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Perceptions of large-scale, standardised testing in religious education: How do religious educators perceive The Bishops' Religious Literacy Assessment?

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Publication Details

Poncini, A. (2018). Perceptions of large-scale, standardised testing in religious education: How do religious educators perceive The Bishops' Religious Literacy Assessment? (Doctor of Philosophy (College of Education)). University of Notre Dame Australia.
<https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/theses/210>

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CHAPTER NINE

FINDING SIX

9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents Finding Six. The finding emerged from Phase One and addresses the SRQ 3: How do the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA influence their teaching and assessment practices in Religious Education? The collation, analysis and cross-analysis of data from 238 religious educators in response to fourteen items in an online questionnaire led to the finding. Finding Six builds upon the previous five key findings by identifying the influence that the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE. The degree of influence seems entrenched and motivated by religious educators' personal and professional experiences of having taught RE and use of LSAs in education.

9.2 The Presentation of Finding Six

Table 9.1 presents the order of the associated sub-findings that led to Finding Six and the order of the discussions in this chapter. Finding Six developed through a process of cross-analysis of data and reveals a dynamic interplay between how the religious educators perceived the purpose and role of the BRLA as a LSA used in RE and how they responded to their teaching and assessment practices in RE.

Three major investigations led to Finding Six. Each of the investigations focused on the level of influence that the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA seem to have had on the religious educators' implementation of the RE curriculum. The investigations began with response data to Likert scale Item 41 because that data considers the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA's influence on student learning in RE. The data were cross-referenced with previously analysed data to other items from the online questionnaire. Later, response data to Item 39 was also cross-referenced with written data in response to Open-ended Items 12, 37 and 81. Given, the cross-referencing of data was conducted earlier to address SRQs 1 and 2, the data from these items were cross-referenced to build upon and further clarify if possible connections existed between how the religious educators perceived the effectiveness of the BRLA as a measure of student learning and the religious educators' experiences of the BRLA, teaching RE and using LSAs. Profiles of groups of religious educators emerged from the investigations. Each group presented contrasting rationales for

the changes they made or did not make to their teaching and assessment practices in RE as a result of their contrasting perceptions of the BRLA.

Table 9.1

Overview of Chapter Nine: Finding Six

9.2	Finding Six: The religious educators' contrasting perceptions of the BRLA seem to have contributed in some ways to changes in how they implemented the RE curriculum.
9.2.1	Sub-finding 6.1: The religious educators disagreed about whether the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE.
9.2.2	Sub-finding 6.2: Leaders of RE in Catholic primary schools agreed more than other sub-groups of religious educators that the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE.
9.2.3	Sub-finding 6.3: The religious educators disagreed about the use of the BRLA reports to inform teaching and assessment practices in RE.
9.2.4	Sub-finding 6.4: Half the number of religious educators neither agreed nor disagreed about student and parent use of the BRLA reports.
9.2.5	Sub-finding 6.5: The religious educators disagreed about the use of the school feedback about the BRLA by system administrators at the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia.
9.2.6	Sub-finding 6.6: The religious educators presented different rationales for the influence they perceived the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE.
9.3	Chapter Summary

9.2.1 Sub-finding 6.1. The analysis of data in response to Item 41 identifies groups of religious educators who agreed [80 of 234 (34.2%)] and disagreed [86 of 234 (36.8%)] the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE. The data also identifies statistically significant numbers of religious educators (29.1%) who were ambivalent and chose neither to agree nor disagree about the improvements to student learning in RE that the BRLA may have led. Table 9.2 displays the frequency of that data. This sub-finding suggests the religious educators disagreed about whether the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE, with only a third of the number implying they did use the BRLA for that purpose.

Table 9.2

Perceptions of the Influence of the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
I believe that the BRLA has led to improvements in student learning in RE. [Item 41 (n = 234)]	23 9.8%	63 26.9%	68 29.1%	73 31.2%	7 3.0%	2.91 (1.044)

Note. The item consisted of a statement that required religious educators to use one of five ratings (n = 233). The ratings are: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. To reflect missing response data, the percentages presented in the table represent the valid percent as calculated in SPSS.

9.2.2 Sub-finding 6.2. The analysis of response data to Likert scale Items 79a, 79b and 79c suggests that many religious educators agreed that the use of the BRLA had helped them and, in particular, leaders in Catholic primary schools to focus on improving student learning in RE. Table 9.3 presents the frequency of that data.

Firstly, Table 9.3 shows that over half the number of religious educators [127 of 231 (55.0%)] agreed the BRLA had helped them focus on student learning in RE. In comparison, only a third agreed the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning (Table 9.2). These results together with the results in Sub-finding 6.1 suggest that possibly the BRLA was being considered rather than used by more religious educators to focus their attention on improving student learning in RE.

Secondly, Table 9.3 shows slightly fewer but still half the number of religious educators [118 of 231 (51.1%)] who agreed school leaders used the BRLA to help them focus on student learning in RE. An analysis of variance provides supporting evidence to suggest that Catholic primary schools leaders of RE more than any other sub-group of religious educators in the study implied they used the BRLA to help them focus on student learning in RE. For example, the Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test finds a 0.009 probability of difference in response to Item 79a according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of that data (Table 9.4) suggests principals [18 of 26 (69.2%)] and other leaders of RE [25 of 37 (67.6%)] in Catholic primary schools agreed more than other sub-groups of religious educators that the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE. In contrast, Year Nine teachers chose more than other sub-

groups neither to agree nor disagree that the BRLA had helped them focus on student learning in RE.

Table 9.3
Perceptions of the Use of the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in RE. Me [Item 79a (n = 231)]	13 5.6%	39 16.9%	52 22.5%	110 47.6%	17 7.4%	3.35 (1.031) p = 0.009 role
The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in RE. Other Teachers [Item 79b (n = 231)]	16 6.9%	41 17.7%	78 33.8%	91 39.4%	5 2.2%	3.12 (0.961) p = 0.009 role
The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in RE. School Leaders [Item 79c (n = 231)]	10 4.3%	27 11.7%	76 32.9%	101 43.7%	17 7.4%	3.39 (0.939) p = 0.000 role

Note. The items consisted of statements that required religious educators to use one of five ratings. The ratings are: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. To reflect missing response data, the percentages presented in the table represent the valid percent as calculated in SPSS.

The p value is the statistical probability of the rejection of a null hypothesis, 0.05 or less, in the non-parametric testing using the Kruskal-Wallis Test to measure differences according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility.

In response to Item 79b, less than half the number of religious educators [96 of 231 (41.6%)] agreed that other teachers used the BRLA to help them focus on student learning in RE. The Kruskal-Wallis Test also finds in that data, a 0.009 probability of difference according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. Again, the frequency of the data suggests that principals [16 of 26 (61.5%)] and other leaders of RE [22 of 37 (59.5%)] working in Catholic primary schools agreed more than other sub-groups that the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE (Table 9.5). In comparison, more of the Year Nine teachers chose neither to agree nor disagree.

Table 9.4

The Frequency of Data for Item 79a According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	5	0	3	1	2	1	1	13
Disagree	8	5	13	5	4	3	1	39
Neither agree nor disagree	13	11	17	4	2	4	1	52
Agree	29	19	16	19	11	14	2	110
Strongly Agree	0	4	2	6	1	4	0	17
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Item 79a: The use of the BRLA has helped me focus on improving student learning in RE ($n = 231$).

APRE represents Assistant Principals as school leaders of RE in Catholic primary schools.

REC represents Religious Education Coordinators as school leaders of RE in Catholic secondary schools. CPP represents Catholic primary principals and CSP represents Catholic secondary principals.

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Furthermore, in response to Item 79c, where over half the number of religious educators [118 of 231 (51.1%)] agreed that school leaders were helped by the BRLA to focus on student learning in RE, the Kruskal-Wallis Test finds in that data a 0.000 probability of difference according to the religious educators' employment role. The frequency of the data suggests for the third time that principals of Catholic primary schools [17 of 26 (65.4%)] and, in particular, Assistant Principals of RE [26 of 37 (70.3%)] agreed more than other sub-groups that the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE (Table 9.6). Again, half the number of Year Nine teachers [28 of 55 (50.9%)] chose neither to agree nor disagree. In comparison to school leaders of RE, the analysis of variance suggests that Year Nine teachers were ambivalent and possibly divided about the BRLA and its influence on them and others to improve student learning in RE.

Table 9.5

The Frequency of Data for Item 79b According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	4	4	3	1	2	1	1	16
Disagree	9	4	13	4	7	3	1	41
Neither agree nor disagree	20	16	23	8	4	6	1	78
Agree	22	14	11	20	7	15	2	91
Strongly Agree	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	5
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Item 79b: The use of the BRLA has helped other teachers focus on improving student learning in RE. ($n = 231$)

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Table 9.6

The Frequency of Data for Item 79c According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	10
Disagree	5	3	8	2	6	2	1	27
Neither agree nor disagree	23	11	28	6	1	6	1	76
Agree	25	18	12	20	11	13	2	101
Strongly Agree	1	5	1	6	0	4	0	17
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Response data to Item 79c: The use of the BRLA has helped school leaders focus on improving student learning in Religious Education ($n = 231$).

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

9.2.3 Sub-finding 6.3. Data in response to Likert scale Items 68, 70, 71 and 72 were also collated and analysed to determine how the religious educators perceived the use of the BRLA reports (Table 9.7). From the analysis of that data it appears that the BRLA reports provided by the CEOWA were used by half the number of religious educators. A total of 116 of 231 religious educators (50.2%) agreed they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE (Item 70a). However, less than half the number [105 of 231 (45.5%)] felt confident in using the reports (Item 68). Fewer numbers [93 of 231 (40.3%)] chose neither to agree nor disagree that other classroom teachers used the reports (Item 70b). In terms of other people's use of the BRLA reports, more religious educators [102 of 231 (44.2%)] agreed school leaders used the BRLA reports (Item 70c) compared to teachers [61 of 231 (26.4%)] not involved with the BRLA (Item 70b).

The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a probability of difference in the response data to Items 68, Item 70a and 70c. In each case the probability of difference is according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of those data sets (Tables 9.8, 9.9, 9.10 and 9.11) suggest school leaders and, in particular, leaders of RE working in Catholic primary schools were more confident using the BRLA reports and did so in ways that considered future decision making and planning in RE. For example, in Table 9.8, 25 of 37 primary school leaders (67.6%) and 18 of 26 primary principals (69.2%) indicated they confidently used the BRLA reports. More Year Three teachers [20 of 55 (36.4%)] and Year Nine teachers [21 of 55 (38.2%)] than other sub-groups of religious educators chose neither to agree nor disagree. Similar trends in the data in response to Items 70a, 70c and 72 are also evident.

Almost half the number of religious educators [112 of 231 (48.5%)] disagreed teachers at their school work collaboratively to analyse student performance of the BRLA using the school reports (Item 71). Similarly, 104 of 231 religious educators (45.0%) disagreed they use the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE (Item 72). The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.019 probability of difference in that data, and the frequency of the data according to employment role of responsibility in RE indicating Year Nine teachers [20 of 55 (36.4%)] disagreed more than other sub-groups of religious educators that they used the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE (Table 9.11). More principals of Catholic primary schools chose neither to agree nor disagree. In this case, the principals' response suggests they may have been uncertain of how their teachers used the BRLA reports.

Table 9.7

Perceptions of the Use of the BRLA Reports

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
I feel confident in using the BRLA school reports. [Item 68 (n = 231)]	12 5.2%	48 20.8%	66 28.6%	96 41.6%	9 3.9%	3.19 (0.985) p = 0.002 role
People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses. Me [Item 70a (n = 231)]	17 7.4%	45 19.5%	53 22.9%	108 46.8%	8 3.5%	3.20 (1.036) p = 0.000 role
People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses. Other Teachers [Item 70b (n = 231)]	19 8.2%	58 25.1%	93 40.3%	59 25.5%	2 0.9%	2.86 (0.924)
People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses. School Leaders [Item 70c (n = 231)]	14 5.9%	36 15.1%	79 33.2%	93 39.1%	9 3.8%	3.21 (0.960) p = 0.029 role
Teachers at my school work collaboratively to analyse the student results in the BRLA school reports. [Item 71 (n = 231)]	27 11.7%	85 36.8%	46 19.9%	71 30.7%	2 0.9%	2.72 (1.051)
I use the student data from the BRLA school reports to plan lessons in RE. [Item 72 (n = 231)]	30 13.0%	74 32.0%	62 26.8%	63 27.3%	2 0.9%	2.71 (1.033) p = 0.019 role

Note. The items consisted of statements that required religious educators to use one of five ratings. The ratings are: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. To reflect missing response data, the percentages presented in the table represent the valid percent as calculated in SPSS.

The p value is the statistical probability of the rejection of a null hypothesis, 0.05 or less, in the non-parametric testing using the Kruskal-Wallis Test to measure differences according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility.

Table 9.8

The Frequency of Data for Item 68 According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	4	1	5	1	1	0	0	12
Disagree	14	8	9	4	6	4	3	48
Neither agree nor disagree	20	14	21	5	2	4	0	66
Agree	17	16	13	24	9	15	2	96
Strongly Agree	0	0	3	1	2	3	0	9
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Likert scale Item 68: I feel confident in using the BRLA school reports ($n = 231$).

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Table 9.9

The Frequency of Data for Item 70a According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	4	2	8	1	1	1	0	17
Disagree	12	5	13	5	6	2	2	45
Neither agree nor disagree	14	8	18	7	0	4	2	53
Agree	25	22	11	20	11	18	1	108
Strongly Agree	0	2	1	2	2	1	0	8
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Likert scale Item 70a: I use the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE ($n = 231$).

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Table 9.10

The Frequency of Data for Item 70c According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	0	3	6	1	3	1	0	14
Disagree	8	3	8	5	6	4	2	36
Neither agree nor disagree	26	15	22	8	3	3	2	79
Agree	21	15	14	20	6	16	1	93
Strongly Agree	0	3	1	1	2	2	0	9
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Likert scale Item 70c: School leaders use the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE ($n = 231$).

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Table 9.11

The Frequency of Data for Item 72 According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	7	3	14	2	1	2	1	30
Disagree	16	10	20	11	9	7	1	74
Neither agree nor disagree	12	13	8	9	6	11	3	62
Agree	20	12	8	13	4	6	0	63
Strongly Agree	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 72: I use the student data from the BRLA school reports to plan lessons in RE ($n = 231$).

*The total refers to the number of religious educators who responded to the questionnaire item.

Three inferences are drawn from the analysis of response data shown in Tables 9.7, 9.8, 9.9, 9.10 and 9.11 about the perceived use of the BRLA reports. Firstly, half the number of religious educators appear to have used the BRLA school and student reports. Secondly, Catholic primary school leaders appear to have confidently used the BRLA reports to improve student learning in RE more than other sub-groups of religious educators. This inference supports Sub-findings 6.2 that identifies, more Catholic primary school leaders of RE than any other sub-group as having perceived the BRLA as a tool for helping them focus on improving student learning in RE. Thirdly, even though more teachers of RE, in particular, Year Three and Year Nine teachers, indicated they were neither confident using the BRLA reports nor chose to agree nor disagree about their use of the reports, greater numbers of teachers as a whole indicated they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE. For example, 17 of 55 Year Three teachers felt confident using the BRLA reports (Item 68), compared to 25 who agreed they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE (Item 70a).

9.2.4 Sub-finding 6.4. The response data from four Likert scale items (Table 9.12) identifies a statistically significant number of religious educators who appear ambivalent about how students and parents used the BRLA reports, and considered the usefulness of the BRLA to focus attention on improving student learning in RE. According to the data, 113 of 231 religious educators (48.9%) neither agreed nor disagreed parents referred to their children's BRLA reports (Item 70d). Also, 116 of 231 religious educators (50.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed students referred to the BRLA reports to track their achievement (Item 70e). Similarly, in response to Items 79d and 79e, more than half the number of religious educators chose neither to agree nor disagree that the BRLA had helped parents [137 of 231 (59.3%)] and students [136 of 231 (58.9%)] focus on improving learning in RE. The religious educators' consistent and seemingly uncertain response about student and parent use of the BRLA reports is consistent with data that led to Findings One (Chapter Five) and Three (Chapter Seven). Further investigation is presented in Finding Seven (Chapter Ten) and suggests that the religious educators' response may have influenced how they considered possible changes to their teaching and assessment practices in RE.

Table 9.12

Perceptions of the Use of the BRLA Reports by Students and Parents

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE. Parents [Item 70d (n = 231)]	27 11.7%	63 27.3%	113 48.9%	27 11.7%	1 0.4%	2.62 (0.856)
People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE. Students [Item 70e (n = 231)]	27 11.7%	60 26.0%	116 50.2%	27 11.7%	1 0.4%	2.63 (0.854)
The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in Religious Education. Parents [Item 79d (n = 231)]	15 6.5%	52 22.5%	137 59.3%	26 11.3%	1 0.4%	2.77 (0.750)
The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in Religious Education. Students [Item 79e (n = 231)]	15 6.5%	51 22.1%	136 58.9%	28 12.1%	1 0.4%	2.78 (0.757)

Note. The items consisted of statements that required religious educators to use one of five ratings. The ratings are: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. To reflect missing response data, the percentages presented in the table represent the valid percent as calculated in SPSS.

9.2.5 Sub-finding 6.5. The school feedback about the BRLA (Table 9.13) was perceived by some religious educators as irrelevant to the system administrators of the BRLA at the CEOWA. Even though more religious educators agreed than disagreed that feedback about the BRLA was being used by the CEOWA, a statistically significant number chose neither to agree nor disagree. For example, 34.6% of the religious educators neither agreed nor disagreed the school feedback had provided professional learning opportunities in RE (Item 80c).

Based on the analysis of data presented in Table 9.13, less than half the number of religious educators [112 of 231 (48.5%)] agreed system administrators used feedback from

the BRLA to help improve the structure of the BRLA (Item 80a). Secondly, less than half the number of religious educators [98 of 231 (42.4%)] agreed the CEOWA used feedback from schools about the BRLA to help develop better assessment practices in RE (Item 80b). This number of religious educators who agreed system administrators used feedback to develop better assessment practices is greater than the number who disagreed or chose neither to agree nor disagree. Thirdly, over a third of the number of religious educators [91 of 231 (39.4%)] agreed the CEOWA used feedback from schools about the BRLA to help provide professional learning in RE (Item 80c). The religious educators' mixed perceptions regarding the use of school feedback may have further influenced how they considered changes to teaching and assessment practices in RE.

Table 9.13

Perceptions of the Use of School Feedback About the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
I believe that the CEOWA uses feedback from schools about the BRLA to help improve the structure of the BRLA. [Item 80a (n = 231)]	9 3.9%	36 15.6%	74 32.0%	102 44.2%	10 4.3%	3.29 (0.918)
I believe that the CEOWA uses feedback from schools about the BRLA to help develop better assessment practices in RE. [Item 80b (n = 231)]	13 5.6%	43 18.6%	77 33.3%	86 37.2%	12 5.2%	3.18 (0.982)
I believe that the CEOWA uses feedback from schools about the BRLA to help provide professional learning in RE. [Item 80c (n = 231)]	14 6.1%	46 19.9%	80 34.6%	80 34.6%	11 4.8%	3.12 (0.984)

Note. The items consisted of statements that required religious educators to use one of five ratings. The ratings are: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Neither agree nor disagree (N) = 3, Agree (A) = 4, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5. To reflect missing response data, the percentages presented in the table represent the valid percent as calculated in SPSS.

9.2.6 Sub-finding 6.6. This sub-finding is based on three investigations involving a cross-referencing of the overall response data from the online questionnaire. The cross-

referenced data identified three distinct groups of religious educators. Two of the groups presented contrasting rationales for the influence they perceived the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE. The contrasting rationales helped to build the profiles of each group. These profiles highlight the contrasting perceptions that the religious educators had about the BRLA and suggest that contextual factors seem to have influenced their perceptions and, in turn, how they perceived the BRLA had influenced their teaching and assessment practices in RE. These contextual factors were identified throughout the study’s key findings as the religious educators’ personal and collective experiences and beliefs about the use of LSAs, and specifically about, how RE should be taught and assessed.

9.2.6.1 Investigation one. Response data to Item 39 were cross-referenced with written data in response to Items 12, 37 and 81. For Item 39 the religious educators were asked to rate the effectiveness of the BRLA as a measure of student learning in RE on a scale from zero to 100, with 50 as the mid-point. For Items 12, 37 and 81, the religious educators were asked to describe their experiences of the BRLA, indicate whether they used LSAs, and explain whether the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE. Table 9.14 summarises the cross-referenced data.

Table 9.14

Investigation One: Cross-referenced Response Data

Item 39	Item 12	Item 37	Item 81
Rating is 50 or less (n = 120)	Expressions of concern for the BRLA	Expressions of concern for LSA	Expressions suggesting the BRLA has not influenced RE
[120 of 234 (51.3%)]	[106 of 120 (88.3%)]	[103 of 120 (85.8%)]	[97 of 120 (80.8%)]
Rating is 51 or greater (n = 114)	Expressions of support for the BRLA	Expressions of support for LSA	Expressions suggesting the BRLA has influenced RE
[114 of 234 (48.7%)]	[101 of 114 (88.6%)]	[90 of 114 (78.9%)]	[83 of 114 (72.8%)]

Note. Item 39: Rate the effectiveness of the BRLA as a measure of student learning ($n = 234$).
 Open-ended Item 12: Describe your experience of The Bishops’ Religious Literacy Assessment.
 Open-ended Item 37: Describe your experience of using large-scale, standardised assessments. Open-ended Item 81: What influence do you believe The Bishops’ Religious Literacy Assessment has had in RE?

Firstly, over half of the number of religious educators [120 of 234 (51.3%)] rated the BRLA between zero and 50. As a group, these religious educators raised concerns about the BRLA (88.3%) and LSAs (85.8%) and perceived the BRLA not to have influenced RE (80.8%). Secondly, 48.7% of the religious educators rated the BRLA between 51 and 100. Of these religious educators, 88.5% used expressions of support for the BRLA. Slightly less of the group (78.9%) used expressions of support for LSAs and even fewer (72.8%) used expressions suggesting the BRLA has influenced RE.

9.2.6.2 Investigation two. Given that the first investigation identifies groups of religious educators who perceived the use of LSAs differently, the response data to Item 39 was cross-referenced with data to Likert scale Items 35 and 36 (Table 9.15). These data were specific to the perceived use of LSAs. Full details of the analysis of response data to the two Likert scale items is presented in Appendix O. For Item 35, the religious educators were asked to indicate whether they perceived LSAs as useful in measuring student learning. For Item 36, the religious educators were asked to show if they liked to use LSAs to gather information about student learning.

Table 9.15

Investigation Two: Cross-referenced Response Data

Item 39	Item 35	Item 36
Rating is 50 or less (n = 120) [120 of 234 (51.3%)]	56 of 120 (46.7%) disagreed [41] and strongly disagreed [15] [*30 religious educators]	56 of 120 (46.7%) disagreed [38] and strongly disagreed [18] [*29 religious educators]
Rating is 51 or greater (n = 114) [114 of 234 (48.7%)]	90 of 114 (78.9%) agreed [79] and strongly agreed [11] [*15 religious educators]	88 of 114 (77.2%) agreed [78] and strongly agreed [10] [*13 religious educators]

Note. Item 39: Rate the effectiveness of the BRLA as a measure of student learning ($n = 234$). Open-ended Item 35: I find large-scale, standardised assessment to be useful in measuring student learning. Open-ended Item 36: I like to use large-scale, standardised assessments to gather information about student learning.

*This number represents the religious educators who chose neither to agree nor disagree with statements in Likert scale items.

Firstly, less than half the number of religious educators who rated the effectiveness of the BRLA 50 or less as a measure of student learning in RE also disagreed (46.7%) that LSAs were useful to gather information about student learning and measure that learning. Secondly, of the group of religious educators who rated the effectiveness of the BRLA 51 or greater on the scale, most agreed they found LSAs to be useful (78.9%) and liked to use LSAs to gather information about student learning (77.2%). Statistically significant to these results is that a quarter of the number of religious educators in both groups appear ambivalent about the usefulness of LSAs.

9.2.6.3 Investigation three. As previously discussed and summarised in Table 9.2, the analysis of response data to Likert scale Item 41 identifies religious educators who argued for and against changes to their teaching and assessment practices in RE as a result of using the BRLA. That is, 86 of 234 religious educators (36.8%) disagreed that the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE; 80 of 234 religious educators (34.2%) agreed; and 68 of 234 religious educators (29.1%) chose neither to agree nor disagree. When the response data to Item 41 were cross-referenced with other data sets, further profiling of these groups of religious educators emerged. The profiles are based on contrasting rationales about the perceived influence the BRLA has had on teaching and assessment practices in RE.

The data sets that were cross-referred with Item 41 included previously presented written responses that described the religious educators' experiences of the BRLA (Open-ended Items 12 and 81), teaching RE (Open-ended Item 33) and using LSAs (Open-ended Item 37). Also, numeric data in response to several items were cross-referenced. These data sets provide additional information about the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA (e.g. Items 11 and 39, Likert scale Items 70a, 72 and 79a), their general use of LSAs (e.g. Likert scale Items 35, 36a) and their treatment of RE as an academic learning area (e.g. Likert scale Items 77 and 78). Appendix O presents the full analysis of Likert scale items focused on the religious educators' perceptions of the use of LSAs and the treatment of RE.

9.2.6.3.1 Perceived lack of influence. Of the 234 religious educators who responded to Item 41, 36.8% (86 of 234) disagreed the BRLA had influenced how they taught and assessed student learning in RE. These religious educators suggested that the BRLA had not led to improvements in student learning. The written comments from this group (Table 9.16) identify them as disagreeing about aspects of the BRLA and the use of LSAs yet describing positive experiences of teaching RE.

As a group, the 86 religious educators mostly agreed they treated RE as an academic learning area and agreed student learning in RE should be assessed. In terms of the group's perceptions of LSAs, more than half the number described negative experiences of using LSAs and disagreed LSAs were useful measures of student learning. These religious educators mostly rated the BRLA as an ineffective measure of student learning in RE. Less than half the number in the group disagreed the use of the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE and believed the BRLA had no role to play in RE. Almost three-quarters of the group disagreed they used the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE. This evidence suggests that religious educators in this group were not convinced that the BRLA, as a LSA, was an appropriate measure of student learning to be used in RE. Further to this evidence, 55.8% of the group (48 of 86), described negative experiences of the BRLA in their response to Open-ended Item 12.

Table 9.16

Religious Educators Who Perceived the BRLA to have Limited Influence

Perceptions of Religious Education

- 32 of 86 (37.2%) shared their challenging experiences of teaching RE [Open-ended Item 33].
- 8 of 86 (9.3%) disagreed RE should be treated as an academic learning area [Likert scale Item 77].
- 14 of 86 (16.3%) disagreed student learning in RE should be assessed [Likert scale Item 78].

Perceptions of large-scale, standardised assessments

- 46 of 86 (53.5%) disagreed LSAs are useful in measuring student learning [Likert scale Item 35].
- 46 of 86 (53.5%) disagreed they used LSAs to gather information about student learning [Likert scale Item 36a].
- 60 of 86 (69.8%) described negative experiences of LSAs [Open-ended Item 37].

Perceptions of the BRLA as a large-scale, standardised assessment used in RE

- 36 of 86 (41.9%) believed the BRLA as no role to play in RE [Likert scale Item 11].
 - 65 of 86 (75.6%) rated the BRLA 50 or less on the scale of effectiveness [Item 39].
 - 40 of 86 (46.5%) disagreed the use of the BRLA has helped them focus on improving student learning in RE [Likert scale Item 79a].
 - 36 of 86 (41.9%) disagreed they use the BRLA to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE [Likert scale Item 70a].
 - 58 of 86 (67.4%) disagreed they use the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE [Likert scale Item 72].
-

In the groups' written response to Open-ended Item 81, 75.6% (65 of 86) explained how they believed the BRLA had not influenced RE. The reasons provided by these religious educators relate to perceived concerns and opposition to the structure and relevance of the BRLA. This group remarked that the BRLA was a stressful LSA and irrelevant to the RE curriculum because of its "literacy focus" and "content specific" nature.

As previously discussed in Findings One (Chapter Five) and Four (Chapter Seven), for 44 religious educators in the group of 86, the BRLA was considered irrelevant to the RE curriculum because it was "out of touch" with and "isolated" from the curriculum. The religious educators explained that the BRLA test items did not assess content from the RE curriculum and remarked that as "far as they were concerned", the students' BRLA results were "an inaccurate measure of their learning in RE". The rationale of one Year Nine teacher suggests the BRLA did not assess student learning as well as assessments designed by classroom teachers:

The tests are largely irrelevant to me. I teach in a school that generally performs at the average or above for most of the large-scale testing because of our students' "cultural capital". Some lack a background of attending a Catholic school for years but most have picked up enough along the way to answer the questions. I just give them a practice on the format. I think my assessments give me a clearer idea of how they are working in class because they are responding to something that I know has been taught directly to them.

Further to the comment, phrases such as "cramming for the test" were used. As one teacher stated, "Only around test time do teachers focus on the RE content". The religious educators suggested that after the assessment was administered, teachers "continued to do their own thing".

The comments and phrases by the 44 religious educators suggest that the BRLA test items may have been perceived as irrelevant to the RE curriculum for two reasons. Firstly, the content in the RE curriculum may have been perceived as too extensive to cover prior to the administration of the BRLA. Teachers may have felt overwhelmed by not knowing which test items would appear in the assessment and which content would be targeted by the test items. Secondly, teachers may not have focused on the content in the RE curriculum and felt the need to attend to the content prior to the administration of the BRLA.

Several other reasons were presented by religious educators within the group of 86 for why they perceived the BRLA as irrelevant to the RE curriculum. The reasons they provided, seem to justify why they believed the BRLA had not influenced their teaching and

assessment practices in RE. For example, five religious educators described how the BRLA was irrelevant to the teaching of RE because they believed that students did not attend Mass. As one teacher of RE explained:

I don't really believe that the BRLA has much influence at all. Closer to the testing a number of teachers simply supply the students with local information etc. so they can achieve satisfactory results. These pieces of information are generally of no use as the students do not attend Mass or other Catholic celebrations.

The religious educators described how parents did not value RE. As one school leader wrote, "I don't believe the BRLA is taken too seriously by students and parents even though the formality of its preparation and administration is formalised". Similarly, two other religious educators wrote, "Parents do not hold the importance of the BRLA as to tests like NAPLAN", and:

Personally, I believe a lot of RE learning needs to be supported in the home as literacy and numeracy are. Through my observations, parents know a lot less about religion than their own children due to what is learnt in our schools.

One Year Nine teacher questioned the use of the BRLA in light of the students' commitment to their faith.

When curriculum matches student assessment, large-scale assessments are very useful. I do not believe this is the case with the BRLA. Also, it does not take into consideration student background, and an assessment in RE is something that should take this into consideration.

The comment from the Year Nine teacher also reflects rationales provided by other religious educators that expose differing perceptions of the nature and role of RE.

A second reason provided by 20 religious educators as to why they believed the BRLA was irrelevant to the RE curriculum is that the assessment was "just another stressful assessment imposed on the students in Years Three, Five and Nine". According to these religious educators the BRLA focused heavily on content. As one primary school leader of RE wrote:

I feel in Years Three and Five there has been more of a focus on teaching the C area of the RE curriculum although I don't feel this has had a flow on effect to other Year levels.

The school leader referred to the "C area" in the RE curriculum as the content specific learning points about the role of the Church. This leader questioned such a focus in the content.

A third reason presented by 15 religious educators suggests that the BRLA was perceived as irrelevant to the RE curriculum because in their opinion, the academic nature of the BRLA was changing RE from being a “happy subject” into a formalised, content driven subject. As one Year Three teacher explained:

It makes a subject area that usually creates happiness and discussions about our religion into something that becomes stressful as the children and staff feels the pressure placed on them from a standardised test such as the BRLA.

Similarly, a Year Five teacher wrote:

Teachers have become more focused on the outcomes assessed in the BRLA rather than those in the RE Units of Work. Around the assessment time, RE becomes a focus on doing well in the test rather than developing a deep understanding of the Catholic faith.

These religious educators considered the BRLA as an academic exercise contrary to how they taught and assessed in RE classrooms and made comments such as the following to further expose their views:

The BRLA has done very little. I teach the RE curriculum according to the needs of the children in my class, not according to what they need to know to get a good score in the BRLA.

This evidence suggests that within the group of 86 religious educators there were those who perceived the BRLA as either “too literacy based” or “too content driven”. Furthermore, the Units of Work that made up the RE curriculum were described as “different” and “not as complicated” in comparison to the test items used in the BRLA.

Further to the evidence, thirteen of the 15 religious educators who described the BRLA as an academic exercise also described the BRLA as a LSA that was “damaging the students’ faith”. As one Year Five teacher explained:

LSAs and, in particular the BRLA, are limited in capturing what really matters about a person not in keeping with the Christian outlook on the value of the whole person and the complexity and dignity of each individual.

Similarly, as four teachers further described, the BRLA had not had an impact on their teaching practices in RE because as an assessment the BRLA was perceived as about content and the RE curriculum was about spirituality. The teachers made comments such as “Students are receptive to the notion of spirituality and faith but resistant to the specific teachings of the ‘institutional church’”. One secondary school leader wrote:

In terms of implementation and scoring, the BRLA is a worthwhile experience. I would have to question if it has had an effect on pedagogy and the teaching of RE in Catholic schools. Does the BRLA make RE “better”? I do not believe it does.

The rationales provided by religious educators in the group of 86 highlight the inaction taken by the group in terms of assessment practices in RE.

According to eight religious educators, student learning should not be assessed and specifically not formally assessed in RE using the BRLA. Of the eight, one Year Three teacher who did not agree with the treatment of RE as an academic learning area and believed that formal assessment had no place in RE, wrote:

This is my first year of being part of the BRLA, but I believe measurement of Christian literacy is not something that assists in spreading the Gospel Values and Christian lifestyle. Students in today’s technological multimedia society need to be related to on their level, so that they can connect with their developing spirituality.

Similarly, three school leaders of RE explained that the BRLA was an assessment in RE where assessment is unwarranted. One of the school leaders wrote:

I think the BRLA is a waste of time especially at primary level. I am a teacher at a Catholic school and have a very strong faith. I send my children to Catholic schools. However, I really hate when my children’s experience during Religious Education is given a grade. I feel since formal assessment in this area it has turned many older children off learning about God.

A second primary school leader remarked:

I don’t believe testing in this area is necessary and children would benefit more from being given the opportunity to develop a personal relationship with God in RE classes through learning about the Bible and church structure.

A third, secondary school leader suggested:

Many of our students have little spiritual and more so religious awareness or language. In view of this the content laden curriculum I find a struggle to teach I would prefer to have more scope to be able to work with students to explore these things in a more creative, and experiential way. Maybe just a different blend of what we are doing, but at a gentler pace.

The full comments from this school leader are presented in Chapter Five. The repeated inclusion of the comments aims to demonstrate how perceptions seem to have influenced practice.

A fourth reason was presented by three Year Nine teachers of RE to explain why they believed the BRLA was irrelevant to assessment practices in RE. They showed how information about the BRLA was not provided to them from school leaders, including “information about the students’ results”. The Year Nine teachers wrote that school leaders withheld information and only used information from the BRLA to their advantage. One Year Nine teacher explained:

If any, the influence of the BRLA is from teachers and Heads of Departments who have used it as a lever to ensure that Religious Education is taught and assessed in a more structured and academic way within their own school contexts.

The comment from the Year Nine teacher is echoed in the comments of other religious educators in the group of 86 who indicated that school leaders were the “keepers” of student results from the BRLA and did not conduct “any follow-up review of the results with staff”. Similarly, another Year Nine teacher explained:

I feel the BRLA is not commonly known amongst the staff. They are aware of it when the test is being done and the school is asked to cooperate by being mindful of students during the test time. Being unaware of the report on the BRLA, I have thus not used it to assist with what is needed to be taught.

A third Year Nine teacher commented:

At the school, BRLA is just another external assessment that in certain Years students undertake and it has no influence on their grade in Religious Education. Would it have a greater impact if the BRLA result was part of their grade in RE?

The latter Year Nine teacher suggested that only students in Years Three, Five and Nine took part in an assessment that other students and their teachers were not involved with, therefore unaware of and not privy to the results.

A fifth reason was presented by ten religious educators who described how the BRLA was irrelevant to teaching and assessment practices in RE because the RE curriculum had not been reviewed and updated since the BRLA was introduced. This evidence aligns with evidence that led to sub-finding 6.5 where the religious educators had mixed perceptions about how the CEOWA used feedback from schools about the BRLA. According to one Year Five teacher, “The biggest change in RE has not been the RE Units rather the move of students in Year Seven into secondary Catholic schools and the Sacrament of Confirmation being moved to Year Six”. Similarly, one teacher of RE stated, “We have been teaching from the same Units of Work for a while now”. One primary school leader wrote, “At the school

level, the BRLA has had a big influence but at the CEOWA level we have seen minimal change”. One Year Nine teacher explained:

I don't believe the BRLA has any influence on the way that I teach or the programmes that are supplied to us to teach in our classes. The evidence that I would support this with is that many of the RE resources we are supplied with continue to have draft written over them and the student resource book. Whilst the presentation has been updated to make the books more appealing, do not link with the teacher resource books in regard to page references etc. The teacher resource books unfortunately have not had the same updating applied to them.

Other religious educators questioned the term “draft” on the Units and recommended future changes to the structure of student and teacher resources.

The various rationales made known by the 86 religious educators as to why they perceived the BRLA as being irrelevant to the RE curriculum are summarised in the comment from one school leader:

Limited! Hardly ever has the testing been mentioned at network meetings in 21 years. I am unaware of any changes to the accreditation workshops to value add to the teaching of Religious Education. Results of the testing are far too late in the year to maximise assistance or reprogram. The testing is done during clashes with the Catholic Performing Arts Festival whereby many students are involved, which takes them away from lessons, revision activities and the actual testing day. Ideal for future planning (if time permits this to be done in consultation with staff). Not having a strong nucleus of staff who have taught in a number of Year groups adds to the superfluous nature of any benefits that the test results might have on teaching students. Insufficient time provided in the way of enhancing students' faith journey in these years when content is being tested. General consensus is that students need to perform well to give a “grand” impression of the state of Religious Education in any given school (perception of image).

Further to this comment, school leaders of RE made references to the reporting process for the BRLA. One primary school leader described the BRLA as irrelevant to RE because “the reporting of RE results using the BRLA as a LSA had no relevancy in primary education”. Another school leader wrote, “I'm not sure that reporting on RE to parents is seen as being of relevance at a primary level”. These leaders also wrote about the teaching of RE as a spiritual activity rather than an academic one.

Overall, the discussed rationales suggest that the 86 religious educators dismissed the BRLA in terms of its relevance to the RE curriculum because they approached the teaching of RE with a faith-based focus. This focus appears to have shaped the religious educators' teaching and assessment practices in RE. In turn, the educational purpose and role of the BRLA may have been perceived as contrary to their faith-based practices. In this scenario, it appears likely that LSAs such as the BRLA would have been perceived as limited in influencing the teaching and assessment practices of religious educators in RE.

9.2.6.3.2 Perceived influence. In contrast to the latter group, 80 of 234 religious educators (34.2%) agreed the BRLA had influenced how they taught and assessed students in RE. This group believed the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning. Table 9.17 is a summary of the profile of the 80 religious educators. These religious educators mostly agreed on a number of aspects about the BRLA, the use of LSAs and the teaching of RE. They believed the BRLA had a role to play in RE and that it was an effective measure of student learning in RE. They agreed RE should be treated as an academic learning area and believed student learning should be assessed in RE. Although they did not necessarily describe positive experiences of using LSAs, they considered LSAs useful in gathering information about student learning. This group indicated that the BRLA as a LSA had helped them focus on student learning in RE and agreed they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses of students' learning. However, as a group, they were less inclined to use the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE.

Of the 80 religious educators, 76.3% (61 of 80) described positive experiences of the BRLA in response to Open-ended Item 12. In response to Open-ended Item 81, 78.8% (63 of 80) indicated the BRLA had influenced RE. The rationales these religious educators provided for their perceptions suggest the BRLA had heightened the profile of RE as an academic learning area and, as a result, teachers had become more focused on teaching the content of the RE curriculum to students.

Table 9.17

Religious Educators Who Perceived the BRLA to be Influential

Perceptions about Religious Education

- 50 of 80 (62.5%) described positive experiences of teaching RE [Open-ended Item 33].
- 73 of 80 (91.3%) agreed RE should be treated as an academic learning area [Likert scale Item 77].
- 74 of 80 (92.5%) agreed student learning in RE should be assessed [Likert scale Item 78].

Perceptions about large-scale, standardised assessments

- 63 of 80 (78.8%) agreed LSAs were useful in measuring student learning [Likert scale Item 35].
- 65 of 80 (81.3%) used LSAs to gather information about student learning [Likert scale Item 36a].
- 39 of 80 (48.8%) described positive experiences of LSAs [Open-ended Item 37].

Perceptions about the BRLA as a large-scale, standardised assessment used in RE

- 72 of 80 (90.0%) believed the BRLA has a role to play in RE [Likert scale Item 11].
 - 70 of 80 (87.5%) rated the BRLA as an effective measure of student learning [Likert scale Item 39].
 - 68 of 80 (85.0%) indicated they used the BRLA to help them focus on student learning in RE [Likert scale Item 79a].
 - 55 of 80 (68.8%) agreed they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE [Likert scale Item 70a].
 - 41 of 80 (51.3%) indicated they used the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE [Likert scale Item 72].
-

Table 9.18 presents common expressions from the group of 80 about the BRLA and the perceived influence the assessment had on their teaching and assessment practices. The following elaborations from two religious educators reflect the nuance of the expressed perceptions from the group. As one principal wrote:

The BRLA has given RE more status and credibility in line with other subjects. It has drawn attention to RE and the importance of making RE programs by teachers more effective. It promotes an awareness and increases the students' factual knowledge about RE.

Similarly, one other school leader of RE wrote:

I believe that the BRLA raises the status of RE as an academic subject. It also emphasises how important the teaching of RE is as an issue in co-responsibility for

teachers and parents in the faith formation of our students. I talk about the test and its importance in the context of Catholic education in general.

These religious educators attributed the changes to their teaching and assessment practices in RE on the BRLA. They described how the BRLA was “a positive influence on student learning in RE” and how students were beginning to “see” RE as a “real subject”.

Table 9.18

Statements About the Influence of the BRLA

-
- I believe the BRLA forms an implicit directive in shaping the content and approaches of Religious Education. [primary teacher of RE]
 - I think the BRLA has increased the awareness of teaching of content in RE, but it has not become the focus of our teaching. [secondary teacher of RE]
 - It has identified key areas of learning that have been consistent in all BRLA tests I have been involved with. The fact the BRLA is broken up into key areas of understanding (e.g. Church, Jesus etc.) has enabled teachers to focus their teaching accordingly where appropriate. [primary school leader of RE]
 - As a whole school community, one can look at the BRLA results to plan better for areas where students haven't shown good results. I have encouraged staff to be more proactive and creative in presenting their RE Units of Work. Leadership have stressed the importance and relevance of teaching RE in a Catholic school. [primary school leader of RE]
 - The BRLA places an emphasis on students attaining knowledge and facts in the Religious Education learning area. The BRLA raises the profile of Religious Education in line with other learning areas assessed in standardised testing such as NAPLAN and WAMSE. [secondary school leader of RE]
 - The BRLA has led to students focusing more on knowledge, which in turn helps build upon faith. [primary principal]
 - The BRLA has had a huge influence! RE lessons are now based around the RE Units of Work and previous assessments. [primary principal]
-

For these religious educators the BRLA had provided formality to RE. They considered the BRLA as a measure of student learning that had influenced how they implemented the RE curriculum. They also expressed a “passion” and “enjoyment” for teaching RE to students (Table 9.19). They described how the content in the RE curriculum was “relevant”, highlighting that the RE resource material was well-structured and easy to follow. As one Year Nine teacher explained, “I find the RE resource material in the curriculum easy to modify and I am able to adapt lessons based on those resources to meet

the students' individual needs". This group recommended the need for Catholic schools to be vigilant about the "teaching" and "assessment" of RE as a learning area.

As a supported LSA, the BRLA was perceived by most of the group of 80 religious educators as an accountability measure, positioning RE in a "well deserved spotlight". As one Year Five teacher explained, "The BRLA has led to more questioning by students during religion lessons. In particular, students ask questions about areas they were unsure of during the testing". A similar comment was provided by one school leader of RE:

The BRLA has made parents and students more aware of Religious Education as an academic learning area. Those RE teachers who have prepared students for the BRLA are more aware of what content is assessed and can use this information when teaching other grades, and when having conversations with other teachers.

The group suggested that the BRLA had enabled teachers, other than those who taught RE, and students and their parents who perhaps did not support RE, to become aware of the academic potential of the learning area. The religious educators remarked that they recognised the BRLA as a "feature" of classroom practice and "not an extra" that had brought about a "system-wide approach" to improving student learning in RE.

Table 9.19

Statements About Teaching Religious Education

-
- It is my passion to teach RE.
 - I am a practising Catholic and enjoy handing on the faith.
 - It is the main reason I am teaching in a Catholic school.
 - It is my duty to pass on the faith.
 - I love the message of the Gospels. I believe all teachers should give witness to the Gospels.
 - It is a vocation. RE is challenging though rewarding because students and teachers alike find their spirituality.
 - I am not sure but hope that the BRLA leads to better teaching and learning. Religious Education is extremely important to me as a teacher and Catholic person.
-

The group of 80 also explained how the BRLA had influenced RE at three different levels of teaching and assessment practices (Table 9.20). They explained how the influence of the BRLA was at the classroom, school and system levels. The BRLA was perceived as having allowed students to critically and "really think" and "develop a better understanding of Religious Education"; encouraged teachers "to better attend to the RE curriculum" as

individuals and as colleagues within schools; and ensured efforts by the CEOWA to establish cohesion in RE throughout the system.

Table 9.20

The Identified Broad-scale Influence of the BRLA

Classroom	<p>The BRLA has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • helped teachers focus on the content of the RE curriculum; • ensured that teachers read questions to students so that literacy is not an issue for students who are being assessed; • encouraged teachers to focus on improving student learning in RE in schools; and, • given more time to the teaching of RE.
School	<p>The BRLA has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraged the collaboration of teachers to analysis RE results; and, • encouraged school leaders to use the BRLA results to monitor student progress in RE rather than add pressure to classroom teachers.
Whole System	<p>The BRLA has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encouraged everyone involved to become more aware of the importance of RE; • raised the profile of RE and the students' standards in RE; • raised the idea of using online testing and graphic resources to cater for the different learning styles of students and their difficulty with literacy; • assisted test administrators and teachers to review assessment practices and the design of test items; • identified the more explicit purpose for testing; • highlighted the importance of linking test items to the RE curriculum; • encouraged better marking opportunities of the BRLA for all year levels; • encouraged more timely results; • identified overdue changes to the RE curriculum; and, • provided PD [professional development] opportunities for teachers who may require better understanding of the RE curriculum.

The religious educators provided specific and detailed examples of how they perceived the BRLA had influenced teaching and assessment practices in RE within their classrooms, their schools and the whole system. One teacher of RE explained how the BRLA assists teachers to focus on student learning in RE that involves parental support:

I think the BRLA has made teachers a lot more accountable for what and how they are teaching. I know that in my own practice in preparation of the children I have developed homework sheets for Term 2 with a breakdown of previous test papers. These are sent home and the children are encouraged to ask their parents for help or to research answers themselves in the Bible, online, or to ask their priest at Mass if

they're really stuck. We then review these questions and answers in a mini-lesson at the conclusion of each week.

One principal explained the BRLA had improved teaching practices in RE. He suggested the BRLA had ensured that RE was “no longer recognised as a soft teaching subject”. The principal wrote:

The BRLA has made all staff aware that the teaching of RE needs to be taken seriously as per Maths, English etc. RE is no longer recognised as a soft teaching subject. Teachers need to focus on the B & C components of the programs of work and not just A.

The principal referred to the structure of the RE curriculum whereby (A) represents personal experiences of God and (B) and (C) are key learnings about Jesus and the Christian response to God. Also, the principal explained how the BRLA had focused teachers' attention to key learnings in the RE curriculum. According to the principal, prior to the BRLA teachers focused “heavily” on personal experiences of God and “not enough” on Jesus and the Christian response to God.

Two teachers of RE further described the benefits of the BRLA on assessment practices in RE. One Year Five teacher wrote:

The BRLA has given RE a greater academic focus. The BRLA also provides the school with well-constructed RE tests which provide examples of RE assessments and the results can be used to gain an insight into the knowledge students have on RE topics. NAPLAN used to be the same. I believe there is far too much emphasis now placed on the NAPLAN tests. NAPLAN has gone from being a very useful tool to assess student progress to now where schools are judged according to their NAPLAN results.

One Year Nine teacher added:

The BRLA itself has notoriously asked questions that would be perceived as outside the scope of what would be covered in a Religious Education class. However, in my opinion these questions are valuable in so much as they tell us the nature of what is required for our religious formation that comes from our Tradition and culture that students should be receiving both at school and at home.

The comments from the teachers provide a summary of the common expressions by religious educators within the group of 80 who perceived the BRLA had influenced their teaching and assessment practices in RE.

The group's rationales seem to have been shaped by their exposure to whole school, and possibly whole system approaches in education (e.g. Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). That is, the religious educators described how classroom teachers as well as leaders at their schools used data from the BRLA to learn to track student achievement, become better acquainted with the content specific to the RE learning area, and to better evaluate their own assessment practices in RE. This evidence suggests comparability between the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA and their perceptions RE as an educational activity. Given the likelihood of comparability, the dynamic influence that the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE is plausible.

9.2.6.3.3 Uncertain influence. The rationales from a group of 68 religious educators are also identified through investigation three. This group appear ambivalent about the influence of the BRLA. They chose neither to agree nor disagree that the BRLA had led improvements in student learning. Given their ambivalence, it is unclear whether their perceptions of the BRLA had influenced their teaching and assessment practices in RE.

Most of this group agreed that they treated RE as an academic learning area [56 of 68 (82.4%)] and that students should be assessed in RE [51 of 68 (75.0%)]. However, their responses to items regarding the BRLA suggest that as a group they did not agree about aspects of the assessment. For example, more than half the group [46 of 68 (67.6%)] rated the BRLA as an effective measure of student learning. In contrast, over half the group [40 of 68 (58.8%)] believed the BRLA did not have a role to play in RE. Similarly, half the group [35 of 68 (51.5%)] agreed the use of the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE and agreed [34 of 68 (50.0%)] that they used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning. In contrast, only a minority [14 of 68 (20.6%)] agreed they used the student data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE. Significant numbers of these religious educators [29 of 68 (42.6%)] described negative experiences of LSAs and the challenges they faced teaching RE [28 of 68 (41.2%)]. The groups' ambivalence about the influence of the BRLA on their teaching and assessment practices in RE suggests that they may not have considered changes to how they implemented the RE curriculum. This evidence raises implications for the professional formation and training of religious educators in terms of teaching and assessment practices in RE.

The cross-referenced response data from all three investigations suggests that there were connections between the different rationales that groups of religious educators provided

about the BRLA as a LSA and its use in RE, and how they chose to teach and assess student learning in RE. These connections are consistent with evidence that led to Findings One and Two regarding the religious educators' contrasting perceptions of the purpose and role of the BRLA, and in Findings Three, Four and Five about the religious educators' response to the administration and implementation of the assessment. Groups of religious educators who demonstrated support for the BRLA argued that the assessment had led to changes in RE. In contrast, groups of religious educators who raised concerns about the BRLA suggested that limited changes had occurred in RE as a result of the use of the assessment. Therefore, it appears that the BRLA was perceived by groups of religious educators as having changed teaching and assessment practices in RE to some degree. These changes seem motivated by contextual factors such as the religious educators' personal and professional experiences and in turn, perceptions of teaching RE and using LSAs in education.

9.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed Finding Six and is summarised in Figure 9.1. Finding Six explains the influence that the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE. The level of influence was described and explained by groups of religious educators through different rationales. These rationales relate to how religious educators valued the BRLA, understood its purpose and attributed the assessment to improvements in student learning in RE.

Finding Six identifies two distinct groups of religious educators. Firstly, those who disagreed the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning; and secondly, those who agreed. The latter group were predominately primary school leaders of RE. As a group, they identified the BRLA as a beneficial measure of accountability in RE, used the BRLA reports to better understand student learning, and described whole school and system changes to the way RE was implemented at their schools. The finding suggests that how the religious educators in this study perceived the BRLA and responded to the assessment was contextual to their experiences of teaching RE and using LSAs. Furthermore, the religious educators' overall perceptions seem to have influenced how they taught and assessed students in RE. The next chapter helps to further build upon and define the profiles of contrasting groups of religious educators and their different perceptions of the BRLA.

Specific Research Question Three

How do the religious educators' perceptions of BRLA influence their teaching and assessment practices in Religious Education?

Contributing Questions

Describe your experience of the BRLA. (Item 12)

Describe your experience of teaching RE. (Item 33)

I find LSA to be useful in measuring student learning.
(Item 35)

I like to use LSA to gather information about student learning.
(Item 36)

Describe your experience of using LSA. (Item 37)

How would you rate the BRLA?
(Item 39)

I believe that the BRLA has led to improvements in student learning in Religious Education. (Item 41)

The use of the BRLA has helped people in my school to focus on improving student learning in Religious Education. (Item 79)

I feel confident in using the BRLA school reports. (Item 68)

People at my school use the BRLA school and student reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE (Item 70)

Teachers at my school work collaboratively to analyse the student results in the BRLA school reports.
(Item 71)

I use the student data from the BRLA school reports to plan lessons in RE.
(Item 72)

I believe that the CEOWA uses feedback from schools about the BRLA to: help improve the structure of the BRLA [Item 80]

What influence do you believe the BRLA has had in RE? (Item 81)

Finding Six from Phase One

Finding Six: The religious educators' contrasting perceptions of the BRLA seem to have contributed in some ways to changes to their implementation of the RE curriculum.

Sub-finding 6.1: The religious educators disagreed about whether the use of the BRLA had led to improvements in student learning in RE.

80 of 234 (34.2%) agreed, 86 of 234 (36.8%) disagreed and 68 of 234 (29.1%) chose neither to agree nor disagree that the BRLA led to improvements in student learning.

Sub-finding 6.2: Leaders of RE in Catholic primary schools agreed more than other sub-groups of religious educators that the BRLA had helped them focus on improving student learning in RE.

127 of 231 (55.0%) agreed the BRLA had helped them. 118 of 231 (51.1%) agreed school leaders were helped. 96 of 231 (41.6%) agreed other teachers were helped. An analysis of variance identifies Catholic primary school leaders using the BRLA to help them focus attention on student learning in RE.

Sub-finding 6.3: The religious educators disagreed about the use of the BRLA reports to inform teaching and assessment practices in RE.

116 of 231 (50.2%) used the BRLA reports to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning in RE. 105 of 231 (45.5%) felt confident using the reports, 102 of 231 (44.2%) agreed school leaders used the BRLA reports and 93 of 231 (40.3%) chose neither to agree nor disagree teachers used the reports. 112 of 231 (48.5%) disagreed teachers at their school work collaboratively to analyse student data from the reports. 104 of 231 (45.0%) disagreed they use the student performance data from the BRLA reports to plan lessons in RE.

Sub-finding 6.4: Half the number of religious educators neither agreed nor disagreed about student and parent use of the BRLA reports.

116 of 231 (50.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed students and 113 of 231 (48.9%) that parents used the reports. Similarly, religious educators seemed undecided about parents [137 of 231 (59.3%)] and students [136 of 231 (58.9%)] using the BRLA to focus on improving learning in RE.

Sub-finding 6.5: The religious educators disagreed about the use of the school feedback about the BRLA by the CEOWA.

112 of 231 (48.5%) agreed the CEOWA used feedback from the BRLA to help improve the structure of the BRLA. 98 of 231 (42.4%) agreed feedback helped the CEOWA develop better assessment practices in RE. 91 of 231 (39.4%) agreed feedback helped the CEOWA provide professional learning in RE.

Sub-finding 6.6: The religious educators presented different rationales for the influence they perceived the BRLA had on their teaching and assessment practices in RE.

Figure 9.1. Summary of Finding Six