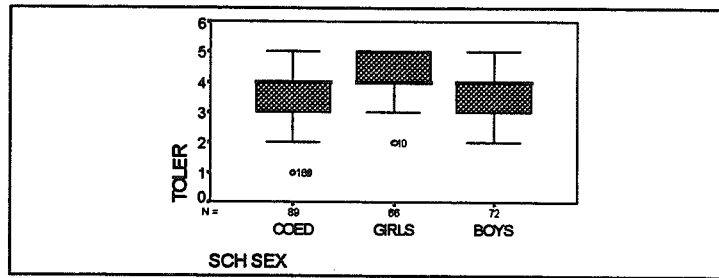


Figure 16: Students' perceptions of their increased tolerance of different faith traditions according to 'school sex' category.

As with Item 1, while the responses from girls' schools were clearly more positive, the gender variable did not appear to influence the responses. This finding supports the contention that school culture could be an influential factor in shaping students' responses.

The responses to multi-faith tolerance levels were also influenced by the third school category, region, as shown in Figure 17.

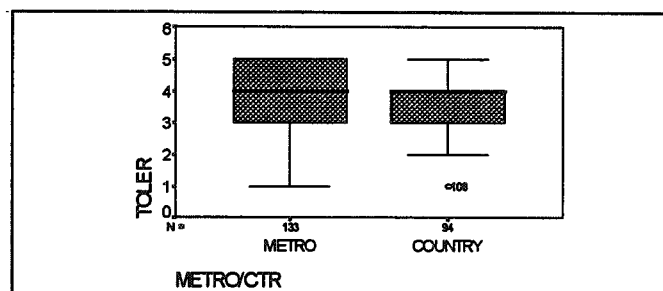


Figure 17: Students' perceptions of their increased tolerance of different faith traditions according to 'regional' category.

Students in metropolitan schools had a wider spread ranging from very positive to very negative. From an earlier discussion, it was noted that, generally, the metropolitan schools in the sample had a more culturally diverse student population. This multicultural student population could have contributed to the development of a particular school culture which could have influenced these results.

Once again, the nine students who professed to have no religion were the most positive about the influence of the program on their increased tolerance levels to different faith traditions. Thus, the program appeared to meeting some of its objectives for these students.

Other results showed that:

- country of birth and religious affiliation did not appear to be influential factors, and
- religious practice as in Mass attendance made little difference to the responses.

The next two items, Items 3 and 4, relate to students' understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in a person's life.

- Item 3: I understand how the beliefs of a particular religious tradition can influence the customs and practices of the people of that tradition.
- Item 4: I have been able to develop an understanding of the importance of religion in the lives of many Australians from different cultural backgrounds.

For simplicity of presentation, the possibility of combining these two variables into a single variable was explored. A Spearman Rank correlation between Items 3 and 4, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .001$), implies a positive association. Therefore, the means of the individual scores were computed to create a single, new variable - understanding and appreciating the role of religion in society. For the following tables, the computed value for the variable was rounded up. In effect, a response of *strongly agree* for Item 3 and a response of *mostly agree* to Item 4, combined to be *strongly agree* to the new variable.

The overall student response to the understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in society, as a result of the religious education program, is displayed in Table 11.

Table 11: Distribution of responses indicating understanding and appreciation of the role of religion

Value	Frequency	%
SA	17	8%
MA	122	54%
U	71	31%
MD	14	6%
SD	3	1%
Total	227	100%

The majority of responses were positive with 62% in agreement that they understood and appreciated the role of religion in society as a result of the religious education program. Of the remaining students, 31% were undecided and 7% disagreed with the statement. Thus, it would seem that almost a third of the students showed some indecision to this variable and it would be useful to identify influential factors that caused this response.

Figure 18 presents a profile of responses according to school groups.

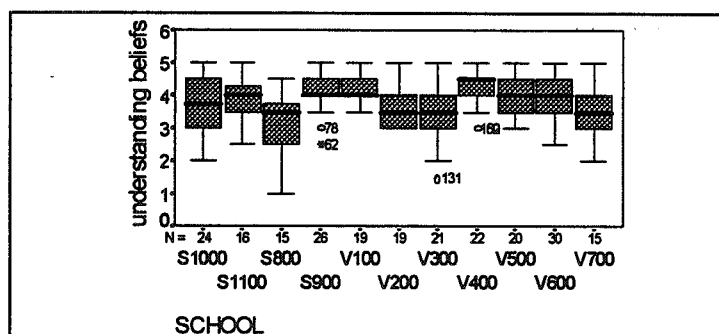


Figure 18: Students' perceptions of their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion according to school groups.

As can be seen there were significant variations between school groups. The three most positive, S900, V100 and V400, had a combination of all the school characteristics included in this study, that is, different types of principals, regions and sex. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate any particular school characteristic as being more influential. The only common characteristic of these three schools was that they were single-sex schools, two girls' and one boys' school. However, a closer analysis showed the 'school sex' category made little difference to the responses. This result, once again, highlights the big

difference between schools in effecting positive responses to some aspects of their religious education programs.

As with some earlier results, there was a similarity of responses from students who indicated they had no religious affiliation to those who did. It could be, as discussed before, that the religious education program did possibly have a positive impact on these students.

Other results showed that the type of program, country of birth, gender, religious affiliation and religious practice, as indicated by the individual's and family's attendance at Mass, made little difference to the responses.

The three variables presented above related broadly to one area being investigated in this research study, that is, different aspects of learning about religions in the Year 12 program. More specifically these were divided into (i) interest in different religions, (ii) tolerance towards different religions and (iii) an understanding and appreciation of the role of religion.

Overall, students responded quite favourably to two of the three variables. Specific features were:

- the programs influenced only a third of the students to become interested in learning about different religions;
- a majority of students did appear to increase their tolerance of different religions and their understanding of the role of religion as a result of the programs;
- a large number of students appeared undecided about their responses to these variables and further investigation to identify influential factors could be useful for future curriculum development;

- there was a marked difference in the responses of students from different schools implying that school culture could be an influential factor in the success of a religious education program;
- the different types of programs did not produce significantly different results;
- the more positive responses from girls' schools suggest that school culture could be a factor that affected the responses.
- there were more positive responses from overseas born students which could suggest possible links between a higher incidence of cultural diversity and increased levels of interest in and tolerance of different faiths, and
- the religious education program had a positive influence on students who professed to have no religious affiliation.

Faith development

The next items included in Section 1, part A, related to sub-question 3 of this research study was whether the religious education program promoted faith and spiritual development.

The first variable to be discussed here is faith development. Item 10 required the respondents to indicate whether, in their perceptions, their personal faith commitment had developed as a result of the religious education program. Item 11 asked for students' perceptions of the development of faith as an on-going process and Item 16 focused on the cognitive aspects of faith and its contribution to the process of faith development:

- Item 10: My own faith commitment has been developed.
- Item 11: I believe it is important that I continue to develop my faith and relationship with God when I leave school.
- Item 16: I believe that it is as important for senior students to study their faith tradition as it is for junior students because it helps senior students find meaning in their lives.

Since each of the above items dealt with different aspects of faith development they are presented separately.

Table 12 shows the responses to Item 10. We can see that 44.5% of students felt that their faith commitment had developed as a result of the religious education program. However, of those who did not share this perception, 30% were undecided, 25% disagreed with the statement and one student did not respond.

Table 12: Distribution of responses indicating faith commitment as a result of the RE program

Value	Frequency	%
SA	26	11.5%
MA	76	33%
U	68	30%
MD	40	18%
SD	16	7%
Missing	1	.5%
Total	227	100%

This result revealed that a majority of students did not feel that the program had affected their own faith development. This result needs to be viewed in light of later related findings.

Figure 19 presents the spread of responses according to how school groups perceived the influence of the religious education program on their faith development.

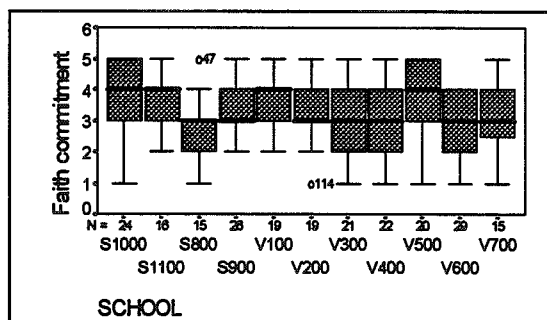


Figure 19: Students' perceptions of their faith commitment according to school groups.

These spreads reveal that there was a wide variation across the schools with both school-based and VCE/school-based programs having a range of positive and negative responses.

While this figures makes it difficult to isolate a common characteristic that may have influenced the result, Figure 20, shows that there was some difference according to the type of program.

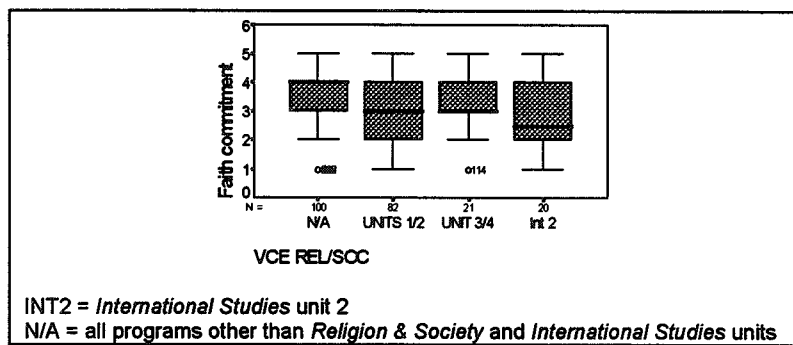


Figure 20: Students' perceptions of their faith development according to type of RE program - *Religion & Society* and *International Studies*.

The slight trend found earlier, where students studying *International Studies* unit 2 were less positive, is noticeable here. Also it is clear that the more positive spreads came from students in school-based programs and those studying VCE *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4.

Table 13 shows the responses to Item 11. We see that 54% of students believed that it was important to continue to develop their faith after they had left school but 46% disagreed.

Table 13: Distribution of responses showing perceptions of continued faith development after school

Values	Frequencies	%
SA	44	19%
MA	79	35%
U	54	24%
MD	34	15%
SD	15	6.5%
Missing	1	.5%
Total	227	100%

It would seem, from these figures, that a small majority of students had some understanding of religious education as being a life-long process. However, once again there is a wide variation in the spread of responses across schools as shown in Figure 21.

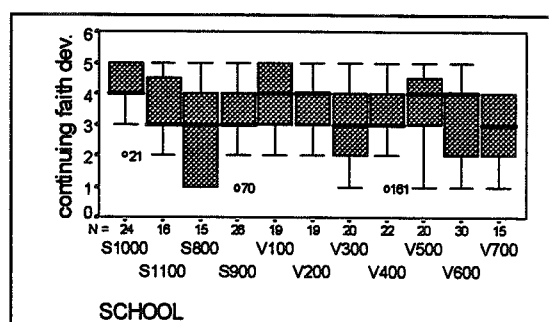


Figure 21: Students' perceptions of their continued faith development after they leave school.

S800 had the most negative spread of responses and S1000 had the most positive spread. Both these schools had school-based programs. Equally, there was a wide variation between schools with VCE/school-based programs. Therefore, it is difficult to identify an influential factor for this result.

Table 14 shows the responses to Item 16. We can see that 48% of students agreed that it was important for senior students to study the faith tradition as it contributed to their faith development but 52% disagreed with the statement.

Table 14: Distribution of responses indicating the importance of studying the faith tradition for senior students

Value	Frequencies	%
SA	46	20%
MA	63	28%
U	54	24%
MD	41	18%
SD	23	10%
Total	227	100%

The above table provides insights into students' perceptions of the effect of the cognitive aspect of the program. Indeed, it would seem from the wide variation in the spread of

responses according to school groups, as seen in Figure 22, that there could be some disparity in the levels of cognitive focus in the different programs.

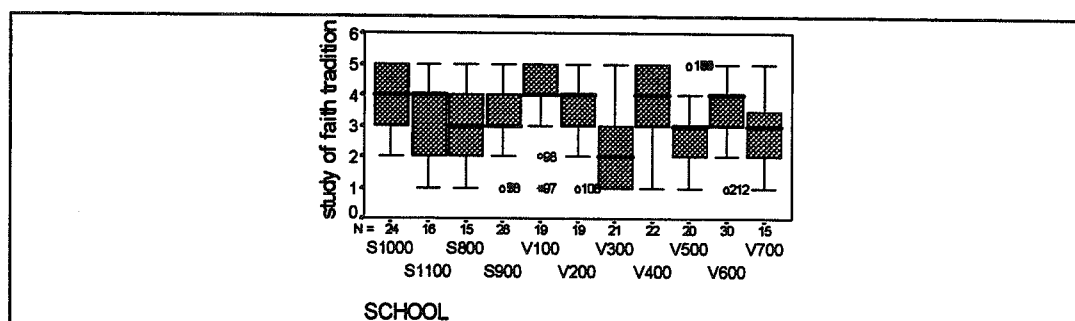


Figure 22: Students' perceptions of the importance of studying the faith tradition for senior students because of its contribution to their faith development according to school groups.

Indeed, the differences that have been shown here do raise a point of concern that such a wide variation can exist between schools. The implication is that some schools appear to be successful in promoting faith development through a study of the faith tradition while others, in their students' perceptions, are not achieving this. Clearly, it would be beneficial to identify influential factors in the more successful programs. Further insights into this response are sought by discussing it in connection with the variable, the intellectual challenge of the program, in the next chapter.

Figure 23 illustrates the differences for this result according to the type of program.

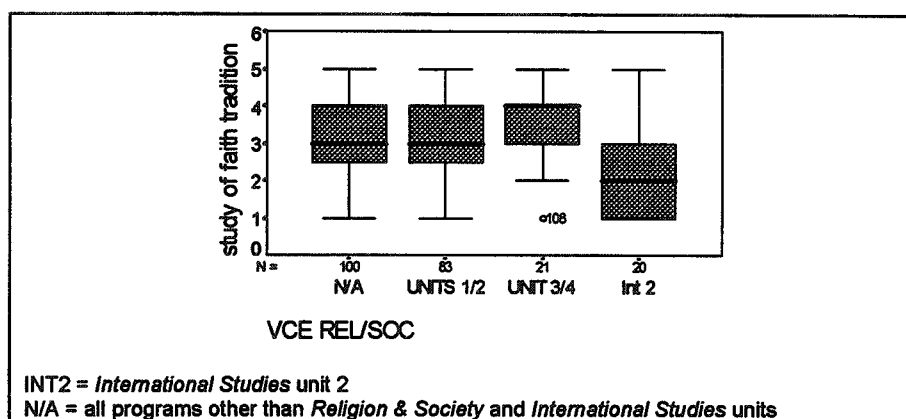


Figure 23: Students' perceptions of the importance of studying the faith tradition for senior students because of its contribution to their faith development according to type of RE program - VCE *Religion & society* and *International studies*.

It can be seen that students offering *International Studies* unit 2 were the least positive about the importance of studying the faith tradition. However, as these students came from one school, it is possible that other factors, such as teaching strategies, group dynamics, lack of opportunities for faith development and so on, could have influenced the result. Also, as mentioned earlier, while this unit was offered as part of the religious education program, its original intention was not to promote learning in the area of religion studies.

Other results showed that:

- schools with religious principals, single-sex schools and schools with school based programs had more positive results than others;
- the region, gender, country of birth, religious affiliation and frequency of Mass attendance did not appear to be influential factors.

Overall, there was a wide variation in the responses showing students perceptions of their faith development. In brief, significant findings were:

- less than half of the students felt that their faith commitment had developed as a result of the religious education program;
- a little more than half of the students believed that it was important to continue to develop their faith after they had left school;
- just under half of the students felt that it was important for senior students to study the faith tradition as it contributed to their faith development, and finally,
- the results showing wide variations in the responses from the different school groups suggest that some schools are distinctly more successful than others in promoting faith development in their respective religious education programs and the identification of influential factors could be useful to curriculum planners.

Spiritual development

The next variable to be discussed related to Items 9, 12 and 13. These were included to gain insights into students' perceptions of their own spiritual development:

- Item 9: I understand my own spirituality.
- Item 12: I have come to understand the great questions in life eg. Does God exist? Is there life after death? etc.
- Item 13: I believe that Jesus' teachings help to bring meaning to my life.

The correlation coefficients between Items 9 and 12, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$), Items 9 and 13, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$) and Items 12 and 13, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$) respectively, implies a positive level of agreement between these three items. Therefore, the mean scores were computed to create a single variable: spiritual development. Table 15 shows the distribution of the responses for this variable.

Table 15: Distribution of responses indicating spiritual development

Value	Frequency	%
SA	23	10%
MA	89	39%
U	78	34%
MD	35	16%
SD	2	1%
Total	227	100%

Forty-nine per cent of students agreed that the religious education program had promoted their spiritual development. However, 34% were undecided and 17% did not agree. It would seem, therefore, that the religious education program was unsuccessful in promoting spiritual growth for a large number of students.

Figure 24 presents students' perceptions of their spiritual development according to school groups.

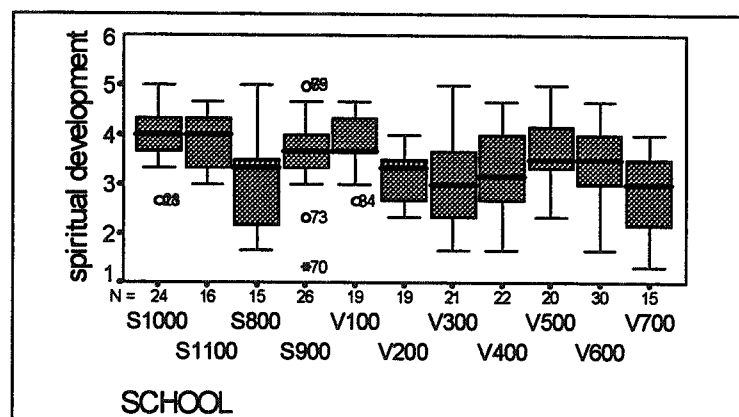


Figure 24: Students' perceptions of their spiritual development according to school groups.

As can be seen, there is a broad variation in the spread of responses between the different school groups and the pattern is similar to the responses for faith development. For instance, three of the schools with school-based programs appeared to be more positive than others with S800 being the only exception. Also, of schools which had a VCE/school-based program, V100 and V500 had most of their spreads on the positive side of undecided.

It was previously noted that school-based religious education programs emphasized the affective aspects of religious education with a particular focus on personal development. On the other hand, VCE/school-based had a cognitive emphasis in the classroom program and were less concerned with expressions of faith and spirituality. In the latter situation, the programs aimed to include retreats or reflection days and liturgies, and sometimes meditations and prayer to address affective learning. The major focus, however, was on the completion of work requirements as prescribed in the *VCE Religion and Society* study design. These factors are revealing when discussing the above results. S800 had a program that was influenced by the VCE Ethics unit and focused on the

completion of work requirements. This was the school-based program with less positive responses for this variable. V100 and V500, however, had VCE/school-based programs. The former included a documented unit on prayer and meditation. The latter included reflections and meditations throughout the program. As noted, these schools received the most positive response out of the VCE/school-based programs. The results here suggest that further exploration of such programs that attempt to secure a balance between cognitive and affective learning would be fruitful.

Figure 25 shows the responses according to the 'principal' category where schools with religious principals appeared more positive about their spiritual development than schools with lay principals.

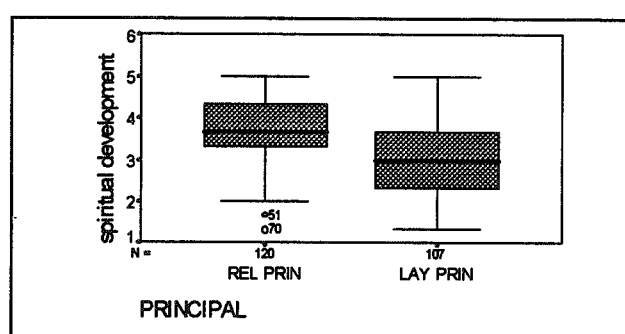


Figure 25: Students' perceptions of their spiritual development according to 'principal' category.

This could be linked to the above finding where, with one exception, schools with religious principals had school-based programs, that is, interpersonal and intrapersonal personal development were dominant features. It would seem that students responded positively to these features.

Other findings related to this variable are presented below:

- single sex schools had a slightly more favourable spread than coeducational schools;
- responses from overseas born students were slightly more favourable but Australian born students had a wider spread, and

- type of program, region, gender, religious affiliation and Mass attendance did not produce much variation in the responses.

Overall, the results showed that a minority of students felt that the program had influenced their spiritual development.

Knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition

Item 5 related to whether the program increased students' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition.

- Item 5: I have increased my knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition.

Table 16 presents the frequencies of responses to this variable.

Table 16: Distribution of responses indicating increased knowledge and understanding of Catholic faith tradition

Value	Frequency	%
SA	66	29%
MA	102	45%
U	28	12%
MD	24	11%
SD	7	3%
Total	227	100%

A large majority of students, 74%, indicated that their knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition had increased as a result of the program while 26% responded that it had not. Among the latter group were the 12% who remained undecided. It would seem, therefore, that the program met this objective for the majority of students.

Figure 26 indicates that there was, once again, quite a variation in the responses between schools with a few showing very positive results. Two schools noticeably had spreads ranging from very positive to very negative.

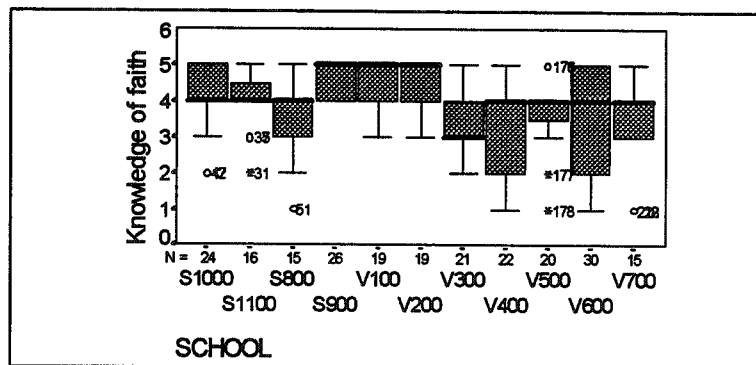


Figure 26: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to school groups.

It is not clear from this figure whether school-based or VCE/school-based programs were influential in effecting this outcome but Figure 27 shows that both VCE *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 and school-based programs had more positive results.

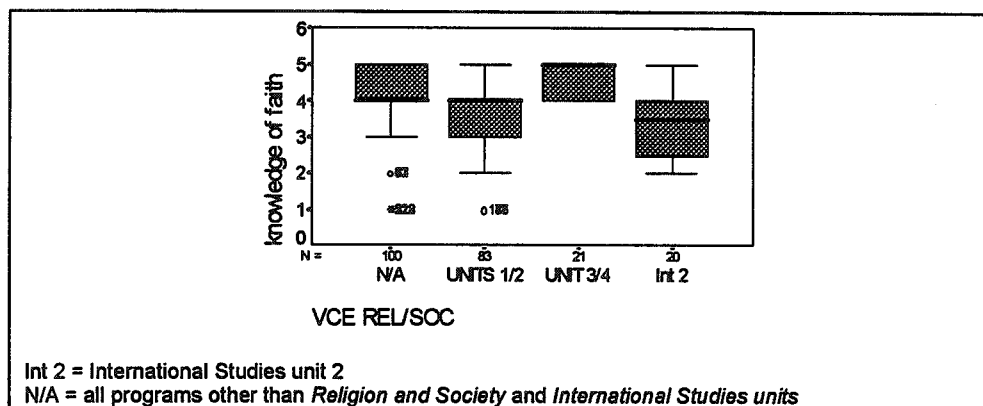


Figure 27: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to type of religious education program - VCE *Religion and Society*.

It is important to recall here that the schools offering school-based programs at Year 12 had, in fact, offered *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 to these students when they were in Year 11. This factor, therefore, could have had some bearing on these results. Also

clearly shown in Figure 27, are the less positive responses from students who studied VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2, and International Studies unit 2, compared to the rest of the students. When we consider the significantly large number of students who offered VCE units 1 and 2 compared to students who offered other types of combinations for their Year 12 program, implications arise regarding the appropriateness of VCE units 1 and 2 for religious education programs at Year 12.

Results according to the 'principal' category, as shown in Figure 28, indicate a more negative spread from schools with lay principals. This is fairly consistent with previous responses according to this variable.

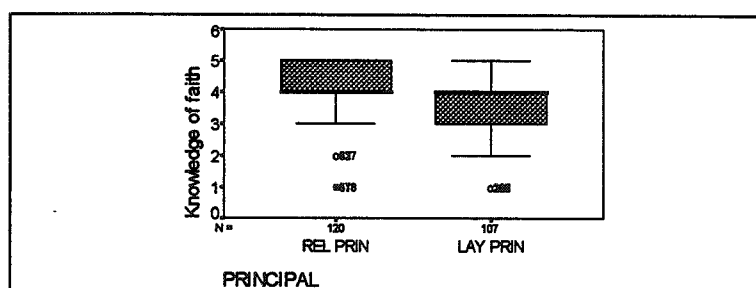


Figure 28: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to 'Principal' category.

Figure 29 shows an unusual variation in the responses according to the school-sex category. While all three groups had the same median, the spread from boys' schools was more positive than girls' and coeducational schools.

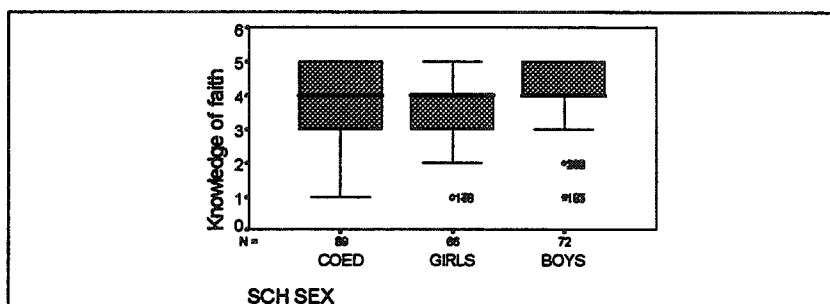


Figure 29: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to 'school-sex' category.

This finding is interesting when combined with the result according to gender shown in Figure 30 where male students were more positive about their knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition than female students.

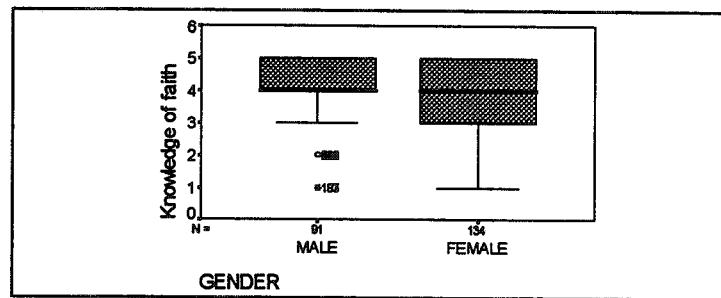


Figure 30: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to gender.

This result contrasts with earlier gender-related findings. An investigation into the more positive response from boys' schools combined with this one could be useful to discover any influential factors.

The regional factor also seemed to affect this result as shown in Figure 31.

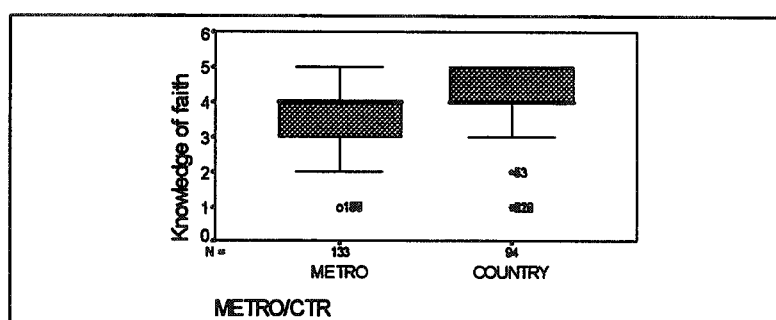


Figure 31: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to 'regional category'.

Metropolitan schools were less positive about the influence of the religious education program on their knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition. It is pertinent to note here that

with the results so far, when there have been differences in results according to the regional factor, responses from country schools have, generally, been more positive. One exception was the variable relating to tolerance of other religions.

Figure 32 also repeats findings for earlier variables, that is, the spread of responses from students born overseas was, overall, more positive than from those born in Australia although both groups had the median on *mostly agree*.

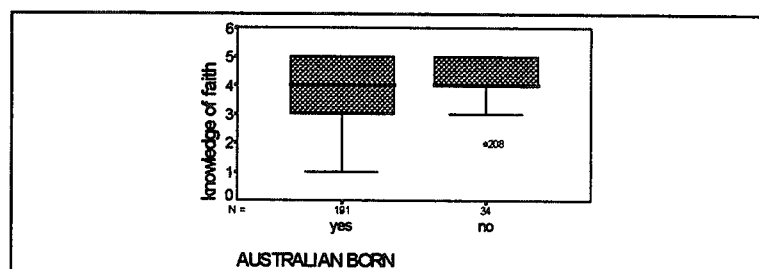


Figure 32: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to country of birth.

These findings continue to support the suggestion that a study of cultural factors on students' perceptions of learning in religious education could be relevant for curriculum planners in this area.

As could be expected, the frequency of Mass attendance drew the most favourable spread of responses from those who attended weekly or monthly. However, Figure 33 shows an interesting variation in the responses according to Mass attendance.

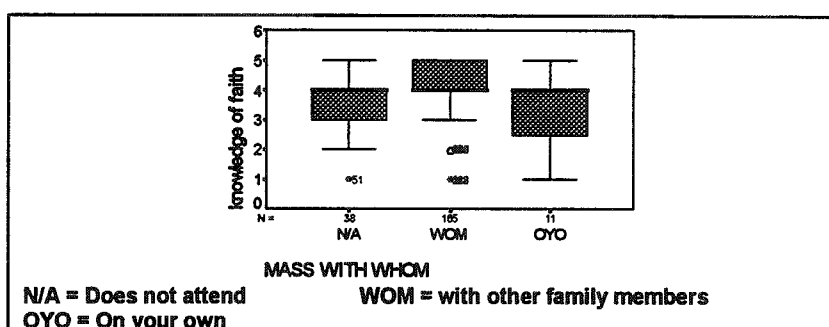


Figure 33: Students' perceptions of their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition according to family's attendance at Mass.

Those students who attended Mass with other family members were more positive about their knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition than those who attended alone. It would seem that family influence is an important factor in senior adolescent's perceptions of religion.

Overall, students were positive about their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition. However, the breadth and quality of these aspects and the accuracy of students' perceptions were not assessed by this study. Therefore, it is difficult to draw significant conclusions about these results. Some factors that appeared to influence the responses to this variable were:-

- School-based programs and VCE *Religions and Society* units 3 and 4 elicited more favourable responses regarding the knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition compared to programs that included VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 and *International Studies* unit 2.
- The more favourable responses from schools with religious principals, country schools and overseas students follow a trend similar to previous results.
- The male factor in relation to responses according to single-sex schools and gender provided a contrasting trend to earlier results and needs to be further examined.
- Family influence was an important factor in the development of students' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition.

Interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition

The following items 7, 8 and 14 were framed to elicit information on whether the religious education program increased students' interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition:

- Item 7: I am more interested in attending Mass and/or other Church services.
- Item 8: I am encouraged to become more involved in Church community and/or Christian youth groups.

- Item 14: I believe that it is important that I continue to be involved in the Catholic Church when I leave school.

The Spearman Rank correlations between Items 7 and 8, $r_s = +.6$ ($p < .000$), Items 7 and 14, $r_s = +.6$ ($p < .000$) and Item 8 and 14, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), implies a positive association. Therefore, the means of responses to these items were computed to form a new variable: interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition. The distribution of responses to this variable is shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Distribution of responses indicating interest and involvement in the Catholic Church

Value	Frequency	%
SA	3	1%
MA	49	22%
UD	79	35%
MD	67	29%
SD	29	13%
Total	227	100%

Less than a quarter of the students, 23%, indicated that they were influenced by the religious education program to become interested and involved in the Catholic faith tradition. A large majority did not agree. Of these, 35% were undecided and 42% responded negatively.

Figure 34 (p. 229) shows that, despite a wide variation in the spread of responses across schools, the median for the eleven groups reflected the negativity displayed by students to this variable.

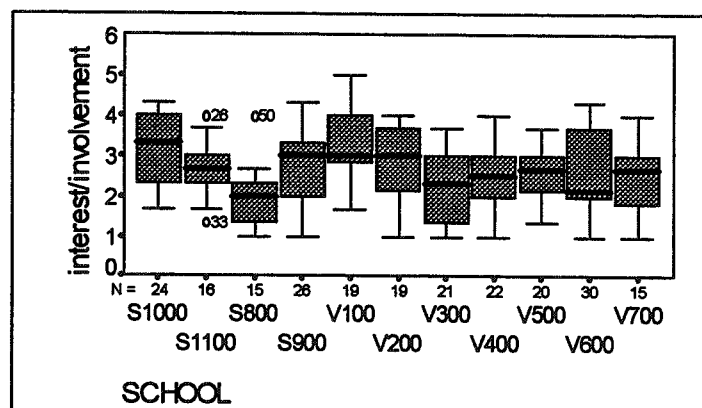


Figure 34: Responses indicating interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition according to school groups.

It was difficult to isolate any particular variable that might have been more influential in determining the outcome of this result. The negativity regarding involvement in the Catholic faith tradition was spread across schools with VCE/school-based and school-based religious education programs.

As could be expected, those who attended Mass or church services regularly were more positive about their interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition as a result of the program than those who never attended.

Other results with marginal differences were as follows:

- contrary to earlier findings, the spread for coeducational schools and Australian born students was marginally wider than for single-sex schools and overseas born students;
- the principal and regional school categories and gender made little difference to the responses, and
- family religious practice did not influence the result.

Overall, only a quarter of the students were influenced by their respective programs to become interested and involved in the Catholic faith tradition.

Importance of religion in the lives of students

Items 6 and 15 focused on the final variable for this section: students' perceptions of how important religion was to them.

- Item 6: I have greater understanding and appreciation of religion in my life.
- Item 15: I believe that Religious Education is a life-long process and not just a part of schooling.

Since these two items focused on different aspects of the importance of religion they have been treated separately. Table 18 presents the overall responses to Item 6.

Table 18: Distribution of responses indicating the importance of religion in the lives of student

Value	Frequency	%
SA	30	13%
MA	88	39%
U	50	22%
MD	39	17%
SD	20	9%
Total	227	100%

From the figures it can be seen that 52% of students indicated that religion was important in their lives as a result of the religious education program. However, 48% of students did not agree with the statement. Of these, 26% responded negatively and 22% were undecided. It would seem, therefore, that, for nearly half the students who were surveyed, the religious education program was not successful in this area.

Figure 35 shows that there was a wide variation in the way students from different school groups responded about the importance of religion for them.

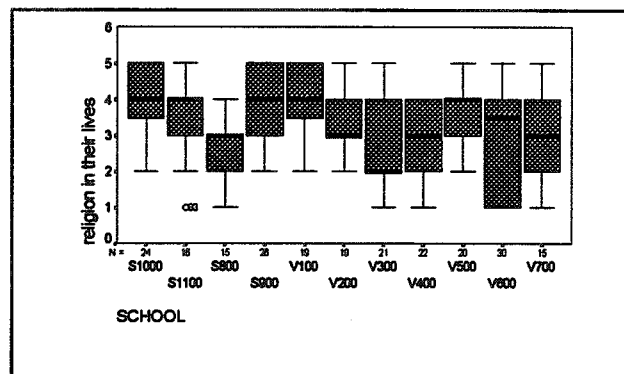


Figure 35: Responses indicating the importance of religion in the lives of students according to school groups.

The three schools with the most positive results were S1000, S900 and V100, that is, there were two schools with school-based programs which focused on affective learning. However, S900 had a particular emphasis on personal development. The third school had a VCE/school-based program. It must be remembered that this was the only school from the latter group that included a documented unit in prayer and meditation. It is possible that these features were influential in effecting this more favourable response.

A recurring trend was the less favourable response from students studying *International Studies 2* as shown in Figure 36. It is possible that the aims of this unit may not have had the same focus as the aims for religious education which affected these results.

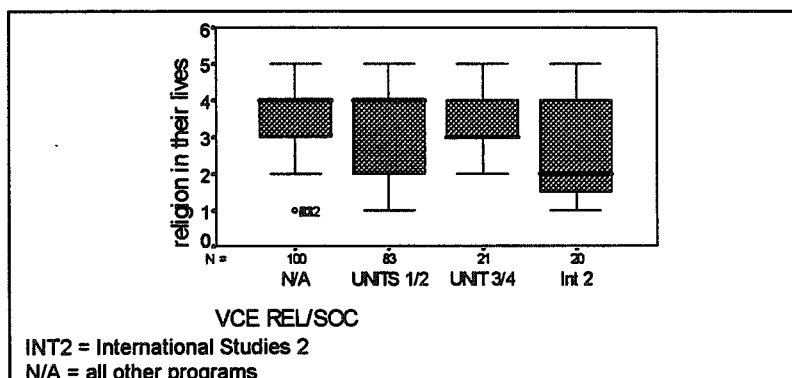


Figure 36: Responses indicating importance of religion in the lives of students according to type of RE program: *Religion and Society* and *International Studies*.

While there was a wide spread of responses from students in the different programs, it is clear that a study of *International Studies 2* had not influenced students to see religion as an important factor in their lives. The median for this group was on *mostly disagree*. Equally, the 21 students studying *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 were not as positive about the importance of religion as groups studying other types of religious education programs. However, both these groups made up single class groups from two different schools, therefore, other factors, such as teaching personalities and strategies, school

culture and so on, may have had some influence on this result. Overall, school-based programs elicited more favourable results as shown in Figure 37.

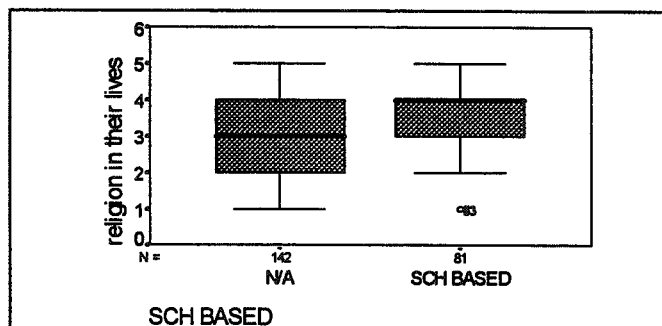


Figure 37: Responses indicating importance of religion in the lives of students according to type of RE program: school-based.

Thus, once again, programs that focused on the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of religious education, appeared to be influential in obtaining more positive responses. It would be useful for future planning to identify the features that led to the more favourable results.

Country of birth appeared to affect responses to this item as shown in Figure 38. Overseas born student had a more favourable spread and the median was on *mostly agree* compared to *undecided* for the other group.

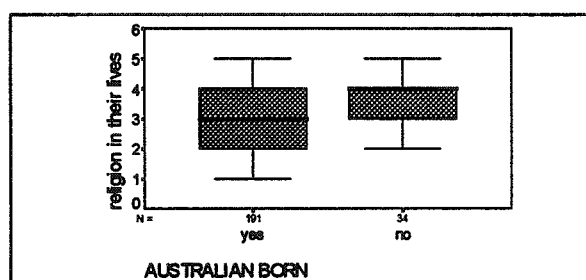


Figure 38: Responses indicating importance of religion in lives of students according to country of birth.

This more positive response from overseas born students has become a consistent feature with the results so far and further investigation could be beneficial for the design of future programs.

Other results showed that:

- two of the school characteristics, 'principal' and 'region' prompted slightly more favourable responses but 'school-sex' had little influence;
- gender, religious affiliation and frequency of Mass attendance had little effect on the results but family influence, as indicated by the family's Mass attendance, had a more positive effect.

Overall, just over half of the students felt that religion was more important in their lives as a result of the religious education program.

The second item related to the importance of religion asked for students' perceptions on whether religious education was a life-long process. Table 19 presents the overall response to this item.

Table 19: Responses indicating perceptions of religious education as a lifelong process

Value	Frequency	%
SA	66	29%
MA	94	42%
U	41	18%
MD	12	5%
SD	14	6%
Total	227	100%

These figures show that 71% of students agreed that the program had influenced them to perceive religious education as a lifelong process while 18% were undecided and 11% disagreed. Thus, some aspects of the program appear to be successful for two thirds of the students. However, the remaining third present a challenge for religious educators and suggest that this is an area that could need attention.

The results from the different schools for this item reflect the positive response as show in Figure 39.

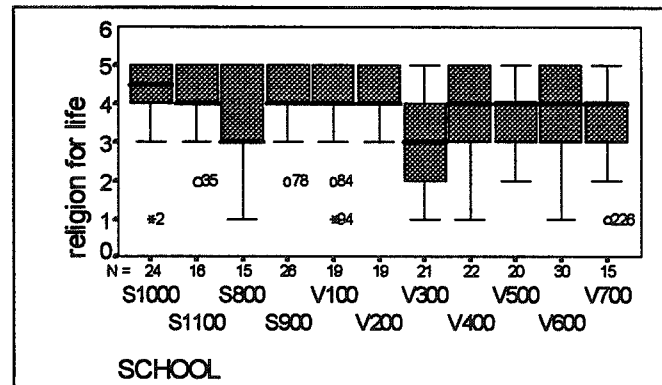


Figure 39: Responses indicating perceptions of religion as a life-long process according to school groups.

In particular, it shows that the four schools with school-based programs responded favourably. However, while schools with VCE-school-based programs were also generally positive, there was a more varied spread in this group.

Two elements that appeared influential in effecting more positive responses was the type of religious education program and the school characteristic, 'school-sex'. For the former, as shown in Figure 40, students from school-based programs agreed that religion was a life- long process with over 50% responding very positively. With the latter group, while the median was the same as the former group, there was a wider spread between *strongly agree* and *mostly disagree* and half the group showed less positive.

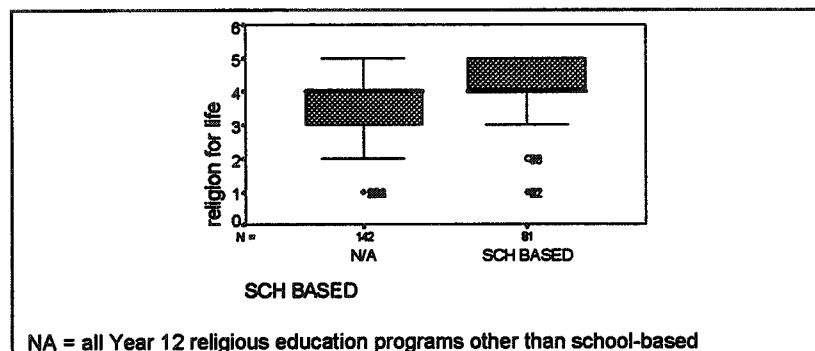


Figure 40: Responses indicating perceptions of religion as a life-long process according to type of religious education program - school-based

Boys' schools, as shown in Figure 41, were also more positive than girls' and coeducational schools which is, once again, consistent with some earlier findings and contradicts others.

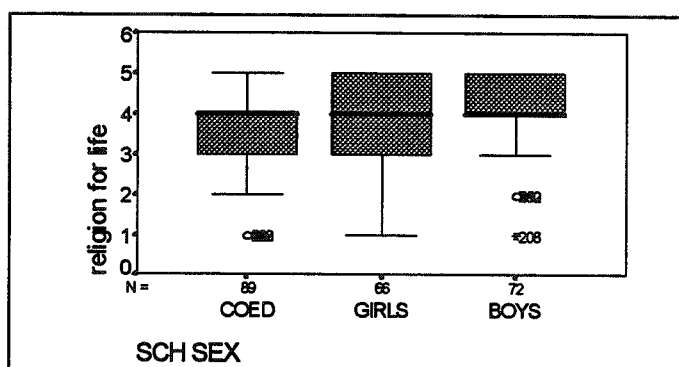


Figure 41: Responses indicating perceptions of religion as a life-long process according to 'school-sex'.

Once again, there is an implication that school culture could be the influential factor since the responses to this item according to gender were no different. The contrasting trends found in the results according to the 'school-sex' characteristic certainly provides a potential source for further research to isolate the factors that have led to this result.

Other results for this item showed that:

- students professing to be Christians, generally, agreed with the statement which suggests that religious affiliation did influence the result;
- the frequency of Mass attendance and the family's religious practice prompted more favourable responses;
- school characteristics, such as, 'principal' and 'region' appeared to make little difference to the results, and
- overseas born students were slightly more positive about this item.

Overall, as a result of the program, the majority of students were encouraged to see religious education as a life-long process.

It is useful to compare the positive results for Item 15, where 71% perceived religious education to be a life-long process, with the results for Item 11, where only 54% of students intimated that they believed that it was important to develop their faith after they left school. The apparent difference in these results could suggest that students do not see a connection between the two areas. Certainly, it would be most useful to discover factors that have affected these results so that religious educators can attempt to address them.

Summary and significance for this research study

This chapter presented the responses to Part A Section 1 of the questionnaires which focused on aspects of different areas of study in religious education. Also included were responses related to the relevant aspects of the background of the respondents.

The major findings were:

1. A large majority of students responded that the year 12 religious education program had not increased their interest in the study of other religions.
2. The majority of students indicated that their tolerance of other religions and their understanding the role of religion had increased as a result of the religious education program.
3. A majority of students felt that the religious education program had not contributed to the development of their faith commitment.
4. A small majority of students believed that the religious education program had encouraged them to see the importance of continuing to develop their faith and their relationship with God after they had left school.
5. Just over half of the students believed that a study of the faith tradition did not assist senior students to find meaning in their lives.

6. Just over half of the students felt that the religious education program had not contributed to their spiritual development.
7. A majority of students felt that their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition had increased as a result of the religious education program.
8. A majority of students felt that the religious education program had not encouraged them to become interested and involved in the Catholic faith tradition.
9. Just over half of the students felt that religion was more important in their lives as a result of the religious education program.
10. A large majority of students felt that, as a result of their religious education program, they saw religious education as a life-long process.
11. Students who professed to have no religion were influenced by the religious education programs to respond positively regarding different aspects related to the study of religion.

The minor findings were as follows:

12. There were a significant number of students studying VCE units 1 and 2 in religion as compared to those studying VCE units 3 and 4 which supported the contention that the former units were offered as a compulsory part of the program.
13. Girls' schools yielded more positive responses than boys' or coeducational schools to learning about religion and increased tolerance levels as a result of the religious education programs.
14. Gender made little difference to the responses indicating interest in learning about, and increased tolerance levels of, different religions as a result of the religious education program. However, male students responded more positively that their knowledge and understanding of, and interest and involvement in, the Catholic faith tradition had increased as a result of the religious education program.
15. Schools with students who were born overseas or who had parents born overseas were more positive about the influence of the religious education program on their

interest in and increased levels of tolerance of different religions and on their understanding of the role of religion.

This concludes the presentation of the results to Part A Section 1 and Part B of the questionnaire. However, the above results need to be viewed in light of the appropriate features for senior secondary religious education that were identified in the review of the theory of and approaches to the subject in the first part of this work. If there are certain features that educators and theorists perceive as desirable in promoting the cognitive and affective aspects of religious education (see p. 79) for senior secondary students, and if, in students' perceptions, programs are not achieving successful outcomes in these areas, certain issues emerge. One is the need to discover whether there is a congruence between students' perceived needs and the aims, as articulated by educators and religious education guidelines, for religious education at this level of secondary schooling. Another point is that attention may need to be given to the delivery of the program. Both these issues are raised and discussed in successive chapters of this work. In particular, the results of the rest of the questionnaire, which focused specifically on aspects of the delivery of the religious education classroom program, are presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Students' and teachers' perceptions of aspects related to the delivery of the religious education classroom program: Responses to the questionnaires

This chapter continues the presentation and analysis of the results from the questionnaires. It deals with responses from Part A Section 2 and subsequent sections which indicated students' perceptions of different features related to the delivery of the classroom program. At the end of the chapter a comparison of teachers' perceptions of their students' responses is made with the students' own perceptions of some of these aspects of the classroom program.

Responses to items in Part A - Section 2

The first five variables presented from Section 2 are interest in, meaning and relevance of, intellectual challenge and importance of, and attitude to the religious education classroom program. The presentation and analysis will be followed by an overall summary of these results. The last variable in this section - use of varied activities and resources - include a focus on specific learning activities. These will be presented at the end of the discussion of the items in Section 2 and will be linked with Item 47 in Section 3.

As discussed previously, the scoring of negative statements was reversed.

All items in Section 2 were prefaced with the following statement:

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response.

Interest in the religious education classroom program

Items, 20, 22, 27 and 29, sought information on the first variable in Section 2 which was interest in the subject. The items were:

- Item 20: I have found RE boring this year.
- Item 22: Generally, in RE classes this year, students appear interested in class work.
- Item 27: We do not usually study topics that have interest for senior students in Year 12 RE.
- Item 29: I am usually interested in what we do in RE this year.

Once again, for simplicity of presentation, these four items were combined into a single variable, that is, interest in the classroom religious education program (RE). The Spearman Rank correlations between Items 20 and 22, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), between Items 20 and 27, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), between Items 20 and 29, $r_s = +.6$ ($p < .000$), between Items 22 and 27, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$), between Items 22 and 29, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$) and between Items 27 and 29, $r_s = +.5$ ($p < .000$), imply a positive association between all items. Therefore, the process described earlier was followed where the means of responses to these items were computed to create a single new variable - interest in RE. In effect, a response of *strongly agree* to one item, *mostly agree* to another item and *undecided* to a third item, were combined to be *mostly agree* to the new variable: interest in RE. The computed scores from the new variable have been used to generate the tables and charts used in the following discussion.

It is interesting to note, in this section of the questionnaire, that a few students chose not to respond to some items. However, there does not appear to be any consistency

between the number of missed responses from one item to the next but for each item these missed responses are recorded in the tables.

The overall response of students' perceptions of their interest in RE, as shown in Table 20, indicates that only one third of the students responded positively.

Table 20: Distribution of responses indicating interest in RE

Value	Frequency	%
5	9	4%
4	64	28%
3	79	35%
2	66	29%
1	7	3%
Missing	2	1%
Total	227	100%

One third of the students were undecided, and a further third were negative. Thus, the majority of students were not interested in their religious education classroom programs. It is important to remember that religious education in these schools was compulsory, whereas most of their other subjects were elective. Further, their other subject choices were perhaps motivated by career aspirations, and so, unlike religious education, had more potential to be of interest to the students.

There were major variations in distributions of responses between schools as shown in Figure 42. It can be seen that there is a big variation in both the medians and spreads of the different groups.

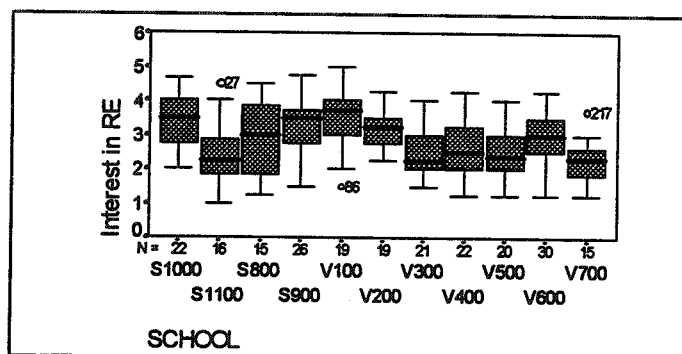


Figure 42: Responses indicating interest in RE.

The findings indicated that there were four schools, two with school-based and two with VCE/school-based programs, with positive responses. There were also two schools with quite negative responses. It is possible that students' interest was related to aspects of program content and delivery. It would seem, from these findings, that students' interest in the religious education classroom program can be promoted.

It is possible that one factor influencing students' interest is the type of program, as indicated in Figure 43.

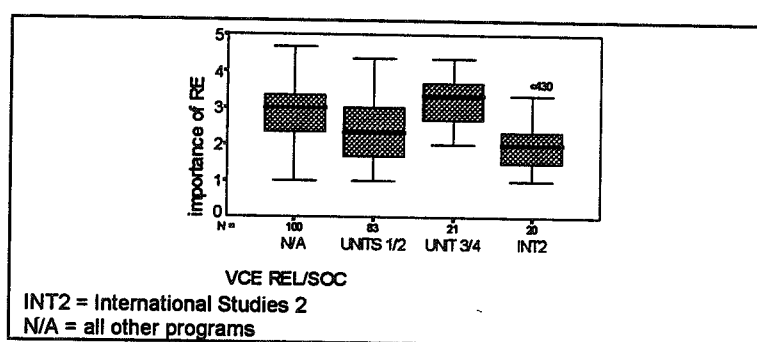


Figure 43: Responses indicating interest in RE according to type of RE program - *Religion and Society* and *International Studies*.

There are quite stark variations between the responses to different programs. Students responses in the *International Studies* and those in *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 were negative, while the students offering *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 were positive. The contribution of the subject to these students' overall academic score may have contributed to this interest. In any case, the influence of program type on the interest level of the students requires further exploration.

Other findings for this variable were:

- students in schools with religious principals were marginally more interested in RE;
- students in boys' schools were slightly more interested than those in girls' or co-educational schools;

- no overall gender differences were noted;
- responses of students from country schools were slightly more favourable, and
- religious affiliation, frequency of mass attendance, and country of birth of the students did not seem to be influential factors.

Meaning and relevance of the religious education classroom program

There were two items which sought responses for the second variable, that is, meaning and relevance of RE classes. These were:

- Item 24. RE classes have little meaning for me this year.
- Item 39. The topics we have studied in RE this year were relevant to me at this stage of my life.

A Spearman Rank correlation between these two items, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), implies a positive association. Thus, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create the single variable - meaning and relevance of RE.

Table 21 shows that 64% of students' offered unfavourable responses about the meaning and relevance of the religious education program. Of these, 33% were undecided and 27% were negative. Thirty-six percent were positive while 4% chose not to respond

Table 21: Distribution of responses indicating meaning and relevance of RE

Value	Frequency	%
SA	31	14%
MA	49	22%
U	76	33%
MD	51	22%
SD	12	5%
Missing	8	4%
Total	227	100%

It would appear that the program was not achieving its objectives for a majority of students. Further, the fact that a third of the students were undecided raises the

possibility that interest, meaning and relevance may not have been consistent features in the program.

Responses from school groups, as seen in Figure 44, showed a variation in spreads, ranging from positive to negative, which reflected the indecision referred to above.

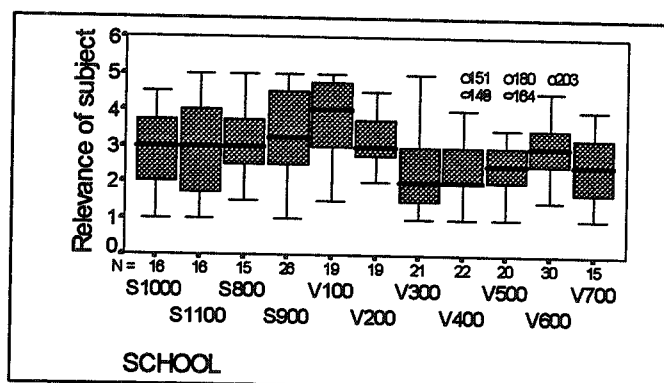


Figure 44: Responses indicating meaning and relevance according to school groups.

Given the wide variation in the results, it is difficult to isolate any one school characteristic as being more influential than another. However, a closer examination of the responses according to the types of religious education programs do appear to have had some impact as seen in Figure 45.

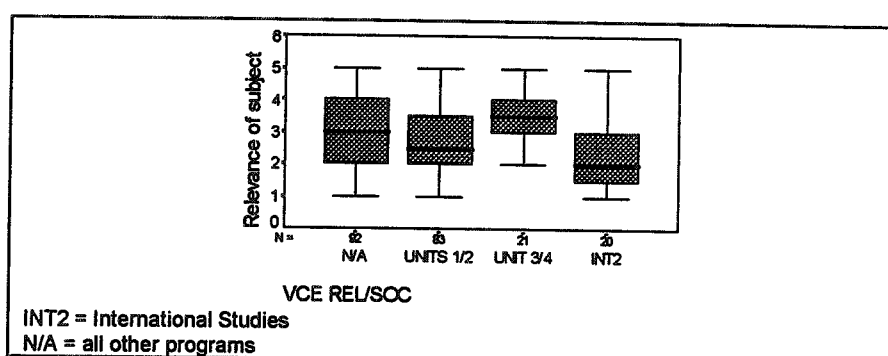


Figure 45: Responses indicating meaning and relevance according to type of RE program - Religion and Society and International Studies.

It can be seen that students studying VCE *International Studies* unit 2 were the least positive followed by the groups studying VCE *Religions and Society* units 1 and 2.

Students studying *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 and those with school-based programs were the most positive. The consistency of these findings continue to support the need to investigate the appropriateness of including these units in a Year 12 religious education program in Catholic schools.

Figure 46 presents an interesting result. It shows responses according to frequency of Mass attendance.

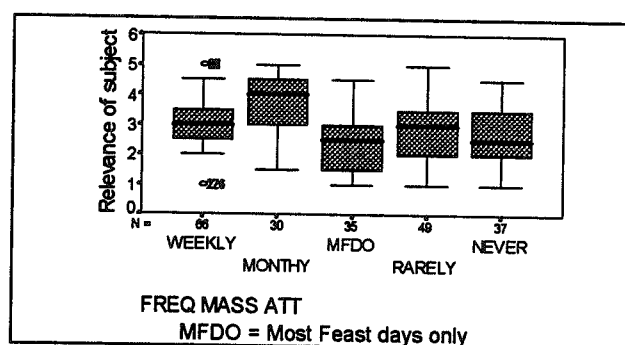


Figure 46: Responses indicating meaning and relevance according to frequency of attendance at Mass.

Interestingly, students who attended Mass on a monthly basis were more positive than the group that indicated a weekly attendance but since there may be a range of variables that contributed to this, it is difficult to attribute any particular reasons for this finding.

Other results were:

- students whose responses were marginally more positive about the meaning and relevance of RE classes came from schools with religious principals, from the country or who were born overseas;
- boys' and coeducational schools were more positive than girls' schools, and
- male students were slightly more positive about the meaning and relevance of their programs.

Intellectual challenge of the religious education classroom program

The next variable to be discussed is the intellectual challenge of religious education classes. Two items were included in the questionnaire to gather information on this:

- Item 28: This year most students find RE easier than other subjects.
- Item 31: Most students find Year 12 RE a challenging and intellectually stimulating subject.

A Spearman Rank correlation, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), implies a positive association between Items 28 and 31. Therefore, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a single variable: the intellectual challenge of RE. Table 22 presents the frequency of these responses.

Table 22: Distribution of responses indicating RE as an intellectually challenging subject

Value	Frequency	%
SA	9	4%
MA	21	9%
U	45	20%
MD	103	45%
SD	42	19%
Missing	7	3%
Total	227	100%

Only 13% of students perceived the Year 12 religious education program to be intellectually challenging, thus, a significant majority were not challenged by the program. Of these, 64% were negative, 20% were undecided and 3% chose not to respond.

Figure 47 (p. 247) presents an interesting variation in the spread of responses according to school groups. Apart from two schools with school-based programs, all others had a large percentage of their responses on the negative side of *undecided*. A distinguishing feature of these two schools was that they each had a seminar program, that is, single days, spread over the school year. Responses for other school-based or VCE/school-based programs were equally negative.

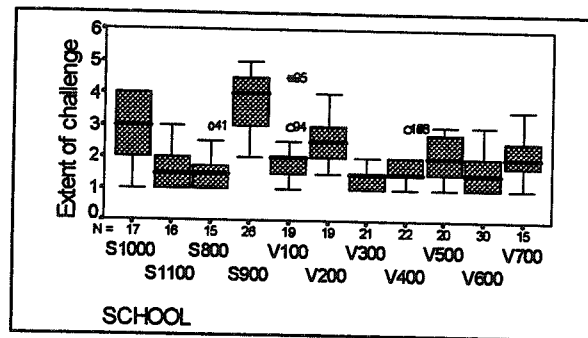


Figure 47: Responses indicating the intellectual challenge of RE according to school groups.

In Figure 48, the difference between school-based programs and VCE/school-based programs can be seen. Obviously, the responses from the two schools referred to earlier would have impacted on this result.

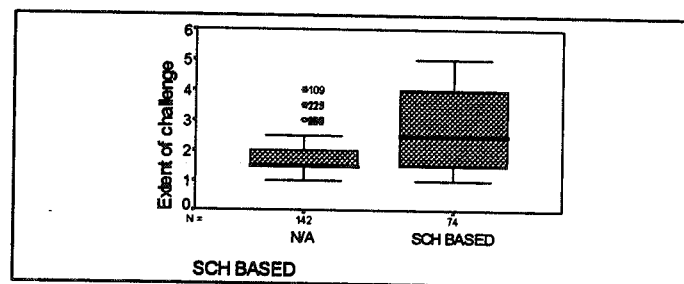


Figure 48: Responses indicating intellectual challenge of RE according to type of RE program - school-based.

The types of religious education programs offered by the schools in this research study were identified earlier. It was found that the school-based programs focused more on affective learning while the VCE/school-based program gave greater emphasis to cognitive learning in the classroom program. It was also noted that this latter approach was seen as one way of including a serious study in religion that was knowledge based and which, therefore, had the potential to improve the status of the subject. The responses, shown in the above figure, present a contradiction to such a belief. It would seem that, while the overall result regarding the intellectual challenge of the subject was

negative, the two schools with the more positive results were those that had a particular focus on the affective aspects of religious education.

Figure 49 shows that schools with religious principals had a much wider spread of responses than schools with lay principals where the spread was on the negative side of *undecided*. This was a repeat of the pattern in other results noted earlier.

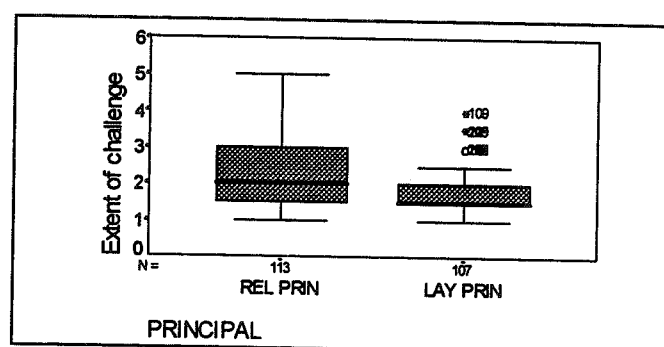


Figure 49: Responses indicating the intellectual challenge of RE according to 'principal' category.

Responses to other variables showed that:

- school-sex and gender made little difference to the response;
- country schools and overseas born students were marginally more favourable than metropolitan schools and Australian born students respectively, and
- religious affiliation and religious practice did not appear to be influential factors.

It is important to note here the apparent conflict that exists between the responses to Item 5 regarding knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition. Seventy-one per cent of students believed their knowledge and understanding had increased as a result of the religious education program. However, the results here suggest that only 13% of the students found the program intellectually challenging. These results suggest a certain tension related to the knowledge components of the programs which may need to be addressed. It could be that certain aspects related to the delivery of the program, such as the teachers' knowledge and experience; the use of resources, and the employment of

teaching strategies that were appropriated for senior secondary students, raised some problems for students' learning. Certainly, further investigation of this area could be useful.

Importance of the subject - religious education

The next variable to be discussed is students' perceptions of the importance of the subject, religious education. Four statements were included for this variable.

- Item 17: RE is an important subject in Catholic schools.
- Item 18: This year I give as much study time to RE as I do to my other subjects.
- Item 40: I believe that, in general, most students feel that Year 12 RE makes an important contribution to their development.

A Spearman Rank correlation between Items 17 and 18, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$), between Items 17 and 40, $r_s = +.5$ ($p < .000$), and between Items 18 and 40, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$), implies an association between these three variables. Therefore, their means were computed to create a single variable: importance of RE. Table 23 presents the frequencies of the responses for this variable.

Table 23: Distribution of responses indicating importance of RE

Value	Frequency	%
SA	2	1%
MA	42	18%
U	84	37%
MD	72	32%
SD	27	12%
Total	227	100%

Overall, 81% of students provided negative responses regarding the importance of religious education. Of these, 44% disagreed and 37% were undecided. Nineteen per cent thought religious education was important. These results reflect the trend observed in the previous finding where a significant majority of students were negative about aspects of the classroom program.

A closer analysis of the results shown in Figure 50 indicates, once again, there was wide variation in the spreads and the medians according to school groups.

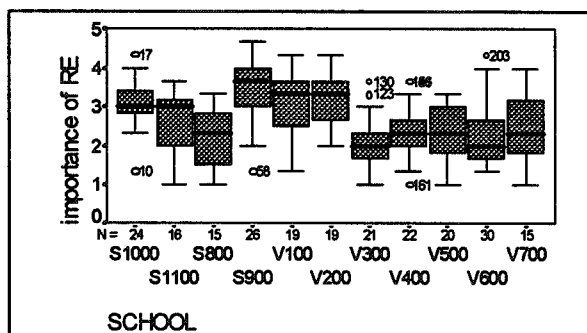


Figure 50: Responses indicating importance of RE according to school groups.

In general, school-based and VCE/school-based programs produced both positive and negative results and these findings are made clearer at Figure 51.

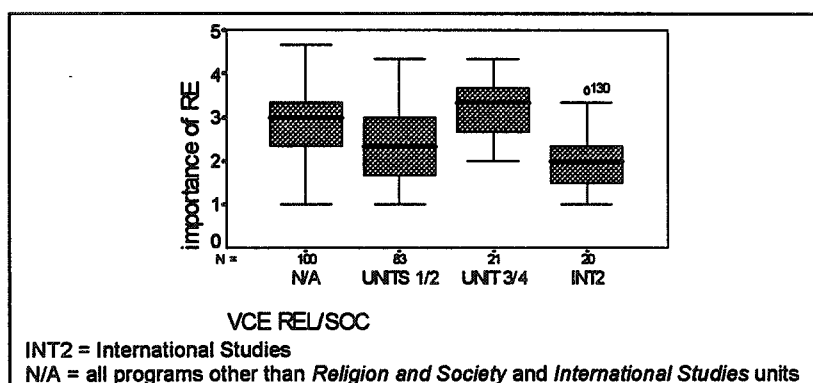


Figure 51: Responses indicating importance of RE according to type of RE program - Religion and Society and International Studies.

Similar to earlier findings, the least favourable responses came from students studying *International Studies* unit 2 and the study of VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2. This continues to support the assertion that these units may not be appropriate for Year 12 religious education.

Other results with marginal findings were:

- the three school characteristics followed earlier trends with schools with religious principals, boys' schools and country schools responding slightly more favourably;
- gender, country of birth and religious affiliation did not appear to be influential factors with responses generally negative;
- there was a slightly more positive response from those who had no religion which repeated the pattern observed earlier, and
- religious practice made little difference to the responses but, once again, family Mass attendance was influential, thus supporting earlier findings.

Religious education at Year 12: Should it be optional?

In order to add a further dimension to the above results, Item 19 was included in the questionnaire to discover students' perceptions of the importance of RE. Students were asked for their perceptions of whether religious education should be optional for Year 12 students in a Catholic school.

- Item 19: RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools.

This statement was one which was treated as negative, thus, the scoring was reversed. Table 24 shows that a large majority, 75% of students agreed with the statement, 11% were uncertain and 13% disagreed, while one student chose not to respond.

Table 24: Distribution of responses indicating whether Year 12 RE should be optional

Value	Frequency	%
SA	123	54%
MA	47	21%
U	25	11%
MD	14	6%
SD	17	7%
Missing	1	1%
Total	227	100%

These responses were clearly negative regarding the compulsory nature of religious education and continued the trend of responses towards the classroom program shown

so far. Given the optional nature of other subjects at this level, this finding is not unexpected. The responses at Figure 52 showed the negativity was not confined to particular schools but was spread across school-based and VCE/school-based programs although there was some variation in the spreads. This box-plot needs to be interpreted in reverse order to others, thus, 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *mostly agree*, 3 remains at undecided, 4 = *mostly disagree* and 5 = *strongly disagree*.

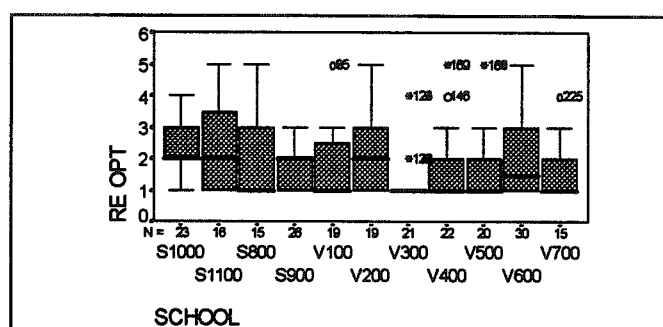


Figure 52: Responses indicating whether Year 12 RE should be optional according to school groups.

The consistency of these results across schools make it difficult to identify any one influential factor. It would seem, that students clearly prefer the subject to be optional.

Students' attitude to the religious education class

The next variable, students' attitude to religious education class, provides something of an overview of students perceptions of the religious education classroom program. Three statements were included to measure attitude levels.

- Item 21: Most students do their homework and come prepared for RE class.
- Item 25: Students often tend to ignore instructions and directions in RE classes this year.
- Item 36: Usually, students are noisy and disruptive in RE class.

The Spearman Rank correlations between Items 21 and 25, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$), between Items 21 and 36, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .000$), and between Items 25 and 36, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .000$),

implies that we would be correct in assuming a positive association between the three items in contributing to a single variable: attitude to RE.

A distribution of responses for this variable is shown in Table 25

Table 25: Distribution of responses indicating attitude to RE

Value	Frequency	%
SA	2	1%
MA	29	13%
U	78	34%
MD	81	36%
SD	30	13%
Missing	7	3%
Total	227	100%

On balance, we can see that a significant majority of students were not positive in their attitudes to the program. Overall, 49% were negative, 34% were undecided, 14% responded positively and 3% chose not to respond. A negative attitude to a subject will undoubtedly affect the overall learning that takes place and will seriously negate any real benefits the program might have to offer. This result is obviously linked to other findings related to the classroom program.

Responses according to school groups show a wide disparity in attitude between the spreads of different schools as seen in Figure 53, thus, making it difficult to identify any influential elements.

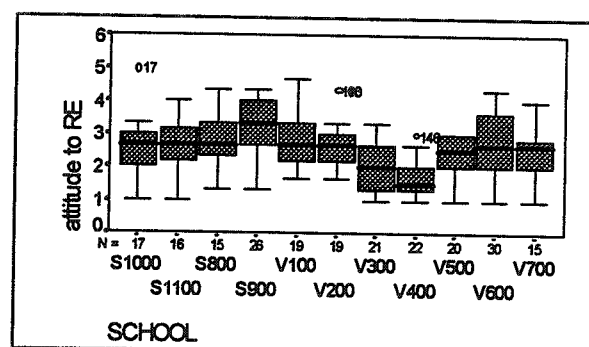


Figure 53: Responses indicating attitude to RE according to school groups.

Boys' schools were more favourable than either the coeducational schools or girls' schools as shown in Figure 54. Interestingly, girls' schools had a wider spread of responses than the other two groups.

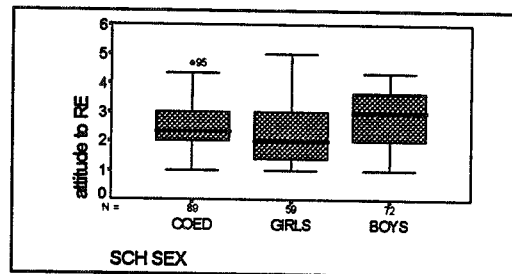


Figure 54: Responses indicating attitude to RE according to 'school-sex' category.

Also pertinent, and following the trend previously observed, is the identical response of two groups, those who attended Mass weekly and those who never attended. A possible implication, as with preceding variables, is that the broader religious education program offered in Catholic schools on these students may have had a positive impact on these students.

Other results showed that:

- that type of program appeared to make little difference to this result;
- schools with religious principals and schools from the country were slightly more positive;
- male students were slightly more positive, and
- religious affiliation, country of birth and family religious practice made little difference to the results.

Overall, a large majority of students responded negatively to the five variables - interest in, meaning and relevance of, intellectual challenge of, importance of and attitude to the religious education classroom program. Of these, a significant number of students were undecided about their response.

In brief the results showed:

- a significant majority of students responded that the program was not intellectually challenging;
- a significant majority of students displayed negative attitudes to the program;
- an overwhelming majority believed that Year 12 religious education should be an optional subject.
- a consistent result was the less positive response from students studying *International Studies* unit 2 and *Religion and Society*, units 1 and 2;
- students from schools with school-based programs consistently responded more favourably, sometimes with a significant difference and at others, with a marginal difference;
- schools with religious principals consistently showed more favourable responses which was a repeat of the findings to some of the variables in Section 1;
- in general, boys' schools appeared to be more positive and girls' schools appeared to be the least positive, which, in light of the findings of the responses in Section 1 where girls' schools consistently had provided more favourable responses, presents a potentially complex finding;
- male students were marginally more positive, overall, than female students which reflected the findings of the variables from Section 1, relating to interest and involvement in the Catholic Church;
- country schools appeared to be consistently more positive than metropolitan schools;
- in general, while students who were born both in Australia or overseas displayed negative attitudes to the subject, overseas born students were more positive;

- the groups who attended Mass with their families consistently were more positive than those who attended alone; and finally,

These findings bring us to the end of the discussion of the responses to these five variables that focused on some aspects of the classroom religious education program.

Learning experiences in the religious education classroom

The last three items in Section 2 focused specifically on learning activities and resources used in the program. These are Items 30, 33 and 38 and they are treated separately since each deals with a particular aspect of the classroom learning experience.

Balance between written and practical activities

- Item 30: I believe there is a good balance between written and practical activities in RE this year.

Table 26 presents the frequencies of responses indicating whether or not there was a balance of practical and written activities in the classroom program.

Table 26: Distributions of responses indicating balance of practical and written activities

Value	Frequency	%
SA	18	8%
MA	68	30%
U	44	19%
MD	56	25%
SD	32	14%
Missing	9	4%
Total	227	100%

The majority of students believed that there was an imbalance between practical and written activities. Only 38% agreed with the statement while 39% disagreed and 19% were undecided. The fact that 58% of students did not perceive the activities to be well-balanced raises the question as to whether students' different learning styles were catered for in the program. If not, this could be a factor that provoked some of the negative responses related to the classroom program.

Figure 55 presents a clearer picture of how individual groups' perceptions of the balance of their learning activities changed according to school groups.

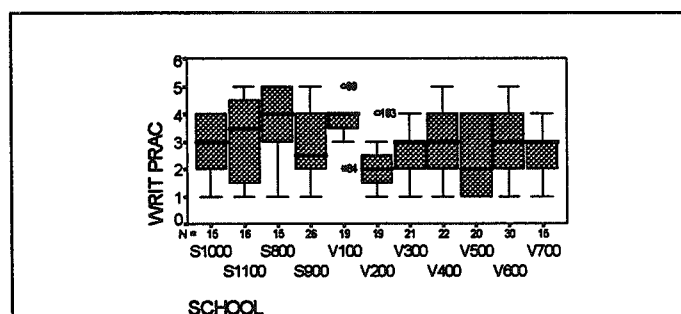


Figure 55: Responses indicating balance of learning activities according to school groups.

The results show a wide range from very positive to very negative and imply that there is little consistency in the practice of learning and teaching strategies across schools. This could be one factor that has caused some of the negativity in earlier results. It also suggests that some schools are more successful than others and further research to identify contributory factors could be illuminating.

Use of resources

The next item explores whether up-to-date resources were used and whether they did stimulate interest among students.

- Item 33: I believe that usually there are not enough stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources used in RE classes this year.

This was a negative statement expressed in positive terms, therefore the scoring was reversed. In Table 27 the frequencies of the responses to this item are presented.

Table 27: Distribution of responses indicating use of stimulating and up-to-date resources

Value	Frequency	%
SA	18	8%
MA	44	19%
U	67	29%
MD	65	29%
SD	24	11%
Missing	9	4%
Total	227	100%

Overall, 69% of students did not agree that the resources had been stimulating and up-to-date. Of these, 40% were negative, 29% showed uncertainty and 28% were positive about the resources being up-to-date and stimulating and 4% chose not to respond.

Figure 56 presents a break-down of these responses according to school groups.

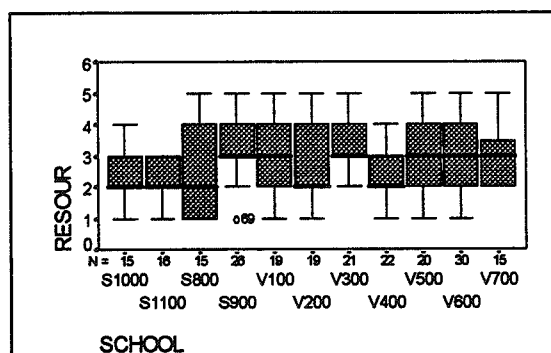


Figure 56: Responses indicating stimulating and up-to-date resources according to school groups.

It can be seen that the medians from five of the seven schools with VCE/school-based programs were more positive than three of the four schools with school-based programs.

Variation of learning activities

Item 38 looked at the variation of learning activities used in the classroom

- Item 38: I believe that most students would prefer to have more varied activities than we usually have eg. meditation.

An agreement with the above statement would imply that the respondent did not feel that there was enough variation in the activities used. This is the interpretation used in the discussion of these results. Table 28 presents the responses to the statement.

Table 28: Distribution of responses indicating use of varied activities

Value	Frequency	%
SA	78	34%
MA	85	37%
U	35	16%
MD	19	8%
SD	8	4%
Missing	2	1%
Total	227	100%

These findings show that a significant majority of students, that is, 71%, indicated that they would prefer more varied activities to be used in the religious education class. Another 16% displayed uncertainty and only 12% disagreed with the statement. One per cent of students chose not to respond.

Figure 57 presents a further breakdown of these responses according to school groups.

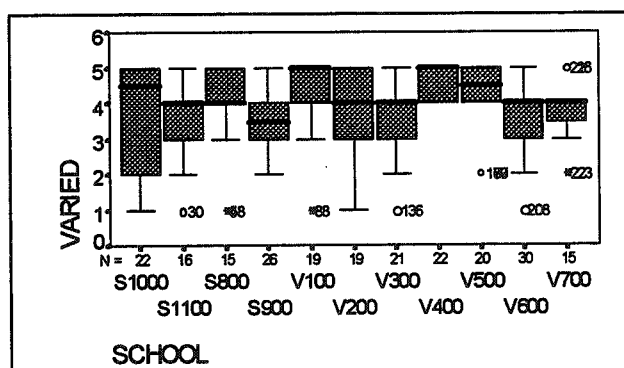


Figure 57: Responses indicating use of varied activities according to school groups.

It can be seen that, while there was a wide variation in the spread across school-based and VCE/school-based programs, approximately half of the total sample had their responses ranging from *strongly agree* to *undecided*. It would seem that these students agreed that there was need for more variation in activities. Only a few schools had students who disagreed with the statement. These findings imply that there is a need for

more variation in the learning activities offered in religious education classrooms. A more detailed picture about students' perceptions of the learning activities is provided by the next set of results. These relate to the findings for Item 47 from Section 3 of the questionnaire.

Specific learning activities

Items 47 a - p were included to provide more information on a range of learning activities in terms of how helpful students perceived them to be and in terms of how often they were used in different classrooms. Students were asked to respond on a 5-point scale where 1 was *most helpful* and 5 was *least helpful*. For purposes of discussion the numbers have been translated into the following descriptions:

- 1 = Most helpful
- 2 = Somewhat helpful
- 3 = Possibly helpful
- 4 = Not very helpful
- 5 = Least helpful
- NA = Not applicable

Table 29 (p. 261) presents a summary of the findings in order of the most used activities in the classroom programs. It includes, both, the total number of students who listed an activity as one which they had experienced and the number of students who responded with *not applicable* for a particular activity.

Table 29: Responses indicating the most commonly used learning activities according to students' perceptions of how helpful they were

Activities	Most helpful	Somewhat helpful	Possibly helpful	Not very helpful	Least helpful	NA	Frequency of usage	% (usage)
discussions	95	66	49	11	5	1	226	99.5%
retreats	131	31	25	8	11	21	206	91%
films/videos	46	69	59	23	8	22	205	90%
written assignments	29	42	57	35	41	23	204	90%
prayer, formal/informal	19	33	62	42	35	36	191	84%
guest speakers	73	43	33	24	16	38	189	83%
research activities	31	43	52	36	25	40	187	82%
Mass preparation	7	28	48	54	47	43	184	81%
reflection days	66	35	40	19	11	56	171	75%
prepared talks/tutorials	24	41	41	27	23	71	156	69%
oral presentations	13	35	45	34	29	71	156	69%
meditation	73	25	24	14	16	75	152	67%
role plays/drama	20	30	37	21	21	98	129	57%
community work	38	26	19	7	15	122	105	46%
pastoral programs for juniors	15	24	34	12	12	130	97	43%
other	3	2	1	2	4	215	12	5%

It can be seen from the above table that the ten most commonly used activities according to student responses were class discussions (99.5%), retreats (91%), films/videos (90%), written assignments (90%), prayer, formal and informal (84%), guest speakers (83%), research activities (82%), Mass preparation (81%), reflection days (75%) and prepared talks/tutorials (69%).

Table 30 presents a summary of whether a learning activity was helpful or not according to students' perceptions. This is based on a combination of responses from the *most helpful* and *somewhat helpful* categories for 'helpful' and a combination of the *not very helpful* and *least helpful* categories for 'not helpful'. *Possibly helpful* was included as a separate column since it appeared to convey some indecision.

Table 30: Summary of activities according to students' perceptions of whether they are helpful or not

Activity	helpful (%)	possibly helpful (%)	not helpful (%)
retreats	79%	12%	9%
discussions	71%	22%	7%
meditation	64%	16%	20%
guest speakers	62%	17%	21%
community work	61%	18%	21%
reflection days	59%	23%	18%
films/videos	56%	29%	15%
prepared talks/tutorials	42%	26%	32%
pastoral programs for juniors	40%	35%	25%
research activities	40%	28%	32%
role plays/drama	39%	29%	32%
written assignments	35%	28%	37%
oral presentations	30%	29%	41%
prayer, formal/informal	27%	33%	40%
Mass preparation	19%	26%	55%

The ten most helpful activities as perceived by students were retreats (79%), discussions (71%), meditation (64%), guest speakers (62%), community work (61%), reflection days (59%), films/videos (56%), prepared talks/tutorials (42%), pastoral programs involving junior students and research activities (both 40%).

The purpose of presenting the two tables, 26 and 27, was to discover if those activities most commonly used in the religious education classrooms were the ones which students perceived to be of most benefit to their individual learning.

Retreats and discussions were among the first two on both lists. Certainly, the students' perceptions of retreats supports earlier findings by Rossiter (1988) and others who noted the very positive response from students to their experiences of retreats and camps. Discussions, also, have been a popular choice of activity in RE classes for many years now, especially in light of the experiential approach that is proposed in the Melbourne guidelines. However, some of the problems related to excessive use of discussions noted in the earlier part of this work could be relevant to the classrooms under investigation, namely, the practice of uninformed discussions. It is not clear whether students perceived discussions to be more helpful because of the informal, less stressful class atmosphere or whether, in fact, class discussions did enhance their own learning.

One conclusion that could be drawn from the above responses is that the students involved in this study appeared to favour affective learning activities. This could be a reflection of classroom practices that had a distinct focus on cognitive learning and not enough attention was given to the affective aspects of religious education. In such cases, the students' responses could be seen as reactive. It is possible that classroom programs that featured affective learning as the dominant factor, with little attention given to an intellectual study of the subject, may have produced different results.

What is worthy of attention are those activities that were not common to both lists. Three of the ten most common learning activities: written assignments, prayer and Mass preparation, received a poor response from students in terms of their helpfulness, 35%, 27% and 19% respectively.

Overall, the responses related to the learning activities were fairly mixed and there was inconsistency in practices between different school groups. This would seem to support the previous suggestion that there should be more communication between schools to promote the sharing of best teaching practice. In brief the findings showed:

- a majority of students across school groups agreed that more varied activities should be used in the religious education class;
- some activities which students were more positive about, such as meditation, were not as widely used while others which were used more consistently, such as written tasks, were perceived to be less beneficial to the learning process, and
- in general, there was considerable negativity from students regarding the use of stimulating and up-to-date resources and this was more pronounced from students with school-based programs.

Responses to items in Part A - Sections 3 and 4

The final two sections of the questionnaire, 3 and 4, contained open-ended questions which were included to provide additional information gained from the first two sections. Items 41 to 43 focused on specific learning activities and invited students to comment further on each. Each statement required an open-ended response relating to specific aspects of the religious education classroom program

- Item 41: Overall, I do/do not enjoy the discussions we have in RE this year because...
- Item 42: In general, I, personally, have/have not found Year 12 RE classes interesting because ...
- Item 43: It is/is not important to have guest speakers in for the RE program because...

Table 31 shows the frequencies of students who agreed or disagreed with the statements.

Table 31: Responses to Items 41, 42, 43 indicating students' perceptions of specific learning activities

	Focus	agree	%	disagree	%	missing	%	Total	%
Item 41	value of discussions	154	68%	57	25%	16	7%	227	100%
Item 42	interest of RE classes	121	53%	2	1%	104	46%	227	100%
Item 43	value of guest speakers	172	76%	40	18%	15	6%	227	100%

Overall, it can be seen that the two activities, class discussions and guest speakers were valued by students. This supports the findings from Items 47a and 47n. Only 53% agreed that RE classes were interesting while 46% refrained from responding. Some of those in the latter category did offer a comment. The comments from each of the above items have been collated and broadly grouped according to the following features: relevance to students, sharing of experiences, class atmosphere, faith development, contribution to VCE score and challenging activities. These are presented here in two sets of tables each, one in support of and one against the item. Accordingly, Tables 32 and 33 provide a summary of the positive and negative responses to Item 41.

Class discussions

From the figures in Table 32 it would appear that, overall, 186 students or 82% offered suggestions as to why discussions in religious education class were useful.

Table 32: Reasons supporting class discussions as a learning activity

Up-to-date, relevant, learn about different issues	76	34%
Share opinions, listen to one another, get to know one another, a bonding experience	46	20%
Increase understanding of the topic, help with work requirements, help make choices,	21	9%
Relaxing class, stimulating and lively, personal	15	7%
Reflects on our lives and community in faith	14	6%
Sometimes interesting, depends on topic	9	4%
Challenging and new experience	5	2%
Total	186	82%
No response	41	18%
Total	227	100%

This is an increase in the number of students, 154, who responded positively to Item 41 as shown in Table 31. It is possible that those students who, overall, refrained from responding favourably were able, on further reflection, to draw some positive qualities from their experiences. Seventy-six students or 34% found class discussions were 'relevant' and 'up-to-date' and felt that they 'learnt something', 5 or 2% said that the discussions were 'challenging' and offered a 'new experience' and 21 or 9% claimed the discussions had 'increased their understanding thus enabling them to make choices and complete their work requirements'. The informal atmosphere of a class discussion had some impact on 61 or 27% of students. This was reflected in comments like 'bonding', 'sharing opinions', 'listening to one another' and 'get to know one another' (25%) and 'relaxing', stimulating and lively' and 'personal' (8%). The 14 students or 7% who offered 'reflects on our lives in faith' or 'reflects on our lives and communities in faith' came from the school group who were studying *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4. Students studying other school programs did not comment on any contribution the religious education class may have made to their development in this area.

Table 33 shows that 70 students or 31% had more negative perceptions.

Table 33: Reasons indicating lack of support for class discussions as a learning activity		
Can become boring and repetitive, can lose focus, limited range of topics	32	14%
Not important and/or relevant	20	9%
Nothing is achieved by them, no one listens	7	3%
Does not contribute to VCE score	4	2%
Topics belong to a social studies class not RE	3	1%
Not enough input from students because Church view is pushed	2	1%
Lacks challenge and substance, does not motivate students to become involved	2	1%
Total	70	31%
No response	157	69%
Total	227	100%

They claimed that discussions 'could become repetitive and boring', they were 'not important or relevant', that 'nothing was achieved' by them and that 'many students didn't listen or get involved'. Two per cent of students remarked on the fact that discussions 'did not contribute to the VCE score', 1% claimed they 'belonged in a social studies class' as the topics were not focused on religion, another 1% felt they 'lacked substance and

challenge' and that therefore, 'students were not motivated to become involved' and a further 1% felt that students' input was not encouraged as 'the Church's view' tended to be 'pushed'.

In brief, 82% of students offered reasons why discussion were helpful and 31% offered reasons why they were not, therefore, it would seem from these figures that the majority of students found discussions a useful learning activity. The varying reasons, both positive and negative, that were discussed above highlighted some of the problematic aspects of teaching in a religious education classroom. From the responses it appeared that, in some classes, discussions can be informative, lively and challenging sessions where students get involved, listen and learn. However, in other instances, these very obvious strengths of class discussions as a teaching strategy were not apparent.

Religious education classroom program - was it interesting to students

Tables 34 and 35 present the positive and negative responses relating to Item 42 - the interest of the religious education class.

Table 34 shows that approximately 141 students or 62% had something positive to say about how interesting the religious education class was.

Table 34: Reasons in support of the perception that RE classes are interesting		
Made us think about current issues that concern us,	39	17%
Variety of activities which are RE specific, eg. meditation and retreats	23	10%
Some relevant topics, sometimes interesting, sometimes we learn something new	23	10%
Reflections and discussions allow for personal and spiritual growth	13	6%
Listened to others' viewpoints and offered my views	12	5%
Learnt more about the Catholic faith tradition	10	4%
Time to relax, not pressured like other VCE subjects	9	4%
Challenging	7	3%
Learnt more about other cultural groups	4	2%
Made new friends	1	1%
Total	141	62%
No response	86	38%
Total	227	100%

It is apparent that there was some overlap with the responses to Item 41. For instance, some comments which included 'reflections and discussions allowed for personal and spiritual growth', 'listened to other viewpoints and offered my views', 'made new friends', 'time to relax' and 'made new friends' are sentiments that are similar to the sharing and bonding experiences referred to earlier. The other comment that also suggested links to Item 41 was the reference made by 10% of students to the activities that were RE specific such as, meditation and retreats. Both such activities would entail a degree of informal learning in a more relaxed atmosphere which is one of the valuable features noted in the responses to class discussions as a learning activity. The perception that religious education offered an opportunity to learn about issues that concerned students was shared by 17% of students and 10% felt that, sometimes, the topics were relevant and of interest and provided them with new learning. Another 6% felt that reflections and discussions allowed 'personal and spiritual growth', 5% appreciated the opportunities to share of viewpoints and 4% professed to have 'learnt more about the Catholic faith tradition'. These last responses came from the school group that were studying *Religion and Society*, units 3 and 4, as did the 2% who believed that they had 'learnt more about other cultural groups'. Only 3% saw religious education classes as 'challenging'.

Table 35 shows that 96 students or 42% provided a negative comment.

Table 35: Reasons indicating lack of support for the perception that RE classes are interesting		
Classes provide a biased picture, not interesting or relevant	44	19%
Little variety, becomes repetitive and boring, too much writing for work requirements	29	13%
Little work is done in class, rather spend time doing work requirements for other subjects	14	6%
No benefits at the end of the course	3	1%
Not challenging, no motivation to get involved	2	1%
Not enough prayer time, failure to focus on the spiritual side of RE	2	1%
Too difficult	2	1%
Total	96	42%
No response	131	58%
Total	227	100%

This is interesting in light of the fact that 104 chose not to respond to the first part of the question and only 2 said they did not agree that religious education classes were interesting (see Table 31). Nineteen per cent of students offered the comment that the classes 'lacked interest or relevance' for them. A few of these perceived a 'one-sided' or

'biased' presentation of the topics. Thirteen per cent felt that there was 'little variety' in the activities with 'too many written work requirements' which led to the classes becoming 'boring and repetitive'. One per cent saw 'no benefits' emerging from religious education classes, another 1% found that there was 'little challenge' or 'motivation to get involved', a further 1% felt that there was 'not enough time for class prayer' or for 'spiritual development' and yet another 1% found the subject 'difficult'. These last 2 students came from the school group who were studying *Religion and Society*, units 3 and 4.

To sum up, a majority of students or 62% offered reasons why they found aspects of the class interesting while 42% offered reasons why they did not.

Guest speakers

Item 43 sought information regarding students' perceptions of guest speakers as a useful learning experience. Overall, there were 186 students or 82% who offered favourable comments on the involvement of guest speakers in the classroom program while 39 or 17% were unfavourable (Tables 36 and 37). The positive aspects of using guest speakers were that they gave students an 'expert's point of view', they 'assisted students to understand the topic better', 'provides variety and interest' and provided opportunities for 'religious communities to present their views' (Table 36).

Table 36: Reasons in support of the use of guest speakers in the classroom program		
Presents viewpoints from experts, thereby assisting in a better understanding of the topic	147	65%
Breaks up the monotony of class work, lends variety and interest	28	12%
Provides a greater scope for members of religious communities to present their views	11	5%
Total	186	82%
No response	41	18%
Total	227	100%

The reasons given for not supporting the use of guest speakers ranged from 'no benefits', 'students can learn just as well from their own teachers', speakers can be 'boring' and

'lack relevance', and finally, 'presentations were biased' and structured towards religion' (Table 37).

Table 37: Reasons indicating lack of support for the use of guest speakers in the classroom program

No benefits - learning can occur through teacher and other resources	29	13%
Speakers can become boring and lack relevance so no one listens or cares	8	3%
Presentations were biased and structured towards religion	2	1%
Total	39	17%
No response	188	83%
Total	227	100%

The 11 students who referred to the opportunity for members of religious communities to present their views came from two different school groups, one with a religious principal and one with a lay principal. The 2 students who felt the presenters were 'biased towards religious views' also came from one of these groups.

Overall, 82% of students offered positive reasons for the use of guest speakers while 17% offered some views on the negative aspects.

Activities that promote faith and/or spiritual development

Item 44 also sought more information on the benefits of specific learning activities. Students were asked to list those class activities or experiences that were particularly meaningful to them and which offered opportunities for faith and/or spiritual development.

Item 44: The class activities and/or experiences that have encouraged me to reflect on my own personal and/or spiritual growth were . . .

Table 38 shows the variety of activities that students felt had encouraged their faith and/or spiritual development.

Table 38 : Frequencies indicating activities that encouraged faith and/or spiritual development

Retreats	59	26%
Discussions	47	21%
Meditation	46	20%
Reflections and prayer	27	12%
Guest speakers	18	8%
Class masses and liturgies	15	7%
Faith development days/Seminar days	10	4%
Videos of inspirational people	4	1.6%
Learning about other faith traditions	1	.4%
Total	227	100%

Consistent with the findings from Items 47a-p, retreats, discussions and meditations were the most frequently chosen. The words most commonly used to describe the special experience of such activities were 'bonding', 'sharing', 'getting to know one another better', 'becoming close as a group', 'able to express my own view and listen to others', 'learn about issues that are relevant to us', 'relaxed', 'informal', 'enjoyable', 'think about who I am', 'reflect on my relationship with God', 'become closer to God', 'getting away from the pressures' and 'a sense of belonging'. These comments suggest that activities which are less formal and which allow some flexibility and freedom for students to speak out and feel that they are being heard are valuable strategies in a religious education classroom. When students perceive discussions to be 'biased', lacking focus and direction so they become 'uninformed', and occasions where a few 'dominant' voices 'take over', they regard the activity as a waste of time. Obviously, if discussions are to be a major teaching strategy the topic must be well prepared and handled carefully by the teacher. The other feature associated with the three above-mentioned activities was the 'getting away from the classroom' atmosphere, which could be interpreted as a break from the pressure of study related to other Year 12 subjects. This was seen as an opportunity for students to quietly turn thinking to their own personal growth. Prayers and class reflections were also perceived as such opportunities.

Emerging from the above findings is that affective learning is a desirable aspect of religious education as perceived by students. A point that teachers may need to consider and utilize is the role of such learning in the promotion of knowledge and skills as outlined in the curriculum model proposed earlier (see Figure 5, p. 77).

The impact of gender on attitude to and participation in the religious education class

In Items 45 and 46 students were asked for their perceptions of possible gender differences in attitudes to and participation in religious education classes.

- Item 45: I believe that, in general, **girls/boys** show more interest in RE because . . .
- Item 46: When we have reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class the **girls/boys** are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because . . .

The responses of the 89 students from coeducational schools were collated and are shown in Tables 39 and 40.

Table 39: Students' perceptions of gender differences in attitude to RE classes		
Boys and girls have similar attitudes	15	17%
Girls - RE relates to them more, they are more concerned with the issues	13	15%
Girls - more in touch with their emotions and their spiritual side which is a focus in RE	12	13%
Girls - more motivated to complete tasks, they are better behaved	9	10%
Girls - more socially acceptable, boys don't want to appear religious, not 'macho' enough	5	6%
Girls - more passive, don't show their disinterest as much	3	3%
Girls - better at writing and communicating	2	2%
Neither	9	10%
Missing	21	24%
Total	89	100%

Table 39 shows that 49% of students believed that girls had a more positive attitude and, although there were six different reasons offered in support, five of them revolved around perceptions of the differences between male and female personalities. On the one hand, girls were seen as more 'interested in the personal and spiritual side of their development'. They were described as 'more passive' which made them 'less inclined to show disinterest' and they were seen as 'more motivated to get the work done'. Boys, on the other hand, were perceived to have more peer pressure to conform to a 'macho'

image in which RE had no place. Only 2 students stated that girls had a better attitude because of their skills in writing and communication. This last finding could imply that, for these students, religious education classes lacked a variety of teaching and learning strategies and therefore did not cater for individual learning styles.

The findings for Item 46, as shown in Table 40, provided a slightly different pattern of responses to those observed at Item 45.

Table 40: Students perceptions of gender differences in levels of participation in RE classes

Both equally contribute and get involved (sometimes because they have to)	29	33%
Girls - more interested in their own development, they're more cooperative and responsible	21	24%
Girls - more confident about themselves, need little reassurance	3	3%
Girls - because boys can't be bothered - its not 'macho' enough	3	3%
Boys - because they used to be more involved as altar boys	2	2%
Girls - because boys are embarrassed about showing their spiritual and/or emotional side	1	1%
Boys - have more confidence to stand up in front of the class	1	1%
Neither	6	7%
Missing	23	26%
Total	89	100%

In this case, 44% of students believed there was little or no difference in the levels of participation but 42% believed girls were more willing to participate for reasons similar to the ones provided at Item 45. An interesting insight offered by 2 students from one country school was that boys were more interested because they 'knew and got on with the priest better', having served as altar boys in the past. Another student attributed an increased interest from boys to the fact that 'boys were less embarrassed to stand up in front of the class'. This was contradicted by a student who stated that 'boys were more embarrassed at showing their spiritual and/or emotional side' and, therefore, less likely to participate.

Overall, it would seem that students did perceive difference related to gender that impacted on attitude to and participation in the religious education classroom.

The effect of the religious education program on students' understanding and acting out of the Christian message

The next three items, 48, 49 and 50, asked for students' perceptions of whether the religious education program had contributed towards their own faith development. Each of the statements were prefaced with the same phrase:

Overall, my learning experiences in RE this year

- Item 48: **have/have not** helped me understand the message of Jesus Christ
- Item 49: **have/have not** helped me to live out the message of Jesus Christ
- Item 50: **have/have not** helped me to include prayer in my daily life

The frequencies for the responses to each of these statements are shown in Tables 41, 42 and 43 respectively.

Table 41: Responses indicating understanding the message of Jesus Christ

Value	Frequency	%
Have	83	37%
Have not	139	61%
Missing	5	2%
Total	227	100%

The responses to the three items were mixed between positive and negative. The results suggest that, in students' perceptions, 63% did not believe that the religious education program had furthered their understanding of the Christian message (Table 41). However, 54% felt that it had helped them live out the Christian message (Table 42) and 66% believed it had helped them to develop their ability to pray (Table 43).

Table 42: Responses indicating living out the message of Jesus Christ

Value	Frequency	%
Have	122	54%
Have not	98	43%
Missing	7	3%
Total	227	100%

Table 43: Responses indicating the inclusion of prayer in daily life

Value	Frequency	%
Have	151	66%
Have not	72	32%
Missing	4	2%
Total	227	100%

Overall, these results provide some pertinent insights into the classroom religious education program. While the program appeared to be beneficial for a majority of students in helping them live out the Christian message and to include prayer in their lives, there was a proportion of students who did not experience this. Further, a majority of students did not feel that it had helped them to further their understanding of the Christian message.

These results, once again highlight a certain tension that arises in students' perceptions of the cognitive component of the program. As discussed earlier, a large majority of the students agreed that the program had increased their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition. However, a large majority did not find the program intellectually challenging, and finally, there was a majority of students who did not feel that the program had helped them understand the message of Jesus. Clearly, there were some influential factors that led to these conflicting results and these need to be investigated. It could have been that the first statement, Item 5, regarding knowledge and understanding, occurred early in the questionnaire while both the other items occurred later. This could have meant that, as students got further into the questionnaire, their thinking and responses were further prompted as they went through the process of answering different items. While this may have caused the differences discussed here, the underlying tension implied by these results suggests that further research into aspects related to the cognitive domain in senior religious education could be useful for curriculum planners.

Strengths, weaknesses and recommendations

The final three items in the questionnaire were structured for open-ended responses where students were asked for their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of their existing religious education program. They were then invited to suggest those characteristics that they felt were desirable for a Year 12 religious education program.

- Item 51: What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?
- Item 52: What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?
- Item 53: What do you believe are desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools? Please give reasons for your answer.

The responses to these three items were collated and, in some cases, were grouped for ease of analysis.

Table 44 presents a summary of the responses to Item 51 indicating the perceived strengths of the religious education program.

Students' perceptions of the strengths of the religious education program

Table 44: Responses indicating perceived strengths of existing RE programs		
Class discussions focusing on relevant topics and increasing one's knowledge of life	85	37%
Retreats and Meditations	54	24%
The study of religious traditions, Catholic and others	23	10%
Relaxing, bonding, break from other pressures	16	7%
Guest speakers providing valuable information	16	7%
Reflections and class prayer - bringing one closer to God	16	7%
Doing Units 3 and 4 at Year 11- contributing to the TERS	9	4%
Films on special people	4	2%
Good, well-informed and dedicated teachers	3	1%
Seminar days	3	1%
Spreading one unit over the year	2	1%
Group presentations	2	1%
Class masses	2	1%
Pastoral groups	2	1%
Note: Percentages are calculated on the total student population - 227 students.		

It is necessary to note that for item 51, the following responses were grouped under the heading of class discussions:

- opportunities to express one's views,
- informal and open,
- talking about relevant issues,

- learning other's views about interesting topics which help to broaden one's understanding of life,
- class discussions.

All other responses for this item were listed as they were expressed

In general, the strengths of the programs, as seen in Table 44, supported the findings at Items 41 - 44. Thirty-seven per cent of students were positive about their experiences of class discussions if they focused on 'contemporary issues' which were 'relevant' to the students' needs and interests. The reasons proffered were because the discussions offered opportunities for sharing, bonding, expressing one's views and listening to others. All these were seen as facilitating the learning process and leading to a better understanding of the topic.

Other strengths were:

- the inclusion of retreats and meditations (24%);
- the study of religious traditions in-depth which gave one a better knowledge of one's own tradition and increased one's understanding of how other people perceive God (10%);
- the relaxed nature of religious education classrooms which provided opportunities for students to get to know each other better and were a welcome relief from the other pressures associated with Year 12 (7%);
- the choice of guest speakers who could speak on topics from personal experience thus providing a valuable insight into the understanding of the topic (7%);
- the time given for reflections and prayers which provided opportunities to reflect on one's relationship with God (7%), and
- the opportunity to study units 3 and 4 which acted as a 'back-up' subject for the TERs (4%).

[Note: This final figure must be read in light of the fact that only 21 students (one school group) was involved in a study of *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 and only one student studied *Texts and Traditions* units 3 and 4.]

The remaining features of the religious education program that found favour only elicited a small number of responses. These were:

- films on people who had lived their lives according to Christian values and could inspire others (2%);
- teachers who were well-informed, caring and dedicated (1%);
- seminar days (1%), and
- pastoral activities.

[Only two schools had their RE program based on 4 seminar/reflection days spread over the year].

The last four items, each of which were mentioned by 2 students, were:

- the spread of a VCE unit of study over the year instead of over a semester;
- the inclusion of group work and presentations;
- the inclusion of class masses, and
- the inclusion of pastoral groups.

[Only one school group included pastoral care groups in their program].

Students' perceptions of the weaknesses of the religious education program

However, the other side of the picture emerges in Table 45.

Table 45: Responses indicating perceived weaknesses of existing RE programs

Lack of class involvement, not challenging, out of date, boring, irrelevant topics, unnecessary work	58	26%
Repetitive work requirements, too much written work, lack of variety	51	22%
Too many meditations, reflections and uninformed discussion: waste of time - don't learn anything	21	9%
Church's views pushed, individual's view not considered, biased	12	5%
Focus on other religions, not enough learning about the Catholic tradition	6	3%
Too much structure, adds to pressure from other classes	4	2%
Scripture study - boring, repetitive	4	2%
One unit over the year is too long, work drags on	3	1%
Compulsory nature	3	1%
Not given equal status with other subjects	3	1%
Not enough prayer time, personal activities, sharing	3	1%
Faith development/reflection days or seminars near CAT time	3	1%
Everything other than the retreat	3	1%
Studying Church documents - too hard to understand	2	1%
Poor structure	2	1%
Lack of staff to help	2	1%
Some guest speakers	2	1%

Note: Percentages are calculated on the total student population - 227 students.

Twenty-six percent of students referred to the 'lack of challenge' and the use of 'irrelevant topics' which led to 'boredom and lack of class involvement'. Twenty-two per cent felt that there was 'too much written work' which included work requirements and the 'lack of variety' in activities led to boredom. Also students' perceptions of class discussions raised some pertinent points. When the topics discussed were 'irrelevant or out-of-date' students became bored and were 'not challenged or motivated to become involved'. If the discussions were uninformed and if too much time was spent on reflections and meditations, no real learning took place (9%). If discussions were biased so that individual opinions were not valued there were negative reactions from students who, once again, were unmotivated to get involved (5%). Three per cent felt the focus on learning about different religious traditions detracted from learning about one's own tradition and this was problematic in a Catholic school. There were only a small number of students who identified the other 'weaknesses' listed in Table 45. Some of these need to be interpreted in relation to the number of students for whom these features were relevant. For instance, from the student group that were studying *Texts and Traditions* came:

-scripture study - boring, repetitive (2%).

From those students studying units 3 and 4 came:

- too much structure, adds to pressure from other classes (2%), and
- studying Church documents - too hard to understand (1%).

From two schools which offered school-based programs that consisted of 4 days spread over the year there was a perception that:

- faith development/reflection days or seminars organised near CAT time was poor timing (1%), and
- there was a 'lack of staff to help' (1%).

Other weaknesses of the religious education programs were identified by only a few students who were spread across the eleven groups:

- one unit over the year is too long, work drags on (1%);
- compulsory nature of the subject is problematic, should be optional (1%);
- RE is not given equal status with other subjects (1%);
- there is not enough prayer time or personal activities which involve sharing (1%);
- everything other than the retreat provided little benefit(1%);
- the program was poorly structured (1%), and
- some guest speakers who were boring/biased (1%).

Students' recommendations for future religious education programs

The final item in Part A of the questionnaire asked for suggestions that identified desirable characteristics of a senior religious education program in a Catholic school. These are shown in Table 46 (p. 280) and are consistent with the earlier findings that focused on the helpfulness of specific learning activities and the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs.

Table 46: Desirable characteristics of a senior religious education program in a Catholic school

Discussion of broad, social issues that are contemporary and relevant and prepare us for life, sharing views	47	20%
Retreats, meditations and reflections	38	17%
Opportunities to 'escape from pressure', involve the group and bring them closer together	19	8%
Learn and understand religious traditions, particularly one's own but also others	12	5%
Opportunities to improve one's relationship with God, exploring faith through prayer and discussion	10	4%
Guest speakers	10	4%
RE should contribute to TERS, good 'back-up' subject	9	4%
Opportunities for personal growth, teaching 'self-worth'	9	4%
Activities should be varied, stimulating, challenging, away from the classroom, should include seminar days	6	3%
Should be optional	2	1%
Structure should be informal	1	1%
Class Mass and prayer should be included	1	1%
Need for helpful staff	1	1%
Good resources	1	1%
Students should contribute to the choice of topics to be studied	1	1%

Note: Percentages are calculated on the total student population - 227 students.

The activity that was most nominated by students (20%) as desirable for the religious education classroom was the class discussion which focused on 'broad social issues', which were 'contemporary and relevant', which allowed students to 'share views', and which 'prepared students for life'. The next most listed activities were 'retreats', 'meditations' and 'reflections' (17%). Another characteristic which was also valued was the opportunity to 'escape from pressures', 'involve the group' and 'bring the class closer together' (8%). Five per cent mentioned 'learning and understanding religious traditions, including one's own' and 4% mentioned faith development opportunities where one could 'improve one's relationship with God through prayer and discussion'. Another 4% believed Year 12 religious education should contribute to the university entrance score and 4% said that there should be opportunities for 'personal growth' and the teaching of 'self-worth. Three per cent referred to the need for activities to be 'varied', 'stimulating', 'challenging', 'away from the classroom' and 'should include seminar days'.

There was a small minority, 1%, who suggested that Year 12 religious education should be optional, the structure should be informal, class Mass and prayer should be included, staff should be helpful and good resources would be used and students should have the opportunity to contribute to the choice of topics to be studied.

It is relevant here to reflect on these responses in light of the curriculum model proposed earlier (see pp. 77), following the review of the theory of and approaches to religious education. In students' perceptions, the learning activities that found most favour, in terms of their interest and their ability to assist in learning, were those that were drawn from the affective domain. It would seem that the classroom practices that these students experienced were dominated by learning experiences which focused on the accumulation of knowledge and skills, that is, the completion of work requirements as stated in the respective VCE study designs. Since VCE programs had to follow strict time-lines, it is possible that other learning activities that promoted interpersonal and intrapersonal development were given scant attention. This is certainly the evidence provided by students' comments. Thus, the responses here may be a reaction against the dominance of cognitive learning strategies. It may also imply that teachers need to recognise that cognitive learning can be promoted through affective learning and vice versa, and that this recognition needs to be reflected in their teaching practice.

The final three questions in Part B of the questionnaire which related to the time allotment for Year 12 religious education revealed that there were a variety of timetabling structures between the different schools. There appeared to be some contradiction among students from schools which offered 10-day cycles. Some of these students chose 5-day cycle and some chose 10-day cycle from the options. There also appeared to be some confusion in responses from the same school as to how many periods were actually timetabled for religious education as compared to other subjects. As a result, the responses to these three questions have not been included in the presentation and discussion.

A comparison of teachers' and students' perceptions of senior secondary religious education classroom programs in Catholic schools

The final section of this chapter presents a comparison of the teachers' and students' responses to the same aspects of the delivery of the classroom program. Due to the

nature of the study, the number of teacher responses were small. However, their first-hand experience and, therefore, their observations of classroom behaviour provided valuable insights into their perceptions of their students' responses to the classroom program. The responses also provided a useful means of comparing teachers' and students' perceptions. Thus, the variables presented here, such as knowledge and content, interest, meaning and relevance, intellectual challenge and so on, relate specifically to the classroom program. Other variables, such as interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition, are often outside the confines of the classroom and therefore, are not included here.

For simplicity of presentation, the same method that was used to present the students' responses is applied here, that is, in some cases, the possibility of combining two or more items into a single variable was explored. When a Spearman Rank correlation between two or more items implied a positive association, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a single, new variable. When interpreting the tables for the new variable, the computed value of the variable was rounded up. For example, a response of *strongly agree* for one item and a response of *mostly agree* to another item was combined to be *strongly agree* to the new variable. The corresponding items from the students' questionnaires that were presented in Chapter 6 are used here for comparison to the teachers' responses.

The responses in this chapter are presented according to groups of variables followed by a discussion of the results for each group.

Perceptions of students' interest in, tolerance of and understanding of different religions.

The first three items in the teachers' questionnaire were T-interest in and T-tolerance of different religious traditions and T-understanding the role of religion. The 'T' placed in front of each variable identified these as being items from the teacher's questionnaire.

- T.Item 1: My students have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia.
- T.Item 2: My students have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions.
- T.Item 3: My students understand how the beliefs of a particular religious tradition influence the customs and practices of the people of that tradition

A point needs to be made here regarding the scaling shown in the box-plots indicating the teachers' responses. The five point scale which was used for the students' questionnaires was also applied here: 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *mostly agree*, 3 = *undecided*, 2 = *mostly disagree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*. However, the smaller number of teacher responses meant that halfway points were shown in the corresponding box-plot.

There were some differences in the responses of the two groups, teachers and students, to these three variables, as shown in Figures 58 and 59 respectively (see p. 284).

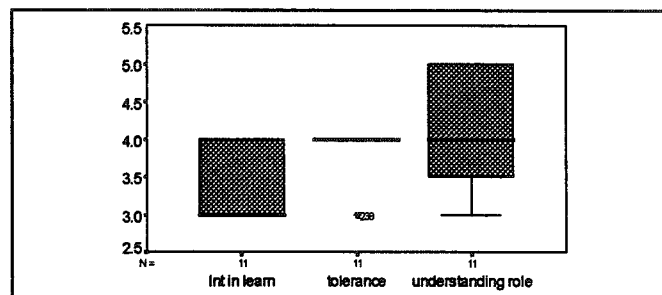


Figure 58: Teachers' perceptions of students' interest in and tolerance of different religious traditions.

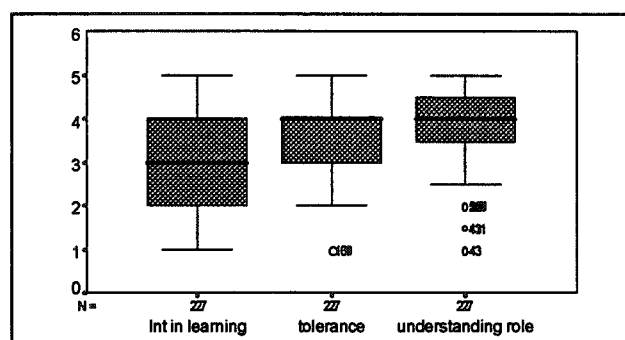


Figure 59: Students' interest in and tolerance of different religious traditions.

While the medians for each variable were the same between the two groups, it would seem that teachers' perceptions that the program was successful for their students did not quite coincide with what their students felt. Generally, teachers' responses to all three variables were positive with none falling on the negative side of *undecided*. Students, however, did have a proportion of negative responses. In particular, there were approximately a quarter who were negative about learning about different religions, a feature that was noted earlier. It would seem, from the above results, that teachers were not always clear in their understanding and interpretation of their students' behaviour and attitudes.

Perceptions of students' knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition

A similar difference can be noted with the next variable: students' knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition and indicated by Item 5 from the teachers' questionnaires.

- T.Item 5: My students have increased their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition.

The teachers' results were very positive, as shown in Figures 60 and 61, with a spread between *mostly agree* and *strongly agree* and teachers and students had the same medians.

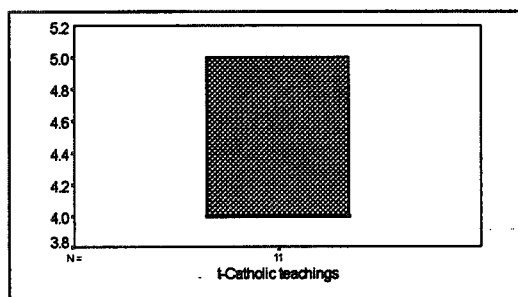


Figure 60: Teachers' perceptions of students' knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition.

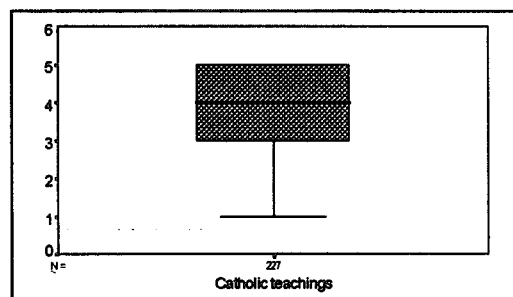


Figure 61: Students' responses indicating knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition.

However, as with the previous result, student responses were widely spread, from positive to negative. As mentioned in an early part of this work, this particular area is of vital importance to Catholic school education and the possibility that teachers may have misconceptions of their students' level of knowledge of the Catholic faith tradition has serious implications.

Perceptions of students' interest in RE; meaning, relevance and intellectual challenge of RE, and students' attitudes to RE

The variable: students' interest in the subject religious education, was expressed in T.Items 13 and 21.

- T.Item 13: Generally, the topics that I am required to teach in Year 12 RE have little interest for my students.
- T.Item 21: My Year 12 students are usually interested in participating in class activities in RE.

A Spearman Rank correlation between Items T.Items 13 and 21, $r_s = +.7$ ($p < .003$), implies a positive association. Therefore, the means of the scores of these items were computed to create a new variable - t-interest in religious education. In effect, a response of *mostly agree* to T.Item 21 and a response of *undecided* to T.Item 13, combined to be *mostly agree* to the new variable.

The next variables to be looked at were: religious education as a meaningful and relevant subject. Two items focused on the meaning and relevance of religious education:

- T.Item 18: Generally, RE, this year, makes a meaningful contribution to the development of my students at this stage of their lives.
- T.Item 28: The topics that are included in the Year 12 RE units of study have little relevance for my students.

A Spearman Rank correlation between these two items, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .3$), implies a positive association between the two. Therefore, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a new variable - t-meaning and relevance of religious education.

The intellectual challenge of the religious education program was looked at next. T.Item 22: focused on this variable.

- T.Item 22: My students find Year 12 RE an intellectually challenging subject.

The next variable was attitude of students to religious education. This was expressed in T.Items 23 and 25.

- T.Item 23: Most students do their homework and come prepared for Year 12 RE class.
- T.Item 25: Generally, my Year 12 students are noisy and disruptive in RE class.

A Spearman Rank correlation between these two items, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .8$), implies a positive association. Therefore, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a new variable - t-attitude to religious education.

Figure 62 and 63 present the teachers' and students' responses for this group of variables.

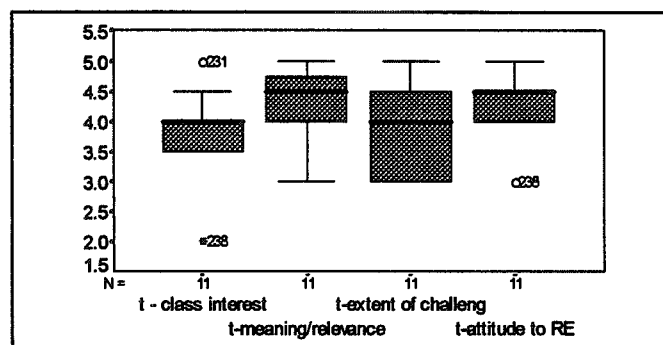


Figure 62: Teachers' perceptions of students' responses to the RE classroom program.

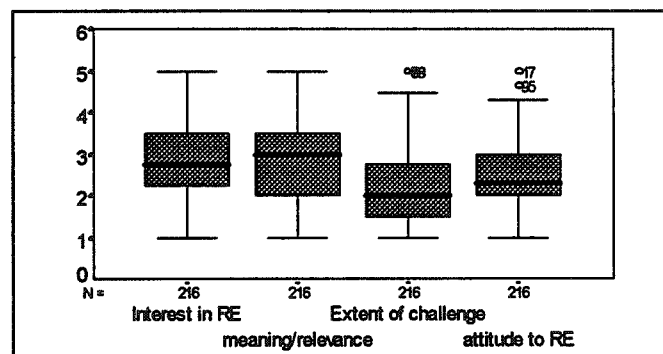


Figure 63: Students' responses to the RE classroom program.

Once again, it can be seen that there was a variation in the spreads between the two groups for all the variables. In general, the teachers' responses were on the positive side of *undecided* while students' responses were spread from positive to negative. Clearly there were discrepancies between the teachers' and students' responses to these aspects of the classroom program which highlights an area that could require further investigation.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of resources and specific activities in religious education

The following items refer, in particular, to class activities. These are: resources, work requirements, class prayer and retreats/reflections.

- T.Item 29: It is difficult to find stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources to use in RE this year.
- T.Item 30: I believe that work requirements in Year 12 RE are well balanced between practical and written activities.

The next two items, T.Items, 32 and 33, focused on class mass/class prayer.

- T.Item 32: There should be more opportunities to include class prayer in the Year 12 RE program.
- T.Item 33: Generally, I believe, Year 12 class masses are occasions when students develop their ability to pray.

A Spearman Rank correlation between T.Items 32 and 33, $r_s = +.3$ ($p < .3$), implies a positive association. Therefore, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a single, new variable - t-class mass/prayer.

T.Items 19 and 35 focused on retreats and reflections:

- T.Item 19: There should be more informal learning experiences like reflection days and retreats in the Year 12 RE program.
- T.Item 35: My Year 12 students appear to find reflection days an enriching religious experience.

A Spearman Rank correlation, $r_s = +.6$ ($p < .008$), implies a positive association, therefore, the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a single, new variable - t-retreats/reflections.

Teachers' and students' results for these four variables are presented in Figures 64 and 65.

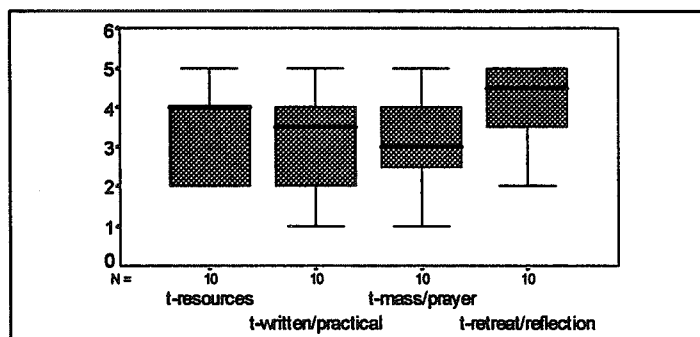


Figure 64: Teachers' responses to different types of class activity.

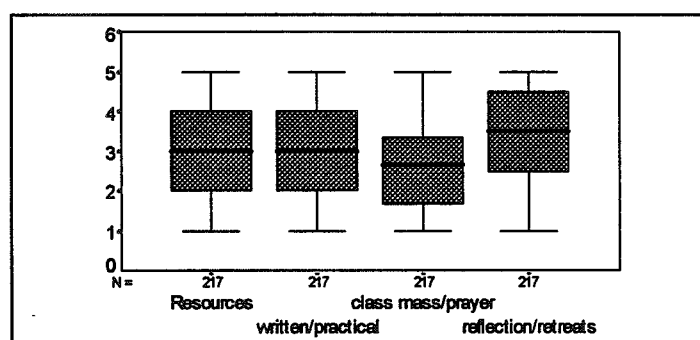


Figure 65: Students' responses to different types of class activity.

The spreads for these responses for both teachers and students were on either side of *undecided*. While teachers were more positive than their students, the differences were marginal. Retreats/reflections received the most favourable response out of the four variables from both groups.

These findings clearly show that teachers were not as positive about these items that related to class activities as compared to their other responses. For the first, it would appear that there is a need for more interesting and stimulating teaching resources in religious education, ones which are more relevant for senior students. For the second, it is possible, as noted earlier, that in most of the VCE/school-based programs involved in this study, learning activities were dominated by work-requirements, thus, leading to an

imbalance which provoked some of the negativity from both teachers and students. Earlier comments on the need for balanced activities using a range of resources so as to cater for individual differences are pertinent here. Equally, the need to address learning in the affective domain would imply a need for different kinds of learning activities to be included in the program,

The variable, class mass/prayer, had the lowest median of the four for both teachers and students. It is possible that this result betrayed a certain degree of discomfort experienced by teachers in planning liturgy and prayer programs due to feelings of inadequacy and lack of competence in the area. If this is the case, there are implications for professional development programs in these specific areas in religious education to be offered to teachers to assist them to improve their delivery in the classroom.

The background of the teachers

The following items provided some insight into the teaching backgrounds of the respondents. They were included in the questionnaire to gain information on the teachers' background and level of 'satisfaction' with teaching religious education.

- T.Item 26: On the whole I enjoy teaching Year 12 RE this year.
- T.Item 36: I find teaching Year 12 RE more difficult than my other subjects.

A Spearman Rank Correlation between T.Items 26 and 36, $r_s = +.4$ ($p < .1$), implies a positive association. Therefore the means of the individual scores of these items were computed to create a single, new variable - satisfaction with teaching the religious education program.

Figure 66 shows the responses of teachers from different schools indicating their satisfaction with teaching in the religious education program.

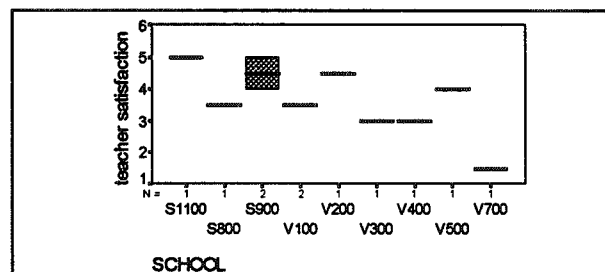


Figure 66: Response showing teacher satisfaction with teaching the RE program.

Of the ten teachers who responded to this question, nine responded positively with a range of *strongly agree* to *undecided*. Only one teacher strongly disagreed. The next few tables may provide a better understanding of these responses. These relate to three items that sought information on the teachers' feelings of enjoyment, comfort and competence in teaching the subject.

- T.Item 38: Personally, I do/do not enjoy teaching my Year 12 RE class because

Table 47 shows that all 11 teachers responded positively to this item.

Table 47: Responses indicating feelings of enjoyment of teaching RE

Value	Frequency
Do	11

The reasons provided to support this view are presented in Table 48.

Table 48: Reasons that teachers enjoyed their Year 12 RE classes

5	Provides the chance to share time, views and debate important/interesting/stimulating/controversial topics
2	Provides the chance to observe their maturation both personally and spiritually
2	Provides the chance to develop and appreciation of the Church's teachings and relate it to their lives
2	Students are intelligent, articulate and capable of understanding and appreciating the work
1	The involvement and commitment from a few and the cooperation and interest from others
1	Provides opportunities for prayer and liturgy
1	Teach students to think critically
1	I don't take it personally that they don't like RE

It can be seen that the sharing of time, sharing opinions and the discussion of interesting and relevant topics was mentioned by five of the eleven teachers. This is an aspect that was also strongly favoured by students. Two teachers expressed their satisfaction at watching their students develop and mature, two saw the opportunity to develop an understanding and appreciation of relevance of the Church's teachings to their lives was rewarding and two indicated that, at this level, students were mature enough to contribute intelligently, articulate their ideas and understand and appreciate the work being done. One teacher referred to the pleasure of having a few committed and involved students in the class but, at the same time, mentioned the overall cooperation and interest of the group. Another said the religious education class offered opportunities to pray and have liturgies. Still another offered the comment that it was good to teach the students to think critically and finally, one referred to the dislike the students had shown towards the subject which the teacher was able to put into perspective so that it did not detract from his/her enjoyment of the class.

The next two items came from Part B of the teachers' questionnaire.

- T.Item B14: I do/do not feel very comfortable when I teach Year 12 RE.
- T.Item B16: I do/do not feel as competent at teaching RE as I do my other subjects.

Tables 49 and 50, respectively, present the responses to these items.

Table 49: Responses indicating teachers' feelings of comfort with teaching RE

Value	Frequency
Do	9
Do not	1
missing	1

Table 50: Responses indicating teachers' feelings of competence in teaching RE

Value	Frequency
Do	9
Do not	1
missing	1

As can be seen, nine teachers were positive in their responses to these two items, but for each, one teacher was negative. One teacher did not respond. It is not surprising that the

negative response each time came from the teacher who had referred to his/her students' dislike of the subject at T.Item 38. Further information, which could reveal the reasons for this negativity, were provided by Items B15, B17 and B18, also from Part B of the teachers' questionnaire, which referred to background in religious education teaching methodology.

- T.Item B15: I did/did not include studies related to the teaching of RE, such as, Religious Studies, Religious Education Methodology and/or theology, during my teacher training.
- T.Item B17: I have returned to study to learn more about teaching in religious education.
- T.Item B18: If you answered 'yes' to Question 17, please state whether your studies are:-
☐ post-graduate ☐ under-graduate
☐ religious studies ☐ religious education ☐ theology

As can be seen from Table 51, eight teachers did have some background in religious education but two did not and one did not respond.

Table 51: Responses indicating teachers' background in RE methodology

Value	Frequency
Did	8
Did not	2
missing	1

Table 52 indicates the numbers of teachers involved in further study in religious education.

Table 52: Responses indicating teachers' undertaking further study in RE

Value	Frequency
Yes	7
No	3
missing	1

Table 53 indicates the type of program being studied.

Table 53: Type of program being undertaken as part of the further studies of the RE teachers.

Type of program	Teachers involved in the study										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
post-graduate	y				y	y			y		
under-graduate						y			y		
religious studies									y		
religious education				y	y				y		
theology				y		y		y	y	y	y
missing		m	m				m				

y = yes

n = no

m = missing

Seven teachers said they had returned to further their studies in the area, three had not and one teacher did not respond. Four teachers and three teachers were undertaking postgraduate units and undergraduate units respectively. There were six responses indicating the study being pursued was theology, three indicated religious education and one indicated religious studies. A pertinent factor is that the teacher who had responded negatively to Items B14 and B16 about his/her levels of comfort in teaching the subject, indicated that he/she had no background in the subject at Item B15 and also indicated that he/she had not undertaken further study. This supports earlier discussions related to the impact of the teachers' background in the subject on the delivery of the classroom program.

It must be noted here that nine of the teachers involved in this research study were Religious Education Coordinators and this could have some relevance for the fact that so many of them were undertaking further study. However, it must be remembered that this is not necessarily the case for many teachers who are teaching the subject at Year 12. Thus, there are implications for the teaching of senior religious education classes, in terms of the relationship between intent and practice, and the subsequent attitudes that might develop as a result of classroom experiences.

Summary and significance for this research study

This chapter focused on the presentation of the results of students' responses related to aspects of the delivery of the classroom program. A comparison of teachers' and students' perceptions of the same aspects of the religious education classroom program was also included.

The results are presented in three sections: major findings from the students' responses, minor findings from the students' responses and findings from the comparison between teachers' and students' responses.

Major findings:

Generally, students' responses to the five variables - interest in, meaning and relevance of, intellectual challenge of, importance of and attitude to the religious education classroom program - were largely negative with the majority mostly disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statements. The main findings were:

1. There were significant differences between the responses from different schools which implied that some schools had more successful religious education programs than others.
2. A large majority of the students were not interested in the religious education classroom program.
3. A large majority of the students did not find the religious education classroom program meaningful or relevant.
4. A significant majority of students did not perceive the religious education program to be intellectually challenging and this, linked with the positive responses from a majority of students' regarding their knowledge and understanding, suggests that some tension may exist in the cognitive components of the program.
5. A significant majority of students did not view the religious education classroom program as important.

6. A significant majority of students expressed the view that the religious education classroom program should be optional.
7. A significant majority of students displayed negative attitudes to the religious education classroom program.
8. A majority of students believed there was not enough variety in the activities used in religious education classes.
9. A majority of students believed that there was not enough use made of stimulating and up-to-date resources in religious education classes.
10. Three particular strengths of the religious education program that were most often identified by a number of students were:
 - the relaxed, informal atmosphere where they 'bonded' with each other and shared views and experiences;
 - class discussions that dealt with topics that were contemporary, relevant to their interests and needs, and which helped to prepare them for life, and
 - times for reflection, meditation and quiet prayer.
11. Three particular weaknesses that were most often identified by a number of students were:
 - a lack of challenging, relevant and interesting content;
 - repetitive work requirements, too much written work and a lack of variety in class activities, and
 - class discussions when they are uninformed or have boring and irrelevant topics which leads to wasted class time.
12. A majority of students believed the classroom program had helped them to live out the message of Jesus and to include prayer in their lives, however, they also believed that it had not helped them to understand Jesus' message.

The minor findings were:

13. A majority of students consistently showed some indecision in their responses to aspects of the classroom program.
14. The study of VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 and *International Studies* unit 2 consistently elicited less favourable responses to the religious education classroom program than other types of programs.
15. Students from schools with school-based programs consistently responded more favourably to aspects of the study of religion as well as religious education classroom program than students from schools with VCE/school-based programs.
16. The responses of students who professed to have no religious affiliation were consistently similar to those who professed to belong to a faith tradition.
17. Overseas born students were marginally more positive about the religious education classroom program than Australian born students.
18. Family influence appeared to promote a more positive response from students to religious education.
19. Gender did not appear to make a difference to the responses related to the classroom program.

Findings from the comparison of teachers' and students' responses:

In general, teachers' perceptions of what was happening in religious education classes were much more positive than students. The major findings were:

20. Teachers, generally, agreed that their students were interested in the religious education classroom program and that it offered meaningful and relevant content. However, the responses from a majority of students showed that they were not interested in the classroom program, nor did they find it meaningful or relevant.
21. There was wide variation in responses regarding the intellectual challenge of the subject. While teachers felt that the subject did offer a challenge to their students, a majority of students did not find the program intellectually challenging.

22. There was a wide discrepancy between the positive responses of teachers and the negative responses of students regarding their perceptions of students' attitudes to religious education.
23. The majority of teachers indicated that they had some background for teaching the subject which could be attributed to the fact that the majority of them were Religious Education Coordinators.

In general, the above findings highlighted the fact that there was considerable variation between students' and teachers' perceptions, and the perceptions of students from different schools, of various aspects of the classroom program. Additionally, there appeared to be some tension in students' perceptions of the cognitive elements of the program. With respect to the differences between students' and teachers' responses, it seems that, in light of the theory and in relation to the curriculum model proposed in the first chapter of this work (see Figure 5, p. 77), teachers appeared to have a distinct focus on the promotion of knowledge and skills in religious education. Thus, they perceived the content and learning strategies to be intellectually challenging to their students. That students appeared to have different perceptions in this regard may imply some discrepancy between the teachers' intent and practice, and ultimately, with the mode of delivery of the classroom program. It could also mean that the implications of contemporary contexts for religious education have not been considered sufficiently (see Figure 9, p. 146, at the end of the first section of this work). The first factor could also account for the variation of responses from different schools which could be linked to the different emphases between the objectives and the practical application of these objectives in terms of cognitive and affective elements of the respective programs.

It seems, then, that teachers need to clearly demonstrate their understanding that cognition and affectivity play a complementary role in the learning process in religious education. They may need to realign their intent and practice, and they need to provide a balance of content and activities that address learning in both the domains. This is

necessary for effective learning in religious education and has the potential for successful outcomes to be achieved in the subject. In brief, the delivery of the classroom program is an area that may need to be reviewed.

This summary brings us to the end of the discussion of the results and findings of the questionnaires. The next chapter will focus on the results of the interviews and the implications these have for future developments in senior religious education programs.

Chapter 7

Students' perceptions of the Year 12 religious education programs: Responses to the interviews

This chapter focuses on the responses from the structured interviews with ten Year 12 students from three secondary schools. Each of the schools had one or more characteristics that were identified at the beginning of this work as being representative of Catholic secondary schools in general. These were:

- principal factor: religious or lay principal;
- regional factor: metropolitan or country;
- school sex factor: girls', boys' or coeducational.

The interview structure had three sections each with distinct foci and the results of the interviews are presented accordingly:

Focus 1 - the role and influence of religion and the role of the Church;

Focus 2 - faith development;

Focus 3 - Year 12 religious education classroom program.

The responses of the ten participants' were coded to identify the different school characteristics. Thus, *co* was used for coeducational schools, *b* for boys' schools and *g* for girls' schools. *m* and *c* were used for metropolitan and country schools respectively and *r* and *l* were used for religious and lay principals respectively. The interviews were taped and the researcher also took notes. When transcribing the responses, they were 'cleaned' up so that additional vocal sounds and repetitive phrases were deleted and grammatical errors were corrected. Only the main thrust of the answers were transcribed.

In the transcriptions, students from two schools with VCE/school-based programs provided the first six responses and the last four responses were from students with a school-based program. Three of these latter students had elected to study VCE *Religion and Society* Units 3 and 4 at Year 11.

Before examining these responses, it would be useful to recall that the data collected from the interviews was expected to provide further insights into the results from the questionnaires. Thus, a group of questions was designed for the interview to elicit information for each of the three foci mentioned above. These broadly corresponded to the different sections of the questionnaires. As such, comparisons between the results from both sets of data will be contained in the discussion at the end of each group of questions in this chapter.

Students' responses on the role of religion

The questions to this section were prefaced with a statement from the researcher to the interviewee that explained the aims of the research study. Students were informed that the questions would refer to different areas of the program to discover students' perceptions of each of them.

The first group of questions sought students' perceptions on the importance of religion, the contribution it makes to a person's life and how it can influence a person's behaviour.

Question 1a: Do you feel that religion is an important part of society? Why do you think this is so?

Question 1b and 1c: What does religion do for a person? What does it do for you?

Nine of the ten interviewed students felt that religion was important to people. Three students moderated their responses indicating that they felt there was a difference between their own personal perceptions and the perceptions of people generally. Two of these students, both from the boys' school, indicated that religion was important for other

people but they were not religious. The third, also from the boys' school, felt that while religion was important to him because of his family's influence it was not as important to other students. In general, these results reflected the perceptions offered by students to the questionnaires when asked about their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion and the importance of religion in their lives.

Most of the interviewed students believed a Catholic background was an influential factor in their perceptions of the importance of religion and in guiding their behaviour:

- co.c.l - 1: *It is important when you have been brought up to it . . . you can't force someone who doesn't believe in religion to start believing.*
- co.c.l - 2: *Being brought up as a Catholic, I think it is important . . . to know what is right especially when you are dealing with difficult situations, you know why you should do something.*

One student felt religion was only important for the oppressed:

- b.m.r - 3: *I personally don't believe in religion. I am a maths and science student and I believe in the Big Bang theory. That makes sense to me. I think religion is for the oppressed. It gives them hope.*

Other reasons offered as to why religion was important was that it provided people with hope and helped them get through 'tough times' and it provided a sense of community and a sense of belonging: 'people like to feel they belong to a nice big group of people'. Responses that dealt with the more personal aspects of religion indicated that students generally felt that religion gave a person something to believe in. Six students saw religion as providing hope through difficult times which was indicated by answers such as:

- co.c.l - 1: *can go to Church during stressful times and pray to God.*
- g.m.r - 1: *It makes people feel more secure ... they can turn to somebody if they need help, a back-up sort of thing.*
- g.m.r - 2: *It gives you peace of mind ... it has helped me around school, not like with good grades but more, it's helped me to keep sane.*

Three students believed religion gave your life some meaning and purpose and was influential in decision-making:

- co.c.1 - 2: *It gets you to do right, it gives you the direction to take for your journey ... everyone believes in their own thing but this is something you will always have.*
- co.c.1 - 3: *Your faith helps you know what to do ... I was brought up believing, it helps me make choices.*
- co.c.1 - 4: *It provides meaning in your life.*

Generally, it would seem that a religious upbringing did influence students' perceptions of the role and importance of religion. Their behaviour and values were influenced by religious and/or Catholic teachings, these words sometimes being used interchangeably. However, students did not directly attribute this influence to the religious education program.

The next question, 1d, attempted to gain an insight into how students saw religion influencing people's behaviour:

Question 1d: Can you think of an example of how you see a person's behaviour being influenced by the teachings of his/her religion?

Overall, eight students believed that religion did influence behaviour. They felt that it made people more hopeful and helpful and encouraged people to treat others with more care, consideration and understanding.

- co.c.1 - 1: *A lot of people that don't have a religion are cynical and don't have much hope within themselves whereas people who are religious are always hopeful and they see better sides to things.*
- co.c.1 - 4: *Just the way they (people with a religion) treat people on a general basis, they treat people a bit more meaningfully (sic), try to understand them a bit better, a bit more considerate, perhaps, at times.*

Two students, both of whom came from the boys' school, remarked on the influence religion had on the behaviour of the teachers, brothers and priests.

- b.m.r - 2: *The teachers at this school, especially one who was really good, who made me appreciate religion and gave me confidence.*
- b.m.r - 3: *The priests and brothers doing what they are doing because of their beliefs.*

One student mentioned his mother's influence on the family's religious practice and one student felt that the Catholic school played a role in influencing behaviour.

Discussion

From the responses to the first set of questions it can be noted that the most frequently offered reason for religion being important was that it was something a person was brought up with, thus, there was a strong sense of family influence. Its role was to provide comfort or something to lean on and someone to turn to and it helped one through difficult times. It was also seen as providing meaning and direction to a person's life and helping them to make choices. One student remarked on the sense of belonging which was perceived as being associated with religious practice. Another student believed that religion was only important for the oppressed and that it gave them hope.

The next set of responses relating to the influence of religion showed that the ten students, generally, felt that religion was important and that it had a positive effect on the code of conduct of believers. Interestingly, even those students who stated that religion was not important to them personally, still saw a need for it 'for others'. At least two students perceived a religious influence at work amongst their teachers and the school in general and expressed an appreciation of this.

In general, there was little difference between the responses from the different types of programs in the three schools. The responses from both the interviews and the questionnaires, regarding the role and importance of religion, were positive and students indicated that they perceived religion to have an influence on their own lives and on the

lives of others. While this is a desirable result, there was no direct evidence that the religious education program had been particularly influential. In most cases, students clearly attributed their family's religious influences as a major factor.

Students' perceptions of the role of the Church

The next group of questions focused on students' perception of the role of the Catholic Church both in contemporary society and in their own lives. Students were also asked for their views on the need for a Church in the future.

- Question 2a: What do you see as the future role of the Church in the life of Catholic people in Australia?
- Question 2b: What do you see as the role of the Church in your own life? Through the religious education program have you been encouraged to become more active in the life of the Church?
- Question 2c: Do you see a need for the Church in the 21st century? Do you think its role will change?

There was some evidence that students used the words 'religion' and 'Church' synonymously. For instance, two students suggested that with the many pressures on people the Church would provide some relief, a place to turn to and that people needed this (read religion), and one student responded to the question with the claim that he had no religion and was not involved in religious practices. The next question, 3a, dealt with this issue, that is, how did students perceive 'Church' to be different from 'religion'.

Most of the interviewed students felt that the Church would continue to have a role in people's lives but they were quite clear in their view that this role would have to change and that there would need to be more lay people involved in decision making:

- co.c.1 - 1: *I think even if people aren't willing to be priests or nuns they would still be involved as lay people.*

- co.c.l - 4: *I think it will have to change. I think it will have to be more a people's Church. People will have to become a lot more involved in the Church because the number of clergy is declining. I think it will really become the community's Church.*
- b.m.r - 4: *The church is changing. It is becoming more collective, less hierarchical. There are less priests so more people have to become involved in the Church and this has already begun to happen.*

Two students were explicit in their belief that the Church would continue to exist 'because people need Church, they need a religion' and 'there will always be Church, there will always be some people who will go to Church'. Two other students felt that while the Church was not important to them at present, they believed it would become more important as they got older because one 'would like to pass the Catholic faith tradition on to my kids, I'd make them go to Church', or for the other, 'maybe later on as we get older, we're just starting up life and we don't have as many hassles as the older generation. Later, there may come a point in your life when you do need the Church'. It would seem from these responses that these students appeared to derive some security from the knowledge that the Church was there if they need it.

One student offered the following reason for why the Church would need to change:

- g.m.r - 1: *I think the Church is not up with the times at all. For example, with contraception, which is an old favourite. If the Church decided to keep up with what people want, a lot more people would follow it. From the people I talk to, that I'm close to, a lot of them are not very religious either. There are a fair few that go to Church every Sunday but I'm not sure if that is because their parents make them. I think that they really don't see a need for Church because they don't feel it helps them in any way.*

Finally, two students, both from the boys' school, suggested that the Church would lose its significance for many people because they were more knowledgeable:

- b.m.r - 2: *I think people will begin to move away from the Church because they will have less need for it. People will know more than they used to, we have more knowledge and therefore, we won't need the Church in the same way. I'm a scientist and we did the Big Bang theory and that is what I believe. Biblical theory is not so popular today.*

- b.m.r - 3: *People are going to turn more and more away from the Church as they realise that it is not important.*

At the more personal level, students provided conflicting responses regarding the influence of the Church in their lives. Seven students indicated that they went to Church (Mass) although two of them attributed their attendance to family influence rather than the impact of the Year 12 religious education program. One of these students felt that the religious education program from junior years was more influential in getting students involved in attending Church:

- g.m.r - 1: *The RE program does not necessarily encourage us. In the younger years you learn about the Church and values but in senior years you learn about other religions and their church...it's just opening your mind to other religions. While the Catholic Church is at the basis of what you study you learn about other religions and you become more accepting.*

Only one student indicated that she was involved in a Church youth group and one indicated that he was a Reader in his parish but he had no interest in becoming further involved at this stage of his life. Another student indicated some uncertainty and did not feel the religious education program had influenced her to become more involved:

- g.m.r - 2: *No, I have not really been encouraged to become involved. At times I have my low days and I feel my belief is really weak but then there are days when I feel like God is..... I don't know, I'm full of some belief or whatever.*

Finally, two students stated clearly that they did not attend Mass. One was not religious and the other did not see the Church as important. These latter findings support those from the questionnaire which related to students' perceptions of their interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition where the majority of students responded negatively.

The large majority of responses to the third question in this group, that is, the need for a Church in the 21st century, were quite positive. Generally speaking, students felt that there would be a need for Church but it would be a different kind of Church. A reason

suggested by five students as to why there would be a need for Church was that the pressures in the world today would encourage people to turn to the Church for comfort because they needed to believe in something. However, every student felt that the Church would be a changed Church, it would *'need to get in touch with people'* and the rules would need to change. However, there did not appear to be any unity in the ideas or suggestions as to what these changes should be. One student suggested there was a need to allow priests to marry. Another disagreed but felt that women should be allowed to become priests. A suggestion offered by more than one student was that the Church would become more of a *'people's Church'*, where there would be more *'social interaction among the people'* and where the lay people were more involved with the decision-making processes. Such a process would bring the Church closer to and more in touch with the people. There was an underlying implication here that the decisions in the Church today are made by *'someone out there'*, that is, someone removed from the congregation and this has led to the Church being out of touch with the people. One student suggested *'the Masses should be different, more interesting. I have problems paying attention at Mass now, it could be something different, maybe not a Mass'*. Inherent in some of these above observations was the feeling that the Church was not listening to the people, particularly young people. Only one student felt that there would be no need for the Church in the 21st century and offered the following scenario as an alternative:

- b.m.r - 3: *No, there will be no need for the Church in the 21st century. The Church is out of touch with what people want. It is more likely that the powerful governments and organizations will do what is necessary. Something like the United Nations, they will see to it that there is no oppression. They will provide the answers.*

Discussion

Overall, students did not offer positive comments about the Church in their lives. This follows the same trend noticed in the findings from the questionnaires where students showed little interest or involvement in the Catholic faith tradition. With the interviews, ten

students felt that there would always be a place for the Church but most felt that it would have to change to keep in touch, to include young people and newer ideas and to involve more lay people especially in the decision-making process so that it became more 'collective', 'a people's church'. These views were supported by statements which said the '*hierarchical structure of the Church had to change*', '*there was a need for more interaction between all people*', '*there was a need to change some of the rules, for example, allowing women into the priesthood*', there was a need for the Church to listen to the people and not just '*tell them what to do*'. Interestingly, one student acknowledged that while there had to be some changes, such changes should be introduced slowly. '*They (the Church) will have to stick to some of their old ways otherwise, if they give in all the time, people will say we don't need it*'. Only one student stated clearly that there was no role for the Church in today's society or for the future because the role of the Church would be taken over by powerful organizations that would act to address the oppression and suffering in the world. While this response was different to earlier responses, it still echoed the underlying belief of those earlier responses where the role of the Church was seen as a place to turn to in times of stress and sorrow because it offered comfort.

At the personal level, two students said the Church had no part to play in their lives. Responses from the other eight ranged from involvement as in attending Mass every Sunday or being involved as a reader or in a youth group to a student who experienced a shifting faith - sometimes '*full of belief*' and at other times '*weak*'. None of the students attributed their interest to the influence of the religious education program. Rather, their reasons ranged from a religious family influence to the pressures of a stressful time in their lives as a result of exams, illness and death. At least two students claimed that while the Church was not important to them at present, they believed it would become important when they got older. In their views this was because when you got older '*there were more hassles in your life*' or because you would want to '*hand on the faith to your children*' and get them involved in the Church.

What is of significance here is the commonly held view which confined the Church to a place that offered comfort in troubled and stressful times. Implicit in this view is that the Church is a place of prayer, ergo, the place you go to when you need to pray. None of the students expressed the view that they saw the Church as a place of celebration and thanksgiving or as a community with shared beliefs.

Another interesting factor was the general perception that one of the expected and necessary changes that would take place in the Church was that it would become more of a community church. It would seem that there were some perceptions of a division between the congregation and the clergy which led to a 'them' and 'us' mentality. It is possible that such a perception arose because students did not experience a sense of belonging in today's Church.

Most students, once again, indicated that family influence rather than the religious education program was responsible for any involvement they might have had with the Church which supports the need for recognition of this factor in the design of future programs.

Students' perceptions of Church and religion

The next two questions attempted to discover if students perceived differences between 'Church' and 'religion'.

Question 3a: What is your definition of Church?

Question 3b: Do you see a difference between 'Church' and 'religion'?

These questions were included since the Catholic school is seen as an evangelizing arm of the Church and the religious education program is an essential component of its curriculum. As such, the church provides a rationale for the existence of the school. Thus, it was of interest to discover students' attitudes to Church because of the implications that

lay therein for the continued existence of church and school, and thereby, for the continued presence of the religious education program.

The format for Question 3a was changed in an attempt to move away from the use of words which can sometimes be misinterpreted. Equally, it provided an alternate form of communication for those students who found it difficult to articulate their views. It also served to introduce some variety into the process. Students were shown fourteen pictures and were asked to select the ones that they believed represented 'Church'. It was expected by going through the activity of defining 'Church', students would be better able to explain if they saw any differences between 'Church' and 'religion' which was asked for in Question 3b.

Table 54 presents a summary of the responses to the pictures chosen as symbols of Church.

Table 54: Symbols of Church	
Frequency	Symbol
9	a nun tending a sick person
9	a small table with a chalice of wine, a plate of bread and a lit candle
7	a large family group or group of friends enjoying a meal together
7	a member of the Salvation Army attending to a homeless person
7	three different types of Christian Church buildings
7	one person comforting another obviously distressed person
6	a street procession with people carrying banners bearing religious symbols and a large cross
6	Buddhist monks sitting cross-legged in prayerful pose
6	a chalice
5	a mother and her baby
4	a Right-to-Life rally with banners bearing the words 'Abortion kills babies'
1	a team of rowers on a river
0	a batsman dressed in cricket whites
0	an elderly musician, sitting on a bench playing his trumpet

The two symbols chosen by nine out of ten students as representing Church were obviously religious. These were No. 11 - *a nun tending a sick person*, and No. 14 - *a small table with a chalice of wine, a plate of bread and a lit candle*. The former presents an interesting comparison between No.13 - *one person comforting another obviously distressed person*, and No 8 - *a member of the Salvation Army attending to a homeless person*, which received seven responses each. It is possible that students' perceptions could have been influenced by their Catholic education where the religious significance of

the nun's habit had some impact. Certainly, the act, that of offering help to another person, was the same act depicted in all three. Also interesting is that No. 14 was chosen by more students than No. 10 - a *chalice*. It would appear that the first was more closely connected with the sacrament of the Eucharist than was the second.

The next group of symbols which gained a majority response, that is, they were chosen by seven and six students each, ranged from images of family and community or acts of Christian charity to obvious religious symbols like a cross or Buddhist priests in a prayerful pose or a Church building.

Finally, No. 4 - a *Right-to-Life rally with banners bearing the words 'Abortion kills babies'*, had the lowest response, chosen by four students. Relatively speaking, the number of responses for this last image was interesting. It is possible that students possibly saw this as a political protest and did not connect it with a Christian act.

Two images which received no response were depictions of single individuals using their special skills or talents. One that received a single response was a group of rowers on a river. It would have been interesting, in the latter case, to include an image of a different group using their special skills, for example, a Church choir, to discover if the apparent religious setting of such a group would have provoked a different response.

The point that did emerge from the choices made by students was that, when faced with the question 'What is Church?', they included places of worship, religious symbols as well as people who were involved in living their faith, that is, members of a community of believers. Thus, on reflection, students did appear to have a broad understanding of what constituted 'Church'.

The second part of the question, relating to the difference between Church and religion, evoked a range of conflicting responses that showed contradictory understandings of the

terms. Generally, there was a strong feeling that Church and religion were interlinked and for three students, Church and religion were interchangeable. However, the majority felt they were two separate entities. One view was that the Church was there for religion to be practised but religion could exist without the Church:

- *co.c.l - 3: I think the two go together but they can be separate things because lots of people do not go to Church but they do have a religion.*
- *g.m.r - 1: Religion is what you practise and you can practise that whether you're at Church or whether you're at home. The Church is just a place, a building, a space where people who believe in the same religion go to pray. It brings the religion together.*

There were conflicting statements as to whether the Church provided the rules for religion or whether religion provided the rules for people to live by:

- *co.c.l - 4: The Church is in charge of religion but religion is ... well it's what people do ... the Church gives us the opportunity to practise it.*
- *g.m.r - 2: The Church is the people and the religion is your faith and the rules of the faith, like the Commandments, which guide you.*

Finally, there was the understanding that the Church was all-encompassing while religion is something that is practised by the people:

- *b.m.r - 2: The people are the Church, religion is the practice.*
- *b.m.r - 4: Religion is much narrower than Church. It only applies to a group of people. The Church is much wider in application, more general, as in 'out there'. Religion is confined to what people in the community do (as in religious practice).*

Discussion

The responses to the Question 3a suggest that students understood two dimensions of Church. One included obvious religious symbols which linked with prayer and liturgy. The other included images of family and community, thereby, linking with community and service. However, when they were asked specifically for a definition of 'Church' and of 'religion', seven of the ten students perceived differences between the two. In general,

perceptions of the Church ranged from the Church hierarchy to a place of worship. On the one hand, it was seen almost as an external body which made decisions that affected the smaller communities that were part of the whole. On the other, it merely provided a place for the community to gather for prayer and worship. Some students felt that religion was something apart from Church. While it was complemented by the Church it did not owe its existence to the Church. Individuals could be religiously active without attending a Church.

Summary

In general, the perceptions of students, as indicated from the first part of the interview, would appear to have some implications for the future of the Church in the Catholic community. Students, generally, appeared to agree that religion had an important role to play in the lives of people and that people needed religion. However, it was clearly their impression that their own religiosity and/or involvement in religious practice was largely influenced by their families rather than by the religious education program.

It was also clear, through their answers to the different questions, that their perceptions of Church are less favourable. While the majority of students supported the need for Church, the ability of the Church to offer solace and comfort in times of crisis and sorrow was the over-riding factor in determining this need. Students did not identify the Church as being part of other aspects of their lives. They felt that the Church was out of touch with people's needs, that the rules, such as those affecting eligibility for the priesthood, needed to be changed and that something had to be done to encourage more involvement from young people. It would seem, therefore, that these students perceived a need for a future Church to have a different hierarchical structure to the existing one. They felt that there would be more involvement from community members in the decision-making process which would make the Church more relevant and it would be more a 'people's church'. Underlying these statements is the disturbing implication that the

students who were interviewed did not experience a sense of belonging and ownership in the Church; for them it was not a people's church.

Students' perceptions of faith development

The next area of focus in the interview was on students' perceptions of faith development. It was first suggested to students that one of the aims of a religious education program is to provide them with opportunities for faith development. Once again, a variety of processes were used to gather information to further enhance the information gathered by the survey where students were asked whether they felt there had been opportunities for faith development in the religious education program and whether they had personally benefited from these. In the interview, questions ranged from asking for a definition of faith to using scenarios to discover how students' beliefs and values would influence their response to a particular situation. Most of the answers on faith development were short and therefore, a discussion providing an overview is included at the end of the section.

Question 4a: Give one word for faith

Question 4b: What would you describe as an act of faith?

For the first question, six students said *belief*. Of the remaining four, one each said *RE*, *religion*, *trust* and *forgiveness* respectively.

In response to the second question, four students suggested an act of charity or helping someone and three students said '*going to church*'. Three students felt that it was doing something you believed was the right thing to do:

- co.c.1 - 2: *Faith, Church and what you believe in, for instance, I won't go to a pub until I'm 18 and I don't drink alcohol, There are things like that, that I don't get into.*
- co.c.1 - 4: *To do something that you believe is right especially when it's for someone where you might find it difficult to do the right thing.*

These responses imply that students perceive faith as something that influences their behaviour in terms of choosing to do the right thing by themselves and by others, that is, faith involved both belief and action.

The next two questions, 4c and 4d, have been treated together since the responses tended to overlap.

Question 4c: Do you feel your faith has been enriched through your experiences in the RE program this year?

Question 4d: Can you recall a particular person/experience which/who has strengthened your faith this year?

Overall, students did not feel the religious education program had influenced their faith development through the year. In most cases, they attributed the influences to other sources, such as, family and friends. Two students mentioned specific teachers and one mentioned some visiting speakers who came from an aid organization. Two students from different schools stated clearly that they did not feel their classroom religious education program had offered opportunities for faith development:

- g.m.r - 1: *No, our work requirements were based on authority, assumptions and values. It was mostly repetitive. Basically, my faith isn't that strong but probably our Year 12 retreat helped me a little.*
- b.m.r - 4: *My faith is important but it has not changed this year as a result of RE. The program was not really about faith and we didn't really have time for prayer.*

One student agreed that the religious education program had helped but also pointed to other significant influences:

- co.c .l - 4: *Yes, we had meditation sessions which helped in particular and then there were class masses and so on. Our parish priest, who is a young priest, really helped me through my difficult time with my cousin. I think it helped strengthen my faith in God, just with some events that happened.*

Finally, one student expressed negativity about the religious education program:

- b.m.r - 3: *I don't believe in God and the RE program only reinforced this belief. It was not relevant or meaningful.*

The next question in this group asked students to reflect on their own actions which were influenced by their beliefs:

Question 4e: Is there anything you have chosen to do/not to do this year because of your faith or beliefs?

Five students responded to this by giving examples of behaviour when they did something they believed in even when other students did not, for example, treating the religious education program seriously, not going to the pub because they were underage, giving to charity, going to Church, and praying. Four students couldn't think of a response. One student was negative but qualified his opening comment with a more positive statement about the influence of Catholic education:

- g.m.r - 1: *Not really, I don't see faith or religion as a major part of my life and I don't really think twice about it unless I'm going to RE or something. However, I think going to a Catholic school as opposed to a state school means that you are taught to respect other people and this affects the way you act.*

Possibly a further investigation of these results are needed to assist religious educators in improving this aspect of the program. It would seem that for most students the program had less impact on their faith development than other significant people in their lives.

The next few questions were included to glean information on students' perceptions of appropriate Christian behaviour. Question 4f asked for a response to a scenario which created a degree of hesitation among most students as they tried to answer honestly. This was apparent through a self-conscious laugh and/or body language with a shifting in their seats showing some level of discomfort before they proffered an answer. The researcher, each time, assured them that most people would probably do the same thing in their place. This appeared to make them feel better about their response.

- Question 4f: You come into a room and you see that there are different groups of your classmates talking and laughing. However, you notice that one person is sitting by themselves, a bit of a loner. Who do you think you would go over to join - the person alone or one of the groups?
- Question 4g(i): Could you suggest a TV show that you watch in which you see examples of Christian acts?
- Question 4g(ii): Could you suggest a TV show that you watch in which you see examples of acts that go against the Christian faith?

In response to 4f, six students believed they would go over to the group but some acknowledged that they should have made the effort to befriend the lone student. However, three students felt they would go over to the single individual and each offered a different reason:

- co.c.l - 4: *Probably the one, because I feel a bit intimidated by big groups myself. There is a kid in my class who is a bit of a loner but I think if everyone paid him more respect and made him feel more welcome he would become part of the bigger group.*
- b.m.r - 2: *I think it is important to get people involved so I think I might have gone over to the person and got him to come and join the others.*
- b.m.r - 4: *I think I might go over to the person but I think I would try to get him to join the others.*

One student offered the following qualified comment:

- g.m.r - 1: *I suppose I would go to the group that I hang out with but if I went into a room and I knew everyone the same, if I liked everyone the same and we were all just as close, I'd probably go over to the person alone and say 'Come join us'.*

The above responses indicated clearly that, among these students, there was a distinct perception of what appropriate Christian behaviour should be. Those who felt their answer was not the 'right' Christian one, indicated their awareness by the degree of discomfort and embarrassment that was referred to earlier.

The responses to 4g (i) and (ii) gave a further understanding of what students perceived to be appropriate Christian behaviour. These are presented in Table 55.

Table 55: TV shows showing Christian/unchristian acts

TV shows showing Christian acts	TV shows showing unchristian acts
don't watch much TV so don't know	probably all of them!
<i>Home and Away</i> - they're always trying to help one another and the parents will do anything for their children and family	<i>Melrose Place</i>
<i>Rosanne</i> - they're different, they have a message to do right, like in one episode there was a good Mum and a bad Mum but they both got their message through.	<i>Melrose Place</i>
I suppose current affairs when they show people and issues, for example, there was this lady in South Africa protecting this great big nature reserve.	We see a lot of those, (unchristian acts) the media seems to promote that kind of thing.
Soapies, like <i>Home and Away</i> and <i>Full House</i> , they all fight and have their blues, but they all make up in the end. There are Christian acts where they always forgive and try to do something for someone else.	I suppose day-time shows where you go and abuse everybody, Maybe they're also on at night but I don't watch much TV any more. I think there are more shows, for example, soaps, which have Christian acts.
<i>Brady Bunch</i>	<i>Melrose Place</i> and <i>Neighbours</i> , for example, in <i>Neighbours</i> Annalise goes behind the family's back.
Don't know	Don't watch much but I think there are more shows that go against Christian beliefs like having sex and violence.
The News where you sometimes see Christian acts	The News, you see more unchristian acts because the news is usually about bad things.
<i>Robo-cop</i> showed Christian beliefs. Even if there was lots of violence and murder, he was trying to get the bad guys.	More shows have unchristian acts.
<i>The Nanny</i> , everyone is always trying to help each other out, they try to be nice to each other.	There is a lot of violence and crime on most TV shows and films. These go against Christian beliefs. There are more shows with unchristian acts.

In general, Christian acts were seen in family shows and/or where people '*helped each other*', '*were nice to each other*', '*were trying to get the bad guys*' and '*forgiving one another*'. Unchristian acts were those that showed violence, sex and people abusing one another, for example, on some midday chat shows. There was a mixed response in terms of whether television shows showed more Christian acts than unchristian ones although the majority of students believed the latter were more common.

With the next scenario, 4h, which required a response, it was interesting that students responded more readily. It appeared that they felt more at ease with the researcher at this stage of the interview.

Question 4h: The class is having a test. You were at sport training/practice the night before and did not have time to study. Your friend says that you can copy off him/her as the marks are going to be counted towards your assessment. You know there are a few students doing this as your teacher does not keep a strict watch. What do you do?

A summary of the responses to this scenario are presented in Table 56.

Table 56: To cheat or not to cheat: Students' responses

Yes	2
No	8

Of the eight students who responded in the negative, six gave reasons which ranged from moral values to fear of getting caught. These are presented below:

- co.c.l - 1: *None of my friends would let me and even if they did, I still wouldn't do it.*
- co.c.l - 3: *I wouldn't copy, I'd talk to the teacher or something.*
- co.c.l - 4: *I wouldn't do it, mainly because it's cheating myself. I think my marks should be my mark. I take pride in knowing I do the best I can do whatever that might be, so really, it's not only because I would be cheating the teacher and other people, I just wouldn't do that to myself.*
- b.m.r - 1: *I would not copy, I think it is wrong.*
- b.m.r - 2: *I would just hand up my paper with what I could do but I would go and see the teacher and explain what had happened and I would ask if I could make it up or something.*
- b.m.r - 4: *I don't think I'd cheat but that's not based on moral grounds. It would be more a fear of getting caught.*

Of the two students who answered in the affirmative, one attributed her actions to her shifting faith:

- g.m.r - 2: *Yeah, I'd copy, this is it, my faith isn't that strong.*

The other was the student who had previously claimed to have no faith or belief in God, the implications being that he set his own code of conduct:

- b.m.r - 3: *I'd cheat, what does it matter, I'd find out the answers anyway.*

Discussion

In general, with the exception of one student who claimed to have no belief in God and who felt that the RE program had served to reinforce that belief, other students indicated they had varying levels of faith. While they appeared to display elements of Stage 3 (conventional faith), Stage 4 (personal faith) and Stage 5 (community faith) as described by Fowler (see p. 93 of this work) there was also some suggestion of faith in terms of belief and commitment (see discussion on p. 19 of this work). Thus, there was an acknowledgement of a belief system that led to certain actions. However, only one student felt that the religious education program had contributed to her faith development. Others mentioned significant adults, such as, parents, teachers and a priest. This would support the results from the survey where the combined number of students, who showed some indecision or negativity about their own faith development being influenced by the program, was nearly half of the sample. In the interviews students also showed, through their responses to the scenarios, that they felt that their faith did influence their actions, that is, they were more inclined to do what they perceived to be 'the right thing'. Generally, when they responded negatively to the situation involving the 'loner', their discomfort was apparent which indicated that they knew it was not the 'Christian' response. On the other hand, with the exception of two students, all others insisted they would not cheat in an exam and offered reasons that ranged through the six stages of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. For instance, one student asserted that the reason he would not cheat was not based on the sense of doing right or wrong but rather the risk of being caught out which would put him at Kohlberg's first stage of moral development. At the other end of the scale was the student who stated that not only was it cheating the teacher and other students but it was also cheating herself and that she would not do that to herself. Interestingly, the two students who said they would cheat included the one who described her faith as a 'shifting' faith and the one who declared he had no faith but believed in the 'Big Bang' theory.

The responses to television shows that showed Christian or unchristian acts suggested that the students found Christian acts in many shows because they saw people 'helping one another' or 'being nice to one another' even if such acts were performed against a backdrop of unchristian values as would happen in some of the programs mentioned. Most felt that there were more unchristian acts shown because of the predominance of crime, sex and violent language and behaviour.

It appears that students who have grown up in the television era have had their sensibilities de-sensitized by an inundation of programs whose visuals and language are often contrary to Christian belief. The backdrop that displayed distinctly unchristian values against which these 'Christian' acts were performed did not seem to provoke much reaction. Students appeared to focus on the act which they isolated from the surrounds, that is, the ambience suggested by violent language and actions. As a result, it is possible that their responses to these programs are significantly different from the responses of the adults, including their teachers, to the same programs. If teachers were able to divorce their own reactions to such programs so that they can appreciate students' reactions, it is possible they would develop insights into students' responses. This might enable them to use media resources as teaching tools more effectively in their programs.

Students' perceptions of acts of faith

The final question in this section, Question 5, used a similar format to Question 3a. Students were shown a number of cards on which a description of an action was written. Students were then asked to choose those that they perceived to be acts of faith. It was hoped that these responses would provide a further indication of students' understanding of faith development.

Question 5: Which of these do you see as acts of faith?

Table 57 presents the responses to this question.

Table 57 : Acts of faith	
Frequency	Acts of faith
9	praying by myself sometimes
8	acts of compassion
8	aspire to be like someone who has lived by their beliefs, eg. Mother Theresa or Martin Luther King
8	proud to be a Christian
7	feel comfortable with your religious beliefs
6	attending Mass every Sunday
6	praying by myself everyday
4	try to convince someone else to be a Christian
3	praying out loud

Discussion

Students' responses to the acts of faith echoed the response to the previous question, that is, acts of compassion and living one's life doing good to other people were definitely seen as Christian practice. The responses to this activity provided an interesting insight into students' perceptions of behaviour which was considered a display of faith. This was not an aspect identified in the surveys, therefore, these results help to enhance the interpretation of the responses to faith development in the surveys.

From the breakdown of responses in the table, it appears that quiet prayerful or reflective activities are valued by students as an expression of faith and this is followed by the act of 'helping others' and aspiring to be like those whose lives were devoted to 'helping others'. The act of helping others also came through frequently in the responses to earlier questions in this section. Attending Mass or daily prayer did not rate as highly. This latter response was interesting in light of the favourable response to occasional prayer. It could be that students felt the latter was a more genuine expression of faith. It is possible that the routine implied by the former could have been seen as detrimental to its value and significance, the repetition resulting in a mindless act.

The Year 12 religious education classroom program

The final focus of the interview was on the classroom program. This attempted to extend the questions from the section on the classroom program in the survey. Students were asked for their perceptions of the class response as well as their own response to the program. The first two questions, 6a and 6b, looked at the interest, relevance and intellectual challenge of the program as well as whether it provided opportunities for spiritual development.

Students' perceptions of the interest, relevance and intellectual challenge of the Year 12 religious education program

Question 6a. Thinking back over the RE program this year, do you think most students found that it

- intellectually challenging
- a successful learning experience
- an opportunity to encourage prayer
- interesting/uninteresting because of the topics
- interesting/uninteresting because of the resources used
- interesting/uninteresting because of the lack of variety in the activities used
- provided some occasions for students to reflect on and further develop their spirituality (the term is used here to refer to a sense of the transcendence, things regarded with reverence and which relate to conscious thoughts and emotions).

Question 6b. What would your answer be to the above list?

The responses to Questions 6a and 6b are presented in Table 58.

Table 58: Perceptions of individual and group responses to the religious education program

Features of the program	Group			Individual		
	Y	N	E	Y	N	E
opportunities for reflection and spiritual development	6	4		7	3	
interesting because of the resources used	5	3	2	4	4	2
a successful learning experience	4	3	3	7	1	2
an opportunity to encourage prayer	3	6	1	4	5	1
interesting because of the topics	3	5	2	4	3	3
interesting because of the variety of activities	1	8	1	4	4	2
intellectually challenging		10			10	

Y = yes

N = no

E = to some extent

Discussion

As with the results from the survey there were mixed responses to the questions relating to different aspects of the classroom program. Survey responses showed approximately half of the students were undecided or negative about the impact of the classroom program on their spiritual development. Of the interviewed students, at both the group and the individual level, the majority felt that there had been opportunities for spiritual development. However, there was a minority that did not believe the program was addressing the spiritual needs of students. This, once again, reflects the need for attention to be given to affective aspects of religious education in senior secondary programs.

In terms of the use of interesting resources students had mixed feelings. This echoed the responses from the surveys and emphasizes the need for improved resources to be developed and made accessible for senior religious education programs.

The next response related to perceptions of whether the involvement in the program had been a successful learning experience for the class. Generally, these were more negative than positive which supported the findings of the survey. Specific features which were seen as positive were: the retreat; a unit on prayer; and seminar days which focused on relevant topics. At a personal level, the majority felt it had been a positive experience.

The next item regarding class prayer received more negative responses at, both, the group and the personal level. This response along with two previous ones relating to faith and spiritual development suggest that educators may need to reconsider the appropriate use of prayer in their classrooms. Students appear to see some benefit in the activity and different innovative forms involving meditation, creative visualization and so on, can be used to enhance the impact.

The next two items asked for responses regarding the use of interesting topics and activities. Generally, students had mixed reactions as to whether the topics had been interesting and the large majority felt the activities had been uninteresting for the class. At the personal level, while the responses were mixed with nearly half still projecting some negativity towards the activities.

The response that provides the most serious concern for religious education teachers and coordinators is the overwhelming agreement to the question on the intellectual challenge of the program. With one voice students said they had not been challenged by the program. If the purpose of the Catholic school is to hand on the faith tradition, it would seem that an aspect of this would be to include a serious study of the Church and her teachings so that exiting students will be well informed. Results from both the questionnaires and the interviews appear to consistently indicate that this goal is not be successfully achieved and highlights a priority area that needs to be reviewed and addressed by curriculum planners and teachers of the subject.

Students' perceptions of whether religious education should be offered at Year 12

Question 6c. After your experience this year do you feel that an RE program should be offered to Year 12 students? Can you give reasons for why you feel this?

The responses to 6c are presented in Table 59.

Table 59: Should RE be offered to Year 12 students: Students' responses

yes	6
no	4

Six students agreed that religious education should be offered at Year 12 but most felt that the program should be different to the one they had experienced. There were a range of suggestions and reasons for change:

- co.c.l - 1: *Some people might 'knock' the RE program, but, on looking back, without the RE program we wouldn't have gone on a retreat which was one of the most memorable moments in Year 12. We were able to openly speak about everything, and a lot of closeness developed after that, there was a lot of praying and meditating, it was just a time in RE to come together and not have to worry about the stress of work. About the classroom program, there was praying and meditating there too which was really good. Also in the RE class there wasn't the stress or the tension there of having CATS because we were doing units 1 and 2 and it was the only time, where all the Year 12s could get together and talk openly because all the RE classes were joined. This didn't happen much elsewhere.*
- co.c.l - 2: *Yes, but it should be counted. I think being a Catholic and brought up in a Catholic school, RE should be around for life.*
- g.m.r - 1: *I think it should be offered but it should be offered in a different way. There should be less classes in Year 12 but not at the younger levels. There's a lot of stress with the CATs and that sort of thing which is why it should be offered because it is a relief from stress. However, some of that time you need for your CATs in other subjects that is why there should be less time. Often people don't turn up for class so that they can do their other CATs.*
- g.m.r - 2: *I think we should do it but have different topics.... the topics we had this year were alright but we spent too much time on them. With work requirements...they were all on the same thing and it was just a little bit different for each one and you're pretty much writing the whole thing over and over again. (The word 'little' was underlined to indicate the inflection and emphasis in the voice).*
- b.m.r - 2: *I think it is good to do Units 3 and 4 in Year 11 because it gives you an extra subject without taking up time in Year 12. In year 12 I think the seminar program worked well. There are too many pressures in Year 12 so having four days meant that people were relaxed and could enjoy them and take a break from their studies.*
- b.m.r - 4: *Yes, this year's program was effective, it shouldn't be changed. I did VCE 3 and 4 last year and I enjoyed that. I enjoy history so it was good but I would not want to do that in Year 12. There is already too much pressure on us at Year 12 with our other subjects.*

Discussion

It can be seen that there was recognition that some parts of the religious education program did, in fact, benefit students. As with the results from the survey, certain activities were highlighted, for instance, the retreat; meditation and prayer; the closeness that developed among class members as a result of sharing ideas and opinions; less tension and stress compared to other subjects; and the relief provided by a seminar program from the routine and pressures of a classroom program. Some students expressed an appreciation of the intellectual challenge of VCE units 3 and 4 which they had completed at Year 11 although they preferred to see such units offered at Year 11 while a more informal program was offered at Year 12. They suggested that these could include seminar type programs. Others felt that if religious education was offered at Year 12 it should 'count', that is, it should contribute towards the end of year score. Most felt that religious education should be offered in some format in a Catholic school.

However, there were four students who did not agree that religious education should be offered as a compulsory subject at Year 12. The reasons offered ranged from the fact that students did not take it seriously, that there were already too many other pressures at Year 12 and that it was boring.

- co.c.1 - 3: *Probably we should do it to Year 11 but I don't know whether we should have to do it in Year 12, especially as certain people do not take it as seriously as they should.*
- co.c.1 - 4: *At our school now they are doing Units 3 and 4 at Year 11 and I think that is a much better idea. I think by now if you haven't found yourself and all that type of thing that we do for Year 12 . . . Well! We did Unit 2 which was compulsory, if it was going to be compulsory I would have preferred it to be Units 3 and 4 so we got some credits for it.... but I don't think it should be compulsory at Year 12, it's just a matter of stress. I do think that they should keep the retreat and at lunch times have the opportunities for prayer or something like that.*
- b.m.r - 1: *Units 3 and 4 were good at Year 11 but at Year 12 there are too many pressures. It would be better not to have RE at Year 12.*

- b.m.r - 3: *No, it's boring. I did Unit 1 in Year 11 and that was boring. It takes up too much time in Year 12 and this affects our other subjects which are more important.*

The implications of the above responses suggest that, in the perceptions of a majority of the interviewed students, religious education should be offered at Year 12 in a Catholic school. This was different to the responses to the questionnaires where a large majority of students responded that religious education should be optional at Year 12. Both sets of results implied that, if the program was to be offered, the affective aspects of the program that catered for students' needs and others that presented an intellectual challenge should be retained. These perceptions provide support for the curriculum model proposed earlier (see p. 77). It must be added here that, in the end, in the perceptions of most students, there were several aspects of the program that did not appear to work and, therefore, there is a clear need to address these.

Students' perceptions of their learning experiences in religious education

The next two questions drew on the objectives that were stated in the *VCE Religion and Society* study design and which were also included in the general aims of religious education guidelines.

Question 7: As you face the next few years, do you feel that the RE program has provided you with the knowledge and learning experiences that has taken you nearer to understanding the meaning of human existence?

Question 8: Are there issues that concern you in your life at present? Did you find that the RE program helped you to come to a better understanding of these issues?

Three students were quite explicit in the fact that they had found the religious education program beneficial and they provided a few reasons for their views. However, two of them qualified their comments by highlighting areas they felt had not been dealt with sufficiently. One student expressed concern about the fact that some issues were '*sidelined*' because they were sensitive in relation to the Church's view, for example,

women's role in the Church. In the student's perception, this led to some loss of credibility:

- g.m.r - 1: *I think it has helped me understand a lot about people, a lot about religion and it opened up my mind.... but with human existence, I don't really think it matters, who really cares why we're here, we are here, lets enjoy life to the full. I suppose we should look at environmental issues, that sort of thing. RE gives you morals basically that you live your life by, you just take what you want from the RE program and use it, anything you don't believe in, you don't feel is important. Some things, like women in the Church was sidelined a little bit. Because we were a Catholic school, they had to push the Catholic point of view and opposition to it was very much put down and because of that a lot of students said, 'No' I don't believe in it, I think we should be able to have abortion or euthanasia if we wanted,' because we were pushed so much towards 'No, you can't do that'.*

Another student felt that there should have been more discussion on the future of the Church:

- co.c.l - 4: *I think it has helped me, especially with dealing with other people. About issues, perhaps, the uneven distribution of wealth. We did work on that in Year 11. Perhaps a bit more on the future of the Church, where it is headed. I think it should concern all of us because it will be our Church and I don't believe people are aware of how bad things are becoming, not in the way the Church is run but in the lack of people, that is, lack of priests.*

There were five students who felt that some aspects of the religious education program had helped them. Generally speaking, the issues that had been studied appeared to draw this response, for example, euthanasia and social justice. Equally, topics, such as, 'marriage' was felt to be quite relevant for the age group:

- co.c.l - 2: *Sort of, you feel that some of the different areas of RE have helped, like 'euthanasia' which was quite interesting. Also we did 'marriage' and a student in our class got engaged and that made it more interesting. Otherwise, in previous years we did things about our future but not this year.*
- g.m.r - 2: *I think the topic euthanasia helped me learn a lot. I think we should study current issues a little bit more, how to deal with them, to understand realistic stuff that happens in our lives.*
- co.c.l - 3: *No, not really, I don't know whether it has, perhaps a little bit. The topic on 'marriage' was interesting and relevant. These are things useful to us at this stage of our lives.*

One student believed that his experiences in the religious education program had contributed to his own personal growth:

- b.m.r - 2: *I don't know about the meaning of human existence. I think it has given me faith in myself and that has helped me be stronger, and we dealt with issues that are relevant to us.*

Finally, there were three students who could not perceive any real benefits from the religious education program. In one case, the student felt that the areas covered were not 'religious' and in another, the student attributed his understanding of religious issues and questions to the influence of his family:

- b.m.r - 1: *Not this year. We didn't do very much about religion we did more about things that we need to know when we leave school like careers and things. I can't think of any other issues that we should have done.*
- b.m.r - 4: *I think my own family has given me this understanding. The RE program this year did not really touch on these things. I can't think of any other issues that need to be included.*

Discussion

Generally, seven of the ten students felt they had learnt something from the religious education program and three students were negative. Most felt the program had not really brought them closer to an understanding of the meaning of human existence while one student felt his family had given him this understanding. Another student felt that she had learned something but followed it up with a '*who cares about why we are here, let's enjoy life to the full.*' When asked if she thought that was the purpose in life, she agreed. One student felt what he had got out of the program was a faith in himself which had made him a stronger person, thus, the personal development aspects of the program were beneficial for him.

What is apparent here is the different levels of maturity that were displayed by these students. It provides support for the proposal that programs need to consider the different

stages of intellectual and personal development of students, and that they bring different life experiences and situations into the classroom.

Students' overall impressions of the religious education program

The final two questions asked for a summing up of the program and the responses are presented below.

- Question 9. In one or two words could you sum up your impressions of how effective the RE program was for you this year.
- Question 10. If you had any advice to offer the RE teachers about improving the program what would you say?

The majority of students found some aspects of the program effective and/or beneficial, particularly, the retreats. One student said it should not be offered, one felt it had been ineffective and one had a mixed response. The advice was that more relevant topics should be offered, ones which touched the students at this stage of their lives. Those who had seminar days felt such a format was better than regular classes and one student felt if religious education was to be part of VCE it should add to the Tertiary Entrance Score. At least two students referred to the need for religious education to be stress free and a time to relax from other pressures of Year 12. Some of the comments are presented below:

- co.c.1 - 1: *Worthwhile. However, we did meditating at the start of the year and that's when none of us were stressed and we felt it was a waste of time. We should include meditation and prayer later in the year when we are really stressed.*
- co.c.1 - 2: *Beneficial. If we do VCE RE at Year 12 it should be Units 3 and 4 which give us credits.*
- co.c.1 - 3: *Sort of effective. I suppose we could have done more relevant issues. There wasn't a lot of time during the year to do a lot of things. 'Marriage' wasn't very useful for use. They could have done something like 'pre-marital sex' or 'relationships' or the 'role of women in the Church'.*

- co.c.1 - 4: *Ineffective this year, as far as the actual program was concerned. Some of my experiences, like the retreat, were very effective but the actual classroom program was ineffective.*
- g.m.r - 1: *The principles behind it were good but basically, the structure of it has to be less focused on work requirements and getting them completed. We should focus more on things that are going to affect us.*
- g.m.r - 2: *The retreat was the best, tops, an all-time excellent! We should do less work requirements and they should be different. We should have more discussion about things in our lives. We did discuss things outside our lives that may affect us later on but we should discuss things that are happening in our lives now.*
- b.m.r - 2: *Keep the four seminar days. Don't go back to VCE RE at Year 12.*
- b.m.r - 4: *Effective. They should keep it the same as this year (that is, the four seminar days). The four days are better at Year 12 than having it as another subject. This way we could relax more in RE and enjoy it more.*

Discussion

On balance, students were clear about the fact that while the religious education programs had some benefits, they needed to be reviewed and changes introduced. Once again, these results support the findings in the survey where students offered a range of suggestions which, in their perceptions, could improve the program and make it more meaningful, interesting and relevant for them. Some of the suggestions were echoed here, for instance, there was some reference to a need for the program to be intellectually challenging and to contribute to the VCE score. Also, the retreats and activities that involved reflections were obviously the highlight of the year for most students who had experienced them. It would seem, however, close attention needed to be given to the timing of such activities in the school year, so that students could derive the maximum benefit from them. If they occur too close to dates when CATS or work requirements are

due, compulsory attendance is more likely to provoke a negative response which can ultimately impact on the expected benefits of the activity.

It has become evident from the above findings that, in the perceptions of the interviewed students, attention could be given to affective learning in terms of making the programs more relevant and meaningful by addressing students' needs. However, it could be that this was directly in reaction to what these students actually experienced in their classroom programs. As mentioned before, and supported by students' comments here, if some teachers had allowed the completion of written tasks, as articulated in VCE work requirements, to dominate the learning activities to the detriment of affective learning, students may have responded adversely and their comments could be a reflection of this. Accordingly, this again implies the need to balance content and teaching strategies in relation to cognitive and affective learning in these classrooms.

Summary and significance for this research study

This chapter focused on the results of the interviews. Ten students from three different schools were interviewed. Of the three schools, one was a metropolitan boy's school with a religious principal, one was a metropolitan girl's school with a religious principal and one was a country coeducational school with a lay principal. Two schools offered school-based seminar type programs and one school offered a VCE/school based program.

The interviews focused on three areas and these were expected to extend the information and findings from the questionnaires. These were:

Focus 1 - the role and influence of religion and the role of the Church;

Focus 2 - faith development;

Focus 3 - Year 12 religious education classroom program.

Major findings

In general, the findings of the interviews reflected the broader findings of the questionnaires and provided deeper insights into some areas of the religious education program. The major findings were:

1. Students, generally, agreed that religion was important and that, at some stage in their lives, people needed religion because it offered them hope, comfort and a place of refuge.
2. Most students' understanding of the Church encompassed two dimensions, one related to prayer and liturgy and the other related to community and service.
3. Most students felt there was a need for the Church but believed the Church would need to change and have more involvement and decision-making from the laity.
4. Most students felt (i) that young people did not feel welcome in the Church today, and (ii) that young people did have something of value to offer and that their input could help to make the Church more relevant to them.
5. Most students believed that other significant adults in their lives, rather than the religious education program, had contributed to their faith development.
6. Generally, students' responses indicated that they were at different stages of faith development.
7. Generally, students' responses showed that they were at different stages of moral development.
8. Students' selection of Christian acts were those where people were seen to be helping one another or being nice to one another.
9. Generally, students' viewed acts of compassion and living one's life doing good to other people as true examples of Christian practice.
10. Generally, students' individual responses to the classroom program were positive but their perceptions of the class response to the program were negative.
11. All students strongly voiced the desirability for the religious education program to address topics and issues that were relevant to their particular needs and interests;

for them to have the freedom to articulate their own ideas and opinions, and more importantly, for these to be heard and respected.

12. A small majority of students believed that a religious education program should be offered to Year 12 students in Catholic schools but firmly expressed the need for a different type of program.

The above results support the findings of the questionnaires. On the one hand, students appear to be proposing that more attention be given to personal development in the religious education classroom, while on the other hand, they express the lack of intellectual challenge. As referred to, in the previous discussion, the emphasis that students' placed on the former could be a direct result of their actual classroom experiences, that is, their responses were reactive. The implications therein suggest that despite the intent, as stated in curriculum documents, teachers of these programs may have allowed learning activities to be dominated by the attainment of knowledge and skills. Consequently, the personal needs and, more generally, the affective aspects of religious education may have been given inadequate attention. In light of the theoretical curriculum model proposed earlier (see p. 77), the point needs to be reiterated here that senior secondary religious education programs should have a sound academic base that challenge students and promote knowledge. Additionally, there should be learning activities that address aspects of different stages of development and cater for the personal needs of the students. Furthermore, teachers need to be clear in their understanding that intellectual study in religious education can promote affective learning. Likewise, by addressing aspects of personal development, the program can further contribute to learning in the cognitive domain. If such an understanding is reflected in their classroom practice, there is more chance that teachers will communicate it to their students.

This brings us to the end of the presentation of the results from the data collection. The next chapter will explore the significance and implication of the findings and will draw on them to offer suggestions for future developments in religious education.

Chapter 8

Desirable features of senior religious education in Catholic schools:

Discussion and conclusions; implications and recommendations

This chapter examines the findings of this study that were presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 in light of relevant theories and approaches to religious education as discussed in Section 1 of this work. Additionally, it proposes some guiding principles which could inform a review and development of future senior secondary programs in Catholic schools and suggests relevant areas for further research.

There were three objectives of this research study:

- to examine the theory of and approaches to religious education to identify characteristics that were seen as desirable for programs for senior secondary students;
- to analyse curriculum documents of the programs involved in the study to illuminate the discussion of students' perceptions of their experiences within their respective programs, and
- to determine, based on students' and teachers' perceptions, how appropriate religious education programs were in meeting the needs of today's students and in achieving the aims of religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

Six sub-questions which drew on the characteristics identified as desirable for senior religious education (see Chapter 1, pp. 76-79 of this work) formed the basis for the questionnaires and interviews. These are set out below.

Did the Year 12 religious education program:

1. increase students' interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion;
2. offer a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition;
3. increase students' interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives;
4. provide students with learning experiences that have the potential to enhance their faith and spiritual development;
5. offer content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society, and
6. achieve appropriate status and recognition of its specific contribution to the broad Year 12 curriculum?

In general, the findings from the questionnaires and interviews complemented each other and provided some important insights into students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences of different areas of study in the Year 12 religious education program with a special focus on the delivery of the classroom program.

In addition, there were significant findings related to

- the intentions of different approaches to religious education, and
- professional development for religious education teachers.

These will be discussed later.

To begin with, various approaches to religious education were identified in Chapter 1. There were those which gave greater emphasis to an intellectual study of the subject or learning in the cognitive domain. Others paid more attention to learning in the affective

domain in terms of the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of religious education. From the curriculum outlines provided by the schools involved in this study, it was apparent that, between them, different emphases were given to cognitive and affective learning in the classroom program:

- seven schools with VCE/school-based programs and one school with a school-based program had classroom programs which promoted cognitive learning, that is, they aimed to develop knowledge and skills.
- three of the four schools with school-based programs had a greater focus on affective learning, that is, on personal growth and development.

The six sub-questions listed above provide the framework for the following discussion on the findings of this study.

Students' interest in different religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion

Overall, it seemed that the majority of students were not encouraged by the religious education program to become interested in learning about other religions. However, most of these reported that their tolerance of other religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in society had increased. A small majority said that religion was more important to them as a result of the program and most saw religious education as a life-long process. The results from the interviews supported the findings from the questionnaires and provided further insights into students' thinking. A majority of the students who were interviewed shared the perception that religion was important and influenced certain patterns of behaviour which brought meaning to the lives of individuals. Likewise, a majority felt that religion had an important role to play in society because it offered solace and comfort, even a kind of security. Their perceptions of the world today was that it was a place of stress and problems. Religion was seen by most as a kind of antidote that provided relief from such afflictions because it offered a channel of

communication with God or 'someone there'. Following this thinking, many students stated that the importance of religion in one's life increased as one got older because one's stress levels increased! These feelings were also expressed by those students who declared that they themselves were not religious. Therefore, it would seem that, while the programs did not increase most students' interest in learning about different religions, other aspects related to a study of religion were successful for a majority of students.

Students who had overseas links, either with their own place of birth or with their parents' place of birth, were slightly more positive for these items. This could mean that an investigation into possible links between a higher exposure to multiculturalism and an increased tolerance of different faiths could be useful. A pertinent finding was that the small group of nine students who professed to have no religious affiliation seemed to be more positive about the three items related to a study of different religions than those who stated that they were adherents to a particular faith tradition.

The students' apparent lack of interest in learning about different religions could be a concern given that, in the early seventies, theorists and curriculum writers in the area of religious education articulated the need for senior religious education programs in Australian schools to include a study of different religions. They recognized that such a study should be included as a subject in its own right in the curriculum because it contributed its own form of knowledge. They also felt it was important that students should gain a better understanding of other faith traditions, given the greater exposure they had to different beliefs and practices in contemporary society. It was also suggested that such a study could be beneficial in increasing students' understanding of their own faith tradition. Findings from subsequent studies have validated this expectation (for instance, Angelico 1997; Malone 1996; McGrath 1996).

An underlying factor that may have contributed to students' lack of interest could be that they did not understand the importance of learning about the subject or that other

subjects took priority. In their final school year, there appeared to be a number of pressures they experienced, many of which related to further studies, work and career aspirations. Students, therefore, were more motivated to focus on those subjects that they saw as being beneficial in these areas. Perhaps, the significance of learning about different religions could be demonstrated to students, that is, that the pluralist nature of modern Australian society provides a rationale for them to learn about and understand the cultural and religious differences that they are likely to be exposed to. This could motivate students to desire further knowledge in this area, that is, it could increase their levels of interest in learning about different religions. One plan of action could be to encourage students to recognize that an understanding of different faith traditions, and associated religious practices, could enhance their relationships and communications within the community at the local, national and global level. Further, it could lead to greater tolerance levels thereby promoting a deeper sense of peace and harmony. An appreciation of this may increase students' interest in learning about different religions.

Another possible reason for the lack of interest could be related to the developmental stages that adolescents were experiencing. If their interests and needs were motivated by their own search for identity and their acceptance by their peers, and if these were coloured by their pre-occupation with career choices and aspirations, it could be that an academic study of different religions was not appropriate for inclusion at Year 12. Perhaps, it would be more suitable to include this at Year 11 or earlier levels and to concentrate on other more personal aspects related to the study of religion at Year 12. Certainly, the positive comments from students from schools which included *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4 at Year 11 would appear to support such a contention. Indeed, a possible reason for the disinterest at Year 12 could be that students had experienced similar courses of study in earlier years.

Yet another point that needs to be considered here is the suitability of the teachers' background for teaching about world religions. To begin with, while some teachers in

Catholic schools may have a background in Christian theology or religious education, this may not necessarily include knowledge of world religions. Therefore, they may have limited knowledge of the subject. More particularly, they would lack the understanding that comes from being an adherent to a particular religion. The combination of these two features is likely to detract from their successful teaching about different religions. One solution may lie in offering professional development programs to improve teachers' knowledge of world religions. However, it would be difficult to address the other issue related to a teacher's lack of an 'inside' understanding of a religion to which s/he does not belong. This needs serious consideration in curriculum planning when study of different religions is being included in senior religious education programs.

It is possible that the lack of interest from students in learning about different religions could be attributed to the presentation of the content, the choice of learning and teaching strategies and the use of resources. The variation in students' responses to these aspects of the program possibly reflected similar variations in the delivery and practical application of the programs. The challenge here would lie in improving the delivery of the classroom program by adopting approaches that lead to effective learning. These could include the use of new technologies that cater for the different styles of learning, thereby promoting the learning process. It may be beneficial to include guest speakers from different faith traditions (Goosen, 1996) and visits to their places of worship. Seeing religious people worship in their places of worship, visiting places of worship, meeting members of other faith communities face-to-face, festivals and other 'religious activities' were found to promote a better understanding of religions and religious influences (Astley, et al., 1997). This would bring the study closer to the 'life' of the religion and remove it from the possibly sterile atmosphere of the classroom which concentrates on theory and facts. If adequate preparation for such visits have been made there is potential for such study to be interesting, enriching and relevant to students.

A final point for consideration is that if teachers are failing to interest students' in learning about different faith traditions, which have become an integral part of Australian society, it may be as difficult to stimulate students' interest in their own faith tradition especially if they see it as having little relevance or meaning in modern society.

To sum up, the findings, according to students' perceptions, indicated that as a result of the religious education program, a majority of students had increased their tolerance of other religions and their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion. However, the program had not enhanced their interest in learning about different religions. This appears to lend support to the proposition that the classroom program at Year 12 could, perhaps, concentrate on content that caters for the developmental needs and interests of senior adolescents, thus increasing its potential to have meaning and relevance for them.

A sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition

A majority of students believed that their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition had increased as a result of the religious education program. At this point, no conclusions are drawn about the intellectual quantity or quality, that is breadth and depth, of this knowledge since the study did not attempt to assess this aspect. Also, the accuracy of students' perceptions cannot be determined since no assessment was conducted to discover the level of prior knowledge or the achievement of knowledge at the end of the program. Both these aspects were outside the scope of this work and they provide possible areas for further research. However, the results do raise the issue of the importance of on-going assessment of students' knowledge as part of the curriculum process so that schools can identify and address problem areas.

Despite the positive response here, there was a certain tension in the findings related to the cognitive element of the religious education programs. On the one hand, the majority of students declared that their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition

had increased as a result of the program. On the other hand, a majority of students reported that the program had not helped them to understand the message of Jesus. Additionally, a significant majority perceived that the program lacked intellectual challenge. The conflict therein suggests that an urgent priority for religious educators could be to examine this area further. It is possible, in relation to the first two findings, that the programs were not sufficiently christocentric and that there had been a greater emphasis placed on learning about other aspects of the faith tradition. Thus, the centrality of Jesus, and his teachings, to the Catholic faith tradition may have been overshadowed by historical studies, rites and rituals, the liturgical cycle and so on. According to the General Catechetical Directory:

Christ Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, since he is the supreme reason why God intervenes in the world and manifests himself to men, is the centre of the Gospel message within salvation history ... Hence catechesis must necessarily be christocentric (GCD 1971, #40).

This teaching has been stated equally strongly in the recently released *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997):

The fact that Jesus Christ is the fullness of Revelation is the foundation for the "Christocentricity" of catechesis: the mystery of Christ, in the revealed message, is not another element alongside others, it is the centre from which all other elements are structured and illuminated (1997, #41).

The different findings in this area suggest that there are implications for the selection and organization of content in senior religious education programs.

The third finding referred to above, that the programs, in the perceptions of students, may have lacked intellectual challenge may need to be considered by religious education teachers. Perhaps, strategies could be included that accurately assess the level of knowledge that students have achieved which might reflect their individual development and maturity. Equally, ongoing evaluation of the programs would be beneficial to examine

whether the classroom practice reflects the desired outcomes as stated in the curriculum documents.

The point that emerges in the preceding paragraph is that there is a distinct need for religious education programs to contain a strong knowledge base which can provide students with an intellectually challenging study. Such a study need not desist from addressing the personal aspects of religious education but may contribute to the development of the student's individual faith and spirituality. It is important, also, that students are encouraged to recognize this contribution. Certainly, this feature was seen as an essential component in the theoretical model proposed earlier (see p. 77).

To sum up, it seems from these and previous findings related to aspects of learning about religion that the intentions of the programs, based on a cognitive focus, are not being achieved for a majority of students.

Interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of religion in their lives

A majority of students agreed that the program had increased the importance of religion in their lives. Their responses regarding their involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and the importance of Church in their lives were mixed. The interviewed students offered similar reasons for the continued existence of the Church as they did for religion, that is, it provided a place to turn to in times of need. Most felt that the Church would have to change because it lacked relevance for so many people and it was out of touch with the times. Direct answers to the question 'what was Church?' provided answers ranging from a community to a building where religious practices took place. It needs to be noted that the suggestions as to how the Church would change implied that students did not perceive themselves and their parish communities to be Church. Instead, there appeared

to be a mentality of a 'them' and 'us', that is, the 'Church' was the Church hierarchy who made the decisions but was out of touch with the people.

Many recent studies have highlighted the decline in interest and involvement of young Catholics in the Church (for instance, Crawford & Rossiter, 1988; DiGiacomo, 1993; Angelico, 1997). Their generation have grown up in a society which, as a result of the large numbers of migrants from different cultural and religious backgrounds, has promoted the tolerance and celebration of diversity in culture and faith. The emergence of a contemporary Australian identity that draws itself from a variety of cultures is clearly different from that of previous generations which was dominated by an Anglo-saxon/Anglo-celtic heritage. Senior adolescents, today, have not only had a greater exposure to different beliefs and practices, they are also a generation with their own variety of youth cultures, the spread of which have been greatly assisted by the mass media. One result has been the growth of peer pressure and other significant factors that impact on their lives, often leading to stress and disillusionment. Higher suicide rates, drug and alcohol abuse and youth homelessness are some symptoms of such dislocation. The role of the Church amidst such influences was perceived by many young people to be irrelevant and unimportant. Many also saw it as being deaf to their voices, unable and unwilling to develop an empathy with them, therefore, increasing in them a sense of alienation.

Of the interviewed students, most did feel that there was a need for Church, one which needed to be a 'people's church' with strong links to the community which, in their perceptions, the contemporary Church did not have. These students indicated that they perceived two dimensions to Church, one related to prayer and liturgy and the other related to community and service.

There was some indication that students had developed a sense of community as a result of the religious education program, both at the broader level of the Catholic school and

the classroom level. Many students expressed a sense of appreciation of the 'closeness' and the 'bonding' of the Year 12 group during religious education, both at the class and the year level. For many students the Catholic school, through the religious education program, had become Church, a community where they felt valued; where they were able to share and learn from the different ideas and opinions that were expressed; and where there were opportunities for faith and spiritual development through liturgical celebration, prayer and reflection. These were the perceived strengths of the religious education program. From their responses, it became clear that being a part of a group composed of their peers was an important factor for most students. Thus, they demonstrated features of the 'Identity versus Role Confusion' stage as described by Erikson (1968) as described in Chapter 2 of this work.

However, there were concerns expressed by a few students that they did not learn enough about the Catholic faith tradition. While these were in the minority there is a need for educators to acknowledge this factor. It may mean that an elective program, rather than a compulsory one, could be offered to interested students at Year 12; a study, such as VCE *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4, which could focus on a sound academic study of the Catholic faith tradition. However, the curriculum model proposed earlier would still have applicability so that learning which focused on the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of religious education would need to be addressed.

There was a large majority of students who expressed little interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition as a result of the religious education program. Students who were interviewed also said they did not feel that their experiences in the religious education program had encouraged them to become interested and involved in the Church. Instead most students believed their interest and/or involvement were influenced by significant adults in their lives or by their families' religious practices. The family's influence on students' religiosity and their interest and involvement in the Church was an important finding and has been supported by other research studies (for instance, Flynn

1986; Leavey et al. 1992). This factor became evident in responses to both questionnaires and interviews. With the former, students who attended Mass with their families were generally more positive than those who attended alone. If we can assume that the latter group who attended Mass on their own had made a conscious choice to involve themselves in this practice, the more negative responses they displayed about the religious education classroom program compared to the former group is of concern. It is possible that the former gained some strength and stability from the shared religious practice of the family in their search for meaning. However, the religious education program did not appear to provide similar levels of support for the latter group of students. This could be another area which requires examination to determine what can be done to address the apparent needs of these students. With the former group it seems that a greater emphasis on the importance of the family's role as the primary religious educator is required. Whilst this is acknowledged in theory in Church documents, the practice may be otherwise. There appears to be a need for a partnership to be established between school, parish and parents and for the allocation of appropriate resources to support the family as a major influence in the religious education of the student. This has been supported in the recent document, *To know worship and love* (1998), a report from the Committee of Enquiry into Religious Texts to the Archbishop in the Melbourne Archdiocese. Two recommendations from the committee related to parent's involvement in religious education:

4. There is a need for the preparation of material which complements the student texts and is appropriate to parents for self-education purposes and also assists them in contributing to the religious development of their children.

and

5. The fostering of a supportive partnership between parent, schools and parishes should be seen as paramount in the ongoing process of religious education (1998, p. 2)

One aspect of the above findings is pertinent to the development of future religious education programs. If students are not challenged by different aspects of the Catholic

community, one of which is the religious education program, to become interested and involved in their own faith tradition, it could have long-term implications for the identity and culture of Catholic schools and for the life of the faith tradition among future generations. While this is an issue that reflects a wider area than the school and the religious education program, it has some relevance for this discussion. There may be a need for reconsideration of the ongoing mission and purpose of the Catholic school in contemporary society, especially in relation to its role as one of the evangelizing agents of the Church. Such schools may evolve differently if a future generation of Catholic adults perceive links between the Church and schools as different from what they are now. According to the Congregation for Catholic Education

The aim of the (Catholic) school, however, is knowledge. While it uses the same elements of the Gospel message, it tries to convey a sense of the nature of Christianity, and of how Christians are trying to live their lives. It is evident, of course, that religious instruction cannot help but strengthen the faith of a believing student, just as catechesis cannot help but increase one's knowledge of the Christian message... a school can and must play its specific role in the work of catechesis. Since its educational goals are rooted in Christian principles, the school as a whole is inserted into the evangelical function of the Church. It assists in and promotes faith education (RDECS 1988, # 69).

This direction needs to be viewed in light of the findings under discussion. Certainly, if senior religious education programs, which are an essential part of Catholic education, fail to inspire interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition, it suggests an area of potential concern for the Catholic Church. In particular, there is significance for such programs if they are to remain faithful to the broad aims and directions of Catholic religious education guidelines as discussed in the first part of this work (see Chapter 1). If, on the one hand, the school is intended to be an evangelising arm of the Church, these findings imply a need for major curriculum reform. On the other hand, it may be that the appropriateness of the religious education classroom program for evangelization, which is one aspect of some programs, needs to be reconsidered, and the links between Church

and school may need to be re-identified and further articulated (see discussion in Chapter 1, pp. 18 -24).

The student's responses here may be an indication of the way the Catholic faith tradition is experienced by young people today. It was apparent that students saw the Church as an authority that failed to listen to them. They did not identify with the Church's views on current social and cultural issues which they believed were often out-dated and meaningless and this contributed to their sense of alienation from the Church. It was equally apparent, from their references to the sharing and bonding experiences they had, that the Catholic school was more successful than the local parish in meeting students' needs, in affirming them and in nurturing in them a sense of belonging.

The tension for the religious education teacher lies in the need to bridge the widening gap between students' perceptions of the Catholic school and the Church as faith communities. It is possible that an increased exposure to different community groups living out the Church's teachings on social justice would assist in informing students, widening their perceptions and increasing their understanding of Church and the teaching of the gospel values. The other tension arises from the need to provide students with knowledge and personal experience of their religious heritage and to also establish an atmosphere where their individual freedom to respond is respected. Such a study should enable them to put into perspective the Church's role in contemporary society and the relevance it has to their immediate world. Additionally, it would have the potential to address learning in the cognitive domain and possibly motivate students to further thought and/or action.

These factors point to the need for teachers who are confident with their own knowledge and understanding of the subject and whose personal commitment could enhance their teaching. If they were comfortable in the handling of questions and issues that arose in

class discussions, it is possible that they would be better placed to focus their energies on improving the delivery of their programs.

A feature worthy of note among the responses according to religious affiliation was from those students who professed to have no religion. Consistently, their responses were similar to other groups who perceived themselves to be adherents to a particular faith tradition. The pattern was also repeated with groups who never attended Mass. In the latter case, this group responded within a similar range to that of students who did attend. The frequency of attendance did not appear to influence the results. Certainly, it would appear that the religious education program had some impact on these students and further research would be necessary to identify any influential aspects.

To sum up, if senior religious education programs intend to promote knowledge, understanding, interest and/or involvement in the Catholic faith tradition for a majority of their students, these findings suggest a need for review of future curricula objectives in this area.

Learning experiences that have the potential to enhance students' faith and spiritual development

Overall, the responses showing students' perceptions of their faith and spiritual development were varied across school groups. A small majority of students responded that their faith and spiritual development had not developed as a result of their learning experiences in the program. Retreats, reflections, meditations and quiet prayer were nominated as the most appreciated parts of the program which enhanced their faith and spiritual development. Some students who had not experienced these during the year mentioned a lack of them and felt they should have been included. Implicit in these responses is that between schools there was a variation in the provision of opportunities for faith and spiritual development. It appeared that, in the case of some schools with

VCE religion units, the corresponding work requirements seemed to dominate class time; that is, those parts of the program that belonged to the cognitive domain and formal assessment. This was to the detriment of other aspects of the program which belonged to the affective domain. Students' responses confirmed this when they referred to the 'boring, repetitive nature' of writing tasks and work requirements and complained that little time was given to reflections and meditation. Given the positive expressions of interest and appreciation from students regarding these more informal activities, it seems that such activities could be included as an on-going part of the program. A careful monitoring of the process would provide more accurate insights into the expected benefits. These results emphasize the importance of attending to both the cognitive and affective aspects of religious education.

The results discussed here have implications for teachers in religious education. It would appear that, if a particular aim of Catholic education is to help students on their personal journey of faith development, in students' perceptions, this was not achieved for over half the Year 12 students in the sample. One aspect of the above discussion could relate to the handling and delivery of classroom programs that promote an intellectual study of religious education. It appeared, from students' comments, that such programs tended to be dominated by the acquiring of knowledge and skills. It is possible that these activities became an end in themselves, thereby becoming dry and unstimulating exercises. As such, they may not have been integrated to form an wholistic approach to learning in religious education, which is to say, their potential to promote the affective aspects in religious education were not realized. Equally, it is possible that the focus on cognitive learning meant that opportunities for more informal activities were not included in the program, such as, understanding the significance of the Gospel's message for their own lives, quiet prayer, reflection, community work and so on. A blending of these, that is, a wholistic or integrated approach that recognizes and caters for the movement between cognitive and affective learning in religious education (as discussed on p. 77 of this work),

may have led to a more successful outcome. This is, indeed, an area that requires closer investigation.

Another relevant factor that emerged, and which reflected earlier findings, was the obvious influence of the family or some significant person on the faith and spiritual development of senior adolescents. This was acknowledged by most students in their responses to the questionnaires and interviews. Such a person could have been a relative or someone from within the Catholic community. Most students did not see a corresponding influence of the religious education program in these areas. This finding supports the proposal that an effective partnership between the school and the rest of the Catholic community should be developed. Clearly, some study needs to be undertaken to explore ways in which this family influence and the school program can be mutually enhancing. The contribution families make to the religious and social lives of students, in terms of love, trust, security, mutual support, hope, forgiveness, spirituality and so on, should be recognized. Equally, it should be acknowledged that these features can be used to enhance the religious education program. The above findings do suggest that the school should not expect to be totally responsible for the faith development of its students (Leavey *et al*, 1991). Instead it should recognise that the family and the parish community have a significant part to play in the nurturing of young Catholics into the faith tradition. As such, each should endeavour to establish a complementary partnership with the other.

Another feature that was seen as most valuable in developing a sense of community and promoting spiritual development was class discussions. In this, students 'shared' experiences, 'listened' to one another, 'bonded' with each other, 'learnt' from one another, felt 'valued' and generally developed a strong sense of community. Further, a perceived strength of the religious education class was the opportunity that it provided for students to relax and forget the stresses of Year 12 for a while and, with some topics, helped to prepare them for life. Generally, students felt that the religious education program was most relevant and meaningful when it engaged them in such activities. There has been

some recognition that the spirituality of senior students, which is influenced by television, shapes their beliefs and values and gives meaning to their actions and codes of conduct (Rossiter, 1996). Thus, by creating opportunities for students to express and share these beliefs, it is possible that the classroom program catered for the personal and spiritual development of students and promoted a sense of a community with shared values.

A negative aspect of class discussions was the view offered by some students that the topics discussed became repetitive and boring. Instead, they felt that there was a need for them to discuss issues that were relevant to them at their particular stage in life and which would help to prepare them for the future. They felt that, sometimes, the Church's views were pushed and they were not given the opportunity to express their own opinions. They voiced the need to have the freedom to articulate their own ideas and opinions and, more importantly, for these to be heard and respected. Some key results from a survey by the *Herald Sun* (18 May, 1998) showed that of a random sample of 3325 Victorian students, aged between thirteen and nineteen years, nearly two-thirds were worried about the environment and about guns in the community; 63% were concerned about the honesty of politicians; 55% were worried about getting AIDS, and 51% were worried about their physical appearance. Other relevant factors were that 70% had lost their virginity before their seventeenth birthday, almost a third had tried marijuana, 6% had tried other drugs and 61% of girls felt under pressure to be thin. Also, 32% said that they had been offered illegal drugs at school. These are just some of the realities and issues that many young people face every day. The religious education classroom can provide a setting within a Christian context where students may have the opportunity to voice their anxieties and concerns in their efforts to discover and articulate their own value system and codes of behaviour.

It is possible that in some classrooms, pertinent issues may be sidestepped, perhaps, because they are seen as too difficult to handle in light of the Church's attitude to them. Such avoidance leads to a lack of credibility for the subject and some scepticism on the

part of the students. Students should be provided with the opportunity to ask questions about areas that concern them. This is something they experience in other subjects and, if they do not have similar experiences in religious education classes, it is possible that they could make unfavourable comparisons between this and other subjects.

The mix of positive and negative responses apparent in the findings related to class discussions do suggest that close attention needs to be given to the topics that are chosen for the program so that students not only find them relevant to their lives but that they gain a deeper knowledge of Christian truths and beliefs which should assist in providing their lives with meaning and help them shape their own values and actions in the future. There appears to be a message here which suggests that contentious topics need to be sensitively handled, so that while the Church's stance is discussed, students are given the freedom to discuss, ask questions and offer their own opinions. In most subjects, students are taught to view material critically, to question and to look at opposing sides of an argument. They are also encouraged to offer their opinions and articulate their ideas. If, in a religious education classroom, this is discouraged, it is possible that an artificial barrier may be created between religious education and other subjects which may prompt the feeling that the voices of senior students are not valued in the subject and, by extension, in the Church. If, as previously discussed, today's students do not feel that there is a place for them in the contemporary Church, the above scenario has the potential to exacerbate such feelings and lead to undesirable consequences for future Catholic communities

A significant finding from the questionnaires, which has relevance here, is the fact that students were clear about the value they placed on the community aspect they experienced, that is, sharing, bonding and praying together. They consistently expressed their appreciation of this element in the school's religious education program, including the classroom program, which suggested that a majority of the students did feel accepted as members of a group with shared values. These responses highlight the fact that the

inclusion of activities that promote such experiences in the religious education program appear to meet the developmental needs of senior secondary students (see discussion in Chapter 2). In terms of the theoretical model for religious education curriculum proposed earlier (see p. 77) it is desirable that this affective aspect of the classroom program be used to promote cognitive learning in religious education. For instance, the relevance of passages from the Gospel could be read in an informal learning situation to explore their meaning for a contemporary issue or hypothetical situation and students could be invited to share their thoughts and experiences that are stimulated by the reading. This could lead to further critical reading and research, using other sources, which are brought back into an informal class setting for further discussion and learning. Such a learning activity is ongoing and has endless potential to move between the cognitive and affective domains to produce meaningful learning in religious education.

From their appreciation of the community aspect of the religious education program as mentioned above, it seemed that the Catholic school was, in fact, Church for many students (this was also found by Angelico's (1997) study; see p. 135 of this work). Certainly, the implications were that schools appeared to be playing a distinct role for students and effectively fulfilling some of their needs which were not being met by their local parish. Possibly, schools need to capitalize on this so as to strengthen and increase the contribution they make to the lives of their students. This situation, once again, highlights the need for the school to explore ways of improving communications between themselves and the local parishes so as to enhance the religious education they might offer to their students.

One response that emerged through the interviews related to the television shows that students nominated as illustrations of Christian acts. While acknowledging that most programs today tended to illustrate 'non-Christian' values, the main criteria that appeared to guide their selection of Christian actions were if people were seen to be 'helping one another' and 'being nice to one another'. It appears that students who have grown up in

the television era have been de-sensitized by an inundation of programs whose visuals and language are often contrary to Christian belief. The backdrop that displayed distinctly un-Christian values against which these 'Christian' acts were performed did not seem to provoke much reaction. Students appeared to focus on the act which they isolated from the surrounds, that is, the ambience suggested by violent language and actions. As a result, it is possible that their responses to these programs are significantly different from the responses of the adults, including their teachers, to the same programs. If teachers were able to divorce their own reactions to such programs so that they can appreciate students' reactions, it is possible they would develop insights into students' responses. This might enable them to use media resources as teaching tools more effectively in their programs.

An echo of the previous finding was the response regarding acts of faith, that is, acts of compassion and living one's life doing good to other people were definitely seen as Christian practice. This, once again, suggests that an important part of the religious education program should include some kind of community service where students have contact with people living their faith. The value of such exposure was shown in students' responses to guest speakers who worked with AIDS sufferers or in the missions and so on. One implication from these findings is that students appeared to value another feature of community life, that is, 'looking out for one another'.

It would seem that a priority for Church authorities would be to explore the issues raised above which could be enlightening for them and which could assist them in improving their communication with the youth of today. An effort needs to be made to understand the culture and identity of today's youth, as well as their concerns and impressions. Without such an understanding, effective communication would be difficult and young people would continue to be estranged from the Church thereby leading to a continuing reduction in congregation sizes in the foreseeable future. This, once again, may have

some implication for the future of Catholic schools, and therefore, religious education programs in Catholic schools.

Among the insights gained from these results, a particular one is that the classroom is an environment that has the potential to encourage students to develop a sense of community. The fact that many students spoke positively about this element implies it is already alive and well. However, if the attempt to offer more intellectually challenging content means that the program is dominated by work requirements or other repetitive tasks, this feature can lose its beneficial influence. Rather, it should be recognized that learning can be facilitated through both an academic study and reflective practice. Despite the fact that Year 12 is a stressful year for many students, the days set aside for reflection could be extended to involve students in some social action with different Christian community groups. Such a practical sharing of faith has the potential to enhance a student's personal faith. Schools, as a general rule, expect Year 12 involvement in other co-curricular activities, such as athletics and swimming sports. It should be possible, therefore, to include some days where students go out into a faith community to witness Church groups in action. Such experiences could lend depth to the theoretical study and enhance their learning. The organization of such activities would, no doubt, place greater responsibility on the religious education team to locate appropriate community groups and to make the necessary arrangements. This aspect, however, should not be a deterrent as the value for both teachers and students, who shared the experiences, could exceed the initial problems with planning and preparation. A related factor is that in many secondary schools today, administrators and curriculum planners have to take into account the combination of VCE and Vocational Education Training (VET) programs. This has called for an increased flexibility of senior school timetables to allow students to benefit from these offerings. Therefore, planning for community involvement days, which can be linked to the religious education program, could be just another aspect of a flexible timetable, especially if the benefits of such activities are explored, articulated clearly, publicized and evaluated.

A second point gained from the above responses is the use that can be made of television programs that constitute students' weekly viewing. In the survey conducted by the *Herald Sun* (18 May, 1998), the responses of 3325 Victorian students showed that they spent an average of 12.67 hours a week watching television and 9.85 hours listening to music. After sport, these activities dominated teenage leisure time. If religious education teachers were able to draw on these resources to enhance their lesson, they would have more chance to interest and stimulate their students. Very often, television programs are based on music entertainment or they may be family dramas which depict people and situations that students can identify with. It would be a useful exercise to draw on a few minutes of such television viewing to prompt discussion and lead to further study on how Christianity and other religions would view and respond to different incidents. The situations chosen should be ones that are common images in today's society, ones which may touch students' lives and may occupy their thoughts, for example, conservation, drug and alcohol abuse, teenage homelessness, unemployment, domestic violence, pre-marital sex, gender roles, and so on. It is important for teachers to consider that their students' responses to the portrayal of such situations may be quite different from their own. The results from the interviews suggested students' perceptions of whether an action was right or wrong were not distracted by the setting in which such an action took place. This may be an important consideration for teachers when they incorporate media resources into their programs. As discussed earlier, they could attempt to view the action through their students' eyes and not be influenced by pre-conceived notions and interpretations. Daily incidents, as relayed through the media, could provide the starting point to introduce the theoretical content of the subject. This strategy could have a few benefits. First, it would draw on material, and possibly images, with which students are familiar and with which they may identify. This has the potential to make the learning more accessible and meaningful to them. Secondly, it provides an opportunity to apply Christian teachings to modern day scenarios, thus, helping to make these teachings more relevant to the contemporary environments in which students live. The drawback, once

again, is the extra work load for teachers and it points to a serious need for improved resources in religious education.

Finally, it may be appropriate to consider that, while religious education in a Catholic school has a faith orientation, the catechetical model of religious education is not always appropriate in contemporary classrooms where many students are unchurched and uncommitted to the faith tradition. They have been influenced by the different youth cultures that permeate western society which were referred to in the previous discussion. A feature of a youth culture, as shown in recent studies, is that young people have negative perceptions of the future (for instance, Eckersley, 1997) and this has been attributed, in part, to the lack of attention given to religious, moral and spiritual development in contemporary society. Current trends in religious education in Britain, which are reflected in the recent writings of Australian theorists, recognize this factor. The argument offered is that religious education should cater for the development of the whole person, that is, the religious, personal, moral and spiritual dimensions of the human person. Many students in Catholic schools also form part of this disillusioned fabric of youth. In such cases, religious education with a faith orientation could be evangelizing where students can be provided with opportunities to experience the Gospel as 'good news' and to interpret it in light of different spiritual experiences. Further, they could be encouraged to look for new meaning in such experiences. It should also address the different levels of growth and maturity that are likely to exist amongst different students. In the final instance, they could be invited to draw on gospel values to shape their own beliefs and practices in a free and unrestricted environment.

To sum up, while the schools involved in this study had programs that gave different levels of emphases to interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of affective learning, in the perceptions of a small majority of students, these programs had evidently not promoted their faith and spiritual development.

Content and learning experiences that are relevant, meaningful and intellectually challenging for students from a contemporary pluralist society

The majority of students did not find the classroom programs interesting, meaningful or relevant and they displayed negative attitudes to them. In particular, a significant majority of students expressed the opinion that the program lacked intellectual challenge and that it should be optional at Year 12. If students are to value a subject, they must be able to recognize the contribution it makes to their education and their overall growth and development. If, in their perceptions, the subject lacks challenge they are more likely to consider it a waste of valuable class time which can be devoted to other 'more important' subjects, notably, those contributing to their tertiary entrance scores or their careers. Such a situation means that religious education will fail in its efforts to reach students and/or achieve its goals. Equally, students are unlikely to gain a high level of knowledge and understanding in the subject which could have implications for the future of Catholic school communities. The tension relating to these cognitive outcomes of the program and the fact that they need to be addressed in the planning of future programs was referred to earlier.

The fact that two-thirds of the students also indicated that the religious education classroom program failed to inspire any interest in them is another area of significant concern, particularly given the compulsory nature of the subject in Catholic schools. It seems that compelling students to study a subject which has interest for only one third of them may be counterproductive. It is possible that this factor could be partially responsible for the negative attitude shown by a majority of students to the classroom program. For instance, if students, who were pre-occupied with their end-of-year exams, did not see the subject as important or useful to their tertiary entrance scores or to their future careers, this perception was likely to colour their experiences in the subject. Thus, a major challenge for religious educators could be to explore ways of making the subject more interesting and increasing its sense of importance by demonstrating its intrinsic

value for senior students. Indeed, the issue of the subject contributing to the tertiary score could be resolved if units in religious education, such as VCE units 3 and 4 in *Religion and Society* and *Texts and Traditions* were offered to students as part of the elective program. This could help to put Religious Education on a par with other subjects.

The above point has reference, once again, to the theoretical model for religious education curriculum that has been proposed. It relates to the tension that emerged between students' perceptions that the program did not offer intellectually challenging material but that, at same time, they preferred the less intellectual affective aspects which they found more interesting and meaningful. The point needs to be emphasized, that if a program recognizes that learning takes place on a cognitive-affective continuum, it could structure the learning activities to enhance this. Thus, the attainment of knowledge can begin with content and activities, formal and informal, that are relevant, meaningful and accessible at different levels of ability and maturity. The aim is to promote interest which could lead to the desire for further knowledge and learning. In time, this may lead to commitment which, in turn, leads to a desire for more knowledge and learning.

Much has been written about the diversity of students in contemporary classrooms in Australia and the need for this factor to be considered in the development and delivery of contemporary educational programs. Although there were only a few students in this research study who had been born overseas, many had one or both parents born overseas. It is relevant that the responses from these students were generally more favourable in their perceptions of the importance of religion, faith and spiritual development. This is supported by a finding from an earlier study where LBOTE students were found to be more interested in religion (Goosen, 1996). Accordingly, teachers could draw on the perceptions and experiences of students from such culturally diverse backgrounds in an attempt to promote interest levels in the classroom program.

The other aspect related to the diversity of students is the varying range of interests and abilities among them. This has implications for the choice of content, learning tasks and resources that are used in the classroom program. These are discussed below.

Content for senior religious education

It must be remembered here that only a minority of students showed interest in learning about different religions. This was supported by an earlier finding (Goosen 1996) in relation to the Year 12 religion studies program in New South Wales. While this has been discussed earlier and suggestions offered as to how such a study could be made more interesting to students, other options regarding the choice of content for senior religious education need to be considered. The results suggested that students felt that the religious education program needed to include broad topics and issues that would help to further their own personal journey in their search for meaning. They voiced a desire to have the freedom to articulate their own ideas and opinions and, more importantly, for these to be heard and respected. This latter finding suggests that Erikson's (1963, 1968) and Maslow's (1968) theories on personal development might have some implications for the choice of content for senior learning programs. If senior adolescents are primarily concerned with their own search for identity and they are experiencing the related aspects of role confusion as described by the above mentioned theorists, this could be an important area for inclusion in religious education. The focus could be on an individual's search for meaning in both a Christian context and a multi-faith context which is desirable in a pluralist classroom.

A related factor that emerged from the interviews concerned stages of faith and moral development where it became clear that students were spread across different levels of maturity in these areas. Thus, while one student indicated that s/he did not believe in God and another indicated a wavering faith, the majority of interviewed students expressed a faith commitment. Equally, student responses demonstrating their moral reasoning

appeared to range from Level 1 to Level 6 according to Kohlberg. Such diversity in the levels of moral and faith development supports the need for a range of content and teaching strategies to be incorporated into the learning program which would address these varying levels. The challenge lies in maintaining an intellectually stimulating program which is at once relevant and meaningful to students and which they can access at various levels.

There are implications here for the selection of content in religious education programs at earlier levels in secondary schooling. For instance, it might be desirable for a study at Years 10 and/or 11 to incorporate an academic study of different religions. Certainly, those students who offered *Religion and Society* units 3 and 4, which provided opportunities for a more in-depth study of religion, showed positive responses to the questionnaires and the interviews. Such a program had the dual advantages of assisting them in learning about different religions and by offering them an opportunity to add to their tertiary entrance score at Year 11 when they were not as pressured about their other career-choice subjects. It seems that these findings have serious implications for the choice of content for Year 12 religious education.

An observation that may have some pertinence to the choice of content is to do with the respective roles of cognition and affectivity in the learning process in religious education. Through this chapter and preceding ones, students' negative responses relating to the intellectual challenge of the program and their preferences for more informal learning activities have been discussed in light of the curriculum model that was proposed at the end of the Chapter 1. It is suggested here that the artificial polarity between programs purported to be educational as against those which were seen as being faith oriented with a focus on the personal reflective dimension in religious education, which was referred to in Chapter 1 (see p. 29), may still exist; if not in intent, then in practice. It is possible that some religious education teachers who have made a determined effort to develop programs that are, ostensibly, more knowledge-based, and therefore, which can be held

up as a serious intellectual study, may in fact be proceeding from a reactive response rather than a pro-active one. This could be a result of their past experiences in classrooms where approaches to religious education were life-centred and experiential. Thus, in their efforts to counteract the informality which was a dominant feature of such classrooms, they may have unknowingly 'reacted' by over emphasizing the cognitive elements in their current programs. In practice, such a tendency can mean that the affective domain, which is often linked to more informal learning activities, may be given inadequate attention. It seems that the persistent negativity of students' perceptions of work requirements which, according to the curriculum documents, were intellectually-based tasks, would support this premise. Thus, the implication here is that the intent of some religious education teachers may be pro-active but their practice may be reactive and this may have contributed to the negative responses to these elements in the programs. Additionally, the potential of cognitive learning to promote learning in the affective domain may not have been recognized and sufficiently addressed by some teachers. These are areas that need further investigation so that the content of a program can be taught with a view to its particular contribution to both cognitive and affective learning in religious education.

Learning activities for senior religious education

A majority of students believed that there had not been a good balance between written and practical activities and declared that they would prefer to see more varied activities used in the classroom program. It was also found that three of the most commonly experienced activities, that is, written assignments, prayer and Mass preparation, were not perceived by students as helpful to their learning while the activities which students rated as more helpful, such as meditation, were not as widely used. Generally, the four activities that, perhaps, should be included in programs because they were rated most highly as helpful learning experiences were class discussions, retreats, reflections, and guest speakers. Some negative comments offered regarding the written tasks such as

work requirements suggest that care should be taken to ensure that they do not become repetitive and that they should be evaluated to determine their effectiveness in contributing to students' learning.

There were other issues in reference to the activities that were rated as helpful. While the use of guest speakers appeared to be a favourable learning activity, important considerations are balance and variety among the presenters with regard to, both, topic and presentation. In the case of two schools, many students responded negatively to their two speakers because both had represented Religious Orders and students perceived this to be a form of indoctrination. This would suggest that care needs to be taken in the choice and variety of speakers and their role and contribution to the program needs to be made clear to students.

Another problem related to uninformed and poorly prepared class discussions. While this has previously been discussed, it is presented here from a different viewpoint. It could be argued, as with any subject, if the classroom teacher is not fully comfortable with the subject or the topic, it will be reflected in the level of the teaching and learning that goes on in the classroom. With class discussions this would be particularly evident since so much depends on the input and direction provided by the teacher. As pointed out in the first part of this work, one of the difficulties facing religious education in Catholic schools is the expectation that many teachers will be involved in the teaching of religious education, whether or not they have any previous training in the subject. While this situation has greatly improved in recent years, there is still a number of teachers in religious education with little training in the subject which could account for the range of responses found.

A further related area was the apparently negative response to the preparation of liturgy, particularly, the Mass. These activities would require certain qualities in the teacher or leader, for example, someone who was comfortable with the activity, had a sound

knowledge of liturgy and who could draw on appropriate resources for young people. Teachers need time to work with the class group on liturgical preparation which is often done out of class time. If a teacher is unable to meet such criteria it could impact on the positive features of the activity.

To sum up, it is possible that the negative attitude displayed by the majority of students to aspects of the religious education classroom program, that came to light through this research study, could be partly attributed to students' perceived lack of balance and variety in their learning experiences.

Resources used in senior religious education

A majority of students stated that they considered the resources used in the classroom program had not been stimulating and up-to-date. Of these, nearly a third of the students were undecided. It may have been that on some occasions the resources were stimulating and up-to-date, but this did not occur often enough for the student to agree or disagree, in general, with the statement. Alternatively, it may have been that resources were either stimulating or up-to-date and therefore it was difficult to agree or disagree with the statement. However, it would be accurate to say that, with only approximately a third of students responding positively, the results suggest a need for improved resources to be used in religious education. This could mean that new resources need to be developed or that schools need to allocate appropriate funds to extend the resources they have.

An unusual finding was the negative responses from students in schools with school-based programs as compared to students in schools with VCE/school-based programs. This contrasted with the earlier results where students with school-based programs consistently responded more favourably to other aspects of the religious education program. It could mean that there was a significant lack of up-to-date and stimulating

resources for programs that gave an emphasis to interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects in religious education as compared to available resources for programs that offered a sound academic study that had a cognitive focus.

It is unclear if this result was linked to the fact that two of schools with school-based programs offered seminar days spread over the year. Therefore, less exposure could have meant that fewer resources were used. It is possible that the other reason could be attributed to the fact that resources were more readily available for the VCE units of study and were, consequently, utilised. In the case of students studying VCE units 3 and 4, there would have been the added pressure of external assessment which could have led to teachers making a greater effort to find suitable resources.

Most students indicated that films and videos were used regularly. However, it was not clear how up-to-date these resources were. Some aspects relating to the use of films and television programs have already been discussed. The fact remains that today's students are used to visual images and realistically reproduced sounds that generate their thoughts and actions. Thus, they are more receptive to the use of such resources than they are to the written word. However, there was little mention of multimedia resources in the curriculum documents. In today's senior classrooms, most students would be encouraged to, or indeed, expected to make use of CD-Roms and the Internet and this should occur in religious education classrooms as well.

Two resources that were apparently under-used were the use of guest-speakers and excursions. In an earlier discussion, the advantages of using guest-speakers and excursions as learning activities were noted, especially in a study of different religions. While such activities require time and careful organization, this is not a sufficient reason to exclude them from the program. Their contribution to the learning process is unquestionably high if they are planned with precision and focus.

To sum up, there appears to be a distinct need to develop a well-resourced senior religious education program with a good balance and variety of activities. A possible plan of action could be to open up channels of communication between schools so that the best practices can be shared. This could lead to a greater sharing of successful teaching experiences and materials, and lead to the further development and accessibility of stimulating and up-to-date resources appropriate for senior religious education. Recent innovations in technology and multimedia could be drawn on to cater for a wide variety of interests and ability.

Appropriate status and recognition of the specific contribution of the religious education program to the broad Year 12 curriculum

As discussed earlier, there was an overwhelming majority of students who did not find the classroom program in religious education intellectually challenging. This is a significant finding which raises serious concerns. One of the reasons teachers welcomed the advent of the VCE was that they could offer units of study that would be perceived to be equal to other Year 12 subjects. However, with many schools opting to offer the first two units rather than the last two in Year 12, as indicated by the enrolment figures presented in Chapter 2 of this work, it meant that the subject did not have the same status as other subjects because it did not include external assessment which could contribute to the tertiary scores. This was reflected in students' responses when they mentioned that if VCE units were incorporated into the Year 12 religious education program, they should include units 3 and 4 which included the Common Assessment Tasks. In other words, they preferred to study units which contributed to their Tertiary Entrance Ranking. Other students spoke in favour of studying units 3 and 4 at Year 11. This meant that they could study the subject when they were less stressed and it gave them the advantage of adding the results to their final score at the end of Year 12. The students, who volunteered this opinion, were involved in a school-based program at Year 12 which the majority had found interesting and more relaxing. As noted earlier, the schools involved in this study

which had chosen to offer a school-based program had previously offered VCE units 3 and 4 at Year 11 as part of their religious education program. Thus, these students had experienced a more intellectual program in their previous year and this was acknowledged as being a positive move by those students involved.

A consequence of using Units 1 and 2 at Year 12 meant that religious education did not compare favourably with other Year 12 subjects and there was consistent negativity shown by students studying such VCE units. This latter finding continues to be of concern when the question of the appropriateness of these units for Year 12 is considered in light of the first semester enrolment figures for 1998 in Religion and Society as shown in Table 60.

Table 60: Religion & Society - units 1 & 3, enrolment figures for 1998

Religion & Society unit 1	6163
Religion & Society unit 3	1775

Source: CEO, Melbourne, 1998

As can be seen, *Religion and society* unit 1 has a greater number of enrolled students than unit 3. As mentioned earlier, these units were often used as a core or compulsory part of the program. While the final figures for the second semester, 1998, were not available, it would be reasonable to assume, following these figures, that the number of students enrolled in *Religion and Society* unit 2 would be higher than the numbers for unit 4. Therefore, the point made regarding the appropriateness of VCE units 1 and 2 at Year 12 is a valid one and needs to be considered by religious educators.

The compulsory nature of Year 12 religious education

The other significant finding was that an overwhelming majority of students expressed the belief that religious education should be optional at Year 12. This is an important consideration for religious educators when deciding on the structure of the religious

education program. While a small majority of the interviewed students felt that religious education should be included in a Year 12 program in a Catholic school, these numbers were smaller than numbers who responded to the questionnaires. A common finding in both the questionnaires and interviews was that, if the presence of a program was to be assumed, there needed to be substantial changes made and students offered clear recommendations that focused on the perceived benefits of existing programs.

Certainly, students' perceptions of the strengths of the existing program could be noted for future reference. It is equally clear that curriculum reform could address the negative aspects, for instance, the perceptions that programs that included VCE units were being dominated by the completion of work requirements, most of which were written tasks that students found 'boring' and 'repetitive'. In such cases, in students' perceptions, the work requirements became the religious education program. Other informal learning experiences that had the potential to promote faith and spiritual development were, for the most part, restricted to the retreat and/or a class mass, sometimes offered by the broader religious education program. Given this finding, it is possible that 'lip-service' was being paid to the guidelines from the Catholic Education Office which recommended that the VCE religion study units did not comprise the whole of the religious education program. When students felt that this was happening, it consistently drew negative responses. Issues related to students' experience of work requirements were discussed earlier (for instance, see pp. 267 and 278).

Yet another perspective offered by a majority of students was that they valued the informal, affective aspects of religious education which they perceived as being 'special' to the subject. These were the features described earlier as promoting a sense of community, that is, the sharing and bonding experience. The majority of students' responses suggested that religious education should address meaningful topics that could help them function effectively in the future. The idea of a seminar program rather

than a weekly classroom program was appealing to the interviewed students as they felt it could focus on topics more specific to their needs.

Other relevant findings of this study

In the course of analysing the data from the questionnaires and interviews, other areas of concern emerged. These included the impact of leadership in Catholic schools; the impact of school culture on students' perceptions, attitudes and, ultimately, learning; the discrepancies between students' and teachers' perceptions of what goes on in the classroom; the differences related to gender in students' perceptions, attitudes and involvement in religious education and the Church, and the future role of the Church.

Students who were generally more positive in their responses to the religious education program came from

- schools with religious principals;
- single-sex schools;
- overseas backgrounds;
- schools with school-based religious education programs, and
- families with shared religious practices, such as, attending Mass together.

It would be useful to identify the influential factors that caused students from schools with religious principals to respond more positively to most aspects of the program than students from schools with lay principals given that the number of lay principals is expected to increase in the future. It could be that the inter-relatedness of school leadership and school culture needs to be examined to discover their impact on student learning. This is an area that has potential for further research.

A relevant finding was the fact that students from girls' schools, in general, were more positive than students from coeducational or boys' schools to items related to the role of religion. However, students from boys' schools were slightly more positive in their

responses to the religious education program. Overall, coeducational school students usually were less positive than students from single-sex schools. These findings also raise the question of school culture and its impact on students' perceptions and subsequent behaviour. More research is needed to explore this phenomenon.

Generally, students from country schools, students born overseas or with parents born overseas and students whose families were more 'religious', as evident from their attendance at weekly mass, were more positive. These results highlight the influences of family and community in the development of young people's perceptions and practices and provide yet another area for further research to identify significant contributory factors.

The finding that students were less interested in involving themselves in the Catholic faith tradition is one that indicates a crucial problem and one that certainly needs to be addressed in terms of the future role of the Church for Catholic people. However, the solution must be arrived at within the broader framework of the Catholic community which includes parish, family and school. In education today, students are generally expected to develop critical and analytical skills which they are encouraged to apply to their own learning. Many are, therefore, both reasonably competent and interested in participating in and contributing to debates on current social and religious issues. Many have also learnt how to develop sustained arguments to support their respective stances. Thus, senior students could have much of value to contribute to the Catholic community and this needs to be recognized by the church hierarchy and the community. It is an area that needs to be identified and explored to ensure that such contributions are encouraged.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of the religious education program: A comparison

A finding from this research study that has significance for classroom practice in religious education were the discrepancies between teachers' and students' perceptions of the religious education classroom program. Generally, in the areas of students' interest in learning about different religions; students' knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition; meaning and relevance of the classroom program for students; student's interest in the classroom program; students' attitude to the classroom program, and intellectual challenge of the subject, teachers' responses were more positive than the responses given by students. If teachers have the impression that their students are leaving Catholic schools at the end of Year 12 with a sound understanding of the faith tradition and that they have been intellectually challenged by the subject, it could lead to a degree of complacency. That is, they may feel little need to extend the knowledge and skills component in this area. Equally, if teachers mistakenly believe that students are interested in or that they have a positive attitude to aspects of the program it is unlikely that they will introduce any changes to the program. These findings suggest that more effective strategies for communication between students and teachers may be needed to ensure that a realistic understanding of classroom dynamics and students' interest and attitudes are achieved.

The study also points to the need for religious educators to include appropriate assessment tasks which will accurately assess students' knowledge and skills. When students are being challenged by other subjects and having demands placed on them in terms of intellectual and time-consuming activities, a subject that does not meet such criteria is seen as lightweight and its value, in students' eyes, is often diminished. It can lead to attempts to do other work during religious education classes or to hand in work that is less than what could be achieved. These points were made by students in their responses both in the questionnaires and at the interview. When the subject does not

contribute to the tertiary entrance score, as happened with religious education, this problem is compounded.

However, no attempt was made to discover how teachers, in fact, arrived at their conclusions about students' responses to the program. Whatever the answers to such questions, it is difficult to understand the teachers' level of unawareness of their students' responses to the program which led to such conflicting responses. It is possible, of course, that a similar exercise applied in different subject areas could lead to similar conflicting results. The implications are that formal evaluation and assessment strategies may need to be built into the classroom program. Certainly, these findings suggest a need for further research into teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom environments and learning.

It needs to be remembered that nine of the eleven teachers involved in this study were religious education coordinators. As such, these teachers had some qualifications and experience in the subject. As mentioned earlier, there are some teachers in religious education who may not have appropriate qualifications to teach the subject. This could affect both their attitude and the delivery of their program, and indeed, their grasp of theoretical issues. This was, perhaps, the case with one teacher involved in this study (see pp. 290-294). It could be argued that some of the negativity that students showed towards some aspects of the classroom program may be compounded in classes with more inexperienced and less qualified teachers; it could also be the differences between the teachers' and students' understanding of the subject and its contribution to the general education of the student. Equally, it could be related to the issue of pro-active intent versus reactive practice (pp. 366-367).

The issues raised above and from preceding discussions indicate that there appears to be a need for teachers to be offered professional development and support to enable them to make the most of their classroom experiences, for instance, in the teaching of

world religions. It was noted earlier that despite an improvement in this area, there are still many teachers with limited qualifications in the subject that teach religious education (see pp. 44 and 52-53). It was also noted that, with external pressures and continuous changes impacting on teachers today, their professional lives have become extremely busy and stressful. As such, it is difficult for teachers to find the time for on-going professional development which is an essential item in the world of education today. When they do undertake professional development they often choose programs that have been promoted and/or funded because these are initiatives mounted by the government or other external agencies. In recent years, with more emphasis given by the Catholic Education Office in Melbourne to the accreditation of teachers to teach religious education in a Catholic school in Victoria, many teachers have returned to study religious education or theology as indicated by increasing enrolments in relevant programs. This is an encouraging sign and hopefully, this will continue. In the meantime, however, the problem of inadequately trained teachers in the religious education class still exists and this can have ramifications for successful teaching of the program. It does mean that religious education coordinators must be more supportive and be prepared to give more time to assist their staff to perform effectively in their classrooms. Related to the teaching aspect, a positive finding was the appreciation and value that some students expressed for the dedication and interest shown by their teachers.

As was suggested earlier, it is possible that the largely negative perceptions of students regarding the religious education classroom program may have been compounded by the problem related to the lack of well-trained teachers in the subject. It would seem that funding should continue to be made available to encourage teachers to attend to their own ongoing professional development by enrolling in appropriate programs in religious education.

Summary and significance of this research study

This study focused on the perceptions of Year 12 students and teachers of their experiences in the core or compulsory religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria. These were programs which included VCE *Religion and Society* units 1 and 2 with a school-based component or they were entirely school-based programs. The study was not concerned with the learning experiences associated with other elective or optional religious education units of study which were accessed by a smaller number of students who had chosen to study them. Teachers' responses relating to the delivery of the classroom program were used as a point of comparison with students' responses.

The use of questionnaires provided an overview of students' and teachers' perceptions of current practices in the Year 12 religious education program. The interviews with some of the student respondents served to complement the findings of the questionnaire. Eleven Catholic schools were chosen to participate in the study because they displayed certain characteristics that were representative of a broader range of Catholic schools in Victoria. However, as mentioned in Chapter 4 (152), because of the specific nature of the variables being investigated in this research study, no claims are made about the generalizability or transfer of results to other populations. More accurately, the findings have identified issues for further study.

Therefore, while this research study has relevance for curriculum planners and religious education teachers in Catholic schools, it also highlights significant aspects of senior religious education that require further in-depth investigation.

This study set out to discover the appropriateness of religious education programs in meeting the needs of today's students and achieving the aims for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

Two types of religious education programs were involved in this study:

- seven VCE/school-based religious education programs and one school-based program combined a cognitive and affective focus with the major focus of the classroom program being on the former.
- three school-based programs had a major emphasis on the personal dimension in religious education which related to affective learning.

As a result of the Year 12 religious education program, this research study has drawn the following conclusions:

1. There was some tension in students' perceptions of the cognitive outcomes of the program so that, while a majority of students indicated their knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition had increased, a further majority stated that the program did not develop their understanding of Jesus' message.
2. A further tension underlying the cognitive components of the program was revealed when a significant majority suggested the program lacked intellectual challenge.
3. A majority of students reported that they had increased their tolerance of different religions but did not become interested in learning about different religions.
4. A majority of students indicated that they considered they had increased their understanding and appreciation of the role of religion and the importance of religion in their lives.
5. A majority of students stated that they did not develop their interest and involvement in the Catholic faith tradition and indicated that they experienced a sense of alienation from the Church.
6. Just over half of the students responded that the program had not contributed to their faith and spiritual development but was of the opinion that this was influenced by their families or other significant people in their lives.
7. A majority of students displayed negative attitudes to the classroom program; they claimed that they did not find it interesting, meaningful or relevant, and they suggested that it should be optional.

8. A majority of students did not perceive Year 12 religious education to have the same status as other subjects but they did value some aspects of the program.

These findings suggest that, for a majority of students in the study, the religious education programs were not meeting their needs. Nor were they achieving the aims of religious education, as proposed in the theory and guidelines, for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

It is possible that the variation in responses for some aspects of the programs, which ranged from very positive to very negative, indicated that some schools in the research sample had more successful religious education programs than others, in the perceptions of their teachers and students. It is equally possible that this range of success may exist at the wider level of Catholic schools. Further research is required to examine influential factors of successful programs so that they can be drawn on to enhance future religious education programs.

Implications of the findings of this study for the Year 12 religious education curriculum

The findings of this study indicate that the following principles could be considered in the development, implementation and evaluation of Year 12 religious education curriculum in Catholic schools:

1. Religious education for senior students should include features which
 - address the personal needs, interests and maturity levels of contemporary students, and
 - recognize and develop the complementary role of cognition and affectivity in the facilitation of knowledge and understanding, and faith and spiritual development.

2. The intrinsic value of religious education to the overall personal growth and maturity could be indicated to senior students by making the content meaningful and relevant to their personal lives, that is, it should be student centred, so that they may find the subject more interesting and important.
3. The centrality of the person and message of Jesus to the Catholic faith tradition could be a major focus of the compulsory classroom program, that is, it should be Christ-centred. This has implications for the selection of sound academic content which focuses on other aspects of the faith tradition in earlier years of secondary schooling.
4. As part of the compulsory classroom program, students could be provided with opportunities to experience the Gospel as 'good news', to interpret it in light of their personal experiences, and to understand its applicability to contemporary life.
5. An academic study of different religions may not be appropriate as a compulsory subject at Year 12 but may be offered as part of an optional program in religious education or offered at earlier year levels.
6. The religious education program plays a complementary role to the religious education offered by the family and wider community and channels of communication between the three groups should be established and nurtured.
7. Opportunities could be provided to promote students' understanding and appreciation of the Church, in particular, prayer, service and community.
8. Strategies could be developed that allow students to have input into curriculum development and ongoing curriculum evaluation in religious education.
9. There could be improved communication between schools to promote greater consistency in the delivery of programs between schools.
10. A flexible approach to the timetabling of the classroom program could be considered so as to have greater scope to promote students' interest through the inclusion of a wide variety of different learning experiences.
11. The use of content, learning strategies and up-to-date resources should be appropriate for the developmental needs of students and should reflect their different levels of ability and the diversity of their backgrounds.

12. The effectiveness of the content, learning activities and resources, particularly the use of media, should be evaluated regularly to ensure their appropriateness for contemporary classrooms in meeting the desired outcomes.
13. Professional development programs that address both the content and process in senior religious education could be offered to teachers to assist them to be more effective in the preparation, delivery and evaluation of their classroom programs. Possibly improved communications between schools could be effected to share best practices.

Overall, the findings of this research study suggest that there is a need for a renewal of aspects of senior religious education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria. As a first step, the ongoing mission and purpose of the Catholic school and its role as one of the evangelizing agents of the Church could be reconsidered in light of the recognition of the family as a major influence in the religious development of students.

In addition, the theory of religious education in Catholic schools may need to be reviewed. The basic assumption upon which religious education from a faith perspective rests is to promote knowledge and understanding of the faith tradition with particular emphasis given to interpersonal and intrapersonal learning. The findings suggest that, for a large majority of students, this assumption was not supported. The other dominant perspective from which religious education with a cognitive emphasis was drawn, recognized religious education as a subject that provided a distinct way of knowing which contributed to the general education of an individual. As such it promoted knowledge and understanding about religion and religious traditions. The findings of this study indicated that this intention was not achieved for a large majority of students. Further, VCE units 1 and 2 were not experienced by students as having equal status as other Year 12 subjects. Hence, it may be appropriated to evaluate theories and assumptions of religious education in Victorian Catholic schools in light of these findings.

Finally, it is proposed that the subject, religious education, be re-examined in the context of both contemporary classrooms and society, and in light of the experiences that today's senior adolescents have of the faith tradition. The apparent negative perceptions that students had of the Catholic Church; their inability to identify with it, and their lack of interest to become involved in the faith tradition pose a challenge for educators which requires further articulation of the nature and purpose of the Year 12 classroom program in religious education.

Ultimately, what is needed is a greater consistency between students' and teachers' perceptions of the classroom program; a greater congruence between the theory and practice, and between rhetoric and reality of religious education, especially for senior students.

Recommendations for further research

There are several issues raised from these findings which have implications for future research into religious education. In brief, they are:

1. Students' perceptions of religious education programs, which focused on interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of affective learning were generally more positive than their perceptions of programs based on the attainment of knowledge and skills, that is cognitive learning. Further research in this area may be useful to religious educators to assist them in planning future programs.
2. The different features of religious and lay leadership in schools that may have contributed to different perceptions and attitudes of students to their religious education classroom program could be explored.
3. The wide variations in the results from different schools suggest that school culture may have influenced students' perceptions and attitudes to the religious education classroom program, and ultimately, their learning in this subject. This could be a fruitful topic for investigation.

4. The traditional mission and purpose of the Catholic school and its relevance to a pluralistic, contemporary Australian society may need to be redefined and the implications therein for future practices and developments in religious education curricula could be examined.
5. Family influence was an important factor in the development of students' perceptions and practices in religion, therefore, communication channels between school and family to encourage mutual support, and funding for additional resources to maximise the family's positive impact on the religious education program, could be explored.
6. Investigation of the factors that contribute to the sense of belonging that senior students experienced at school could assist educators to develop effective strategies to strengthen the links between school and parish which, in turn, could foster, amongst senior students, a sense of belonging in the wider faith community.
7. An exploration of features that appear to promote a positive attitude from students with multicultural backgrounds to religious education could be identified and utilised to enhance the program for other students.

This chapter set out to examine the findings of this research study in light of the theories and approaches to religious education as identified in the literature. Following the articulation and discussion of the main findings, thirteen guiding principles were proposed that would provide the framework for the development, implementation and evaluation of sound Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools. In particular, given the context of contemporary classrooms which reflect a pluralist society, three points were made. Firstly, the mission and purpose of the Catholic school may need to be reconsidered. Secondly, the theory and practice of Year 12 religious education in Victorian Catholic schools may need to be reviewed. Thirdly, the nature and purpose of the subject, Year 12 religious education, may need to be re-examined. Finally, further areas for research, which have the potential to produce valuable information for religious educators, Catholic schools, policy makers and, indeed, the Catholic Church, were proposed.

Appendix A

STUDENT SURVEY(VCE and school-based programs)

PART A

The following statements refer to the religious education program that you have studied this year. Using the code below, please indicate your response according to the directions for each section.

Section 1

[Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Uncertain, Mostly Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
SA MA U D SD

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. I have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 2. I have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 3. I understand how the beliefs of a particular religious tradition can influence the customs and practices of the people of that tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 4. I have been able to develop an understanding of the importance of religion in the lives of many Australians from different cultural backgrounds | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 5. I have increased my knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 6. I have greater understanding and appreciation of religion in my life | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 7. I am more interested in attending Mass and/or other Church services | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 8. I am encouraged to become more involved in Church community and/or Christian youth groups | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 9. I understand my own spirituality | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 10. My own faith commitment has been developed | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

11. I believe that it is important that I continue to develop my faith and relationship with God when I leave school	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
12. I have come to understand the great questions in life e.g. Does God exist? Is there life after death? etc	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
13. I believe that Jesus' teachings help to bring meaning to my life	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
14. I believe that it is important that I continue to be involved in the Catholic Church when I leave school	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
15. I believe that Religious Education is a life-long process and not just a part of schooling	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
16. I believe that it is as important for senior students to study their faith tradition as it is for junior students because it helps senior students find meaning in their lives	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

Section 2

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

17. RE is an important subject in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
18. This year I give as much study time to RE as I do to my other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
19. RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
20. I have found RE boring this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
21. Most students do their homework and come prepared for RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
22. Generally, in RE classes this year, students appear interested in classwork	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
23. Generally, students find that retreats/reflection days provide them with opportunities to reflect on their own faith commitment and spirituality	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
24. RE classes have little meaning for me this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

25. Students often tend to ignore instructions and directions in RE classes this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
26. I believe we should spend less time on RE each week/cycle this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
27. We do not usually study topics that have interest for senior students in Year 12 RE	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
28. This year most students find RE easier than other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
29. I am usually interested in what we do in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
30. I believe there is a good balance between written and practical activities in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
31. Most students find Year 12 RE a challenging and intellectually stimulating subject	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
32. I believe that class masses provide me with an opportunity to develop my ability to pray	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
33. I believe that usually there are not enough stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources used in RE classes this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
34. I believe that there should be more opportunities for class prayer in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
35. I believe that reflection days take out time that could be better spent on more important subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
36. Usually, students are noisy and disruptive in RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
37. I believe that students find that class masses provide them with opportunities to become closer to God	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
38. I believe that most students would prefer to have more varied activities in RE class than we usually have e.g. meditation	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

39. The topics we have studied in RE this year were relevant to me at this stage of my life

SA MA U MD SD

40. I believe that, in general, most students feel that Year 12 RE makes an important contribution to their development

SA MA U MD SD

Section 3 (Open-ended questions)

For the following statements please circle the words that do apply and then complete the statement:

41. Overall, I **do/do not** enjoy the discussions we have in RE this year because-----

42. In general, I, personally, **have/have not** found Year 12 RE classes interesting because-----

43. It **is/is not** important to have guest speakers in for the RE program because-----

44. The class activities and/or experiences that have encouraged me to reflect on my own personal and/or spiritual growth were-----

45. I believe that, in general, **girls/boys** show more interest in RE because -----

44. When we have reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class the **girls/boys** are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because -----

47. On a scale from 1 - 5 (1=most helpful and 5=least helpful), please circle the response that indicates to what extent you find each of the following to be a helpful learning experience? If you have not included the activity in your lessons, please circle NA.

	most helpful -----least helpful					
a) discussions	1	2	3	4	5	NA
b) Mass preparation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
c) written assignments	1	2	3	4	5	NA
d) oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5	NA
e) community work	1	2	3	4	5	NA
f) film/video	1	2	3	4	5	NA
g) role play/drama	1	2	3	4	5	NA
h) research activities	1	2	3	4	5	NA
i) meditation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
j) prepared talk/tutorial	1	2	3	4	5	NA
k) retreats	1	2	3	4	5	NA
l) pastoral programs for junior students	1	2	3	4	5	NA
m) prayer, formal/informal	1	2	3	4	5	NA
n) guest speakers	1	2	3	4	5	NA
o) reflection days	1	2	3	4	5	NA
p) other, (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	NA

Section 4 (overall conclusions)

For the following statements please cross out the words that do not apply:-

Overall, my learning experiences in RE this year

48. have/have not helped me understand the message of Jesus Christ

49. have/have not helped me to live out the message of Jesus Christ

50. have/have not helped me to include prayer in my daily life

(If you wish to add any further comments about the above statements, please do so)

Section 5 (recommendations)

51. What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?

52. What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?

53. What do you believe are desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools? Please give reasons for your answer.

Part B (Background Information)

Tick the appropriate boxes or answer Yes [Y] or No [N]:-

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Officially, what is your religion?

Roman Catholic ☐ Other Christian denomination ☐ Orthodox ☐
Non-Christian religion ☐ None ☐

3. Were you born in Australia? [Y] / [N]

If not, please name the country where you were born _____

4. Name the country where your parents were born.

Mother _____ Father _____

5. Are there any special occasions that your family celebrate that are different to the rest of your classmates [Y] / [N]

e.g. First Holy Communion, weddings etc. Please add any more information:-

6. How frequently do you attend Sunday Mass, if at all?

Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Major feast days only ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

7. If you attend Sunday Mass do you usually go

With other members of your family ☐ On your own ☐

8. Which of the following describe your school? You may tick more than one.

Religious principal ☐ Lay principal ☐
Co-educational ☐ Girl school ☐ Boy school ☐
Metropolitan ☐ Country ☐

9. Tick the unit/s of work that you are studying this year:

VCE Religion and Society VCE Texts and Tradition School-based

Unit 1 ☐ Unit 1 ☐ []
Unit 2 ☐ Unit 2 ☐
Unit 3 ☐ Unit 3 ☐
Unit 4 ☐ Unit 4 ☐

(if you have ticked the box for school-based, please list the topics or main themes)

10. Is your school timetable divided into

a 5-day cycle ☐
a 6-day cycle ☐
a 7-day cycle ☐
a 8-day cycle ☐
a 9-day cycle ☐
a 10-day cycle ☐

11. How many periods for RE do you have per cycle this year? []

12. How many periods do you have for your other Year 12 subjects this year? []

APPENDIX B

STUDENT SURVEY(School-based programs)

PART A

The following statements refer to the religious education program that you have studied this year. Using the code below, please indicate your response according to the directions for each section.

Section 1

[Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Uncertain, Mostly Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
SA MA U D SD

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. I have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 2. I have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 3. I understand how the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church have influenced the lives of Australian Catholics | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 4. I have a better knowledge of the Scriptures/Gospels | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 5. I have increased my knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 6. I have greater understanding and appreciation of religion in my life | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 7. I am more interested in attending Mass and/or other Church services | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 8. I am encouraged to become more involved in Church community and/or Christian youth groups | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 9. I understand my own spirituality | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 10. My own faith commitment has been developed | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

11. I believe that it is important that I continue to develop my faith and relationship with God when I leave school	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
12. I have come to understand the great questions in life e.g. Does God exist? Is there life after death? etc	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
13. I believe that Jesus' teachings help to bring meaning to my life	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
14. I believe that it is important that I continue to be involved in the Catholic Church when I leave school	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
15. I believe that Religious Education is a life-long process and not just a part of schooling	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
16. I believe that it is as important for senior students to study their faith tradition as it is for junior students because it helps senior students find meaning in their lives	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

Section 2

As a result of the religious education (RE) units you have studied this year, please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

17. RE is an important subject in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
18. This year I give as much study time to RE as I do to my other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
19. RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
20. I have found RE boring this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
21. Most students do their homework and come prepared for RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
22. Generally, in RE classes this year, students appear interested in classwork	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
23. Generally, students find that retreats/reflection days provide them with opportunities to reflect on their own faith commitment and spirituality	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
24. RE classes have little meaning for me this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

25. Students often tend to ignore instructions and directions in RE classes this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
26. I believe we should spend less time on RE each week/cycle this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
27. We do not usually study topics that have interest for senior students in Year 12 RE	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
28. This year most students find RE easier than other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
29. I am usually interested in what we do in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
30. I believe there is a good balance between written and practical activities in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
31. Most students find Year 12 RE a challenging and intellectually stimulating subject	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
32. I believe that class masses provide me with an opportunity to develop my ability to pray	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
33. I believe that usually there are not enough stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources used in RE classes this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
34. I believe that there should be more opportunities for class prayer in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
35. I believe that reflection days take out time that could be better spent on more important subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
36. Usually, students are noisy and disruptive in RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
37. I believe that students find that class masses provide them with opportunities to become closer to God	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
38. I believe that most students would prefer to have more varied activities in RE class than we usually have e.g. meditation	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
39. The topics we have studied in RE this year were relevant to me at this stage of my life	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

40. I believe that, in general, most students feel that Year 12 RE makes an important contribution to their development

SA MA U MD SD

Section 3 (Open-ended questions)

For the following statements please circle the words that do apply and then complete the statement:

41. Overall, I **do/do not** enjoy the discussions we have in RE this year because-----

42. In general, I, personally, **have/have not** found Year 12 RE classes interesting because-----

43. It **is/is not** important to have guest speakers in for the RE program because-----

44. The class activities and/or experiences that have encouraged me to reflect on my own personal and/or spiritual growth were-----

45. I believe that, in general, **girls/boys** show more interest in RE because -----

44. When we have reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class the **girls/boys** are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because -----

47. On a scale from 1 - 5 (1=most helpful and 5=least helpful), please circle the response that indicates to what extent you find each of the following to be a helpful learning experience? If you have not included the activity in your lessons, please circle NA.

most helpful -----least helpful

a) discussions	1	2	3	4	5	NA
b) Mass preparation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
c) written assignments	1	2	3	4	5	NA
d) oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5	NA
e) community work	1	2	3	4	5	NA
f) film/video	1	2	3	4	5	NA
g) role play/drama	1	2	3	4	5	NA
h) research activities	1	2	3	4	5	NA
i) meditation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
j) prepared talk/tutorial	1	2	3	4	5	NA
k) retreats	1	2	3	4	5	NA
l) pastoral programs for junior students	1	2	3	4	5	NA
m) prayer, formal/informal	1	2	3	4	5	NA
n) guest speakers	1	2	3	4	5	NA
o) reflection days	1	2	3	4	5	NA
p) other, (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	NA

Section 4 (overall conclusions)

For the following statements please cross out the words that do not apply:-

Overall, my learning experiences in RE this year

48. have/have not helped me understand the message of Jesus Christ
49. have/have not helped me to live out the message of Jesus Christ
50. have/have not helped me to include prayer in my daily life

(If you wish to add any further comments about the above statements, please do so)

Section 5 (recommendations)

51. What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?

52. What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have studied this year?

53. What do you believe are desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools? Please give reasons for your answer.

Part B (Background Information)

Tick the appropriate boxes or answer Yes [Y] or No [N]:-

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Officially, what is your religion?

Roman Catholic ☐ Other Christian denomination ☐ Orthodox ☐
Non-Christian religion ☐ None ☐

3. Were you born in Australia? [Y] / [N]

If not, please name the country where you were born _____

4. Name the country where your parents were born.

Mother _____ Father _____

5. Are there any special occasions that your family celebrate that are different to the rest of your classmates [Y] / [N]

e.g. First Holy Communion, weddings etc. Please add any more information:-

6. How frequently do you attend Sunday Mass, if at all?

Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Major feast days only ☐ Rarely ☐ Never ☐

7. If you attend Sunday Mass do you usually go

With other members of your family ☐ On your own ☐

8. Which of the following describe your school? You may tick more than one.

Religious principal ☐ Lay principal ☐
Co-educational ☐ Girl school ☐ Boy school ☐
Metropolitan ☐ Country ☐

9. Tick the unit/s of work that you are studying this year:

VCE Religion and Society VCE Texts and Tradition School-based

Unit 1 ☐ Unit 1 ☐ []
Unit 2 ☐ Unit 2 ☐
Unit 3 ☐ Unit 3 ☐
Unit 4 ☐ Unit 4 ☐

(if you have ticked the box for school-based, please list the topics or main themes)

10. Is your school timetable divided into

a 5-day cycle ☐
a 6-day cycle ☐
a 7-day cycle ☐
a 8-day cycle ☐
a 9-day cycle ☐
a 10-day cycle ☐

11. How many periods for RE do you have per cycle this year? []

12. How many periods do you have for your other Year 12 subjects this year? []

APPENDIX C

TEACHER SURVEY (VCE and school-based programs)

PART A

The following statements refer to the Year 12 religious education program that you have taught this year. Using the code below, please indicate your response according to the directions for each sections.

Section 1

[Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Uncertain, Mostly Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
 [SA] [MA] [U] [MD] [SD]

As a result of the Year 12 religious education (RE) program you have taught this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. My students have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 2. My students have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 3. My students understand how the beliefs of a particular religious tradition influence the customs and practices of the people of that tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 4. My students have begun to understand the importance of religion in the lives of Australians from different cultural backgrounds | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 5. My students have increased their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 6. My students have a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in their lives | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 7. My students have become more interested in being involved in class and school masses | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 8. My students have been encouraged to become more involved in Church community work and/or Christian youth groups | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 9. My students understand better their own spirituality. | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 10. My students have begun to develop their faith commitment | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

11. My students have begun to find answers to some questions about life e.g. Does God exist? Is there life after death? SA MA U MD SD

12. My students have become more active in their own faith tradition SA MA U MD SD

Section 2

As a result of the religious education(RE) units you have taught this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

13. Generally, the topics that I am required to teach in Year 12 RE have little interest for my students SA MA U MD SD

14. It is important for Year 12 students to be taught about their own faith tradition SA MA U MD SD

15. The approach used in the VCE Religion Study units has stimulated my students' interest in the role of religion in people's lives SA MA U MD SD

16. Overall, more content on the teachings of the Catholic Church should be included in the Year 12 RE program SA MA U MD SD

17. Religion is an important subject in Catholic schools SA MA U MD SD

18. Generally, RE, this year, makes a meaningful contribution to the development of my students at this stage of their lives SA MA U MD SD

19. There should be more informal learning experiences like reflection days and retreats in the Year 12 RE program SA MA U MD SD

20. RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools SA MA U MD SD

21. My Year 12 students are usually interested in participating in class activities in RE SA MA U MD SD

22. My students find Year 12 RE an intellectually challenging subject SA MA U MD SD

23. Most students do their homework and come prepared for Year 12 RE class SA MA U MD SD

24. This year, most students find RE easier than other Year 12 subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
25. Generally, my Year 12 Students are noisy and disruptive in RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
26. We should spend more time each week/cycle on RE in Year 12	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
27. On the whole I enjoy teaching Year 12 RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
28. The topics that are included in the Year 12 RE units of study have little relevance for my students	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
29. It is difficult to find stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources to use in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
30. I believe that work requirements in Year 12 RE are well balanced between practical and written activities	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
31. Students in Year 12 usually show little interest in preparing for class masses	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
32. There should be more opportunities to include class prayer in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
33. Generally, I believe, Year 12 class masses are occasions when students develop their ability to pray	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
34. Generally, Year 12 RE includes content which provides students with a good understanding of the Catholic faith tradition	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
35. My Year 12 students appear to find reflection days an enriching religious experience	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
36. I find teaching Year 12 RE more difficult than my other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

Section 3 (open-ended)

For the following statements please circle the words that do apply and then complete the statement:

37. Overall, my Year 12 students **do/do not** enjoy the discussions we have in RE because -

38. Personally, I **do/do not** enjoy teaching my Year 12 RE class because -

39. On a scale from 1 - 5 (1 = most helpful and 5 = least helpful), please indicate, by circling the appropriate number, to what extent do you find each of the following to be a helpful learning experience for your students? If you have not included the activity in your lessons, please circle NA.

most helpful -----least helpful

a) discussions	1	2	3	4	5	NA
b) Mass preparation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
c) written assignments	1	2	3	4	5	NA
d) oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5	NA
e) community work	1	2	3	4	5	NA
f) film/video	1	2	3	4	5	NA
g) role play/drama	1	2	3	4	5	NA
h) research activities	1	2	3	4	5	NA
i) meditation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
j) prepared talk/tutorial	1	2	3	4	5	NA
k) retreats	1	2	3	4	5	NA
l) pastoral programs for junior students	1	2	3	4	5	NA
m) prayer, formal/informal	1	2	3	4	5	NA
n) guest speakers	1	2	3	4	5	NA
o) reflection days	1	2	3	4	5	NA
p) other, (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	NA

For the following statements please cross out the words that do not apply and add your comments:-

40. I believe that, in general, Year 12 girls/boys show more interest in RE because -

41. This year when we have had reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class, the girls/boys are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because -

Section 4 (Recommendations)

42. What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have taught this year?

43. What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have taught this year?

44. What do you believe are the desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools. If possible, please give reasons for your answer.

Part B [Background information]

Tick the appropriate boxes or answer Y (Yes) or N (No) to the items which best describe you:-

1. Male [] Female []

2. Religion:

Catholic [] Other Christian religion [] Orthodox []
Non-Christian religion [] None []

3. Which of the following are appropriate for your school:

Religious Principal [] Lay Principal []
Co-educational [] Girl's school [] Boy's school []
Metropolitan [] Country []

4. Tick the units of work in Year 12 RE that you are teaching this year:-

VCE Religion & Society	VCE Texts and Tradition	School-based
Unit 1 []	Unit 1 []	[]
Unit 2 []	Unit 2 []	
Unit 3 []	Unit 3 []	
Unit 4 []	Unit 4 []	

(if you have ticked the box for school-based, please list the topics and/or add a few words to describe the objectives and the content)

5. Is your school timetable divided into

a 5-day cycle []
a 6-day cycle []
a 7-day cycle []
an 8-day cycle []
a 9-day cycle []
a 10-day cycle []

6. How many periods for RE do you have per cycle this year? []

7. How many periods are allocated for other Year 12 subjects this year? []

8. Have you taught Year 12 RE before 1995? []
If yes, please state the number of years. []

9. Did you teach any of the Group Two religious studies before the new VCE was introduced? []

10. From your experience could you list, in order of preference, three units of study from the Year 12 RE program, that have attracted the most favourable response from your students. Would you like to comment on why you think this is so?

11. Did you participate in designing the RE units of study that you are currently teaching at Year 12? []

12. Do you feel that there should be some changes made to the Year 12 RE program that you have been teaching this year? []

13. If you answered 'yes' to Question 12, please add further comments.

For the following, please cross out the words that do not apply:-

14. I do/ do not feel very comfortable when I teach Year 12 RE

15. I did/ did not include studies related to the teaching of RE, such as, Religious Studies, Religious Education Methodology and/or theology, during my teacher training

16. I do/do not feel as competent at teaching RE as I do my other subjects.

17. I have returned to study to learn more about teaching in religious education [Y] [N]

18. If you answered 'yes' to question 17, please state whether your studies are:-

post-graduate []

under-graduate []

religious studies []

religious education []

theology []

APPENDIX D

TEACHER SURVEY (School-based programs)

PART A

The following statements refer to the Year 12 religious education program that you have taught this year. Using the code below, please indicate your response according to the directions for each sections.

Section 1

[Strongly Agree, Mostly Agree, Uncertain, Mostly Disagree, Strongly Disagree]
[SA] [MA] [U] [MD] [SD]

As a result of the Year 12 religious education (RE) program you have taught this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1. My students have become interested in learning about the different religions that exist in Australia | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 2. My students have become more tolerant towards the people and customs of other faith traditions | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 3. My students understand how the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church in Australia has influenced the lives of Australian Catholics | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 4. My students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures/Gospels | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 5. My students have increased their knowledge and understanding of the teachings of the Catholic faith tradition | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 6. My students have a greater understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in their lives | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 7. My students have become more interested in being involved in class and school masses | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 8. My students have been encouraged to become more involved in Church community work and/or Christian youth groups | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 9. My students understand better their own spirituality. | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

10. My students have begun to develop their faith commitment	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
11. My students have begun to find answers to some questions about life e.g. Does God exist? Is there life after death?	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
12. My students have become more active in their own faith tradition	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

Section 2

As a result of the religious education(RE) units you have taught this year please indicate to what extent you agree/disagree with the following statements by circling the appropriate response:-

13. Generally, the topics that I am required to teach in Year 12 RE have little interest for my students	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
14. It is important for Year 12 students to be taught about their own faith tradition	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
15. Generally, the Year 12 RE program has helped my students develop a conscious, loving relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
16. Overall, more content on the teachings of the Catholic Church should be included in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
17. Religion is an important subject in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
18. Generally, RE, this year, makes a meaningful contribution to the development of my students at this stage of their lives	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
19. There should be more informal learning experiences like reflection days and retreats in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
20. RE should be optional for Year 12 students in Catholic schools	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
21. My Year 12 students are usually interested in participating in class activities in RE	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
22. My students find Year 12 RE an intellectually challenging subject	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
23. Most students do their homework and come prepared for Year 12 RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

24. This year, most students find RE easier than other Year 12 subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
25. Generally, my Year 12 Students are noisy and disruptive in RE class	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
26. We should spend more time each week/cycle on RE in Year 12	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
27. On the whole I enjoy teaching Year 12 RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
28. The topics that are included in the Year 12 RE units of study have little relevance for my students	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
29. It is difficult to find stimulating and up-to-date, printed and visual resources to use in RE this year	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
30. I believe that work requirements in Year 12 RE are well balanced between practical and written activities	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
31. Students in Year 12 usually show little interest in preparing for class masses	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
32. There should be more opportunities to include class prayer in the Year 12 RE program	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
33. Generally, I believe, Year 12 class masses are occasions when students develop their ability to pray	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
34. Generally, Year 12 RE includes content which provides students with a good understanding of the Catholic faith tradition	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
35. My Year 12 students appear to find reflection days an enriching religious experience	SA	MA	U	MD	SD
36. I find teaching Year 12 RE class more difficult than my other subjects	SA	MA	U	MD	SD

Section 3 (open-ended)

For the following statements please circle the words that do apply and then complete the statement:

37. Overall, my Year 12 students **do/do not** enjoy the discussions we have in RE because -

38. Personally, I **do/do not** enjoy teaching my Year 12 RE class because -

39. On a scale from 1 - 5 (1 = most helpful and 5 = least helpful), please indicate, by circling the appropriate number, to what extent do you find each of the following to be a helpful learning experience for your students? If you have not included the activity in your lessons, please circle NA.

most helpful -----least helpful

a) discussions	1	2	3	4	5	NA
b) Mass preparation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
c) written assignments	1	2	3	4	5	NA
d) oral presentations	1	2	3	4	5	NA
e) community work	1	2	3	4	5	NA
f) film/video	1	2	3	4	5	NA
g) role play/drama	1	2	3	4	5	NA
h) research activities	1	2	3	4	5	NA
i) meditation	1	2	3	4	5	NA
j) prepared talk/tutorial	1	2	3	4	5	NA
k) retreats	1	2	3	4	5	NA
l) pastoral programs for junior students	1	2	3	4	5	NA
m) prayer, formal/informal	1	2	3	4	5	NA
n) guest speakers	1	2	3	4	5	NA
o) reflection days	1	2	3	4	5	NA
p) other, (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	NA

For the following statements please cross out the words that do not apply and add your comments:-

40. I believe that, in general, Year 12 girls/boys show more interest in RE because -

41. This year when we have had reflection days, class masses or other activities in RE class, the girls/boys are the ones that usually volunteer to take an active part. I believe this is because -

Section 4 (Recommendations)

42. What do you see as the strengths, if any, of the RE program you have taught this year?

43. What do you see as the weaknesses, if any, of the RE program you have taught this year?

44. What do you believe are the desirable characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools. If possible, please give reasons for your answer.

Part B [Background information]

Tick the appropriate boxes or answer Y (Yes) or N (No) to the items which best describe you:-

1. Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Religion:

Catholic ☐ Other Christian religion ☐ Orthodox ☐
Non-Christian religion ☐ None ☐

3. Which of the following are appropriate for your school:

Religious Principal ☐ Lay Principal ☐
Co-educational ☐ Girl's school ☐ Boy's school ☐
Metropolitan ☐ Country ☐

4. Tick the units of work in Year 12 RE that you are teaching this year:-

VCE Religion & Society	VCE Texts and Tradition	School-based
Unit 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	Unit 1 <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit 2 <input type="checkbox"/>	Unit 2 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Unit 3 <input type="checkbox"/>	Unit 3 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Unit 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	Unit 4 <input type="checkbox"/>	

(if you have ticked the box for school-based, please list the topics and/or add a few words to describe the objectives and the content)

5. Is your school timetable divided into

a 5-day cycle ☐
a 6-day cycle ☐
a 7-day cycle ☐
an 8-day cycle ☐
a 9-day cycle ☐
a 10-day cycle ☐

6. How many periods for RE do you have per cycle this year? ☐

7. How many periods are allocated for other Year 12 subjects this year? ☐

8. Have you taught Year 12 RE before 1995? ☐
If yes, please state the number of years. ☐

9. Did you teach any of the Group Two religious studies before the new VCE was introduced? ☐

10. From your experience could you list, in order of preference, three units of study from the Year 12 RE program, that have attracted the most favourable response from your students. Would you like to comment on why you think this is so?

11. Did you participate in designing the RE units of study that you are currently teaching at Year 12? []

12. Do you feel that there should be some changes made to the Year 12 RE program that you have been teaching this year? []

13. If you answered 'yes' to Question 12, please add further comments.

For the following, please cross out the words that do not apply:-

14. I do/ do not feel very comfortable when I teach Year 12 RE

15. I did/ did not include studies related to the teaching of RE, such as, Religious Studies, Religious Education Methodology and/or theology, during my teacher training

16. I do/do not feel as competent at teaching RE as I do my other subjects.

17. I have returned to study to learn more about teaching in religious education [Y]
[N]

18. If you answered 'yes' to question 17, please state whether your studies are:-

post-graduate []

under-graduate []

religious studies []

religious education []

theology []

APPENDIX E

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM (to be retained by the student)

To the Respondent

TITLE OF THE PROJECT:

An investigation into students' and teachers' perceptions of the Year 12 Religious Education programs in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

NAME OF THE INVESTIGATOR:

Marian de Souza

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus.

1995 is the fourth year since the full implementation of the new VCE and, in particular, the VCE Religion Studies units 1- 4. Given the flexibility of the new VCE, Catholic schools have responded with a variety of creative approaches in the development of their Year 12 religious education programs. However, to date, attempts to assess the Year 12 VCE and/or school-based religious education programs in Victorian Catholic schools have been few. It is to fill this gap that I have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers of existing Year 12 programs in religious education in Catholic schools in Victoria. My aim is to explore and describe the characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools and, based on students' and teachers' perceptions, to determine to what extent they meet the needs of today's students and to what extent they achieve the aims in religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

PROCEDURES:

In order to obtain accurate information relating to the religious education programs being offered to Year 12 students in different schools, I am sending this questionnaire to a number of schools in the following categories:-

Single sex - Boys
Single sex - Girls
Coeducational

Religious Principal
Lay Principal

Metropolitan
Country

The questionnaires are for Year 12 students and their religious education teachers. The purpose is to attempt to gain an insight into the respondents' perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences in religious education, whether the students experienced opportunities for faith and spiritual development and finally, the respondents' attitudes to the Year 12 religious education program.

Permission has been granted by your Principal for your school to participate in the survey.

TIME INVOLVED:

It is anticipated that it will take approximately 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH:

As a result of the findings of this research, the further aim of this thesis is to propose an appropriate model of religious education for senior secondary students in Catholic schools in Victoria, one that will meet their needs, enhance their learning and provide opportunities for their spiritual development.

The findings of this research may be used for publication or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify you in any way. You are advised that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times so that no school or individual will be named. Further, no adverse action will be taken against you if you choose not to participate in this survey.

Any questions regarding the project titled: Research into Year 12 Religious Education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria can be directed to the Principal Investigator: Marian de Souza, Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus, on telephone number 9563 3699.

This research study has been approved by the Australian Catholic University Victorian Divisional Research Projects Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns regarding this study, you may contact my supervisor: Dr. Marie Macdonald, Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus, Oakleigh, Ph. 95633600

Any communication will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation,

Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus, Oakleigh, Vic

Would you please complete and sign the consent form below and, if you are under 18 years of age, please also ask your parent/guardian to sign:

I have read and understood the information with regard to the survey on Year 12 Religious Education and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

SIGNATURE OF PARENT/GUARDIAN _____ **DATE** _____

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR _____

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

APPENDIX F

TEACHER INFORMED CONSENT FORM (to be retained by the respondent)

To the Respondent

TITLE OF THE PROJECT:

An investigation into students' and teachers' perceptions of Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

NAME OF THE INVESTIGATOR:

Marian de Souza

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus.

1995 is the fourth year since the full implementation of the new VCE and, in particular, the VCE Religion Studies units 1- 4. Given the flexibility of the new VCE, Catholic schools have responded with a variety of creative approaches in the development of their Year 12 religious education programs. However, to date, attempts to assess the Year 12 VCE and/or school-based religious education programs in Victorian Catholic schools have been few. It is to fill this gap that I have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers of existing Year 12 programs in religious education in Catholic schools in Victoria. My aim is to explore and describe the characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools and, based on students' and teachers' perceptions, to determine to what extent they meet the needs of today's students and to what extent they achieve the aims in religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

PROCEDURES:

In order to obtain accurate information relating to the religious education programs being offered to Year 12 students in different schools, I am sending this questionnaire to a number of schools in the following categories:-

Single sex - Boys
Single sex - Girls
Coeducational

Religious Principal
Lay Principal

Metropolitan
Country

The questionnaires are for Year 12 students and their religious education teachers. The purpose is to attempt to gain an insight into the respondents' perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences in religious education, whether the students experienced opportunities for faith and spiritual development and finally, the respondents' attitudes to the Year 12 religious education program.

Permission has been granted by your Principal for your school to participate in the survey.

TIME INVOLVED: It is anticipated that it will take approximately 40 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH:

As a result of the findings of this research, the further aim of this thesis is to propose an appropriate model of religious education for senior secondary students in Catholic schools in Victoria, one that will meet their needs, enhance their learning and provide opportunities for their spiritual development.

The findings of this research may be used for publication or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify you in any way. You are advised that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times so that no school or individual will be named. Further, no adverse action will be taken against you if you choose not to participate in this survey.

Any questions regarding the project titled: Research into Year 12 Religious Education programs in Catholic schools in Victoria can be directed to the Principal Investigator: Marian de Souza, Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus, on telephone number 9563 3699.

This research study has been approved by the Australian Catholic University Victorian Divisional Research Projects Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns regarding this study, you may contact my supervisor: Dr. Marie Macdonald, Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus, Oakleigh, Ph. 653360

Any communication will be treated in confidence, investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation,

Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus
Oakleigh, Vic

Would you please complete and sign the consent form below:

I have read and understood the information with regard to the survey on Year 12 Religious Education and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

APPENDIX G

Dear Principal,

My name is Marian de Souza and I am a PhD student in the Department of Religious Education at the Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus. I am writing to request your permission for some Year 12 students and teachers from your school to take part in a survey and assure you that at no time will your school be named or identified.

1995 is the fourth year since the full implementation of the new VCE and, in particular, the VCE Religion Studies units 1- 4. Given the flexibility of the new VCE, Catholic schools have responded with a variety of creative approaches in the development of their Year 12 religious education programs. However, to date, attempts to assess the Year 12 VCE and/or school-based religious education programs in Catholic schools have been few. It is to fill this gap that I have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers of existing Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools for my doctoral studies. My aim is to explore and describe the characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools and based on students' and teachers' perceptions, to determine to what extent they meet the needs of the todays students and to what extent they achieve the aims in religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

The title of my thesis is - An investigation into students' and teachers' perceptions of the Year 12 Religious Education program in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

In order to obtain accurate information relating to the religious education programs being offered to Year 12 students in different schools, I am sending a questionnaire to a number of schools in the following categories:-

Single sex - Boys
Single sex - Girls
Coeducational

Religious Principal
Lay Principal

Metropolitan
Country

The findings of this research may be used for publication or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify your school. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

I, therefore, request that you will allow your Religious Education Coordinator, one Year 12 religious education teacher and one Year 12 religious education class to fill in the questionnaires. It should take approximately 40 minutes to complete.

If you have any concerns about the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me at Christ Campus on 9563 3699.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus
Oakleigh 3166

Would you please complete and sign the form below and return it to:

**Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus
Oakleigh 3166**

I have read and understood the information with regard to the survey on Year 12 Religious Education and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to grant approval for the researcher to have access to approach students in my school to participate in this survey. I am aware that I can withdraw my consent at any time in this procedure.

I agree that the research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my school in any way.

Permission is hereby granted for students at

to participate in the survey.

Principal

Signature - _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H

Dear Religious Education Coordinator,

My name is Marian de Souza and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus.

1995 is the fourth year since the full implementation of the new VCE and, in particular, the VCE Religion Studies units 1- 4. Given the flexibility of the new VCE, Catholic schools have responded with a variety of creative approaches in the development of their Year 12 religious education programs. However, to date, attempts to assess the Year 12 VCE and/or school-based religious education programs in Catholic schools have been few. It is to fill this gap that I have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers of existing Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools for my doctoral studies. My aim is to explore and describe the characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools and, based on students' and teachers' perceptions to determine to what extent they meet the needs of the todays students and to what extent they achieve the aims in religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

The title of my thesis is - An investigation into students' and teachers' perceptions of the Religious Education program in Catholic secondary schools in Victoria.

In order to obtain accurate information relating to the religious education programs being offered to Year 12 students in different schools, I am sending this questionnaire to a number of schools in the following categories:-

Single sex - Boys	Religious Principal	Metropolitan
Single sex - Girls	Lay Principal	Country
Coeducational		

Permission has been granted by your Principal for your Year 12 students and Year 12 Religious Education teachers to participate in the survey. As the Religious Education Coordinator your involvement is appreciated. You will need to work through the following procedures to ensure correct administration of the survey.

1. It would be best if students are given one period during a Religious Education class to complete the questionnaire and they should complete it without any discussion of the items. The questionnaire is anonymous and will take approximately 40 minutes to complete, including reading time, distribution and collection of the surveys.
2. Please ensure that every student and teacher signs one copy of the Informed Consent form prior to completing the survey. This form must also be signed by the parent/guardian of each student. The other copy can be retained by each respondent.
3. The signed Informed Consent form should be collected separately to the survey and put in a separate envelope. This should be sealed and returned to the researcher.
4. Please sign the Informed Consent form yourself and complete the survey.
5. Please post the questionnaires and the Informed Consent forms in the two postage-paid envelopes provided to the researcher by the return date which is ----- October.

If you have any concerns about the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me at Christ Campus on 9563 3699 or at home on 9783 6449.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation,

Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus
Oakleigh, Vic.

APPENDIX I

Dear Religious Education Teacher,

My name is Marian de Souza and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus.

1995 is the fourth year since the full implementation of the new VCE and, in particular, the VCE Religion Studies units 1- 4. Given the flexibility of the new VCE, Catholic schools have responded with a variety of creative approaches in the development of their Year 12 religious education programs. However, to date, attempts to assess the Year 12 VCE and/or school-based religious education programs in Catholic schools have been few. It is to fill this gap that I have focused on the perceptions of students and teachers of existing Year 12 religious education programs in Catholic schools for my doctoral studies. My aim is to explore and describe the characteristics of religious education programs for Year 12 students in Catholic schools and based on the students' and teachers' perceptions, to determine to what extent they meet the needs of the today s students and to what extent they achieve the aims in religious education for Year 12 students in Catholic secondary schools.

The title of my thesis is - Students' and teachers' perceptions of the Year 12 religious education program in Catholic schools in Victoria: Implications for curriculum

In order to obtain accurate information relating to the religious education programs being offered to Year 12 students in different schools, I am sending this questionnaire to a number of schools in the following categories:-

Single sex - Boys
Single sex - Girls
Coeducational

Religious Principal
Lay Principal

Metropolitan
Country

Permission has been granted by your Principal for you and your Year 12 students to participate in the survey.

As a Religious Education teacher your involvement is appreciated. You will need to work through the following procedures to ensure correct administration of the survey.

1. Your Religious Education Coordinator will issue you with Informed Consent forms which are to be distributed to your students. This form must be signed by a parent/guardian of the student and then should be signed by the student before he/she completes the survey. The form should be collected and put in the envelope provided. The other may be retained by the student.
2. It would be best if students are given one period during a Religious Education class to complete the questionnaire and they should complete it without any discussion of the items. The questionnaire is anonymous and will take approximately 40 minutes to complete, including reading time, distribution and collection of the surveys.
3. Please sign the Informed Consent form yourself and complete the survey.
4. Please return the questionnaires and the Informed Consent forms to the Religious Education Coordinator a few days before the return date which is ----- October.

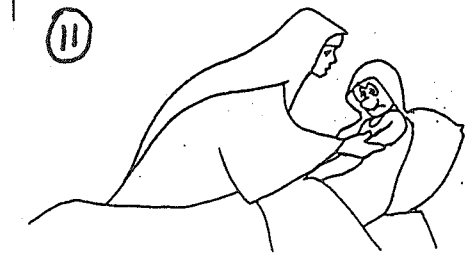
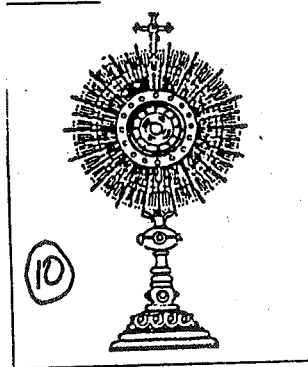
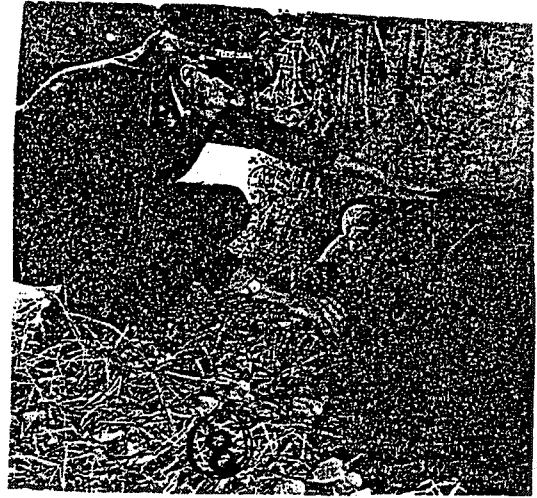
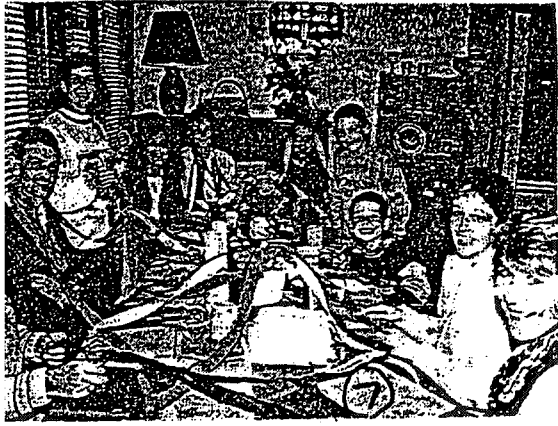
If you have any concerns about the questionnaire please do not hesitate to contact me at Christ Campus on 9563 3699 or at home on 9783 6449.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation,

Marian de Souza
Department of Religious Education
Australian Catholic University
Christ Campus
Oakleigh, Vic.

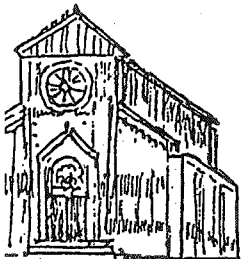
Appendix J
Interview Q. 3
Perceptions of Church



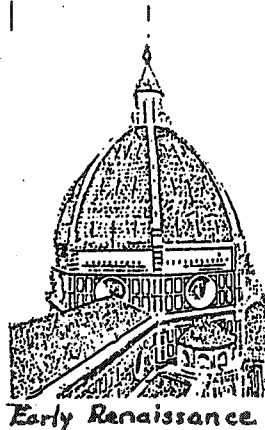


12

Romanesque



Gothic



Early Renaissance



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