

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

Submitted by

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Statement of Sources

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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

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

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