Article

Student Priorities for Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes in Senior Secondary Religious Education: An Australian Perspective

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Abstract: This paper reports on one part of a larger longitudinal empirical study (2021–2023) that responds to the call for Religious Education (RE) to address religious plurality in the context of senior Catholic schooling within an Australian Archdiocese where students represent multiple faith traditions or no traditions. The research focuses on the level of satisfaction by students across Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes within a new and innovative senior school curriculum, Religion Meaning and Life (RML) based on national RE guidelines. Participants included 276 students across 17 schools who completed an online survey with 32 of these students participating in focus group interviews. Data analysis of quantitative data was both descriptive and inferential, and qualitative data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Topics of most interest were Ethics and Other World Religions; pedagogies entailing dialogue and use of media and technologies were rated highly; and learning outcomes entailed awareness of school mission, the religious dimension of the school, and pastoral care. Inferential statistical analyses confirm four core topics, pedagogies, and outcomes as significant to levels of satisfaction and in combination accounted for 42% of the variance of satisfaction with RML. Theoretical propositions for what matters most in senior secondary RE were advanced through four integrating principles (educational, formative, social, communitarian) and practice implications that preference Catholic tradition, and reference religious plurality.

Keywords: Australia; Catholic; religious education; students; senior secondary; curriculum innovation

1. Introduction

Educators in Catholic schools recognise the significant role that Religious Education plays in the curriculum. They are also aware of the ongoing religious and social changes within the school community that necessitate continual evaluation of what matters most in Religious Education, particularly for students. The ongoing challenge is to integrate RE theory and practice within high-quality curriculum programs that consider inclusive practices, curriculum preferences, student agency, and the diversity of religious affiliations and faith practices. These considerations are increasingly important for students in their final years of schooling as they mature, search for meaning, and develop the competence to operate independently and relationally. Curriculum practices often reflect these imperatives by incorporating community expectations and new understandings of mission practice relationships.

Catholic schools are built upon a unique model and vision that fosters a sense of community and shared values. At the heart of this model is the example set by Jesus, whose teachings emphasise the importance of justice, peace, liberation, and compassion as the foundation for authentic human existence.[1] Educators in Catholic schools strive not only to embody these principles in their professional practices and personal witness but also to cultivate these qualities in their students. As stated by the Congregation for Catholic

Education (CCE 1977) in 1977, "The Catholic school is committed thus to the development of the whole person, since in Christ, the perfect human, all human values find their fulfilment and unity" (para. 32). Consequently, the mission of Catholic schools in Australia is to facilitate the holistic development of individuals and communities, guided by the Gospel of Christ (NCEC 2018) while referencing other traditions in formal curriculum offerings.[2]

1.1. The Catholic School and Religious Education

The significance of mission within Catholic schools is described by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) as: "the young people we are educating today will become the leaders of the 2050s" (CCE 2014). To this end, the Congregation asks:

> What will religion's contribution be to educating younger generations to peace, development, fraternity in the universal human community? How are we going to educate them to faith and in faith? How will we establish the preliminary conditions to accept this gift, to educate them to gratitude, to a sense of awe, to asking themselves questions, to develop a sense of justice and consistency? How will we educate them to prayer? (n. III)

Within Australia, Religious Education is viewed as a formal curriculum area within the mission of the school and is responsive to social, ecclesial, and educational contexts (National Catholic Education Commission, NCEC (2018), Introduction). The goal of Religious Education is to "expand students' spiritual awareness and religious identity, fostering their capacities and skills of discerning, interpreting, thinking critically, seeking truth and making meaning. It inspires and challenges their service to others and engagement in the Church and the world" (NCEC 2018, p. 7)

The provision of Religious Education curriculum is heavily influenced by the unique context in which it is delivered. Each educational setting is shaped by its own distinct history, priorities, political landscape, and legislative framework, as well as the evolving expectations and demographics of the community it serves. As Barnes (2014) points out, "One cannot talk about Religious Education in the abstract but only about particular forms of RE, and these forms differ greatly from country to country" (p. 4).

The nature of Religious Education, across different contexts is also made complex by definitions as to what might be included in Religious Education. In this light, a report published by the Australian National University (Singleton et al. 2019) explored the changing role of religion in society and its relationship with the younger generation. The study shows that 52% of individuals aged 13–18 do not identify with any formal religious affiliation. However, the report also highlights that 74% of Australian teenagers hold a generally positive view of religion, and while they may not be affiliated with a specific faith, they remain receptive to various forms of spirituality. They note that 67% of Australian adolescents believe in some form of transcendent reality beyond themselves, and an additional 9%, although uncertain, are open to considering this possibility. These trends are further supported by recent findings from McCrindle (2021), which indicate that despite a decline in cultural Christianity, Australia as a nation remains spiritual. This can be attributed, in part, to the country's growing cultural diversity and the influx of other faiths through migration.

1.2. The Evolving Nature of Religious Education

Rossiter (2021) emphasises the crucial role of Religious Education in helping learners develop a sense of meaning, purpose, and values. To achieve these objectives, Religious Education functions as both an academic discipline and a field of research, operating in connection with its Catholic Tradition while remaining responsive to the needs and characteristics of the learning community it serves. Rossiter (2022) further elaborates on this position in a systematic review of the development and emphases in Religious Education in Australia from 1960 to 2022. The review clarifies the "relationships between Religious Education and young people's personal development" (p. 22) and argues that Religious Education can have a significant impact on personal growth. In this context, Rossiter proposes "a need to recalibrate the expectations of Religious Education with a

more appropriate and realistic account of its role as a school subject that can resource the spirituality and development of young people through the knowledge and skills it can impart" (p. 22).

Rossiter identifies a range of "best practice" strategies (p. 20) and highlights the importance of context, the challenge of perceptions about Religious Education, the significance of teacher beliefs and skills, and the relevance of pedagogy and content, particularly in the senior years of schooling. These conclusions are not presented in isolation but rather draw from the rich and engaging history of Religious Education, which has been responsive to needs and influences while remaining faithful to Church Tradition (Rossiter 1999; Crawford and Rossiter 2006). Religious Education is imperative when considering inclusive practices, religious diversity within the classroom, and the necessity of professional practice to ensure quality and consistency. According to Rossiter, this approach to Religious Education in the context of personal development helps:

> . . . religion teachers clarify what they are trying to accomplish in both the short and long terms. It helps give perspective, purpose, and direction to their teaching. It helps shape reasonable and realistic expectation of what can be achieved in the classroom, and of what is respected as the private inner workings of young people's minds that are not open to scrutiny. It can affect their choice of content and methods, as well as the questions they ask of students in class, and the sorts of responses they would like to get. It can help them evaluate various theories of Religious Education as well as discern where expectations and practice may be inappropriate and/or unrealistic. It can help them value their own teaching and their profession as religious educators (Rossiter 1999, p. 3).

The evolving focus of Religious Education reflects a shift from a singular emphasis on faith and faith practice to a more complex, dynamic, and inclusive perspective. Initially aligned with the catechetical focus of the Catholic Tradition, Religious Education in Australia has broadened its development and delivery in response to religious plurality, pedagogical innovation, and expectations of parents and caregivers. Over time, religious understanding and spirituality have become integral to life awareness and the development of ethical responses, incorporating reflection on one's experiences. Recent developments emphasise experiential learning, combining faith traditions, other world religions, and ethical practices with reflective processes.

This shift in emphasis does not dismiss progressive approaches; instead, Religious Education integrates a variety of perspectives. The evolution and application of Religious Education are now centred on pedagogies that enrich content, blend experiences, empower reflection, and foster the integration of the whole person. Educators are responsible for understanding, moderating, and reinforcing the curriculum through their witness. The combined emphasis on doctrinal and catechetical approaches, along with spiritual, existential, experiential, ethical, and collaborative reflection through dialogue, forms the foundation of the innovative senior secondary RE curriculum, *Religion, Meaning, and Life*.

1.3. A Reconceptualist Approach to Religious Education

The word "reconceptualist", coined by Kieran Scott (1984), simply means changing the way that concepts are used for interpreting or explaining something. In his article, Scott makes the point that a reconceptualized religious education builds a suspension bridge between the work of the church and the great public issues of our day. Questions of justice and peace, equality and ecology, public policy, and interpersonal relations are critical issues for both church and society. Nothing from ordinary experience, then, is beyond consideration in its curriculum. It offers a mediating language to link the rich wisdom and prophetic vision of the church to the pressing social and public concerns in the modern world.

The Reconceptualist approach within the pilot schools of this study entails an educational framework rather than a catechetical orientation. This educational framework is one

that positions Religious Education as a robust academic subject in the school curriculum with the personal/spiritual dimension accommodated within it.

> Classroom religious education is about educating young people spiritually, ethically, and religiously. It is not primarily a religious experience, but it is essentially teaching young people about religion, and about spiritual and moral issues, from a Catholic viewpoint. (Rossiter 2018, p. 1)

Similarly, Scott (1984) argues that "a reconceptualized religious education takes education as its overarching frame of reference. It self-consciously works out of an educational rather than ministerial framework". Gabriel Moran distinguishes between the classroom learning of religion and the practice of religion (Moran 1981, p. 37). He asserts that "an education that deserves to be characterised as religious would have to include two quite distinct things: (1) an understanding of religion, starting but not ending with one's own religion; and (2) access to the free and intelligent practice of a particular form of religious life" (Moran 1981, p. 21). Key to the approach are strategies of avoiding presumptive language, teaching the Tradition, and applying powerful pedagogies.

The Reconceptualist approach to Religious Education emphasises the importance of avoiding presumptive language and assumptions about students' faith development based on their religious affiliation. Instead, teachers are encouraged to use invitational and educational language to engage students in the religion classroom. By using non-presumptive language, teachers create an environment where students feel free to respond in ways that are not predetermined or programmed.

When teaching about the Catholic Christian tradition, teachers demonstrate the value they place on their own personal beliefs through their search for meaning and purpose. However, they are also challenged to maintain a critical distance between themselves and the content they are teaching, allowing space for authentic dialogue and giving students the freedom to investigate, inquire, and use their religious imagination. To achieve this, a Reconceptualist approach necessitates the use of powerful pedagogies that engage students with the rich resources of the tradition along with the volume and presentation of material on digital platforms (Pollefeyt and Richards 2019). Teachers are encouraged to acknowledge the reality of students' lives, identify their levels of thinking, and build on the unique attributes each student brings to the classroom. This involves incorporating powerful questioning techniques within a community of learners that fosters genuine, active, and authentic student engagement. The goals and outcomes of this approach include pedagogies that encompass didactic presentations, peer-to-peer learning, conversations at home, reflection, integration, and meaningful applications in formal and informal engagements. In summary, the influence of the teacher is significant as specialist, moderator, and witness.

1.4. Research Context

The data reported in this paper were part of a larger research project (Sultmann et al. 2023). The study explores the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents regarding innovative Religious Education (RE), developed, trialled, and implemented in senior secondary schools in Australia. The data presented here focus on student perceptions, particularly in the context of increasing diversity and the demand for RE experiences that reflect community expectations.

The larger study compared the outcomes of two traditional academic RE programs, *Religion and Ethics* and *Study of Religion*, with the innovative Religion Meaning and Life (RML) program (Sultmann et al. 2023). Notably, student satisfaction levels were similar across these programs, but the influences identified within each were distinct. No significant differences in the factors contributing to traditional programs were identified. However, within the RML initiative there were significant influences that gave rise to effectiveness. This paper details these findings, aiming to identify key factors in the RML program that contribute to its effectiveness and to consider potential adaptations for the content, pedagogy, and outcomes of traditional RE offerings. The research challenge is not to determine the most effective program but to explore the influences that students perceive

as making a difference. This was achieved through an exploration of the effectiveness of the RML curriculum guided by the following research questions:

1. What did students perceive to be important topics?
2. What did students perceive to be important pedagogical approaches?
3. What did students perceive as important outcomes?
4. What was the overall level of student satisfaction?
5. What combination of topics, pedagogies, and outcomes contribute to levels of satisfaction?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were drawn from those studying RML in 17 Catholic schools across two years of the project (*N* = 276). In both years, students completed an online survey and at the conclusion of year two of the study, 32 students participated in four semi-structured interviews.

2.2. Data Collection

The research team secured ethical clearance from Australian Catholic University and the relevant system authorities before commencing data collection. Two primary methods were employed to gather data as follows: anonymous surveys and semi-structured focus group interviews with students.

Thematic areas of interest were used to create an online survey, which was distributed to participants via an anonymous digital link on the Qualtrics platform. The intent of the survey was to gather information on the most important topics, pedagogies, and outcomes, as well as gauge overall satisfaction levels with the RML program. The questions were informed by the following three primary sources: the "Framing Paper: Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools" (NCEC 2018), the commissioning authority's RML Pilot 2020 Course Handbook, and relevant case studies from recent research (Sultmann et al. 2021a, 2021b). Participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with the questions using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented the lowest score and 5 the highest.

To complement the survey data and gain deeper insights, the researchers conducted semi-structured focus group interviews. These interviews explored the same domains of learning as the surveys, focusing on the most significant topics, pedagogies, and outcomes.

2.3. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed to analyse the combined data collected from completed surveys across two years. These analyses included generating descriptive statistics, which were presented in tabular form with percentage response distribution and means. In addition to these descriptive statistics, inferential analyses were conducted to assess differences in satisfaction levels and variations within response domains where multiple items were rated differently. For these analyses, *t*-tests, ANOVAs, and multiple regression analyses were used to examine the data and identify statistically significant findings.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and aligned with the first three research questions of the study. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 1999) was applied to all qualitative data. IPA aims to "unravel the meaning contained in narrative accounts through a process of interpretative engagement with the text of transcripts" (p. 218) by focusing on the three research questions. The process involves the following three stages: (1) data observations; (2) generating thematic titles; and (3) connecting themes through an integrating principle.

3. Results

3.1. Topics

Table 1 presents an overview of students' perceptions categorized according to Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes in the Religion Meaning and Life (RML) curriculum. The table displays the mean scores for program criteria in each of the domains of Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes. For Topics, findings suggest that Ethics (mean 3.6) and Other World Religions (mean 3.4) were the most relevant studied.

Table 1. Importance of RML by Topic, Pedagogies, and Outcomes (*N* = 276).

Topics		Pedagogies		Outcomes	
Criteria	**Mean**	**Criteria**	**Mean**	**Criteria**	**Mean**
Ethics	3.6	Dialogue	3.8	Listening to others	3.5
Other World Religions	3.4	Media & Technology	3.5	Dialoguing with others	3.4
Catholic Social Teaching	3.1	Solving Problems	3.4	Making connections	3.4
Jesus	3.0	Peer-to-Peer Learning	3.3	Contributing to community	3.3
God as Trinity	2.9	Applying RE	3.0	Critiquing information	3.2
Christian Traditions	2.8	Projects	2.9	Understanding myself	3.1
Prayer	2.6	Applying Scripture	2.5	Applying Catholic Teachings	2.8
Scripture	2.6	Praying	2.2	Praying	2.2
Christian life	2.6	Textbook	2.1	-	-
Church	2.5	-	-	-	-
Sacraments	2.5	-	-	-	-
Doctrines (Church Teachings)	2.4	-	-	-	-

Further insights into the importance of specific topics were gleaned from student comments, which provided a more nuanced understanding of their perspectives. Students emphasised the significance of the topic areas of Ethics and Other World Religions, viewing them as crucial components in facilitating dialogue and applying religious concepts to questions of meaning and life. Students placed great value on the transition from simply learning about a topic to actively applying that knowledge in real-world contexts.

> To me, I feel it's the morality side of things not so much the text and reading too deep into the text, but more looking at... you know the example that Jesus set and the modern take on that.

Students did not perceive RML as a formal curriculum of study.

> Like I wouldn't describe it as another subject to study, but more just a chance to participate and engage in religion in a different way. Which is how, if I was selling it to someone, I would sell it in that way, like you get the chance to study a subject that you're interested in and help you moving forward after school. And you also don't lose the ability to study religion, which a lot of us here enjoyed.

Experiential learning was important.

> You definitely do get involved in religion, and but in this amount and in an engaging way. It's definitely more helpful to be able to talk about religion. In this sense, we're not being hindered by assignments or exams surrounding religion as an [traditional Religious Education subject], 'so you really get to learn', I guess. Yeah, more important moral questions ... And it's definitely more educational, in that sense.

3.2. Pedagogies

Table 1 also presents data on student perceptions of pedagogical approaches used in the Religion Meaning and Life (RML) curriculum. Findings suggest Dialogue to be the most effective pedagogical approach, with a mean score of 3.8. Other highly rated approaches include Media and Technology (mean 3.5), Solving Problems (mean 3.4), and Peer-to-Peer

Learning (mean 3.3). In contrast, students found Textbooks (mean 2.1) and Praying (mean 2.2) to be the least effective pedagogical approaches.

The focus group interviews yielded additional insights into the impact of various pedagogical practices on student learning and engagement. Commentary confirmed pedagogical practices of scheduling and timetabling; respectful inclusion; student agency; dialogue; teacher as witness, and assessment relevance.

Timetabling and scheduling

> RML happens every two weeks, and in the afternoons, we basically take a few hours to discuss... And we begin with a few focus questions to start up the conversation. And those can range from what are your personal beliefs to what do you think about this specific topic

Respectful inclusion

> So, in normal religion classes, it's very structured, and there's really no room to talk about what you think or your interpretations. It's mostly just analysing Scripture or, you know, that kind of thing. But in RML, it's way more open, as they said before. But it's much more welcoming, especially if you don't already like talking in front of people. If you chime in with your beliefs, it's very welcome, and it can branch into completely different conversations, which are really beneficial. And I think that's the best part of RML.

Student agency

> I feel like what you said before about the relationship between us. It's pretty good. But it's even better when you have something like [teacher's name] who's willing to share his story. And that sort of encourages us to sort of get our perspective, like he's told us a lot about growing up with religion and how that impacted his life and how his understanding of religion has grown and changed and pick the people around him. And that's, I guess, something you wouldn't get on the Internet.

Diversity of witness

> It's different for everyone, and that's probably one of the best things we've explored. We also looked at, um, how religious practises like how that has an influence on our life, I guess, like whether we're devout Catholics and we go to church every Sunday, or whether it's just something we passively engage in at school and how that differs between each of us and [teacher] included. So, I guess that's the best thing is discussing that getting to hear from different people about.

3.3. Outcomes

Table 1 also details Outcomes and findings suggest that students feel most confident in their interpersonal skills (listening, mean 3.5; dialoguing, mean 3.4), moderately confident in their critical and reflective skills (critiquing information, mean 3.2; making connections, mean 3.4; understanding myself, mean 3.1; contributing to community, mean 3.3), and less confident in applying religious practices (applying Catholic teachings, mean 2.8; praying, mean 2.2).

Developing the importance of interpersonal skills from self-reflection and community contribution, students commented on the place of religion on personal meaning and its application within a safe a learning environment.

Personal meaning

> It (studying RML) gave me the ability to choose another subject. But I also feel like I gained. It gave me an insight to what religion means on a deeper sort of level, because I got to find out what other people see in that conversation sort of atmosphere.

Application

> But what I've always liked about RML is it focuses more on the meaning... So, while of course, some of our activities may lead us into an environment that could resemble being in the chapel... Now the volunteering opportunities that we have with Catholic Mission and that kind of sphere of things, you could say that involves prayer. But in a regular session, I wouldn't describe it as being prayerful at any stage.

Safe learning environment

> We do stay after school [to do RML]. But it's a good atmosphere around here just to spend time with my friends and just to talk generally. So, it's had a good impact on my mental health. Just sitting here in a good environment. And what else have I gained from this course? Well, obviously I've strengthened my understanding on Christianity and other religions, which we all talk about here, and [teacher's] perspectives on certain topics and just everyone's opinions and everyone's beliefs. They all combine and merge together, so it allows me to have a deeper understanding of all the topics we talked about.

3.4. Overall Satisfaction and Comparisons

As displayed in Table 2, students rated RML positively, with a mean score of 3.2, indicating satisfaction above the midpoint. The educational research domains of Topics Overall, Pedagogies Overall, and Outcomes Overall revealed consistent and favourable perceptions. However, Pedagogy was rated more favourably (mean 3.5) compared to Topics Overall and Outcomes Overall (both with a mean of 3.2). Responses to Topics Overall and Outcomes Overall followed a normal distribution, but there was a notable positive inclination towards RML pedagogy. Analysis indicated that 45.3% of students were either highly satisfied (5) or satisfied (4) with the program overall. Satisfaction was higher for pedagogical processes (55.1%) than for the topics studied (43.2%). When examining the Pedagogy Overall domain, the results were similar to those related to Topics Overall. Students placed greater value on content that was communal and practical rather than purely cognitive or doctrinal. This aligns with the RML's experiential approach, which promotes dialogue about personal experiences informed by Catholic teaching and insights from other world religions. Students appreciated the opportunities for dialogue and peer-to-peer learning, valuing the "space" to express themselves and clarify their thoughts.

Table 2. Student perceptions of RML by overall domains of learning.

Domains	% Response Proportions					Mean
	1	2	3	4	5	
Topics Overall	15.6	9.8	31.5	28.3	14.9	3.2
Pedagogies Overall	9.8	12.0	23.2	27.2	27.9	3.5
Outcomes Overall	13.4	14.5	29.3	25.0	17.8	3.2
RML Overall	13.0	15.2	26.4	26.8	18.5	3.2

3.5. Assessment of Influence

RML was found to be effective generally and within domains of learning Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes. A further analysis of student responses was employed to determine which elements within each theme are most significant and how these elements influence each other and contribute to overall satisfaction. The process entailed the following actions: (1) identification of core elements, which involved selecting four variables within each theme that received the highest mean ratings from students; (2) regression analyses to establish what level of influence existed across the four domains of learning for overall satisfaction for Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes; and (3) regression analysis to evaluate the impact on overall student satisfaction.

Linear regression for the four Core Topics (Ethics, Other World Religions, Catholic Social Teaching, and Jesus) indicated a significant relationship with overall satisfaction with

Topics, F $(4, 275)$ = 25.2, $p < 0.0001$, with an R^2 value of 27% for shared variance. For the four Core Pedagogies (Dialogue, Media and Technology, Peer-to-Peer Learning, and Solving Problems), linear regression showed a significant relationship with overall satisfaction with Pedagogies, F $(4, 275)$ = 18.6, $p < 0.0001$, with an R^2 value of 22% for shared variance. For the four Core Outcomes (Listening to Others, Dialoguing with Others, Making Connections, and Contributing to the Community), linear regression indicated a significant relationship with overall satisfaction with Outcomes, F $(4, 275)$ = 44.9, $p < 0.0001$, with an R^2 value of 40% for shared variance. These findings confirmed the significant contributions of the selected Core Topics, Core Pedagogies, and Core Outcomes with their respective overall satisfaction measures.

Multiple regression analysis assessed the ability of the criteria in each of the learning domains of Core Topics, Core Pedagogies, and Core Outcomes to predict overall satisfaction with RML. The model explained 42% of the total variance, F $(3, 275)$ = 64.49, $p < 0.0001$. Core Topics and Core Outcomes made the strongest contributions to overall satisfaction with RML, with the largest beta coefficients of 0.35 and 0.42 respectively, both reaching statistical significance ($p < 0.0001$). The beta value for Core Pedagogies was lower at 0.06, indicating it made a less unique contribution and did not reach significance. Semi-partial correlation coefficients showed that Core Topics and Core Outcomes each uniquely explained 29% of the variance in overall student satisfaction with RML, while Core Pedagogies explained 6%.

The regression analysis of Core Topics, Core Pedagogies, and Core Outcomes explained a considerable variance in student responses to overall satisfaction with RML. Additionally, the individual contributions of Core Topics and Core Outcomes uniquely impacted overall satisfaction with RML. In summary, student responses highlight their satisfaction with RML and its expression in Core Topics, and Core Outcomes with some influence from Core Pedagogies.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The research presented in this paper provides a window into how RE in senior secondary Catholic schools can be responsive to their tradition (particularity) in addressing the multi-religious affiliations or no affiliations of their students (plurality). This challenge for RE is contextualised within Australia and influenced by its unique educational, social, cultural, and ecclesial influences (Barnes 2020). Moreover, this situation of particularity interfacing with plurality finds its further unique expression across states, and Catholic educational authorities within diverse ecclesial settings. What becomes significant with respect to this breadth of relationship and governance emphases in Religious Education are the generic findings of what Topics, Pedagogies, and Outcomes warrant consideration in theoretical terms and with respect to practice. These conclusions are captured in theoretical propositions and practice implications.

4.1. Theoretical Propositions

The following theoretical propositions arising from the research are offered in support of advancing Religious Education in senior secondary schools in light of particularity within the context of religious plurality:

Educational: Based on high-quality educational experiences that encompass relevant topics, effective pedagogies, and meaningful outcomes integral to the mission and culture of the school. Key themes include a relevant curriculum preferencing the Catholic tradition and referencing other religious traditions, ethical applications, dialogical processes, existential questions, experiential learning, and a rich pedagogy.

Social: Focusing on the unique development of learners within the social contexts of the classroom, family, school, and community. Key themes include collaborative processes, student agency, and trusting relationships.

Formative: Shaping and guiding student perspectives through preferencing the Catholic tradition and referencing other world religions on existential questions. Key

themes include Gospel values of love and truth, inclusive practices, respectful engagement, and holistic learning.

Communitarian: Connecting students to the mission and religious life of the school and the wider community. Key themes include ecumenical and inter faith perspectives, school mission and religious rituals and practices, community awareness, and participation in service learning.

These theoretical propositions support the effectiveness of recontextualised Religious Education in senior secondary schools. They offer a foundation for the practical implementation of RML at scale and provide frameworks for evaluating and developing similar initiatives.

4.2. Practice Implications

Topics: Students in senior secondary Religious Education prioritise topics that integrate a Catholic Christian faith perspective, explore existential questions, and include knowledge of other world religions to foster inclusive dialogue. They value the application of ethical principles based on the teachings of Jesus and appreciate experiential learning and discussion as key components.

Pedagogy: Students stress the need for developing dialogical skills in all units and ensuring that course content is aligned with experiential learning opportunities. Moreover, students value service learning as a means to demonstrate Christian witness and develop personal and social skills.

Outcomes: Students emphasise the importance of developing interpersonal skills such as active listening, engaging in dialogue, making connections, self-understanding, and contributing to the community. Students recognise the unique and integral role of Religious Education in the mission and identity of the school. Through open, respectful, and meaningful conversations about faith, values, and spirituality, students can deepen their understanding of Catholic teachings, enhance their sense of belonging, and contribute to a positive and inclusive school culture.

In summary, the regression analyses pinpointed a core set of topics, pedagogical practices, and outcomes that significantly predict student satisfaction with Religious Education in the senior secondary school. These core elements include topics such as Ethics, Other World Religions, Catholic Social Teaching, and Jesus; pedagogical practices like Dialogue, Media and Technology, Peer-to-Peer Learning, and Solving Problems; and outcome skills such as Listening to Others, Dialoguing with Others, Making Connections, and Contributing to the Community. Semi-partial correlations confirmed the unique impact of each theme on overall satisfaction. Overall, these findings support educators to enhance and or develop Religious Education in the senior secondary stage of learning.

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Notes

[1]   It is important to note that besides justice, peace, and liberation, there is research literature on the social accommodation of controversial systems of social war and against justice, as signaled in Py (2021).

[2]   Portions of this article first appeared in popular form in Sultmann et al. (2023).

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