[CHAPTER 4: TEACHING FOR LEARNING IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION]
Chapter 4 Teaching for Learning in Religious Education

4.1 Religious Education – A discipline-based learning area

‘The school curriculum is a statement of the purpose of schooling.’ This principle, clearly articulated in the Victorian Curriculum F – 10, is relevant across all learning areas of the curriculum. It applies in a fundamental way to the role of the Religious Education learning area in the curriculum of Catholic schools. As noted earlier, Religious Education expresses, deepens, and extends the Catholic school’s mission of integral human development for all students, through rich encounters of genuine dialogue at the level of personal meaning-making, including religious or nonreligious worldview.

Religious Education in the Catholic tradition is a discipline-based learning area, arising from the community of enquiry that is the Church in its rich and diverse history. Like other disciplines, Religious Education invites and guides learners to ‘a unique way of seeing, understanding and engaging with the world’, that is both enduring, in terms of its underlying methodologies and ways of understanding, and dynamic, in the way learners engage with new content in changing contexts.

Religious Education is the discipline-based learning area that promotes and facilitates student learning in the knowledge, practices and self-understandings of Catholic Christianity, in particular, and of other Christian denominations and other religious traditions in general. The content of this learning area focuses on the sources, history, worship, beliefs, structures and roles of the faith community, and on the ways the church interacts with other groups and with the state in Australia and in other societies.

Religious Education is deeply interconnected with other curriculum areas, since the Catholic Christian tradition has been a constitutive element of the history and culture of Western societies and institutions, and because like other disciplines Religious Education addresses the fundamental questions of meaning, identity and purpose that arise for individuals and societies. Therefore, learning in Religious Education is both practical and transformational for all involved. It challenges and equips students to respond intelligently, creatively and responsibly to their own and others’ religious identities and commitments or nonreligious worldviews, as religiously literate members of Australian society.

As an indispensable learning area of Catholic schooling, the content of Religious Education is informed by the official and authoritative statements of Catholic teaching, reflects high-quality research in biblical, historical and systematic theology, engages the cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of the person, and is directed toward transformative praxis in the personal and social spheres.

The content of Religious Education constitutes a continuum of learning in which foundational awareness, understandings, and dispositions are deepened and broadened in ever richer ways as new content is identified and interconnections are explored with other learning areas and capabilities. In Religious Education, as in other learning areas, ‘a high-quality curriculum is not a collection of disconnected items of knowledge but rather a set of progressions that define increasingly complex knowledge, skills and concepts.’

The Victorian Curriculum F – 10 represents the elements to be aligned in effective student learning in this way:
‘Each of these components plays a separate and distinct role in the process of student learning and each is interconnected with all of the others.

- The first is the **curriculum** that defines what it is that students should learn, and the associated progression or continuum of learning.
- The second is **pedagogy** that describes how students will be taught and supported to learn.
- The third is **assessment** that identifies how well a student has (or has not) learnt specified content.
- The fourth is **reporting** that explains to the student and the teacher where a student is on a learning continuum at the end of a specified period of schooling, and where this places them in relation to their own learning goals and/or the learning of their peers.’

These four components of effective student learning in Religious Education – curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, reporting – will be explored in the following sections of this chapter of the *Awakenings* Core Document.

In Religious Education, the what and the how of the discipline are integrally related, since in the domains of religious or nonreligious worldview and of personal identity formation what is known and how it comes to be known are mutually constitutive. This is characteristic of the hermeneutical space of learning for human persons. In a similar way, the UNESCO Report on Education in the Twenty-First Century, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, identified four interrelated pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be.’ Therefore, while distinct in educational objectives, learning about religion and learning to be religious in a particular tradition cannot be separated.

The **what** and **how** of religious learning are brought together in the Post-Critical Belief Scale, one of the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity* instruments. This typological scale interrelates a **what**-axis (from disaffirmation of transcendence to affirmation of transcendence/belief in a personal God) and a **how**-axis (from direct, unmediated literalism in religious knowledge to direct, symbolically-mediated encounter through religious knowledge). The interrelation of these two axes gives rise to four types or belief styles, indicating ways in which a person tends to relate cognitively and emotionally to religious experiences, texts and traditions: literal belief, literal disbelief, relativism, and post-critical belief, as indicated in the diagram.
Since a learner’s cognitive and affective stances move along these axes through the levels of schooling and stages of life experience, these four types do not represent absolute positions; they are interpenetrating and contextual. However, they can become stable habits of thinking, influenced by personal dispositions, prevailing worldviews and informal and formal learning environments.

In line with the theological, anthropological and pedagogical principles arising from the discipline of Religious Education, this learning area intentionally promotes and supports a post-critical, symbolically-mediated believing style. It is expected that learners in Religious Education will transition in stage-appropriate ways from a pre-critical, first naivety in relation to religious texts and traditions to a reflective and critical second naivety. This post-critical belief style holds together a receptivity to the God of Jesus Christ who communicates through Scripture and Tradition (the what-axis) and a critical and evaluative awareness of the historical and contingent character of those texts (the how-axis).

This preference for a personal and enduring post-critical, symbolically-mediated believing style in Religious Education is grounded in the nature of religious knowledge in the Catholic tradition. The interpersonal, dialogical and mediated character of human knowledge of the mystery of the Triune God is explored in the next section.

### 4.2 Curriculum – the what of Religious Education

The discipline content of Religious Education is derived from the response of the community of believers (in ancient Israel and in the history of Christianity) to God’s self-communicating revelation. Revelation can be understood as

- natural (or general or universal) – referring to an awareness of God's activity in the existence and evolutionary unfolding of the cosmos; in the human quest for truth,
beauty, goodness and unity; in the phenomenon of religion and the sincere search for God’s will;

- *historical* (or *specific* or *particular*) – referring to the knowledge, practices and social forms that emerge from the particular encounter with God witnessed to in the historical traditions of Judaism and Christianity.

While these understandings of revelation are interdependent, it is the content of *historical revelation* that structures the Christian worldview and the ways of knowing and acting which are characteristic of the Catholic tradition.

**Revelation and Faith: God in dialogue with humanity**

The Genesis narratives of origin describe the universe as a free and loving work of a Creator God, who brings all things into existence by speaking their names, ‘Let there be…’ (Gen 1: 3 and *passim*). Human persons too receive their existence from God and, alone among creatures, are also enabled to speak, to God and to one another. This reciprocal communication – in the metaphorical language of biblical narrative – is a fundamental characteristic of the divine-human relationship.

This divine-human dialogue is continued in the election and history of biblical Israel in a covenant of shared life and love; it is expressed in the law codes, worship practices and prophetic oracles of Israel’s history; it is recognised in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ by the early communities of Christians; and continues in Christianity through a dynamic relationship with Scripture and Tradition.

Describing divine revelation, the Second Vatican Council stated:

‘By thus revealing himself God, who is invisible, in his great love speaks to humankind as friends and converses with them, so as to invite and receive them into relationship with himself.’

Since the encounter with the mystery of God transcends empirical experience and cognitive apprehension, religious texts employ the richer language orders of symbol, metaphor and analogy. Thus Vatican II uses biblical language to describe the revelation of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition through the analogy of a ‘conversation between friends’. The covenant initiated by God with humanity witnessed to in the scriptures is *like* an unfolding, ever-deepening relationship between friends. So too the knowledge of self and other that emerges in this graced relationship is *like* the knowledge that develops in and sustains a committed friendship.

The Genesis narratives also convey that human persons are free to respond or not to this invitation by God to a life of friendly dialogue. A gift given with existence, this freedom allows a truly loving and humanly authentic relationship to develop between God and humans. In Catholic theology, this free response to God’s initiative and assent to the knowledge of God and God’s will for creation is called *faith*. Faith is awakened by God’s self-communicating revelation, and faith makes revelation concrete and fruitful in the life of the believing person and community. Faith, too, has the character of friendly dialogue, and includes experiences of enquiry and wonder, doubt and uneasiness, interpretation and testing, receptivity and surrender.

Thus, the dialogue of divine revelation and human faith gives rise to the following characteristics, which inform the *what* and the *how* of Religious Education:
o **an encounter mediated by dialogue**: God, who is beyond human categories, enters into the symbolic order of language to engage humans in their historical and material existence, giving rise to the ongoing task of discernment and interpretation of God’s Word.

o **a relationship that gives rise to knowledge**: our knowledge of God and God’s will for creation is contextual, like all human knowledge; it arises from the communal experience and reflection of a real interpersonal encounter with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in particular contexts.

o **initiated by God, motivated by love**: moved by loving concern, God enters into historical relationship with Israel through the Passover from slavery to freedom, and with all humanity through the Passover of Jesus Christ from death to new life, and the gift of his Spirit to the church.

o **experienced through a symbolic realism**: the Catholic intellectual tradition is grounded on the sacramentality of all creation; since all things are created by God, God can really meet and communicate with humanity in and through created things.

o **inviting humanity into communion in the Triune God**: this graced relationship transforms the human search for meaning into a salvific sharing of life and love with each other and in the mystery of God’s love.

For Christians, this ‘conversation between friends’ is definitively incarnated in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and made available to all humanity through the outpouring of God’s Spirit brought about through the Christ-event. Christians recognise that in his person and his mission, Jesus Christ is the fullness and goal of God’s self-communicating revelation-in-dialogue with humanity. Already completed in Jesus Christ, God’s self-communicating invitation continues to unfold in history through the work of the Spirit and the mission of the church, welcoming and embracing all people and the whole creation into the communion of this gracious friendship.

**Scripture and Tradition: The two-fold source of Revelation**

The Second Vatican Council teaches that this saving and transforming dialogue between God and humanity, in the dynamic interplay of revelation and faith, continues as an ‘uninterrupted conversation’ mediated by Scripture and Tradition in the life of the church. Scripture and Tradition arise from the same source – God’s loving self-gift in relationship with humanity, and flow towards the same goal – the gathering of all humanity into friendship and communion with God. Scripture is the written record of the faith community’s experience of encounter with the self-revealing God. Tradition is the dynamic history of the faith community living out that encounter in the worship, teaching, witness and service of the church in all its contexts.

Flowing from God’s self-communication with humanity, both Scripture and Tradition have a dialogical character. Catholics recognise that the Triune God is truly present in and through Scripture and Tradition; believers encounter that presence by engaging with the texts of Scripture and the practices and teachings of Tradition. Through prayerful reflection, enquiry and interpretation, discernment and action, believers enter into a living encounter with the God who speaks in and through Scripture and Tradition.

**Scripture**

The books of Scripture are acknowledged by believers to be the Word of God recorded in human words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They emerged in different places
and times in response to a community’s experience of God in and through historical events and circumstances. Composed by various authors and editors using many literary styles, the Scriptures communicate both God’s invitation to friendship and humanity’s varied responses. Authoritatively recognised texts are collected in what is known as the Bible.

Though written in particular contexts, the Scriptures continually engage generation after generation of people of different cultures and worldviews. They call hearers to respond reflectively and prayerfully, personally and communally, ‘with an obedience by which the human person entrusts their whole selves freely to God’, in faith. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, they remain God’s living Word to every generation.

The Scriptures share the literary characteristics of all texts. That particular people wrote the books of Scripture for specific audiences and settings means we are removed from the original languages, cultures, contexts and purposes of the texts. This provides us with the continual challenge of interpretation, in order to receive the Scriptures intelligently and meaningfully, and to be invited by them to respond to our own experience of God’s transforming presence. In this way we will reach the fullness of knowledge and understanding when we live by the realities to which the Scriptures witness.

Responding in faith, Christians read, reflect upon, teach and learn from Scripture, and the church is thereby guided in its worship, its doctrines, its interior life of prayer, and its mission of self-giving love and service in the world.

Tradition

The church is the community of those people who profess faith in the crucified and risen Jesus as the incarnate Son of God and are baptised in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians have passed on this Good News and sought to live their lives according to the mission they have received from Jesus and his Gospel. Christians believe that the Spirit is constantly enlivening and guiding the church and its members, giving new insight, discernment, and gifts to empower a response to the Gospel in every context. This experience of the constant presence of the Spirit in the life and history of the church has led to the Catholic understanding of Tradition. Tradition is the ongoing work of the Spirit of Christ, and a gift entrusted to the church for the sake of all humanity. ‘The Tradition that is activated by God’s creative and redemptive action and revelation is a torrent of life; it is the history of cooperation between God and humankind.’

Tradition refers to the living faith expression of the Christian community, a faith believed, lived, celebrated, and communicated to others. Tradition is expressed in various ways: in the witness of the apostolic generation of the early church; in the worship forms, preaching and sacramental rites of Christians in various cultures and societies; in the practices of reading and studying Scripture; in the formal definitions of Christian faith in creeds, doctrines, theological studies, and the teaching of the Magisterium; in the music, art and architecture of Christian cultures, in spiritual practices and traditions; in the lives and teachings of the saints; in the forms and traditions of religious life and married love. Tradition complements Scripture, and guards against interpretations that contradict the church’s understanding of the Gospel.

As the church community seeks to express its faith in every generation, to clarify its understanding of the meaning and implications of living the Gospel in a particular time and place, the Tradition is renewed and progresses in time. Tradition is a dynamic and
interactive reality which brings forth the depth and meaning of all that the church has received and hopes for in Christ, and moves towards the fullness of truth in God's kingdom. This great Tradition of the history of salvation (often represented with the upper-case letter ‘T’) can be distinguished from particular ecclesiastical traditions (with lower-case letter ‘t’) that arise in specific contexts for particular communities within the church.

Scripture and Tradition, understood as ongoing and dynamic mediations of God’s dialogue with humanity, form and inform the Christian worldview and the Catholic intellectual tradition. It is from these that the discipline content of Religious Education arises.

Human Experience and the Gift of Creation

The response of human persons to the initiative of God’s loving self-communication is a constitutive element of the dynamic dialogue of revelation and faith. This response involves all the dimensions of human existence: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, bodily, relational, environmental and cultural. If the dialogue between God and humans is to be authentic, the response must be free, personal, and fully human. Humans’ awareness of themselves, and of the universe in which they exist, are fundamental experiences of the ‘hermeneutical space’ in which the divine Other can be encountered. Human persons experience both themselves and the cosmos of created reality not just as ‘things’, but as questions of meaning, purpose and love.

Human Experience

Human persons are characterised by the desire to know and understand. We seek to make meaning of things we see, hear, touch, taste and smell; of other people and our relations with them; of the universe in which we exist. We also desire to make meaning of things we cannot know through the senses: of love and hate, joy and sorrow, peace and turmoil. We enquire into experiences of wonder, love, life and death. Our quest for knowledge reaches beyond the natural order, extending to the limits of our capacity to understand.

Unique among creatures, as far as we know, human persons seek to know and to make meaning of the vast array of experiences arising from our own existence, experiences of sensation, affection, cognition, memory, imagination and creativity. We have a capability for self-reflective knowledge, and leaning to exercise this capability contributes to our sense of happiness and purpose in living.

Thus, human experience is recognised as privileged locus of meaning, and of receiving and responding to God’s invitation to divine friendship in revelation. Guided by Scripture and Tradition, it is possible to reflect on all human experiences in a way that draws us into the larger reality of God’s creative action: the joys of friendship, the promptings of conscience, the search for truth, the bond of human solidarity, the cry of protest, the wonder of intimacy, the freedom of decision. Some experiences question and challenge us: the pain of guilt and sin, the recognition of evil, the finality of death. Learning from the witness of other Christians, the believer reflects on all life’s experience in the light of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the action of the Holy Spirit.

The Christian tradition, among other religious and spiritual traditions, values the skills of self-reflection, and the context of solitude and silence, as prerequisites for the potential encounter with God in the depths of human personhood. The Tradition also witnesses to the awareness of God’s presence in interpersonal relationships and in acts of social engagement discerned in response to the Gospel. When this encounter with God takes place, humans
experience a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction in regard to the meaningfulness of life. This encounter also gives rise to a sure hope for our ultimate destiny in the mystery of loving communion in God beyond death.

The Cosmos as Creation

Christians believe that the universe and everything that comes to exist within it is created by God out of love, freely and willingly. ‘Creation’ is a theological term, pointing to the origins of existence in the free and loving act of God as Creator. All things, visible and invisible, stand in relation to God as their origin and source of life. The faith-claim that the cosmos is ‘created’ leaves open the scientific enquiry into the proximate causes of the emergence and history of the universe. Current Catholic teaching supports the evolutionary models of contemporary sciences, provided that these models are not closed to the question of transcendence. The Catholic position can be described as one of ‘theistic evolution.’ Christians profess their understanding of God as Creator when they recite the creed in the liturgy: ‘I believe in God...maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.’ In the Judeo-Christian religions, humanity is understood to hold a particular role within creation, as the image, icon, or representative of the Creator, tasked with wise stewardship of the created world.

God is transcendent and beyond the order of existing realities but, with the eyes of faith, traces of the Creator’s presence and activity can be perceived in the cosmos and all it holds. The energy, creativity and beauty of the universe invite awareness of the mystery of life at the heart of all that exists (Psalm 19:1). While facts of disease, death and decay, as well as natural events that are destructive of life, raise questions for believers about the goodness of God’s creative action, they nevertheless have a role in an emergent and contingent universe. Just as God is understood to be relational in the Trinity of divine Persons, so is the universe relational. All inhabitants and forms of the universe are interconnected. The sum of this diversity witnesses to God’s continued presence and involvement in creation.

Christians recognise that the cosmos comes to its highest expression in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word, through whom all things live and come into being (1 Corinthians 8:6). By the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection all creation will be renewed, set free and brought to completion in him (Romans 8: 18-28). Enacted in his miracles, exemplified in his parables and made known in his bodily resurrection, there is a dynamic within creation that links the cosmos and God’s salvation closely together. With faith in the God who gives a new creation, Christians look forward in hope to the new heavens and new earth, where sin, suffering and death will be no more (Revelation 21: 1-7).

Understood as creation, the cosmos leads humanity to God and to praise of God. God’s gift is immensely rich, and to love and respect its abundance and diversity is to worship God. To abuse or destroy the gift of created things is to frustrate the loving purposes of God in creation. In the biblical narratives, the dominion over the created world given to humanity (Genesis 1:28) is one of stewardship, of caring for the environment and making it fruitful in partnership with God. There can be no justice on earth without respect, love and care for the created world. Reverence for creation is expressed in the Liturgy of the Eucharist when bread and wine, ‘fruit of the earth and work of human hands,’ are offered to God, are consecrated by God’s grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, and given to the assembly as communion in the Body and Blood of Christ, our food of everlasting life.

Primary Sources of Official Catholic Teaching
Discipline content in Religious Education in Catholic schools is informed and authorised by reference to relevant official documents of the teaching office (Magisterium) of the Church. Generally, these official documents are not intended for direct application to school-based curriculum but provide a set of norms and criteria for the development of curriculum frameworks and key learning content in Religious Education.

- **Documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)**
  The sixteen documents of Vatican II – 4 constitutions, 9 decrees, 3 declarations – represent the official teaching of the twenty-first and most recent Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, the most authoritative exercise of church teaching by the world’s bishops in union with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. These documents set out the church’s official and authoritative understanding of matters including the nature of the church itself, the church’s liturgy, life and mission, the Catholic Church’s relations with other Christians, other religions, and with the contemporary culture.

- **Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992)**
  At the request of the Synod of Bishops on the twentieth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, a Catechism or summary of official teaching was developed to support the universal church’s ministry of teaching, catechesis and theological reflection. A revised edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* was published in 1997, and represents the official statement of Catholic doctrine on a wide range of topics concerning Catholic creed, worship, moral life and prayer. An edition of the Catechism in question-and-answer format oriented to young people, *YouCat*, was developed. The purpose of the CCC is not to replace local catechetical and educational materials, but ‘to encourage and assist in the writing of new local catechisms, which must take into account various situations and cultures, while carefully preserving the unity of faith and fidelity to catholic doctrine.’

- **General Directory for Catechesis (1997)**
  The *Directory for Catechesis* (GDC)** outlines the ‘norms and criteria’ for the renewal of Religious Education and catechesis in the light of the Second Vatican Council that need to be undertaken at diocesan and regional level. The Directory sets out general principles for the structure, content and pedagogy of religious learning in Catholic parishes, schools and other ministries. It leaves to local authorities the task of organising and sequencing the content of Catholic teaching in particular learning contexts, in keeping with two governing imperatives: the integrity of the Catholic teaching and the circumstances, prior knowledge, and development level of the learners.

- **Documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education**

Interpreting and implementing documents of the Magisterium of the Church in the context Catholic schooling and Religious Education is the task of national and diocesan educational authorities.
working in collaboration with the Australian bishops and leaders of religious institutes. It is necessary to take into account the status of the document, its intended audiences, and its applicability to local needs and circumstances. There is a certain weighting of church teaching documents in terms of the centrality of the teaching they express, of the intention of the teaching authority issuing the document, and of the obligations of church members and organisation in adhering to those teachings. This grading has been described as follows:\textsuperscript{x}xi

- solemn definitions of the content of revelation (creeds, dogmas, infallibly defined teachings);
- definitive pronouncements related to the truths of faith (papal encyclicals, conciliar teachings, \textit{Catechism of the Catholic Church});
- non-definitive declarations promoting the understanding of revealed truth (ordinary teaching statements of the magisterium, regional and national bishops’ conferences;
- prudential and contingent applications of doctrine (occasional speeches, pastoral letters addressing particular circumstances).

Interpreting the intent, scope and seriousness of the teaching expressed in a particular document takes account of this grading of magisterial statements. Three other principles that guide this task are:

- \textit{the unity of Catholic faith}: the various elements of Catholic faith are dynamically ordered in a coherent, intelligible and meaningful worldview, a wholeness (\textit{kat – holos}) of perspective and understanding, grounded in the consistency of God’s self-revelation in dialogue with humanity.

- \textit{the centrality of the mystery of Christ}: flowing from the revelation of the Trinity and the incarnation, the event of Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection and ongoing presence in creation through the Holy Spirit, is the organising centre of the Catholic worldview.

- \textit{the ‘hierarchy’ of truths}: particular teachings are received in the light of their relationship to the central Christian doctrines of Trinity, incarnation, and the mystery of Christ. ‘In Catholic doctrine there exists an order or “hierarchy” of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.’\textsuperscript{x}xii

\textit{Content Structure}

So, classroom Religious Education aims to engage all participants in learning experiences that develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to live meaningfully and act responsibly in relation to the religious traditions that they and/or others identify with. The content of Religious Education is structured by the narratives, symbols, lived witness and public expressions that constitute the Catholic tradition, as the ‘host tradition’ from within which all learners are invited and challenged to enter into meaningful dialogue that promotes richer understanding and more articulated self-identification regarding each one’s faith-stance or worldview.

The \textit{Awakenings} Religious Education Curriculum Framework intends to engage learners in a ‘designated educative journey’ (\textit{GDC}, n. 147) into the content of the Catholic Christian tradition. It makes use of educational research and the wisdom derived from good practice to present curriculum content in a sequenced, stage-appropriate continuum, so that the learner may be ‘an
active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient’ (GDC, n. 167).

The content of the Awakenings Curriculum Framework is structured by the following content strands which reflect the major topics of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the General Directory for Catechesis, and the Religious Education frameworks across Australia.

- Scripture, Israel and Jesus
- Church and Tradition
- Prayer, Liturgy and Sacraments
- Christian Ethics: Personal and Social
- God, Religion and Society

These strands are overlapping and interwoven in describing the key knowledge, understandings and practices of the Catholic tradition and history. They outline the breadth of the Christian tradition in all its dimensions, and of its vision of the human person integrally related to all reality, material and spiritual. They correlate to other learning areas of the curriculum at the level of thematic, historical, ethical, or cultural learning. Various generic skills, capabilities and dispositions are embedded in learning generated through the content strands.

A brief description of the key knowledge content associated with each strand follows:

- **Scripture, Israel and Jesus**
  
  The Scriptures are writings recognised by the Church as inspired by God and containing the truth necessary for our salvation. Consisting of the Hebrew Bible, inter-testamental literature, the four gospels, and early Christian writings, they have been collected in two great libraries known commonly as the Old and New Testaments. They witness to the foundational events of God’s creating and redeeming relationship with the world, through the election and history of Israel and through the mission of Jesus Christ and the church. The biblical writings tell that story in various literary forms: poetry, prose, law, history, epic narrative, letter and gospel. Through prayer and study, Christians engage with the Scriptural text as a means of encounter with the Triune God and as an authentic guide for faith and life.

  Written by different human authors and in various circumstances, the Bible points to God who chose the Israelite nation for the sake of all nations, setting them free from slavery in Egypt and bringing them into the promised land. In covenantal love, God does not forsake the chosen people despite their infidelity. Even in exile God does not abandon them, but promises a new covenant. The New Testament witnesses to the fulfilment of this story in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, in the tradition and context of Second Temple Judaism. It reflects the faith of the early Church in its different communities as Christians experienced and proclaimed Jesus as Lord, alive and active among them in the power of the Holy Spirit. Over time, Christians came to profess and worship Jesus Christ as the Word of God incarnate, fully human and fully divine.

- **Church and Tradition**
The church arises from the mission of Jesus Christ entrusted to the apostles in his death and resurrection. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the early Christian community was empowered to continue that mission. The church exists as a communion of those, living and dead, who have come to Christ in faith and been adopted in baptism as members of his Body, empowered by the Holy Spirit. In its various Christian denominations, the church proclaims Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, as Lord of history and universal Saviour. Animated by the Spirit of the Risen Christ, the church flows from the inner life of the triune God, and exists as a sign of the loving communion of all peoples in God. It turns to Mary, the Mother of God, and the saints as examples of faith and self-giving love, and seeks their intercession that it may remain true to Christ’s call.

As the community of disciples, the church is continually called to conversion and renewal, learning to hear and respond to the voice of its Lord in the concrete circumstances of its time. Though spread throughout the world, the Catholic Church is gathered in local communities around the bishops and united in a common faith around the successor of the apostle Peter, the bishop of Rome. In a ministry of service in faith, the Pope and bishops as pastors and servants of the Word, teach and interpret the gospel message with authority. As the church hands on its creed and teaching, liturgy and sacraments, ministries and service, a living Tradition continually recontextualises itself to make present God’s self-communication in every generation.

**Prayer, Liturgy and Sacraments**

The church recognises the presence of Christ and the Spirit at work in all creation. The church itself a kind of sign of both human and divine realities, and the community of faith expresses and builds up the Christian life of its members by sacramental signs, through which believers participate in the gracious gift of God communicated by each sacrament. Expressed in symbols drawn from the created world and human experience, the sacraments conform Christians to the mystery of Christ’s life, death and resurrection when they participate in the sacramental rites. This participation is richer and more effective when the individual and assembly are conscious of the meaning conveyed by the liturgical rite, assisted by a period of spiritual preparation. Thus the Christian life is realized as the believer is consecrated, nourished, sustained, forgiven, healed and called to loving service in committed relationships.

Liturgy is a structured pattern of ritual activity, including readings of Scripture, silence, music and song, processions and gestures, and other symbolic actions, which expresses and deepens the loving communication between the Triune God and the community of faith. Through liturgy, the church expresses its nature and mission in the public sphere, and invites all people to hear and respond to the Gospel. Other forms of personal and communal prayer reflect the varied circumstances and dimensions of a relationship with God. Prayer has been described as a conversation with God, in which there are moments of praise, wonder, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, sorrow, and searching. Jesus taught his disciples to pray and gave us the Lord’s Prayer as a model for our own prayer.

**Christian Ethics: Personal and Social**

Religious communities which are founded on the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures find in them both the imperative and the guidance to discern ways of being and
acting in the world which faithfully respond to the covenantal love of God. Catholic communities also find guidance for living and acting in the traditions of social and moral teaching that have arisen over centuries of gospel-inspired practice. At the heart of the quest for authentic human flourishing is the Christian understanding of the dignity of human persons. Created in the image of God, persons experience themselves as free agents of thought and action, in relation with other persons and with the non-human environment. This quest involves the experience of human sinfulness and moral evil, and thus calls for the ongoing conversion of persons and cultural structures to the norms of the Gospel.

Christians collaborate with people of other religious and nonreligious worldviews to work for peace, justice and the common good of persons in society, as well as the promotion of stewardship for the environment. At the same time they witness before all people to the vision of God’s kingdom as Jesus lived it, and to practices of moral discernment motivated by God’s love for all, and guided by solidarity with others, especially those who are marginalized and most vulnerable in society. Christians wait in hope for God’s redeeming love to gather all creation into the resurrection of Jesus, to participate in his glory beyond sickness, sin and death. This waiting is expressed in both prayer and action, in collaboration with the Spirit of God, leading to acts of healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration.

**God, Religion and Society**

Religion is a social and communal way of life, which emerges from the human search for meaning and is a response to a perceived ultimate or transcendent reality. It draws on authoritative teachings, stories, rituals, ethical norms, laws and spiritual experience to create a community, which in turn confers identity and purpose on its members. Australia is a country with its own indigenous peoples who live in age-old spiritual closeness to the land and its dreaming. Australia is an increasingly diverse and pluralized society. Many ethnic communities have their own spirituality, customs and ways of life, often set within a particular religious tradition; some immigrants come from officially atheistic states. While Christianity in various denominations is the most represented religious tradition in Australia, other faiths are increasing as a percentage of the population.

In recent decades, a steadily increasing number of Australians indicate they have no religion. Many others live day to day without reference to a religious worldview. Various worldviews provide resources for purposeful and ethical living, and motivate and guide personal and public life. In a pluralising and secular culture where people of many religious and nonreligious worldviews are in contact with each other, Christians, with a particular understanding of the God as the triune mystery of love, are challenged to find ways of respectful engagement with others that promote the common good of society as well as authentic human encounters that enhance and deepen each other’s personal self-awareness and dignity.

**Capabilities**

In the *Victorian Curriculum F – 10* a number of capabilities are identified that, while not disciplines in themselves, are essential to the achievement of life-long learning goals. The capabilities are a set of discrete knowledge and skills, not a statement of pedagogies, and students benefit from explicit
instruction in these areas. Therefore they are presented as discreet learning areas in the curriculum for planning, assessment and reporting purposes.

- Critical and Creative Thinking
  - questions and possibilities
  - reasoning
  - meta-cognition
- Personal and Social Capability
  - Self-awareness and management
  - Social awareness and management
- Ethical Understanding
  - Understanding concepts
  - Decision making and action
- Intercultural Understanding
  - Cultural practices
  - Cultural diversity

While supporting this research-based position on the distinct curriculum content of these capabilities, the *Awakenings* Religious Education Curriculum also recognises that there will be many points of intersection between the content and pedagogies of Religious Education, on the one hand, and that of the capabilities of Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical and Intercultural Understanding on the other. It is in the interest of deep learning in both RE and these capabilities that points of intersection, in which the capabilities are embedded and activated within the content and methods of the RE curriculum, are made visible and articulated within the learning process.

Paying attention to these dispositional capabilities as they are embedded in the curriculum content of Religious Education also allows the particular character of Catholic understanding and practice of the capabilities to be explored. This guards against an approach to generic human values education removed from the faith-motivated worldview of the Catholic tradition. Therefore, in addition to all the dimensions of these capabilities outlined in the Victorian Curriculum, the Religious Education Curriculum will be aware of the religious, transcendent, and spiritual dimensions of Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical and Intercultural Understanding.

**addition of a spiritual awareness capacity??**

Also, as indicated in the Victorian Curriculum, literacy, numeracy, and ICT capabilities are embedded in all curriculum learning areas, including Religious Education. The design of learning experiences in RE should promote students’ awareness of the knowledge and skills associated with these capabilities as they are employed in the specific learning content of RE. The capabilities of literacy and of critical and creative thinking are particularly crucial in religious learning in order to foster a post-critical, symbolically-mediated style of relating to religious texts and traditions, as indicated in the Post-Critical Belief Scale. In Religious Education these capabilities also will extend to the transcendent and spiritual dimensions of human experience and knowing, by developing awareness and receptivity to the encounter with the Triune God symbolically mediated in and through critical, creative and prayerful engagement with Christian texts and traditions.

Similarly, the cross-curriculum priorities identified in the Victorian Curriculum can be intentionally addressed in a variety of strands and topics in Religious Education.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
Curriculum Design

Desired learning results are derived from the Religious Education content strands for each stage of schooling, which inform the curriculum design, planning and assessment strategies to be used at each level.

- **Foundational Stage (Prep – Year 2)**
  - substantial attention to Religious Education in the learning and teaching program, drawing on content strands especially suited to the early years of learning

- **Breadth Stage (Years 3 – 8)**
  - a Religious Education program that includes material related to each strand over each two-year level of schooling
  - opportunities may be found to develop learning goals that integrate knowledge, skills in RE with those of other curriculum areas, eg. History, Civics and Citizenship, the Arts, Health, ICT, as well as the capabilities

- **Pathways Stage (Years 9 – 10)**
  - a Religious Education program that includes material related to each strand over these years of schooling
  - opportunities may be found to develop learning goals that integrate knowledge, skills in RE with those of other curriculum areas, eg. History, Civics and Citizenship, the Arts, Health, ICT, as well as the capabilities
  - desired learning results that coordinate learning in RE with activities outside the classroom, eg. community service programs, retreats and spiritual enrichment programs, participation in parish/congregational activities, may be explored
  - where the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) is offered as an alternative curriculum in Year 10, relevant content from the RE strands should be introduced in the Work Related Skills and Personal Development Skills strands.

- **Years 11 – 12**
  - a school-based Religious Education program
  - VCE
  - VET
  - VCAL

Enduring Understandings – by strand and by level?

### 4.3 Pedagogy – the how of Religious Education

The *General Directory for Catechesis* states that classroom-based Religious Education should ‘appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines’
Therefore, the two guiding principles informing the pedagogical approach of the Awakenings Religious Education curriculum are:

- the theological and pedagogical imperatives of the *Enhancing Catholic School Identity* framework, and
- quality teaching and learning approaches based on contemporary educational research

**Recontextualising Pedagogy**

Since the dialogue of revelation and faith continues uninterruptedly in the church (DV, n.8), and the Tradition is a living and dynamic witness in every context in which believers live, deepen and share their faith, Catholic Christianity is present in the world by means of an ongoing recontextualisation of its identity and witness. Recontextualisation is a fundamental characteristic of:

- *the Tradition as a whole*, in which local or temporary practices, devotions, rites, catechetical approaches, ecclesial movements emerge and recede as Christians respond in faith to the Gospel in their particular contexts;

- *the individual Christian believer*, who relates to Scripture and Tradition from within particular contexts in enquiring and reflective ways that give rise to personal meaning and renewed commitment;

- *the methodologies and pedagogies of religious learning*, through which learners interact personally and meaningfully with the content of the Tradition, aware of the plurality of faith stances and worldviews practiced in their contexts.

A recontextualising approach in Religious Education recognises and responds to the pluralising and detraditionalising social dynamics at work in the Australian context. It is no longer the case that Christian faith and self-identification will be institutionally and socially transmitted to the next generation of Australians by virtue of family, ethnic, or denominational belonging. In this context, Christian faith formation requires intentional practices of engagement with a faith community and with the beliefs, rituals, and codes of behaviour that are particular to the Christian worldview. This is most effective in a dialogical encounter with Scripture and Tradition, in the awareness of other religious and nonreligious worldviews.

Recontextualising Christian faith and identity in a pluralising and secularising context calls for a shift in Religious Education and faith formation from a pedagogy of *transmission* to a pedagogy of *appropriation*. A hermeneutics of appropriation brings together a commitment to student agency in learning with a post-critical, hermeneutical approach in religious learning in the contemporary context.

A recontextualising approach in Religious Education flows from and fosters a *post-critical belief style* in learners, and in the Christian Tradition itself. The three other ‘types’ of the Post-Critical Belief Scale – literal belief, literal unbelief, and relativism – have little or no role for recontextualisation. Literal faith directly transmits pre-determined religious knowledge from one context to another; literal nonbelief regards religious knowledge as suspect or delusional; relativistic worldviews do not look beyond particular contexts to enquire about lived faith experience. By engaging in structured experiences of enquiring and respectful dialogue with one’s own worldview, and the strangeness of other worldviews in one’s awareness, a renewed and more fully-articulated commitment to one’s personal faith stance is fostered, as well as a generous receptivity to those whose views differ.
A recontextualising approach in Religious Education responds to both the particularity of Catholic Christianity and the plurality of religious and nonreligious worldviews lived out in the Australian context. When a Catholic community practices a recontextualising style of engagement with its context, it promotes the preferred option of the Melbourne Scale, responding to the increasing divergence of contemporary Australian culture from the uncritically Christian worldview of earlier generations.

The key methodological feature of recontextualising pedagogies is the shift from a mono-correlational strategy of relating human experience and Christian tradition (faith and life) towards multi-correlational strategies that recognise and hold together both particularity and plurality. Recognising that Christian faith is one among a number of historically-determined religious and nonreligious worldviews, and at the same time being attracted to and encountering the real presence of God and Jesus Christ made available in and through that Christian tradition in today’s context, locates the Christian person in a relationship of post-critical or hermeneutical awareness of the contents of one’s own and others’ worldviews. ‘The hermeneutical approach gives attention to the gap as well as the bridge between experience and tradition and it focusses on the multidimensional ways in which both experience and tradition may be interpreted.’

Pollefeyt (2016) identifies five key criteria of effective recontextualisation, which can be summarised thus:

- an intentional strategy of engaging a Christian text (tradition, artwork, devotion, practice) within the categories and conditions of the new context, seeking enhanced meaning and communicability for the original text;
- an openness to the faith-witness contained in the original text; promoting a spiritual awareness of the God-encounter communicated within the text;
- a reflective exploration of the contemporary context, seeking with gain understanding from within of its diverse aspirations, perspectives, and worldviews;
- intentional encounter through dialogue, bringing together the learner, the Christian Tradition, and the various other worldviews of the context in multi-correlational strategies of engagement;
a challenge to all participants to existential transformation; for believers, openness to a deeper faith response to God's self-revelation in and through the contemporary context.

Religious Education calls learners into a task of recontextualising the foundational sources of faith traditions within the cultural and cosmological worldviews of their current context. Only in this way can these foundational sources 'speak' in the contemporary context and continue to witness to the revelatory events they describe. In Catholic hermeneutics, the texts of scripture and tradition are at the same time historical records of lived faith experience and the means of religious encounter with the transcendent mystery of the Triune God.

So, both critical literary skills and religious awareness skills are needed in a recontextualising method of learning. This allows learners to explore and integrate both their difference/distance from religious texts, which arise from ancient cultures and others’ experience, and their presence/belonging to the texts, as learners are addressed by the witness of those sources in today’s context.

A recontextualising approach is enacted through a variety of pedagogical methods and strategies used in designing learning tasks in Religious Education. These pedagogies are employed to promote learning outcomes that enable students to progress, in age- and level-appropriate ways, from a pre-critical, literalist way of engaging with religious knowledge to a post-critical, multi-dimensional interaction with the content of religious traditions. This progress is aligned with growth in critical thinking and interpreting skills in other curriculum areas, as well as students’ maturing reflective skills and spiritual awareness.

Recontextualising pedagogies promote critical thinking and reasoning skills together with openness to the transcendent and meaning-making experience conveyed by religious texts and traditions. Naturally, this will lead to personalised learning journeys for each student as their religious or nonreligious worldview and experience becomes more reflective and articulated. It is in respectfully engaging divergent religious and nonreligious interpretations and experience that the dialogue approach to learning is most vital. In making use of a variety of pedagogical methods and approaches, teachers work together and with students to ensure that the learning experiences they design genuinely enable a recontextualisation of Christian sources in the lived context of the students’ world.

In Catholic Religious Education, a recontextualising approach to pedagogy will:

- be founded on principles of authentic student learning
- engage the content of the Catholic faith as the ‘host tradition’ for differentiated religious learning
- involve teachers and students in collaborative processes of design in learning experiences
- develop appropriate open inquiry, critical thinking and creative reasoning skills
- promote capacities of reflective attention, spiritual awareness and personal meaning-making
- draw on teacher roles of witness, specialist and facilitator to ensure rich dialogue between learners, the Catholic tradition and other religious and nonreligious worldviews
- be attentive to the experiences of self-reflection, personal identity and worldview formation that accompany religious learning
- equip and accompany the maturing of belief style from an early, pre-critical naïveté to a reflective and critical-aware ‘second naïveté’

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Some key characteristics of recontextualising pedagogies are as follows:

- **Animated**: subjects are active agents of their own learning – meaning makers, truth seekers, inquirers into their living story
- **Dialogical**: the communicative nature of the Catholic faith seeks to draw people into dialogue
- **Contextual**: drawing on the authentic context of the learner as the locus of engagement and what it offers to the dialogue
- **Multi-correlational**: evoking, encouraging, confronting various world views, attending to otherness and difference
- **Transformational**: a life-long project of identity formation nurtured through encounter with the otherness of others, God, scripture, and within the self and community
- **Intentional**: teachers are key to creating an open, trusting and relational environment that nurtures dialogue as witness, moderator, specialist, co-inquirer and designer

**Shared Christian Praxis**

In the *Awakenings* Religious Education Curriculum, the key pedagogical approach employed to facilitate a recontextualisation of the Christian tradition in the learning experiences of Religious Education is **Shared Christian Praxis**. Shared Christian Praxis (SCP) is a ‘pedagogy of appropriation’ that envisages the learner as a ‘agent-subject’ of their own existence and learning, who enters more consciously and capably into their own subjectivity by reflecting on their current *praxis* of life, by interacting with meaningful worldviews and ways of life (with the Christian Scripture and Tradition as the key stimulus in this dialogue), and by responding in new or renewed practices of knowing, acting and relating in the world.

- The term *praxis* refers to learners’ self-consciousness as agents, with the internal and external influences that motivate their way of being and acting in the world. It brings together active, reflective and creative aspects of learning. People engage in praxis when they name and reflect critically on what they think and do, and what is happening around them, and make decisions of response for future action.
- Praxis is *shared* when learners articulate and reflect together on their current experience, draw on the understandings, skills, and dispositions available from their worldview or religious tradition, and discern responses for future engagement. Praxis-based learning is a mutual partnership of active participation in dialogical encounters of meaning.
- Praxis is *Christian* when the structured experiences of praxis-based learning arise from and engage with the understandings, practices and dispositions of the Christian narrative and tradition. In the classroom, it is presumed that there will be a range of stances toward the Catholic Christian faith, yet all worldviews and faith commitments can be enhanced by shared learning on the curriculum content of Religious Education.

SCP is based on the dynamic interrelationship of five movements, introduced by a focussing activity:

- Focussing activity
Although set in a logical sequence as outlined here, these movements of SCP should not be treated as a series of separate and independent steps. They have the character of the movements of a symphony or piece of choreography, ‘a free-flowing process to be orchestrated’ in which the movements ‘often overlap, recur, and recombine in other sequences.’\footnote{xxix} While a particular learning strategy will highlight a particular movement, the other movements will also play a part, overlapping and blending in a dynamic process that enhances all learners’ journey of deeper learning.

The focus of SCP is the whole learner, the one who thinks, feels, decides, relates, acts, and is always involved in making meaning of his or her life and its context. It is concerned with

While SCP is intended to be ‘an approach to Christian Religious Education that is usable for all age levels, in all contexts (eg. schools), and for all themes of life in Christian faith and of Christian faith in life,’\footnote{xxx} classroom Religious Education in a secularising and pluralising context such as Australia requires a particular sensitivity to the diversity of worldviews and faith stances represented by students, their families, teachers and friends, as well as the ineffectiveness of pedagogies of pre-critical transmission in a post-critical and pluralising culture.

The *Awakenings* Religious Education Curriculum aligns the appropriate pedagogy of SCP with the priorities of recontextualisation in the Australian cultural context. It presumes that learners in classroom Religious Education range widely along the two axes identified in the Post-Critical Belief Scale:

![Post-Critical Belief Scale](image)

Therefore, in each of the movements of SCP, learning strategies will pay attention to articulating and leading into respectful dialogue both:

- the *plurality* of worldviews, faith stances and believing styles with which students identify or are familiar from their world of meaning; this includes awareness of the diverse understandings and practices within the Christian tradition itself;
- the *particularity* of the Catholic Christian worldview, its creeds, worship, ethical and spiritual practices, as lived by believers and communities within specific contexts; in a pluralising context, this faith commitment includes awareness of the contingent and personally-decisive character of a Christian faith stance.

Multi-correlational learning strategies at each stage of the SCP process will promote awareness of plurality and particularity, and enhance deep learning and personal appropriation in each student’s own particular worldview through rich dialogue with diverse religious and nonreligious faith stances.
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<tr>
<th><strong>Focused activity</strong></th>
<th><strong>Shared Christian Praxis Movement</strong></th>
<th><strong>Recontextualisation Awareness</strong></th>
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practice; learners are invited and challenged to a richer personal understanding of one’s own and others’ worldview; the teacher roles of witness and moderator are key aspects of the learning experience.

| Responding | learners are invited to identify appropriate responses that apply their deeper understanding of the topic as part of their own worldview and life-purpose. | learners are challenged to make personal and collective responses that express free and authentic appropriation of personal meaning related to the topic; the particularity of personal responses is recognised and affirmed. |

The movements of SCP may occur within one lesson or over an extended period, during the study of unit of work or by the movement across several units. The overall praxis style informs the teacher’s step-by-step initiative in planning, designing and initiating the learning experience. In a sense, the teacher acts as a conductor drawing the different movements into a harmonious and unified field of sound.

The choice of learning and teaching strategies used to design effective and rich learning opportunities in each movement of SCP is not predetermined or fixed. Teachers are encouraged to explore a comprehensive range of strategies, to consider the evidence of research on quality teaching and learning, to build on knowledge of their students’ current level of achievement in Religious Education, and to work collaboratively with students and colleagues, to design learning experiences that promote deep understanding and increased post-critical religious literacy.

**Quality Learning and Teaching**

In *Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School*, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Schools Advisory Council outlines a number of indicators of a quality learning and teaching program that are essential for effective learning in Religious Education:

- a guaranteed and viable curriculum
  - an agreed curriculum that is current, relevant, needs based and rigorous
  - the curriculum is vertically aligned so that there is continuity and progression across all years of school
  - there is clear alignment between curriculum planning, teaching practices, and assessment of student learning
  - curriculum is differentiated according to the learning needs of all students and allows for alternative educational pathways

- effective teaching
  - teachers set clear and rigorous expectations for all learners
Teachers know their students and what they know, how they learn, what they need to learn next, and what teaching will support that learning.

Students are provided with a range of learning experiences that are purposeful and interrelated.

Teachers effectively use explicit instruction to maximise student learning.

- Engaging students in their own learning
  - Students are able to identify the value and purpose of learning.
  - Students regularly identify their prior learning and set learning goals.
  - Students receive timely and targeted feedback from teachers.
  - Students have opportunities to share their learning with peers, teachers, and parents/carers.

- Analysis and use of data
  - Student achievement data is used at all levels to identify and monitor student achievement and to map individual student and whole school learning trends to inform whole school annual action plans.
  - The school identifies appropriate starting points for learning for each student and is able to differentiate learning and teaching activities in order to meet the learning needs of all students.
  - Teachers use formative and summative assessments to monitor and assess student learning and growth.

- Coordinated strategies for intervention
  - Schools have in place agreed measures that allow for early and ongoing identification of students who require special consideration and further support with academic or behavioural learning.
  - Practices are in place where targeted assessment data provides teachers with additional information to further direct adjustments to learning and teaching.
  - Decisions regarding appropriate intervention/s are made and resources to support the implementation of the Individualised Learning Plan or targeted instruction strategies are identified, including which staff will work with students.

### 4.4 Assessment and Reporting – the how well and where of learning in Religious Education

**Assessment in Religious Education**

The goal of planning, teaching and assessment is student achievement in learning; reporting is the communication of that achievement. ‘Wherever a student starts from on the first day of the year, he or she deserves to have made a year’s worth of progress by the end of it.’

Assessment is the process of gathering and interpreting evidence about student progress across a period of learning activity. As indicated in the *Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School*, this evidence is used to enhance student learning through effective and targeted teaching strategies. Evidence of student learning is used:

- To design more effective learning goals.
- To foster learner’s reflection on their own learning.
to indicate the level of achievement attained on the continuum of learning
- to raise awareness of the needs and aspirations of individual students
- to enable teachers to target the use of teaching strategies to learners’ needs
- to enable whole school improvement in curriculum design and delivery based on student learning needs
- to provide evidence for reporting student achievement to themselves, to parents and teachers

A key role of assessment, including in Religious Education, is to enable teachers to target their teaching to the learning readiness of each student.

‘Teachers and schools can lift all students’ performance if they are equipped to collect and use evidence of individual student achievement and progress. Working together, teachers should assess what each student knows now, target their teaching to what they are ready to learn next, and track each student’s progress over time. Teachers should then analyse their own impact, keep what works and change what does not.’

Ongoing assessment based on evidence of student learning over time, mapped onto a rigorous continuum of learning in the content of Religious Education, enables teachers to recognise and track the impact of their teaching on student learning in the RE curriculum area, and to adapt and align their teaching strategies to the explicit learning readiness of each student.

Gathering and interpreting evidence of student evidence allows for timely, accurate, and relevant feedback to be communicated to both learners and teachers. ‘Of all of the influences on student learning, feedback is among the top-ranked – and this is also the case for teacher learning.’ The first aim of assessment is improved student progress in learning, yet teacher feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching is a key means by which student learning is progressed.

Therefore, a range of assessment practices and interpretations are employed to improve targeted teaching and to maximise student progress in learning:

- **assessment for learning (formative)** is to ascertain a student’s prior knowledge, perceptions and misconceptions, and to monitor student learning progress. The evidence gained through these assessment tasks is used to inform and target teaching practice and curriculum planning in order to promote the student’s future learning and understanding.

- **assessment as learning (ongoing)** focuses on ongoing constructive feedback form the teacher and peers in order to develop the learner’s capacity of self-assessment and goal-setting in their learning.

- **assessment of learning (summative)** makes judgements about what and how well the student has achieved in learning in relation to the expectations of learning at a particular level.

Self-assessment and peer-assessment make important contributions to student learning, especially in the pedagogies of appropriation and dialogue preferred in Religious Education. **Self-assessment** involves student’s in reflecting on and taking some responsibility for their achievement in relation to the continuum of learning in RE. For this to be effective, they need to understand the learning intentions of units, including the openness to encounter through dialogue with others and the Christian Scripture and Tradition, and to take note of what and how well they have achieved in new
knowledge and skills, personal insights and meaning, greater appreciation of one’s own and others’ religious or nonreligious worldview.

**Peer-assessment** flourishes in a climate of cooperation, respectful dialogue and shared reflection and evaluation. It occurs best in a trusting and safe learning environment, in which the teachers facilitate a process of guided interaction and critical questioning in which learners provide appropriate feedback on a peer’s learning.

In Religious Education, which is designed to promote learning by encounter through dialogue with others, enacted in the movements of Shared Christian Praxis, all the dimensions of the human person are engaged and challenged with transformative learning. All aspects of learners’ knowledge and understanding, values and attitudes, skills and capacities, motivations and goals, interactions with others, spiritual experience and personal meaning, openness to transcendent encounter, and religious or nonreligious outlook on life, will be awakened and called into the learning environment. Evidence of learners’ progress in each movement of SCP – naming, critically reflecting, accessing Christian tradition, understanding and integrating, and identify personal response – can be observed and interpreted by students and teachers.

Assessment for learning in Religious Education will gather and interpret evidence that touches on all these personal, relational, spiritual and religious aspects of students’ experience in RE. It is appropriate that feedback is given to students on the basis of the evidence the student produces, including in the areas of spiritual awareness, religious understanding, or personal worldview and sense of meaning. It is also appropriate that teachers use feedback from this student work to inform and target their teaching to students’ learning readiness.

However, in keeping with the practice of assessment and reporting on Religious Education in Australian Catholic schools, a student’s personal faith-commitment in Christianity or another religious tradition, their participation in a faith community, or their nonreligious worldview, is not evaluated or interpreted in assessment of learning.

**Reporting in Religious Education**

Reporting is the communication of student achievement in learning, and the progress they have made in learning over time. It can be written or verbal, formal or informal. It may have a range of audiences – students themselves, parents, school leaders and teachers, state and national education authorities, the wider community – and a number of purposes including that of public accountability. The format of reporting should be relevant to the purpose. It may take various forms:

- a written statement
- teacher-parent interview
- online portfolios of student work with interpret
- newsletters, websites and school annuals
- displays of student work

In keeping with the Victorian Curriculum, schools have some flexibility in deciding how they report student progress in learning, what format is used for each curriculum area, and the frequency and timing of reports.

‘Schools are responsible for reporting student achievement against the content of the curriculum’ (VCAA, 2015). In Religious Education, this means reporting of student achievement is aligned to the
achievement standards in knowledge, skills and capabilities for each level of learning derived from the content strands and enduring understandings of the RE Curriculum structure. Student achievement is not reported against the movements of Shared Christian Practice or the stages of recontextualisation.

‘The reporting of student achievement will be consistent with the proposals for curriculum provision’ (VCAA, 2015). In Religious Education, schools will report on student achievement after the Foundation stage, and at the end of each two-year band of school?? or every year of schooling F-10 ?? (n. 45)

-reporting against individual leaning goals in RE as well as age or year-level cohort expected levels of achievement?? (n. 49)

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3 VCAA (2015), p. 3.

4 VCAA (2015), p. 3.


7 *Dei verbum*, n. 8.

8 *Dei verbum*, nn. 11-12.

9 *Dei verbum*, n. 5.


11 *Dei verbum*, n. 8.

12 *CCC*, n. 83.


17 See http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM

18 See https://www.youcat.org/


xxxi Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Schools Advisory Board, (2016), Characteristics of a Highly Effective Catholic School, pp. 7-9, adapted.

