

**AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT MEANING-MAKING  
IN THE POST-COMPULSORY SUBJECT OF  
STUDY OF RELIGION**

Submitted by  
Mark Gerard Craig

Grad Dip Ed (Australian Catholic University)  
Grad Cert RE (Australian Catholic University)  
BTh (The Brisbane College of Theology)  
L Dip .A (Australian and New Zealand Cultural Arts)  
AMusA (Australian Music Examinations Board)

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of  
Masters of Education - Research.

School of Religious Education  
Faculty of Education

Australian Catholic University  
Research Services  
Locked Bag 4115,  
Fitzroy, Victoria 3065  
Australia

Date of submission: May 2006

## Abstract

Current research and anecdotal evidence has suggested that students enrolled in the QSA (Queensland Studies Authority) subject for Year 11 and Year 12, *Study of Religion*, as outlined in the Senior Syllabus for *Study of Religion*, are experiencing difficulties in meaning-making. This may be due to particular methodologies being employed to teach the subject to secondary students (Barnes, 2001; Flood, 1999; Kay, 1997). The purpose of this research was to explore the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. It was anticipated that this study would illuminate the nature of the relationship between these two variables and provide a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in the *Study of Religion* classroom.

The researcher adopted a case-study approach and further utilized the research methods of a survey questionnaire and a focus group to collect data. A cross-sectional survey at a Catholic co-educational College was completed. Forty-five students from a *Study of Religion* cohort totalling ninety were surveyed at this College. This was followed up by a focus group discussion involving five of the original forty-five students surveyed. The participants furnished a range of valuable insights in regard to the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making and the employment of largely phenomenological methodologies in teaching *Study of Religion*.

Data analysis revealed that students enrolled in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 are struggling to construct meaning when phenomenological methodologies are predominantly employed. This is arguably a result of phenomenological methodologies having their provenance within a modernist paradigm. Consequently, methodologies that once assisted students to make meaning effectively in a modern context are unable to continue to do so in a post-modern context. This may be due to paradigmatic shifts in Education, Philosophy and Religious Studies.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been a number of people who have generously supported this project. They have offered valuable encouragement and advice and shared a range of their professional and personal skills, thoughts and ideas. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank those people here.

I am grateful to the students who participated in the cross-sectional survey and focus group discussion. I would like to acknowledge their honesty and maturity, which was clearly demonstrated in their response to the two research instruments used in this study. It is their comments that have provided reliable empirical evidence for considering changes to the way in which *Study of Religion* is currently taught.

A particular mention needs to be made in regard to my colleagues in education who took on the roles of assisting me in orchestrating the completion of the survey instrument and focus group discussion; my sincere thanks for your ongoing enthusiasm of the research project.

To Brisbane Catholic Education who generously allowed this research to be completed within one of their schools, my most sincere thanks.

To my wife who was extremely patient and encouraging of me throughout the duration of my degree, I am most grateful.

To my academic supervisors, Dr Peta Goldberg and A/Prof Allan Doring of Australian Catholic University, whose guidance and support were invaluable. Without the assistance of these people this document would not stand completed as it does now.

## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>Contents</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
	<i>Abstract</i>	(i)
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	(ii)
	<i>Statement of Authorship</i>	(iii)
	<i>Contents</i>	(iv)
	<i>Appendices</i>	(viii)
	<i>Tables and Figures</i>	(ix)
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>1.0 DEFINING THE RESEARCH</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Introduction	
1.2	Exploring pedagogical shift	
1.2.1	The Doctrinal Approach	
1.2.2	The Kerygmatic Approach	3
1.2.3	The Experiential Approach	4
1.2.4	The Shared Christian Praxis Approach	5
1.2.5	The Study of Religion and Educational Approach	6
1.3	Phenomenology: A History	7
1.3.1	Origins of the Term	
1.3.2	Hegel	8
1.3.3	Husserl and Habermas	
1.3.4	Developing a Methodology	9
1.3.5	Ninian Smart	10
1.3.6	The British Experience	11
1.3.7	The Australian Experience	
1.4	Phenomenology and Study of Religion	13
1.5	Phenomenological Methodologies in the Australian Context	15
1.5.1	A Multilithic View of Ultimate Reality	16
1.6	Context of the Study	17
1.7	The Research Problem	
1.8	Purpose of the Study	18
1.9	Significance of the Study	
1.10	Limitations of the Research	19
1.11	Research Questions	
1.12	Clarifications and Working Definitions	20
1.13	Thesis Outline	22
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1	Introduction	
2.2	Phenomenological Methodologies and the Local Context: Greene College Study of Religion Work Program	
2.2.1	The Queensland Study of Religion Syllabus	
2.2.2	Study of Religion Work Program – Greene College	25
2.3	Paradigm Shift One: Post-modern Religious Studies	26
2.3.1	Theology: Reinventing the Term	27
2.3.2	Theological Universalism and Religious Studies	
2.3.3	A Post-modern Model for Understanding the Religious Concept of Ultimate Reality	

2.3.4	Qualitative Difference within Religion	28
2.3.5	The Multilithic Model of Ultimate Reality and Study of Religion	29
2.3.6	Critiquing the Multilithic Model	30
2.3.7	Advantages of the Multilithic Model	31
2.4	Paradigm Shift Two: Linguistic Philosophy	32
2.4.1	Student Meaning-making and Discourse-based Methodologies	
2.4.2	Language	33
2.4.3	Language Structures	34
2.4.4	Saussure	
2.4.5	Derrida	35
2.4.6	Presence	36
2.4.7	Presence within Texts – Dominant Culture	38
2.4.8	Derrida and Study of Religion	39
2.4.9	Binary Oppositions and Study of Religion	
2.5	Paradigm Shift Three: Post-modern Educational Models and Study of Religion - Increasing Student Potential for Meaning-making	41
2.5.1	Multiliteracies	
2.5.2	The Three Tiers of Multiliterate Learning	
2.5.3	Reflection Literacy and Phenomenological Methodologies	43
2.5.4	Multiliteracies and Study of Religion	45
2.5.5	Developing a Meta-language	46
2.5.5.1	Education Queensland and Multiliteracy	
2.6	Post-modernism and the Challenge to Educational Theory and Practice	48
2.6.1	Developing New Educational Paradigms: Proposing a New Methodology	
2.7	Paradigmatic Shifts: A Synthesis	
2.8	Summary	49
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>3.0 DESIGN OF RESEARCH</b>	<b>53</b>
3.1	Introduction	
3.2	Case-study	
3.3	Research Methods	55
3.3.1	Data Collection Instruments	
3.3.2	Cross-sectional Survey	
3.3.3	Cross-sectional Survey Structure	56
3.3.4	Focus Group Discussion	57
3.4	Alternative Sources of Data	59
3.4.1	Triangulation of Results	60
3.4.2	Research Participants	61
3.4.3	Validity and Reliability	62
3.4.4	Limitations	
3.4.5	Delimitations	63
3.5	Data Analysis Procedure	
3.6	Ethical Considerations	64
3.7	Design Summary	66
3.8	Conclusion	67

<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>4.0 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1	Introduction	
4.2	Design of Research	
4.3	Survey Data	
4.3.1	Survey Results	
4.3.1.1	Cross-sectional Survey	70
4.3.2	Organisation of Data	
4.3.3	Survey Question 5	73
4.4	Focus Group	74
4.5	Survey Data Analysis: Student Perceptions	
4.5.1	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like: Whole sample group	
4.5.2	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like: Whole sample group	
4.6	Student Perceptions according to Gender	75
4.6.1	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Gender	
4.6.2	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Gender	76
4.7	Student Perceptions according to Subject Choice	
4.7.1	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Subject Choice	
4.7.2	Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Subject Choice	77
	Question 5	
4.8	Focus Group data	78
4.9	Discussion of results	79
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>5.0 DISCUSSION</b>	<b>81</b>
5.1	Introduction	
5.2	Design of Research	
5.3	Summary of Results	
5.4	Discussion of Results	82
5.5	Cross-sectional Survey: Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like at Greene College - Whole sample group	83
5.5.1	Student Perception 5	
5.5.2	Student Perception 10	
5.6	Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like at Greene College: Whole sample group	84
5.6.1	Student Perception 3	
5.6.2	Student Perception 8	85
5.6.3	Student Perceptions 9 and 10	87
5.6.4	Summary	
5.7	Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Gender	88
5.7.1	Student Perception 3	
5.7.2	Student Perception 6	
5.7.3	Student Perception 8	
5.8	Unexpected Outcome	89
5.8.1	Student Perception 9	
5.9	Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Gender	90
5.9.1	Student Perceptions 4 and 6	

5.10	Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Subject Choice	91
5.10.1	Student Perception 5	
5.10.2	Student Perception 9	
5.11	Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Subject Choice	92
5.11.1	Student Perception 7	
5.11.2	Student Perception 10	
5.12	Question 5	93
5.13	Focus Group Data	94
5.14	Conclusion	95
5.15	Summary	96
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	<b>6.0 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>98</b>
6.1	Introduction	
6.2	Design of Research	
6.3	Key Issues	
6.3.1	Phenomenology	99
6.3.1.1	Phenomenology and adolescent development	
6.3.2	Discourse Analysis	
6.3.3	Multiliteracies	100
6.3.4	Multi-religious Curriculum	
6.3.5	Finding Relevance in Study of Religion: The classroom context	
6.4	Recommending Strategies in Response to Key Issues	101
6.4.1	Phenomenology	
6.4.1.1	Methodology and adolescent development	102
6.4.2	Discourse Analysis	103
6.4.3	Multiliteracies	104
6.4.4	Multi-religious Curriculum	106
6.4.5	Finding Relevance in Study of Religion: The classroom context	110
6.5	Conclusion	111
<b>REFERENCES</b>		<b>113</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>		<b>121</b>



## Appendices

		<i>PAGE</i>
APPENDIX 1:	Survey Instrument	121
APPENDIX 2:	Letter to Parents/Guardians	123
APPENDIX 3:	Ethics Approval	128
APPENDIX 4:	Destination Survey 1999	129

## Tables and Figures

	<i>Pages</i>
 <b><u>Chapter 1</u></b>	
Table 1      Historical Shifts in Religious Education	2
 <b><u>Chapter 3</u></b>	
Figure 3.0      Focus Group Session: A Summary of the Process	59
Figure 3.1      Triangulating Research Results	60
Table 3.0      Research Process Summary	66
 <b><u>Chapter 4</u></b>	
Figure 4      Data sequence	71
Table 4.0      What Study of Religion is like – Whole Sample Group	72
Table 4.1      What Study of Religion should be like – Whole Sample Group	72
Table 4.2      Student Perceptions of Study of Religion according to Subject Choice	73
Table 4.3      Student Responses to Question 5	73
Table 4.4      Student Responses from the Focus Group Discussion	74
Table 4a      Student Perceptions 5, 6, 8 and 10	75
Table 4b      Student Perceptions 3, 8, 9 and 10	75
Table 4.1a      Student Perceptions 3, 6, 8 and 9	76
Table 4.1b      Student Perceptions 1, 4 and 6	76
Table 4.2a      Student Perceptions 5 and 9	77
Table 4.2b      Student Perceptions 7 and 10	77
 <b><u>Chapter 5</u></b>	
Table 5.0      Linking Student Perceptions to Research Questions	82
Table 5.1      Student Perceptions 5 and 10	84
Table 5.2      Student Perceptions 3, 8, 9 and 10	84
Table 5.3      Student Perceptions 3, 6, 8 and 9	90
Table 5.4      Student Perceptions 1, 4 and 6	90
Table 5.5      Student Perceptions 5 and 9	92
Table 5.6      Student Perceptions 7 and 10	93
Table 5.7      Comparing Student Responses with the Literature Review	94
Figure 5      Validating Data	95

## **CHAPTER 1**

This Chapter sets out the rationale for the investigation of the connection between student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* in the secondary school context. The central issues of this research project are briefly introduced, and key terms defined.

## 1.0 DEFINING THE RESEARCH

*The central task of the Catholic School is to provide a synthesis of culture and faith and a synthesis of faith and life (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, p.33).*

### 1.1 Introduction

The history of Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools in Australia has seen the development of various educational approaches to better engage student potential for meaning-making at a particular point in history. Buchanan (2005, p.20) refers to this phenomenon as “pedagogical drift”. There have been six key shifts in methodology in Religious Education over the last two hundred years (See Table 1 below). Therefore it is important to explore these key shifts in order to provide a clear context for the present study, which is an examination of student meaning-making in the senior secondary school, post-compulsory subject *Study of Religion*.

Table 1

*Historical shifts in Religious Education*

Historical Period	Approach
Pre-1960s	Doctrinal
1960s	Kerygmatic
1970s	Experiential
1980s	Shared Christian Praxis
1970s to present	Educational
1980s to present	Phenomenological

(Engebretson, Fleming & Rymarz, 2002; Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.58)

### 1.2 Exploring Pedagogical Shift

#### 1.2.1 The Doctrinal Approach

The doctrinal approach influenced the study of religion from the time of European settlement in Australia until the 1960s (Ryan & Malone, 1996). Before the 1960s the emphasis in Religious Education was on rote-learning the official Catechism of the Catholic Church (Mannix, 1938, Foreword). The rote learning of Catholic doctrine was understood to lead to belief and socialisation into the Catholic Church. “The memorising of doctrine as a means to the internalisation of faith [was considered to be] the key element in this approach and dominated the landscape of religious education until the 1960s” (Fleming, 2002, p.63). The general title used for religious education in Catholic and State schools in Australia between 1900 and the 1960s was “religious instruction”. The general aim of this religious instruction was to promote the faith of believers (catechesis) for the

purposes of passing on the faith tradition (Malone, 1990, p.35). This was partly in response to religious sectarianism and the perceived need for Catholic adolescents to be crystal clear on the fundamental beliefs of the Catholic tradition. It was anticipated that such learning would equip Catholic students to effectively counteract the perceived threat of Protestantism by providing for them, intellectual clarity on Catholic doctrine (Buchanan, 2005).

At this time Church doctrine was given more emphasis than Scripture. Consequently, a weakness of this approach was that it privileged Church Tradition as a perceived witness to divine revelation over Sacred Scripture (Buchanan, 2005). The Doctrinal approach minimised the importance of Scripture as a witness to divine revelation, the latter being arguably more fundamental than Tradition to the teaching authority of the Church. Furthermore, the Doctrinal approach did not encourage students to “encounter Jesus as a personal saviour”, which was deemed a priority of adolescent faith development by Catholic educational authorities at that juncture (Buchanan, 2005, p.23).

Finally, due to its highly prescriptive method of teaching it negated the fact that learning was a highly individualised process (Lovat, 2002, p.6). The insights of developmental psychologists such as Piaget (1959) and Erickson (1968) strongly indicated that the assumption that everyone “can learn in the same way and at the same pace, is doomed to frustrate and exclude many a student” (Lovat, 2002, p.7). With Vatican II some of these weaknesses, particularly the imbalance between the two primary sources or more correctly “witnesses” of divine revelation, Tradition and Scripture, was addressed to some extent. Vatican II ushered in the introduction of the Kerygmatic approach.

### *1.2.2 The Kerygmatic Approach*

The Kerygmatic approach was implemented with emphasis upon “proclaiming the Good News” and the use of the Bible during religious education lessons (Ryan & Malone, 1996, p.58). The Hebrew and Christian scriptures were given more prominence so that they were now presented as being just as important as Church Doctrine in the faith development of adolescents in secondary education. Central to this approach was a change in content. The content rather than doctrine was now the person of Jesus or as Jungmann (1962) states, “Christ, Redemption, Grace [and] the sacraments” (p.96). However, the method of learning this new content, which was question and answer format, remained the same. Furthermore, the purpose of the Kerygmatic approach remained identical to the Doctrinal approach: to impart knowledge (Malone, 1982, p.8). The basic assumption of the Kerygmatic approach was that “the focus on Jesus as God, as presented in scripture, would help to inculcate students into a life of faith in the

...Church” thereby enhancing their potential for personal faith development (Buchanan, 2005, p. 24). The 1970s, however, saw another shift in the model of Religious Education being employed in many Australian schools. This shift was from the Kerygmatic approach to a more experientially based curriculum - the Experiential or Life-centred approach.

### *1.2.3 The Experiential Approach*

*Dei Verbum* made it clear that Scripture and Church Tradition were not sources of divine revelation but rather, witnesses to it (Flannery, 1984). Consequently, the second Vatican Council affirmed the view that God was not only revealed in past events, as recorded in Scripture and evidenced by Tradition, but also in the present events of ordinary life (Buchanan, 2006, p.25). Secondly, the emphasis on life experience in this approach was influenced by the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, which emphasised the importance of holistic personal development and the importance of community (Ryan, 1997, p.54). As a result, catechetical theorists were challenged to develop a life-centred pedagogical approach to religious education that reflected the insights of psychology and anthropology. This in turn assisted religious education teachers to address the perceived weakness in the Kerygmatic model – that the importance of religious experience as a key factor necessary for appropriate faith development was not always accommodated.

As the experiential approach emphasised present events, it was naturally better positioned to incorporate popular culture more effectively than the Kerygmatic approach. The experiential or life-centred approach was deemed better equipped to assist students to construct meaning or find personal relevance in religion at that particular historical moment. The experiential approach, like the Doctrinal and Kerygmatic approaches, was catechetical in its intention. It stressed that only through an examination of life experience could believers enter into an understanding and encounter with God (Fleming, 2002, p.66). It is not surprising then that in the religious education classroom, group discussion was used as a key tool for learning. Teacher directed discussions challenged students to make connections between their Church related activities and secular activities. These changes were significant at this time as pedagogy was largely based on teacher exposition with little opportunity for student discussion.

A weakness inherent in the experiential approach to religious education was that students did not always treat religious education as a legitimate subject alongside other subjects such as Maths and English. By the early 1980s the experiential approach lost ground as the central theoretical basis for religious education. It had become almost content free and was judged to be theologically and educationally inadequate (Welbourne, 1995, p.5). Eventually the Shared Christian Praxis approach to teaching religious education was

introduced in the 1980s to address some of these perceived methodological shortcomings (Engebretson, Fleming & Rymarz, 2002).

#### *1.2.4 The Shared Christian Praxis Approach*

The Shared Christian Praxis approach rather than being solely based on a theological and catechetical rationale, which was typical of the earlier approaches, was also influenced and shaped by critical educational theories (Engebretson, 1999, p.27). However, this approach was still faith-centred and sought to reframe religious education within the parameters of general educational theory and practice. Due to this change in emphasis the Shared Christian Praxis approach was deemed by religious education authorities to be more academically rigorous and challenging than earlier approaches (Groome, 1991, p.276). Thomas Groome, an American theologian and educator, was instrumental in developing this approach. Groome's focus was to reframe religious education in such a way as to overcome the perceived inadequacies of the doctrinal and experiential or life-centred approaches (Groome, 1991).

In his first major work, *Christian Religious Education*, Groome introduced the term "Shared-Praxis" (Groome, 1980). The Shared Christian Praxis model of religious education encouraged students to reflect critically upon their actions and current events and make distinctions between what was "really happening" in the world and what was perceived as "should be happening" in the world (Engebretson, 2002). It paved the way for issues of social justice to be reflected upon in the religion classroom. Furthermore, it challenged students to make personal decisions about future action that might go some way in addressing perceived injustices within the Church and society.

A factor contributing to the success of Groome's Shared Christian Praxis approach in Catholic schools was its ability to fit within an academic and educational context (Buchanan, 2005). Consequently, it was anticipated that students would more easily discover meaning in studying religion if they could see a clear connection between the Christian story and vision and contemporary events within society (Engebretson, 2002). Secondly, students were learning and developing genuine academic skills alongside appropriate faith development and this went some distance towards legitimating the subject as a serious academic enterprise within the minds of some students.

However, the Shared Christian Praxis model of religious education was not without its limitations. Ryan (1997, p.77) argues that In Australian schools the radical and critical dimensions of this approach were de-emphasised in favour of "aspects which [sought] to conserve and maintain the tradition". Consequently, as a methodology it could be

postulated that the Shared Christian Praxis model of religious education struggled to objectively critique theology and religious practice within the Catholic tradition. This was especially apparent when such a critique challenged long established religious beliefs and practices such as celibacy within the priesthood and the ordination of women. Furthermore the language of this approach was largely theological than educational in essence (Ryan, 1997, p.77). This meant that lesson content would generally have been geared toward increasing a students' knowledge of their Catholic faith more so than nurturing appropriate faith development and particular academic skills.

As a consequence of this, critics of this approach expressed the concern that the Shared Christian Praxis model tended to be "a messenger for a prevailing Church theology" rather than a healthy critic of it and the Christian praxis that such a theology promotes (Ryan, 1997, p.78). Partly owing to these inherent limitations and due to shifts in education generally, the 1980s and 1990s were witness to further methodological shifts in religious education in Australian Catholic Schools. A key shift was from a Shared Christian Praxis approach to Phenomenological approaches for teaching religion in the Catholic school. This approach, which had its origins in Britain, had a predominant academic and educational focus with little direct emphasis upon personal faith development.

#### *1.2.5 The Study of Religion and Educational Approach*

The Queensland Studies Authority subject, *Study of Religion*, when introduced into Australian Catholic secondary schools in the mid 1980s, identified Religion as a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon. As such, religion was deemed as warranting serious academic attention in Australian secondary schools. State Educational Authorities wanted *Study of Religion* to be viewed as legitimate a subject as those associated with other Key Learning Areas (Engebretson, 1996). This resulted in two streams of education in religion being offered to students enrolled in Catholic schools. Senior students (Year 11 & 12) could choose to either enrol in religious education with an emphasis on faith development or *Study of Religion* with an emphasis on academic development. The former would later adopt an Educational approach while the latter utilised phenomenological methodologies for teaching religious content in the classroom.

Phenomenological methodologies were "founded on the theory that religion [could] be studied from the outside" (Buchanan, 2005, p.30). In other words, one did not have to be a member of a religion to understand it. Phenomenology was considered a most appropriate methodology for assisting student meaning-making in the classroom as it identified religion as a legitimate object of study, which developed distinctive skills and encouraged particular insights relevant to the life-world of the student (Lovat, 2002, p.45).



Phenomenological approaches in many ways contributed to the later development of the Educational approach to religious education.

The Educational approach to religious education placed emphasis on the educational components of religious studies (Buchanan, 2005, p.33). Rummery (2001), who was influenced by the work of Smart, was the first Australian to present a systematic view of the educational dimensions of religious education. A key question for Rummery was: Can we assume that students in Catholic schools are believers (Rummery, 1975, p.27)? This type of questioning contributed to the development of an Educational approach to religious education that combined catechesis with appropriate educational theory and practice. However, *Study of Religion* unlike the Educational approach did not have as one of its goals, catechesis. In the Phenomenological approach, religion was not studied for the purposes of faith development but in order to understand the role that religion occupied in the lives of people and culturally (Fleming, 2002, p.73).

Post-modern shifts in educational methodology, however, have impacted strongly on secondary education in the last decade. This in turn has presented serious challenges to the way in which *Study of Religion* is currently being taught in senior secondary schools. Furthermore, these shifts are arguably rendering phenomenological methodologies out-dated and less equipped to engage student potential for meaning-making in the post-modern *Study of Religion* classroom. A strong tradition within literature has suggested that phenomenological methodologies for teaching *Study of Religion* are possibly outmoded and may reflect a modern rather than a post-modern context (Flood, 1999; Hobson & Edwards, 1999; Jones, 2003; Kay, 1997). Consequently, an historical overview of phenomenological methodologies was required in order to contextualise the present study and demonstrate why, as a methodology, it may be struggling to engage student potential for meaning-making.

### 1.3 Phenomenology: A History

#### 1.3.1 *Origins of the Term*

The term, "Phenomenology" was first coined in 1764 by Johann Heinrich Lambert, a Swiss-German mathematician and philosopher. It was derived from two Greek terms "whose combined meaning was the setting forth or articulation of what shows itself" (Moreau, 2001, p.1). Immanuel Kant, a contemporary of Lambert, also used the term to distinguish between "things" in the world as they appear to us (phenomena) from "things" in the world as they really are (noumena). It was out of this context that Chantepie de la Saussaye in 1887 (cited in Sharpe, 1975, p.222) coined the term "the phenomenology of religion" in *Lehrbuch der Religionsgeschichte* (Textbook of the History of Religions).

Stimulated by the insights of Kant and later Hegel, Chantepie sought to underline the different and diverse manifestations of religion across common themes (Barnes, 2001).

### 1.3.2 Hegel

According to Boucher (2000), Hegel's argument was that we are driven by a desire to really know the "nature" (noumena) of things, which he referred to as *wesen* or essence and that this knowledge is mediated through the social world - the world of appearances or manifestations (phenomena). Chantepie applied Hegel's philosophical insight to the phenomenon of religion, identifying that while religion manifested itself concretely in the world as diverse, there was present within each world religion an essence (*wesen*) that was common to each. Therefore, while the socio-cultural manifestation of religions may differ across contexts the essence of these same religions does not. Such thinking is reminiscent of Aristotelian metaphysics and the distinction between substance (the essence of a thing) and its accidents (the outward characteristics of a thing that gives it material shape and definition) (Aquinas, trans. 1947; Barnes, 1982). This distinction between the essence of religion and its socio-cultural and historical manifestation was later pursued by a number of continental philosophers including van der Leeuw (1938), Otto (1958) and Husserl (1983).

### 1.3.3 Husserl and Habermas

Husserl, reacting to the dominant methodology of his day, empirical science, postulated that in order to truly come to know the essence of something there must be a suspension of judgement (*epoche*) and a continuing openness to the object or phenomenon under investigation. Habermas (1985) later built on the thinking of Husserl and this is evident in his articulation of the epistemic distance between a phenomenon and the observer. Habermas (1985) argued that the critical knowing of the essence of phenomena comes through a lengthy process of observation and self-reflection. Cultural conditioning and presuppositions regarding particular phenomena can then be identified by the observer prior to final conclusions being drawn (Lovat, 2001). Consequently final conclusions would arguably be free of prejudice and bias. This assumption within phenomenology that things in the world possess an essence that make them what they are demands, according to Moreau (2001), that the observer rely on intuition in order to experience it and identify it.

This intuition is called "eidetic vision" or "eidetic reduction" (Moreau, 2001). Furthermore, this intuition enables the observer to see and understand a phenomenon in terms of its essence and not have that understanding adulterated by bias and prejudice due to the socio-cultural and historical conditioning of the observer. A key characteristic of phenomenology is the belief that objective meaning/truth is attainable. This belief in the

possibility of objective truth is arguably influenced by empirical science, which made the same claim. However, the reliance on intuition or “eidetic vision” in order to discern the nature of a thing is arguably a weakness in a methodology that claims to be objective (Moreau, 2001). Therefore, the combination of “objectivity” and “intuition” may be a contradiction in terms. This is because the ability to demonstrate that one particular intuitive insight is more adequate than another is exceedingly difficult at best and impossible to prove empirically (Moreau, 2001).

Lovat (2005, pp.47-48), however, suggests that this apparent conflict between objectivity and intuition are not necessarily contradictory. *Epoche*, according to Lovat (2005), enables the observer to objectively assess a particular phenomenon by an extensive gathering of the views of others (data) without any judgements being made about the relative value or worth of the data itself – suspension of judgement. However, this notion is coupled with the idea that once an objective assessment has been undertaken, that the observer is then in a position to reflect critically upon this assessment and make informed judgements about the phenomenon under investigation. This is called “informed subjectivity” or “eidetic science”. Therefore, Lovat (2005, p.48) suggests that at the eidetic science end of phenomenological methodology that intuition may be quite legitimate. This is because phenomenological methodology *per se* is a “movement across the spectrum from objectivity [*epoche*] to informed subjectivity [eidetic vision]” (Lovat, 2005, p.48). Therefore, while Moreau (2001) posits that the combination of “objectivity” and “intuition” (subjectivity) within the one methodology is a contradiction in terms, Lovat (2005) argues that these two elements are simply opposite poles of the spectrum that is phenomenological methodology and that no contradiction exists.

#### *1.3.4 Developing a Methodology*

Applying this insight to secondary education it is important to note that phenomenology, when proposed in the 1960s, was never intended as a teaching methodology for religious education in secondary schools. It was originally intended as an analytical framework for exploring religion as a sociological and historical phenomenon. Religious Studies departments in secular Universities later adopted phenomenology for this purpose (Flood, 1999). Before the Second World War, the study of religion took place in the domain of theological colleges and institutions whereby academics who were adherents of a particular religion would provide a pseudo-scientific rationale for particular doctrines held by a particular religious group primarily for that religious group (Flood, 1999, p.17). Flood (1999) has suggested that claims to the pre-eminence of a particular brand of religious truth over others, such as that espoused by Christianity, Hinduism or Islam, were

considered highly questionable and deemed outside of the scope of scientific methodology to deny or confirm.

The establishing of Religious Studies departments within secular universities in the United States of America and the United Kingdom during the decades that followed the Second World War marked an important shift in the way religion was studied. There was a movement away from theology, which was traditionally regarded as an insider discourse, to religious studies, which favoured a more academic and non-confessional approach to the study of religion. Flood (1999) states:

[That while] Institutionally theology and religious studies often find themselves in close proximity as there are many combined theology and religious studies departments in European (though not American or Canadian) universities, many in religious studies have perceived [this] separation . . . as a hard-won battle which has separated a confessional understanding of religion from a non-confessional, objective one (p.18).

Consequently in those institutions of higher learning where a clear delineation between theology and religious studies was made, Religious Studies departments adopted phenomenological methods of inquiry (Flood, 1999). This was in order to provide objective descriptions of religion from the position of an outsider rather than an insider of a particular religious group (Flood, 1999). The use of phenomenological methodologies also afforded Religious Studies departments in universities more credibility. This was because academics were able to claim a level of objectivity and empirical validity in the study of religion consistent with other tertiary subjects like Mathematics and Physics. Phenomenology as a tool for analysing religion was pioneered by Ninian Smart (1968).

#### *1.3.5 Ninian Smart*

Ninian Smart was a Professor of Religious Studies at Lancaster University in England and is considered a “modern pioneer of Religious Studies” (Lovat, 1993, p.7). Smart (1968) assisted in developing a phenomenological approach that was later used within a university context of education and learning. By emphasising the importance of observing a religion as a concrete socio-cultural and historical phenomenon, Smart attempted to see what an adherent of a particular religion sees. This was to be achieved by entering the believer’s thought world and suspending judgement in order to reduce or ideally eliminate bias or presupposition regarding the religious phenomenon under observation.

For Smart this was crucial as it ensured that data collected would be sifted of all presupposition and bias and be truly objective. Hence, there would be neither endorsement nor criticism of what was observed, so preserving the Husserlian value of

*epoche* or the suspension of judgement (Smart, 1968). Smart argued that one comes to know religion by endeavouring to strip oneself of all presuppositions about it and by immersing oneself in the experience of it. This immersion would enable the observer to attempt to see what a particular believer of a particular religious tradition might see. The approach developed by Smart was founded on the theory that religion could feasibly be studied from the “outside”. That is, one does not have to belong to a religious tradition in order to learn about religion. It is out of this methodological approach that the seven dimensions of religion, now synonymous with Smart, were later developed as a way of examining and comparing particular religions within secondary education contexts.

#### *1.3.6 The British Experience*

It is important to note that a move toward a phenomenological approach to teaching religion in secondary schools had its beginnings in Britain. Up until the 1960s the teaching of religion in British schools was largely “confessional” (Hull, 1984, pp.5-7). However, as the British population became more diverse and multicultural in its makeup, due to an increase in immigration, a new approach to teaching religion was developed. A number of Agreed Syllabuses in religious studies appeared in the late 1960s, with the central focus being Christianity. The “Birmingham Agreed Syllabus” and accompanying Handbook, which was published in 1975 was the culmination of this trend in religious education in Britain (Buchanan, 2005, p.30).

The “Birmingham Agreed Syllabus” was based on a phenomenological approach as proposed by Smart (1968). Consequently, it was not until the 1970’s and 1980’s that phenomenological methodologies were adapted and then adopted for teaching religion in secondary schools in Britain then later in Australia. It needs to be stated that “Smart was not concerned with how religion should be taught in schools” but rather with “what content should be taught” (Buchanan, 2005, p.31). Moore and Habel (1982), two Australian academics, adapted Smart’s approach and focused not so much on “what” to teach but on the pedagogical question of “how” to teach Religion to secondary school students.

#### *1.3.7 The Australian Experience*

Moore and Habel (1982) developed a theory that demonstrated how the phenomenological approach of Smart could be implemented in the religion classroom – the Typological approach. Whereas Smart identified that any religion could be viewed as a collection of rituals, myths and doctrines et cetera, he did not provide a practical methodology for assisting students to approach a study in this way (Lovat, 2002). Smart identified the forest but Moore and Habel identified the specific trees that make up the forest (Lovat, 2002). “For Moore and Habel, the types (or elements) of religion (i.e. rituals,

myths, etc) make up the vocabulary ...which must be mastered...for religious literacy to develop” (Lovat, 2002, p.52).

Typology suggests that effective learning within any academic discipline will follow something of this methodology – moving from the particular to the general (inductive reasoning). For example, rather than identifying very broadly ritual as a phenomenon of Catholicism (typical of Smart), the student would begin with a specific ritual type within Catholicism such as Confirmation. Students would study this ritual type and then move through a six-stage process relate this ritual type to other non-Christian ritual types (Fleming, 2002, p.77). For example, the Jewish Bar-Mitzvah/Bat-Mitzvah or an Aboriginal Coming-of-Age ritual are rituals of passage similar in purpose to the Confirmation ritual in the Catholic Christian tradition (Lovat, 2002, p.56). Consequently these types or elements would then become the map or guide by which students could compare any number of religions.

The “Typological approach” was based on the understanding that the contemporary world challenges people to increasingly confront others from diverse religious and cultural contexts (Ryan, 1997, p.105). This was especially pertinent in Australia given its demographics or multi-cultural makeup. Consequently the study of religion was deemed to have a social significance. Moore and Habel held the view that students would undoubtedly benefit from learning the types of component phenomena associated with religions generally (Buchanan, 2005, p.32; Malone, 1996, pp.54-55). Eight “types” or components shared by religious traditions that students could use as a framework for studying religion were identified by the Typological approach.

These components were as follows: beliefs, sacred texts, stories, ethics, ritual, symbols, social structure and experience (Habel and Moore, 1982, p.71). The Typological approach utilizes a technique that begins with components of the home tradition and emphasises the importance of a careful translation of these components to other religions (QBSSSS, 2001, p.11). For example, a focus on the belief component of religion might emphasise in Catholicism the Nicene Creed while in Islam it might highlight the seven cardinal beliefs of that religion (Crotty, Crotty, Habel, Moore & O'Donoghue, 1989; Lovat, 1993). Furthermore, the juxtaposing of component parts of different religions, such as two creeds or belief systems, allowed for a more effective comparison of them by students. The Typological approach was identified by the Queensland Studies Authority as a valid methodology for teaching *Study of Religion* alongside sociological, feminist, historical and phenomenological approaches (QBSSSS, 2001, pp.10-12).

It is important to acknowledge, however, that while Typological and Phenomenological methodologies are presented separately within the *Study of Religion* Syllabus, the former has its origins within the latter as stated earlier (Engebretson, 2002, p.10; Lovat, 2002, p.52; Ryan, 1997, p.105). Also, some secondary school textbooks for teaching *Study of Religion* have clearly adopted the Typological approach. An example of this is the text, "Finding a Way" (Crotty, Crotty, Habel, Moore & O'Donoghue, 1989). Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this text has been and continues to be widely used and consulted by *Study of Religion* students in Queensland schools.

#### 1.4 Phenomenology and Study of Religion

During the 1970s and 1980s, state governments in Australia began to introduce state-accredited courses in religion in schools. These courses relied heavily upon the Phenomenological approach and the Typological approach and later gained popularity as a teaching methodology in *Study of Religion* in Queensland Schools (QBSSSS, 1995). This may have been because Phenomenology and Typology offered effective pedagogical frameworks for teachers to utilise when challenging students to compare religions (Ryan, 1997, p.105).

Consequently, teachers found the seven dimensional framework of Smart and the eight-tiered typology of Moore and Habel effective pedagogical tools for teaching students about a variety of world religions. According to the QBSSSS (2001, p.11) Smart's approach to *Study of Religion* emphasised impartial observation and analysis without the influence of a person's particular belief system. In other words the practice of *epoche* or the suspension of judgement was facilitated by using this methodology in secondary schools and was particularly attractive in a multi-cultural society such as Australia (Husserl, 1983). This was because one was challenged to avoid passing value judgements regarding particular religious beliefs and values that have often found strong endorsement within a particular ethnic group. For example, historically and culturally, Judaism has been strongly linked to the Jewish community while Islam has been strongly linked to the Arabic community. It is interesting to note that particular people who were on the Syllabus Committee and who facilitated the introduction and development of a *Study of Religion* Syllabus in Australia had studied with Smart and were influenced by his thinking (Lovat, 2002).

Smart's particular interpretation of phenomenological methodologies for teaching religion suggests seven dimensions in order to describe certain formal characteristics of all major religions. These seven dimensions are the ritual, experiential, mythological (stories), doctrinal (beliefs), ethical, social and material dimensions (Lovat, 1993, p.7; Ryan & Goldberg, 2001, p.8; Smart, 1968). This interpretation of phenomenology and its

application by Smart to the teaching of religion has constituted what now will be referred to as Smart's approach to teaching religion. In Britain further refinements to the use of phenomenological methodologies in secondary education, post the *Birmingham Agreed Syllabus*, led to the seven dimensional framework developed by Smart (1968) being strongly endorsed by the British education system (Buchanan, 2005; Swann, 1985). Furthermore, material was later added to supplement this model late in the 1970s. This framework was deemed to be an effective pedagogical tool for teaching religion in British secondary schools and came to prominence in Australia during the early to mid 1980s.

An official British enquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups in 1985, "Education for all: Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups", or as it was more popularly referred to, "The Swann Report", gave unqualified endorsement to Smart's interpretation of phenomenological methodology and its application to religious education in British Public Schools (Swann, 1985). This was consistent with the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus, published in Britain in 1975, which stated that religious studies must be impartial between the religions and the secular ideologies that are the context of religion (Buchanan, 2005, p.30; Lovat, 2001). Due to such widespread support for this methodology, it was adopted as the preferred methodology for teaching religion in secondary schools in Britain. This was because it could accommodate religious difference without discrimination and was deemed particularly pertinent in Britain due to its multicultural mix.

The Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, due in part to the Australian teachers who were influenced by Smart and Australia's multicultural mix, similarly endorsed the dimensions approach in Australia (Ryan, 1997). In 1982 the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) trialed a matriculation course in *Study of Religion*. It was officially approved as a Board subject in 1989 and a revised curriculum was published in 1995 (Ryan, 1997, p.107). This curriculum largely employed Smart's dimensional approach to teaching religion (*Study of Religion Syllabus*, 1995). Students were enabled to study a variety of religious views existing in their own local communities as well as "develop an appreciation of the beliefs, attitudes and values of others" (Ryan, 1997, p.107).

In 1991 the development of a discrete HSC subject in New South Wales, the *Studies of Religion Syllabus*, and in Victoria, *Religion and Society* (1994a) and *Texts and Traditions* (1994b), further attested to support for Smart's dimensions approach (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, pp.147, 150, 153; NSW Board of Studies, 1991; Victorian Board of Studies, 1994, 1994a). This support was evident in an emphasis upon phenomenological methodologies



within the various syllabi. By 1992 *Study of Religion* was offered in most Australian states as an elective matriculation course (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, p.147).

This section has provided an historical context to phenomenological methodologies as a tool for teaching religion in senior secondary schools. The next section will elaborate on this and explain how phenomenological methodologies have been adopted and adapted for the Australian context.

### 1.5 Phenomenological Methodologies in the Australian Context

Phenomenological methodology, as applied to religious education and *Study of Religion* in the Australian context, has viewed religion as a social and cultural phenomenon. Consequently, religion has been offered as an area of academic inquiry in secondary schools because it is an essential component of the world (Engebretson, Fleming, Rymarz, 2002). Australia, like Britain, is a multicultural society, home to an array of religious groups. Due to this social and cultural reality it has been deemed important that schools prepare students for this context, as it is an essential component of the social world that are entering into as young adults. Consequently, teaching *Study of Religion* to students, which models for them a process that acknowledges religious differences between religious groups without encouraging discrimination is an important value to preserve.

Barnes (2001) postulates that phenomenology when applied to *Study of Religion* goes further than simply acknowledging religious difference. Barnes (2001, p.572) argues that phenomenology helps to reconcile differences by attempting to theologically reconcile the “great religions”. Phenomenology achieves this by describing each religion as manifestations of the same essential spirit or *wesen*, though the outward characteristics of doctrine, ritual and ethics particular to various religions may differ. Essentially, this type of approach could be deemed a cultural lens’ view of religion whereby images of the divine are understood to be the result of perceiving the same ultimate reality through various cultural lenses that are varying versions of belief in the same monolithic divine entity (Barnes, 2001; Hick, 1989, p.369). Hebblethwaite (1997, pp.138, 146) supports this notion when stating that various religion’s experience the same transcendent, ultimate reality “albeit under different guises” due to historical and cultural context.

McTernan (2002) elaborates on this notion and explains that images of ultimate reality are constructed within the boundaries of historicism established by culture and experience and that as a consequence there is no fixed foundational or normative location from which to develop truth claims about God (cf. Hartshorne, 2001; Whitehead, 1978). However,

McTernan (2002) rejects a cultural lens view of religious plurality and proposes a radically different approach. McTernan's approach signals a departure from classicism and modernism, which presupposes a monolithic view of ultimate reality to post-modernism and its postulation of a Multilithic view of ultimate reality.

#### *1.5.1 A Multilithic View of Ultimate Reality*

It can be argued that the Multilithic approach espoused by McTernan (2002) has emerged out of a changed social and thought world whereby diversity has been acknowledged but without the compulsion to explain such diversity away with a universalising theory. This has been to some extent the practice of modernism, however (Boucher, 2000; Jones, 2003). Furthermore, it can be argued that approaches based on phenomenology, as applied to *Study of Religion*, have often been employed to explain diversity away by identifying a universal essence or *wesen* common to all religion types. The post-enlightenment preoccupation with reason as the instrument for arriving at scientific certainty when confronted with a diversity of responses to the human question of origins, for example, has shown itself to be wanting in answers (Hall, 2003, p.3). Reason itself is now seen as a particular historical form, as parochial in its own way as the ancient explanations of the universe in terms of gods and demi-gods (Jones, 2003). However, phenomenological methods have not always registered this shift in thinking and have had a propensity to endorse a modernist discourse of reason rather than critically evaluate such a discourse.

Phenomenological methodologies due to their origin within modernism have arguably been struggling to assist students to make meaning in a post-modern context. They may no longer be as effective as a pedagogical tool for *Study of Religion* as they were in the past. Anecdotal evidence suggests that particular school interpretations of the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001) do not always reflect the changed thought world and social world of post-modernism. This is evident in the types of methodology that some secondary schools in Queensland have employed in teaching *Study of Religion* (Green College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.14). It is important to note, however, that by advocating a shift to methodologies that better reflect post-modern shifts in thinking is not tantamount to saying that post-modern methodologies are superior to modern methodologies. Rather, by advocating a change in methodology is simply to acknowledge that the construction of meaning is now occurring within a different social and cultural context and that other methodological frameworks for meaning-making may be more effective.

Therefore, a suggested change in methodology should not be confused with making a value judgement about the relative worth of methodologies, especially those having their provenance within a modern context. The site that was chosen for data collection strongly endorses phenomenological methodologies as its central pedagogical tool. This is evident from an analysis of the College's *Study of Religion* Work Program.

### 1.6 Context of the Study

In order to ensure the confidentiality of the College wherein the research for this project was completed, it was given the pseudonym "Greene College" and is referred to as such throughout this study. Greene College is a Catholic secondary co-educational college established and operated by the Catholic Education Centre in Brisbane under the authority of the Archbishop of Brisbane. Situated in suburban Brisbane, Greene College was established in order to provide students in the local area access to a Catholic secondary education. The administration team consisted of a Principal, Deputy Principal, an Assistant to the Principal (Religious Education) and an Assistant to the Principal (Administration). There were thirty fulltime teachers on staff and of those thirty teachers, sixteen of them were Academic Coordinators and five were Pastoral Coordinators. A full-time Counsellor and a Campus Minister were employed to support the Pastoral Coordinators in their respective roles.

Greene College had a student enrolment of six hundred and twenty one at the time that this research was completed. These students were largely situated within the middle to lower socio-economic grouping. The researcher is employed at this College and teaches *Study of Religion* to Year 11 and 12, *English* to Year 11 and *Religious Education* and *Social Science* to Year 9. Greene College offers to students in Year 11 and 12 the opportunity to enrol in *Study of Religion*. This is an approved Queensland Studies Authority subject (Formerly Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies) offered to students in Year 11 and 12 (QBSSSS, 2001).

### 1.7 The Research Problem

Phenomenological methodologies are largely employed to deliver subject matter to students in Year 11 and Year 12 *Study of Religion* at Greene College (Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.13). Anecdotal evidence and student survey data collected at Greene College has suggested that *Study of Religion* students do have difficulty in meaning-making (Muller, 1999). Consequently, the presence of the two variables in *Study of Religion* at Greene College, phenomenological methodologies and student difficulty in meaning-making, invites further research.

### 1.8 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion* at Greene College. It was anticipated that this study would illuminate the nature of the relationship between these two variables and provide a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in *Study of Religion* at this site. In order to do this an examination of current paradigm shifts in education, religious studies and philosophy was undertaken so as to provide a context for the present study within current literature.

This study investigated the implications of these paradigmatic shifts for *Study of Religion* and for methodologies being employed at Greene College to teach *Study of Religion*. Consequently, the connection between these paradigm shifts and student potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion* was explored. This study also examined alternative methodologies, as has been adopted by the *English Senior Syllabus* (QBSSSS, 2001), and explored the potential of these methodologies to enhance student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* (QBSSSS, 2001). Consequently, a key focus of this research has been to explore the effectiveness and validity of current assumptions about education, religion and philosophy, which underpin some of the current methodologies being employed to teach *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

### 1.9 Significance of the Study

Anecdotal evidence obtained by the researcher as a result of seven years of teaching post compulsory religious education and *Study of Religion* in Queensland and recent studies confirmed the following: that a link may exist between difficulty in student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies when employed to teach *Study of Religion* (Flood, 1999; Hobson & Edwards, 1999; Lovat, 2001). The strongest tradition of this research has involved investigation of associations between phenomenological methodologies and student potential for meaning-making (Barnes, 2001; Flood, 1999; Kay, 1997). Consequently, it was defensible that there may have been a relationship between phenomenological methodologies and student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. The question that this conclusion prompted was: what was the exact nature of this relationship? The absence of empirical research data with regard to testing the relationship between these two variables was noted. Consequently, research attention being paid to this issue in this study was justifiable

### 1.10 Limitations of the Research

While there were arguably a number of variables, besides the two identified within this study, that impact upon student potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion* not all could be adequately addressed given the scope of the present research. Furthermore, the data collected was from one single Year 12 *Study of Religion* cohort. If more time had been available to the researcher, the research completed at Greene College could have been replicated at other sites. This would have afforded more comprehensive triangulation techniques. It was recognised that a range of techniques could have been used to maximize validity and reliability of results. However, due to the nature of the site and the participants it was judged that the following techniques - a survey questionnaire and focus group would best be suited to the data gathering process. This was because a Case-study approach was adopted by the researcher. Furthermore, these techniques allowed the researcher to gather rich data within normal College hours of operation, being an employee on site.

### 1.11 Research Questions

The primary research question that directed this study was: Do the educational, religious and philosophical assumptions that underpin some methodologies being employed to teach *Study of Religion*, assist students to make-meaning effectively in a post-modern context? This central question was then broken into three key sub-questions. These three sub-questions assisted the researcher to explore the connection between the two key variables under investigation: Phenomenological methodologies and student potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. These three questions were as follows:

- a) Are current approaches to teaching *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological approaches effective in engaging student potential for meaning-making?
- b) To what extent does post-modern thinking challenge the potential for student meaning-making when phenomenological methodologies and particular strands of educational theory and practice are used within *Study of Religion*?
- c) What alternate educational methodologies could better engage student potential for meaning making in *Study of Religion*?

The first and second question illustrated to some extent both variables under investigation (phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making) while the third question primarily illustrated the second variable under investigation (student meaning-making).

## 1.12 Clarifications and Working Definitions

### 1.12.1 Clarifications and Working Definitions

The following section presents clarifications<sup>1</sup> and a list of key terms with definitions that appear throughout this study:

**Modernism** is defined as an intellectual paradigm shift in which elements of the pre-modern worldview are replaced with an ultimate confidence in reason, an understanding of the objective nature of reality and the belief in empirical certainty (Siejk, 1999, pp.155-156). Intellectuals of this epoch (late 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) generally argue from a universal discourse of reason.

**Post-modernism** denotes the intellectual shift from a universal discourse of reason and of empirical certainty to diversity. According to Whelan (1999) reality is not objective but multifaceted and no single discourse or view of reality is pre-eminent over others. Consequently, methodologies that reflect the insights of Discourse analysis and of language deconstruction typify this period, which extends from the 1960s to the present (Blake & Hamilton, 1995; Croft & Cross, 1997).

**Study of Religion** refers to the Queensland Studies Authority Syllabus for the subject *Study of Religion*, formerly the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies, and its translation into work programs in the secondary school system (QBSSSS, 2001).

**Roman Catholic Secondary School** pertains to Catholic Schools within the Archdiocese of Brisbane that are systemic. That is, Catholic Schools, which are administered by the Catholic Education Centre and overseen by the Archbishop of Brisbane as opposed to non-systemic schools, which are administered by religious orders.

**Ultimate Reality** is an umbrella term that refers to the particular language that is used by believers/insiders of a discrete religion in order to designate the source of all being. Semitic religions will tend to use the word God, G-d or Allah. Ultimate reality in this tradition is represented as a “divine thou” evoking worship (Hebblethwaite, 1997, p.141). However, Asian religions will employ terms such as Buddha, Bodhisattva and Nirvana in

---

<sup>1</sup> References made in this study to the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (QBSSSS) when referring to the syllabi for *English* and *Study of Religion* are references to the Queensland Studies Authority Syllabi (QSA) for *English* and *Study of Religion*. This is because the title QBSSSS appears on the current Syllabi for *English* and the *Study of Religion*. The statutory authority was previously named the Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. However, since 2002 it has been titled the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA).

order to designate ultimate reality (Ryan & Goldberg, 2001, pp 38, 49, 58-59, 64). This is because ultimate reality in the eastern traditions of religion is represented as a “non-personal absolute” that “yields peace, bliss and unlimited compassion” (Hebblethwaite, 1997, p.141).

**Phenomenology** refers to a “modern” philosophical discourse and its application to religious education curriculum whereby religion is presented as a social and cultural phenomenon that is present throughout the world. This is particularly evident when examining world religions and the myriad of socio-cultural contexts, which religion emerges out of (Barnes, 2001; Hebblewaite, 1997).

**Discourse** is defined as the particular perspective one may take to view reality because of a particular socio-historical and cultural context. Consequently attitudes, beliefs and values are shaped by this context and this is evident in how individuals and groups use language to understand and act in the world (Miller & Colwill, 2003, p.18).

**Religious pluralism** refers to the belief that all religions are in some sense potentially and equally valid unless proven otherwise. No single religious tradition should be deemed as superior to another regarding their particular understanding of religious truth (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, pp. 51-52). Therefore, the definition of religious pluralism used in this study is to be distinguished from the sociological definition of the same term - that many societies throughout the world have a wide range of practicing religious groups (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, p.51). The latter definition is presumed as a given within the context of this study.

**Study of Religion Programs** indicate the specific teaching units designed by individual schools for student learning. These teaching units are based upon the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (QBSSSS, 2001).

**Pedagogy** denotes a teaching and learning relationship that creates the potential for building learning conditions that lead to full and equitable participation by students (The New London Group, 2000, p.9).

**Multiliteracy** extends the meaning of literacy beyond learning to read and write in official standard forms of the national language. Multiliteracy includes the context of learning (cultural and linguistic diversity, globalisation) and the multiplicity of text forms associated with information and multi-media technologies (The New London Group, 2000, pp.9-10).

### 1.13 Thesis Outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. This first chapter presents the research topic and provides an overview of the rationale for the study. Chapter two contains a review of the literature pertinent to the research topic and specifically identifies paradigmatic shifts in education, religious studies and philosophy that provide a context for the present study. Chapter three describes the design of the research project and validates the data collecting methods used in this study. The findings of the research are presented and analysed in Chapter four. Chapter five presents a discussion of this analysis and compares results from the present study with those reported in the literature review. Chapter six presents a synthesis of data collected by identifying key issues surfaced as a result of this study. Concrete strategies are then recommended to address these key issues.



## **CHAPTER 2**

This Chapter consists of a review of the literature relating to the issues identified in Chapter one. In particular the literature relating to key paradigmatic shifts in intellectual thought in Education, Religious Studies and Philosophical Linguistics are explored. These paradigmatic shifts provide a socio-cultural and historical context for this study and support the contention that student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* could be linked to a much larger context – a shift from a modern world-view to a post-modern world-view.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

*What we must get away from is the idea, which in some form or other is very commonly held, often unconsciously, that words have an essential real, meaning if only we can discover what it is (Emmet, 1986, p.24).*

### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in a post-modern context and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. These two variables were explored in the following literature review. It was anticipated that a review of relevant literature would help to illuminate the nature of the connection between these two variables. Also, it was hoped that the literature review would provide a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in *Study of Religion* classrooms.

There are three sections in the literature review. Each section seeks to demonstrate the following respectively: that the religious, philosophical and educational assumptions that underpin some methodologies being employed to teach *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological methodologies, may be thwarting effective student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. This could be due to paradigm shifts in thinking that may have rendered these assumptions obsolete in a post-modern context. However, in order to appreciate the relevance of Greene College as a site for completing the present study it was important to first establish that phenomenological methodologies have strongly influenced the way in which *Study of Religion* is taught there.

### 2.2 Phenomenological Methodologies and the Local Context:

#### Greene College Study of Religion Work Program

In order to establish that phenomenological methodologies have strongly influenced the way in which *Study of Religion* is taught at Greene College a description of the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001) has been provided. This description has then been compared to the structure of Greene College's *Study of Religion* Work Program and demonstrates the following: that recommendations in the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001), especially in regard to utilising phenomenological frameworks for analysing religion, are mirrored to a large extent in Greene College's *Study of Religion* Work Program (2002).

#### 2.2.1 The Queensland Study of Religion Syllabus

The Queensland *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001) presents a course organisation model that clearly reflects the influence of phenomenology. The three core components of the

course correspond to the two essential elements that comprise phenomenology – the *wesen* or essence of religion, and religion as a socio-cultural and historical phenomenon. The *Study of Religion* unit, “The nature and significance of religion”, challenged students to explore that which is the very essence or *wesen* of religion. Students were challenged “to recognise the role of religion in the quest for meaning and purpose in the lives of individuals and communities” irrespective of socio-cultural and historical context (QBSSSS, 2001, p.14). The remaining two core units reflected the second key element of phenomenology: that religion is an historical and cultural phenomenon in the world. This was to be achieved through a study of world religions and the role religion plays in Australia (QBSSSS, 2001, pp.9, 16).

### 2.2.2 *Study of Religion* Work Program – Greene College

The *Study of Religion* Work Program for Greene College closely mirrored the Syllabus suggestions presented above

.

The core components, which are compulsory in the Syllabus, of the *Study of Religion* curriculum at Greene College were listed as follows:

- The nature and significance of religion.
- Religions of the world.
- Religion in Australia and the local community.

(Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.13)

Educational approaches to *Study of Religion* at Green College suggested the following: That in “the study of world religions, the phenomenological approach [should be] used within a comparative analytical structure” (Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.14). Secondly, while methodologies other than phenomenology were suggested for particular elective units offered at Greene College (Feminist, Historical and Sociological), it was arguable that these units already mirrored to some extent the seven dimensional framework of Smart. For example, the three elective units, Sacred Texts, Values and Ethics and Ultimate Questions offered at Greene College corresponded to the Mythological, Ethical and Experiential dimensions of Smart respectively (Lovat, 1993).

Finally, in elective units offered at Green College a typological approach to teaching religion, which is an offshoot of phenomenology, was sometimes adopted. For example in the elective unit, Values and Ethics, offered at Greene College students were challenged to “recognise and define different religious and ethical [types or] frameworks” and “decide on the relative worth of alternative [ethical types] theories” by active analysis and

comparison of them (Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.30). Therefore, it was justifiable to postulate that phenomenological methodologies have played a significant role in the shaping of the present *Study of Religion* curriculum at Greene College. Secondly, it was also feasible to postulate that the delivery of this curriculum to students was arguably influenced to some extent by phenomenological methodologies through the types of learning experiences suggested and also anecdotal evidence (Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002, p.30, 34-35).

From this document analysis it is evident that one of the two variables under investigation in this study, phenomenological methodologies, has arguably influenced the shaping and delivery of subject matter to students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. Consequently, the following section of this study has investigated this variable further and explored the degree to which phenomenological methodologies are effective in teaching *Study of Religion*. It has attempted to address in detail the first research sub-question: are current approaches to teaching *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological approaches, effective in engaging student potential for meaning-making? It has done this by reflecting on whether current approaches to teaching *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological approaches, are effective for engaging student potential for meaning-making in a post-modern context.

### 2.3 Paradigm Shift One: Post-modern Religious Studies

School interpretations of the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001) reflected in particular *Study of Religion* work programs could be said to reflect a cultural lens view of ultimate reality (McTernan, 2002). In other words, various religions can be understood to be diverse socio-cultural expressions of the same divine essence or *wesen* that permeates them all. Consequently, religious differences can be explained to students of *Study of Religion* as due largely to diverse social and cultural contexts in which religion is situated. The understanding that each major world religion is deemed to be an expression of the same immutable ultimate reality underpins this view of religious plurality. This corresponds to the Husserlian notion of *wesen* or essence, which when applied to religion identifies as present within all religions the same essence regardless of socio-cultural and historical context.

This understanding of religious diversity displays a rooted-ness in modernity rather than post-modernity. This “modern” understanding of religious pluralism does not always reflect current thinking in religious studies. This is because the intellectual ground that once supported phenomenological methodologies has shifted. This shift in religious thinking has been from modernism’s monolithic model of ultimate reality-world relationship to post-

modernism's Multilithic model of ultimate reality-world relationship (Hartshorne, 2001; McTernan, 2002). This shift has significant implications for *Study of Religion*. The Queensland Studies Authority subject, *Study of Religion*, as it is currently taught in some systemic Catholic Colleges, does not always reflect these post-modern intellectual shifts in religious thinking. It could be argued that current religious thinking does not consistently support the use of phenomenological methodologies evident within particular *Study of Religion* programs. Therefore, a context to this shift has been given by redefining the term "theological" so that it is consonant with a post-modern understanding of that term.

### *2.3.1 Theology: Reinventing the Term*

Flood (1999) identifies a change in how 'theology' is understood within institutions of higher education today. This has consequences for how "theology" is understood in a secondary school context. Theology no longer strictly refers to an "insider" discourse that reflects a largely confessional understanding of a particular religion's doctrinal, ethical and ritual position regarding religious truth. Rather, it refers to "theological universalism" or that post-modern propensity to understand religious plurality without giving pre-eminence to a particular group(s) articulation of religious truth (Flood, 1999; Hick, 1989). As a result, the term 'religious studies' is arguably a more appropriate term to use than theology.

### *2.3.2 Theological Universalism and Religious Studies*

The term 'religious studies' avoids confusion over the current meaning of that term (theological universalism) with previous meanings of that term (insider discourse). Hick (1989, pp.252-253) defines theological universalism as follows: religions are different ways of responding to ultimate reality or "the Real". Therefore, the Moslem "Allah", the Christian "God", the Taoist "Tao" and the Hindu "Brahmin" are all terms for the same ultimate reality towards which various world religions believe they are moving, whether theistic or non-theistic. Flood (1999, p.55) elaborates on this notion by describing ultimate reality or the "Real" as that which appears within "...the various forms of human interpretative and linguistic systems and [that] it is only possible to respond to the Real within the different cultural ways of being human". It is in this sense that theology is to be understood in the post-modern context. As a result, it is important to understand that a key theological shift has occurred. This shift is from modernism's monolithic view or model of ultimate reality to post-modernism's Multilithic view or model of ultimate reality.

### *2.3.3 A Post-modern Model for Understanding the Religious Concept of Ultimate Reality*

The paradigm shift from a monolithic view or model of ultimate reality to post-modernism's Multilithic view or model of ultimate reality reflects a historical shift from the dominant metaphor of the eighteenth century to a more contemporary metaphor of the twentieth or

twenty first century. This shift has been from the metaphor of the machine to the organic model inherent with post-modernism (Hartwell, 1996). The former identified the universe and all within it as a closed system that followed a clear set of rules and ultimately was predictable. Hence, ultimate reality or God was understood to be a closed system, immutable and unchanging (monolithic model). However, the latter identifies ultimate reality as an open system that changes, adapts and even evolves according to varying socio-cultural and historical contexts (multilithic model). Ultimate reality like any living entity then is mutable.

According to Towne (2001), the post-modern religious term, Multilithic falls between the idea of the existence of multiple gods (polytheism) and a cultural lens view of plural gods as variations of one God (monotheism). This view does not propose multiple divine entities but rather emphasises and radicalises the incommensurability of different socio-cultural and historical constructions of ultimate reality in order to retain their distinctiveness. It needs to be noted, however, that Towne's explanation of the term Multilithic reflects a privileging of Semitic religious traditions over Mystical religious traditions thereby silencing polytheistic and non-theistic notions of ultimate reality.

This is evident in the lack of references to polytheism/non-theism and the emphasis upon monotheism in examples given (Towne, 2001). Bearing this in mind, Towne (2001) is suggesting that individuals and communities in different cultural settings and historical locations can be understood as living in intimate relationships with ultimate reality that are unique and qualitatively different. The most important word in this explanation is "qualitative", which denotes a significant shift in religious understanding in comparison to more traditional understandings of ultimate reality.

#### *2.3.4 Qualitative Difference within Religion*

Drawing upon the insights of McTernan (2002) and Towne (2001) in analysing several of the mainline world religions, it could be argued that each discrete religion is simply a concrete manifestation of a unique relationship with ultimate reality. It is a relationship whereby the ontological character, the "quality" or essence of this reality, is understood to be mutable. In other words not only do the socio-cultural expressions of ultimate reality reflected in the institutional elements of religion change but the very nature of ultimate reality, believed to be at the heart of these socio-cultural expressions, also changes.

That is "God's intimacy with [all] humanity changes God" and not only the human community (McTernan, 2002, p.2). This view postulates that ultimate reality possesses ontology (*wesen*) that is shaped and changed while in relationship with a particular

religious community and culture at a particular time. In other words, the way in which one religious community experiences ultimate reality is unique not only because of socio-cultural and historical differences (cultural lens/monolithic view) but because of differences in the very nature of encounter with ultimate reality (multilithic view).

Consequently, because religion often reflects the dominant culture in which it is rooted, this God who is changed and changes those with whom s/he is in relationship makes God radically transgressive of dominant culture (McTernan, 2002, p.2). As a result, dominant culture often resists those within it who reflect this transgressive God. Hence, mainstream religion can tend to privilege particular elements that appear immutable, such as male priesthood in the Roman Catholic Christian tradition and silence those groups who reflect this transgressive God – the feminist movement in the Roman Catholic tradition. This thinking has serious implications for *Study of Religion*. It signals a departure from phenomenological methodologies and the fundamental understanding of essence (*wesen*) that is purportedly inherent within them and that gives them cohesion.

#### *2.3.5 The Multilithic Model of Ultimate Reality and Study of Religion*

The shift in religious thinking from modernism's monolithic view of ultimate reality to post-modernism's Multilithic view of ultimate reality has serious implications for *Study of Religion* and how it is taught. Utilising the Multilithic model of ultimate reality in *Study of Religion* could potentially assist students to better understand the nature of religious plurality in a post-modern context (QBSSSS, 2001, p.2). It must be kept in mind, however, that terms such as monolithic and Multilithic always function as a model or extended metaphor for the God/Ultimate reality-World relationship. These models *per se* are limited and inadequate ways for imagining what is not observable empirically. They sit somewhere between literal pictures and useful fictions of the thing they are imagining. Consequently, the term Multilithic makes a tentative ontological claim regarding the God/Ultimate reality-world relationship that there is a reality something like that postulated in the model (Bracken, 2002). What it does not intend to say is that the model is tantamount to ultimate reality.

If *Study of Religion* programs employed the Multilithic model as an assumption underpinning an analysis of religion it could then present world religions as doctrinal articulations of a group or community's unique relationship with ultimate reality. Differences in doctrine and ritual would be understood to reflect not only socio-cultural differences (monolithic view) but also actual differences in the essence of the divine/human encounter (multilithic view). Ultimate reality would be understood to be encountered variously and not only as a result of differences in time, place and culture.

This is because ultimate reality is comprehended to be not only quantitatively different (socio-cultural difference) in each encounter but also qualitatively different (different in essence) in each encounter. This is essentially what the term Multilithic refers to and a model of teaching religion based on a Multilithic understanding of ultimate reality could feasibly be developed for senior secondary school students.

#### *2.3.6 Critiquing the Multilithic Model*

A criticism that could be levelled at a Multilithic view of ultimate reality is that this view risks being inclusivist and so simply another permutation of a universalising theory for explaining away diversity (Boucher, 2000; Flood, 1999; Hobson & Edwards, 1999). Such universalising theories are typical of modernism and may signal an intellectual regression. Religious difference in the inclusivist model of teaching religion is accounted for by claiming that various religions, such as Islam and Buddhism, are simply partial versions of a particular religion that is deemed to be most correct in terms of religious truth, such as Christianity. In response to such a criticism the following could be argued: a Multilithic approach to teaching *Study of Religion* is pluralist more than it is inclusivist.

A Multilithic approach accommodates difference without attempting to explain it away, which is the tendency of phenomenological methods. Secondly, a Multilithic approach does not privilege one cultural context over another but views each context as unique and distinct but equal in value. This is contrary to phenomenological methodologies, which tacitly account for religious difference by stating that while doctrines and rituals may differ across religions, the essence (*wesen*) of what is being experienced within each religion is the same (Smart, 1968). Therefore, it appeals to universalism by stating that all religions regardless of socio-cultural and historical context possess at their core the same essential substance that makes them 'religion'. This thinking is arguably a product of a modernist world-view as it reflects a monolithic view of ultimate reality – that religions regardless of socio-cultural and historical context have at their core the same divine *wesen*.

By employing Smart's phenomenological approach, the essence of religion is universalised and does not allow for a multiplicity of different *wesen* co-existing. Nevertheless, phenomenology as a tool for teaching religion has been effective in that it attempts to suspend the need for value judgements hence avoiding or at least delaying such judgements (Barnes, 2001; Lovat, 2001). This characteristic has been most helpful in teaching religion to secondary school students in a multi-cultural society like Australia. It has assisted schools to provide a rationale for religious tolerance and to break down barriers of religious exclusivism. However, by relocating the question of religious plurality within the post-modern religious framework of Whitehead (1978), Hartshorne (2001),



Towne (2001) and McTernan (2002) and away from the phenomenological approach of Smart (typical of modernity) the suspension of value judgements is not necessarily compromised. This is because each socio-cultural and historical manifestation of religion is deemed to be of equal value and significance regardless of differences.

### 2.3.7 Advantages of the Multilithic Model

Each socio-cultural and historical manifestation of religion is understood to be equally entitled to lay claim to particular religious truths when a Multilithic model is employed for understanding religious plurality. This view better promotes religious tolerance than phenomenological methodologies as it maintains that “other” religious beliefs that conflict with those that are dominant within a particular cultural context are not simply variations on the traditional view of ultimate reality within that context. Rather, ultimate reality is real in particular and individualised ways that reject “sameness”. Consequently, the “otherness” of doctrines associated with a particular religious group that may lie outside of dominant culture are deemed to be no less true or meaningful than those within the dominant culture when a Multilithic view is employed (McTernan, 2002, p.3).

Hick (1992) and McTernan (2002) are particularly helpful in providing a context for the development of alternative methodologies to that of Smart (1968). These alternative methodologies would encapsulate the central insight of multiple divine essences (multilithic) for analysing world religions in *Study of Religion*. *Study of Religion* programs could use the core units in Year 11 and 12, which focus on world religions, as an opportunity to view discrete major religions as a concrete manifestation of a unique relationship with ultimate reality in line with the Multilithic model (QBSSSS, 2001). Such a view of religious plurality if taught in secondary schools has the potential to build bridges of understanding between students of different religious backgrounds, whereby religious difference is simply accepted rather than tacitly rationalised.

The tendency to rationalise religious difference rather than accept it is arguably supported by phenomenological methodologies and could be linked to the struggle of some students to make meaning in *Study of Religion*. Therefore, one could argue that the potential for student meaning-making could be enhanced if a shift in religious thinking from a monolithic view of ultimate reality to a Multilithic view of ultimate reality was reflected in the *Study of Religion* Syllabus. The second core unit, “Religions of the world”, would provide a good opportunity to do this (QBSSSS, 2001, p. 9). This section has explored the religious assumption that underpins some methodologies being employed to teach *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological methodologies – that a universal essence (*wesen*) exists within religion regardless of socio-cultural and historical context. It has been

demonstrated that because of this assumption effective student meaning-making could be thwarted in *Study of Religion* due to socio-cultural and intellectual shifts that reflect trends often associated with post-modernism. The next section of this study has attempted to address the extent to which intellectual trends often associated with post-modernism challenge current educational theory and practice in *Study of Religion*. It challenges the assumption that objective truth is possible and postulates that meaning/truth is context bound. Consequently, the relationship between phenomenology, which assumes the possibility of objectivity, and the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* will be thrown into sharper focus.

## 2.4 Paradigm Shift Two: Linguistic Philosophy

Intellectual shifts in Linguistic Philosophy, similar to those in Religious Studies, support the notion that phenomenological methodologies may be struggling to engage the potential of students to make meaning in *Study of Religion* (Derrida, 1982; Habermas, 1985; Jones, 2003). This section explores the philosophical assumption that underpins some methodologies being employed to teach *Study of Religion*, particularly phenomenological methodologies. It demonstrates that because of this assumption effective student meaning-making could be thwarted in *Study of Religion* despite the best efforts of educationists to do otherwise. Therefore, it was deemed as necessary to examine a key paradigmatic shift in linguistic philosophy: a shift from the structuralism of Saussure to the post-structuralism of Derrida and Foucault and evaluate its impact upon *Study of Religion* regarding the potential for students to construct meaning.

### 2.4.1 Student Meaning-making and Discourse-based Methodologies

Saussure (1959) introduces the notion that language has meaning primarily due to its socio-cultural and historical context while Derrida (1982) builds upon this thinking in proposing a linguistic model of deconstruction in order to uncover new meanings within texts. The thinking of both Saussure and Derrida could be said to underpin the discourse-based methodologies that have shaped to a large extent the current *English* Syllabus (2001). The following discussion provides a springboard for suggested changes to the *Study of Religion* Syllabus similar to those that have occurred in the *English* Syllabus (2001) in Queensland. It is anticipated that such a change could enhance the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. To do so the second research sub-question has been addressed: To what extent does post-modern thinking challenge the potential for student meaning making when phenomenological methodologies and particular strands of educational theory and practice are used within *Study of Religion*?

Furthermore, by addressing the second research sub-question, a context for the third research sub-question regarding the introduction of alternate educational methodologies has been provided. It has been within the discipline of Linguistic Philosophy that some approaches to Discourse analysis, which are reflected in the *English Syllabus* (2001), have been conceived (Jones, 2003). Discourse analysis provides an effective analytical structure for deconstructing the language and meanings of texts and conversely for constructing meaning. This deconstruction presupposes an appreciation for language and how it is constructed and used to make meaning within particular socio-cultural and historical contexts.

#### 2.4.2 Language

Language is generally used to designate things that are observable. Phenomena such as a table, book or person are clearly observable within time and space and often at this level of observation there is agreement between various parties as to what something is in terms of its materiality. On the other hand, when language is used to designate something abstract or that has no clear concrete counterpart in the realm of time and space, such as the word “God”, then agreement between parties can become most difficult (Emmet, 1986). Therefore, to conceive linguistically of an entity like God or ultimate reality, which is not a concrete thing observable within the realms of space and time, unlike a book or table, is a self-contradictory notion. Hence, language is limited in its capacity to render the abstract meaningful due to the abstract having no clear empirical form that can be observed (Emmet, 1986, p.36).

Religious studies and philosophy have generally sought to couch in intelligible terms the nature of ultimate reality by focussing on discrete words and phrases within a language system rather than the structure of language itself (Rorty, 1995). This approach has assumed that the basic language structure is capable of expressing in intelligible terms the nature or objective meaning of reality. For example, philosophers and theologians have to some extent explored the meanings of words like “being” and “nothingness” assuming that these words correspond to some objective truth/reality.

However, these same philosophers and theologians have refrained from asking why words like “being” and “nothingness” have any meaning at all within human language. Instead the modern trend has been to focus on particular words within language structures and make them the focus of analysis rather than the language structure itself of which they are a part (*cf.* Macquarie, 1986, p.69). Consequently, it is language structures, which are the context of particular words that have become a focus for analysis in the post-modern context rather than the words themselves.

#### *2.4.3 Language Structures*

The focus on the structure of language is linked historically, to the paradigmatic intellectual shift from structuralism to post-structuralism. The former identified a causative foundation to reality upon which was built the superstructure of academic disciplines while the latter eschewed such a notion. For example, modern science was understood to be built upon the foundation that objective reality existed and that through reason one could truly come to know the essence or meaning of a thing. The centrality of reason and the belief that scientific method could bring coherence to the search for truth underscored structural analysis (Bloland, 2005, p.122). Consequently, this foundational belief about reality that truth was knowable through reason became the hard rock upon which great minds like Darwin, Marx and Freud later built the foundations and superstructure of their respective scientific, economic and psychological theories.

Darwin claimed that all complex forms of life were linked to the causative foundation of lower and simpler forms of life while Freud claimed that all conscious thought and behaviour was linked to the causative foundation of a deeper psychic reality – the unconscious. Post-structuralism or Post-modernism has sought to deconstruct these foundational categories and replace them with some new base (Grassie, 1997, pp.2-3). Therefore, in examining the work of Saussure regarding the structure of language and comparing it to the work of Derrida, one witnesses an example of this shift from structuralism to post-structuralism within the context of linguistics. The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) laid the foundation for structural linguistics. Consequently his contribution opened up discussion on the inherent limitations within language and symbol systems (semiotics) for expressing meaning.

#### *2.4.4 Saussure*

Saussure (1959), a structuralist, extended the boundaries of structuralist theory and in his analysis of the whole structure of language postulated that there was no necessary relationship between that which carries the meaning (the signifier, usually a word or symbol) and the actual meaning, which is carried (the signified). However, what makes the word meaningful is its location within the structure of a whole language system and within that structure, its contrast-effect with other words. For example, “red” means what it does only by contrast with “blue” and “green”. Consequently, without the presence of other colours like blue and green, the colour red is devoid of meaning. Therefore, Saussurian thinking supported the statement that words derive their meaning due to their relationship with other words within the broader structure of language itself. Consequently, these “Words achieve their denotative function only through connotative associations in established usage” (Grassie, 1997, p.4).

Whether one equated yellow with the sun and blue with the sea, one would ultimately only be using metaphoric associations to create meanings that are literally untrue. This insight challenged traditional structuralist thought. It achieved this by claiming that particular words within a language system did not necessarily correspond to some objective reality in the world. Saussure, in a sense, helped to bridge the gap between structuralist and post-structuralist thought by postulating that words have meaning not simply because they correspond to some objective reality but because within a particular socio-cultural and historical context through established usage they communicate intelligible meaning. As a result, the context of language as a human construction was drawn into sharper focus rather than the human construction of language itself.

Applying Saussure's thought to the Semitic concept of ultimate reality; one could say that there is no inherent relationship between the signifier, "God", and the actual meaning of the word "God" (the signified). The word "God" only has meaning due to connotative associations with the word "God" in established usage. These connotative associations are usually contingent upon socio-cultural and historical context. The corollary of this is that the word "God" only has meaning in contrast to other words such as humanity and mortality – the direct opposites to divinity and immortality. Consequent meanings associated with the word "God", therefore, are established by usage within a particular socio-cultural and historical context and are not literally or objectively true.

Rorty (1995, p.2) postulates that no word can acquire meaning in the way in which philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell have hoped it might – by being the unmediated non-linguistic expression of something in the world. Language itself is a symbol that represents reality; however, language is not tantamount to reality. Miedema (2000, pp.294-295) identifies with this in stating: "[That] humans are born into a culture, which means the world already has meaning [and that] cultural practices may be interpreted as culturally predefined meaning systems that enable coordinated activities". Hence there are no culturally neutral facts as knowledge is always embodied (Rorty, 1979).

#### *2.4.5 Derrida*

Derrida (1982), while describing language as a natural reflection of the world, argues thus; that while language structures may shape to some extent perceptions and understandings of the world and so to a degree determines meaning itself it is the individual person or "I" at the centre of meaning-making rather than the structure of language. By this Derrida was arguing: that that which is "present" within texts reflects a particular socio-cultural and historical reality. Furthermore the cultural assumptions, values, beliefs and attitudes

embedded within texts in turn reflect the main-stream ideologies held by persons located within a particular socio-cultural and historical reality. Derrida's thinking challenged the structuralist argument by emphasising "the indeterminacy of language [and] the primacy of discourse" or the way in which texts are constructed and reflect particular values, attitudes and beliefs within culture (Bloland, 1995, p.526).

Consequently Derrida reinforced the notion that language systems were rooted in socio-cultural and historical contexts that impacted upon meaning-making. However, Derrida took it a step further. Meaning-making not only varied due to a diversity of socio-cultural and historical contexts but could vary within a single context. Therefore, a shared language structure could hold the potential for a diverse range of meanings rather than a single set of meanings established through common usage (Bloland, 1995; Derrida, 1982; Grassie, 1997). Derrida (1982) explored this notion through the analytical tools of "privileging" (present-ing) and "silencing" (absent-ing).

#### *2.4.6 Presence*

Derrida challenged Saussure's argument that language and so intelligible communication relied upon the causative foundational structure of binary oppositions within language. Derrida achieved this by identifying that within binary oppositions, such as love and hate one term was always a presence of something (love) and that this presence of something highlighted what was absent (hate). Presence, according to Derrida was the precondition for language to exist. Derrida's underlying reasoning for this position went further than Saussure in arguing that meaning was conveyed not simply through contrast to other words established through common usage but through the relationship of words within a binary opposition.

Meaning was predicated upon a network of oppositions that not only distinguished them but also related them one to another (Rorty, 1979; Saussure, 1959). In other words, language structures did not originate meanings but rather all language structures had a centre – the thing, Derrida (1982) argued, that created the system in the first place. This centre or point of origin was presence and was usually identified as dominant or mainstream culture, which largely determined meaning within a particular human context. It was dominant culture associated with a particular human community in a particular place at a particular time that created language and through common usage over time endowed language with meaning. Another salient departure from the thinking of Saussure was in regard to the sets of oppositions that were said to govern language. Derrida (1982) went further than Saussure in arguing that linguistic meaning was conveyed not simply through juxtaposition of contrasting words within languages that had evolved over time.

For example, in applying Derrida's thinking to any binary pair or opposition such as good and evil, alive and dead or light and dark, while the contrast between the two words as opposites distinguishes them one from the other with the first term in each pair being positive in value and the second term being negative in value, they are also related to each other (Derrida, 1982; Miedma & Biesta, 2004). The relationship is that the first term is a presence of something or someone while the second term is always an absence of something or someone. For example, evil, death and dark are contingent upon goodness, life and light and can only be an absence due to the presence of the latter (Derrida, 1982; Rorty, 1995). Hence, presence cannot be present in itself but needs the help of what is not present, of what is absent in order to be so (Miedma & Biesta, 2004).

However, if this is the case what is absent cannot simply be made present. For example, if in modernist terms, 'science' is the absence of 'religion' then the latter cannot simply be made present. Rather, it can only be assumed that there is something else, which approximates to the signifier 'religion'. The best one can do is to be open to the incoming of this absence (religion) via the presence that is science (Miedma & Biesta, 2004). As a result, one could argue that fundamental to openness to the incoming occurring is the precondition of presence (science) without which openness to the incoming of absence (religion) would be impossible. Consequently, the traditional polarity between a binary opposition such as science and religion associated with the post-enlightenment emphasis on human reason and objective truth is dissolved as the presence of one (science) relies on the absence of the other (religion) to have meaning.

Such reasoning suggests that each term of a binary pair or opposition only has meaning in reference to the other with presence being foundational within the opposition. Science *is* what religion *is not*. If one examines other binary oppositions within other language systems associated with other academic disciplines one observes this same interplay between terms. For example, the binary opposition of masculine and feminine, which forms the structural foundation of Freudian psychology, posits the former as valued over the latter because the penis is defined as a presence in the male and an absence in the female (Rorty, 1995). However, maleness, which is determined by the presence of a penis, is only maleness because of femaleness, which is absence of a penis. Consequently, maleness while having meaning because it is the opposite of female, thus forming a binary opposition, is inseparable from the word female and has meaning only in relationship with it (Derrida, 1978; Rorty, 1995; Saussure, 1959).

Similarly, Western thought has a host of binary pairs that function as the structural foundation and centre of particular language systems – being/essence,

substance/accidents in Aristotelian philosophy and Thomistic theology and humanity/divinity or transcendent/immanent as used in Semitic Religion (Aquinas, Trans. 1947; Barnes, 1982; Splett, 1975). However, to apply Derrida's deconstruction to these binary pairs requires that they be understood as being in dialectical tension with each other. That while these word pairs are polar opposites to each other and because of that derive their meaning they are wholly inseparable from the other – indeed, making the possibility of one (for example, humanity) the impossibility of the other (divinity) (Miedma & Biesta, 2004). Albeit within these pairs presence has a level of pre-eminence over absence.

#### *2.4.7 Presence within Texts - Dominant Culture*

The corollary of Derrida's thinking regarding binary oppositions leads one to conclude the following: that at the centre of any language system, understood as a system of communication built upon a basic structure of binary oppositions, is a "presence" or an "I". This "I" is the origin of language and identifies being rather than nothingness as the pre-existing condition for the emergence of language (Derrida, 1982). Therefore, it is this presence at the centre of language, this "I", that constructs and deconstructs meaning. For example, in the authority subject, *English*, in senior school, when analysing a text, the pre-existing condition for the construction of this text with its particular meanings is dominant culture replete with particular values, attitudes and beliefs that are evident within the text itself. Texts present a view of reality refracted through the prism of socio-cultural and historical context and often reflect mainstream values, attitudes and beliefs associated with that context. Therefore, the "presence" or "I" at the centre of language manifested in texts generally is the dominant culture of a particular socio-cultural and historical context.

However, while Derrida acknowledged "presence" or "being" as the precondition for language to exist, presence/being *per se* is contingent upon the metaphysical notion of absence/nothingness in order to have meaning and is inseparable from it. For example, if texts reflect or make present the values, attitudes and beliefs of dominant culture then conversely it silences or absents from texts, those values, attitudes and beliefs that lay outside of mainstream or dominant culture. Texts therefore, reflect a tension between the binary opposition of dominant culture and alternative or marginalised culture and the presence of the former draws attention to the absence of the latter.

This tension between being and nothingness, presence and absence cannot be resolved but is, according to Derrida (1978, p.280), the "shaking" foundation upon which language and communication is constructed. As a result, there is no tidy resolution to the tension between dominant and alternative culture when deconstructing texts. The basic



conclusion that acknowledgement of this tension engenders is that all texts are partial versions of reality. No single text can ever fully encapsulate meaning/truth in a way that is representative of all people's meaning/truth regardless of socio-cultural and historical context. Texts will always be a combination of reality present (usually dominant culture) and reality absent (usually alternative/marginalised culture). Hence, meaning can be understood as socially constructed and can never be understood as objectively true, regardless of socio-cultural and historical context. However, meaning is not without reference to a "real" reality (Grassie, 1997, p.5). Texts will always reflect a partial reality. However, the extent to which it is partial will be the task of the reader/viewer to determine through deconstruction of meanings within texts.

#### *2.4.8 Derrida and Study of Religion*

Derrida deconstructed the theoretical foundation of language proposed by Saussure and replaced the "solid" foundational category with a new "shaking" foundational category (Grassie, 1997, p.2). Derrida challenged Saussure's claim that language and so intelligible communication relies upon the causative foundational structure of binary oppositions within language. Derrida sought to replace this foundation with a new base – that binary oppositions while making intelligible communication possible conversely defied the possibility of intelligible communication. This was because binary oppositions, while creating meaning through contrast, were inseparable from each other if meaning was to be created.

Derrida's reasoning for this was that binary oppositions, in favouring presence over absence within language systems, alluded to a centre from which the whole system came. This centre or place of origin, usually dominant culture, created the nature of the relationship between each pair of a binary opposition. In applying Derrida's insights to the context of religion this centre or presence at the heart of religious language could be the dominant cultural manifestation of religion in a particular place at a particular time. This dominant cultural manifestation of religion could be defined by its contrast with alternative manifestations of religion that are at the margins of the dominant cultural manifestation of religion. For example, Buddhism in Thailand rather than Christianity would be the dominant manifestation of religion (Burke, 1996). However, it is feasible to postulate that the dominant cultural manifestation of religion, such as Buddhism, can only be truly understood due to the absence or at least minority status of alternative religion, for example, Christianity, within that socio-cultural context. Without the latter the former may be unintelligible and have no meaning.

#### 2.4.9 Binary Oppositions and Study of Religion

The Derridaen shift in how language is understood to be intelligible and communicate meaning in a post-modern context has serious implications for *Study of Religion* and student meaning-making in a post-modern context. The theological language of Religion in Semitic traditions, for example, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have formed themselves around a series of binary oppositions that have provided the foundational structure for the development of systematic theologies (insider theological knowledge). These binary oppositions have been largely understood as mutually exclusive and so reflect a modernist structuralist approach to an understanding of religious language. Some of these binary oppositions include the spatial metaphor used by Semitic religions of a world above (Heaven) and a world below (Hell).

The theological concept of grace and sin, a God immanent and transcendent, similarly bespeak a modernist understanding of binary oppositions. As a result a modernist interpretation of this language would arguably struggle in a post-modern context to construct meaning for students as it would deem each pair of words as polar opposites rather than related. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in *Study of Religion* at Greene College the understanding that teachers bring to the lesson may largely be a modernist view of such binary pairs – each term being understood as mutually exclusive rather than related. Heaven is what Hell is not and so forth.

Discourse-based methodologies are arguably better positioned to assist students in a post-modern *Study of Religion* classroom to make meaning. This is because such an understanding is consonant with paradigm shifts in linguistic philosophy and no longer clings to the assumption that language has meaning regardless of socio-cultural and historical context. Discourse-based methodologies incorporate the insights of Derrida regarding presence and absence inherent within binary oppositions. Key analytical terms such as privileging (present-ing) and silencing (absent-ing) as used in the *English Syllabus* (2001) have their provenance in Derridaen linguistics. Consequently, *Study of Religion* would arguably better address post-modern shifts in thinking if a similar language of analysis was adopted. It has a precedent in the *English Syllabus* (2001) and could enhance student potential for meaning-making. The next section of this study explores alternate educational models and how they challenge assumptions about education underlying the use of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion*.

## 2.5 Paradigm Shift Three: Post-modern Educational Models and Study of Religion - Increasing Student Potential for Meaning-making

Recent developments in educational theory and practice reflect a post-modern context and would arguably favour a Discourse analysis approach to the teaching of *Study of Religion*. This is in contrast to phenomenological methods, which embody assumptions that reflect a modern context. Specifically, the Multiliterate model of education possesses great potential for enhanced student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. This section of the study addresses the third research sub-question: What alternate educational methodologies could better engage student potential for meaning making in *Study of Religion*?

### 2.5.1 Multiliteracies

A Multiliterate educational approach dispels the modernist assumption that the written text, which has been privileged in education generally up until the 1960s, may now be outmoded (The New London Group, 2000). Multiliterate education is a product of post-modern research and may be better positioned than phenomenological methodologies to support Discourse-based methodologies. This is because the latter may be better able to engage student potential for meaning-making more effectively (Lankshear, 1994; Muspratt et al., 1997). A Multiliterate educational approach has been at the forefront of educational change over the last five years (The New London Group, 2000). This approach to learning may allow students to construct meaning in *Study of Religion* more easily. This is because Multiliterate learning is supported by a groundswell of intellectual thought that is rooted in post-modernism rather than modernism.

### 2.5.2 The Three Tiers of Multiliterate Learning

Multiliterate education effectively engages and develops within students, their critical literacy skills. According to Unsworth (2002) within the context of Multiliterate education there are three key stages of learning that a critical literacies approach identifies: The first is Recognition Literacy, which involves the learning of verbal, visual and electronic codes that are used to construct and communicate meanings. The second is Reproduction Literacy, which involves an understanding and producing of the conventional visual and verbal text forms that construct and communicate the established systematic knowledge of cultural institutions. Finally, Reflection Literacy, which necessitates an understanding that all social practices, and hence all literacies are socially constructed and thereby selective in including certain values and understandings while excluding others (Unsworth, 2002, p. 70).

It could be argued that an application of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* does not assist students to develop as effectively Reflection Literacy skills compared to Discourse-based methodologies. This could have implications for student meaning-making potential. Therefore, it is essential that, in a post-modern context, teachers of *Study of Religion* consider this possibility and utilise analytical methodologies that uncover the full meaning of religious texts whether they are printed, visual and/or auditory in nature. The critical dimension of a Multiliterate approach to student learning (Reflection Literacy) is arguably served better by Discourse-based methodologies. This may be due to Discourse-based methodologies fundamentally necessitating awareness that all literacies are socially constructed including religious literacy and in need of deconstruction (Lankshear et al, 2000).

Reflection Literacy suggests that a clear theoretical link between the descriptions of the visual and verbal elements of texts and how they make meaning be analysed within the broader context of its relationship to the parameters of the social context in which they function (Unsworth, 2002). Applying this to student learning in *Study of Religion*, it may be argued that Smart's dimensions if applied to Islam, for example, provide the verbal and visual elements of texts that depict that religion (recognition literacy). Because of this students are then able to understand and reproduce the central elements that constitute that religion (reproduction literacy). For example, the text of ritual (the five pillars) and the text of doctrine (the seven cardinal beliefs of Islam) are descriptors for understanding how Islam constructs meaning for its followers (Burke, 1996). Students are assisted to first of all recognise these elements as particular to Islam then through class work and assessment reproduce in some context these elements to demonstrate their understanding of them.

Marton and Saljo (1976) and Saljo (1979) suggests that students who are successfully challenged to operate on the level of Reflection Literacy generally achieve better academically than students who operate solely on the levels of Recognition and Reproduction Literacy.

Students who pay attention to details (eg. Signs in the text) in order to reproduce them later on [Reproduction Literacy] have a superficial idea or quantitative conception, about learning. Students who focus on the meaning of what they are learning have a deep idea [Reflection Literacy] or qualitative conception, about learning (Marton & Saljo, 1976; Saljo, 1979 quoted in Cano, 2005, p. 206).

Consequently, students who have a "deep idea about learning" or who operate at the level of Reflection Literacy could achieve more academic success than those students who are

not operating at this level. This is because a qualitative conception of learning presumes that a student is engaging higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. However, a quantitative conception of learning presumes a student is engaging lower order thinking skills such as knowledge, understanding and application (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956 cited in Marsh, 1996, pp.94-95). This is corroborated by a study of 1,600 Spanish students from several secondary schools in Spain (Cano, 2005, p.216). While it is important to note that all three levels (recognition, reproduction and reflection literacy) need to be incorporated in the education process in order to bring about improvements in learning, it is the third level of literacy that is the most significant indicator of higher order thinking skills.

### *2.5.3 Reflection Literacy and Phenomenological Methodologies*

On the first two levels of Recognition and Reproduction Literacy, one may postulate that phenomenological methodology as espoused by Smart (1968) is consonant with a Multiliteracies approach to learning. However, phenomenological methods do not sufficiently challenge students to identify the relationship between the visual and verbal elements of language and how these linguistic elements function and have functioned historically within the parameters of a particular socio-cultural, political and historical context (reflection literacy). The suspension of judgement (*epoche*) distinctive of phenomenological methodologies arguably discourages this third step to some extent in order to avoid value judgements. The goal of *epoche* is objective assessment of a phenomenon whereby predispositions, biases and prejudices are shed in favour of receiving maximum information from all sources before arriving at even the most preliminary conclusions (Lovat, 2005, p.47).

Lovat (2005) labels the discipline associated with *epoche*, “descriptive science” and stresses that this is but one of two poles that constitute phenomenological methodology. The second pole is “eidetic science”. As the title of the first pole suggests, descriptive science’s main focus is description rather than critical analysis. The focus on description rather than critical analysis is to avoid “value judgements”, which may be construed as discriminatory or biased toward a particular religious group and/or institution (Barnes, 2001). One could argue that the closest phenomenological methodologies approach the development of Reflection Literacy skills is via a comparison of religions. In order to do such a comparison *Study of Religion* teachers have generally utilised the seven dimensions of Smart or the eight tiered typology of Moore and Habel (Crotty & Crotty et al., 1989; Lovat, 1993).

However, comparison does not equal critique. This is because a student is not empowered simply through comparison to identify how visual and verbal codes within a religious meaning system, such as Islam, privilege particular viewpoints and silence others (Miller & Colwill, 2003). This can impact upon student potential for meaning-making negatively in *Study of Religion*. For example, a *Study of Religion* class may be exploring the reasons underlying female Islamic dress in Pakistan and whether women are required by rules of Purdah (rules of modesty) to wear a Hijab or veil in accordance with the Qu'ran (Sura 33:59). It could be stressed to students that while the Qu'ran does not literally say that veils are mandatory; within some Islamic cultures it has been made so. However, in an Australian context students' attention might be drawn to anecdotal evidence, which suggests that some Islamic women interpret this same verse from the Qu'ran quite differently. That is, not all Islamic women living in Australia feel obligated to wear the Hijab.

Phenomenological methodology as presented by Smart would acknowledge for students this difference between two diverse socio-cultural expressions of Islam regarding female dress codes. However, classroom forms of phenomenology would normally not encourage the critical question regarding why a particular viewpoint on Islamic dress has been privileged within a Pakistani Islamic culture while in other countries like Australia it has not been the case. Questions such as this might be deemed to be overstepping the mark regarding the need to suspend judgement (*epoché*) when analysing and comparing world religions. A consequence of this is that students are denied access to a richer process of academic inquiry and meaning-making. Thus it can be argued that phenomenological methods are limited in their ability to engage student potential for critical thinking. This may render *Study of Religion* less meaningful to some students. However, Lovat (2005) does argue that the second pole of phenomenological methodology, "eidetic science", does allow for some level of critical judgement.

Once a researcher has suspended his/her personal views and assembled an extensive data base consisting of the views of others a "refreshed and renewed insight impelled by eidetic science, 'knowing the essentials', will follow" (Lovat, 2005, p. 48). Therefore, Lovat (2005) argues that it is at the eidetic pole rather than the descriptive pole of the phenomenological spectrum that a critical and reflective assessment is possible. This is because the suspension of judgement enables the researcher, "to clear the mind of pre-emptive and poorly formed judgements ... in order to establish a mindset necessary to engage in the more judicial, critical and reflective study implied by 'eidetic science' " (Lovat, 2005, p. 48). However, the level of personal maturity and self discipline necessary for a shedding of personal bias and prejudice in order for such critical assessment to

occur is arguably beyond the developmental capacity of some secondary school students to demonstrate. Consequently, this factor has been explored in more detail later in this study.

#### *2.5.4 Multiliteracies and Study of Religion*

Two salient pitfalls in the study of religion generally are religious exclusivism: that one religion is exclusively true while others are largely in error or false; and religious inclusivism: that other religious belief systems are deemed to be partial versions of an exclusively true religion (Hick, 1989). A Multiliterate approach to teaching *Study of Religion* would encourage students to embrace religious pluralism and avoid these two pitfalls. Hick (1989) presents a very helpful model for understanding and reconciling to some extent, the ideological diversity that is the essence of religious pluralism. He postulates that religion is able to assist adherents toward embracing a legitimate meaning system (*cf.* Hebblethwaite, 1997, p.138; Hobson & Edwards, 1999, p.51). All religions are culturally conditioned ways of responding to the same set of ultimate questions and so manifest themselves diversely within the world. Socio-cultural and historical responses to this set of ultimate questions produce the defining characteristics that make one religion distinct from another (Hick, 1989).

Applying these insights to *Study of Religion* it could be justified that the appropriate philosophical basis for organising a course in the study of world religions is; that no single religious position is to be favoured over another. Rather, all religious positions regarding the nature of ultimate reality are to be deemed potentially valid until proven otherwise. A Multiliterate approach to education, which identifies knowledge as a social construction that requires deconstruction in order for meaning to be possible would support this premise (Unsworth, 2002, p.70). A Multiliterate approach if employed in *Study of Religion* would begin with the premise that any body of religious knowledge regarding the nature of ultimate reality is a social construction that requires deconstruction. This approach would also be in accord with a Multilithic model of ultimate reality. A Multilithic model of ultimate reality rejects the notion of “objective truth” and the idea that one socio-cultural and historical manifestation of religion might possess it (Hartshorne, 2001).

Hobson & Edwards (1999, p.57) suggest that appropriate criteria to achieve a genuine understanding of religious pluralism would include critical rationality whereby students would decide, “that some beliefs are better based or more rationally defensible than others [thus leading] to a more personally meaningful world view”. This is referred to as “extended pluralism” or the idea that no single religion is uniquely valid or equally valid but that “all significant attempts [by religions] to answer issues of ultimate concern deserve

careful and open consideration” (Hobson & Edwards, 1999, p.57). This type of thinking arguably demands the engagement of Reflection Literacy in order to appropriately evaluate religion. A Multiliterate approach to teaching *Study of Religion* could assist in achieving this outcome more effectively than phenomenological approaches.

Phenomenological methodologies are arguably not as effectively positioned to engage students in a critical analysis and evaluation of religion compared to Multiliterate educational approaches. This may be a result of Phenomenological methodologies valuing of *epoche* or the suspension of judgement over evaluative processes in learning. The New London Group (2000) argue that as the world has changed and continues to change so too do the pedagogies in schools need to change. Changes in pedagogy may equip adolescents to take their place more confidently and competently within the world. Teachers are challenged to become the creators of pedagogical and classroom designs that motivate students and achieve the sorts of learning meaningful within the world (The New London Group, 2000, p.19). Therefore, what could be needed to support pedagogy of Multiliteracies as a tool to be utilised in *Study of Religion*, is a metalanguage or accessible functional grammar for students that empowers them to de/construct religious meaning (Luke, 2000; The New London Group, 2000).

#### *2.5.5 Developing a Meta-language*

*Study of Religion* programs within schools would arguably benefit from a Multiliterate approach in order to facilitate enhanced student meaning-making. Diverse meaning systems of religion could then be understood in terms of their relationship to the socio-cultural context in which they are produced, and critiqued accordingly within a Discourse analysis framework. The language of Discourse analysis may provide a starting point for the development of a meta-language for teaching *Study of Religion* in a post-modern context. Furthermore, such a language could have the potential to be meaningful across curriculum areas and increase the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. For example, the *English* Syllabus (2001) already has appropriated the language of Discourse analysis and so there could be cross-curricular relevance between the two subjects if *Study of Religion* did the same.

##### *2.5.5.1 Education Queensland and Multiliteracy.*

Multi-modality and the observation that the written word is no longer the dominant medium for communication is an assumption of the Literate Futures Project (2002) developed by Education Queensland. Phenomenological methodologies have generally reflected a “modern” life world in which writing was the dominant vehicle for communicating information deemed important. This is in contrast to the “post-modern” situation where



writing is far from dominant. Instead, images communicated via a host of mediums including print, electronic (computers) and audio-visual (film & radio) mediums are becoming dominant over the written word (Kress, 2000, p.182; The New London Group, 2000, p.9). The Literate Futures Project (2002) recognises Multiliterate learning as a given within the classroom and multi-modality is encouraged both in the creation of learning experiences for students by teachers and in the assessment of student performance (QSA, 2002, pp. 3, 16). Furthermore it is implied by a senior English text, "Queensland senior English: Theory practice-connections" (Miller & Colwill, 2003). This text refers to a multitude of text types and does not presume a dominance of the written word over other text types.

It is important to note, however, that even though the written word may no longer be dominant in the post-modern context it is certainly important. Within the world of literacy what has changed is the medium of communicating the written word and not the fundamentals of reading and writing *per se* (Misson, 2005, p.38). Consequently, whether one is using a computer, reading a book or viewing the television all media presume the facility of being able to recognise language, both written and spoken, decipher the codes associated with language and when required write or reproduce language (Misson, 2005). Therefore, the basic skills of reading and writing are no less important in a post-modern context. The Queensland Studies Authority supports a Multiliteracies approach to education in Queensland schools over some of the current methodologies.

This is evident in the working document, "Whole School Literacy Planning Guidelines". This document examines in detail the need to implement within schools a more comprehensive school literacy program (QSA, 2002). A literacy review conducted by Luke and Freebody (QSA, 2002) recommended a futures-oriented view of literacy for Queensland state schools. This futures-oriented view presupposes the fact of multi-modality in student learning and presumes that the written word no longer holds primacy of place as a communication medium in secondary education. This project was initiated by the Queensland State Government in response to a perceived change in Queensland communities and economics as identified in "Queensland State Education – 2010". Among the many recommendations made in this document is a clear reference to Multiliteracy as a desired outcome for learning in regard to Queensland primary and secondary school students.

The report states that priority is to be given among other things to the challenges raised by Multiliteracies (QSA, 2002, pp. 3, 16). In order to achieve a Multiliterate learning approach at a whole school level it was encouraged that schools adopt a broad multi-method of

pedagogy and that a shared vocabulary or vision of literacy be formed, in other words a workable meta-language that has cross-curricular relevance. Luke and Freebody (QSA, 2002) suggest that secondary education in Queensland needs to progress toward a Multiliterate approach to classroom teaching. As a result a challenge is presented for schools to develop specific methodologies in Key Learning Areas that reflect a Multiliterate education model. Therefore, it would be feasible that in *Study of Religion*, methodologies that are best supported by a Multiliterate approach to pedagogy be preferred over others. It is reasonable to postulate that phenomenological methodologies may not as effectively be supported by a Multiliterate approach to learning compared to Discourse-based methodologies. Consequently, phenomenological methodologies may be less able to engage student potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in Queensland if schools progressively incorporate the Multiliterate learning model.

## 2.6 Post-modernism and the Challenge to Educational Theory and Practice

Research suggests, in accord with the third research sub-question for this study that post-modernism poses a serious challenge to current educational methodologies being used in the Queensland Studies Authority subject, *Study of Religion*. It is feasible to suggest that other methodologies be explored, which could better address the needs of the post-modern secondary school student and their potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion*.

### 2.6.1 Developing New Educational Paradigms: Proposing a New Methodology

The third research sub-question suggests that paradigm shifts in education, as reflected in Multiliteracies education for example, invites that a review of alternate methodologies to those currently being used be completed. This is for the purpose of assisting students to construct meaning more effectively. Such a review may lead to new strategies being employed in *Study of Religion* that engage better student potential for meaning-making. The following section provides a context for such a review to take place. It suggests possible future directions for adopting and/or developing alternate methodologies to phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion*.

## 2.7 Paradigmatic Shifts: A Synthesis

It has been argued that phenomenological methodologies operate under the assumption that a cultural lens view of ultimate reality and religion is valid. Consequently, a monolithic concept of ultimate reality is espoused, which clearly reflects a “modern” rather than a “post-modern” context (Barnes, 2001; Bracken, 2002; Hartshorne, 2001; Hebblethwaite, 1997; McTernan, 2002). Coupled with this is the observation that a post-modern deconstruction of the religious concept of ultimate reality is unable to sustain some of the

current religious language used in *Study of Religion*. This is because the current religious language presumes a monolithic model of the ultimate reality-world relationship. Consequently, such language rests on the assumptions of a structuralist approach to linguistic analysis and may no longer be as effective in meaning-making in a post-modern context (Derrida, 1982; Hartshorne, 2001; Rorty, 1995).

The deconstruction of language as reflected in Discourse analysis methodologies is fast becoming a standard theoretical framework in the post-modern era of academic inquiry and educational theory. Discourse analysis methodologies have been adopted by the Queensland Studies Authority *English Syllabus* (2001) as the underlying framework for organising student learning in Year 11 and 12. Consequently, it could be postulated that the *Study of Religion Syllabus* (2001) and School work programs developed from that Syllabus need to adopt similarly Discourse-based methodologies if it is to successfully facilitate student meaning-making in a post-modern world. It could be argued that the *English Syllabus* (2001) represents an authentic response to challenges in education posed by post-modernism. The *English Syllabus* document has clearly appropriated some of the language and insights of Discourse analysis. This is evident in its enumeration of student objectives (*English Syllabus*, 2001, pp.5-7), which reflect the rhetoric of Discourse analysis as defined by Slembrouck (2003).

## 2.8 Summary

The Queensland Studies Authority subject, *Study of Religion* and its translation into work programs in some Catholic schools/colleges employ a phenomenological methodology in the study of some core units when describing and analysing religion (QBSSSS, 2001, p.11). Phenomenological methodologies are used as the organising framework for teaching some core units in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. Phenomenology had its origin within modernism and reflects the assumption that reason and objective truth/meaning exists. Consequently, phenomenological methodologies may be less able to assist students to construct meaning in a post-modern context. This is because post-modernism understands reason itself to be a particular historical form, "as parochial in its own way as the ancient explanations of the universe in terms of Gods" (Jones, 2003). Furthermore, in a post-modern context objective truth/meaning is understood to be an illusion. This is because all texts allow for multiple interpretations and no one single interpretation can be claimed as the truth (Derrida, 1982).

Research reveals that there may be a connection between student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion*. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the relationship between these two variables in the context of the

post-compulsory subject, *Study of Religion*. The first research sub-question regarding the effectiveness of phenomenological approaches to engage student potential for meaning-making was explored in the opening section of the study. Phenomenology has its foundation within modernism (Barnes, 2001; Boucher, 2000; Jones, 2003; McTernan, 2002). As a consequence, students are arguably better assisted to construct meaning by employing methodologies in *Study of Religion* that have their provenance in post-modern theoretical frameworks. The intellectual assumptions that once supported phenomenological methodologies are no longer tenable in the post-modern era. This change in the intellectual landscape is evident on the three levels of education, religious studies and philosophy (Derrida, 1982; Flood, 1999; Klages, 2003; Luke, 2000; Towne, 2001; Unsworth, 2002). Consequently, post-modern intellectual shifts pose a challenge to the way in which *Study of Religion* is currently being taught

Literature has suggested that post-modern thinking challenges current educational theory and practice in the context of *Study of Religion* and so needs to be explored further. This was in accord with the second research sub-question. Research indicates a possible connection between phenomenological methodologies and a reduced potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. Consequently, the need to explore alternate educational methodologies that better engage student potential for meaning-making is drawn into sharper focus. The third research sub-question regarding the need to explore the educational benefits of alternate educational methodologies was the focus of the last section of the study. Multiliterate learning was investigated as a possible model for student learning in the post-modern context.

Post-modern methodologies that have their origin in Discourse theory and analysis are arguably more pertinent to *Study of Religion* and consonant with the paradigm shifts described above (Beaudoin, 2003; Kress, 2000; The New London Group, 2000). This is because they better reflect post-modern shifts in educational theory and practice. Secondly, there is a precedent for this in the *English Syllabus* (QBSSSS, 2001). The research conducted as part of this study has suggested that methodological changes in education may enhance the potential for student meaning-making.

It is feasible that post-modern methodologies may be positioned to assist students to construct meaning more effectively than phenomenological methodologies, which reflect a modern context. The problem that has been identified by the researcher regarding student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* has been explored further in Chapters three to six. A cross-sectional survey of forty-five Year 12 students in a Brisbane Catholic College and

a focus group study involving five students was conducted and triangulated with conclusions drawn from the literature review and direct observation.

### **CHAPTER 3**

This Chapter provides the methodological framework designed by the researcher to collect data. This was in order to investigate the connection between the two variables that provide the focus for the present study: student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies in the post-compulsory subject *Study of Religion* at Greene College. This research utilised a Case-study approach, as it was potentially able to demonstrate a causal argument between phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* and student meaning-making.

### 3.0 DESIGN OF RESEARCH

*Case study research usually involves a detailed and thorough study of a single group, individual, situation or site (Wiersma, 1995, p17).*

#### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between phenomenological methodologies and the potential for student meaning-making in the post-compulsory subject, *Study of Religion* at a Catholic Co-educational College. It was anticipated that this study would shed light upon current teaching methodologies being employed in teaching *Study of Religion* and offer a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of these teaching methodologies.

#### 3.2 Case-study

A Case-study approach for organising this research project was best suited to addressing the research questions that were directing this study. This was because the questions presupposed that the researcher had to interpret data in the light of the literature review, which is valid within a Case-study research model. Furthermore, the researcher was required to describe the experience of a Year 12 cohort in a Catholic co-educational College in order to address adequately all three key research sub-questions. Consequently, a Case-study approach provided the best opportunity for this. Case-study research facilitates an in-depth study of events and relationships in a particular setting where specific topics and variables can be isolated (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995, p.317). The two variables that required isolation in order to complete this study were student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies.

Case-study research has been prominent in the social sciences and has assisted researchers to connect the micro-level (the actions of individuals) to the macro-level (large scale social structures and processes) (Neuman, 2003, p.33). Consequently, a causal argument can be formulated in order to demonstrate how general social forces produce results in particular settings (Walton, 1992, p.129). In relation to the present study, a case study approach did demonstrate the potential for a causal argument between methodology in *Study of Religion* (Macro level) and student meaning-making (Micro level). However, the premise of a causal connection between methodology in *Study of Religion* and student meaning-making requires further replication of the present study in other educational settings in order to strengthen this premise.

According to Hughes & Hitchcock, (1995) the validity of a Case-study perspective is sometimes questioned due to the restricting of data collection to one site. This is because a single site naturally limits the breadth of conclusions that can be formulated by the

researcher. Secondly, it has been suggested that such research furnishes only broad generalizations to external research contexts (Neuman, 2003). In response to such criticisms the researcher did adopt triangulation strategies to achieve a higher level of external validity. As a result, there was the ability to cross-reference various sources from which data had been collected. This in turn minimised the issue of interpretive assumptions when conclusions from data collection and analysis had been formulated. Consequently, internal validity and reliability of results was increased as the data collected was corroborated to some extent by other evidence.

In the case of the present study, in addition to the survey questionnaire, other types of evidence included direct observation, a literature review and a focus group discussion. The literature review revealed that while there has been research conducted, which has investigated the relevance of phenomenological methodologies for teaching *Study of Religion*, this research has not necessarily been based upon empirical evidence but rather theoretical analysis (Barnes, 2001; Lovat, 2001). Also, this same research has not specifically isolated the two variables - student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies – and explored their relationship as the present study has. Consequently, the data collected via the present study provided an empirical basis to the argument that student difficulty in meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies may be connected. Consequently, if changes to the present system are going to be seriously considered by relevant educational authorities then a substantial body of empirical evidence as well as theoretical discussion will be required to justify such changes.

Employing Case-study research offers numerous benefits. Case-study research provides data that are usually more detailed and easily translatable into concrete strategies for addressing a problem (Neumann, 2003). Furthermore, this approach is often associated with action, as policy or programs are modified at a particular site as a result of several sources of data being accessed, analysed and evaluated (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995; Neuman, 2003). This was viewed by the researcher as particularly relevant to *Study of Religion* at Greene College as current approaches to teaching the subject may be modified at the local College level in light of conclusions drawn from data collection and analysis. It may be argued that by participating in a Case-study there is a sense of personal ownership and investment by participants as the conclusions offered are based upon their input and can be accessed and understood by them (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995; Neuman, 2003). These strengths supported the use of the Case-study approach at Greene College as the most appropriate way to organise and manage the research.



### 3.3 Research Methods

In conducting Case-study research, data is usually gathered from a variety of sources. These sources may include documentation, file data, interviews, site visits, direct observation and physical artefacts (Anderson, 1990, p.160). According to Neuman (2003) it is important to include a range of these strategies in order to be able to triangulate data and ensure the validity and reliability of data obtained. Consequently, the present study collected data from a variety of sources available on site. These were as follows: a survey questionnaire of the Year 12 cohort, a focus group discussion comprised of five students from the Year 12 cohort and direct observation by the researcher who is employed on this site. Direct observation by the researcher was completed via the accessing and analysis of Greene College's *Study of Religion* Work Program. This analysis was presented in the opening section of Chapter two – the literature review.

The researcher used the data collected from these sources in order to construct a representation of student perceptions of *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The representation of these student perceptions was aimed at addressing the central problem identified by this study, which is students enrolled in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 might be struggling to construct meaning due to particular methodologies being employed. This representation of student perceptions was based upon an in-depth and detailed knowledge of Greene College as an educational institution and the methodologies that underpin the College's *Study of Religion* Work Program.

#### 3.3.1 Data Collection Instruments

Case-study research required that the researcher describe the experience of the Year 12 cohort enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. In order to achieve this, qualitative data for this study was collected from two specific sources: A cross-sectional survey and a focus group discussion. This data facilitated an in-depth study of student experiences of *Study of Religion* at Greene College and enabled the two variables being investigated (student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies) to be isolated via these two data collecting instruments (Hughes & Hitchcock, 1995).

#### 3.3.2 Cross-sectional Survey

A cross-sectional survey was elected as one of the key data-collecting methods because it allowed the researcher to describe the connection between student potential for meaning-making at the micro-level and phenomenological methodologies as the overarching methodology being employed in *Study of Religion* at the macro-level. Secondly, a survey questionnaire proved most efficient as it allowed for easy distribution and collection of

completed surveys due to the researcher being employed at this site. Furthermore, direct observation - a review of the *Study of Religion* Work Program at Greene College - revealed that teaching units for Year 11 and 12 were informed by phenomenological approaches to teaching religion (Greene College *Study of Religion* work program, 2002, p.14). Therefore, it was anticipated that the survey data would assist the researcher to address the central problem being investigated through this study: that phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool may not be effectively engaging the potential for students to make-meaning in *Study of Religion*.

### 3.3.3 Cross-sectional Survey Structure

The survey consisted of five questions. The first two questions were designed to establish two background variables of respondents that the researcher had deemed significant. These were Gender and Subject Choices for year 12 (See Appendix 1). The third question was designed to elicit data relating to the second key variable – the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. The researcher then used this data to later describe the connection between student meaning-making and *Study of Religion*. The fourth question was designed to gather data that was subsequently used by the researcher to suggest feasible changes to methodology in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. It was anticipated that suggested changes could render subject matter presented to students as more meaningful (See Appendix 1).

As the central problem being analysed in this study was student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion*, a comment bank was provided to students aimed at addressing this problem. Students were directed to utilise words/phrases from this comment bank only, when responding to questions 3 and 4. As a result the researcher was better positioned to make links between the potential for student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies. This comment bank consisted of twenty descriptors arranged in two columns, numbered one to twenty. The researcher deliberately placed in Column A words/phrases that could be linked to student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in order to expedite analysis once data had been collected. However, in responding to question three students could select words/phrases from Column A and Column B. Similarly, the researcher deliberately placed in Column B words/phrases that could be linked to an enhanced potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in order to expedite analysis once data collection had been completed. In responding to question four students were able to select words/phrases from Column A and Column B (See Appendix 1 for full list). These words and phrases were drawn from the data presented in the literature review. For example words/phrases in Column B were largely

drawn from The Literate Futures Project (2002), Unsworth, (2002), The New London Group (2000) and Kress (2000).

The fifth question was an open-ended question designed to obtain additional data that could be used to explore further the connection between the variables being examined in this study (See Appendix 1). This question afforded more freedom for respondents to express their feelings and thoughts on the way *Study of Religion* was being taught currently and to offer suggestions for change in order to enhance student potential for meaning-making. Student responses to question 5 later provided a basis for the recommendations made in Chapter six. Sproull (1995) supports the inclusion of this type of question in stating that an open-ended response item can add new information when there is very little existing information about a topic. The literature review has revealed that there is a scarcity of empirically validated information that addresses whether students are having difficulty in meaning-making due to the employment of largely phenomenological methodologies. Therefore, an open-ended question was judged to be quite justified and did provide some invaluable insights to the researcher that were not forthcoming in the literature review (See Appendix 1 for complete Survey Instrument).

#### 3.3.4 Focus Group Discussion

Focus Group interviewing is a data collecting technique utilised in qualitative research that promotes a level of self-disclosure by the participants. Focus Group discussion, as a data collecting technique, has grown in popularity over the last twenty years and was utilised in the present study (Neuman, 2003, p.396). This was because participants at Greene College shared a particular experience of *Study of Religion*, which was related to the key research questions directing this research. Therefore, the creation of a permissive environment on site allowed students to listen to the opinions and understandings of others and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses given in the survey questionnaire. This instrument also provided the researcher with some flexibility to explore possible unanticipated issues that may have surfaced during the scheduled discussion (cf. Marshall & Rossman, 1994, p.84).

The Focus Group discussion conducted at Greene College provided a second opportunity for the researcher to obtain from the respondent their perspective and minimise the influence of assumptions when data was interpreted from the survey. Also, the respondents were able to use language natural to them rather than being restricted to language provided by the researcher, as was the case with Questions 2 and 3 on the survey. Furthermore, the respondents had equal status to the researcher in the group interview process thus dispelling the notion of being a guinea pig in a mass experiment

(Burns, 2000, p.425). Finally, data collected from the Focus Group discussion enabled the researcher to triangulate results with the literature review and cross-sectional survey.

A single Focus Group was formed after survey data had been collected and analysed by the researcher. This group consisted of five student volunteers from the original sample group of forty-five Year 12 *Study of Religion* students. Six students agreed to participate, however, one person failed to appear at the scheduled Focus Group session for reasons unknown to the researcher. The Focus Group discussion provided a select number of students with an opportunity to respond to a summary of results based on an analysis of the survey data. The purpose of this session was to identify the degree to which the results from the survey could be corroborated by the Focus Group. Data collected from the Focus Group helped augment and clarify the survey results and provided an opportunity to the researcher for modification of judgements based upon the latter hence increasing reliability and validity.

The questions asked were open-ended rather than closed and due to this the data obtained was invaluable (Neuman, 2003, p.291). This was because the five students involved were able to share their ideas freely and openly and were not positioned by a preset data collection instrument to respond to particular issues identified by the researcher. The audiotape recording of this session was and remains a reliable testament to the freedom and ease with which students engaged. Consequently data collected from the Focus Group was rich data and furnished the researcher with useful supplementary information in addition to the survey. For example, two students strongly endorsed the current methodology being used in *Study of Religion*, which was contrary to the trend of results obtained from the survey.

This additional data made it possible for the researcher to triangulate results from the Focus Group with results from the survey questionnaire and literature review. Hence, reliability and validity of the survey results were tested making a stronger case for the researcher to address the central problem being analysed in this study: the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making and the employment of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion*. The Focus Group consisted of three males and two females. These students from the original sample group of forty-five males/females who completed the survey instrument volunteered to be involved. Students were questioned in a semi-structured interview process as to whether the results arrived at by the researcher reflected what they thought was generally true of students in Year 12 *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The duration of the interview process was twenty-five minutes and the structure of the focus group session is outlined below (See Fig. 3.0 below).

- The Focus Group participants were welcomed by the researcher
- A summary of survey data was presented by the researcher to Focus Group participants with handout
- An open-ended question was directed at participants that sought comments from them regarding whether the results presented were expected/unexpected. Students were invited to elaborate and give reasons for their response
- An open-ended question was directed at students regarding how *Study of Religion* classes could be modified to further enhance student meaning-making
- An open-ended question was directed at students that provided them with an opportunity to seek clarification on issues discussed or further information on any questions unanswered during the session
- The researcher for their contribution thanked participants and the session was formally closed.

*Figure 3.0. Focus group session: A summary of the process.*

### 3.4 Alternative Sources of Data

As the researcher is employed at Greene College, a third source of data was accessed to further validate data collected via the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group. The Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program constituted this third source. This document source was particularly helpful in identifying the degree to which unit outlines developed for *Study of Religion* have possibly been influenced by phenomenological methodologies as discussed in Chapter 2. Secondly, anecdotal evidence generally supported the central problem under investigation – that some students were struggling to construct meaning in *Study of Religion* due to largely phenomenological methodologies being employed. The source of this anecdotal evidence was the researcher's teaching experience at Greene College (2003-2005).

### 3.4.1 Triangulation of Results

The use of two data collecting instruments (survey and focus group), a review of current literature and direct observation enabled the researcher to triangulate results more thoroughly. Trends in current research presented in the literature review were compared to data gathered from the survey, Focus Group discussion and *Study of Religion* Work Program. The level of agreement between all four key sources was identified and noted. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers use this same triangulation process of validating data and so it is a tried and tested method of validation (Neuman, 2003).

The particular type of triangulation method employed by the researcher for this study was triangulation of measures as described by Neuman (2003). Triangulation of measures is a type of triangulation, which involves taking multiple measures of the same phenomena. “By measuring something in more than one way, researchers are more likely to see all aspects of it” (Neuman, 2003, p.138). For the purposes of this study the phenomena of student meaning-making was measured in two ways on site (survey and focus group) and then compared with data reported in the literature review and *Study of Religion* Work Program (See Fig. 3.1 below).

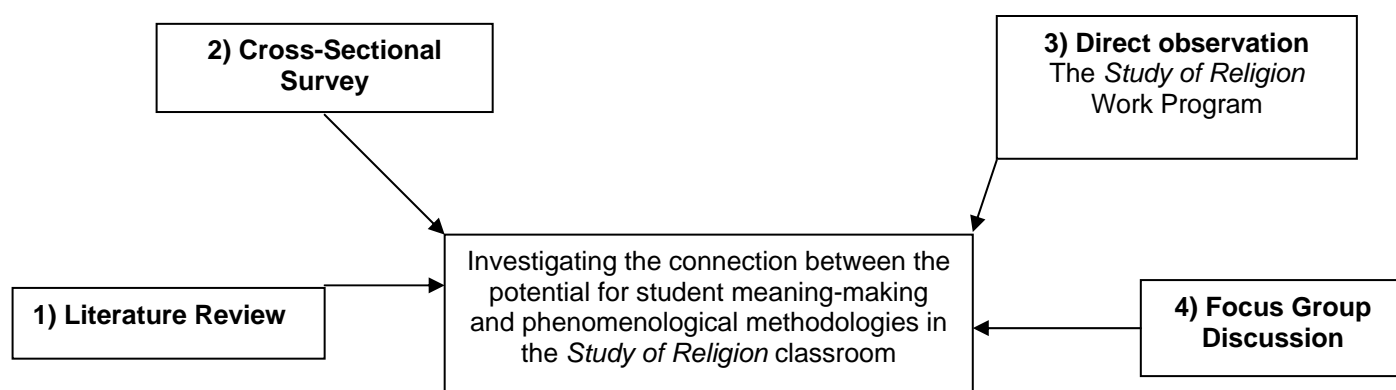


Figure 3.1. Triangulating Research Results.

### 3.4.2 Research Participants

In order to maximise the validity of the data that was collected, all students in the Year 12 cohort (ninety) enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College were invited to participate in the survey. All students received a formal letter addressed to their parents/guardians outlining the details of the research (See Appendix 2). Students were encouraged to discuss their interest in participating in the survey with their respective parents/guardians. Interested students who returned the relevant documentation containing parental/guardian's permission were welcomed to participate. Of the ninety letters that were issued to students, forty-five were returned with the necessary permission given. This represented a fifty percent response rate and was deemed by the researcher to be an adequate sample size. This was due to the fact that a fifty percent response rate enabled the researcher to estimate total population perceptions of *Study of Religion* at Greene College (Neuman, 2003).

Dooley (2001) argues, "That larger sample sizes give more precise estimates of population values" (p.130). Therefore, while forty-five students surveyed at Greene College may not be large *per se*, fifty percent of the total sample population arguably assisted the researcher to render a more precise estimate of student population perceptions regarding meaning-making and *Study of Religion*. A small incentive was offered to students in order to maximise student responses to the offer of participating in the survey. A pizza lunch was provided to all students who returned completed permission forms and who participated in the survey. This occurred on site during a normally scheduled lunch break. Forty-five Year 12 students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College completed the survey questionnaire. The sample group of forty-five students consisted of twenty-one males and twenty-four females from three Year 12 *Study of Religion* classes at Greene College. As has already been mentioned it was from this group that five students who comprised the Focus Group were later drawn. The forty-five student participants generally represented a range of family structures characteristic of Greene College's total student population: one parent and two-parent families. Socio-economic backgrounds varied from those of working class backgrounds to middle/upper-middle class professional working backgrounds. Academic abilities of students varied from high, middle to low achievers.

### *3.4.3 Validity and Reliability*

It may be argued that as this research project has utilised a Case-study approach that conclusions drawn from this study are not directly applicable to other Catholic Colleges under the direction of Brisbane Catholic Education. However, the outcomes from this project do offer support to current literature that identifies phenomenological methodologies as lacking relevance in the teaching of religion in the post-modern age. Also, it offers to other Catholic secondary colleges within the Brisbane Archdiocese a research methodology that has been successfully tested and that can be adapted and replicated. Such replication would potentially validate further data gathered via the present study.

In summary, the use of various sources for data collection – Cross-sectional survey, Focus Group discussion, Direct observation and Anecdotal evidence - has contributed to the information presented in this study. The data obtained from the student sample group of the Year 12 *Study of Religion* cohort presented an appropriate cross section of students and offered a sound basis for further research on this topic. However, given these conditions it was important to identify the particular limitations and delimitations identified by the researcher during the completion of this research. This was to demonstrate that while the quantity and quality of survey data collected may have been limited by factors beyond the control of the researcher, overall validity and reliability of the study was not compromised.

### *3.4.4 Limitations*

Student absence from school on the day of the survey and Focus Group discussion meant that those who had parental/guardian permission to complete the survey/participate in the focus group discussion and who were absent were unable to do so. While forty-six students had permission to complete the survey questionnaire forty-five did so. This was because one student was absent from school on the day the survey was completed. Six students agreed to participate in the Focus Group discussion but due to absence only five did so. Another difficulty was securing an adequate response from all of the respondents, as a small portion of students (20%) in the sample group either did not respond to question 5 and left it blank or answered it in such a way that provided the researcher with little additional information. Furthermore, as it was a voluntary sample of respondents that were to provide data to the researcher it was difficult to gauge their particular motivation for completing the survey. While an incentive was provided to the sample group upon returning permission forms and completing the survey, the reasons for respondents agreeing to participate in the survey were impossible to name with any certainty.



Furthermore, there were certain developmental issues that could have impacted upon the final results of the survey. According to Sproull (1995, p.203) some students in year 12 may find a self-administered survey/questionnaire difficult to complete due to literacy levels and disability. This was the case for a small proportion of students who participated in the survey at Greene College. According to the Learning Support Teacher employed at Greene College, approximately 20% of students from the sample group of forty-five who were surveyed had been assessed as having learning and literacy challenges prior to the completion of the survey. Anecdotal evidence further corroborated this fact. The researcher was aware of a number of students who qualified for this category of literacy deficiency and learning disability. In conjunction with this, when completed surveys were returned there did appear on several of them, ambiguous information, especially in regard to question 5, due to awkward sentence structure that could not be followed up once the survey had been formally completed (Sproull, 1995).

#### 3.4.5 Delimitations

The exact socio-economic and cultural mix of students attending Greene College was a largely unknown quantity to the researcher. How this socio-cultural mix may have influenced particular attitudes to *Study of Religion* as represented in student survey responses and Focus Group discussion responses will remain an unknown factor to the researcher. This is relevant to the present study as a percentage of students who were part of the volunteer sample providing data to the researcher were of Asian, African and Polynesian origin. Socio-cultural factors such as attitudes to religion and facility to speak and read English fluently could have impacted upon particular responses to the survey questionnaire.

### 3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group was aimed at illuminating the central problem being investigated within this study - that student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* may be linked to the observation that phenomenological methodologies have been largely employed in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. Consequently data collected for the present study was organised in order to address the following two key issues:

1. The connection between difficulty in student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion*.
2. The connection between an increased potential for student meaning-making and the employment of Discourse-based methodologies and Multiliterate learning techniques in *Study of Religion*.

Furthermore, the research data obtained, enabled the researcher to address two other issues not specifically dealt with in the literature review. These were the relationship between Gender and student meaning-making and Subject Choice and student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. The first two questions on the survey questionnaire established the participant's gender and subject choices at Greene College respectively (See Appendix 1). This information allowed the researcher to isolate student responses according to gender and subject choice and later discern particular trends that may have been influenced by gender and subject choice (See Chapter five).

This analysis procedure was supported by current research. Anderson (1990, p.163) states that the central objective of data analysis is to arrive at some conclusion after investigating "converging lines of inquiry". That is, data analysis aims to assemble a coherent explanation of the research data collected and present feasible conclusions based upon this explanation. The structure of analysis utilised by the present study did provide a coherent explanation of data collected from several converging lines of inquiry – the Cross-sectional survey, Focus Group discussion, direct observation and the literature review. When this case study was being conducted, analysis of the data occurred as the data was being collected. This then enabled the research data and the context of the research and literature to be considered at every stage of the study by the researcher.

In the present study the Greene College Work Program for *Study of Religion* was read, analysed and summarised. After this the Cross-sectional survey was distributed and completed by students and the data collected was then analysed by the researcher. The analysis of survey data then formed the basis of the Focus Group discussion, which took place four weeks after the survey. Subsequent to the focus group discussion student responses were analysed and documented. At the end of this process data obtained via the Case-study was compared to findings documented in the literature review and conclusions drawn.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

In order to complete this research project ethical clearance was initially sought and obtained from the principal of Greene College and then from Brisbane Catholic Education. Clearance was then sought and granted from Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). Australian Catholic University HREC endorsed the researcher's judgement that the research posed "minimal risk" to participants. (National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans [1999] as cited by ACU Human Research Ethics Committee, 2002). Consequently, this study has been included in the HREC Register of approved projects as Q2004.05.20 (See Appendix 3).

The key elements of the HREC protocol that were directly applicable to the present study included the following:

1. Approval of local College and systemic administrations.
2. Informed positive consent by participants and where applicable their parents and guardians.
3. Privacy protected by ensuring inability to identify individual respondents.
4. Security of data during research process and planned destruction of data post research.

All of these issues were addressed in the researcher's application to ACU's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and approval to approach potential participants and gather data for this research project was granted.

Participation in the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group was voluntary and participants were able to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in this study at any time without giving a reason. Every student wishing to participate in the research required a Parental/Guardian's Statement of Consent. All data gathered from the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group was treated in a confidential manner. Participants were informed of the value that the research could have for the College and that their honesty was valued and respected.

### 3.7 Design Summary

The research for this project consisted of several stages as shown in Table 3.0 below.

Table 3.0

#### *Research Process Summary*

Stage	Activity	Associated Tasks
1	Pre-design preparation	Reviewing literature, synthesizing literature, analysing research instruments used in similar research projects
2	Consolidation of Background	Defining the research problem, Literature review drafts, designing the research methodology
3	Preparation of formal instruments (Survey & Focus Group questions)	Constructing Survey and Focus Group instruments, writing covering letter to parents/guardians
4	Ethics Clearance	Completing necessary forms with supporting documentation contacting College Principal, BCE and HREC
5	Distribution of Parent/Guardian consent forms	Informing Year 12 cohort of research project, distributing forms, collecting signed forms from participants, administratively organising completion of survey and focus group
6	Completing of Survey and conducting of Focus Group discussion	Organising the physical environment and facilitating completion of survey and focus group discussion
7	Writing up outcomes and findings	Analysing data in view of Literature Review
8	Finalizing Thesis	Editing and Presenting document

### 3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to explore the relationship between phenomenological methodologies and the potential for student meaning-making in the post-compulsory subject, *Study of Religion* at a Catholic co-educational College. This chapter has presented the methodology employed by the researcher (case-study) to gather data via a Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group discussion. The following chapter will present data gathered by the researcher at Greene College via the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group discussion. This data was organised to address the central problem at the heart of this investigation – that student difficulty in meaning-making may be connected to the employment of phenomenological methodologies to teach *Study of Religion*.

## **CHAPTER 4**

This Chapter consists of a presentation of the data collected at Greene College from a Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group discussion as outlined in Chapter three. The data was analysed by the researcher and presented in tabular form. The data collecting instruments referred to in this Chapter are located in the Appendices. Key issues arising out of data gathered from the sample group have enabled the researcher to do the following: describe the connection between phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making as experienced by some students at Greene College enrolled in *Study of Religion*.

## 4.0 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

*Research is communication and as such is contingent upon the process of communication between the researcher and respondent ((Lamnek, 1998).*

### 4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the connection between student difficulty to make meaning in *Study of Religion* in a post-modern context and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. The following analysis has illuminated the nature of the relationship between these two variables, and provided a framework, which is explored further in Chapters five and six, for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

### 4.2 Design of Research

As detailed in Chapter three, this research project has utilized a Case-study approach in order to organise and manage this research. The data has been gathered from Year 12 students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The two data collecting instruments used were a Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group discussion. The key issues raised by the sample group enabled the researcher to describe the connection between phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making as experienced by some students at Greene College enrolled in *Study of Religion*. This connection between the two variables measured, phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making, has been presented in four parts. These four parts are as follows: Survey data, Survey data analysis, Focus Group data and Focus Group data analysis.

### 4.3 Survey Data

In order to describe the connection between phenomenological methodologies being employed at Greene College and the potential for student meaning-making, survey data was organised into three categories. These three categories have been listed below:

1. Student perceptions of *Study of Religion* at Greene College (Whole sample group)
2. Student perceptions of *Study of Religion* at Greene College according to gender
3. Student perceptions of *Study of Religion* at Greene College according to subject choice.

#### 4.3.1 Survey Results

Survey data, presented according to the three categories above, has been organised into a series of Tables. In order to understand the significance of this data, an explanation of

the survey questions and how they were analysed has been provided before the presentation of this data.

#### *4.3.1.1 Cross-sectional survey.*

A cross-sectional Survey asked respondents five questions (See Appendix 1). The first two questions established the two background variables to the study – gender and subject choice. The third question was designed to elicit data relating to the second variable – the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* when phenomenological methodologies are largely employed. It sought from participants, data relating to their current experience of *Study of Religion*. The fourth question was designed to elicit data that could be used by the researcher to describe the degree to which post-modern methodologies in *Study of Religion* could enhance the potential for student meaning-making at Greene College. This fourth question sought from participant's data relating to what students thought *Study of Religion* should be like if it was to better construct meaning for them.

With regard to the choice of words/phrases that students could use to respond to questions three and four, a list of twenty descriptors was provided for them. Students were limited to choosing words/phrases from these two lists. Students could choose from a list of twenty descriptors for questions three and four (See Appendix 1). This enabled the researcher to make clearer links between the potential for student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies. This was possible because the words/phrases were derived from the literature review.

#### *4.3.2 Organization of Data*

The data gathered from the Cross-sectional survey has been presented in three sets of tables. The sequencing of this data in three sets of tables is presented below in Figure 4.



Table 4.0
1) Current student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> is like (Whole sample Group)
2) Student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> should be like (Whole sample Group)
Table 4.1
1) Current student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> is like according to Gender
2) Student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> should be like according to Gender
Table 4.2
1) Current student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> is like according to Subject Choice
1) Student perceptions of what <i>Study of Religion</i> should be like according to Subject Choice

*Figure 4. Data sequence.*

The numbers 1-10 in the first column of Tables 4, 4.1, and 4.2 entitled Student perceptions correspond to the two sets of descriptors presented in Appendix 1. However, the particular descriptors that these numbers correspond to change according to which question from the survey instrument the data is addressing:

- The second column in Tables 4, 4.1 and 4.2 address Question 3 from the Cross-sectional survey - Current student perceptions of what *Study of Religion* is like (See Appendix 1: Descriptors 1-10 - Column A for correct meanings).
- The third column in Tables 4, 4.1 and 4.2 addresses Question 4 - Student perceptions of what *Study of Religion* should be like (See Appendix 1: Descriptors 11-20 - Column B for correct meanings).

Table 4.0

*What Study of Religion is like – Whole Sample Group*

Student perceptions	Current student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like (Survey Question 3)	Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like (Survey Question 4)
	Number of Students	Number of Students
1	9	10
2	2	10
3	6	29
4	16	16
5	23	19
6	18	7
7	7	14
8	27	22
9	14	22
10	17	21

Table 4.1

*What Study of Religion should be like – Whole Sample Group*

Student perceptions	Current student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Gender (Survey Question 3)		Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Gender (Survey Question 4)	
	Number of Students		Number of Students	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	4	4	7	3
2	0	2	3	7
3	1	5	13	13
4	8	7	10	6
5	10	12	7	12
6	5	14	5	12
7	3	14	8	6
8	11	16	7	15
9	4	10	8	14
10	8	8	9	11

Table 4.2

*Student Perceptions of Study of Religion according to Subject Choice*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Humanities</b>										
Number of Students	3	2	3	3	8	7	1	4	7	7
<b>Maths/Science</b>										
Number of Students	2	1	2	4	2	6	1	4	3	5
<b>Creative Arts</b>										
Number of Students	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	1	2
Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Humanities</b>										
Number of Students	2	4	9	5	7	1	0	7	4	7
<b>Maths/Science</b>										
Number of Students	2	2	7	6	7	3	7	5	3	2
<b>Creative Arts</b>										
Number of Students	0	1	2	1	2	0	1	2	2	3

*4.3.3 Survey Question 5*

Question 5 of the Cross-sectional survey asked students to suggest ways in which *Study of Religion* could be improved to make it more meaningful and relevant. These comments in response to question 5 are presented below (See Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

*Student Responses to Question 5*

General Comments by students in relation to Question 5	Number of Students
There needs to be more focus on other religions beside Christianity	13
Topics need to be chosen that are more relevant to youth	15
More use of technology required in Study of Religion	1
Lessons and assessment needs to be more multimodal	3
More practical experiences need to be incorporated (Excursions, contact with social outreach programs)	15
Subject content needs to include other views and perspectives on issues	10
More emphasis needs to be placed on the essence or philosophy underlying religion	1
More technology needs to be used (For example, computers and power point)	1
Study of Religion should not be compulsory	5

#### 4.4 Focus Group

Key responses from five students who comprised the Focus Group are presented below (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

##### *Student Responses from the Focus Group Discussion*

Current experience of Study of Religion	Number of students
Strong emphasis on writing	5
The welcoming of student opinions and the freedom to critique religions lacking	5
There is the freedom in the classroom to critique religion	1
Subject is too theoretical and needs to be more practical	5
<u>What Study of Religion should be like</u>	<u>Number of students</u>
Stronger emphasis on multimodal forms of assessment	5
Computer technology and skills need to be utilised more often	2
More opportunity for classroom discussion and critique of religion	4
Lessons need to be more practical	5
More opportunity to use creative/artistic skills desirable	1

#### 4.5 Survey Data Analysis: Student Perceptions

The data presented in the three sets of Tables above has provided a description of current perceptions of students in Year 12 enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. An analysis of this data was then completed in order to establish patterns or trends. The patterns identified by the researcher have provided some direction for the future on how to feasibly enhance student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The word “significant” is used to identify that statistically approximately a third or more of the sample population of students is being referred to.

##### *4.5.1 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like: Whole sample group*

Student Perception 8 and Student Perception 5 attracted the highest student response rate as characteristics reflecting the current experience of year 12 students in *Study of*

*Religion* (See Table 4a). Similarly attracting a high response rate was Student Perception 6, which ranked third highest. A significant proportion of students identified Student Perception 10 as a factor in their current experience of *Study of Religion* (See Table 4a).

Table 4a

*Student Perceptions 5, 6, 8 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 5 Non-judgemental of other religion's beliefs	Student Perception 6 Topics largely reflect Christianity	Student Perception 8 I study religion because it is compulsory	Student Perception 10 To do well you need to be a good writer
Number of Students	23	18	27	17

*4.5.2 Current Student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like: Whole sample group*

Student perception 3 attracted a high student response rate. Student perceptions 8 and 9 were also significant. Also attracting a strong student response was Student perception 10 (See Table 4b).

Table 4b

*Student Perceptions 3, 8, 9 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 3 Relevant	Student Perception 8 Topics include all religions equally	Student Perception 9 Practical	Student Perception 10 Topics allow students to be creative
Number of students	29	22	22	21

## 4.6 Student Perceptions according to Gender

*4.6.1 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like at Greene College according to Gender*

The student response rate to Student perceptions 3, 6, 8 and 9 reflected a significant difference between males and females at Green College regarding their current experience of *Study of Religion*. A higher proportion of females consistently indicated that these perceptions reflected their current experience in comparison to males (See Table 4.1a below).

Table 4.1a

*Student Perceptions 3, 6, 8 and 9*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 3 Discourages critique of religious truths	Student Perception 6 Topics largely reflect Christianity	Student Perception 8 I study religion because it is compulsory	Student Perception 9 Theoretical
Males	1	5	11	4
Females	5	14	16	10

The difference in proportion between males and females regarding these particular Student perceptions is not commensurate to the number of males to females surveyed (21 males to 24 females). Consequently, this result invites further investigation.

#### *4.6.2 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Gender*

Student Perceptions 1, 4 and 6 attracted a higher student response rate among male students in comparison to female students (See Table 4.1b below).

Table 4.1b

*Student Perceptions 1, 4 and 6*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 1 My views on religion are welcome	Student Perception 4 Assessment is multimodal	Student Perception 6 Utilises current technology
Males	7	10	5
Females	3	6	2

### 4.7 Student Perceptions according to Subject Choice

#### *4.7.1 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Subject Choice*

The ratio of difference between Maths/Science students, Creative Arts students and Humanities students was largely inconsequential. A moderate difference between Humanities students and Maths/Science students is noted in relation to Student perceptions 5 and 9, however (See Table 4.2a below). Only three students out of the sample group of forty-five noted Creative Arts as a key subject area. This accounts for the low response rate generally by Creative Arts students to survey question 2.

Table 4.2a

*Student Perceptions 5 and 9*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 5 Non-judgemental of other religion's beliefs	Student Perception 9 Theoretical
<b>Humanities</b>		
Number of Students	8	7
<b>Maths/Science</b>		
Number of Students	2	3

#### 4.7.2 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Subject Choice

Student Perceptions 7 attracted a high response rate from Maths/Science students compared to Humanities students. Student Perceptions 10 attracted a high student response rate from Humanities students at Greene College in comparison to Maths/Science students (See Table 4.2b below). Otherwise, there was largely little difference between Maths/Science students and Humanities students. Only three students out of the sample group of 45 noted Creative Arts as a key subject area, which accounts for the low response rate generally by Creative Arts students to survey question 2.

Table 4.2b

*Student Perceptions 7 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 7 Draws on other subject areas eg. Science	Student Perception 10 Topics allow students to be creative
<b>Humanities</b>		
Number of Students	0	7
<b>Maths/Science</b>		
Number of Students	7	2

#### 4.7.3 Question 5

The following four comments came through very strongly in student responses to Question 5 on the survey questionnaire:

- 15 students (33%) suggested that there be more focus on other religions other than Christianity in work units designed for *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

- 15 students (33%) suggested that topics be chosen that bear more relevance to the lives of secondary students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College.
- 15 students (33%) suggested that learning experiences in *Study of Religion* be more practical with excursions to religious places of worship and involvement in social outreach programs.
- 10 students (22%) suggested that the *Study of Religion* curriculum at Greene College incorporate more effectively student views and opinions on religious topics discussed in the classroom. Furthermore, the suggestion was made that there needs to be more scope for critiquing other religious views and for inter-religious dialogue.

#### 4.8 Focus Group Data

A Focus Group discussion was conducted at Greene College subsequent to an analysis of the survey data by the researcher. Five Year 12 *Study of Religion* students from the sample group of forty-five students who completed the survey questionnaire comprised this group. The purpose of the Focus Group was to provide another opportunity, outside of the Cross-sectional survey, for respondents to furnish the researcher with additional data. During the Focus Group discussion, the researcher systematically explained the outcomes of an analysis of the survey results and then allowed students to respond to a set of three open-ended questions. Key student responses from this discussion are summarised below.

Student perceptions: what *Study of Religion* is like:

- All five students agreed with the survey that *Study of Religion* in Year 12 generally relies on written assessment over multimodal forms of assessment.
- Four students agreed with the survey that *Study of Religion* in Year 12 tends to encourage a classroom climate whereby a critiquing of the belief systems of other religions is not fostered. However, one student (Male) out of the five stated that in his experience he did feel free to critique particular responses by religion to certain social and moral issues.
- All five students agreed with the survey that *Study of Religion* in Year 12 tends to be more theoretical than practical.



Student perceptions: what *Study of Religion* should be like:

- All five students agreed with the survey that meaning making in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 could be improved by a stronger emphasis on other modes of assessment other than the written word. Two students (1 Male and 1 Female student) mentioned utilising computer technology and skills from other subject areas such as Art in assessing *Study of Religion*.
- Three students were in agreement with the survey that *Study of Religion* in Year 12 needs to accommodate more opportunity for the critique of values, beliefs and attitudes underpinning respective doctrinal frameworks particular to various religions. Two students argued that this is already happening to an extent but could be nurtured further in the classroom.
- All five students agreed with the survey that learning experiences provided for students in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 could be more practical and less theoretical in essence. According to two students in the focus group, better use of student creativity in the classroom and in assessment would help to address this need.

#### 4.9 Discussion of Results

Many key issues that emerged from this research provided a valuable insight into the needs of Year 12 students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. This offered a framework for reflecting upon the central problem under investigation in this research project: That students enrolled in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 are struggling to construct meaning. Consequently, the key issues identified in the presentation and analysis of this research reflected to a large extent those presented in the literature review. Therefore, a discussion of these results in the light of data reported in the literature review is presented in Chapter five.

## **CHAPTER 5**

This Chapter consists of detailed discussion of the results presented, described and analysed in Chapter four. The data obtained from participants via the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group offered a comprehensive insight into the perceptions of students in Year 12 enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. Furthermore this data has enabled the researcher to understand better the possible source of the problem that is the subject under investigation in the present study – that there may be a problem regarding student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* and this problem may be linked to the use of phenomenological methodologies.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION

*Because qualitative research occurs in the natural setting it is extremely difficult to replicate studies. Nevertheless, a well organised, complete persuasive presentation of procedures and results enhances external reliability...so that a judgement can be made about its replicability within the limits of the natural context (Wiersma, 1995, p. 222).*

### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the problem that secondary school students might have difficulties in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in a post-modern context. This Chapter identified that there was a connection between the two variables, student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. In addition to this, a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in *Study of Religion* at Greene College has been outlined.

### 5.2 Design of Research

This research project utilized a Case-study approach and gathered data from Year 12 students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The data collecting instruments used were a Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group discussion. This data has enabled the researcher to describe the connection between phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making at Greene College. Consequently, this Chapter discusses the nature of the relationship between these two variables in the light of key insights obtained from the literature review.

### 5.3 Summary of Results

Table 5 below provides a summary of results drawn from an analysis of the findings presented in Chapter four. Data obtained from participants via the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group has illustrated the centrality of the primary research question underpinning this study: Do educational, religious and philosophical underpinnings of *Study of Religion* assist students to make meaningful links between personal experience and religious theory and so construct meaning? Furthermore, this data has been linked to the key research sub-questions formulated to address the primary research question.

Table 5

*Linking Student Perceptions to Research Questions*

Current student perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Current student perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Link to Research Questions
<u>Research sub-question 1</u>		
It is compulsory so I study it	Students struggle to see the relevance of Religion to their life experience and methodology needs to address this issue	Current approaches to teaching Study of Religion, particularly phenomenological approaches, are no longer as effective in engaging student potential for meaning-making
<u>Research sub-question 2</u>		
An over emphasis on Christianity within the curriculum. Other religions beside Christianity require more emphasis	Topics included in the curriculum need to include all religions equally	Post-modern thinking challenges the Study of Religion curriculum to more effectively incorporate a study of all major world religions equally. This would arguably enhance the potential for student meaning-making in Study of Religion.
<u>Research sub-question 3</u>		
Study of Religion is too theoretical	Study of Religion needs to be more practical	Alternate methodologies could better engage student potential for meaning-making in Study of Religion. Discourse analysis and Multiliterate learning are feasible alternatives to current methodologies being employed.
<u>Research sub-question 3</u>		
Assessment is largely written and so students with well developed writing skills are advantaged	Assessment needs to be multi-modal	Alternate methodologies could better engage student potential for meaning-making in Study of Religion. Discourse analysis and Multiliterate learning are feasible alternatives to current methodologies being employed.

## 5.4 Discussion of Results

The following discussion links key trends that emerged from Chapter four to the literature review. Data was compared with current research reported in the literature review and the results of this comparison have arguably demonstrated the feasibility of this study. This was because key research questions that initially gave rise and impetus to the present

study were addressed via the data collected from the Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group.

#### 5.5 Cross-sectional Survey: Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like at Greene College - Whole sample group

##### 5.5.1 Student Perception 5

Students indicated that *Study of Religion* at Greene College (Student Perception 5) encouraged them to be non-judgemental toward other religions (See Table 5.1 below). This value of being “non-judgemental” can be linked to the use of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* at Greene College - the suspension of judgement or *epoche* is a key value underlying phenomenological methodologies generally (Husserl, 1983; Lovat, 2001). Phenomenology stresses the importance of not allowing cultural conditioning and presuppositions to bias one's analysis and assessment of religion (Habermas, 1985). The corollary of this is that when employing Smart's dimensional model students are encouraged to compare and describe religious differences but not to critique them. This may be due to Greene College's *Study of Religion* Work Program, which arguably privileges phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool over other methodologies. Consequently, students are arguably being guided by underlying methodologies to temporarily suspend judgement (*epoche*) regarding the assumptions, values, attitudes and beliefs presented by various world religions

##### 5.5.2 Student Perception 10

The student response rate to Student Perception 10 suggests a current emphasis on the written word in classroom teaching and assessment at Greene College over other types of literacies (See Table 5.1 below). This observation could indicate that a Multiliterate approach to teaching *Study of Religion* at Greene College could benefit a significant proportion of students. This may be due to the strong emphasis on the written word in class work and assessment currently being experienced by students (Luke, 2000; The New London Group, 2000). Most assessment tasks for *Study of Religion* in Year 12 at Greene College require a demonstration of extended writing skills. Five examples out of a total of six assessment items at Greene College in Year 12 (2005) involved some form of extended writing activity. These five assessment items were: Feature Article, Response to Stimulus (extended writing response), Essay (exam conditions), Research Assignment and an in class Written Assignment (exam conditions) (Greene College *Study of Religion* Work Program, 2002).

Table 5.1

*Student Perceptions 5 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 5 Non-judgemental of other religion's beliefs	Student Perception 10 To do well you need to be a good writer
Number of students	23	17

## 5.6 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like:

## Whole sample group

There was a significant student response rate to Student Perceptions 3, 8, 9 and 10 (See Table 5.2 below).

Table 5.2

*Student Perceptions 3, 8, 9 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 3 Relevant	Student Perception 8 Topics include all religions equally	Student Perception 9 Practical	Student Perception 10 Topics allow students to be creative
Number of students	29	22	22	21

5.6.1 *Student Perceptions 3*

The response rate to Student Perception 3 (64%) may indicate that students are struggling to find personal meaning (relevance) in *Study of Religion* currently (See Table 5.2). Consequently, curriculum changes that address this concern might be most appropriate at Greene College. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence gleaned by the researcher supports this datum. Year 12 *Study of Religion* students have on several occasions (2003-2005) remarked to the researcher, that the subject content lacks personal relevance. Data obtained from an earlier survey conducted in 1999 of students at Greene College in Year 12 *Study of Religion*, clearly identified "relevance" as a major issue for students (Muller, 2000). On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being *Good* and 5 being *Poor*, 54.7 % of students surveyed identified 5 in response to the following question: Is *Study of Religion* relevant to their lives?

A further 26.4% identified 4. Only 18.9 % of students identified between descriptors 1-3 as indicative of their experience regarding the relevance of *Study of Religion* (See Appendix 4). Consequently, 81.1% of students in 1999 identified very clearly their perception that *Study of Religion* lacked personal relevance. The present study suggests that this perception has not changed greatly over the last six years. It is feasible that Discourse-

based methodologies may be better positioned to assist more effective student meaning-making as they more clearly reflect post-modern shifts in education, religious studies and philosophical linguistics. Discourse-based methodologies provide a framework for evaluating texts and empower students to identify the degree to which texts reflect mainstream culture with its inherent biases (Grassie, 1997). Discourse-based methodologies encourage a critical approach to learning. Furthermore, such methodologies challenge students to critically reflect upon popular culture. Youth culture as mediated through music, film and computer technology, for example, is an attractive focus for students to critically assess multi-media texts via Discourse-based methodologies.

#### 5.6.2 Student Perceptions 8

A significant response rate to Student Perception 8 (48%) suggest that students would arguably experience *Study of Religion* as more relevant if no single Religion, including the home tradition of the school, in this case Christianity, were given more consideration than others when designing the subject curriculum (See Table 5.2). As discussed previously, the response to Student Perception 3 that *Study of Religion* at Greene College lacks “relevance” may not only be due to “How” the subject is taught but also in part to “What” is taught. Therefore there may be a case for arguing that too much emphasis is placed on the home tradition at Greene College while not enough emphasis is placed on other religions, especially in elective units (*Study of Religion* Syllabus, 2001).

The home tradition of Greene College is the Catholic Christian tradition. When data was being collected for this study at Greene College it was noted that 62% of all students enrolled in the College were registered as Roman Catholic. In the Year 12 cohort 72% of students enrolled were registered as Roman Catholic. The response to Student Perception 3 suggests that there may be a genuine interest in religion among secondary school students at Greene College that is not always nurtured due to an over emphasis on the home tradition. This could be because a significant group of students enrolled in Year 12 *Study of Religion* are not affiliated with the home tradition of the College (28%) and for those who are they may not be familiar with it.

For the former group, a focus on the home tradition in *Study of Religion* is less likely to engender interest and participation. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that a large proportion of students who are registered as Roman Catholic do not attend Church on a regular basis. Therefore, a wider focus on religion in society within the *Study of Religion* curriculum could enhance student potential for meaning-making at Greene College. Anecdotal evidence has suggested that student interest is often better engaged

when opportunities are given to explore a religion outside of the College's home tradition. This has been especially noticeable when visiting a religious place of worship as part of a subject excursion. In addition to opportunities for direct observation a Multilithic approach, which presupposes a focus on religious plurality in society, would feasibly assist students to discover greater meaning in *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

A Multilithic approach is better positioned in a post-modern context to assist students to make meaning for the following reasons: The multi-cultural make-up of Australian society whereby learning about other religious traditions is perceived by students as more in touch with the "real world" beyond the school/college could better engage student potential for meaning-making. Furthermore, the understanding presented by a Multilithic approach of *why* there is such a diversity of religious meaning systems in the world may better fit a post-modern context. This could be because of the ability inherent within a Multilithic approach to intellectually accommodate religious plurality without attempting to rationalise religious difference.

Adopting the Multilithic model for understanding the nature of religious difference in society may be a more authentic response to post-modern developments. The Multilithic model also facilitates and better accommodates the use of Discourse-based methodologies, similar to those underpinning the *English Syllabus* (2001). This could be because Discourse-based methodologies operate from the same assumption as the *English Syllabus* (2001) - that meaning systems are socially constructed and reflect the assumptions, values, attitudes and beliefs of dominant or mainstream culture. Consequently, the critical interface between the student of religion and the particular religion s/he may be studying could be better achieved.

*Study of Religion* students could be guided to understand that truth/meaning communicated through religious texts is culturally and historically conditioned and subject to interpretation (Rorty, 1979; Siejk, 1999). As a result religious pluralism could be identified as particular socio-cultural representations of a response to life's ultimate questions. The language of Discourse analysis could provide students with an analytical tool to understand religious texts as products of dominant culture that may privilege particular values while silencing other values not consonant with dominant culture. Consequently, the degree to which students are enabled to understand the nature of religious difference could enhance potential for meaning-making, especially given Australia's multicultural identity.



### 5.6.3 Student Perceptions 9 and 10

The response rate to Student Perceptions 9 (48%) and 10 (47%) would lend support to the notion that a Multiliterate approach to learning could enhance student potential for meaning-making at Greene College (See Table 5.2). Students identified that *Study of Religion* lessons need to utilise creativity and practicality to a greater extent; this may be achieved better via a Multiliterate approach to learning. This could be due to a wider range of semiotic systems being available to students within the classroom/school when a Multiliterate model of learning is employed. A Multiliterate model of learning would make available to *Study of Religion* students a host of language resources that while communicating meaning in the present are understood to be constantly changing as a result of technological developments. For example, the language resource or textual type of Computer technology is always in a state of flux with resources being developed at such a rapid rate that remaining technologically current is an ongoing challenge.

Due to the evolutionary nature of technological development, students would grow not only in their ability to uncover meaning within religious texts through applying Discourse-based methodologies, but also in their ability to use semiotic resources that are at the cutting edge of technology such as computer based technologies. As the New London Group (2000) postulates, the printed written word is no longer the dominant medium or language of intelligible communication in education. As a result pedagogy is challenged to incorporate other semiotic resources that better equip students in a post-modern context to construct meaning in *Study of Religion*. A Multiliterate approach to pedagogy could assist this transition.

### 5.6.4 Summary

In summary, a significant proportion of students (64% of those surveyed) identified Student Perception 3 (relevance) as a significant factor that needs to be addressed in the delivery of subject matter in *Study of Religion*. This suggests that change does need to occur if students at Greene College are to continue to make meaning in *Study of Religion*. The literature review suggests that the relevance of *Study of Religion* in secondary education may better be promoted through adopting Discourse-based methodologies supported by a Multiliterate approach to student learning. This may be because Discourse-based methodologies supported by a Multiliterate approach better addresses trends in education and religious studies usually associated with post-modernism. Consequently, student perceptions, as outlined in the present study, could be constructively addressed at Greene College through well-considered methodological changes.

## 5.7 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Gender

### 5.7.1 Student Perceptions 3

Female students have identified more so than male students that *Study of Religion* discourages the critique of religious truths and the use of higher order reasoning skills (Student Perception 3). This observation could suggest that current methodologies being employed reflect the phenomenological characteristic of *epoche* regarding the suspension of value judgements with regard to religion (Flood, 1999). The fact that female students have highlighted this more so than male students is unusual given that gender studies reveal that male students demonstrate better reasoning skills compared to female students (Marsh, 1996, p.176). Therefore, one might expect that male students would be more attuned to a lack of being challenged to critique and reason within *Study of Religion* than female students.

### 5.7.2 Student Perceptions 6

Female students have emphasised more so than male students the focus on Christianity in the curriculum over other religious traditions (Student Perception 6). Consequently, a curriculum that more evenly incorporated a study of other religious traditions alongside Christianity may better engage the potential for meaning-making, particularly amongst female students (See Table 5.3 below).

### 5.7.3 Student Perception 8

Female students have identified more emphatically than male students that the study of religion in some form is compulsory in Catholic schools (Student perception 8) (See Table 5.3 below). If students are enrolled in *Study of Religion* only because the study of religion in some form is compulsory in Catholic schools, then potential for student meaning-making may be affected. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students who feel forced to do a subject because it is compulsory are more likely to exhibit off-task and disruptive behaviours.

## 5.8 Unexpected Outcome

### 5.8.1 Student Perception 9

An unexpected result was the fact that female students identified more strongly than male students the experience of *Study of Religion* as theoretical (Student Perception 9) (See Table 5.3 below). This result was unexpected as research indicates that male students would most likely be expected to highlight this characteristic more emphatically than female students. This is because male students generally learn more effectively in kinaesthetic ways than female students. In 2002 the Standing Committee on Education and Training in the Australian House of Representatives tabled its report on the education of boys. The report stated that “active learning as [a] means ...to develop relationships with teachers and to get boys to engage with learning” has been successful in several Australian schools (Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002, pp.77, 83). Consequently, it is arguable that male students would benefit less from purely theoretical tasks and may need opportunities for learning that involves movement and physical involvement (See Table 5.3 below). Therefore, one might expect a stronger response from male students that *Study of Religion* is more theoretical than practical at Greene College.

Reasons for this outcome could be simply that some female students, like some male students, prefer more kinaesthetic learning experiences. Consequently, the traditional stereotype of male students having a predominantly kinaesthetic learning style and female students a predominantly visual learning style is challenged (Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). Gender Studies have indicated that male students perform better on reasoning (mathematical and logical) and spatial skills than female students while female students score higher on verbal and interpersonal/intrapersonal skills than male students (Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002, p.77-78). Other than this, gender studies reveal little else in terms of particular learning needs based on gender (Marsh, 1996, p.176). The learning problems that arise in relation to gender are often the result of discriminatory practices in schools, which the scope of this study is unable to address. For example, a discriminatory practice in co-educational schools could be better financial support for male sports teams compared to female sports teams.

A response to this unexpected outcome could be to provide learning support to students based on specific individual needs rather than on perceived stereotype needs (Marsh, 1996, p.176). Learning styles are arguably more significant than gender differences when designing learning experiences for students in *Study of Religion*. However, teaching strategies could be employed that are aimed at reducing gender stereotyping (Marsh, 1996, p.178).

Table 5.3

*Student Perceptions 3, 6, 8 and 9*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 3 Discourages critique of religious truths	Student Perception 6 Topics largely reflect Christianity	Student Perception 8 I study religion because it is compulsory	Student Perception 9 Theoretical
Males	1	5	11	4
Females	5	14	16	10

### 5.9 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like according to Gender

*5.9.1 Student Perceptions 4 and 6*

Differences in perceptions between female students and male students are not overly significant regarding multi-modality and the use of current technology in *Study of Religion* at Greene College (See Table 5.4). However, it would appear that generally male students more so than female students could benefit from a Multiliterate approach to learning. This is because multi-modality (Student perception 4) and the incorporation of current technology (student perception 6) in the classroom gained a stronger response from male students than female students (See Table 5.4 below). This result reinforces the sex stereotype discussed earlier of boys responding better to more practical and kinaesthetic learning experiences than girls. A Multiliterate approach could effectively incorporate multi-modality and current technology into student learning experiences due to the wider range of semiotic systems at the disposal of this approach (Kress, 2000; New London Group, 2000)

Table 5.4

*Student Perceptions 1, 4 and 6*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 1 My views on religion are welcome	Student Perception 4 Assessment is multimodal	Student Perception 6 Utilises current technology
Males	7	10	5
Females	3	6	2

## 5.10 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like according to Subject Choice

### 5.10.1 Student Perception 5

Evidence suggests that there is generally a stronger connection between student meaning-making and phenomenological methodologies among Year 12 students in *Study of Religion* who are also enrolled in Humanities subjects than students enrolled in Maths/Science subjects. A higher response rate to Student Perception 5 – being non-judgemental of other religions – by Humanities students was evident (See Table 5.5 below). Moderate differences only in response rates between groupings of students with two or more subjects in either the Humanities (History, Study of Religion, Legal Studies) or Maths/Science (Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Maths A, B, C) areas were discernible. It is arguable that Humanities' students experience the value of *epoche* distinctive of phenomenology in *Study of Religion* more keenly than Maths/Science students at Greene College (student perception 5). This could be due to Maths/Science subjects emphasising objectivity more so than Humanities subjects when arriving at conclusions. Consequently, Maths/Science students may be less likely to critique religious values, attitudes and beliefs, which presuppose a higher level of subjectivity on the part of the researcher.

### 5.10.2 Student Perception 9

A Multiliteracies approach to student learning would arguably benefit Humanities students more than Maths/Science students enrolled in *Study of Religion* (See Table 5.5). Humanities students experience *Study of Religion* as more theoretical than practical (student perception 9). Therefore, the inclusion of other semiotic systems in addition to the grammar of languages in student learning experiences could assist Humanities' students particularly, to make meaning (New London Group, 2000). Among these other semiotic systems could be those based on computer technology, film and photography. These genres may have particular appeal to adolescents of today who belong to a culture where the printed written word is no longer the dominant medium of communication (Kress, 2000).

Table 5.5

*Student Perceptions 5 and 9*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion is like	Student Perception 5 Non-judgemental of other religion's beliefs	Student Perception 9 Theoretical
<b>Humanities</b>		
Number of Students	8	7
<b>Maths/Science</b>		
Number of Students	2	3

5.11 Current Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like  
according to Subject Choice

*5.11.1 Student Perceptions 7*

There was little variation in responses between students from different subject areas in regard to survey Questions 3 and 4 generally (See Table 5.6). However, Student Perception 7 (drawing on other subject areas), which supports a cross-curricular approach to *Study of Religion*, particularly appealed to Maths/Science students. Consequently, for students in the Maths and Sciences, inclusion of content matter particular to other subject areas in *Study of Religion*, would arguably enhance student-meaning making (See Table 5.6 below). A Multiliterate approach to student learning could facilitate cross-curricular resourcing due to its emphasis on multimodality (variety of language resources) (Kress, 2000).

*5.11.2 Student Perception 10*

Humanities students generally favoured the inclusion of more “creative” learning experiences in *Study of Religion* (See Table 5.6 below). A Multiliterate approach to student learning could particularly assist Humanities’ students in this regard as it enables them to draw on a variety of language resources. Among these could be those resources associated with the creative arts such as music, art, dance and drama.

Table 5.6

*Student Perceptions 7 and 10*

Student Perceptions of what Study of Religion should be like	Student Perception 7 Draws on other subject areas eg. Science	Student Perception 10 Topics allow students to be creative
Humanities		
Number of Students	0	7
Maths/Science		
Number of Students	7	2

## 5.12 Question 5

The suggestions made by students in response to Question 5 in the survey responses arguably reinforced the validity of the central problem at the heart of this study: that students enrolled in *Study of Religion* in Year 12 are struggling to construct meaning. This study has argued that student problems in meaning-making may be due to the dominant methodologies being employed at Greene College to teach *Study of Religion*. These dominant methodologies have been shown to have their provenance in phenomenology. Conclusions that emerged out of the literature review were consistent with student responses to Question 5 on the survey instrument (See Table 5.7 below).

Table 5.7

*Comparing Student Responses with the Literature Review*

QUESTION 5 Student Suggestions	Discussion	Comparison with Literature review
15 students (33%) suggested that there be more focus on other religions other than Christianity in work units designed for Study of Religion at Greene College	The emphasis on Christianity in work units in Year 12 over other religious traditions could be contributing to difficulty in student meaning making	A Multilithic framework for studying religion could support an equal emphasis on other religious traditions beside Christianity (McTernan, 2002, Hartshorne, 2001)
15 students (33%) suggested that topics be chosen that bear more relevance to the lives of secondary students enrolled in Study of Religion at Greene College	Topics chosen for Study of Religion, which are strongly informed by phenomenological methodologies, are arguably struggling to find a place of relevance and meaning within the lives of students	Discourse-based methodologies may be better positioned to help students construct meaning in Study of Religion (Flood, 1999; Kay, 1997)
15 (33%) students suggested that learning experiences in Study of Religion be more practical with excursions to religious places of worship and involvement in social outreach programs	Study of Religion may be too theoretical and does not always incorporate enough opportunities for practical experiences that could render the subject more meaningful and relevant within the lives of students	A Multiliterate approach to learning could encourage the accessing of other semiotic systems including more practical learning experiences (Kress, 2000; Luke, 2000)
10 students (22%) suggested that the Study of Religion curriculum incorporate more effectively student views and opinions on religious topics discussed in the classroom. Furthermore, the suggestion was made that there be more scope for critiquing other religious views and for student-student/teacher dialogue.	Study of Religion at Greene College does not encourage enough, student views on Religion and opportunities for them to critique Religion in an informed and balanced manner.	Discourse-based methodologies may be better positioned to facilitate a critical approach to understanding religion. Reflection Literacy (multiliterate model) could further assist in this (Kress, 2000; Slembrouck, 2003).

## 5.13 Focus Group Data

Data from the focus group was triangulated with data from the literature review and survey questionnaire. Consequently, this increased the validity and reliability of the researcher's findings drawn from the survey data analysis. In addition to this the validity of the central problem identified by the present study - that there may be a connection between student difficulty to construct meaning in the post-compulsory subject, *Study of Religion* and



phenomenological methodologies - was strongly supported. The diagram below presents a brief summary of results based upon a triangulation of this data (See Fig.5 below).

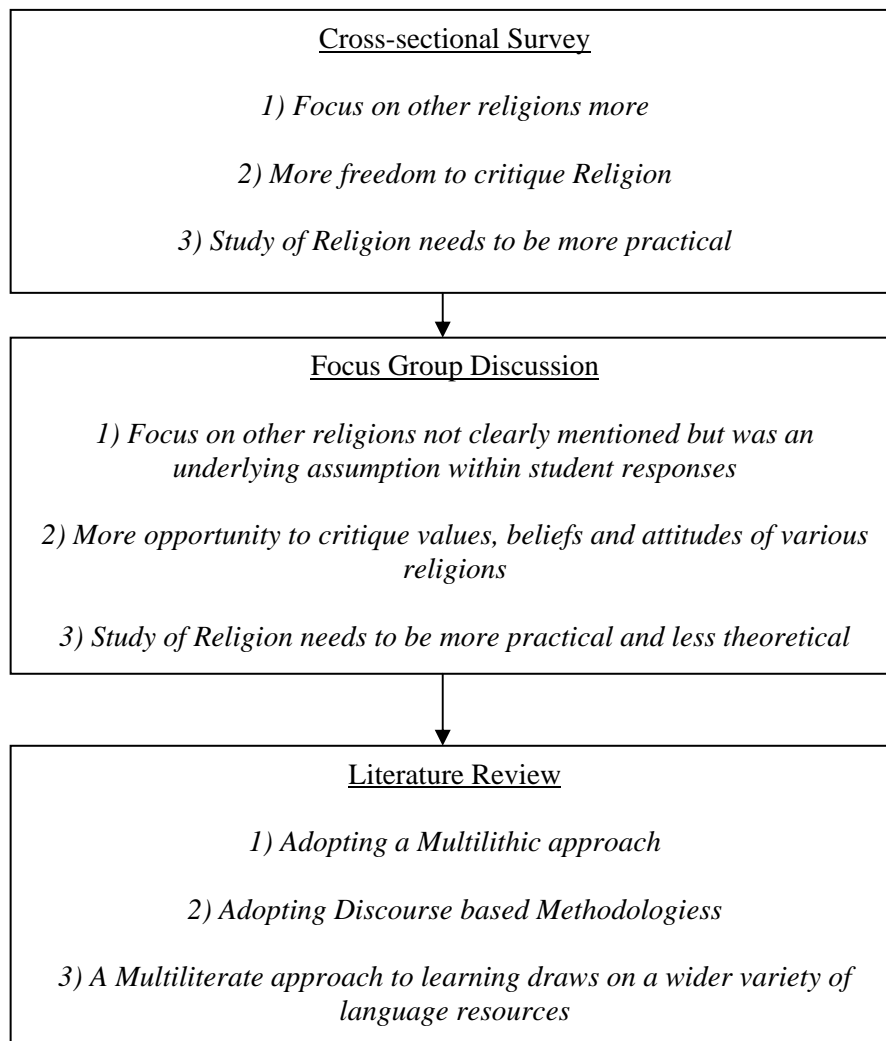


Figure 5. Validating Data.

#### 5.14 Conclusion

This study has presented research investigating the link between phenomenological methodologies and the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* at Greene College. The present study represents one of few studies, known to the researcher that has been completed whereby the connection between phenomenological methodologies and the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* has been explored. In line with current research discussed in the literature review this study has revealed a significant connection between the two variables: phenomenological methodologies and the potential for student meaning-making. The results of the present study are consistent with recent studies by Flood (1999), Barnes (2001) and Unsworth (2002). Therefore, replication of the present study could be justified in other secondary school contexts where *Study of Religion* is offered.

Other secondary school contexts might include Roman Catholic Church schools both rural and urban, non-Catholic independent schools and also State run secondary schools. Such replication could test the generalisability of the results of the present study across other educational contexts. It is important to note that while this study has identified a connection between the two variables (phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making) it does not establish with certainty that phenomenological methodologies are the direct cause of student difficulties with meaning-making. While this study suggests that this may be the case further empirical research would need to be conducted in order to confirm a direct causal relationship. However, the results of this research do call into question the emphasis placed on phenomenological methodologies in the *Study of Religion* Syllabus (2001). Furthermore, it calls into question the preference given to it over other methodologies such as Discourse-based methodologies in some College/School work programs in *Study of Religion*.

#### 5.15 Summary

This Chapter has identified that a connection may exist between student difficulty in meaning-making and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. As anticipated the present study has illuminated further the nature of the relationship between these two variables and provided a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in *Study of Religion*. Consequently, Chapter six has identified key issues raised by the present study and presents recommendations for the future that may enhance student potential for meaning-making in *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

## **CHAPTER 6**

This Chapter has examined the implications of key issues that have emerged out of the data analysis presented in Chapter four and subsequent discussion of that data analysis presented in Chapter five. The connection described between student difficulties with meaning-making and the use of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* at Greene College have suggested the following: that phenomenological methodologies may need to be re-evaluated as an effective tool for teaching religion in a post-modern context.

## 6.0 CONCLUSIONS

*Schools that, under the label of religious education, present only objective information about a religious worldview or worldviews do not offer optimal conditions for dynamic identity formation. Knowledge should be positioned in a functional relationship to religious experiences ( Miedema, 2000, p.296).*

### 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the connection between student difficulty in meaning-making in *Study of Religion* in a post-modern context and the employment of phenomenological methodologies as a pedagogical tool for teaching *Study of Religion*. In response to the data analysis and discussion presented in Chapters four and five respectively, this Chapter provides a framework for the consideration of possible changes to current methodologies being employed in the *Study of Religion* classroom. However, it is important to note that these suggested changes are a response to particular interpretations of the research data by the researcher. A multitude of other possible interpretations of the data could be made based upon other variables such as particular teachers' pedagogies and/or an absence of grounded opportunities for application of phenomenological methodologies in the lives of students. Unfortunately the scope of this study did not allow for a multitude of other possible variables to be tested.

### 6.2 Design of research

This research project utilized a Case-study approach in order to orchestrate the present study. The data was gathered from Year 12 students enrolled in *Study of Religion* at a co-educational Catholic secondary college in the Brisbane Archdiocese. The primary data collecting instruments used were a Cross-sectional survey and Focus Group. Students who participated in the research raised key-issues that assisted the researcher to describe the connection between phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

While a causal connection between phenomenological methodologies and student meaning-making has not been established with any certainty, data suggests a relationship between these two variables arguably exists. Consequently, a series of concrete strategies have been recommended by the researcher to address the central problem of student meaning-making within *Study of Religion* at Greene College.

### 6.3 Key issues

The following section is a summary of five key issues that have emerged out of data gathered and analysed within the present study. These five key issues are as follows:

Phenomenology, Discourse analysis, Multiliteracies, Multi-religious curriculum and the Classroom context

### 6.3.1 Phenomenology

The connection between student difficulties with meaning-making and the use of phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* at Greene College suggests that phenomenological methodologies may need to be re-evaluated as an effective tool for teaching religion in a post-modern context. The results of the present study suggest that phenomenological methodologies may have become less effective in assisting students to make meaning. This may be due to intellectual paradigm shifts in education, philosophy and religion that reflect trends usually associated with post-modernism.

#### 6.3.1.1 Phenomenology and adolescent development.

A major consideration for educationists when appraising phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* is the assumption that students are able to strip away personal prejudice. It is presumed that students can vicariously enter into the experience of others in order to better understand and critique a particular religious tradition. It is envisaged that this skill will enable students to understand a religion from the perspective of an insider rather than an outsider. According to Lovat (2005) the skill of stripping away personal prejudice is a prerequisite if phenomenological methodologies are going to be effective tools for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. Lovat argues that only when one has shed such personal prejudice and presupposition is one able to critically assess from an informed perspective particular religions. Lovat (2005, p.47) refers to this critical assessment skill as 'eidetic science'. Research suggests that this ability to strip away personal prejudice may not be sufficiently developed in some students in Year 11 and year 12 due to developmental deficiencies (Kay, 1997). Consequently, there are developmental constraints on student ability to engage higher cognitive functions such as those required for eidetic science.

### 6.3.2 Discourse Analysis

Data collected from Year 12 students at Greene College suggests that in *Study of Religion* more freedom needs to be allowed to discuss and critique religion. Consequently, Discourse-based methodologies may be better positioned to facilitate student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* by giving students a framework for appropriate religious critique. Discourse-based methodologies challenge students to understand religious texts as socially constructed and thereby selective in including certain values, attitudes and beliefs while excluding others. This type of methodology could more effectively

accommodate post-modern shifts in education whereby pluralism and multi-culturalism are a given.

### 6.3.3 Multiliteracies

Data gathered from students at Greene College enrolled in *Study of Religion* suggest that the subject should not give undue attention to the printed/hand written word when designing learning experiences and assessment. Data indicated that more scope for practical classroom activities in preference to a predominance of theoretical classroom activities be considered. The particular learning experiences made possible through a Multiliterate approach to student learning may better enable students to find relevance in *Study of Religion* at the practical level. This approach could be in preference to a traditional (modernist) approach to teaching *Study of Religion*, which stresses the importance of the written word over mixed textual forms. A Multiliterate approach would employ not only the grammar of languages but also the grammar of other semiotic systems such as computer-based technologies, photography and the creative arts. This approach may better address the diversity of learning needs and multiple intelligences presenting within the learning environment.

### 6.3.4 Multi-religious Curriculum

Data indicated that there was an over emphasis on Christianity within the curriculum at Greene College and that religions other than Christianity could be given more emphasis. Students of *Study of Religion* would arguably experience the subject as more meaningful if a variety of religious traditions were studied. This could mean that a stronger focus on other religious traditions needs to occur while disproportionate attention to the home tradition of the school may need to be avoided. While the religious tradition of a school needs to be emphasised, it may not be to the student's advantage if it is emphasised at the expense of representing accurately the multi-layered and multi-religious make up of society. Consequently, student potential for meaning-making may be enhanced if a multi-religious approach to *Study of Religion* was a guiding value when curriculum was being designed. Coupled with this observation, was the indication from data that students of *Study of Religion* have made available to them learning experiences that are more practical. Some students suggested that excursions to places of worship and social outreach involvement be incorporated into their repertory of learning experiences.

### 6.3.5 Finding Relevance in *Study of Religion*: The classroom context

64% of students surveyed identified that *Study of Religion* was lacking in relevance for them. This study suggested that educational strategies that may have been relevant and meaningful to students in a modern context could now be outdated and may struggle to

engage the interest of students in a post-modern context. This study is not arguing, however, that this perceived trend is due to post-modern methodologies being educationally superior to modern ones. This study is postulating that post-modern methodologies may be better positioned than modern methodologies to engage student potential for meaning-making. This could be the result of an altered socio-cultural and historical context and referencing framework wherein student meaning-making occurs. Consequently, while methodological reforms are important to consider, teaching strategies in the classroom may also need to be re-evaluated due to this changed socio-cultural and historical context where student meaning-making takes place.

#### 6.4 Recommending Strategies in Response to Key Issues

The following section is a response to the five key issues described above that have been distilled from data gathered and analysed within the present study: Phenomenology, Discourse analysis, Multiliteracies, Multi-religious curriculum and the Classroom context. A strong tradition of research as outlined in the literature review and data gathered via the present study suggest that *Study of Religion* Syllabi may need to better reflect post-modern shifts in educational methodology and practice. The relevance of religion and the potential for student meaning-making in *Study of Religion* could be increased if Discourse-based methodologies were employed. Secondly, the context wherein this methodological approach may be best supported and nurtured could be within a Multiliterate approach to student learning.

The Queensland Studies Authority subject *Study of Religion* may benefit from Syllabus changes to methodology similar to those, which have occurred in *English*. The *English* Syllabus (2001) has opted for a Discourse-based methodological framework. This framework clearly reflects the insights of Derrida (1982), especially in regard to the privileging (present-ing) and silencing (absent-ing) of values, attitudes and beliefs within texts. Texts are viewed as representations of reality due to being the product of social construction within a particular socio-cultural, historical and political context. *Study of Religion* could benefit from adopting a similar methodological framework that views all texts associated with religion as socially constructed and thereby a partial version of reality. Furthermore, *Study of Religion* could assist students to construct meaning more effectively if it was offered within the context of a multi-religious school as defined by Miedma (2000).

##### 6.4.1 Phenomenology

Over the last decade research has suggested that the use of phenomenological methodologies for teaching *Study of Religion* may be linked to a decline in student

potential for meaning-making (Barnes, 2001; Flood, 1999; Foster, 2004). Phenomenology is a product of modernism and facilitates meaning more effectively when situated within a post-enlightenment scientific referencing framework. The poles of objectivity and subjectivity need to be firmly in place within this referencing framework if phenomenological methodologies are to be effective in assisting students to construct meaning. Post-modernism has removed this scientific referencing framework and replaced it with another. Objective truth and empirical certainty have been supplanted by the impossibility of objective truth and de/construction of meaning.

Intellectual trends associated with post-modernism have opted for a referencing framework that argues for the impossibility of objectivity thereby dispelling the notion that objective truths and meanings exist. A referencing framework that identifies all meaning as socially constructed has replaced a scientific referencing framework that believed in the possibility of objective meaning/truth regardless of socio-cultural and historical context. Truth and meaning to the post-modern student can only ever be a representation of reality - a partial version of reality. Consequently, phenomenological methodologies that presuppose a scientific referencing framework are arguably struggling and may continue to struggle to assist students in the process of meaning-making.

It is important therefore, that other research be completed to explore this insight further in other secondary educational contexts where *Study of Religion* is offered. This will provide further opportunities to investigate the validity and reliability of the results of the present study. It may even in the long term, contribute to a groundswell of empirical research that could encourage educational authorities to consider a methodological change in *Study of Religion* in Queensland.

#### *6.4.1.1 Methodology and adolescent development.*

A major consideration for educationists when appraising phenomenological methodologies in *Study of Religion* is the assumption that students are able to strip away personal prejudice and vicariously enter into the experience of others. This is in order to appreciate the particular religious tradition that they may be studying at a particular time from the perspective of an insider rather than an outsider. Lovat (2005) stresses that only when one is able to suspend judgement is one in a position to then be able to reflect critically upon religion by making informed judgements and drawing well-reasoned conclusions. Research suggests that the skill associated with *epoche* - suspension of judgement - may not be sufficiently developed in some students by Year 11 and Year 12 (Kay, 1997; Piaget, 1959). Some students may not have reached an appropriate level of cognitive development for this to be possible.



Piaget identifies four stages in the cognitive development of children and adolescents. These four stages are the Sensori-motor stage (0-2 years), Preoperational stage (2-7 years), Concrete operational stage (7-11 years) and Formal operational stage (11 years and up) (Piaget, 1959). According to Kay (1997) some students may not have reached this fourth stage of cognitive development, the formal operational stage, by Year 11 and Year 12. Kay (1997) argues that this fourth stage of cognitive development is necessary for students to have attained in order for them to be able to fully engage with a phenomenological approach in *Study of Religion*. At this fourth stage of cognitive development students are judged to be able to use deductive reasoning processes and focus on 'what if' and 'what might be' questions (Kay, 1997; Marsh, 1996, pp.18-20). In order to suspend judgement students would require a level of maturity that enabled them to place themselves in a "what if" context. For example, "what if" they held no biases, presuppositions and prejudices toward a particular religion? "What might be" the impression they would receive of this religion and the quality of information able to be accessed by them? Consequently, a lack of this sort of cognitive development would frustrate the best efforts of some students to practice phenomenological methodology in the classroom. This inevitably would limit a student's potential for meaning-making. It could be argued that methodologies other than phenomenological methodologies may possess greater potential for student meaning-making in a post-modern context.

Secondly, some post-modern methodologies may not be as limited by student cognitive development as phenomenological methodologies are. Unfortunately, it is not possible within the scope of this research project to explore this further. However, research does suggest that there is a relationship between the two variables, phenomenological methodologies and meaning-making in *Study of Religion*. Therefore, current research does justify and this study recommends further empirical research be completed in order to test the strength of the connection between these two variables.

#### 6.4.2 Discourse Analysis

If Discourse-based methodologies were incorporated into *Study of Religion* Syllabi, religious texts could be analysed and more accurately understood within a post-modern context. Texts would be understood as present-ing ideas, which reflect particular socio-cultural and historical biases. Conversely, these same texts would be understood as absent-ing ideas that lay outside of mainstream values, attitudes and beliefs within a particular socio-cultural and historical context but which are nevertheless valid. For example, an analysis of Christianity within a *Study of Religion* lesson could take the following shape: Identifying how within the Roman Catholic tradition a feudal/hierarchical leadership structure that excludes women from ordained ministry has been privileged over

a democratic leadership structure that is arguably more inclusive of women. This leadership structure historically, has engendered moral and social ethics and doctrine that largely reflects male values, attitudes and beliefs. Consequently female values, attitudes and beliefs have been silenced to a large extent. An example of this can be found within the doctrine of God as a Trinity of persons.

The Roman Catholic Church has long held within its tradition the doctrine that there is one divine being or God but three divine persons within the one Godhead. The three persons of the Godhead are Father, Son and Holy Spirit. An immediate observation may be that within this Semitic model of the Godhead, there is a hierarchical structure based upon the traditional western model of the family – the father as head of the household and beneath him the male child or traditional heir to the father's land and possessions (Patriarchal model). The female persona within the Godhead is absent. Male values regarding power and beliefs regarding role differentiation have taken precedence over female values and beliefs. Catholic theologians have sought to redress this obvious imbalance by postulating that the Holy Spirit may be feminised and by over-emphasising the role of Mary the mother of Jesus within the Communion of Saints.

This type of analysis, which draws upon the insights of Discourse analysis, has the potential for increased student meaning-making. This may be due to the fact that a critique of religious truths as largely social constructions that reflect dominant culture is permissible. This critique does not elevate one set of religious values, attitudes and beliefs over others. Rather, such a critique seeks to describe the reality of religious culture more comprehensively. Furthermore, allowing students this freedom in a controlled learning environment may also increase the sense that students have of the relevance of religion to their lives. Students would be guided to understand that in applying Discourse-based methodologies that no single socio-cultural and historical manifestation of religion has a corner on religious truth. This obvious truism of post-modern thought could find expression in a socio-cultural and historical critique of religious truth. In conclusion, this level of critical analysis made available through Discourse-based methodologies, could be effectively supported by a Multiliterate approach to student learning.

#### *6.4.3 Multiliteracies*

If a *Study of Religion* Syllabus was to incorporate Multiliterate approaches to student learning then it is feasible to suggest that student meaning-making would be enhanced. The third level of critical analysis within a Multiliterate approach to student learning - Reflection Literacy - identifies the following: that all literacies are socially constructed and thereby selective in including (presenting) certain values, attitudes and beliefs while

excluding (absenting) others (Kress, 2000). Consequently, the literacy of the grammar of languages would no longer be dominant in *Study of Religion* class work and assessment. Instead, an array of other literacies would also be an available resource to the *Study of Religion* student. This would mean that *Study of Religion* could draw on semiotic systems that are both language based and not language based. Consequently, students could be empowered to utilise other verbal, visual and electronic codes in *Study of Religion* class work and assessment other than the written word.

This may assist in the development of multiple literacy skills, which would incidentally have cross-curricular relevance. For example, a particular lesson in *Study of Religion* could be designed around television footage of Pope John Paul II funeral mass in 2005. Students could be challenged to discern to what extent European values and beliefs regarding the nature and function of ritual have been privileged over other cultural expressions of ritual. From such a discussion students might be guided to design, in groups, a funeral ritual for Pope John Paul II that incorporates a variety of values and beliefs from non-European cultural contexts and to justify their choices with a brief rationale utilising the written word to do so. By allowing students the opportunity to draw on other semiotic systems, other than the written word, could lead to an increase of student interest in *Study of Religion*. This is because the value and importance of other semiotic resources, such as computer technology, are an assumption of popular youth culture and already hold appeal and meaning for adolescents regardless of the content associated with these resources.

Computer based literacies could be particularly pertinent to the *Study of Religion* learning environment. Assessment in *Study of Religion* could range from developing a website or computer game to creating a virtual ritual, place of worship or narrative. However, secondary education would need to restructure learning environments in order for some of these options to be viable. Schools would need to be able to offer adequate opportunities to students in order for them to access multiple literacy resources. Possibly the model used in primary schools of providing a variety of work stations within the one classroom setting could be a feasible alternative to the largely industrial model of education that continues to currently dominate secondary education learning environments. For example, Multiliterate learning would more effectively be accommodated, if in the same general learning space computer workstations, a reading and writing area and audio-visual reviewing area were made available. However, the possibility of this level of student resourcing is contingent upon economics. In an age that has arguably been influenced by the maxims of economic rationalism, resourcing and commitment to Multiliterate education at this level may not be forthcoming in the short term.

#### 6.4.4 Multi-religious Curriculum

Students identified that there was an over emphasis on Christianity within the curriculum and that other religions beside Christianity require more emphasis. Within Catholic schools and colleges in Queensland it is a given that Christianity, particularly the Catholic tradition of Christianity, will be privileged over other religious traditions within the curriculum. Therefore this study while recommending methodological change to *Study of Religion* also recommends change at a whole school or administrative level. However, this change at the whole school level would seriously challenge the privileging of the Catholic Christian tradition within Catholic schools and would demand a change in the Catholic Educational ethos for it to be feasible. While it is anticipated that this proposed change at the whole-school level may better address student concerns at Greene College that *Study of Religion* curriculum be more inclusive of other religions it could compromise religious education curriculum in the Catholic school. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of the present study to explore this point of tension further. Nevertheless, the multi-religious school model would suit Discourse-based methodologies as a tool of analysis in the classroom and a Multiliterate approach to learning, as previously discussed. These could be effectively nurtured via the multi-religious school model due to a general emphasis on diversity (Miedema, 2000).

Within this particular model of religious education, no single religion or religious denomination has pre-eminence. Students from a multitude of religious and cultural backgrounds are educated within the one educational institution and religion programs are designed to accommodate this diversity. Therefore, *Study of Religion* curriculum would need to consider all religions equally when designing work programs and teaching units. An advantage of this model is that epistemology or knowledge of religion is juxtaposed with a network of functional relationships within the natural school setting (Miedema, 2000). Because of this students within a particular school context would be exposed to a diversity of religious experiences both formal and informal. For example, *Study of Religion* students from such diverse religious backgrounds as Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity and non-religious backgrounds such as Atheism and Agnosticism could engage in inter-religious dialogue quite naturally in the course of a religion lesson on ethics.

Inter-religious dialogue could be expedited due to the differing ethical frameworks that each students' religious/non-religious tradition might operate out of when determining right and wrong (Hebblethwaite, 1997, p.24). Quite naturally then, the key insights of discourse analysis would have practical application to the lives of students. By entering into dialogue with other students both in formal and hidden curriculum, students could experience first hand how their own cultural experience of religion may privilege certain cultural, ethical

and doctrinal and attitudinal characteristics while silencing others. Cross-cultural dialogue between students from a diverse array of religious and cultural traditions could help them to appreciate that what may be privileged in one socio-cultural and historical representation of religion is silenced in another and vice versa.

Consequently, students could “enter into and experience the symbolic [Semiotic] systems” of more than one religious tradition and possibly integrate elements of this experience into their home tradition (Hall, 2004, p.9). Students would be encouraged to explore the strengths and weaknesses of their own religious/non-religious tradition and compare and evaluate other often-competing frameworks and theological models of the ultimate reality-world relationship (Horell, 2004, p.7). This is consistent with Miedema (2000) and Biesta (2004) who postulate the importance of education to reflect not only the input of the teacher but also the response of the learner - that the learner is able to make personal meaning out of the subject matter presented. This insight relates to some extent with a significant proportion of student responses in the survey. Some students experienced *Study of Religion* as not encouraging open discussion and critique of religious truth and that it was lacking in relevance.

Miedema (2000) and Biesta (2004) describe education as a process, which requires the involvement of the whole person in relationship with others. That not only is cognition central to effective student learning but also the engagement of his/her feelings, beliefs, attitudes, values, emotions and actions through social interaction. Education is “only possible by doing, that is, in real interactions with classmates, peers, with persons belonging to one’s own and to other religious and cultural traditions” (Boschki, 2005, p.123). Feasibly, a multi-religious school context could facilitate this type of learning and meaning-making more effectively than a denominational model (mono-religious school). This could be due to the latter making available fewer opportunities for students to naturally interact with other students from diverse religious/non-religious backgrounds. Thus, the modern view of education as an institute for the transmission of knowledge would be challenged and a post-modern view adopted whereby the school is understood to “function as a community of diverse religious practices” that more authentically mirrors the world beyond it (Miedma, 2000, pp.296).

The multi-religious school model fits in well with a Multiliteracies approach to pedagogy. Employing a Multiliterate approach to teaching requires the school to equip students with new kinds of competencies that give them the “ability to express and represent multi-layered identity appropriate to the different life-worlds” that people encounter (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p.139). A multi-religious school provides an excellent educational

environment for the different life-worlds of people to intersect naturally and for students to develop an understanding and appreciation of multi-layered identity or socio-cultural and religious pluralism. As a result there would be greater continuity between the social world and practices of a school and the wider world of social practice beyond the school, which schools are generally attempting to prepare students for.

Current research on the internationalisation of the curriculum at the secondary school level indirectly supports the notion of a multi-religious school and by association a multi-religious curriculum. Tudball (2005) argues that the development of intercultural understanding should be a priority in secondary education. In schools that have a significant number of international students, evidence suggests that the opportunities for students to develop cross-cultural relationships and understanding of a range of cultures are enhanced. Consequently, the sometimes “exotic” and marginalised views of foreign students held by the native born, that creates a them and us mentality, would be demystified (Tudball, 2005). While the particular research identified here is not in direct reference to the multi-religious school model, it certainly highlights what would arguably be one of the strengths of the multi-religious school model. That is, the promotion and development of a global vision within secondary school students that engenders the acceptance and tolerance of cultural differences. The informal curriculum of the multi-religious school would also help promote cultural acceptance and tolerance and would ensure continuity with the formal curriculum.

Students could be invited to relate to each other in a variety of unstructured ways outside of the formal curriculum. For example, shared meals, sporting events and cultural celebrations would provide invaluable opportunities for interactions that would not only be cognitively meaningful but also personally meaningful and challenging. The value of this type of interaction for assisting students to develop a healthy self-esteem and meaningful peer relationships is strongly supported by anecdotal evidence and research. Research particularly identifies peer relationships and the importance of nurturing them, as paramount in the minds of many adolescent students completing High School (Maslow, 1954; Woolfolk, 1993). Self-esteem is considered by many educators to be one of the most basic of human needs and a powerful factor in determining classroom behaviour and academic progress (Marsh, 1996).

A primary source of support for healthy self-esteem is derived from the relative quality of peer relationships. Therefore, in a post-modern context it could be argued that a multi-religious school environment would better assist students to make meaning in *Study of Religion* compared with the mono-religious school. This could be the result of a richer

human fabric of interpersonal relationships being made available to students whereby interpersonal barriers might more easily be broken down between students of different racial and socio-cultural origins. This could lead inevitably to students thinking and feeling better about themselves and others thus bolstering self-esteem. Religion would be seen to have relational meaning and relevance for the students and not simply academic and cultural meaning and relevance. The multi-religious school would also go some way in addressing the natural privileging of particular socio-cultural and religious discourses that occur in denominational schools that may alienate some international students who subscribe to alternative discourses.

Education and schooling are arguably power mechanisms that assist in maintaining the status quo of the dominant groups within a particular society. The imprint of the dominant cultural discourse within a particular society is inscribed in a whole array of educational practices within the secondary school context. Examples of these practices include the official language, school rules and the selection and presentation of school knowledge (Joseph, 2005). Foucault (1980) would argue that the idea of discourse is intertwined with the idea of power and that examples of educational practice as identified above reflect a wider network of power relations. Consequently, the dominant cultural group within a society will privilege those elements within education that accord more naturally with mainstream values, attitudes and beliefs and silence those elements that lay outside of this context. As a result international students can be at a disadvantage within Australian schools if such schools “normalise” a largely Anglo-European socio-cultural experience over and above an Asian socio-cultural experience, for example (Koehne, 2005).

The multi-religious school would assist, not in eliminating necessarily but in reducing the degree of influence that dominant culture has in making its imprint upon the teaching of religion within secondary education. It would achieve this by making available a variety of discourses that assist students to make sense of the world in which they live. The multi-religious classroom would provide opportunities for students of religion to analyse the presence of dominant power relations within religious discourses and evaluate the extent to which they privilege particular truths over others (Koehne, 2005). This could occur quite naturally due to the fact that the presence of students from multiple socio-cultural and religious backgrounds would help to ensure that no one socio-cultural and historical expression of religious truth was privileged over another. Rather than one dominant expression of religious truth being posited as “normative” the reality that within Australian society multiple truths are held would be acknowledged.

#### 6.4.5 Finding Relevance in Study of Religion: The classroom context

In *Study of Religion* classes there are particular strategies that teachers can employ in order to help students make meaning more effectively. Rather than simply transmitting a discipline or knowledge that lies prior to the educational experience the learning environment could encompass the active production of and deconstruction of meaning. This is increasingly becoming the focus of teaching in the twenty first century, if “teaching” is the best word to use (Pilli, 2005).

Perhaps the post-modern age is giving birth to the post-pedagogical classroom where different learning experiences are simply juxtaposed and all are similarly appropriate regardless of lesson content. As was mentioned earlier, the primary school model of workstations within the one learning space could facilitate this type of learning. With regard to teaching *Study of Religion*, what is most at issue is not whether the content of particular units are universally agreeable but whether or not they are accessible for students (Pilli, 2005). Consequently, an important question for teachers or learning facilitators to ask before designing learning experiences for students in *Study of Religion* is: What is the socio-cultural context where the meaning-making of students takes place?

Traditional (modern) answers could be family, nation and religious community. However, cultural trends among adolescents of the twenty first century are somewhat altered compared to previous generations of adolescents. Many “family” units no longer consist predominantly of two parents of opposite gender and X number of children. There exist a significant number of adolescents who do not grow up with both of their biological parents and who consequently do not share the narrative of the “traditional family”.

Secondly, globalisation and increased mobility has altered the perception of the “national narrative” resulting in some adolescents experiencing a diminished sense of national loyalty and patriotism. This is evident in the recent London train bombings whereby the suicide bombers were reported by media to be “home grown Londoners”. Finally, at the religious level many adolescents in religious secondary schools, arguably, do not have any strong sense of religious identity. Many adolescents do not attend church regularly in order to be well acquainted with their respective “religious narrative” (Pilli, 2005). Anecdotal evidence at Greene College would certainly lend weight to this observation.

Teachers of the post-modern age need to identify the altered socio-cultural context where many adolescents are situated. Adolescents of the present generation spend a great deal of time interacting with various forms of media communication. Television, music, cinema and computer technology are the “traditions” that for many adolescents help create the



narratives that will provide for them a frame of reference for meaning-making. Due to this contextual reality, teachers need to be aware of the particular contextual narrative (unique life experience) of students and the traditions associated with it in order to assist adolescents to make meaning.

Educational research strongly suggests that students who are able to relate the things they learn at school to their own life experience generally perform better academically (Rathunde, 2005). This connection between learning and life experience could be facilitated by giving some freedom to students to pursue areas of individual interest within the *Study of Religion* classroom. While parameters may need to be in place in order to ensure an appropriate student response to a particular assessment task, this approach to learning could have the added benefit of assisting students in the development of intrinsic motivation (Rathunde, 2005). This could be because students would possess a natural inclination and incentive to learn more about a topic that they are already personally interested in.

In *Study of Religion* the task of the post-modern teacher/learning facilitator is arguably to render concepts that may be foreign to a student's contextual narrative accessible by presenting these concepts in a language that is intelligible to them. Therefore, it is feasible to postulate that on the changed educational landscape of post-modernism that Discourse-based methodologies may provide better opportunities than methodologies associated with modernism for such a language to be engendered. Perhaps the development of such a language could form the basis of future doctoral or post-doctoral research. Furthermore, a Multiliterate approach to learning may allow for the successful communication of such a language by providing for the post-modern student, resources that are familiar to their contextual narrative. Consequently the task of de/constructing meaning within the learning environment could be enhanced.

## 6.5 Conclusion

A strong tradition of research presented in Chapter two and empirical evidence presented in Chapters four and five provides a basis for the following recommendation: that *Study of Religion* as a post-compulsory subject could be more effective in assisting students to construct meaning if, when designing curriculum and learning experiences, particular elements were included. These elements are listed below.

1. The inclusion of Discourse-based methodologies in *Study of Religion*.
2. The adoption of a Multiliterate approach to student learning.
3. The implementation of the Multi-religious school model.

4. The development of a post-pedagogical learning environment that facilitates the de/construction of meaning rather than the transmission of a body of knowledge or discipline.

These four elements could form the basis of an appropriate and comprehensive response to intellectual trends usually associated with post-modernism in education. In the context of this study, these four elements could have the potential to render *Study of Religion* more meaningful to student's lives in the twenty first century. This could have the added benefit of better preparing adolescents to take their place in the world as responsible and lifelong learners than may currently be the case.

## REFERENCES

- ACU Human Research Ethics Committee. (2002). Application for ethics approval: *Research projects with human participants*. Melbourne: Author.
- Anderson, G. (1990). *Fundamentals of educational research*. Teachers' Library Series: 1. London: The Falmer Press.
- Apokis, C. (2005). *Indicators of the post-modern constructions of religion and spirituality*. Melbourne: Victorian Council of Religious Education.
- Aquinas, T. (1947). *Summa theologiae*. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Trans.). New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc.
- Arberry, A. (Trans.). (1983). *The Koran*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barnes, J. (1982). *Aristotle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barnes, P. (2001). Ideology, the phenomenological approach, and hermeneutics: A response to professor Lovat. *Religious Education*, 96(4), 572.
- Barr, J. (1977). *Fundamentalism*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press.
- Beaudoin, T. (2003). Foucault teaching theology. *Religious Education*, 98(1), 25-42.
- Blake, D. & Hamilton, E. (1995). *Text and context: A guide to speaking and writing*. Queensland: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Bloland, H.G. (1995). Postmodernism and higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 66, 521-559.
- Bloland, H.G. (2005). Whatever happened to postmodernism in higher education? No Requiem in the new millennium. *The Journal of higher education*, 76(2), 121-150.
- Boschki, R. (2005). Re-reading Martin Buber and Janusz Korczak: Fresh impulses toward a relational approach to religious education. *Religious Education*, 100(2), 114-126.
- Boucher, G. (2000). *Hegel and post-modern discourse theory*. Retrieved February 5, 2004, from Andy Blunden's Home Page [http://home.mira.net/~andy/seminars/gb2000\\_2.htm](http://home.mira.net/~andy/seminars/gb2000_2.htm)
- Bracken, J. (2002). Images of God within systematic theology. *Theological Studies*, 63(2), 362-373.
- Bruner, J.S. (1966). *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Buchanan, M.T. (2005). Pedagogical drift: The evolution of new approaches and paradigms in religious education. *Religious Education*, 100(1), 20-37.
- Burch, S.P. (2000). Christian particularity does not depend on exclusive truth claims: Teaching enthusiastic witness in a pluralistic world. *Religious Education*, 95(3), 299-306.
- Burke, T.P. (1996). *The major religions*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

- Burns, R. (2000). *Introduction to research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Sydney: Longman.
- Cano, F. (2005). Epistemological beliefs and approaches to learning: Their change through secondary school and their influence on academic performance. *British Journal of educational psychology*, 75, 203-221.
- Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (2000). Changing the role of schools. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp.121-148). Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Coreno, T. (2002). Fundamentalism as a class culture. *Sociology of Religion*, 63(3), 335-360.
- Croft, S. & Cross, H. (1997). *Literature, criticism and style*. Oxford: University Press.
- Crotty, M., Crotty, R., Habel, N., Moore, B., & O'Donoghue, M. (1989). *Finding a way: The religious worlds of today*. Melbourne: Collins Dove.
- Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Derrida, J. (1982). Excerpt from difference. In A. Bass (Trans.), *Margins of philosophy* (pp.3-27). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- de Vaus, D.A. (1991). *Surveys in social research* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). London: Allen & Unwin.
- Discourse analysis*. Retrieved November 11, 2003, from University of Texas, University of Texas Website:  
<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/discourse.htm>
- Dooley, D. (2001). *Social research methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Emmet, E.R. (1986). *Learning to philosophise*. Middlesex: Penguin.
- Engebretson, K. (2002). Writing church sponsored religious education textbooks. *British Journal of religious education*, 25(1), 33-45.
- Engebretson, K., Fleming, J. & Rymarz, R. (2002). *Thriving as an RE teacher*. Tuggerah, NSW: Social Science Press.
- Erickson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis*. New York: Newton.
- Flannery, A. (1984). *Vatican Council II*. New York: Costello Publishing Company.
- Fleming, G. (2002). *An analysis of Religious Education Coordinators' perceptions of their role in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Melbourne*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne.
- Flood, G. (1999). *Beyond phenomenology: Rethinking the study of religion*. London: Cassell.
- Foster, C. (2004). Religious education at the edge of history. *Journal of Religious Education*, 99(1), 72-78.

- Foucault, M. (1980). Two lectures. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *Power and Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings by Michel Foucault*. New York: Harvester Press.
- Grassie, W. (1997). Postmodernism: What one needs to know. *Journal of Religion and Science*, 1. Retrieved April 22, 2005, from <http://www.users.voicenet.com/~grassie/Fldr.Articles/Postmodernism.html>
- Groome, T. (1980). *Christian Religious Education. Sharing our story and vision*. Blackburn: Dove communications.
- Groome, T. (1991). *Sharing faith: A comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Habermas, J. (1985). *The philosophical discourse of modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hall, G. (1998). *What is the human spiritual impulse? How is this reflected in major world religions, both eastern and western?* Retrieved July 29, 2004, from Australian Catholic University Website: [http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/gehall/Hall\\_Rhetoric.htm](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/gehall/Hall_Rhetoric.htm)
- Hall, G. (2003). *Christian theological rhetoric for a pluralist age*. Retrieved July 29, 2004, from Australian Catholic University Website: [http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/gehall/Hall\\_Rhetoric.htm](http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/gehall/Hall_Rhetoric.htm)
- Hartshorne, C. (2001). Redefining God. *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 22(2), 107-113.
- Hartwell, A. (1996). *Scientific ideas and education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from [http://www.21learn.org/arch/articles/ash\\_complexity.html](http://www.21learn.org/arch/articles/ash_complexity.html)
- Hebblethwaite, B. (1997). *Ethics and religion in a pluralistic age*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Hick, J. (1973). *God and the universe of faiths*. London: Macmillan.
- Hick, J. (1989). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent*. London: Macmillan.
- Hobson, P. & Edwards, J. (1999). *Religious education in a pluralist society: The key philosophical issues*. London: Woburn Press.
- Horell, H. D. (2004). Fostering hope: Christian religious education in a post-modern age [Electronic version]. *Journal of Religious Education*, 99, 5-22.
- Huff, P.A. (2000). The challenge of fundamentalism for inter-religious dialogue. *Crosscurrents*, 50(1-2), 94-102.
- Hughes, D. & Hitchcock, G. (1995). The case study. *Research and the teacher. A qualitative introduction to school based research*. London: Routledge.
- Hull, J.M. (1984). *Studies in religion and education*. London: Falmer Press.
- Husserl, E. (1983). *Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy*. Boyce Gibson (Trans.). Lancaster: Nijhoff.

- Jones, R. (2003). *Post structuralism*. Retrieved April 15, 2003, from <http://www.philosopher.org.uk/poststr.htm>
- Joseph, C. (2005). Discourses of schooling in contemporary Malaysia: Pedagogical practices and ethnic politics. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 28-46.
- Jungmann, J. (1962). *The good news and its proclamation*. New York: Sadlier.
- Kay, W.K. (1997). Phenomenology, religious education, and Piaget. *Religion*, 27(3), 275-283.
- Klages, M. (2001). *Structuralism and Saussure*. Retrieved April 15, 2003, from University of Colorado at Boulder Website: <http://www.Colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012/Klages/saussure.html>
- Koehne, N. (2005). (Re)construction: Ways international students talk about their identity. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 104-120.
- Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp.182-202). Melbourne: Macmillan Press.
- Lamnek, S. (1998). *Qualitative sozialforschung*. Munich: Psychologie Verlags Union.
- Lankshear, C., Snyder, L., & Green, B. (2000). *Teachers and techno-literacy*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Leeuw, G., van der. (1938). *Religion in essence and manifestation: A study in phenomenology*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Literate Futures Project: Education Queensland. (2002) *Whole school literacy planning guidelines*. Brisbane: Queensland Government, Department of Education.
- Lovat, T. (1993). *Studies in Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). NSW: Social Science Press.
- Lovat, T. (2001). In defence of phenomenology. *Religious Education*, 96(4), 564-572.
- Lovat, T. (2001a). The ideological challenge of the public syllabus in religious Studies, *Echo and silence*, 1-13.
- Lovat, T. (2002). *What is this thing called R.E: A decade on*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Australia: Social Science Press.
- Lovat, T. (2005). The agony and the ecstasy of phenomenology as method: The contribution to Australian Religious Education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 53(2), 46-51.
- Luke, C. (2000). Cyber-schooling and technological change. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 69-91). Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Macquarrie, J. (1986). *Existentialism: An introduction, guide and assessment*. Great Britain: Penguin Books.

- Malone, P. (1982). *Guidelines for Religious Education: Signposts of change*. Unpublished master's thesis, Monash University, Melbourne.
- Malone, P. (1990). *Teacher Approaches to the planning of religious education: A study of a sample of teachers in Catholic secondary schools in Sydney*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Macquarie University, Adelaide.
- Mannix, D. Archbishop of Melbourne. (1938). *Primer Catechism for use in junior grades*. Melbourne: The Advocate Press.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. (1994). Data collection methods. *Designing qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Marsh, C. (1996). *Handbook for beginning teachers*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Maslow, A.H. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Miedema, S. (2000). The need for multi-religious schools. *Journal of Religious Education*, 95(3), 285-298.
- Miedema, S & Biesta, G. J. (2004). Jacques Derrida's religion without religion and the im/possibility of religious education. *Journal of Religious Education*, 99(1), 23-37.
- Miller, M. & Colwill, R. (2003). *Queensland senior English: Theory-practice connections*. South Yarra: Macmillan Education Australia PTY Ltd.
- McMillan, J.H. & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Harper Collins.
- McTernan, V. (2002). Performing God: God, organicism, and postmodernism [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 23(3), 236-251.
- Misson, R. (2005). The origin of literacies: How the fittest will survive. *The Journal of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English*, 142, 37-46.
- Moore, B. & Habel, N. (1982). *When religion goes to school*. Adelaide: Texts in Humanities.
- Moreau, S. (2001). Phenomenology of Religion. *Revised evangelical dictionary of theology*. Retrieved July 15, 2005, from <http://www.wheaton.edu/intr/Moreau/courses/532/articles/Phenomenology.htm>
- Muller, S. (1999). *Destination survey 1999 graduates*. Brisbane: Greene College.
- Murphy, T. (2000). Discourse. In W. Braun & R.T. McCutcheon (Ed's.), *Guide to the study of religion* (pp.396-409). London: Cassell.
- Neuman, W. L. (2003). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (5<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- NSW Board of Studies. (1991). *Studies of Religion*. Sydney: NSW Board of Studies.
- NSW Board of Studies. (1994). *Studies of Religion: Preliminary and HSC courses: Draft support document*. Sydney: Board of Studies.

- NSW Board of Studies. (1996). *Studies of Religion syllabus years 11-12*. Sydney: Board of Studies.
- Otto, R. (1958). *The idea of the holy*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Pendergast, D. (2002). Teaching in Middle years – Perceptions of real versus ideal teachers. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 2(1), 1-6.
- Piaget, J. (1959). *The language and thought of the child*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Pilli, E. (2005). *Challenges of post-modernity to religious education*. Retrieved July 13, 2005, from <http://www.edu.joensuu.fi/ortoweb/tartoeinike.htm>
- Presidential Lectures. (2003). *Jacques Derrida: Deconstruction*. Retrieved April 15, 2003, from Stanford University, Stanford Universities Libraries Website: <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/deconstruction.html>
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. (1995). *Study of Religion: Senior syllabus*. Brisbane: Board of Secondary School Studies.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. (2001). *English: Senior syllabus*. Brisbane: Board of Secondary School Studies.
- Queensland Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. (2001a). *Study of Religion: Senior syllabus*. Brisbane: Board of Secondary School Studies.
- Rathunde, K. (2005). Middle school students' motivation and quality of experience comparison of Montessori and traditional school environments. *American Journal of Education*, 111(3), 341-372.
- Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the mirror of nature*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Rorty, R. (1995). *From formalism to post-structuralism*. Retrieved April 15, 2003, from Stanford University, Stanford University Libraries Website: <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/rorty.html>
- Rummery, R. M. (1975). *Catechesis and religious education in a pluralist society*. Sydney: E.J.Dwyer.
- Rummery, G. (2001). Catechesis and Religious Education in a pluralist society revisited. *Journal of Religious Education*, 49(2), 4-15.
- Ryan, M. & Goldberg, P. (2001). *Recognising religion: A study of religion for senior secondary students*. NSW: Social Science Press.
- Ryan, M. & Malone, P. (1996). *Exploring the religion classroom*. NSW: Social Science Press.
- Ryan, M. (1997). *Foundations of religious education in Catholic schools; an Australian perspective*. NSW, Australia: Social Science Press.
- Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education. (1977). *The Catholic school*. Homebush: St. Paul Publications.



- Saussure, F. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*, Wade Baskin (Trans.), New York: Philosophical Library.
- Seijk, C. (1999). Learning to love the questions: Religious education in an age of unbelief. *Religious Education*, 94(2), 155-172.
- Sharpe, E. (1975). *Comparative religions: A history*. London: Duckworth.
- Slembrouck, S. (2003). *What is meant by discourse analysis?* Retrieved November 26, 2003, from University of Gent, Department of English Website: <http://bank.rug.ac.be/da/da.htm>
- Smart, N. (1968). *Secular education and the logic of religion*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Splett, J. (1975). Symbol. In K. Rahner (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of theology: A concise sacramentum mundi* (pp.1654-1656). Great Britain: Burns & Oates.
- Splett, J. (1975a). Aristotelianism: Historical influence. In K. Rahner (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of theology: A concise sacramentum mundi* (pp.43-45). Great Britain: Burns & Oates.
- Sproull, N.L. (1995). *Handbook of research methods: A guide for practitioners and students in the social sciences*. London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Standing Committee on Education and Training. (2002). *Boys: Getting it right*. Canberra: Government House.
- Swann, M. (1985). *Education for all: Report of the committee of inquiry into the education of children from ethnic minority groups*. London: HMSO.
- The New London Group, N.L. (2000). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 9-37). Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Towne, E.A. (2001). The new physics and Hartshorne's dipolar theism. *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 22(2), 114-132.
- Tudball, I. (2005). Grappling with internationalisation of the curriculum at the secondary school level: Issues and tensions for educators. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 10-18.
- Unsworth, L. (2002). Changing dimensions of school literacies. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 25(1), 62-77.
- Victorian Board of Studies. (1994). *Religion and society: Study design*. Carlton: Board of Studies.
- Victorian Board of Studies. (1994a). *Texts and traditions: Study design*. Carlton: Board of Studies.
- Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Welbourne, A. E. (1995). *Critical religious educators: The role of graduate studies in their professional development*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. NSW: University of New England.
- Whelan, W. (1999). Post-modernism in the work of Julia Kristeva. *Religious Education*, 94(3), 289-299.
- Whitehead, A.N. (1978). *Process and reality: An essay in cosmology*. New York: Free Press.
- Wiersma, W. (1995). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Woolfolk, A.E. (1987). *Educational psychology* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Question 1. (*Please Circle*)

Gender

a) MALE

b) FEMALE

### Question 2. (*Please Circle the key subject areas that you are presently studying*)

1. <i>English</i>	5. <i>Physics</i>	9. <i>Drama</i>
2. <i>Ancient History</i>	6. <i>Chemistry</i>	10. <i>Music</i>
3. <i>Modern History</i>	7. <i>Maths</i>	11. <i>Art</i>
4. <i>Geography</i>	8. <i>Biology</i>	12. <i>Health &amp; Physical Education</i>

### Question 3

Write, in the spaces below, five numbers that correspond to five key words/phrases that best describe your current experience of *Study of Religion* offered at this College? Select the words/phrases from the list provided (See Fig.1).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 4

Write, in the spaces below, five numbers that correspond to five key words/phrases that best describe what you think *Study of Religion* should be like at this College? Select the words/phrases from the list provided (See Fig.1).

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 2

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



---

### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

***TITLE OF PROJECT:*** AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT MEANING MAKING IN THE POST-COMPULSORY SUBJECT STUDY OF RELIGION

***SUPERVISORS:*** DR. PETA GOLDBURG & ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ALLAN DORING

***STUDENT RESEARCHER:*** MR MARK GERARD CRAIG

***PROGRAMME ENROLLED IN:*** MASTERS OF EDUCATION

.....

The purpose of this study is to collect information from year 12 students currently enrolled in a Study of Religion course at secondary school level to provide feedback regarding their current perceptions of the course and the way it is taught.

Participants will be required to complete a survey form that describes their current perceptions of Study of Religion and its relevance to their own life experience.

This survey will be issued in normally scheduled classes for the Study of Religion and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. A small group of students will then be selected to provide the principal researcher with feedback on conclusions drawn from survey once data has been analysed. This focus group discussion will occur in normally scheduled classes for the Study of Religion. This may/may not involve your child.

Potentially the benefits of participating in this research are that it allows those who are the consumers of Study of Religion Curricula to express honestly and anonymously their personal thoughts regarding the content and methodology of the Study of Religion. This in turn may contribute to a context of current research that could effect positive changes for the future in Study of Religion

Participation in this research is voluntary and potential respondents are free to refuse their consent without having to justify that decision, or to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study at any time without giving a reason.

As the participants are students in the school where the researcher is employed, any withdrawal from the research will not prejudice the participant's future care or academic progress.

Confidentiality will be ensured during the conduct of the research and in any report or publication arising from it. Participants will not be required to attach their names to the survey document.

**Any questions regarding this project should be directed to**

*Dr. Peta Goldberg on 3623 7303 in the School of Religious Education*

OR

*A/Prof. Allan Doring on 3623 7152 in the School of Education, Australian Catholic University*

AND/OR

*Mr Mark Craig on 3267 6100, Chisholm Catholic College, Cornubia.*

**Appropriate feedback will be provided to participants on the results of the project.**

**The Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University, McAuley Campus, has approved this study.**

**In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Student Researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee, Research Services Unit as shown below.**

**QLD:** Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Campus  
PO Box 247  
EVERTON PARK QLD 4053  
Tel: 07 3855 7294  
Fax: 07 3855 7328

**Fax: 02 9701 4350**

**Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.**

**If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your**

**records and return the other copy to the Investigator or Student Researcher.**

---

**STUDENT CONSENT FORM**

***TITLE OF PROJECT:*** AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT MEANING MAKING IN THE POST-COMPULSORY SUBJECT OF STUDY OF RELIGION

***NAMES OF SUPERVISORS:*** DR. PETA GOLDBURG & A/PROF ALLAN DORING

***NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:*** MR MARK GERARD CRAIG

I ..... (*The participant*) have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. 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 may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

**NAME OF PARTICIPANT:** .....

**SIGNATURE** .....

**DATE** .....

**SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR:** .....

**DATE:**.....

**SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:**.....

**DATE:**.....



---

**PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** AN EXAMINATION OF STUDENT MEANING MAKING IN THE POST-COMPULSORY SUBJECT OF STUDY OF RELIGION

**SUPERVISORS:** DR. PETA GOLDBURG & /PROF ALLAN DORING .....

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** MR MARK CRAIG

I ..... (*the parent/guardian*) have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to the Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree that my child, nominated below, may participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify my child in any way.

**NAME OF PARENT/GUARDIAN:** .....  
(block letters)

**SIGNATURE** ..... **DATE**.....

**NAME OF CHILD** .....  
(block letters)

**SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR:**

..... **DATE:**.....

**SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]:**

..... **DATE:** .....

## ASSENT OF PARTICIPANTS AGED UNDER 18 YEARS

I ..... (*the participant aged under 18 years*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT AGED UNDER 18: .....  
(block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR or SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER [if applicable]: .....

DATE:.....

## Appendix 3

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



### Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Dr Peta Goldberg Brisbane Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Brisbane Campus

**Student Researcher:** Mr Mark Craig Brisbane Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

An examination of student meaning making in the post-compulsory subject of Study of Religion

**for the period:** 24<sup>th</sup> March 2005 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** Q2004.05-20

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: ..... Date: .....  
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

# Appendix 4

## DESTINATION SURVEY 1999 GRADUATES

September 2000

### Response Rate:

The number of respondents 68, representing a sixty percent response rate: Of those responses, 35 also returned the Supplementary Survey for Tertiary Students.

### 1. Subject evaluation:

The results for the 2000 survey illustrate a general positive response the graduates schooling experience. Students continued to respond that the studies they studied were generally appropriate to their needs and overall there was an acknowledgment of the quality of the teaching staff. As in the past, there seems to be a clear point that students do not find SOR relevant, and as a compulsory subject this to me raises some questions. However, it is very important to note that students positively responded to the quality of the teaching experience. Interestingly, there was also some slide in the other core subjects in comparison to previous years, but this is not extensive. Detailed analysis of this data is in the appendix.

