

# Stop and think!

## Report on a preliminary test of a survey on the use of ecclesiastical and educational language in the discourse of Australian Catholic school Religious Education

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#### 1. Purpose of the survey

This survey is primarily an invitation to Catholic educators to reflect on the way they think and talk about school Religious Education.

It investigates the use of ecclesiastical and educational language in the narrative (or discourse) of Catholic school Religious Education (RE) in Australia. In addition, it looks at the idea of giving more attention to a critical, evaluative approach, especially in the senior classes.

This is a report on a test run of the questionnaire which could be used with religion teachers, diocesan authorities and consultants/advisers, and RE academics.

The intention was to collect empirical data on questions raised in the earlier research paper *Addressing the problem of 'ecclesiastical drift' in Catholic Religious Education* (Rossiter, 2020).

#### 2. Introduction and background to the study

The *discourse* of RE is made up of the words and ideas used by educators to articulate underlying assumptions, purposes and practices, and for the evaluation and development of the discipline. A synonym for the discourse is the *narrative* for RE where the nuanced connotation refers to the 'story line' that is used to give an account of RE, its history and progress, how it is understood today and how it might change and develop in the future.

The particular words used by educators when talking about RE are important because they frame the aims, content and pedagogy. In 1985, Crawford and Rossiter argued that there was a need to evaluate the language of Catholic RE because the multiplicity of ecclesiastical terms being used was confusing for teachers, students and parents; it tended to create ambiguity and distract from the task of articulating a meaningful and relevant Religious Education for contemporary youth. This task is even more critical for Catholic RE now than it was then.

The language of Religious Education structures the discussion of the subject. In effect, it determines many of the possibilities that will emerge; it has a formative influence on teachers' expectations and on what and how they teach; it influences presumptions about the types of responses they will seek from students; it provides criteria for judging what has been achieved; it influences teachers' perception and interpretation of problems in religious education; it even influences the way teachers feel about their work – "Am I a success or a failure?" This language can be oppressive if it restricts religion teachers to limited or unrealistic ways of thinking and talking about their work. (Crawford & Rossiter, 1985, p. 33)

In 1970, in the article *Catechetics RIP*, US scholar Gabriel Moran was one of the first to comment on an emerging problem within the language of Catholic Religious Education. Where idiosyncratic, ecclesiastical terms were used exclusively, the discourse became ‘in house’ and relatively closed to outside ideas and debate. Since 1981, publications by Crawford and Rossiter collectively (1981, 1985, 1988, 2006, 2018) drew attention to various aspects of this problem, as well as to the way that devotional and emotional titles, and presumptive language had negative effects on religion curricula and teaching.

More recently, Rossiter (2020), in the current issue of *International Studies in Catholic Education*, explained the problem labelled as ‘ecclesiastical drift’. It is said to occur where the discourse about the purposes and practices of Religious Education has gradually and incrementally come to be dominated almost exclusively by constructs like faith development, faith formation, Catholic identity, new evangelisation and Catholic mission. There is evidence (in diocesan and school documents/websites and in the re-naming of former diocesan RE departments, as well as in new religious leadership roles in Catholic schools) that these ecclesiastical terms have been replacing the word Religious Education. For example: in one instance, the re-badged, advertised role description of the former diocesan RE Director did not include any direct mention of Religious Education. Also noted in this study, has been a deleterious effect on Religious Education as an academic discipline in Catholic tertiary institutions.

Only some conclusions from that study will be noted here.

- Excessive use of ecclesiastical language, at the expense of the word education, turns the focus *inwards* towards Catholicism – at the very time when more of an *outwards* focus on the shaping influence of culture is needed.
- Ecclesiastical language dominance eclipses the educational dimension to Religious Education and what suffers is thinking about what it means to *educate* today’s young people spiritually and religiously.
- If students, teachers and parents are inclined to see RE as an *ecclesiastical* rather than as an *educational* activity, then increasingly they are less likely to see it as it is a meaningful part of school education.
- Special attention given to Catholic identity gives the impression of exclusiveness that can make the 30% of students who are not Catholic, as well as the non-religious Catholic students, and non-Catholic and non-religious teachers, feel uncomfortable and perhaps marginalised.

I consider that ecclesiastical drift is *the* major ongoing problem for the future of Australian Catholic Religious Education. It is explained in terms of its origins and effects on RE in Rossiter (2020) and a strategy for addressing the problem is proposed in Rossiter (2021).

While not all will agree with my interpretation and evaluation of this problem, it is pertinent (some would say imperative) to conduct follow-up empirical research of the views of RE teaches and others involved in Catholic schooling.

### **3. Notes on the questionnaire and expectations of what may emerge from the survey test findings**

Ecclesiastical terms have become so embedded in the fabric of Catholic Religious Education that any questioning of their usage, relevance and utility tends to be resisted because it feels somewhat uncomfortable – as you would if questioning key words in the country’s founding constitution. These terms have acquired a resilience in the discourse of RE and they are likely to remain prominent for a considerable time to come. It seems unlikely then, that this survey would show a high proportion of Catholic educators who readily identified the problems in ecclesiastical drift. Hence the principal purpose of the questionnaire was to serve as an initial stimulus to *think about the issues and potential problems*. I called it the ‘Stop and think’ or ‘Reflective’ questionnaire. It may perhaps incline religious educators towards a more discerning use of ecclesiastical constructs for RE.

Unsolicited phone calls and emails from the test participants have confirmed this thinking. While some took 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire, others reported taking more than an hour. I infer from this that the survey has already succeeded in its purpose of prompting educators to review their thinking about

the language of RE. The proportion of participants who chose the “not sure” option for items could end up being significant as an indicator validating the stop and think approach in the survey.

The first part of the questionnaire asks for a simple valuation of various ecclesiastical and educational words for explaining the purposes of religious education. This is followed by some brief narratives or scenarios for RE where an exclusively ecclesiastical narrative can be compared with others that have an educational focus.

Then questions are raised about potential problems with excessive use of ecclesiastical terms where they tend to displace the word Religious Education from the RE narrative. Attention is given to particular constructs – faith formation and Catholic identity.

Somewhat inevitably, this approach, which asks how participants feel about potential problems, will appear negative in tone. I think that a diagnostic survey like this cannot easily avoid such a difficulty.

In addition to investigating ecclesiastical drift, the survey has items looking at the possibility of giving more curriculum space and time to critical evaluation of culture and study of the contemporary search for meaning in a relatively secularised society.

In the trial, some found it more difficult answering the initial questions evaluating the various terms; they said it was easier to answer the direct questions that identified potential problems. This is because the evaluation of terms, especially the ecclesiastical ones, depends a lot on qualifying contexts, conditions and cautions which were not included in the questionnaire because of the complexity and length that this would have added. The following is an example of the complexity related to particular items that could not be explicated in the questionnaire. However, it is participants’ diverting to, and thinking about precisely these sorts of additions/qualifications that constitute the educational, stop and think values of the survey:

Examples of qualifying complexity that affect the way terms are understood but which could not be explicated in the questionnaire

*Christian witnessing* for a Catholic RE teacher (as is the case for all teachers and staff in Catholic schools) is basically about how Christ-like an individual is in the way they treat and interact with other people, and about how Christ-like they are as role models – and this occurs all the time both inside and outside the classroom. There is no question about how fundamentally important this is for Catholic schooling. But witnessing is not a classroom pedagogy in any subject area including RE. For some RE teachers, the idea of witnessing has been inappropriately used as a sort of ‘licence’ to purvey unethically their own personal views and spirituality.

The *sharing of personal, religious views* in class when the atmosphere is free and respectful has always been valuable. But this is not authentic if there is psychological pressure from the teacher on students to make personal revelations. Caution is needed for teachers who see RE as an opportunity to ‘tell their personal faith story’ as a stimulus for students to do the same. Faith sharing is not necessarily the same as witnessing.

*Catholic identity*: The term has multiple meanings including some that are conflicting. Some teachers readily think of it in terms of the challenging re-contextualising theology of Lieven Boeve (2007, 2016). Others take a more conservative, almost restorationist view, labelled by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2012) as re-confessionalism. Empirical research in Queensland Catholic schools by Gleeson *et al.* (2020) found that many teachers tended to understand the Catholic identity of their school mainly in generic pastoral terms:

87% of respondents saw the Catholic identity of their school as either important or very important. (p. 7)

Providing a ‘safe and nurturing environment’ was . . . the most popular choice for the purpose of Catholic schools, ahead of more explicitly faith-based options, while ‘caring community’ was by far the most popular characteristic of Catholic schools. (Gleeson *et al.* 2020, p. 1)

Unfortunately, there was a major mistake in the questionnaire where it coupled ‘witnessing’ with ‘faith sharing’ in the one item – rather than treating them separately in two items. And this item was therefore ambiguous and misleading; this problem has been rectified.

A principal expectation of the draft questionnaire is that test responses will show what revisions are necessary to make it more clear and useful.

As far as results from this test are concerned, and also for any further use, I anticipate that the same pattern from an earlier small scale study of the views of teachers and parents by Finn (2011) would appear again. He found that teachers (more so than parents) were respectful of the ecclesiastical terms. But both groups found “the language was generally confusing and not helpful for understanding religious education” (Finn, 2011, p. 84; c/f 89, 111).

I expected that the test survey would show that some Catholic educators in Australia think that excessive use of ecclesiastical language does handicap Religious Education in its quest to be a challenging and meaningful subject in the curriculum, which can help resource the spirituality of young people no matter what their level of religiosity. But I did not expect widespread concern. I also thought that the survey test would show respect for ecclesiastical language as a central part of the narrative for Religious Education.

#### 4. Testing the draft questionnaire

The survey was designed specifically for Australian Catholic schools. In testing the functionality of the draft questionnaire, some academic colleagues from overseas as well as some former Australian postgraduate students in RE were invited to try it out. The overseas contingent might also provide a pointer as to whether the idiosyncratically Australian problems with the use of ecclesiastical language were also pertinent to some extent in various contexts in other countries. It was expected that some of the items would be somewhat puzzling for overseas participants because of their context specificity (E.g. words like “ATAR accredited” courses).

Data was collected from both online and email attachment sources and analysed in SPSS.

### Results of the survey test

#### 5. The participants

##### 5.1 Diocese and country of origin

74 completed questionnaires were returned through the online survey and email attachments. 47 respondents were from Australia and 27 from overseas.

##### 5.2 Role

41 (55%) were currently RE teachers while 33 (45%) were diocesan consultants/advisers or RE academics.

##### 5.3 Gender

40 (54%) indicated female and 31 (42%) indicated male.

##### 5.4 Level when teaching RE

	Frequency	%
Senior secondary	35	47
Middle secondary	8	11
Junior secondary	1	1.4
Primary or Kindergarten	23	31

Test survey participants

Diocese / Country	Frequency	%
Sydney	36	49
Broken Bay	3	4
Brisbane	1	1.4
Melbourne	2	3
Ballarat	1	1.4
Bathurst	2	3
Newcastle	1	1.4
Canberra	1	1.4
Goulburn		
USA	10	14
UK	2	3
New Zealand	8	11
South Africa	1	1.4
Germany	2	3
Netherlands	1	1.4
Hong Kong	1	1.4
Nigeria	1	1.4

**5.5 Qualifications (n=69)**

	Frequency	%
Experience	4	5
Undergrad RE / Theology	4	5
Grad Cert RE / Theology	12	16
Masters RE / Theology	49	66
Total	69	92

Croatia	1	1.4
TOTALS	74	100

**5.6 Leadership role (n=71)**

	Frequency	%
No leadership role	10	14
Coordinator of RE	19	26
Coordinate RE at 1 Year level or more	6	8
Other school leadership role	8	11
Diocesan Consultant / Adviser	17	23
RE / Theology Academic	11	15
Total	71	97

**Language used in the discourse of Religious Education – key words, ideas and constructs used for describing purposes and practices****6. Use of ecclesiastical terms in RE.** Statement applied to each term:

The term xxx helps give an account of Religious Education that is appropriate and relevant for today's Catholic school students.

Numbers beside items refer to the numbering of questions in the survey. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number. Items are ranked 1-11 according to their mean score.

	1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
<b>Ecclesiastical / church terms</b>													
11. Catholic identity	5	7%	11	15%	10	13%	25	34%	22	30%	64%	3.66	1
19. Christian outreach	6	8%	7	10%	12	16%	32	43%	17	23%	66%	3.64	2
16. Christian witness and sharing personal faith	5	7%	11	15%	13	18%	25	34%	20	27%	61%	3.59	3
9. Faith development	5	7%	12	16%	9	12%	33	45%	15	20%	65%	3.55	4
10. Faith formation	7	10%	13	18%	10	14%	26	35%	18	24%	59%	3.47	5
14. Ministry	9	12%	8	11%	13	18%	30	41%	14	19%	60%	3.43	6
13. Catholic church mission	12	16%	11	15%	8	11%	29	39%	14	19%	58%	3.30	7
12. Evangelisation	11	15%	17	23%	13	18%	23	31%	10	14%	45%	3.05	8
17. Christian doctrine	12	16%	18	24%	7	10%	31	42%	6	8%	50%	3.01	9
15. Catechesis	21	28%	20	27%	12	16%	17	23%	4	5%	28%	2.50	10
18. Sunday Mass attendance	23	31%	20	27%	15	20%	10	14%	6	8%	22%	2.41	11

**7. Use of educational terms in RE.**

Generic educational terms	1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
23. Critical thinking about religion	0	0%	3	4%	5	7%	26	35%	40	54%	89%	4.39	1
26. Study of contemporary spiritual/moral issues	1	1%	2	3%	4	5%	30	41%	37	50%	91%	4.35	2
27. Resourcing young people's spirituality whether they are religious or not	0	0%	3	4%	6	8%	30	41%	35	47%	88%	4.31	3
28. A credible academic subject with the same study demands as regular subjects	0	0%	5	7%	6	8%	27	37%	36	49%	86%	4.27	4
24. Study of the contemporary search for meaning	0	0%	4	5%	11	15%	22	30%	37	50%	80%	4.24	5
30. Important for the spiritual/moral education of young Australian citizens	1	1%	1	1%	9	12%	31	42%	31	42%	84%	4.23	6
20. Knowledge and understanding of Catholicism	0	0%	3	4%	7	10%	37	50%	26	35%	85%	4.18	7
22. Religious literacy	1	1%	7	10%	9	12%	27	37%	30	41%	78%	4.05	8
21. Some study of other religions represented in Australian society	1	1%	6	8%	11	15%	30	41%	25	34%	75%	3.99	9
25. Skills in interpreting the shaping influence of culture on people	1	1%	9	12%	12	16%	23	31%	29	39%	70%	3.95	10
29. Important as the only spiritual/moral subject in the curriculum	7	10%	10	14%	18	24%	20	27%	19	26%	53%	3.46	11

**Notes**

Catholic identity and Christian outreach had the highest mean scores for the ecclesiastical terms – with catechesis and Sunday Mass attendance having the lowest.

Critical thinking about religion and the study of contemporary spiritual/moral issues had the highest means for the generic educational terms – with the lowest being the importance of RE as the only spiritual/moral subject in the school curriculum

The level of agreement about the appropriateness and relevance of the educational terms was significantly higher than that for the ecclesiastical terms. This shows more clearly below in the graphic representation of scales for the positive evaluation of ecclesiastical and educational terms. All of the educational terms, with one exception (The only spiritual/moral subject in the school curriculum) had higher means than all of the ecclesiastical terms. The dispersion / variance in responses was greater for the ecclesiastical terms where the average standard deviation for items was 1.26, whereas the average standard deviation for the educational terms was 0.92

61% indicated agreement with the problematic item which tended to conflate 'Christian witnessing' with 'personal faith sharing'.

## 8. Narratives or scenarios for Religious Education

### Statement applied to each narrative

The narrative xxx helps give an account of Religious Education that is appropriate and relevant for today's Catholic school students.

#### 31. Narrative 1.

The principal purpose of Catholic schools and Religious Education is to participate in the mission of the Catholic Church. Catholic schools are founded on the person of Jesus Christ and are centres of the new evangelisation. Religious education should imbue young people with a Catholic identity. It should develop their religious faith and deepen their personal relationship with God and Jesus Christ. In RE, students and teachers can share their personal faith. RE should enhance their religious practice and their engagement with the church – especially Sunday Mass.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Not sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
9 12%	24 32%	7 10%	19 26%	15 20%	46%	3.09	5

#### 32. Narrative 2

Religious education should enhance young people's religious literacy. This includes especially knowledge and understanding of Catholicism, its theology, scripture, traditions and religious practices. It should develop critical thinking about religion and religious issues. It will include evaluations from a Catholic perspective.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Not sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
3 4%	8 11%	2 3%	28 38%	33 45%	83%	4.08	3

#### 33. Narrative 3

Young people are confronted by the complexities, dilemmas and conflicting interpretations of life's meaning and purpose. They require, more than ever, the skill of critical thinking in order to navigate an uncertain and pluralistic world. As there is no final answer to life's ultimate meaning and purpose in which intellectual certainty is possible, human knowledge is always partial and limited. Consequently, students are invited to explore within Religious Education the inexhaustible mystery of human existence, as glimpsed primarily through the lens of the Catholic Christian Tradition, as well as other religious traditions and help render this mystery meaningful in their lives.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Not sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
3 4%	3 4%	4 5%	28 38%	36 49%	87%	4.23	2

#### 34. Narrative 4

In giving young people access to their religious heritage, Religious Education can enhance their knowledge and understanding of Catholic theology, Scripture and religious traditions. It should also give some attention to other religious traditions represented in Australia. In addition, it should help develop students' skills for analysing, interpreting and evaluating contemporary spiritual/moral issues, including scrutiny of the shaping influence that culture can have on people's thinking and on their values and lifestyle. In times of rapid social and cultural change, and even more so during a global pandemic, the presumptions people make about 'the good life' can appear shaky and contingent, creating uncertainty and anxiety about the future. RE is the subject that could give attention to the ways people are trying to find meaning and make sense of life in difficult times. And it can give students the opportunity to engage in some research on these questions.

1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Not sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
1 1%	2 3%	4 5%	29 39%	37 50%	89%	4.36	1



**35. Narrative 5**

Both philosophically and historically, Religious Education has been the most distinctively Catholic religious aspect of Catholic schooling in Australia. It testifies to the core principle that any school curriculum is deficient if it does not have a spiritual/moral subject like religion, ethics, philosophy, or personal development etc. RE, through educating young people in their own religious tradition, as well as some study of religion generally and of the contemporary search for meaning, makes a valuable contribution to the education of young Australians and enhances the nation's educational, social capital and contributes to the common good. In this way, Catholic schools could exercise a national leadership role as regards the importance of a spiritual/moral dimension to the Australian school curriculum.

1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
4	5%	7	10%	14	19%	23	31%	25	34%	65%	3.79	4

**Notes**

Narrative 4 rated the highest of five. Narrative 3, which was extracted from the introduction to the Brisbane Catholic Education Office (2019) course *Religion, Meaning and Life* rated second highest. The narrative made up mainly of ecclesiastical terms rated the lowest of the five. All of the four narratives reflecting a mainly educational emphasis had higher means than the ecclesiastical narrative.

**9. New scales for ecclesiastical and educational terms used in the narrative for Religious Education**

**Scale: Valuation of ecclesiastical terms in the narrative for RE**

This scale is a measure of the level of positive endorsement of the use of ecclesiastical terms generally as appropriate and meaningful for the narrative of Religious Education.

This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from items 9-19 and 31. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

Score 20-35		Score 36-51		Score 52-67		Score 68-83		Score 84-100		% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
6	8%	10	14%	20	28%	29	32%	9	12%	62%	64	17.5

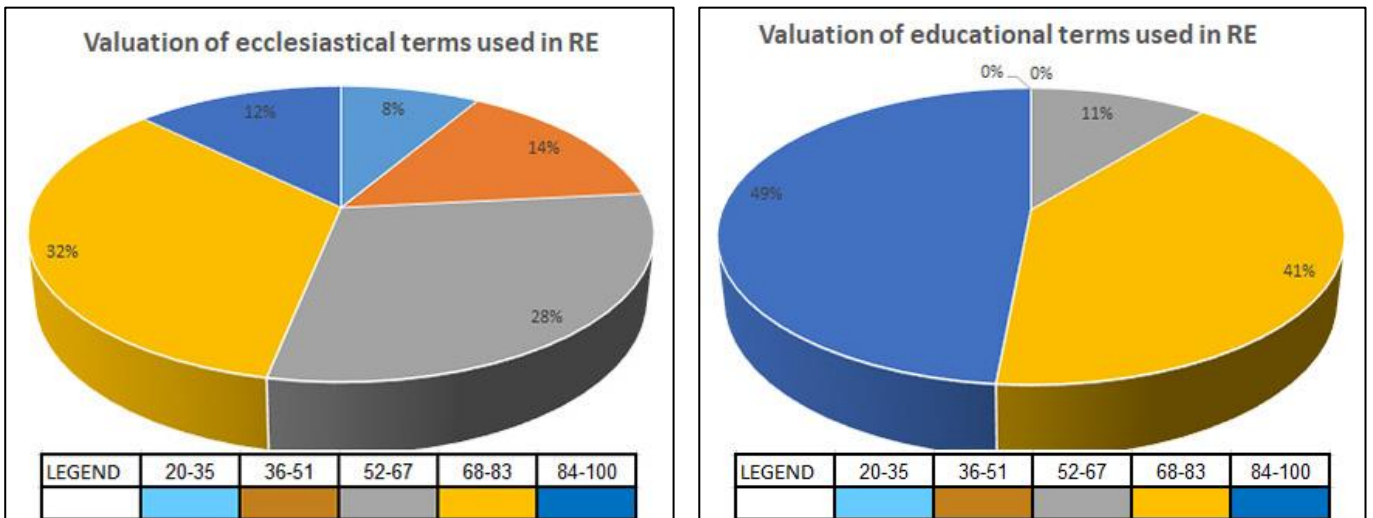
**Scale: Valuation of generic educational terms in the narrative for RE**

This scale is a measure of the level of positive endorsement of the use of generic educational terms as appropriate and meaningful for the narrative of Religious Education.

This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from items 20-30 and 32-35. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

Score 20-35		Score 36-51		Score 52-67		Score 68-83		Score 84-100		% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
0	0%	0	0%	8	11%	30	41%	36	49%	99%	82	11.0

Graphic representation of the two scales. Quadrants show the proportions in each scale range.



**Notes**

The two newly constructed scales set out to aggregate items which were either ecclesiastical or educational, to give a simpler measure of the general level of positive valuation for each group. The result mirrored the findings across areas 7-9. For both scales (20-100) the score of 60 represented the halfway mark.

The *ecclesiastical terms scale* with a mean score of 64/100 showed that 68% of participants scored above the mid point. This reflects a positive valuation of these terms; but there is a significant polarisation in the views of participants (also evident in the large standard deviation of 17.5). By contrast, the *educational terms scale* had a mean score of 82/100 and 99% of respondents were above the mid point of 60, with a lower standard deviation of 11. This indicates that the educational terms were valued particularly highly, with little if any dissent about their relevance for religious education.

### 10. Use of ecclesiastical language in the narrative for Religious Education (c/f terms listed above).

Items have been ranked according to their mean scores.

	1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
45. What is needed in the discourse of RE is a balanced use of ecclesiastical terms along with educational terms.	2	3%	3	4%	7	10%	28	38%	29	39%	77%	4.14	1
36. Ecclesiastical language (especially terms like faith formation and Catholic identity) is very prominent in the discourse of Catholic religious education.	0	0%	12	16%	5	7%	36	49%	18	24%	73%	3.85	2
37. Ecclesiastical language tends to predominate in professional development programs offered to new and continuing religion teachers.	0	0%	10	14%	10	14%	39	53%	12	16%	69%	3.75	3
43. I am aware of new religious leadership positions in Catholic schools and diocesan offices where the position names are worded with the ecclesiastical terms noted above.	4	5%	4	5%	17	23%	31	42%	13	18%	60%	3.65	4
40. Frequent use of ecclesiastical language for RE can make students, parents and teachers think of it more as like a church activity rather than a school/educational one.	3	4%	11	15%	14	19%	24	32%	18	24%	56%	3.61	5

## Report on test of RE questionnaire

42. Ecclesiastical expectations of Catholic RE and church terms are acceptable – but the problem is where they dominate the language of RE.	1	1%	10	14%	20	27%	27	37%	12	16%	53%	3.56	6
39. Ecclesiastical language creates ambiguity and some confusion of purposes about Religious Education because it seems to have displaced educational words.	3	4%	13	18%	16	22%	25	34%	14	19%	53%	3.48	7
46. Frequent use of Catholic ecclesiastical language for RE inhibits its capacity to contribute to the national education discourse about the importance of a spiritual/moral dimension to the school curriculum.	1	1%	20	27%	14	19%	19	26%	16	22%	48%	3.41	8
44. The ecclesiastical names of the new leadership positions create some ambiguity about the nature and role of RE in the school.	1	1%	14	19%	26	35%	16	22%	12	16%	38%	3.35	9
41. Frequent use of ecclesiastical language for RE can give the impression that it is mainly about recruiting young people to Catholic church parishes.	82	11%	20	27%	6	8%	25	34%	11	15%	49%	3.16	10
38. This ecclesiastical language helps teachers get a better understanding of religious education and clarity about its nature and purposes.	7	10%	18	24%	16	22%	24	32%	5	7%	39%	3.03	11

### 11. New ‘Ecclesiastical drift’ scale – perception of problems with the use of ecclesiastical language in the narrative for RE

This scale is a measure of the level of recognition that excessive use of ecclesiastical terms may be causing problems for Religious Education. Higher scores indicate the view that it is recognised as a problem; lower scores indicate the view that this is not so.

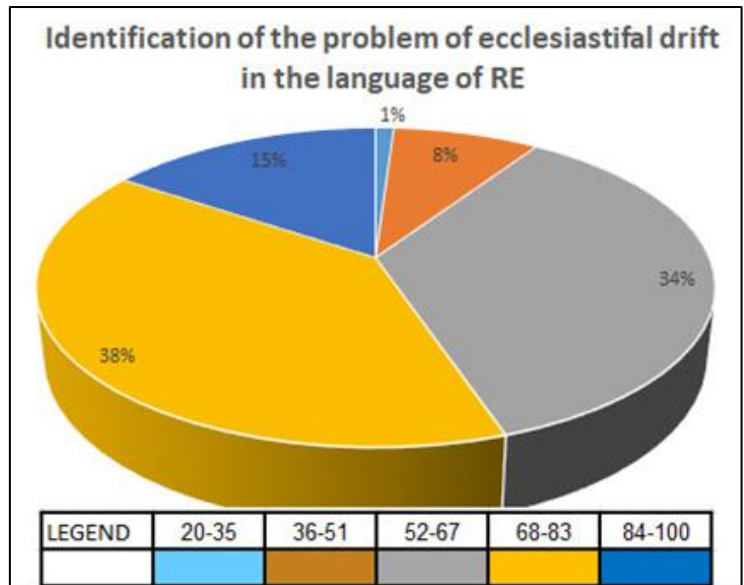
This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from 9 items: Reverse scoring of 38 together with 39-46. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

Score 20-35	Score 36-51	Score 52-67	Score 68-83	Score 84-100	% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
1	6	25	28	11	65%	66	20.30

### Notes

The most highly rated item by far (mean score 4.14) was about the need for balanced use of both ecclesiastical and educational terms for articulating the purposes and practices of religious education.

Notwithstanding the respect shown for ecclesiastical terminology in data sections 7, 9 and 10 (also including implied church interest and involvement in Catholic RE), the data in sections 11 and 12 identified participants' significant concerns about problems related to excessive use of ecclesiastical terms in Religious Education.



## 12. Use of the term faith formation in the language of Religious Education

Items have been ranked according to mean scores.

	1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
48. Faith formation is not just about 'educating' students but about 'changing' them at a personal and spiritual level.	6	8%	10	14%	9	12%	31	42%	15	20%	62%	3.55	1
50. The term makes unrealistic presumptions about both the faith of students and about RE changing their personal faith.	3	4%	15	20%	15	20%	26	35%	12	16%	51%	3.41	2
51. The etymology of the word 'formation', from seminaries and religious order novitiates at an earlier time (e.g. moulding, conforming, uniformity etc.), makes it a questionable term to use in association with a Christian understanding of faith	5	7%	21	28%	15	20%	18	24%	12	16%	40%	3.15	3
47. The meaning of the term, faith formation is clear and unambiguous.	9	12%	18	24%	8	11%	28	38%	7	10%	48%	3.09	4
49. Any observer could readily see the difference between a faith formation activity and an educational one.	6	8%	20	27%	21	28%	17	23%	7	10%	43%	2.99	5

**13. New Faith formation scale – perceived valuation of the use of the term in the narrative for RE**

This scale is a measure of positive valuation of the use of the term faith formation in the narrative for Religious Education. Higher scores indicate the view that its usage is appropriate and relevant; lower scores indicate the view that its usage causes problems for RE.

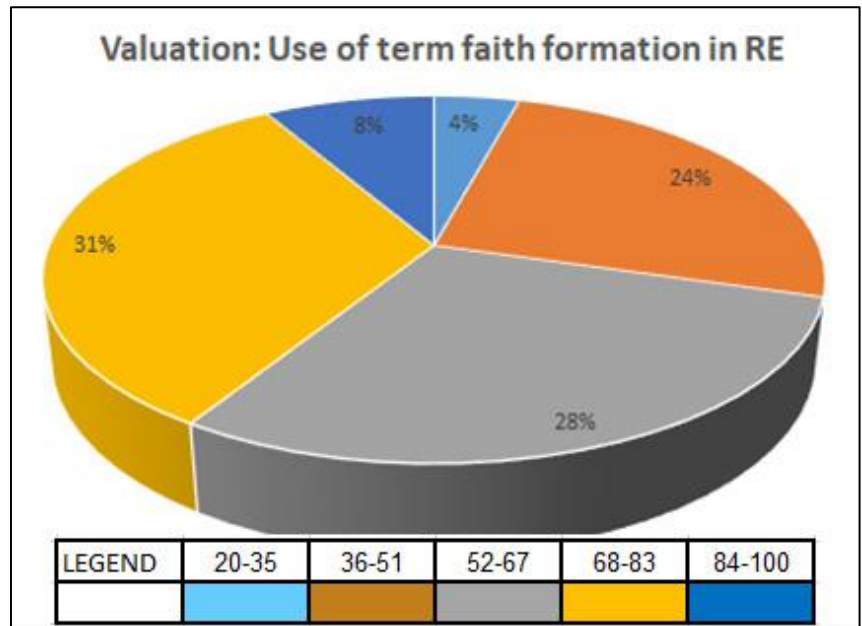
This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from 5 items: 47-49 together with reverse scoring of items 50-51. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

Score 20-35	Score 36-51	Score 52-67	Score 68-83	Score 84-100	% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
3 4%	18 24%	21 28%	23 31%	6 8%	43%	58	19.7

**Notes**

The highest rating item regards faith formation as changing students at a personal and spiritual level, and not just about educating them.

But 51% of participants considered that the term makes unrealistic presumptions about students’ faith and changing that faith (No. 50) For the lowest scoring item (49), 35% disagreed that one could readily identify a faith formation activity as different from an educational one – a high proportion (28%) were not sure



The data shows positive valuation of the term faith formation while also indicating that there are educators who consider its usage problematic in Religious Education. Only 48% agreed that the term had clear and unambiguous meaning.

**14. Use of the term Catholic identity in the language of Religious Education**

	1. Strongly disagree	2. Disagree	3. Not sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly agree	Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
53. Catholic identity is about 'recontextualising' the Catholic school – that is critical dialogue with culture towards a renewed Christian theological presence in the community.	4 5%	5 7%	24 32%	23 31%	15 20%	51%	3.56	1
56. Frequent use of the term would inevitably make students and teachers who were not Catholic feel somewhat uncomfortable.	4 5%	12 16%	23 31%	19 26%	13 18%	44%	3.35	2

## Report on test of RE questionnaire

57. Frequent use of the term would inevitably make relatively non-religious Catholic students and teachers feel somewhat uncomfortable.	4	5%	13	18%	22	30%	20	27%	12	16%	43%	3.32	3
55. The term seems to be 'inward-looking' at the Catholic church at the very time when RE needs to be more 'outwards-oriented' – as in critical evaluation of culture.	7	10%	14	19%	17	23%	23	31%	10	14%	44%	3.21	4
52. The meaning of the term, Catholic identity is clear and unambiguous.	8	11%	27	37%	5	7%	21	28%	9	12%	40%	2.94	5
58. The term feels like it is a Catholic slogan – E.g. 'Make the Catholic church great again'.	9	12%	24	32%	13	18%	13	18%	12	16%	34%	2.93	6
54. The first thing that comes to mind when I see the term Catholic identity is recontextualising the Catholic school.	10	14%	25	34%	12	16%	19	26%	5	7%	33%	2.77	7
59. The term gives the impression that RE should be concerned with getting more students back to regular weekly mass attendance	13	18%	26	35%	8	11%	18	24%	6	8%	32%	2.69	8

### 15. New Catholic identity scale – perceived valuation of the use of the term in the narrative for RE

This scale is a measure of positive valuation of the use of the term Catholic identity in the narrative for Religious Education. Higher scores indicate the view that its usage is appropriate and relevant; lower scores indicate the view that its usage causes problems for RE.

This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from 8 items: 52-54 together with reverse scoring of items 55-59. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

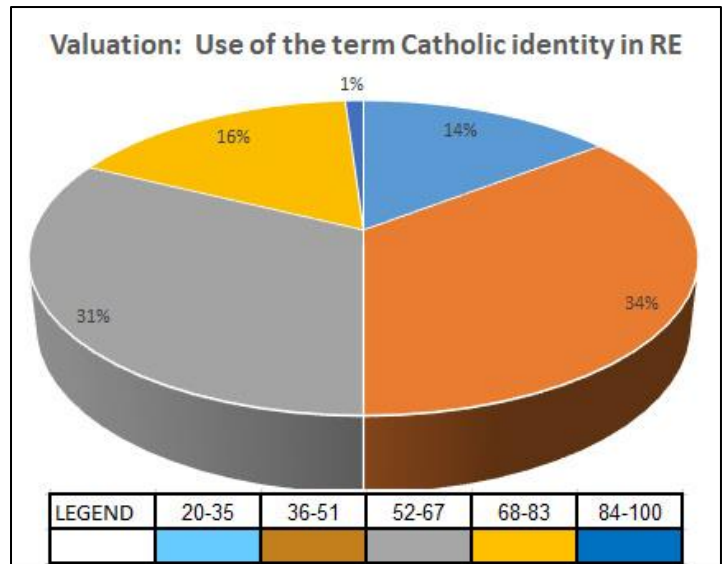
Score 20-35		Score 36-51		Score 52-67		Score 68-83		Score 84-100		% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
10	14%	25	34%	23	31%	12	16%	1	1%	27%	50	17.6

**Notes**

The highest rating item identified Lieven Boeve's 'recontextualising agenda' as the core of Catholic identity. But only 51% agreed with 32% not sure.

Responses to items 56-57 showed respondents' awareness of the problems the term creates for teachers/students who are not Catholic, and for the relatively non-religious Catholics. 44% agreed with 26% not sure.

48 % indicated that the meaning of the term was not clear and unambiguous, while 40% considered that it was.



### 16. The need for giving more curriculum space to study of the search for meaning and the critical evaluation of culture (especially in the senior classes)

	1. Strongly disagree		2. Disagree		3. Not sure		4. Agree		5. Strongly agree		Total % in agreement	Mean Score	Rank
62. Having more critical evaluation of culture and contemporary issues would make RE more relevant to the lives of students	1	1%	2	3%	4	5%	29	32%	35	47%	79%	4.34	1
60. The approach in Scenario 4 above affirms commitment to teaching about Catholicism while allowing more scope for the critical evaluation of culture and contemporary issues.	0	0%	3	4%	9	12%	42	57%	17	23%	80%	4.03	2
61. Because Catholic school Y11-12 students can already study state ATAR courses like <i>Studies of Religion</i> and <i>Religion and Society</i> , and non-ATAR <i>Religion and ethics</i> , it is acceptable to have 'other-than-Catholic' content in RE programs at this level.	1	1%	4	5%	17	23%	30	41%	17	23%	64%	3.84	3

### 17. New Critical evaluation of culture scale – the need for more attention to this aspect in the narrative for RE and in the religion curriculum

This scale is a measure of the level of recognition that a critical evaluation of the shaping influence of culture on people needs more attention both in the narrative for Religious Education and in the religion curriculum, especially for senior classes.

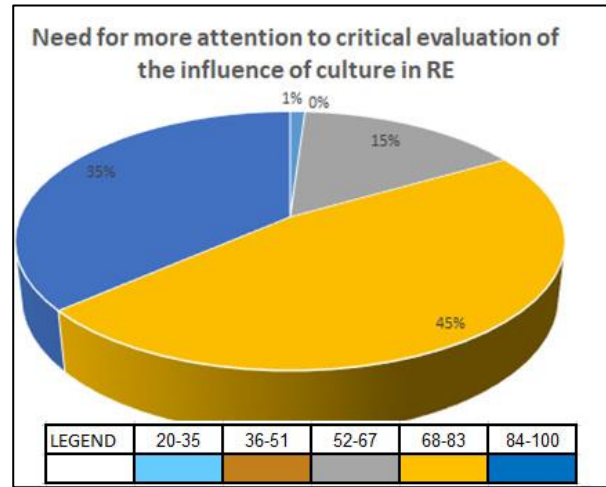
This scale with a score range of 20-100 was calculated from 3 items, 60-62. Scores were then displayed in 5 bands as shown below.

Score 20-35		Score 36-51		Score 52-67		Score 68-83		Score 84-100		% above score 60	Mean Score	Standard deviation
1	1%	0	0%	11	15%	33	45%	26	35%	88%	77	20.3

### Notes

All three items indicated very strong support for the need for giving more attention to critical aspects of Religious Education – studying spiritual and moral issues, critical evaluation of the shaping influence of culture on people.

Also strongly supported, was the view that readiness to implement such a critical pedagogy has already been endorsed in Catholic educational circles.



## 18. Comments contributed by survey participants

*The following collates all the written comments submitted by the survey participants.*

### Need for clarity in the language for the narrative of Religious Education

There is lack of clarity and agreement about terms and their meaning. Clear leadership and agreement about use of terms would assist in our communications with schools.

There definitely needs to be more opportunities to use contemporary language to assist young students in making real life links. This does not mean we 'dumb it down' or go completely alternative but if our students cannot see the link of RE in their lives, then it is outdated and irrelevant and those students are checking out before the teachers can check in. RE needs to be founded on the critical competencies and real life experiences like ALL good teaching and learning experiences and like all other content areas. There is so much potential to captivate our students (Catholic and Non Catholic) but teachers need more liberty to do so with guidance to ensure we stay true to our core values as Catholics. I studied with Graham Rossiter and he is the most contemporary and motivational RE educator that I have ever experienced and am grateful to him every day when I teach my RE lessons to my primary students.

I think the terms and references discussed in this survey are used in response to improving the educational and developmental approach to Catholic Schooling. It is coming from a position of positive intent. The word formation is used in nonfaith settings. Education in general forms students and as Rossiter says faith remains a legitimate long term hope of Catholic Religious Education. I think falling mass attendance and struggling parishes have led to some believing the role of the catholic school is to bring people back to mass and the church. This is not the purpose of the educational endeavour. But Catholic schools do provide a range of experiences that give students an understanding of religion and how the Catholic Church engages with the world. I see this as a good thing. But the process to get the language and activities right is ongoing.

In my experience different students can experience the same RE class as evangelisation, catechesis, religious education or even simply educational in a secular sense. More factors are involved in what they take from the class than the language being used or even the intentions of teachers. I want a both-and, rather than an either-or approach to RE, with flexibility and sensitivity on the part of teachers.

I think there is a difference between Catholic Identity and Catholic world-view. Although they are closely linked, I've used the latter much more with students than the former – and with positive results especially in the area of justice and Catholic Social Teaching.

The on-going usage, and meaning assumptions, of ecclesial terms in isolation is the obvious problem. Using a range of terms can better capture a general religious concept OR a general educational concept. "Integrated Learning" seems to be a case in point. It now has a vast array of expressions in schools but often elicits quite polarising



reactions with teachers. There is also a need to create a meaningful balance to ensure the school still 'feels Catholic' to the young people and families. In my experience, even if the kids aren't that into it, they still claim it.

### **Critical pedagogy and the pursuit of relevance in Religious Education – and the need to acknowledge the level of spirituality and religiosity of students and teachers**

The current RE curriculum 7-10 is so packed that there is little scope to take time for students to critically evaluate their cultural context/ current moral and ethical questions through the lens of the Catholic Faith or through the lens of other faiths. A focus on this skill would allow them to make informed decisions throughout their life, using Catholicism as a set of criteria to measure/ evaluate against.

In addition the non ATAR- *Studies in Catholic Thought Syllabus* is far too abstract for the types of learners in the class; the first few topics especially. Unless teachers have a degree in Liberal Arts/Philosophy or Theology they will struggle. How are we to teach 16-17 year old's who are, with great respect, not wanting to go to university about the ancient Greek philosophers concepts of soul and the links between them and the development of concepts of soul in Christian traditions. We are also expected to teach them the concept of Trinity and how it developed in Church Doctrine. These are young people who can, at times struggle to write a paragraph, let alone juggle content and concepts like these.

We seem to be determined that Religious Education must be treated as an academic subject with educational rigor and in doing so have taken some of its value away from students, as they learn about their heritage and traditions without the time to spend using it to interrogate their cultural context. In short, instead of it being a living religion, informing their lives daily, for many it is at arm's length. It could be the most rigorous of subjects, where students are invited into that grey area or morality and ethics, where their decisions need to be measured by a range of criteria.

The curriculum ought to maintain a healthy tension between three elements: culture, students and tradition.

Many Catholic schools seem almost fearful in doing anything in RE that is not Catholic focussed. The decision needs to be made as to whether the purposes of RE classes are for personal faith formation and catechesis or the teaching of Christianity as a faith and belief system. Many Catholic schools have a large percentage of non-Catholic students, and in fact non-Catholic teachers. To keep students interested, informed and able to deepen their own spirituality, I believe the lessons need to be broad in nature. I love the idea of some kind of research project.

Having scope to go beyond Catholic content helps with the development of critical thinking and it helps make for a better 'education for life'

### **Questionnaire catalysed thinking about use of language in RE and about the relevance of RE**

Questions were challenging; also confronting us Religious Educators to be conscious about the way and manner of getting RE to impact Contemporary people, and just not necessarily Catholics.

Thank you for the opportunity for self-reflection and thinking deeply about each statement. It gave me pause and raised issues for further deep thinking

Good luck! I look forward to receive the findings of your survey

Dr. Rossiter: Thank you for taking the time to develop this survey.

### **General comments about Catholic RE and Catholic schooling**

Most of our students and parents are only experiencing faith in the school or through media and personal events like weddings, funerals, suffering. We need to bring our school back to the community as a whole, sacramental programs do not currently do this for most but people still value them. Catholic identity is changing, whether from the Church or the people.

In a pluralised, secular world, teaching the Catholic perspective is not about making the Church 'great again' - far too much damage done for that - but it provides a reference point with which students can consider a range of points of view. Being clearly Catholic in worldview does not imply 'churchy', but a level of comfort with the tradition that does not exclude meaning-making from other sources in anyway. A scenario I like to use is that whilst being comfortably 'Australian' (despite sometimes cultural cringe!), I nonetheless love travelling abroad, learning from other nationalities and consider myself a global citizen too.

### **Relevance of the issues raised in the survey in other countries**

I am very interested in your work. Here in NZ the same questions are raised and the tension between these two ideas is one of the most challenging aspects of my role as Head of the RE faculty. I will follow this research of yours with great interest and if you would like to discuss the NZ context of this- please be in touch.

Some questions were difficult for me to answer. The reason is that as an academic in religious education in Germany I mainly focus on general schools and only in very rare exceptional cases (approx. 5%) on Catholic schools. Religious education is a compulsory subject at all state and private schools. Therefore I had to leave some questions open.

Your questionnaire raises many questions about terminology and the ambiguity of much of this terminology. This ambiguity can be discerned in Church documentation on Catholic education. Similarly there are many questions about a critical approach to the teaching of Catholicism in Catholic schools, the issue of religious literacy and the inclusion of children who are not of the Catholic faith. There is also a question about aims and mission and daily practice. The questionnaire also raises the issue of Catholic schools in different national/cultural contexts.

My 5s and 5+s indicate strong affirmations. I sense in the approach of this survey a keen "joust" in trying to determine in the here-&-now the viable understanding and breadth/depth of applications of the term and the effort of RE. I think there has been such a "jousting" here in the USA. I am "catholicly" joyful to have had the privilege of spending my most recent 15 years of teaching religion/theology/spirituality in the Benedictine world of Woodside Priory in Portola Valley, CA. I would delight in knowing more of the background for this survey and the results. Please keep me in mind.

### **Australia-centric content was puzzling for overseas participants**

I appreciated the opportunity to respond although some of the questions were Australia-centric and not relevant to other nations. Not sure how this may impact responses to those questions.

Some references to the Australian context left me guessing

Later responses are vague; as an NZer not totally on top of content of Australian Catholic RE

### **Problems with clarity in the questionnaire**

I think Christian Witness and sharing Christian faith are two distinct concepts, which may not always go hand in hand.

I tend to associate formation with flourishing. I found it difficult to restrict it to etymology.

Questions at times are poorly phrased as they read to come from a 'negative' perspective

## **19. Higher order statistical analyses**

Independent sample t tests were performed for some variables to detect whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means for different groups of participants on particular items.

### ***Did current teachers respond differently from academics / RE consultants & advisers?***

The patterns of response of the two groups 'teachers' and 'academics/consultants' were not statistically different except in 11 of the 54 variables. In 10 of these cases, the teachers had *higher* means with the level of statistical significance noted.

*Ecclesiastical terms*: 10. Faith formation ( $p < .05$ ); 11. Catholic identity ( $p < .001$ ); 13. Mission ( $p < .05$ ); 14. Ministry ( $p < .05$ ); Christian doctrine ( $p < .05$ ); 12 Mass attendance ( $p < .001$ ); Outreach ( $p < .05$ ); 64. Ecclesiastical terms scale ( $p < .05$ ); 47. Faith formation clear meaning ( $p < .05$ ); 52 Catholic identity clear meaning ( $p < .05$ ).

The academics/consultants had a *higher* mean for 57. Catholic identity makes relatively non-religious Catholics uncomfortable ( $p < .05$ ).

### ***Were there differences between the responses of overseas participants compared with Australians?***

There were only 3 items where there were detectable statistical differences between the responses of Australian and overseas participants. In these 3, the Australian means were all higher.

43. Aware of new Australian CEO leadership position names ( $p < .05$ ); 52. Catholic identity clarity of meaning ( $p < .05$ ); 54. First thing that comes to mind for Catholic identity is re-contextualising ( $p < .05$ ). The differences are readily explained by overseas unfamiliarity with distinctive aspects of the Australian Catholic school context.

### ***Were there differences in responses according to gender?***

Patterns of response from females and males were statistically the same with 5 exceptions. In all these cases the female means were higher and in all instances were related to valuations of ecclesiastical terms.

10. Faith formation ( $p < .05$ ); 12. Evangelisation ( $p < .05$ ); 31. Narrative 1 Mainly with ecclesiastical terms ( $p < .05$ ); 47. 64. Ecclesiastical terms valuation scale ( $p < .05$ ); Faith formation clarity of meaning ( $p < .05$ ); 52. Catholic identity clarity of meaning ( $p < .05$ )

This result indicated a small tendency of women to value ecclesiastical terms more than did male respondents.

### ***Were there differences in responses from those whose teaching experience was mainly at primary or secondary school levels?***

There were statistically significant differences between the responses from those with primary or secondary teaching experience in only 7 of the 54 items. And in all seven the primary background respondents had lower means than did those with secondary background. And all of the items in question were about educational terms – specifically the level of critical, evaluative pedagogy.

24. Study of the contemporary search for meaning; 25. Skills in interpreting the shaping influence of culture on people; 26. Study of contemporary spiritual/moral issues; 28. A credible academic subject with appropriate study demands; 30. Important for the spiritual/moral education of young Australian citizens; 34. Narrative 4: An educational rationale for RE; 65. Scale valuation of educational terms.

## **20. Discussion of the results – comments on the meaning and significance of the data**

### ***20.1 The participants in the test run of the questionnaire and the views of the various sub-groups***

#### How representative was this group of test respondents?

#### To what extent could the findings be generalised to the wider population of Australian Catholic school religion teachers?

A question might be raised about the selection of test participants. If they were mainly either past students or international colleagues of the researcher, would this imply a bias? This is a fair question. But it makes the problematic assumption that the participants have a sort of ideological allegiance to the researcher's professional view of religious education. I expect that they would reject such a judgment. My experience of both postgraduate students and RE academics is that they have their own professional views of religious education that may well draw on particular sources or influences, but in a self-confident and independent way.

The group of 74 respondents in the initial test of the questionnaire was not large enough to claim that the findings reliably represented the views of the population of Australian Catholic school religion teachers. However, it was large enough and diverse enough to show 'pointers' as to what a more extensive use of the questionnaire might show, as well as identifying key issues that need further research scrutiny and debate. I would not be surprised if these same trends appeared in any future systematic survey of religion teachers across diocesan school systems.

The pointers and issues that emerged in the test survey will be discussed. This will be followed by some comments on similarities and differences in the views of participant sub-groups.

## **20.2 *The use of ecclesiastical and educational terms in the narrative / discourse for Catholic school Religious Education***

As shown in the data in sections 7-10, there is acceptance of both ecclesiastical and educational terms for articulating the purposes and practices of Religious Education. But the means for the ecclesiastical items are invariably and noticeably lower than those for educational terms. There is a network of factors that help explain this finding.

Specific relationship with classroom teaching and learning: The links between educational terms and classroom practice are naturally clearer and more direct than those for ecclesiastical terms. A number of the ecclesiastical terms – for example the mission of the Catholic Church, and outreach – are the concerns of the whole of Catholic schooling and have qualified, restricted implications for religion lessons. The educational terms are more specifically linked with the educative processes that one takes for granted as naturally at home in the classroom – for example: educating for critical thinking and for knowledge and understanding.

As noted in sections 1 and 3, the survey deliberately avoided trying to explicate and tease out the meanings of various terms, particularly the ecclesiastical ones. The purpose of the survey was to prompt participants themselves to undertake this task. As a professional who has long been interested in the language of Religious Education, I have my own specific understandings, definitions and valuations. But these were not imposed on the questionnaire.

Also noted in Section 3 was the contention that the meaning of terms needs to be situated within a discussion of context, possibilities, limitations, cautions and implications. Again, to try to engage in this extended discussion was beyond the scope of a preliminary, issue-raising survey. But I acknowledge that because of these limitations, the survey could well have been frustrating and taxing to complete, because it was raising more questions for debate than it was able to clarify. Ideally, the survey needs larger participation from Catholic educators in this country. And some of the issues it raises need more systematic, focused research, including interviews.

Wide scope of ecclesiastical terms: How the wider scope and generic purposes of the ecclesiastical terms need to be qualified when applied to classroom RE is evident when parallels are made with similar sorts of educational terms. For example: the terms ‘enhancing Australian citizenship’ and ‘promoting responsible environmental stewardship’ as hopes that schooling is trying to promote could parallel terms like ‘Catholic church’s mission’ and ‘Catholic identity’. Very broad ecclesiastical purposes will naturally have limited specific application to classroom RE. This will in turn create some ambiguity about their relevance to this context. There is less likelihood of ambiguity with the specific focus of the educational terms.

Some ecclesiastical terms are not so pertinent or relevant to classroom RE: Take for example, the lowest ranking ecclesiastical item – mass attendance as a measure of the relationship between RE and church engagement. Although the introduction noted that the questionnaire was specifically about the classroom teaching of religion, and not about the religious life of the school, some participants (22%, with another 14% not sure) still indicated that mass attendance was relevant to the narrative of Religious Education.

My view is that RE can well help young people become better educated theologically and scripturally in relation to the Catholic tradition; but it cannot of itself generate commitment to the church and parish participation. What the church itself is like and what actually happens in parish life are the pertinent factors. Hence, I think it remains a problem for RE if mass attendance remains prominent in the minds of educators as a practical purpose. It is a valid ‘hope’ but not a realistic expectation as an immediate aim or educational goal. While I do not have precise data at hand, it appears that within a number of years after leaving a Catholic school, young people tend to have the same low mass attendance rate as those Catholics who attended public schools. In other words, RE is about educating young people spiritually and

religiously, especially with respect to their own religious tradition – and this can be done well. But it is not primarily about recruitment to the church, even if it can dispose young people favourably in this direction.

While this topic has been discussed over and over again for many years, for the record, some further observations about Religious Education and mass attendance / church engagement are pertinent here. For most educators involved in Catholic RE, the secularisation of young people generally and their lack of engagement with the church is a concern. But they realise that this situation will persist despite the best efforts of Catholic schools to provide a relevant religious education as well as vital liturgy and religious life. RE should not be evaluated relative to this situation because RE is not a causal factor. There is still a minority of educators who consider church attendance and church engagement as key purposes for RE. A much smaller minority in the Catholic community persists in blaming RE for the decline in Australian Catholicism. Religious educators need to continue to dispute and reject such claims as those which appeared in the journal *AD 2000*, as recently as 2015.

We firmly believe that the Church has a major problem with its delivery of Religious Education in her school system and think that urgent action is required to improve her performance.

A mere 20% of students in the Catholic school system attend Mass on Sunday during their schooling, but 72% of them stop practicing their faith by the time they are 29 years of age.

. . . there is something drastically wrong with the curriculum and the way it is being taught.

. . . While the school factor appears to be the major factor causing students and ex-students to stop practicing their faith, other factors also contribute such as the family situation, mass media especially TV and social media.

. . . The crisis in Catholic education suggests that the curriculum is lacking. Children need to be made familiar with the Catholic Catechism, the Bible references and the importance of going to Mass every Sunday at the very least. (Kennedy *et al.* 2015)

This distorted view of RE has a long history, going back to the complaints made by the group Catholics Concerned for the Faith in the 1970s (Rossiter, 1977).

Readers interested in the secularisation of youth and the decline in church participation should read the US study *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* which was conducted by St Mary's Press and the Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown, published in 2018. It provides an insightful account of the views of young Catholics (aged 15-25) as regards their affiliation and disaffiliation with Catholicism. Catholic schooling was not a significant factor.

I know that for many religion teachers, the question of young people's (and also the wider Catholic community's) mass attendance is a church problem that is concerning, but not one that RE can solve. Nevertheless, I think that the attention given to this question above is worth including here because it is also pertinent to the ecclesiastical terms generally. All of them can easily become problematical for the narrative of Religious Education to the extent that they carry unrealistic assumptions about reproducing Catholic Church engagement and religious practice as the ultimate goal for RE.

### ***20.3 The valuation of ecclesiastical terms used in the narrative for Religious Education***

The six new scales created from questionnaire items: The six new scales created from selected items have helped give a simple but useful snapshot of opinions on the key areas covered in the survey. Statistical validation of the scales was not undertaken in the light of the relatively small number of participants.

If this questionnaire had been given to religion teachers in the 1960s and 1970s, no doubt *catechesis*, *Christian doctrine* and *ministry* would have rated more highly. Similarly, there was a time when *evangelisation* would have superseded *Catholic identity* in prominence. Things change. And the pattern of key word usage in Religious Education constantly evolves. I believe that we are currently at an important crossroads as regards finding a balance between ecclesiastical and educational perspectives.

Given the extensive national Catholic interest and engagement in the Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2012), the highest rating for the term *Catholic identity* in Section 6 was to

be expected. My own views about the use of the term are elaborated in Rossiter (2018 and 2020). In sections 12-15 however, it would appear that the more detailed questions on faith formation and Catholic identity showed that the former was rating a little higher than the latter.

While I expected that *Catholic identity* and *faith formation* would be the most prized of the ecclesiastical terms, I was surprised and puzzled by the prominence of *Christian outreach*. I would have regarded this more as an extra-curricular or co-curricular component of the Catholic school's overall religious dimension, rather than as a part of classroom RE. I am not sure about the participants' thinking behind this result.

The personal dimension to classroom RE: As noted in section 3, item 16 was ambiguous because it conflated *personal faith sharing* and *Christian witnessing*. But this item attracted the third highest ranking, indicating that the 'subtext' is important for the narrative and practice of Religious Education. This is an area where the qualifying conditions and related issues need to be clarified. It revolves around the larger question of *the place of personal interactions in classroom RE*. The following brief historical sketch of developments is pertinent, and it provides a framework for further discussion of the issues.

Understanding the psychological dynamics to the *personal dimension* of Catholic Religious Education has long been problematic. For many years, Catholic educators have been trying to make RE *personal*, *meaningful* and *relevant* for their students. This intention is both appropriate and valid. My view is that this is more important and necessary now than at any previous time. But how it is to be promoted in the classroom in an ethical and effective way that respects the freedom and personal privacy of students and teachers requires careful scrutiny and clarification (c/f Crawford & Rossiter, 1988; 2006; Rossiter, 2021).

An early interest in making Catholic RE *personal* in the 1960s and 1970s showed up in the use of the word 'affective', contrasting with the 'cognitive' dimension that had become well known through the Bloom taxonomy of educational objectives. The principal connotation for affective at the time was 'emotional'. And this created problems because faith and values (and also attitudes), all of which had significant commitment dimensions, were thought to be located within the affective domain. Brian Hill (1981, 1991) proposed that they should more appropriately be put in what he called the 'volitional domain', which had the connotation of both commitment and decision-making.

Rossiter (1988) proposed that there was a natural '*cognitive contextual quality*' to classroom teaching and learning – in other words, classroom education was primarily about knowledge, understanding and critical thinking, together with the handing on of an intellectual culture. And hence, emotional and personal elements were both educationally valuable when they fitted naturally into this context in a subsidiary way – where this was non-intrusive and respectful of the freedom and privacy of students and teachers. The overall contextual emphasis on intellectual inquiry in the classroom helped provide the *very freedom needed to make emotional, personal and faith learning authentic and meaningful*. Crawford & Rossiter (2006, pp. 277-298) gave a detailed interpretation of the dynamics involved in their discussion of *links between education, personal change and personal learning*. Emotionally loaded content (as well as issues for faith and commitment) could, and should be studied in RE. But the aim was not to stir the students' emotions, but rather to help them put emotional questions into broader perspective. In doing this, it is likely that students may well have their own personal emotional responses and they may feel free enough to express themselves if they sense they can do this comfortably in a respectful, caring class environment.

A second psychological/educational trend that affected the interest in *personal sharing* in Religious Education appeared firstly in the 1970s, following the impact of Carl Rogers' (1961, 1969) relationship-centred, humanistic psychology. The idea of intimate personal sharing in encounter groups became popular with the religious personnel who accounted for most of the Catholic school religion teachers at the time. It influenced their thinking about, and practice of, personalism in the RE classroom. And in the next decade, this morphed into the idea of personal, *religious faith sharing* in the wake of the popularity of Fowler's (1981) *psychological faith development theory*. The term faith development still remains prominent in the contemporary Catholic RE discourse (ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in the 11 religious/ecclesiastical items in the survey). Firstly, it was in the new style 'communitarian retreats' beginning in 1964 where personal, faith sharing was thought to be a pivotal dynamic in promoting the personal faith of young people (Tullio & Rossiter,

2009, 2010). The idea was then applied more generally to the religion classroom, with questionable validity and success.

The religion classroom in Catholic schools is a type of public educational forum – as for all other subjects in the curriculum. It is not like the voluntary retreat. Hence, I take the position that sharing of personal/faith insights is not a principal activity to try to make happen in this setting. There are important ethical principles that should moderate the way in which teachers and students refer to their own personal beliefs in the classroom in any subject, but especially in RE. In my view, the best account of this question was given by Hill (1981) and summarised for Catholic RE in Crawford & Rossiter (2006, pp. 293-297). Personal sharing in the classroom is good and healthy when free, authentic and not contrived. It occurs naturally within a sound academic study; but this is a valuable, somewhat serendipitous event. It is an unintended healthy by-product of academic study in a respectful, accepting class climate, and not a programmed or expected outcome that is essential for RE. In most cases, how young people integrate learning in RE within their own beliefs, values and lifestyle will happen privately and slowly over many years.

Problems with misunderstanding of the term *witnessing* in the classroom was noted in the introduction. In a study of retreats in Catholic secondary schools, Rossiter (2016) cautioned about the strategy of teachers (and others) telling their ‘personal faith journey’ as a stimulus to get students to do the same. While students naturally are voyeuristically interested in any personal details volunteered by their teachers, the faith journey approach can be counter-productive, particularly if it appears contrived and rehearsed, and if there is unwelcome psychological pressure on young people to make revelations about their personal thinking and values. I expect that adolescents are uncomfortable if they feel the teacher is manoeuvring them towards talking about their ‘faith journey’. I heard a report from some students recently who have labelled teachers who tried this as ‘over-exposures’ or ‘over-sharers’. There are related difficulties where a student personal RE journal or diary is required and even more so where this is to be inspected by teachers.

Respect for ecclesiastical terms with a minority showing some disquiet. The data in section 6 shows the *respect* participants had for the ecclesiastical terms used in formulating religious education. 8 of the 11 items rated more than 50% total agreement about their value – the average total agreement for these 8 was 60%. The new scale for ecclesiastical terms (Section 9) showed 62% of participants scored above the half way scale score of 60 – the mean score was 64, while there was a high standard deviation of 17.5.

However, there was a significant minority, averaging 15% per item, who disagreed. Also the average percentage who were ‘not sure’ was also 15%. For me, this is evidence of disquiet that some educators feel about the prominence of ecclesiastical language in describing school RE. This becomes more apparent in the results for sections 10-15 where there were specific questions asked about potential problems with the use of these terms.

#### **20.4 Valuation of the use of educational terms in the narrative for Religious Education**

All the educational terms were rated highly. Promoting critical thinking, skills in evaluating contemporary spiritual/moral issues, and resourcing young people’s spirituality no matter what their religious disposition had very high mean scores.

The new scale for educational terms (Section 9) showed a mean score of 82 (contrasting with 64 for ecclesiastical terms) and 99% of respondents scored above the scale mid point of 60 (contrasting with 62% for ecclesiastical terms).

The response to the item with the lowest score (Item 29: RE important as the only spiritual/moral subject in the curriculum) might suggest that participants considered that spiritual/moral issues are not the exclusive curriculum preserve of RE. This connotation was not intended when the item was written. But it shows the importance of such contextual qualifications and why they need further research clarification.

## **20.5 The narratives or scenarios for Religious Education**

The narratives in Section 8 provided a useful window into the thinking of participants, compared with the approach in sections 6 and 7, because they showed examples of how the various terms might figure in a narrative account of Religious Education. The level of qualifications and contextualising that was needed in the valuations in 6 and 7 would be less of a problem for participants when responding to section 8.

Narrative 1 included all the ecclesiastical terms. This may well have been perceived as both somewhat excessive and not fair because it could have made the scenario look somewhat unrealistic. And this might have affected its appeal. This may have contributed to this item's low rating – it had the lowest rating of the five. But it did show a level of educators' aversion to a narrative dominated by such terminology, especially by contrast with the high level of satisfaction with the educational narratives.

Narratives that specified educational purposes were rated highly. This included narrative 3 which was an extract from *Religion, meaning and life*, the new program being piloted by Brisbane Catholic Education (2019).

It might have been expected that narrative 5, concerned with the generic, civic contribution to the spiritual/moral education of young Australians (mean score 3.79) would have got a higher rating, comparable with that of narrative 4 (mean score 4.36). The latter gave a comprehensive educational account of RE. It may be that educators have not heard much about RE from this perspective, and its rating was lower because they were not familiar with the argument.

Narrative 4 was the most highly rated. It would be interesting in any further research to explore what elements in this narrative were the most important ones for religion teachers. For example: was it the idea of 'resourcing the spirituality of young people no matter what their level of religious identification and practice' or was it the comprehensive and balanced account of a number of valued elements.

Section 8 data exemplified the strong unanimity of participants in endorsing the relevance and utility of educational terms and constructs in framing a narrative for school Religious Education. If such a view is more widespread across the whole population of religion teachers, then this raises two important questions:

- Why is such language noticeably missing in diocesan (and school) accounts of RE?
- Why is the ecclesiastical language of narrative one so ubiquitous in these accounts?

## **20.6 Evidence of awareness of the problem with excessive use of ecclesiastical terms in RE which tend to be replacing the word Religious Education**

In the introduction, it was claimed that there is evidence in diocesan and school documentation/websites, and in diocesan and school departmental/leadership role names and job descriptions that there is a language problem in Catholic school Religious Education labelled as ecclesiastical drift. This preliminary, test study is the first time that data has been collected on whether or not religious educators themselves see what is happening and consider it to be an ongoing problem that needs to be addressed.

The data in sections 10-15 provides empirical evidence that educators are acknowledging the existence of the problem of ecclesiastical drift in Australian Catholic Religious Education. But the problem remains contentious. Firstly, the data from section 10 will be interpreted.

It is significant that the most highly rated item in section 10 (item 45) was about the need for *balanced use* of both ecclesiastical and educational terms in describing Religious Education. There were 77% in agreement with another 10% unsure. My reading of this result, in the light of the responses to the rest of the questions in section 10, is that it implies there is currently a recognised lack of balance that is problematical.

Awareness of the problematical prominence of ecclesiastical language in RE: The most direct indicator that educators are aware of the problem of ecclesiastical drift shows in the *ecclesiastical drift scale*



constructed from the responses across the section 10 items. The scale is a measure of level of recognition that excessive use of ecclesiastical terms is causing difficulties for Religious Education. 65% of participants were above the half way score of 60, with the mean score being 66. The standard deviation of 20 suggests that there was a notable level of divergent opinion about whether or not ecclesiastical drift was an issue of concern. Nevertheless, in my interpretation, this suggests awareness of a problem needs further consideration and action. This is also confirmed in item 38 where only 39% considered that ecclesiastical language helped teachers get a better understanding of RE and clarity about its purposes, with 22% not sure and 34% disagreed.

Participants evidently know that this language is prominent in Catholic RE. Items 36 and 37, rating second and third places in the section, showed that about 70% considered that ecclesiastical language is prominent in both the discourse of RE and in professional development programs for religion teachers. 60% (with 23% unsure) were aware of its prominence in new religious leadership positions in diocesan offices; this item (43) rated in fourth place.

While it was evident that participants were well aware of the use of ecclesiastical language in RE (about 70%), there was a notable division of opinion as to whether or not this was problematical. This showed in the fifth ranking item (40) where a lower percentage (56%, with 19% unsure) felt that frequent use of ecclesiastical language can make RE appear to be more of a *church* activity than an *educational* one, compromising its accepted place in the school curriculum; 19% disagreed. But, in my opinion, this is still further confirmation that educators are concerned about the problem.

In 6<sup>th</sup> place, item 42 showed that 53% of participants (with 27% unsure) judged that it was not so much the ecclesiastical terms themselves that were the problem – rather it was their dominance of the narrative of RE that was the issue. 53% also considered that this usage created ambiguity about the purposes of RE because it tended to displace of obscure educational words (Item 39, 7<sup>th</sup> place in rating).

Items 46, 44 and 41 (with levels of agreement ranging between 49% and 38%) came next in ranking where less than half the participants considered that the following potential problems stemmed from ecclesiastical language usage.

- Inhibits contribution to national educational role of a spiritual/moral subject in the curriculum
- Ecclesiastical names of new leadership positions creates ambiguity about the nature of RE
- Gives the impression of RE as mainly about church recruitment

My conclusion: For some participants, part of their lower valuation for the ecclesiastical terms came from an acknowledgement of problems related to the excessive use of ecclesiastical terms, tending to replace the word Religious Education. This survey has provided more empirical evidence of problem of ecclesiastical drift in Australian Catholic Religious Education – even if it is only limited and preliminary data.

### ***20.7 The terms faith formation and Catholic identity: Problems with their usage***

A general picture of the positive valuation of the terms ‘faith formation’ and ‘Catholic identity’ is evident in the new scales – especially when compared with the scale for ‘critical evaluation of culture’.

<b>New scales constructed from pertinent items</b>	<b>Faith formation</b>	<b>Catholic identity</b>	<b>Critical evaluation of culture</b>
Mean score (20-100)	58	50	77
% participants above the half way score of 60	43%	27%	88%
Standard deviation	20	18	20

These results mirrored those in the first three parts of the survey which showed positive valuation and respect for the key ecclesiastical/religious terms, while at the same time showing that there are concerns about their usage when describing Religious Education. There is not the same difficulty with the

educational purpose of critical evaluation of culture, where there was strong unanimity about the perceived value of this aspect of RE.

### ***Faith formation***

The highest ranking item in section 12 affirmed that faith formation was more about ‘changing’ students at personal and spiritual levels than it was about ‘educating’ them (Mean 3.6 with 62% in agreement). This positive valuation of faith formation is consistent with my reading of the use of the term in current RE documents and publications where faith formation was apparently chosen to replace Religious Education precisely because it was intended to change students’ religious faith and practice. In the light of my understanding of both ‘faith’ and ‘formation’ (Rossiter, 1987, 2018), it is this wide ranging general acceptance of the term that troubles me; and I argue that its meaning and usage need more thoughtful, critical evaluation.

In my professional opinion, the term faith formation is an inappropriate one for Religious Education. I consider that the idea of intentionally favouring *changing* students personally over *educating* them *to be better able to author their own personal change* is manipulative and not ethical – as well as being unrealistic and not open to validation by observation. While registering my concern about the results for item 48, it is significant that item 50 (ranking second) showed 51% (with another 20% not sure) considering that term faith formation made unrealistic presumptions about both the personal faith of students and about how RE could change their faith. This appears to show some inconsistency between the results for the items – if personal change was a key factor in respondents’ thinking for item 48, then one might have expected correspondingly less agreement with item 50. Overall, this ambiguity in results is probably caused by ambiguity in educators’ thinking about faith formation.

Concern about ambiguity and lack of clarity in the use of the term faith formation was also evident in the result for item 47 (36% disagreed with the positive valuation, with 11% not sure.) Also in item 49, only 43% agreed (with 28% not sure) that one could readily identify a faith formation activity as distinct from an educational one.

It would appear that the term formation is popular for teacher professional development programs while faith formation is regarded as more effective than religious education. There are also significant, but not universal, concerns about the meaningfulness and relevance of its usage to describe RE.

### ***Catholic identity***

As noted earlier, the prominence of the Leuven Catholic identity project in Australia readily accounts for the highest ranking of item 53 in Section (51% in agreement) – about the core ‘recontextualising’ agenda for enhancing Catholic identity in Schools. However, in item 54, only 33% agreed that recontextualising was the first thing that the term Catholic identity brought to mind. But as shown in the new scales noted above, faith formation appears to be more favoured than Catholic identity as a term applicable to RE.

The results for this cluster of items in Section 14 show that Catholic identity is regarded as important. But there are also signs of potential problems – especially those noted in items 56, 57 and 58 with a significant minority in the agreement area, but with large numbers in the ‘not sure’ category (average *agreement* was 40% and average *not sure* was 26%); these items tapped into concerns about how non-Catholics and relatively non-religious Catholics may feel uncomfortable about the term’s usage, and about how the term sounded like a ‘Catholic church slogan’.

The same pattern of significant minority concerns also emerged in items 55 and 52 (average *agreement* 42% with *not sure* average of 15%). These items registered discomfort about the ‘inward looking’ focus of Catholic identity, and about lack of clarity and ambiguity in its meaning.

## 20.8 Critical evaluation of culture and spiritual / moral issues

The results for the 3 items in section 16 speak for themselves. This idea is strongly supported. It reads like a validation of the optional unit in Brisbane Catholic Education's new program *Religion, meaning and life* (2019). It is titled "Identity and meaning: How people construct personal identity and community in a consumerist culture".

## 20.9 Higher order statistical analyses: Differences in responses according to sub groups

Statistically significant differences, and the lack of same, between the responses of different participant groupings to the overall 54 items led to the following conclusions. They are tentative because of the small size of the sample; but they are worth noting, and they could be focal points for any more substantial use of the questionnaire.

Australian vs overseas responses: Perhaps the most significant finding from the t tests of differences between means was that overseas participants (n=27) had almost the same pattern of response as Australians (n=47) throughout the survey. The only differences showed up for items where, understandably, there was a lack of familiarity with the Australian context, and because of the current special Australian interest in Catholic identity through the prominence of the Leuven project. Whether the same finding would also show in more extensive research remains to be seen.

Primary vs Secondary teaching background: Response differences between these two groups were limited exclusively to valuations of educational terms. Those with primary background rated 7 items lower than their secondary counterparts where the questions were about critical pedagogy and evaluation of contemporary spiritual/moral issues, and with the status of religion as a credible school subject like other academic subjects. This result might have been expected because the possibilities for a critical, inquiring, issue-oriented study are more appropriate and relevant for older students. It is not that a critical dimension should be missing from primary school RE; but at this level, the emphasis should naturally be mainly on becoming familiar with one's own religious tradition and practice.

Gender differences: There were only five items where the differences between female and male mean scores were statistically significant. And all of these were for valuations of ecclesiastical terms where female responses had higher means than those of males.

Teachers vs Academics/consultants & advisers: In 11 instances only were there statistically different patterns of response between these two groups. In 10 of these, the teachers had higher means and all of these were about valuations of ecclesiastical terms. They had a lower mean for the item on how the term Catholic identity might make relatively non-religious Catholic students and teachers feel somewhat uncomfortable.

*One idea:* If use of ecclesiastical terms was felt by religion teachers to be problem, it could have been expected that for the evaluation of such terms they would have lower means than academics/consultants; and this was not the case.

*Secondly:* Perhaps academics, but not diocesan authorities, have greater freedom to be critical of language use in Religious Education, explaining in part the lower means of this group for ecclesiastical terms. But nothing further could be deduced on this question because in the survey it was not clear how many of the 33 currently not teaching in a school were academics or consultants/advisers.

*Thirdly:* One might have expected higher means for diocesan consultants/advisers because of their position in relation to current local policy in Religious Education. But as noted above, the draft survey could not discriminate on this question; and in any case the numbers were small.

What is significant is that there were no statistical differences between RE teachers and academics/consultants on 43 of the 54 items. All but 3 of the 11 items where there were differences, were in the initial valuation of ecclesiastical terms; and 2 related to perceptions of the clarity of meaning of the terms faith formation and Catholic identity.

Unanimity in the valuation of educational terms for describing Religious Education by both groups was clear.

RE teachers and academics/consultants rated the items identifying the potential problem of ecclesiastical drift in the same way. And with three exceptions, their views of issues with the constructs faith formation and Catholic identity were similar. While the views of only a small sample, they are, in my opinion, further confirmation that Catholic religious educators have identified ecclesiastical drift as a recognisable problem in Religious Education that needs to be addressed.

## 21. Conclusions

Thinking about, and scrutinising the relevance and applicability of both ecclesiastical and educational terms to classroom RE could be expected to inform the choices participants made in their questionnaire responses. The principal *purpose of the survey* was to prompt such thinking and scrutiny; but the requirements of brevity meant that this could not be explored in great detail, even though some of participants' thinking was evident in their written comments (item 63).

Ideally, more extensive survey participation, together with some interview research, are needed to see if the trends or 'pointers' that emerged in this preliminary test study are evident across the wider population of educators involved with Australian Catholic school Religious Education. It is very likely, in my view that the trends reported here would be replicated in further, larger scale research. But I understand the reluctance of Catholic school authorities to authorise such an investigation because it opens doors to questioning the relevance of ecclesiastical language for RE – a language that has become firmly embedded in the current narrative for Catholic school Religious Education and in which they are heavily invested. A research voice that raises questions about the status quo is rarely welcomed. Nevertheless, it is important that such questions pertinent to Religious Education be articulated and that evidence is considered. And if there is growing acknowledgment of the problem, then besides trying to remedy it, there is a need for further research to consider what sort of 'damage' ecclesiastical drift may be doing to teachers' and students' perceptions of RE, and whether it has become a handicap for the ongoing development of this vital learning area in the Catholic school curriculum.

As noted in the introduction, I anticipated that the pattern identified by Finn (2011) in looking at the views of teachers and parents on Religious Education would emerge again in this study – in a few words: *respect for the ecclesiastical terms together with awareness of problems associated with excessive usage*. There was noticeable diversity and range in the views of participants in this trial. And this is to be expected across the whole Catholic schooling community. How much unanimity is possible is difficult to predict. But while it is not likely that all conflicting opinions can be resolved, it is hoped that research like this can help promote more careful thinking and debate. And this may help build a more coherent narrative for Religious Education that is, in turn, more meaningful and relevant for today's young people and more satisfying for religion teachers.

If educational terms are so highly valued by Catholic educators, why are they missing in the descriptions of RE? The parts of the questionnaire that consistently attracted strong, almost unanimous support from the participants were those concerned with an *educational view of Religious Education*. There was no identifiable ambiguity about their meaning and relevance. There is no doubt that educators strongly endorse their use in the narrative for school RE. So one might wonder why they are either missing or minimally present in accounts of Catholic school RE on diocesan and even school websites. Instead, these descriptions of RE are framed almost exclusively in the ecclesiastical words used in Narrative 1. It is hard to find examples that reflect the ideas and language used in Narratives 2-5. Notable exceptions are Narrative 3, which was taken directly from the new Brisbane Catholic Education program *Religion, Meaning and Life* (BCE, 2019) and the National Catholic Education Commission's document *Framing Paper: Religious Education in Australian Catholic Schools* (NCEC, 2018), which gave a good account of the educational perspective on RE.

This illustrates the fundamental problem for Catholic school RE that I have labelled *ecclesiastical drift*. How much of a handicap it is, and how much damage it could cause in terms of diminishing the perceived

relevance of RE are questions that concern me. These concerns have motivated analysis and discussion of the problem, and about how it might be addressed, including implications for content and pedagogy (Rossiter, 2020, 2021).

It is not so much the ecclesiastical terms themselves that are the problem. They have a rightful place in the narrative of RE. Rather, it is the imbalance in usage between the ecclesiastical and the educational. For the large majority of current Catholic school pupils (and their parents), a Religious Education framed exclusively in ecclesiastical terms can be easily and readily dismissed as an irrelevant part of the school curriculum and of their education. And this tends to subvert the valuable contribution it could make to resourcing their spirituality and linking them with the Catholic religious heritage.

It was surprising to me that, apart from items that were expected to be confusing for overseas participants because of the idiosyncratic Australian context, there was no statistically significant difference between the Australian and overseas questionnaire responses.

Catholic Religious Education colleagues in Germany have some interesting points to make that are relevant here. Their context is different; in Germany there are very few church schools. But Catholic RE is firmly established and well resourced in government/state schools. In this context, there is naturally less likelihood of the RE narrative being dominated by ecclesiastical language. In fact, at the 1974 Synod of Wurzburg, the German Catholic bishops put in place a “convergence” argument that Religious Education needed a balanced rationale that included both educational and theological/ecclesiastical justifications – a view that still remains in force (Altmeyer, 2020). One consequence was the inclusion of content about world religions as a standard part of the German Catholic RE curriculum.

A United States voice echoing the concern to have this balance showed in the book *Dynamics of Catholic Education: Let the Catholic school be school* (DeThomasis, 2013). DeThomasis addressed the relationship between the Catholic school and the institutional church. While not talking about RE specifically, he explained that the Catholic school is not the Catholic Church and that it had a different function from the church. Its existence was not justified solely on the grounds of being an ‘annexe’ of the church or instrumental to the church’s mission. “The Catholic school must be free to be a school so that it can truly educate” (p. 20). He lamented claims that US Catholic schools were not ‘Catholic enough’ and he urged authorities to allow the schools to be free, autonomous, educational communities engaged in the exploration of truth and wisdom in a complex world – and not inwardly focused and preoccupied with reproducing a Catholic identity.

I would expect that if this survey were given to religion teachers in Catholic schools in the USA, Canada, Ireland, UK and New Zealand, as well as in some European countries, the same trends evident in Australia would show up, albeit with nuanced differences according to the different contexts. An interesting observation came from Enger (2020) who endorsed arguments about the problem of ecclesiastical drift, but he claimed that it played out in a different way in state schools in Norway. He considered that some within the Evangelical Lutheran church in Norway were dissatisfied with the Religious Studies (RE) programs in state schools (since 1997), and they adopted the term faith formation in ‘opposition’; ‘inwardly’ looking faith formation courses were set up as supplements or alternatives to the school programs; but in so doing, the educational relevance of RE was compromised.

Final words: So the principal hope to emerge from this study would be promotion of more balance between the use of ecclesiastical and educational language for Religious Education. In my view, the current distinct imbalance is a significant handicap for Catholic school RE.

If there was any questionnaire item that could be identified in this survey as at the crux of the matter and a hopeful indicator of where to go next, it would be item 45 – *there is a need for balanced use of ecclesiastical terms along with educational terms in the discourse of RE*. The item registered just under 80% agreement with another 10% not sure.

The revised questionnaire is open on this web address. Participation in further data collection is welcome. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3YYTRD9>

## Thanks

I am indebted to all who took the time to participate in the trial run of the questionnaire. I hope that this report will be of interest to them.

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