

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

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## 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.