

26-5-2020

## Ways Forward in Religious Education: Reflections of an Australian Colloquium

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### Recommended Citation

Hall, David FMS and Sultmann, William AM (2020) "Ways Forward in Religious Education: Reflections of an Australian Colloquium," *eJournal of Catholic Education in Australasia*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/ecea/vol4/iss1/3>

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## **Abstract**

Within a changed and changing context for Religious Education, scholars and practitioners (n = 57) across Australia gathered to share and discern ways forward in Religious Education (RE) within Catholic schools. A Constant Comparative Analysis process identified five pathways (ways forward) in support of RE (Formation, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Partnerships, and Research). Each pathway was underpinned by foundations in faith, summarised by an integrating principle and advanced through strategic intentions. Faith foundations for Formation were centred in Christ, acknowledged Church-tradition and focused on mission as part of one's faith journey. The arena of Pedagogy was reinforced as dependent on dialogue, inquiry, and witness and underscored in love. Curriculum dimensions focused on identity and inclusion and were argued to be relevant and creative. Partnerships were encouraged through collaboration across school, parish and parent community; and, Research was grounded through building awareness and addressing accountability. The Integrating principles for each pathway included: Formation, 'advancing formation for personal identity and school mission'; Pedagogy, 'advancing an inquiry, experiential, encounter-based model'; Curriculum, 'advancing a faith-based liberating curriculum'; Partnerships, 'advancing practices which engage and strengthen collegiality'; and Research, 'advancing data gathering which identifies needs and informs practice'. Strategies to support future RE were multifaceted and included: Formation (forums for networking and integrating faith experience with professional learning); Pedagogy (promoting teacher roles of moderator, specialist, witness); Curriculum (involving all staff in support of curriculum alignment); Partnerships (engaging partners beyond schools); and, Research (gathering and applying quality data). Colloquium conclusions informed an imagination for RE and offered a platform for consideration of 'where to from here' and 'what might be next'.

## **Introduction**

Catholic school communities in Australia reflect the multi-cultural, multi-faith, limited or no faith affiliations within the wider community. The overall curriculum, the subject area of RE, the religious dimension of the school, structures, processes and culture engage this diversity while faithful to Church traditions and Catholic school mission. Moreover, community participation in school life and overall expectations of pedagogy, curriculum and technology situate RE in a complex and changing environment and highlight the significance of collaborative partnerships in sharing perspectives and identifying ways forward. This paper explores ways forward in RE from a process of exchange and dialogue within a national forum (colloquium) where research and practice were shared to inform pathways of importance and associated principles and processes for their advancement.

The curriculum of a Catholic school addresses individual, social and community contingencies and expectations. Principles of equity and excellence drive the educational agenda for students to become “confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community” (Education Council, 2019, p. 6). Within this context, the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) advances goals for Catholic schools which are centred on the person of Christ and a view of the human person revealed by Christ (NCEC, 2017; 2018). It is an anthropology that invites students to find meaning and application in their lives; a philosophy summed up in the Magisterium statement: “Christ is the foundation of the whole enterprise in a Catholic school. His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps to direct thought, action and will according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes the norm of life” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 34).

Curriculum content and pedagogy incorporates a breadth of possibilities identified as integrated, inquiry-based, performing and practical arts focused, outcomes centred, traditional and distinctive subject areas, or emerging curriculum where the goals and processes are negotiated (Churchill et al., 2016, pp. 198-202). More precisely within the field of Religious Education (RE) the models mapped by Lovat (2019) are summarised as en-faithing, inter-faith, and critical. Notwithstanding the variation in pedagogy, the aim of the RE curriculum is:

...to develop students' knowledge and understanding of Christianity in the light of Jesus and the Gospel, and its unfolding story and diversity within contemporary Australian and global society. It expands students' spiritual awareness and religious identity, fostering the capacities and skills of discerning, interpreting, thinking critically, seeking truth and making meaning. It challenges and inspires their service to others and engagement in the Church and the world (NCEC, 2017, p. 7).

Scholars and practitioners of RE seek to reconcile missional, educational, theological, spiritual, and ecclesial considerations in which the balance of information transfer along with Christian witness is the ideal (Buchanan, 2019). The discipline of RE is rich in the variety of instructional approaches (Buchanan & Gellel, 2019), comprehensive in the Traditions it draws from (Groome, 2019) and detailed in the relationships with associated disciplines (Moore, 2019). It has been described variously over the years as religious instruction, catechetics, religion and Christian doctrine, to name some. These different names were usually associated with changes in pedagogical practices or emphases: catechesis, kerygmatic renewal, experiential approach, and shared Christian praxis. Now, what is being done in the 'space' called RE is considered to be in a state of flux. One commentator argues RE is in a state of confusion, with an associated challenge to re-imagine a trajectory in keeping with established educational practice (Rossiter, 2019).

The theory and practice of Religious Education grapples with at least three fragile premises. One, that school RE builds on the catechetical experience of the home and parish; second, that RE teachers are themselves well formed, committed people of faith; and third, that Religious Education can be offered transmissively in classrooms of diversity. The reality of the RE classroom is that more students than ever do not have the experience of explicit faith practice in the home and just as many, if not more, have no connection with parish life or with a faith tradition of any form (NCEC, 2017). Similarly, while Catholic schools are staffed by teachers who are intuitively inclined to, and explicitly contribute to its religious identity and character (Gleeson, Goldberg, O'Gorman & O'Neill,

2018), the majority do not engage in the life of faith beyond the school, and for many, formation experiences are relatively limited. Further, this reality sits within an educational context where the expectations of staff to engage agency, equity and authenticity in their practices are advocated as a significant contribution to the enhancement of school mission (Sultmann & Brown, 2019). The demarcations where shifts are unfolding are therefore threefold: the priority of RE within the Catholic school to empower students with a Christian meaning system that offers an approach to life and living; the necessity of formation in the development of teacher agency in facilitating student knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions; and, professional learning that enables flexible and creative pedagogies to support student agency, equity and authenticity within a multiplicity of circumstances and possibilities.

The challenges of contemporary RE practice cannot presume passive participation in traditional experiences nor the general expectation that the faith and its traditions might be in some way 'rubbed off' on students not of the Catholic, other than Catholic or no faith experience. The challenge is that the Good News be seen in innovative and co-creative ways as part of the living tradition of the Church and as a meaning system of relevance to individuals, social and community experience (Roebben, 2019). At the heart of sharing this Good News is a Gospel imagination which shapes and guides the totality of curriculum and culture. It is against this national backdrop that a national colloquium was convened to explore *'Ways Forward in Religious Education'*. As an initiative of the ACU La Salle Academy, the colloquium was designed to provide a 'space and place' for dialogue among educators and academics seeking to advance the 'why', 'what', and 'how' of RE into the future. The scene was set by the colloquium facilitator in the opening session through a statement of invitation and challenge: "While much has been achieved in Religious Education over many decades, we find ourselves unsettled about our current predicament. We are not sure if what we are doing is really hitting the mark".

## **Method**

Colloquium themes of identifying challenges and future directions; embracing opportunities; and, imagining possibilities were explored through a bounded case study; an approach that “investigates a contemporary phenomenon and context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 13). The method permits an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (Creswell, 2008) through observing life and recognising determinants (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 253); and, provides a focus on the ‘what’, ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions that are being explored (Merriam, 1998). In this instance, the boundaries of the case study were scholars and Catholic school RE leaders selected on their expertise, involvement and representation of University and Catholic employing authorities across Australia in the field of RE. Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000) permitted data to be assessed simultaneously and iteratively by grouping responses to questions, analysing different perspectives on central issues, and guiding the researchers to focus upon further areas (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). That is, the approach compares new information with emerging themes. “Throughout this process the researcher is constantly comparing codes to codes, and categories to categories” (Creswell, 2008, p. 442) and transposing large volumes of data by generating, comparing and merging themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An overview of the shared process inputs and the structure and engagement with the continuing dialogue are shown in Figure 1.

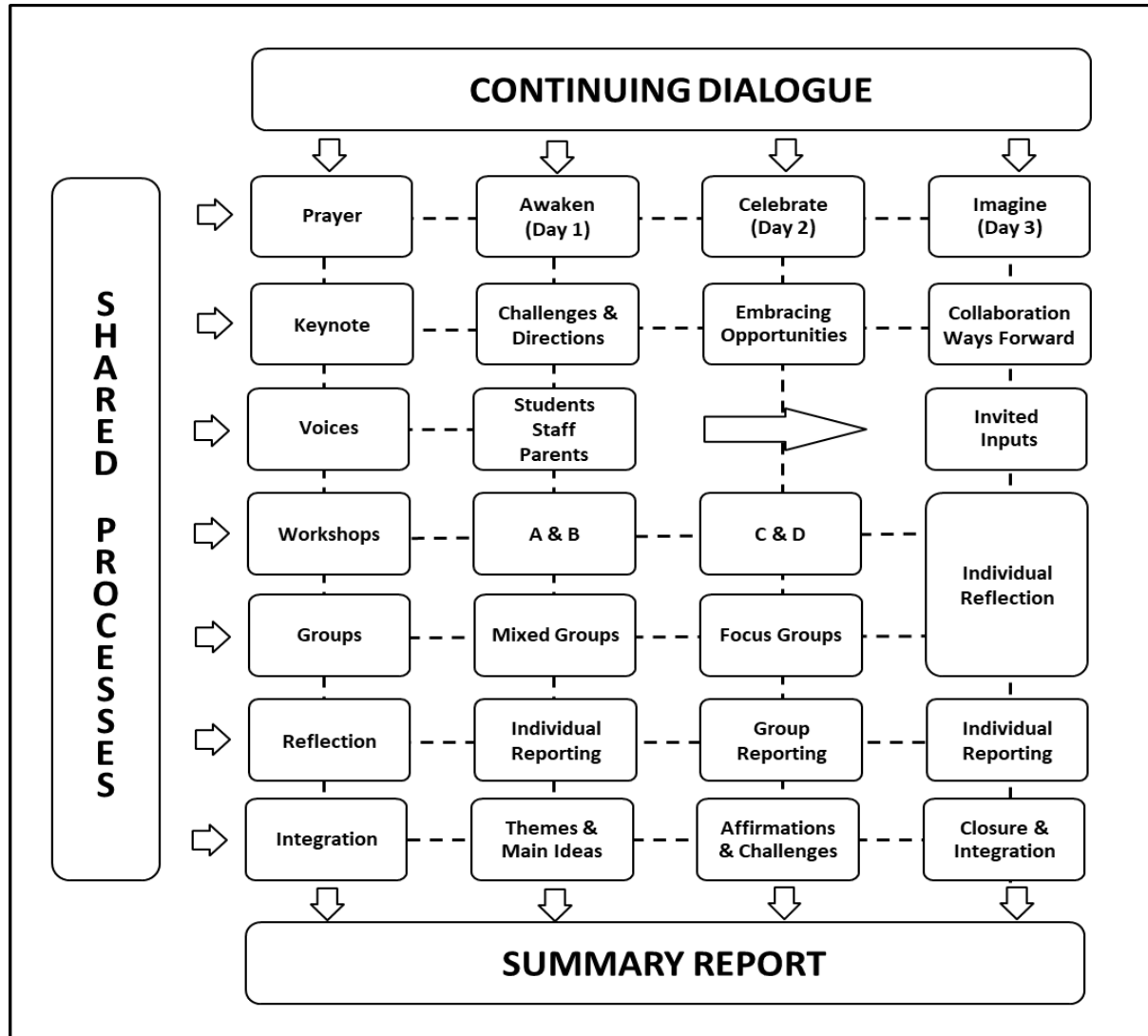


Figure 1. Overview of colloquium inputs and processes for engaging the dialogue

Stage One: Identifying challenges and future directions (Day 1)

The integration of Day 1 discourse involved the collation of individual reflections on: 'existing and emerging challenges;' 'new awakenings and future directions;' and, 'other comments'. The compilation of written summaries and provision of comments were validated by members of the planning group and subsequently summarised by the facilitator as feedback for the whole group.

### Stage Two: Embracing opportunities (Day 2)

Participants were invited to reflect on the recorded themes of Day 1 considering the workshops, the keynote presentation and continuing processes of dialogue within the overall experience. Participant processes entailed focus group discussion on a domain of interest; responding to "What is working well? What remains a challenge? What might be emerging in a wider vision?" and, recording and sharing personal and group deliberations. As with Day 1 narratives, the planning group recorded outcomes for summary and reporting practices for the whole group.

### Stage Three: Imagining possibilities (Day 3)

Accumulated and new data sources informed ways forward in RE on Day 3. First, an interpretative analysis of areas of interest and principles from Days 1 and 2 was activated; second, the summative considerations of participants as to what inspired across the full experience of the gathering were aggregated; and, third, the evaluation responses which identified what was most significant in content and process were reviewed. The aggregated data and the presentation of findings was provided in an overall report circulated to participants for comment.

## Results

### Challenges and future directions (Day 1)

Four dominant challenges were identified: formation; pedagogy and curriculum; partnerships; and, research. Each challenge incorporated themes: formation (seven), pedagogy and curriculum (seven), partnerships (three), and research (three). Themes reflected a range of statements, most of which were optimistic and forthright (Table 1).



Table 1. Collated summaries of challenges, themes and explanatory statements

Challenges	Themes	Statements
Formation	Teacher evangelisation (including RE teachers)	Invitation — proposing not imposing; the critical need to differentiate the faith encounter. RE teachers need to be supported in their intrinsic spirituality and their self-efficacy.
	Undergraduate formation priority	We need to awaken the witness factor in our younger RE teachers and under-graduate RE students.
	Witness	It's not good enough to have well meaning, 'generally spiritual' people in the Religious Education space when we are trying to draw secondary school students into experiences where they can encounter Christ.
	Holistic engagement	What form of RE curriculum/pedagogy is responsive to our context and equips young people to dialogue with a pluralist/secular society?
	Critical mass	We need a critical mass of staff who passionately engage and promote Catholic identity of the school.
	Catholic identity	How do we ensure RE enhances the identity of everyone in our schools - 'fullness of life' for all?
	Embracing the Mystery	Recognising that we do God's work and that union with God is critical in the work of Religious Education.
Pedagogy and Curriculum	Senior schooling	More experiential and inquiry approach to RE ... reconsideration of what we do in senior RE.
	Consensus on purpose of RE	What exactly is expected of an RE teacher in a RE classroom in a Catholic school today, both primary and secondary?
	Professional learning	Formation of our teachers and parents in Catholic Education is key. Celebrate and share our successes more overtly and encourage best practice.
	Community for all	We need to model the radical inclusion of Jesus and ensure everyone can find a place of comfort, solace, compassion, understanding, forgiveness and mercy when they are part of Catholic Education.
	Voices of youth	The vital importance of RE teachers being able to sensitively listen to students and engage them with inquiry into 'the big questions' with sophistication in drawing upon/connection with the Tradition.
	National curriculum and resourcing	There are so many points of congruence between us, along with some significant and productive collaboration but we have never achieved a National RE curriculum. This continues to result in duplication and inefficient use of resources. This matter is still worth pursuing.
	RE and Catholic school identity	Embedding a Catholic world view across the curriculum; improve quality classroom teaching of religion; and encourage an encounter with Jesus in the religious life of the school.
Partnerships	School as mechanism for engagement	Catholic schools have something to offer Catholics (the Church) and potentially many others (who send their children), and the broader society.
	Parent framework of engagement	Listen to parents and their opinions (families are the most important influence). Increase our efforts in the formation of parents.
	Parish relationship and ongoing dialogue	The importance of parish life in renewing/refashioning to engage with people's lives and respect the agency of all the baptised.



Research	Partnerships	Universities will be important in supporting the identification of areas for new research and providing personnel and resources to advance this cause.
	Quality practice in Religious Education	While some useful research has been undertaken more work needs to be done on what makes for effective faith formation of students in Catholic schools.
	Development of quality resources needed	An effective and efficient way of collaborating will be the development of contemporary resources that support the teaching of Religious Education. This needs to be well informed by research aligned to contemporary pedagogies.

### Embracing opportunities

The analysis of reports from focus group discussions on the challenges of RE were categorised in accord with "What is working well; What remains a challenge; and, what is emerging as part of a wider vision?" In addition, given the breadth of responses from the pedagogy and curriculum groups, the separation of comments into domains of pedagogy and curriculum was performed (Tables 2 to 6).

Table 2. Collated list of commentary from formation focus group discussion.

<b>FORMATION</b>		
<b>What is working well?</b>	<b>What remains a challenge?</b>	<b>Emerging in a wider vision?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. System recognition of staff interest in formation.</li> <li>2. Partnerships among organisations.</li> <li>3. Recognition of the liturgical life of the school.</li> <li>4. RE Colloquium: dialogue and networking.</li> <li>5. Programmes that give emphasis on formation alongside and within academic programs.</li> <li>6. The time and energy organisations give to addressing formation concerns.</li> <li>7. Graduates as credible faith models and positive attitude towards Church.</li> <li>8. Faith experiences - pilgrimages, international projects.</li> <li>9. Mandated levels of academic formation of teachers and leaders.</li> <li>10. Formation viewed as integral to mission.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establishing realistic goals.</li> <li>2. Priority of formation for RE teachers.</li> <li>3. Clarity of Catholic identity.</li> <li>4. Collaboration within and beyond systems.</li> <li>5. Shared practice across Australia.</li> <li>6. Capacity building of formators.</li> <li>7. The disconnect of spiritual life and liturgical life in schools.</li> <li>8. Integrating theology with faith formation and RE.</li> <li>9. Engaging middle leaders in developing Catholic identity.</li> <li>10. Avoidance of piecemeal approaches over being strategic.</li> <li>11. Formation for all, irrespective of faith tradition.</li> <li>12. Consistent, contemporary language for: formation, witness, dialogue, identity.</li> <li>13. Quality control of formation.</li> <li>14. Sharing formation: perhaps through a National Formation Institute.</li> <li>15. Competing priorities for staff.</li> <li>16. Image of 'Church: 'official, distant, rules, out of touch.'</li> <li>17. Public dismissal of religious worldview.</li> <li>18. Faith experiences and good spiritual direction.</li> <li>19. Integration and collaboration of schools with the broader Australian and global Church.</li> <li>20. Purpose of RE.</li> <li>21. Formation: individual focus - meeting people where they are at.</li> <li>22. Differentiation of formation for staff - how do we do this well?</li> <li>23. Using Enhancing Catholic School Identity (ECSI) data appropriately.</li> <li>24. Dialogue: not surface listening.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Liturgical formation.</li> <li>2. Technology: delivery and collaboration.</li> <li>3. Reflecting on context and content.</li> <li>4. Being grounded in firsthand experience.</li> <li>5. Collaboration and cohesiveness in formation initiatives.</li> <li>6. Short courses.</li> <li>7. Initiatives beyond current engagement levels and established practices.</li> <li>8. Curriculum which identifies, targets and supports teachers needed for Catholic schools.</li> <li>9. Engagement, community service, and justice into all learning experiences.</li> <li>10. Parent engagement initiatives that build on current practice.</li> <li>11. Building upon existing capacity.</li> <li>12. Resourcing leadership teams.</li> <li>13. Place and importance of dialogue.</li> <li>14. Evangelising digital culture.</li> <li>15. Encouraging parish involvement of teachers and leaders (e.g. Sydney).</li> <li>16. Supporting the core function of parish.</li> </ol>

Table 3. Collated list of commentary from pedagogy focus group discussion

PEDAGOGY		
What is working well?	What remains a challenge?	Emerging in a wider vision?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research base informing pedagogical practice.</li> <li>2. National conversation forums.</li> <li>3. The gift and potential of teachers — avoid a deficit approach.</li> <li>4. Teachers assisted to think about RE differently.</li> <li>5. Differentiate experiences: student voice, inquiry pedagogies, visible learning.</li> <li>6. Professional accreditation for 'specialist' RE teachers.</li> <li>7. Evaluating RE including ways of listening to students and parents.</li> <li>8. Responding to pluralised context - 'dialogical interplay'.</li> <li>9. 'Pedagogy of Encounter' and dialogical re-contextualising process for seeking truth, making meaning and living story.</li> <li>10. ECSI data: theoretical and pedagogical frame to enhance Catholic identity.</li> <li>11. Integration of head, heart, hands not just as a framework for learning but as an entry point to encounter Christ.</li> <li>12. Engagement of learners: critical authentic dialogue and post-critical engagement while 'preferencing' the Catholic tradition in a pedagogy of inquiry.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work on 'witness capabilities': articulation of what this looks like.</li> <li>2. Skills: how to use tools, activities for re-contextualising.</li> <li>3. Accreditation for 'professional' practice.</li> <li>4. Distance between expectations and classroom practices.</li> <li>5. Religion that promotes personal identity.</li> <li>6. Dialogue in the RE classroom and the skills of teacher as moderator, specialist and witness.</li> <li>7. Co-created learning space, listening and engagement with students.</li> <li>8. Nexus: quality pedagogy, curriculum content, assessment, and reporting.</li> <li>9. Sharing good practice, communication, and opportunities to celebrate.</li> <li>10. Hold 'diversity' and identity as paradox, enabling new ways of understanding 'being'.</li> <li>11. Professional learning in rural and remote Dioceses.</li> <li>12. Research on religious profiles.</li> <li>13. Students: space to encounter God/the Holy Spirit when lives are Snapchat, Instagram etc. What is God's #?</li> <li>14. Confidence of teachers and leaders to articulate identity.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educationally sound principles while enabling flexibility and innovation.</li> <li>2. Sustainable professional learning community with opportunity for face to face wider gathering for dialogue and action research.</li> <li>3. Focus on pedagogy rather than a focus on curriculum.</li> <li>4. 'Digitisation' to assist teachers in roles (specialist, witness, moderator).</li> <li>5. Graduate expectations / attributes / framework - a 'distinctive' Catholic graduate.</li> <li>6. RE teachers who animate learning where whole person is educated - head, heart, body and will.</li> <li>7. Greater listening with students, parents, teachers, Church, Catholic Education Offices (CEOs).</li> <li>8. Context matters - working in a hermeneutic space where life, culture and faith meet.</li> <li>9. Commonalities of pedagogy.</li> <li>10. Evidence and data? What does this look like?</li> <li>11. Schools, CEOs and universities: partnership to support educators and educational leaders in nurturing and/or encountering a relationship with Christ in a way that helps them to confidently give public witness.</li> </ol>

Table 4. Collated list of commentary from curriculum focus group discussion

<b>CURRICULUM</b>		
<b>What is working well?</b>	<b>What remains a challenge?</b>	<b>Emerging in a wider vision?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sponsorship to enable educators to become qualified RE teachers.</li> <li>2. Tertiary offerings for teachers and leaders of RE.</li> <li>3. Skills in the National Curriculum reflect essentials in RE literacy.</li> <li>4. Understanding ECSI/Catholic Identity is developing.</li> <li>5. Responding to our contexts ... taking the culture and traditions seriously.</li> <li>6. New Initiatives in 'witness' formation with pre-service teachers.</li> <li>7. Access to curriculum 'content' via the various frameworks.</li> <li>8. NCEC Religious Education Framing Paper eloquently proposes the 'how' of RE.</li> <li>9. Catholic Education South Australia's work on capabilities and dispositions enriches the conversation about how RE can develop learners.</li> <li>10. CEO Melbourne's work on RE 'Pedagogy of Encounter' responds to the need for dialogical re-contextualising process for seeking truth, making meaning and living story.</li> <li>11. Catholic Schools Youth Ministry Australia (CSYMA): opportunity for students who want/choose formation, to receive that in the classroom context.</li> <li>12. Tertiary offerings that enable students to become qualified teachers and leaders of RE.</li> <li>13. Skills in the National Curriculum as critically reflecting RE literacy.</li> <li>14. RE programs to engage senior students in RE (e.g. Diocese of Toowoomba and Cairns).</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Systematic attention to formation for mission.</li> <li>2. Witness capabilities.</li> <li>3. Religion that promotes development of each learner's identity.</li> <li>4. Well-developed Primary / Secondary curriculum with digital resources accessible to teachers.</li> <li>5. A co-created learning space, listening and engagement by design, with students.</li> <li>6. Concept of general capabilities with the distinctiveness of the Catholic Christian story ... human formation for thriving persons, capable learners and leaders for the world God desires.</li> <li>7. A study of religion that supports the identity formation of all students.</li> <li>8. Resources and frameworks to supplement existing curriculum.</li> <li>9. Coordinated development of digital learning resources.</li> <li>10. Professional learning for teachers of RE — particularly in rural and remote Dioceses.</li> <li>11. RE that translates into life-long learning (utilising Religious capabilities?)</li> <li>12. Adults who can manage their spiritual wellbeing and witness to the Gospel.</li> <li>13. Different understandings about the purpose and approach to RE.</li> <li>14. The diverse religious profiles of students.</li> <li>15. Student agency in RE.</li> <li>16. Breaking open the RE curriculum as a place of authentic formation and evangelisation.</li> <li>17. 'Who are we?' Christ at centre.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. RE starting the process of listening to parents.</li> <li>2. RE — a voice contributing to and leading the learning agenda.</li> <li>3. An exciting time for RE in Australia: re-contextualising the curriculum to promote meaning, transformation and being dialogical.</li> <li>4. Listening to our student voices to guide 'where to ... what do our students want RE to be'?</li> <li>5. Evidence and data? What does this look like?</li> <li>6. Assessment and collation of evidence in RE.</li> <li>7. Responding to pluralised context through 'dialogical interplay'.</li> <li>8. RE has a role in enhancing the 'identity of all'.</li> </ol>

Table 5. Collated list of commentary from partnerships focus group discussion

<b>PARTNERSHIPS</b>		
<b>What is working well?</b>	<b>What remains a challenge?</b>	<b>Emerging in a wider vision?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Interesting initiatives in some Dioceses.</li> <li>2. Parish sacramental programs.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A common language across the stakeholder groups.</li> <li>2. A shared understanding of the role of family, school, parish.</li> <li>3. Parent involvement.</li> <li>4. Imbalance of resourcing.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A practical approach that honours the contributions each stakeholder can make.</li> <li>2. An inclusive approach and much broader than 'Father' and 'Principal'.</li> </ol>

Table 6. Collated list of commentary from research focus group discussion

<b>RESEARCH</b>		
<b>What is working well?</b>	<b>What remains a challenge?</b>	<b>Emerging in a wider vision?</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Starting point — the actual questions of the students and teachers 'being attentive to reality as the first formative step'.</li> <li>2. Research projects undertaken in various dioceses, including collaboration with universities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Linking RE/theology as an academic exercise plus faith experience and formation.</li> <li>2. An evidentiary platform for what to research.</li> <li>3. Access to digital platform.</li> <li>4. A national resource bank.</li> <li>5. Appropriate budget allocation.</li> <li>6. Understanding faith within a scientific revolution.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Long-term planning.</li> <li>2. Theological formation of teachers.</li> <li>3. Theological framework for Catholic organisations.</li> <li>4. Accountability mechanism and a research focus.</li> <li>5. Digital connections (knowing and relating).</li> <li>6. Best practice lighthouses.</li> <li>7. Philanthropic and entity support for research funding.</li> <li>8. Centre for Academic Research (RE, Formation, Pedagogy, Theology, Education).</li> <li>9. Publication/s as attractive for academic interest and career progression.</li> </ol>



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was applied to the data within Tables 2 to 6. IPA begins with small group discussion, transcribed notations, broad research questions and subsequent data interrogation. It is based on three discrete and unfolding stages: recording of key data; generating theme titles; and integration of themes through assignment of a key principle (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999).

IPA was performed independently by the report writers on Formation, Pedagogy, and Curriculum data. Where differences existed with assigning themes and principles, a process of conversation provided the necessary consensus. For purposes of detailed examination, the focus group reflections were nominated as 'Affirmations' for 'what is working well'; 'Challenges' for 'what remains a challenge'; and, 'Vision' for 'what is emerging in a wider vision' (Tables 7, 8 & 9).

Table 7. IPA analysis of formation themes and integrating principle

<b>Affirmations</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Vision</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Priority of RE within curriculum.</li> <li>2. Partnerships in provision.</li> <li>3. Dialogue as foundational process.</li> <li>4. Credibility of witness of formators.</li> <li>5. Integral to school mission.</li> <li>6. Critical time.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarification of identity.</li> <li>2. Disconnection of faith and life.</li> <li>3. Goals and strategies articulation.</li> <li>4. Capacity building of formators.</li> <li>5. Personal integration.</li> <li>6. Quality of resourcing.</li> <li>7. Diversity of faiths and faith experience.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Technology.</li> <li>2. Collaboration.</li> <li>3. Faith/life integration.</li> <li>4. Mandated guidelines.</li> <li>5. Parish connection.</li> <li>6. Leadership.</li> </ol>
<p>Principle: Advancing formation for personal identity and school mission through interdependence in support and delivery.</p>		

Table 8. IPA analysis of pedagogy themes and integrating principle

<b>Affirmations</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Vision</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research importance</li> <li>2. Accreditation</li> <li>3. Specialisation recognition</li> <li>4. Multi-faith context</li> <li>5. Pedagogy of Encounter</li> <li>6. Rich dialogue</li> <li>7. Encounter with Christ</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Witness capabilities</li> <li>2. Skills of RE teachers</li> <li>3. Accreditation</li> <li>4. Nexus among pedagogy, assessment, content, and reporting</li> <li>5. Sharing good practice</li> <li>6. Catering for diversity within tradition</li> <li>7. Professional learning</li> <li>8. Encounter</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Educational principles</li> <li>2. Action research</li> <li>3. Sustainable professional learning</li> <li>4. Graduate expectations</li> <li>5. Strategic engagement</li> <li>6. Partnerships</li> <li>7. Digitalisation</li> </ol>
Principle: Advancing an inquiry, experiential, encounter-based model.		

Table 9. IPA analysis of curriculum themes and integrating principle

<b>Affirmations</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Vision</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding ECSI data</li> <li>2. Curriculum and context awareness</li> <li>3. Best practice emerging</li> <li>4. Creativity with Senior RE</li> <li>5. Teacher preparation</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Formation for mission</li> <li>2. Catering for diversity within tradition</li> <li>3. Professional learning</li> <li>4. Personal identity</li> <li>5. Purpose of RE</li> <li>6. Witness</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exemplars of good practice</li> <li>2. Evidence based practice</li> <li>3. Multi-faith and multi-cultural context</li> </ol>
Principle: Advancing a faith based liberating curriculum which is inclusive, relevant, inquiring, and life-giving.		

### Imagining Possibilities

The imagination of possibilities, *Ways Forward in Religious Education*, was drawn from three sources. First, the analysis of the aggregated dialogue across the first two days of the colloquium;

second, participant responses to 'what words or concepts inspire' the theory and practice of RE; and third, evaluative comments on the process overall. Notably, while the responses to what inspires were presumed as core assumptions, the confirmation by participants of what was coded as 'Faith Foundations' served to confirm the basic rationale for the combined formal and informal processes of the Colloquium.

Faith foundations for RE within Catholic schools, while assumed within the overall dialogue, was emphatically confirmed by participants in their responses to what inspires them within the learning process. The centrality of Catholic faith within the key components of RE in Catholic schools was made clear with the key elements of Formation being centred in Christ, tradition, mission and faith journey; Pedagogy as founded in discipleship, and characterised by dialogue, love, inquiry, and witness; Curriculum as inclusive and shaped by encounter and identity, relevant and creative; Partnerships drawn from collaboration across school, parish and parent community; and Research as integral to awareness and accountability.

A third, and unexpected 'window' into overall colloquium dialogue was extracted from the evaluative reports. While the responses were positive and appreciative, there existed within the commentary an emphasis on what was most meaningful from the experience. Aspects of note were the quality and variety of inputs, prayer, planning, facilitation and opportunities to dialogue and share best practice. In addition, significance was given to strategic intentions in advancing *Ways Forward in Religious Education*.

### **Summary outcomes**

Participant commentary identified ways forward in RE as underpinned by faith foundations and summarised by integrating principles and strategic action across each of the interdependent pathways of Formation, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Partnerships, and Research. Included in the summary are samples of participant narrative to illustrate the integrating principle of the overall dialogue.

### **Faith Foundations**

1. Formation - centred in Christ, tradition, mission and faith journey. *(RE teachers need to be supported in their intrinsic spirituality and their self-efficacy; and, it's not good enough to have well meaning, 'generally spiritual' people in the Religious Education space when we are trying to draw secondary school students into experiences where they can encounter Christ).*
2. Pedagogy - founded in discipleship, and characterised by dialogue, love, inquiry, and witness. *(The vital importance of RE teachers being able to sensitively listen to students and engage them with inquiry into 'the big questions' with sophistication in drawing upon/connection with the Tradition; and, we need to model the radical inclusion of Jesus and ensure everyone can find a place of comfort, solace, compassion, understanding, forgiveness and mercy when they are part of Catholic Education).*
3. Curriculum - inclusive and shaped by encounter and identity, relevant and creative. *(Embedding a Catholic world view across the curriculum; improve quality classroom teaching of religion; and encourage an encounter with Jesus in the religious life of the school; and, listening to our student voices to guide 'where to ... what do our students want RE to be').*
4. Partnerships - drawn from collaboration across school, parish and parent community. *(Catholic schools have something to offer Catholics (the Church) and potentially many others (who*

*send their children), and the broader society; and, a practical approach that honours the contributions each stakeholder can make).*

5. Research - as integral to awareness and accountability. *(While some useful research has been undertaken more work needs to be done on what makes for effective faith formation of students in Catholic schools; and, an effective and efficient way of collaborating will be the development of contemporary resources that support the teaching of Religious Education. This needs to be well informed by research aligned to contemporary pedagogies).*

### **Integrating Principles and Strategies**

1. Formation - advancing formation for personal identity and school mission through interdependence in support and delivery; and, forums for sharing and networking; and, integrating faith experience and theology.
2. Pedagogy - advancing an inquiry, experiential, encounter-based model; and dialogue in promoting RE method; and nurturing teacher dispositions of moderator, specialist, witness.
3. Curriculum - advancing a faith-based liberating curriculum which is inclusive, relevant, and life-giving; and professional learning for staff, including school-based leaders of RE at future colloquia.
4. Partnerships - advancing practices which engage and strengthen collegiality; and, communication between Universities, Institutes and CEOs at local levels; inclusive of partners beyond schools (e.g. parish-based ministries).
5. Research - advancing data gathering which identifies needs and informs practice; and, gathering quality data; and, applying the lessons as foundational to meaningful conversation are critical to effective learning.

### **Discussion**

The unspoken assumption of the colloquium, and indeed any discussion on or around RE, was exemplified in a keynote presentation at a national symposium on RE: “we have to know what we are looking at and what we call attention to?” (Cullen, 2019). The deliberations and conclusions of the colloquium addressed this challenge and gave attention to domains of significance for exploring, expanding and confirming RE within the life of the Catholic school.

The colloquium sought to build awareness of best practice in a context of challenges, affirmations and opportunities. It was not a conference in the traditional sense, but a process of dialogue that showcased and enabled Catholic educators to meet, dialogue and imagine *Ways Forward in Religious Education*. The process was shaped by the experience, wisdom and generosity of those who accepted the invitation to participate. Notwithstanding these parameters, the overall planning and purpose of the colloquium, together with the profile of participants, enabled substantial expertise to be applied to advancing RE.

The outcomes of the experience did not seek to extend or imply strategies for implementation in multiple and independent Catholic Education jurisdictions. Rather, what was offered was the experience of dialogue and the analysis of a group of educators within a defined experience. While not comprehensive, prescriptive or definitive; the content, process and outcomes of the colloquium provided a basis for confirming characteristics of quality RE in the domains of Formation, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Partnerships, and Research. Underlying Foundations in Faith; Integrating Principles which wove together a complex and expansive dialogue; and Strategies that offered a basis for development or critique of policy and practice summarised the presentations and deliberations. These domains, principles and strategies constitute a meaningful framework and offer a base from which to situate, examine and develop future RE.

The reconceptualisation of RE within contemporary educational experience might be likened to a Copernican revolution where established and often transmissive educational methods are now dominated by a focus on the student in community, teacher expertise in educational practice, and professional learning in areas of faith. However, the colloquium did not confine itself to a focus on

the RE teacher, but also supported a whole of school approach to curriculum, and the collegial action by the system authority within which the mission of the school is established. The combination of an array of support involves an integrated approach to RE and the designation of a model that is founded on holistic processes of encounter within the classroom; the expertise, moderation and witness of teachers as a response to a missionary impulse; and, outcomes in transformation for students and teachers informed by a Christian anthropology. The emerging culture was summarised within a keynote presentation as "peacefully accepting difference, not being afraid, and letting the 'other be the other'". It was said to incorporate a sense of belonging and respectful dialogue; new learning, deep learning, and digitalisation; a call to take on the responsibilities of being a 'specialist' (with knowledge and skills); moderator (making meaning within a rich educational landscape), and witness to outcomes (through being coach and sign) (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). For some authorities and participants, the 'fruits' of the colloquium highlighted these expanded horizons, while for others, established and familiar pathways were validated.

## **Conclusion**

Religious Education holds a foundational place in the curriculum and culture of the Catholic school. As the profile of the Catholic school widens, the implications for RE in addressing religious, social, cultural and educational perspectives takes on the challenge of responding to the 'signs of the times' while faithful to the Catholic faith and its traditions. The gathering of scholars and leaders of Religious Education reported in this paper, considered the challenges and responses within Religious Education and identified ways forward as incorporating priorities in the form of five pathways: Formation; Pedagogy; Curriculum; Partnerships; and Research. Each pathway was underpinned by foundations in faith, summarised by an integrating principle and advanced through strategic intentions. Colloquium conclusions informed contemporary understandings for the theory and practice of RE and offered a platform for consideration of 'where to from here' and 'what might be next'. Findings in this light confirm areas of focus, processes of engagement and underline traditional foundations which serve to provide the integration of RE within Catholic school mission in service of the community.





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### **Acknowledgment**

The authors would like to thank Associate Professor Janeen Lamb for her work in editing this article.