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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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CHAPTER THREE
REVIEW OF SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

3.1   Introduction

This chapter reviews the research literature significant for understanding this study and its contexts (Table 3.1). The purpose of the study was to investigate how religious educators who work in Catholic schools in Western Australia (WA) perceived a large-scale, standardised assessment (LSA) called *The Bishops' Religious Education Assessment* (BRLA). This assessment is a component of the Religious Education (RE) curriculum. The study involved an in-depth, multi-disciplinary exploration of the personal and professional perceptions of 238 teachers and school leaders responsible for implementing the RE curriculum. The reviewed literature is drawn from local, national and international research about RE, the use of LSAs and the professional confidence of religious educators in implementing such assessments.

3.2   The Presentation of the Chapter

Table 3.1

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3.3   The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 3.1 provides a visual representation of the purpose, focus, investigative inquiry and contextual settings of the study. The general research question (GRQ) featured at the top of the conceptual framework illustrates its overarching purpose. That is to reveal the construction of the social, cultural and historical realities (Charon, 2010; Crotty, 1998) that the religious educators had about the BRLA. The framework is divided into four concentric areas. Situated in the central area are school-based religious educators who are the focus of the study. These religious educators are teachers and school leaders of RE. The three Specific Research Questions (SRQs) are also positioned in the central area. These questions identify how the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA (within the RE curriculum) were specifically targeted and investigated. The three other concentric areas identify the underlying and interconnected contexts of the study. The segmented lines used to divide the areas signify the fluid interplay between the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA as manifestations of their personal and collective, professional experiences of the contexts.

Context One is about the nature and role of RE as a discipline within Catholic education. Within this context, religious educators are exposed to the components of the RE curriculum: content, pedagogy and assessment (Ryan, 2006, 2013). Teaching and assessment practices are considered key components in the implementation of the RE curriculum and influence the quality of student learning. Given Chapter Two addressed local literature about RE, the scope of this review addresses a broader study of Religious Education.

Attempts beyond the Catholic perspective of RE were not explored in this thesis because the study focuses solely on school-based religious educators working in a Catholic education system in WA. Within the confines of a Catholic perspective, RE is considered first in this review of literature for two reasons. Firstly, this study focused on the teachers and school leaders responsible for RE as a learning area. Secondly, the BRLA is a component of the RE curriculum taught in Catholic schools in WA and, as such, is the springboard for the development of the survey questions used in this research and directed towards the school-based religious educators.

General Research Question

How do religious educators who work in Catholic schools in Western Australia perceive *The Bishops' Religious Literacy Assessment* as a large-scale, standardised assessment in Religious Education?

Religious Educators' Perceptions of the BRLA

SRQ 1: How do religious educators perceive the purpose and role of the BRLA as a LSA in RE?

SRQ 2: How do religious educators response to the administration and implementation of the BRLA as a LSA in RE?

SRQ 3: How do the religious educators' perceptions of the BRLA influence their teaching and assessment practices in RE?

teaching Religious Education in Catholic schools

professional training in Religious Education

Context Three

The religious educator

Context Two

The use of large-scale, standardised assessments

Context One

Religious Education

evidence-based curriculum reforms

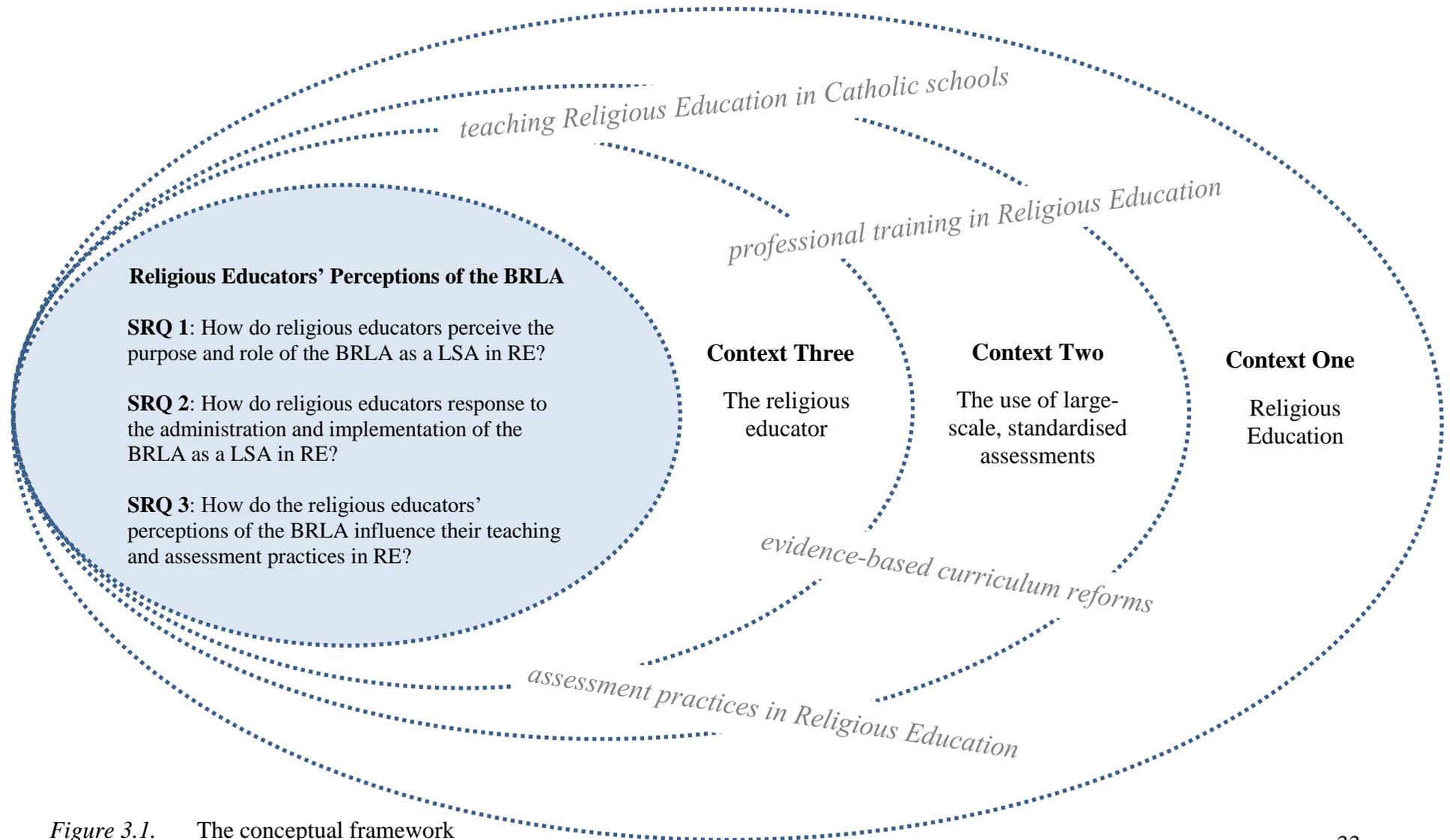*assessment practices in Religious Education*

Figure 3.1.   The conceptual framework

Context Two is focused on the use of LSAs within evidence-based curriculum reforms (Masters, 2013). At the time of the study, these reforms were relevant to the Australian educational landscape, to which Catholic education in WA belongs. For example, the Western Australian Monitoring Standards in Education (WAMSE) was a locally used LSA for measuring student learning in Science and the humanities subject Society and Environment (Department of Education of Western Australia, 2011). Also, the National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was at the time of the study, and continues to be, an LSA used to measure student learning in literacy and numeracy across Australian education jurisdictions (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008a). Religious educators involved in this study prepared students in Years Three, Five and/or Nine for the administration of these LSAs.

The choice to address the use of LSAs as Context Two is based on the concept that LSAs are recognised as one type of measurement tool (Gardner, 2012) belonging to a formal assessment process that is an integral component of any curricula (Kelly, 2005; Ridden & Heldsinger, 2014). As mentioned, the key curricula components are content, pedagogy and assessment. As measurement tools used for the purpose of assessing student learning, LSAs are designed by education system administrators, external to classrooms, to contribute to the evidence-based curriculum reforms (Forster, 2009; Shaddock, 2014). The role of accountability for student learning is central to the reforms. Further developments of these reforms have paved the way for current ideologies about whole school and system responsibility for specifically targeting and progressing student learning (Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

As an LSA, the BRLA was developed to measure student learning of the content in the RE curriculum (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2013, p. 6). Aligned to the evidence-based curriculum reforms, local expectation assumes student learning is the responsibility of all teachers and school leaders of RE (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013b). Hence, research such as this, that investigated the "coherence" (Fullan & Quinn, 2016, pp. 1–2) between the intended use of the BRLA as a LSA and the perceptions that school-based religious educators' had, as they implemented the assessment, was necessary. Given Chapter Two provides a description of BRLA as a LSA used in the Catholic education system of WA, the scope of literature and research reviewed about LSAs in this chapter addresses a broader educational definition and use (Gardner, 2012).

Context Three is about religious educators. The scope of the reviewed literature addresses the role of religious educators as teachers and school leaders responsible for student learning in RE and the professional training to prepare them for these roles. The professional training involves knowing and understanding the content of the RE curriculum, understanding the nature of student learning and applying effective pedagogical and assessment principles in RE to engage with students and improve their learning in RE (Hackett, 2008, 2010; Ryan & Grajczonek, 2010). The school-based religious educators in this study were the focus of the research problem. They were considered as the synthesis between the local Catholic RE curriculum and the use of LSAs in RE.

The next section in this chapter addresses the historical and contemporary perspectives of each context in the conceptual framework. The literature and research reviewed about each context is aligned to the theoretical underpinnings of the study and the local settings and circumstances particular to religious educators working in the Catholic education system of WA.

3.4   Context One: Religious Education

The review of literature about RE draws predominantly on the understandings and interpretations of RE as an educational activity and an academically recognised learning area (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73; Rummery, 1977), which is considered by the Catholic Church as significant to Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 49, 1988, para. 66; Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canon 756, para. 2). Specifically, the literature focuses on the approaches used to teach and assess student learning in RE in Catholic schools in Australia (Ryan, 2013). The literature identifies the complexity that an educational focus can bring to the context of RE (McKinney & Sullivan, 2013) and how this complexity has the potential to influence the perceptions of religious educators involved with implementing a RE curriculum.

3.4.1   The nature of Religious Education. Religious Education is complex because it is defined and treated differently in different countries and by different religious traditions in terms of approach and practice (Moran, 2016; Partridge, 2005). In broad terms, RE is referred to as religious education, religious instruction or religious studies (O'Donoghue, 2001; Ryan, 2013). In each case, reference is made to the study and teaching of a particular religious tradition and its various aspects. That is, the beliefs, doctrines, rituals and roles of a

religious tradition (Griffiths, 2008). As an area of study "there is a long history of curiosity and scholarship regarding the religions of people" yet the study of religions is a "newcomer to the halls of academia" (Partridge, 2005, p. 14). Consequently, the second half of the twentieth century has seen the revisiting of RE as a philosophical study (Knight, 1998) and, as such, a prominent and important field of academic inquiry within the social sciences (Gellel & Buchanan, 2015; Hamilton, 2005).

There have been various political and academic debates about the nature, purpose, role, approach and validity of RE as an academic discipline (Shanahan, 2016). These debates have increased the attention on RE by religious and non-religious communities (Taliaferro & Griffiths, 2008). Further to this attention is the increased presence of secularisation that has brought about questions regarding the need for religion in society (Hamilton, 2005). These questions have had policy implications regarding the appropriateness of teaching RE (Scott, 1984). Yet, collectively, all the arguments surrounding RE highlight the significant moral impetus that RE can contribute to society (Groome, 1998; Scott, 2016).

In Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, the treatment of RE is grounded largely in a sociological study of religion (Partridge, 2005) that draws on the seminal works of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) (Ryan, 2013). RE is generally considered a social science subject in its own right; such as Science, Mathematics and English (Hamilton, 2005; Sullivan, 2016). In this way, RE is no different to other disciplines in its quest to discovering meaning and truth (Ryan, 2013). Through RE, people explore and discover why and how things happen.

As a social science, the teaching of RE from a Catholic perspective within Catholic and non-Catholic schools in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States is generally categorised in two ways (Ryan, 2013). Firstly, RE is either considered as the study of religion(s) or an evangelising activity that attempts to immerse and enculturate those involved. The latter category may focus on purely the cognitive, content and educational dimension of RE and, or the faith and affective dimension of RE (Franchi, 2013; Rossiter, 1981; Scott, 1984). One example of RE as a phenomenological study of one or more religions is evident in government and privately owned, religious schools in the United Kingdom (Copley, 2008; Jackson & Everington, 2017). Catholic schools in the United Kingdom study the Catholic Faith Tradition. One example of RE as an evangelising activity is evident in privately owned Catholic schools in the United States. These schools are run by religious groups and parishes and assume students have a lived experience of the religion (Earl, 2008; Nuzzi, 2015). These international examples operate firstly according to their local diocesan

bishops, and secondly to respective governments responsible for developing education policies (Goldburg, 2008, p. 258).

In the United Kingdom, the academic approach to teaching RE is adopted in various ways (Shanahan, 2016). For example, in England the study of world religions, including the Catholic religion is the focus (Barnes, 2014; Long, 2016). This is because the education system in England is primarily responsible for the development and implementation of all curricula including RE that is taught in all schools. Up until the 1960s, the British system of teaching religion was a form of non-denominational confessional religious education based on the *Education Act 1944* (UK) (Barnes, 2014). The Act did not specify a religion because there was an assumption that Christianity was the only sanctioned religion. The current legislation from the *School Standards and Framework Act 1998*, in England requires State run schools as well as independent schools such as Catholic schools, to have an academic approach to the study of all learning areas including religion (Long, 2016). For Catholic schools, the Christian religious content is studied. In contrast to other learning areas, there is no national curriculum for RE. The content of the RE syllabus in public and private schools is agreed upon by local Church authorities and endorsed by a Standing Advisory Council of Religious Education (SACRE) (Bausor & Poole, 2002). Given the lack of a national RE curriculum, the teaching of religion may be influenced by a successive set of beliefs and values (Barnes, 2014).

In the United States, RE is referred to as catechetics, which is a political move based on a history regarding Protestant and other religious debates about the nature and role of RE (Moran, 2016; Ryan, 2013). Catholic schools in the United States are generally parish-based, educational ministries of the Catholic Church. Hence, RE is considered synonymous with community-oriented activities (Earl, 2008). Within Catholic schools, the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church is the focus of their work. The delivery of the RE curriculum is educationally grounded in a knowledge-centred approach but the focus is generally catechetical (National Catholic Education Association, 2011).

What makes RE unique in the United States compared to the United Kingdom is the peculiar language of "a wall of separation between Church and State" (Harris & Moran, 1998, p. 169). For the State, the question is about whether RE is educationally and politically appropriate. For the Church, the question is about whether RE is providing the students with a faith-filled experience of Christ. Harris and Moran (1998) explain that the United Kingdom "has a better defined and more professionalised meaning of RE than does the United States" and that RE demonstrates "serious academic purpose and religious tolerance" (p. 168).

Several years on, Moran (2016) continues to support the argument by saying, "For the present meaning of religious education and its future possibilities, a movement that began in England in the 1940s offers the best hope" (p. 218). In Australia, the teaching of RE assumes aspects familiar to the teaching of RE in the United Kingdom and the United States (Ryan, 2013).

Although, it is generally accepted in Catholic education in Australia that the teaching of RE occurs in Catholic schools as an evangelisation activity, diversity exists between different Catholic education systems regarding the specific approach used to teach RE (Ryan, 2013). Each approach identifies with a different title for RE and each title relates to a particular educational or faith-based pedagogy (Goldburg, 2008; O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014). Prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), titles for RE included "religious education" or "religious knowledge", "religious instruction", "catechetics", "Christian doctrine" or "Christian living" (Rummery, 1977, p. 279). These titles are assumed as terms covering all aspects of teaching and learning as well as the experiences of certain religious activities such as participation in liturgies, sacraments and prayer.

3.4.2   Religious Education as Evangelisation. The teaching of Religious Education in Catholic education in Australia is grounded within the evangelising mission of the Catholic Church (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:20; Vatican Council II, 1965b, para. 2). The Church's evangelising mission is to reveal God and God's salvation to all people (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 77; Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, paras. 51–67, 768, 775, 776). The Church believes God's revelation (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, paras. 36, 38) is achieved through the process of evangelisation (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 39) by which humanity is formed and changed by the Gospel teachings of the Church made known by Jesus (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 49, 1988, 1997).

The systematic process of evangelisation comes in five forms (elements or activities), of which RE is one (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997). The five forms of evangelisation are Christian Witness, Primary Proclamation, Initiatory Catechesis, Continuing Catechesis and Religious Education. Whereas the first four forms of evangelisation are formational exercises, RE is an educational activity that focuses on teaching the knowledge of the Catholic Faith Tradition (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, paras. 69, 70).

Within the Catholic Church community there are different interpretations of the evangelising mission of the Church (Ryan, 2013; Scott, 2016) and the different and complementary roles that Catechesis and Religious Education play in that mission (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, paras. 69, 70). In Western Australia, Holohan

(1999) and Suart (2007) refer to RE and Catechesis as forms of the Ministry of the Word, that is, activities of evangelisation that contribute to handing on the Christian faith. However, unlike RE, Catechesis refers to the nurturing of faith that is not restricted to a classroom activity but rather to an ongoing formation of faith that extends into the family and the parish community.

3.4.2.1 Distinction between Catechesis and Religious Education. Based on the different interpretations of Catechesis and RE that exist in Catholic education, religious educators appear to deduce and limit the teaching of RE into either a Catechesis or an educational activity (Rossiter, 2010; Scott, 2015). Rossiter (1981) initially argued for the separation of RE and Catechesis. At one point in time, Rossiter (1982) believed there was a need for a "creative divorce" in order to move forward in RE. Rossiter considered RE and Catechesis as "two orientations" or approaches to the teaching of RE in Catholic schools, which both required attention because religious educators were confused about how to best approach RE. Catechesis was considered an orientation towards an "education of faith", and RE understood as an "education in religion" (Hackett, 2006, p. 37). Rossiter (1990) later identifies the close connection as well as the clear distinction between Catechesis and RE:

> If Catechesis is to be properly focused on pastoral ministry, what is to be made of Religious Education in Catholic schools? Perhaps the separation should be formalised through taking out "divorce proceedings" in Religious Education theory. Perhaps Catholic school-based Religious Education should be reconceptualised more along educational than catechetical lines. Perhaps the title of the popular paperback, "Creative Divorce", might be appropriate. A clearer differentiation between Religious Education and Catechesis, as far as a school is concerned, could foster more authentic and creative development of both aspects. However, the "divorce" analogy is not perfectly appropriate, because a revision of the foundations for Religious Education in Catholic schools would not want to exclude Catechesis but would critically determine the possibilities and limitations for "faith-sharing" with the matrix of a more general educational role for religion in the school. (p. 291)

Rymarz (2011) suggests that RE and Catechesis are distinctive, but both should not be seen as "tangential to each other or in opposition" (p. 545). D'Orsa & D'Orsa (2012) suggest that the Catholic school has an important role to play in defusing the challenge that potentially exists in RE for religious educators. In more recent times, Rossiter (2010) has

called for a "re-orientation" of the curriculum of a Catholic school including the RE curriculum. As part of this re-orientation, the education of the whole child is considered in and beyond the RE classroom.

Holohan (1999, p. 30) argues there is no need for confusion between RE and Catechesis. He believes that after the Second Vatican Council a clear distinction between doctrinal instruction (RE) and catechetical instruction (Catechesis) exists for religious educators. According to Holohan, the misconceptions or confusion about the aims of RE and Catechesis can lead to an incorrect expectation that RE can fulfil the aims of Catechesis. He provides a number of examples to support his argument (Table 3.2). Holohan (1999, p. 36) suggests that the distinction between RE and Catechesis is best recognised if Catholic schools ensure they are places of evangelisation striving to be communities of faith that give Christian witness and exercise the Ministry of the Word in all its forms. McKinney (2013) concurs by stating that "Catholic schools are physical, spiritual and symbolic sites of the integration of the Christian faith and education" (p. 24).

Table 3.2

The Distinction Between Religious Education and Catechesis (Holohan, 1999)

- Church documents provide a clear distinction between Catechesis and Religious Education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 70; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73; Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canon 761).
- Two different Magisterial councils known as congregations are responsible for overseeing Religious Education (Congregation for Catholic Education) and Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy).
- Religious Education and Catechesis are both part of the evangelisation process that contribute to the development of Christian faith but in different ways.
- Religious Education and Catechesis are complementary to each other (Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988, paras. 68, 69, 70) as activities of the Ministry of the Word that draw on human experiences of God.
- Religious Education is a classroom activity that helps students understand the religious meaning of their experiences whereas Catechesis is broader than the classroom. Catechesis aims to help students understand their individual experiences in light of the family and the parish community of faith to which they belong. Unlike Catechesis, Religious Education should not presuppose that students have Christian faith.
- Religious Education involves a pedagogy based on Catholic educational principles whereas Catechesis is formational, based on the personal development of faith.
- Religious Education requires sufficient time for students to achieve the cognitive and affective objectives of a topic before moving to another topic whereas Catechesis involves learning over several years and is part of a continuous act of conversion.

3.4.2.2 Church documents. Some Catholic scholars argue that there is a lack of precision within many Church documents that has made the interpretation and application of the term "Religious Education" difficult to clarify (Franchi, 2013; Moran, 1971; Scott, 1984). Franchi (2013) remarks that "surprisingly, given the importance of RE to the missionary life of the Catholic school, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has yet to offer a suitably authoritative document that deals precisely with the specific educational nature of this subject" (p. 469). Scott (1984) argued a "blessed rage for order" was needed in the field of RE. He states there is "no clearly defined field of RE exists today", "no consensus exists on the usage of key terminology" and no "clearly defined purpose" (p. 323). More recently, Scott (2016) continues his call for order. His views are shared by other scholars who believe more attention regarding the academic theories of RE are required (Rummery, 1975, 1977; Ryan, 2013). This attention may ensure that as a learning area taught in Catholic schools, RE is not led by "ideological fundamentalism" (O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014, p. 6) and is treated as a systematic educational enterprise (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 66; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73; Moran, 2016).

Unlike the scholars who claim there is a lack of precision within Church documents, Holohan (1999), McKinney (2013) and Nuzzi (2015) refer to the Church documents as the stabilising force that do provide consistency and leadership regarding RE. Nuzzi (2015) identifies within the Church documents the expectation for Catholic education systems around the world to develop RE curricula that addresses the growth and formation of students as fully integrated whole human persons (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 47; Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) committed to Christ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 40). The Church documents suggest that the "whole person" is developed through effective educational means (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 25–32) and Christian conscience (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 40).

Table 3.3 lists the key Church documents used by Catholic education systems in Australia for developing and implementing RE curricula. These documents inform the content and processes driving the RE curricula (Rymarz & Hyde, 2013). The Church documents stress the importance of RE in Catholic education as well as the importance that religious educators have in teaching RE. For example, *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican Council II, 1965d) as an earlier Vatican document identifies how highly valued education is to the Church community (McKinney, 2013). The document states that RE:

Has the duty of proclaiming the way of salvation to all … of revealing the life of

Christ to those who believe, and of assisting them with unremitting care …. The

Church, … is under an obligation, therefore, to provide for its children an education

by virtue of which their whole lives may be inspired by the spirit of Christ. (para. 8)

Similarly, in *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Pope John Paul II is quoted as

saying, "The teaching of religion is, along with Catechesis, "an eminent form of the lay

apostolate" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 57). The Church community

holds the lay religious educator, who is neither a priest nor a consecrated religious brother or

sister, with the responsibility to pass on the Catholic Faith Tradition through the appropriate

teaching of RE.

Table 3.3

Key Church Documents Used for Religious Education

- *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican Council II, 1965d), directed specifically to Christian education.
- *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975), broadly references Religious Education within the context of evangelising in modern times.
- *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), discusses the scope of the work of schools and the implications of that work for Religious Education.
- *Catechesi Tradendae* (John Paul II, 1979), discussion by the Pope about education in reference to Catechesis.
- *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witness to Faith* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982), discusses the important work of the religious educator beyond the religious orders of men and women.
- *Religious Dimension of Education in Catholic Schools* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), discusses the religious character of the school.
- *Chrsitifidelis Laici* (John Paul II, 1988), discusses the work of the laity.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), identifies the content required in RE curricula in Catholic schools.
- *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997), sets out the vision for Catholic schools in a variety of educational and cultural contexts.
- *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997), discusses the pedagogical processes involved in teaching RE.

As previously mentioned, despite efforts by the Vatican, through letters by successive popes and Church documents from Magisterial councils about how RE is to be taught in Catholic schools, the teaching of the Catholic Faith Tradition as an educational activity is still understood differently within different Catholic dioceses (O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014), and in most cases, legislated differently by governments around the world (Scott, 2016). For example, in Australia, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994) is one Church document used to guide the content of Catholic RE curricula. Religious educators in Australia use the Catechism as a resource rather than a text book (Catholic Education Office of Melbourne, 2011). The content in the Catechism is organised around Four Pillars of Faith: The Profession of Faith (Creed); the Celebration of the Christian Mystery (Sacraments); the Life of Christ (Christian morality, the Commandments); and Christian prayer (Prayer) (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009, p. 64). The *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) is used in Catholic education in WA as a framework for pedagogical processes involved in teaching RE (Holohan, 1999). Further to these Church documents, local diocesan as well as State and Federal government policies and initiatives are referenced by different Catholic education systems in Australia in the development of standards for RE curricula (Rymarz & Hyde, 2013, p. 75).

Ryan (2013) explains that the greatest challenge for religious educators in the Catholic Faith Tradition is whether the study of the life and teachings of Jesus should be the focus of the instruction in RE classes or whether is it more appropriate and necessary to foster and nurture within the RE classroom, a particular way of life, that is in keeping with the life of Jesus. Ryan believes a balance is required that considers a "religious and educational dimension in the teaching of RE into the future" (p. 144). Sullivan (2016) also calls for a balance in RE, suggesting that religious education offers a unique "space like no other" if teachers are open to considering "different aspects of what is entailed when engaging with this curriculum area" (p. 21).

To achieve such a balance, Harris and Moran (1998) stated prior to Ryan and Sullivan that unless a Catholic school is set up to accomplish the aim of teaching people to understand their religion and practise a religious way of life, Catholic school staff may not be able to clearly distinguish the two aims. In turn, the Catholic school will be a place of "muddle and rebellion" (p. 43). Relevant to this study is the extent to which the religious educators working in Catholic schools in WA individually and collectively understand Church documents about the educational nature of RE and how to teach and assess RE. This is because without a collective understanding of RE, the evangelising mission of Catholic

schools is difficult to achieve (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). Furthermore, without a collective understanding of school curricula, improvements in student learning may be unattainable (Kelly, 2005; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009).

3.4.3 The role of Religious Education in Catholic schools.

To understand the evangelising mission of the Church is to understand the significant role that Catholic schools play in the life of the Church, with RE as priority in that role (Vatican Council II, 1965c). The RE curriculum is generally considered within the broader context of the curriculum offered in Catholic schools (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2011; Buchanan & Rymarz, 2008). RE is interpreted from an educational perspective (Holohan, 1999; Rymarz & Hyde, 2013) and recognised as one of the most important learning areas taught in Catholic schools (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 57, 1988, para. 66, 1997, para. 50; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73; John Paul II, 1979). Yet, as mentioned earlier, the educational interpretation of RE is complex.

As outlined in Church documents, Catholic schools as part of Catholic education systems around the world have a distinctive duty (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), through the implementation of RE and other learning areas they offer, to promote evangelisation (Vatican Council II, 1965c). Catholic schools are established as "important means of fulfilling" the episcopal responsibilities of the Catholic diocesan bishop to which they are entrusted (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 6; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 71, 72; Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canons 805, 806). The bishops who govern and guide Catholic schools are considered the principal teachers of the faith (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983, canon 804). Given the challenges for religious educators, Buchanan and Rymarz (2008) identify four aims of the Catholic school within the context of the Church documents and their close connection to the teaching of RE: first, the formation of Catholic believers; second, to foster Catholic principles; third, to give witness to the Catholic educational values; and fourth, to ensure that the spirit of Christ is permeated in everything that is carried out and achieved.

Catholic schools have a unique identity and responsibility whereby all members are called to proclaim the Church's mission of evangelisation (Convey, 2012). This mission is within and beyond the RE classroom (Flynn, 1979, 1985; D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2012). The evangelising mission is the responsibility of principals, teachers and support staff working in Catholic schools to meet the religious and educational needs of students who are baptised, non-baptised, practising Catholics, non-practising Catholics and non-Catholics.

Today the evangelising mission of the Church is referred to as the "new evangelisation" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 58c; Francis I, 2013; John Paul II, 1990, para. 33d). That is, the successful proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus requires all Catholic members in and out of Catholic schools to renew their faith and learn, understand and appropriately share the historical and ongoing narratives of God's revelation and salvation for all people (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Again, central to these narratives is the life and teachings of Jesus. The aim of the Catholic school experience within the context of the new evangelisation is about the full integration of faith, life and culture (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 37, 1997, para. 11) that develops the whole person and revives the identity of Catholic schools (McLaughlin, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe, 1996, pp. 1–22). Leaders and staff in Catholic schools in Australia are encouraged to evaluate their practices so as to better align with the Church's mission (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017a).

Over time, some Australian scholars have attempted to describe the role of RE within the place of Catholic schools (Holohan 1999; O'Donoghue, 2001). Holohan (1999, p. 36) argues that the Catholic school should consider itself a place of evangelisation that needs to strive to be a community of Christian witness. There is a need to experience the Ministry of the Word through primary proclamation, initiatory catechesis activities, homilies and RE, all of which need to be appropriate to the needs of students in their care. Through RE and liturgical worship, Catholic schools can teach people how to understand and engage with a religious way of life. This interpretation of the role of RE in Catholic schools suggests that every element and feature of the Catholic school should have a religious base, and the teaching of every learning area (not just RE) should openly allow for a religious dialogue. Within this interpretation, the role of RE is recognised as a classroom activity whereby the acquisition of knowledge of the content of the Catholic Faith Tradition is systematically and intensively considered (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 62; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, paras. 69, 70; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73). O'Donoghue (2001, p. 80) agrees, suggesting that the official position of the Church is that religious instruction or RE together with the entire "climate" of the Catholic school is "all-pervasive" allowing for the promotion of a Catholic worldview throughout all subject areas.

Religious educators in Catholic schools in WA are expected to know and understand the nature and role of RE within the wider context of the Catholic school setting (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013a; Holohan, 1999). To assist

religious educators, McGunnigle and Hackett (2015) propose Catholic schools strive for academic excellence through awareness of the Christian mentality towards society. Their ideas align with the Australian curriculum and the goal of the curriculum to produce active members of society (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016).

3.4.4   Teaching approaches. Unique historical and cultural (Ryan, 2013), political, geographical and social (Earl, 2008), and ecclesial and educational (Buchanan, 2005, 2009; McKinney, 2013) changes have continued to shape the nature and role of RE within Catholic education. As a result of these changes, different titles and teaching approaches are used in different Catholic schools and systems of education around the world (O'Donoghue, 2001). Given the differing interpretations that have surfaced about RE, approaches to the teaching of RE are varied and have included "traditional catechesis", "kerygmatic renewal", a "life centred" or "experiential approach", "shared Christian praxis" and academically focused "religious education" (Ryan, 2013, p. 5). Each approach can be further subdivided into various models of teaching RE (Buchanan, 2009; Goldburg, 2008) based on differing interpretations and applications to the term RE (Lacey, 2011). Furthermore, the approaches seem to follow the history of approaches in education generally (Ryan, 2013) that relate to curriculum planning (O'Donoghue, 2017).

In Australia, the titles for approaches to teaching RE also have historical significance grounded in educational change. The various approaches to the teaching of RE are historically a sign of educational changes in society and the Church's response to those changes (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009; Ryan, 2013). For example, in the post Second World War era, there was a strong Magisterial sense of Church, dictating and defining what Catholics had to believe, how they were meant to believe and how they were expected to live their lives. Students in Catholic schools in that era were expected to memorise Catholic beliefs by rote (Dwyer, 1986). Following the Second Vatican Council, known as the post-conciliar era, Catholic education and, in particular, RE experienced significant changes brought about through reforms of the Eucharistic liturgy, decreasing the number of consecrated religious brothers and sisters, increasing the presence of laity in schools, changes to society and changes in government funding to Catholic schools (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009).

Generally, the approaches to the teaching of RE emerged from outside Australia but have been reconfigured by the Australian Catholic landscape and have followed educational developments that began, for example, with Plato, Descartes and Kant and moved towards the works of Dewey, Vygotsky and Freire (Ryan, 2013). The educational developments

identify changes to curriculum processes that start as rigid and transform into dynamic and interactive teaching approaches (Kelly, 2005; Print, 1987). The changes in education evolved through philosophical debates about the acquisition of human knowledge. Over time, education moved from teacher-centred to child-centred teaching approaches (O'Donoghue, 2017). Developments in RE curricula are no different (Ryan, 2013). As trained professionals, religious educators may have gained knowledge and understanding about these educational developments that are general to all learning areas and specific to RE. These experiences may have influenced their perceptions of the teaching profession and, in turn, their teaching and assessment practices.

Figure 3.2 categories four approaches used to teach RE in Australia. These approaches are based on the collective work of various scholars of RE and date back to colonialisation: Traditional Catechetical Approaches; Kerygmatic Renewal; Life-centred or Experiential Approaches; and the Educational Approaches. The approaches cover aspects of teaching and learning about the Catholic religion as well as the experiences of particular religious activities such as participation in liturgies, sacraments and prayers. Significant features and events relevant to Australia and the WA landscape since colonisation are included in the figure.

3.4.4.1 The Traditional Catechetical Approach. This approach is based on Catechesis and involves several methods or models of teaching RE that are considered as "Faith-Forming or Catechetical Models". Such models focus on engaging believers in a faith community to grow and nurture their faith (Goldburg, 2008, p. 247). The approach is referred to as traditional because it emerged from the Reformation era (1517–1648) with the use of published Catechisms. The models that support this teaching approach to RE have been used throughout the centuries in Western Christian education (Rummery, 1977; Ryan, 2013).

It is important to note the word Catechesis is not only confused with RE but also often confused with this traditional catechetic style of teaching RE that is associated with learning answers from the Catechism (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009). This is because students were taught to memorise theological propositions, prayers and moral guidelines from various forms of the Catechisms of the Catholic Church.
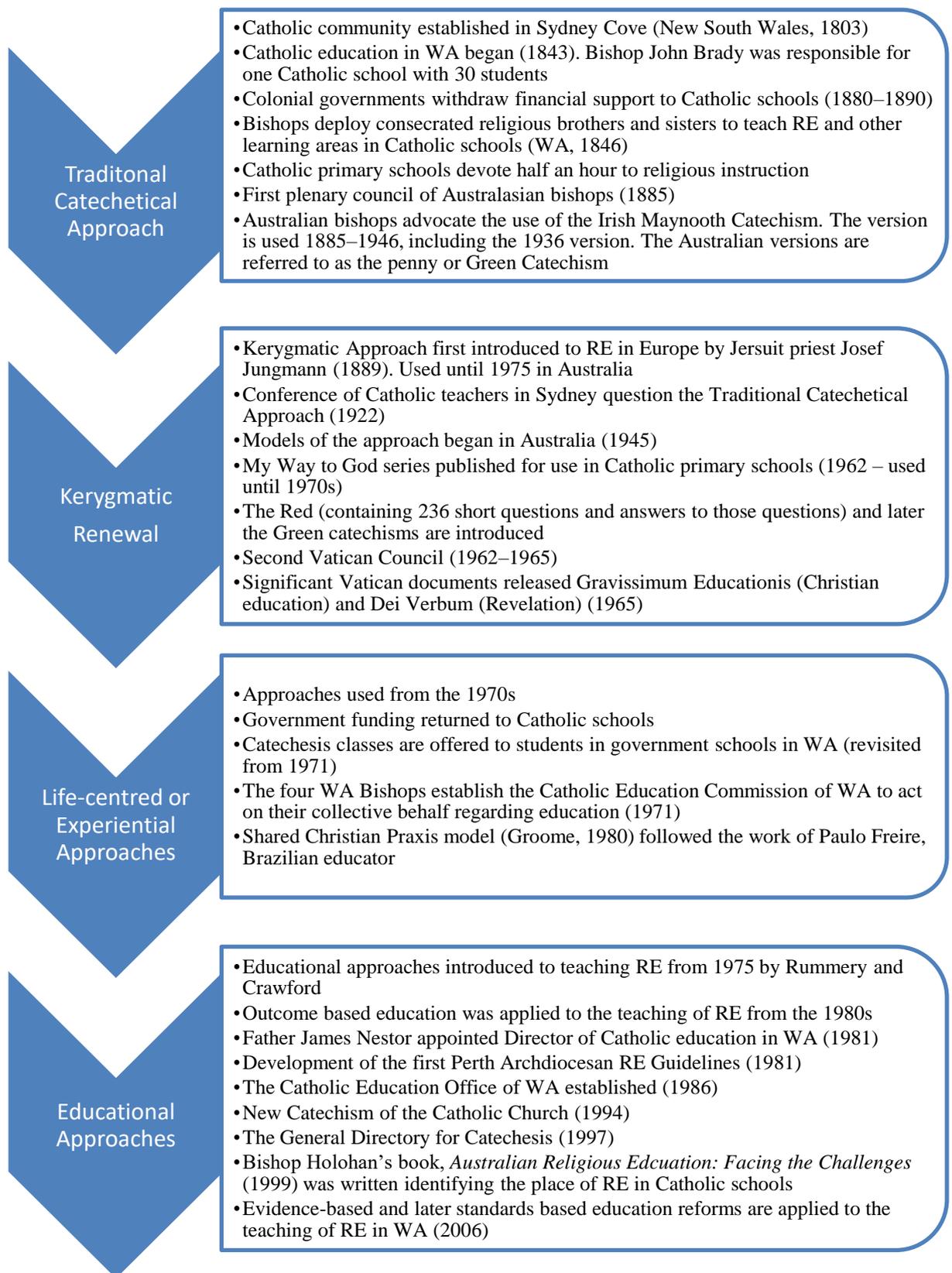
Traditional Catechetical Approach

- Catholic community established in Sydney Cove (New South Wales, 1803)
- Catholic education in WA began (1843). Bishop John Brady was responsible for one Catholic school with 30 students
- Colonial governments withdraw financial support to Catholic schools (1880–1890)
- Bishops deploy consecrated religious brothers and sisters to teach RE and other learning areas in Catholic schools (WA, 1846)
- Catholic primary schools devote half an hour to religious instruction
- First plenary council of Australasian bishops (1885)
- Australian bishops advocate the use of the Irish Maynooth Catechism. The version is used 1885–1946, including the 1936 version. The Australian versions are referred to as the penny or Green Catechism

Kerygmatic Renewal

- Kerygmatic Approach first introduced to RE in Europe by Jersuit priest Josef Jungmann (1889). Used until 1975 in Australia
- Conference of Catholic teachers in Sydney question the Traditional Catechetical Approach (1922)
- Models of the approach began in Australia (1945)
- My Way to God series published for use in Catholic primary schools (1962 – used until 1970s)
- The Red (containing 236 short questions and answers to those questions) and later the Green catechisms are introduced
- Second Vatican Council (1962–1965)
- Significant Vatican documents released Gravissimum Educationis (Christian education) and Dei Verbum (Revelation) (1965)

Life-centred or Experiential Approaches

- Approaches used from the 1970s
- Government funding returned to Catholic schools
- Catechesis classes are offered to students in government schools in WA (revisited from 1971)
- The four WA Bishops establish the Catholic Education Commission of WA to act on their collective behalf regarding education (1971)
- Shared Christian Praxis model (Groome, 1980) followed the work of Paulo Freire, Brazilian educator

Educational Approaches

- Educational approaches introduced to teaching RE from 1975 by Rummery and Crawford
- Outcome based education was applied to the teaching of RE from the 1980s
- Father James Nestor appointed Director of Catholic education in WA (1981)
- Development of the first Perth Archdiocesan RE Guidelines (1981)
- The Catholic Education Office of WA established (1986)
- New Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994)
- The General Directory for Catechesis (1997)
- Bishop Holohan's book, *Australian Religious Edcuation: Facing the Challenges* (1999) was written identifying the place of RE in Catholic schools
- Evidence-based and later standards based education reforms are applied to the teaching of RE in WA (2006)

Figure 3.2. Teaching approaches used in Religious Education in Australia

The traditional catechetical approach to teaching RE was and continues to be heavily scrutinised for its "rote like learning". According to Rummery (1977), Christian Brother, Michael B. Hanrahan considered the approach or the formal teaching of the Catechism as "nothing less than a millstone tied around the neck of teacher and child" (p. 271). Ryan (2013) concurs by writing that the approach "constrained the freedom of teacher and student, was unimaginative in its presentation of material and often did not match students' conceptual abilities … a prime cause for young people to abandon the practice of their faith" (p. 62).

Darcy-Berube (1995) and Ryan (2013) believe the Traditional Catechetical Approach was heavily reviewed in Australia as a result of criticisms by prominent educational theorists at the time who challenged rigid approaches to teaching. The work of these theorists continues to inform the more educationally grounded approaches to teaching RE that operate today. For example, Rousseau (1712–1778) who put the student at the centre of education; Pestalozzi (1746–1827) who viewed education as the natural and progressive development of the child's powers and capacities; Dewey (1859–1952) who rebelled against conventional approaches to education; and Montessori (1870–1952) who believed each child is a unique and sacred individual, and that there is a gradual unfolding of the potential within each person.

3.4.4.2 Kerygmatic Renewal. This approach with its various models began outside of Australia from 1945 (Ryan, 2013). The approach is also referred to as Kerygmatic Catechesis. As an approach to teaching RE, Kerygmatic Renewal emerged from Britain and other Christian dominated parts of the world where the aim of RE was being questioned in response to widespread criticism of traditional authority and familiar institutions (Copley, 2008). In Australian Catholic schools, the approach was adopted from the mid-1960s. The models used under the umbrella of this approach are based on the teaching of RE that considers secular moral education theories (Barnes, 2014, pp. 58–59). The approach assumes that "students are active members of faith communities … religious education was seen as being closely identified with catechesis" (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009, p. 5).

As part of the kerygmatic approach to the teaching of RE, religious educators engaged in the work of critical hermeneutics (Scott, 1984). Religious educators focused on teaching students to understand the knowledge of the Catholic Faith Tradition by analysing and interpreting the Bible or Christian texts from broader social, economic and historical settings. In turn, that knowledge was used to develop students' personal experiences of the Christian

Tradition. The students were exposed to a critical analysis of the Christian Tradition as part of a broader social awareness exercise (Goldburg, 2008; Ryan, 2013).

O'Donoghue (2001) and Ryan (2013) both infer that the seminal work of Jesuit priest, theologian and liturgist Josef Jungmann (1889–1975) initiated the approach in Europe. Jungmann wanted to renew the traditional catechetical approach and its processes. "Jungmann's central notion was that the focus should be on the essential message of Christian teaching, the *kerygma*; hence the name 'kerygmatic catechesis'" (O'Donoghue, 2001, p. 79). Kerygma refers to the Christian message of Jesus and people's experience of that message (Holohan, 1999). Johannes Hofinger was also associated with the kerygmatic approach. He shifted the emphasis from method to content in the teaching of RE and attempted to recapture the spirit and vision of the Church from the time of the Apostles (Goldburg, 2008; Rummery, 1977).

Kerygmatic Renewal adopted psychology and the social sciences to assist with understanding students' personal and social development (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). The work of psychologists such as Jean Piaget (1896–1980) was considered. Piaget introduced cognitive development based on chronological age. The work of Les Vygotsky (1896–1934) was also considered. That work dealt with the cultural–historical aspects of cognitive development. Lawrence Kolberg's (1927–1987) work on moral development was applied to theoretical studies of RE.

The emphasis of the kerygmatic approach to teaching RE was met with approval by Australian bishops to the point that several new texts between 1962 and 1964 were produced for use across Australian Catholic schools (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009; Ryan, 2013). They were prepared by teams led by a priest of the Melbourne Catholic Education Office, Fr John Kelly. The texts were based on a German Catechism developed in 1949. The noticeable feature of the texts was their dependence on the Bible. Some Australian references were provided. One significant primary text, a series of books for students aged five to ten was called *My Way to God*. This four-part series was developed with an emphasis on proclaiming the Good News to students. In contrast, one set of books developed for students in Catholic secondary schools retained the question and answer format from Traditional Catechesis. These books are known as the Red and Green Catechisms (Ryan, 2013, pp. 67–68). Religious educators working in Catholic schools in WA at the time used the texts produced by the Melbourne Catholic Education Office. Ryan (2013) suggests the texts are an example of the first recognised RE curriculum used across Australia.

3.4.4.3 The Life-centred and Experiential Approaches. By the early 1970s a new set of methods for teaching RE emerged in Australia called the life-centred approaches. These approaches built upon Kerygmatic Renewal by further using psychology and the social sciences (O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014). During RE classes, students were invited to express their personal views and feelings and look for signs of God's activity in their lives and the world around them. However, even with those developments, an appropriation of the Traditional Catechesis approach was still evident (Ryan, 2013). Significant life-centred approaches that influenced the teaching of RE include the Shared Praxis, Liberation and Critical Models (Goldburg, 2008; Lovat, 2002).

The 1970s was a time after the Second Vatican Council when changes to theory and practice in terms of theological and catechetical movements were seriously considered. The Church community attempted to break from the traditional catechetical approach of teaching RE and engaged with progressive educational ideas from scholars inside and outside the Church community. During this time, significant Church documents were produced as sources for the teaching of RE. For example, the *General Catechetical Directory* (Congregation for the Clergy, 1971) aimed to synthesise a review of the character and role of the Church. The influence of that review provided a document with a rationale and guidelines for new catechetical approaches that focused on the nature and role of Catechesis, in particular, RE (Ryan, 2013 p. 91). In this case, RE was considered to be catechetical in nature. The new educational ideology caused disputes among the Catholic community because they exposed deficiencies in the Kerygmatic Renewal approach of teaching RE and saw a move away from the past involvement of whole faith communities (Goldburg, 2008).

The disputes arose from different interpretations of the Church documentation about Catholic education (Buchanan, 2005). For example, interpretations of *Dei Verbum* (Vatican Council II, 1965b) focused on Revelation and how Revelation is a present and ongoing reality in the lives of Christians. The interpretations influenced moves towards teaching RE using more life-centred approaches that considered the students' personal experiences and situations. Students entered into critical analysis of the Christian tradition (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009). The aim was to give students religious meaning to their lives (Lovat, 2002).

The life-centred and experiential approaches to the teaching of RE focused on anthropological studies of the Catholic religion. Protestants and Catholics religious educators worked closely together (Lovat, 2002). At the time, Smart (1971), a Scottish Protestant scholar, contributed to the teaching of RE in Catholic secondary schools. His work is known to have advanced secular religious studies in Britain particularly, whereby the content in the

RE curriculum of Catholic schools is overseen by diocesan bishops but managed by the government through the national education system (Rummery, 1977).

One life-centred approach to RE that became popular in Australia during the 1980s and possibly beyond was Groome's (1980) Shared Christian Praxis model. Groome developed a model consisting of four stages: shared experience; reflection-deepened; faith expressed; and insights reinformed. His work is based on the work of Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (Ryan, 2013). This was one of a number of educational approaches used by theorists at the time with insights based on critical theory (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009, p. 9). Earlier life-centred models attempted to pass on the traditional faith whereas the Shared Christian Praxis model attempted to evoke social awareness in students so as to become active agents of the Church and respond to the demands of the Christian tradition.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the Shared Christian Praxis model was adapted and introduced across dioceses in Australia in the form of RE Guidelines (Ryan, 2013). For example, the Archdioceses of Melbourne, Sydney and Perth produced their own RE Guidelines. The development of the RE Guidelines was part of the Church's policy developments aimed at reforming the teaching of RE (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997). Catholic ideology focused on bringing together the faith, the history and the culture of its people in light of the Gospel message. This ideology continues to be a feature of current scholarly works (Rymarz, 2014).

In 1981, the Perth Archdiocese developed its first set of RE guidelines called *The Truth Will Set You Free* (Director of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Perth, 1983). These RE Guidelines were "reviewed and superseded" with the current "working drafts" of the Perth Archdiocesan Religious Education Course (PAREC), which were first released for implementation as Units of Work in 2003 (Hackett, 2006, p. 18). An updated version of the Units is used by religious educators today in Catholic education in WA. The Units contain the mandated content that religious educators involved in this study are prescribed to use in their teaching of RE and in preparing students for the BRLA (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013b; Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2013).

3.4.4.4 Educational Approaches. Prior to and in particular since the 1970s the teaching of RE began to further align with academically recognised models of education. The educational approaches have focused on the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values of the Catholic Faith Tradition (O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014). Hyde and Rymarz (2009) argue that

scholarship in RE since the 1970s has attempted to make RE more educationally relevant. They write:

> Part of this movement was to use some of the concepts and language used in other disciplines and apply them to Religious Education. This movement was supported by Church documents which asked for the same rigour to be applied to RE as was evident in other subjects. To facilitate this development Catholic Education Offices all over the country began to develop their own curriculum along the parameters set out in the Guidelines. The Guidelines gave Religious Education a structure and direction but left it up to teachers and schools to shape the curriculum to suit their particular needs. Guideline documents used language that was common in educational circles such as core objective, learning outcomes and educational goals and applied these to Religious Education …. Teachers planned lessons to meet specific goals and also developed assessments which were an important part of education in other areas …. Part of the movement to make Religious Education more educationally relevant was to develop key resources for students and teachers in the area. (pp. 9–10)

Further to their claim, Rymarz and Hyde (2013) suggest that RE taught using the educational approaches specifically focuses on the principles of scientific inquiry more than any other approaches used in the past.

The work of international researchers such as Moran, Groome, Goldman, Grimmitt and Smart and Australian scholars such as Rummery, Crawford, Rossiter and Malone drew attention to the necessity to bring developments in education and related disciplines of psychology and sociology to RE (Fleming, 2002). The researchers, in particular Rummery (1975), are recognised for paving the way for the development of a language in RE that has brought about a balance between the terms "religious" and "education" (Ryan, 2013). The researchers have strongly argued for RE activities that take place in the formal RE classrooms to be grounded in educational principles. The educational approaches to teaching RE attempt to enhance the religious literacy of students (Crawford & Rossiter, 2006; Rossiter, 2010; Ryan, 2013, p. 137).

Today various models of teaching RE with a focus on education are adopted by Catholic dioceses across Australia, including WA. Locally, the review of the original RE curriculum and resources for the curriculum are developed in WA by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia (CEOWA) to align the developments and implementation of RE with State and Federal education frameworks (Hackett et al., 2017). The CEOWA focuses on academic and systematic approaches to teaching and assessing student learning in RE

(Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013b). The approaches provide Catholic schools with key content, understandings and learning points for all school-aged students in Pre-Primary to Year 12.

In 2006, further alignment was made visible with the introduction of the *Religious Education: Learning Area Statement and Progress Maps* (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006b). This is a resource produced for teachers within the context of standard-based educational reform. The resource integrates the content in the RE Units of Work with the teaching, monitoring and assessment standards in RE as prescribed under the five broad outcomes that students are expected to achieve by the end of Year Ten.

Other Australian examples of educational models used in Catholic schools for teaching RE are found in the Archdiocese of Melbourne (Catholic Education Office of Melbourne, 2011) and Sydney (Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 2011b). The models focus on increasing religious understanding (Ryan, 2007). *To Know Worship and Love* is the text book series that is used to support the academic model in Melbourne and Sydney (Buchanan, 2009).

Within the context of educational approaches to the teaching of RE, Catholic education systems in Australia, including that in WA, recognise RE as an authentic learning area that offers "an academic, disciplined study" (National Catholic Education Commission, 2017b, p. 10; Ryan, 2007, p. 147). The aim of such approaches is to allow students to gain Christian knowledge and skills about the Catholic religion (McGunnigle & Hackett, 2015; National Catholic Education Commission, 2017a, p. 7) and, at the same time, develop an understanding of the culture and faith of the Catholic Tradition (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 50, 1982, para. 57, 1988, para. 69). The assessment of students' knowledge and skills about the Catholic religion is a feature of educational approaches to teaching RE.

3.4.5   Assessment practices. Given that RE is recognised as being taught with the same systematic demands as other learning areas (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 62; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 50, 1982, para. 57, 1988, paras. 69, 70; Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, para. 73) assessment practices in RE are conceivable. Within this context the use of LSAs such as the BRLA in RE is also plausible. In practice, however, the place of formal assessment in RE other than the use of LSAs such as the BRLA has been more a theoretical concept loosely applied to RE classes in Catholic schools with the rigour intended by Church documents (White & Borg,

2002). Much of the scholarship surrounding assessment in RE from a Catholic perspective is about anonymous self-assessments and evaluations (MacDonald, 1994). The intention for rigorous assessment practices are considered (Healy & Bush, 2010), but the reality may continue to be that assessment practices in RE are not as rigorous as in other learning areas (White, 2004). This issue is considered by research literature as beyond the RE classroom and general to education (Gardner, 2012; Harlen, 2007). Evidence suggests that the whole teaching profession is in need of specific training in assessment principles and practices generally (Hill & Barber, 2014).

Two possible reasons for the lack of attention to formal assessment practices in RE may stem from the historical approaches to the teaching of RE. Firstly, the resentment to the idea of returning to a time when the traditional catechetical approach to teaching RE applied rote learning techniques based on the question and answer teaching of RE. Secondly, the ongoing debate about the nature and role of Catechesis and RE. The latter debate presents value laden assumptions and ideologies that are difficult to measure using scientific inquiry (Grimmitt, 2008).

The work of MacDonald (1994) about assessment in RE has been pivotal to the study of the learning area in Catholic schools. MacDonald explains that improvement of student learning is the central concern of the religious educator's work. In order to understand assessment, there is a need for religious educators to acknowledge the following components. Firstly, to consider the nature and purpose of RE within Catholic schools. According to MacDonald, both are significantly connected. Secondly, to consider the nature of faith. For MacDonald, the idea of faith comes in three forms: faith as gift; faith as free response; and faith as communal. MacDonald argues religious educators should only be concerned with a student's ability to demonstrate his or her knowledge and skills relating to the content of faith set in the RE curriculum. Within the curriculum is content that is of an affective and cognitive nature. Assessment in RE should include learning of content that is both affective and cognitive but should not extend to an evaluation of the students' faith response. Of interest to this study, MacDonald's views present a fine line between the content learnt affectively and students' faith responses. Also, for MacDonald, measurement or formal examination and testing such as the BRLA has no place in RE. MacDonald states:

> The question of what to assess in Religious Education is perhaps the most difficult and controversial one concerned with the processes of assessment.… As outlined above, my definition of assessment in Religious Education deliberately avoids any reference to measurement … in Religious Education there would be little justification

for formal assessment procedures such as tests or examinations. Summative or terminal assessment, in the form of a final end of year examination, where there is no opportunity to use the examination paper and the students' performance as a learning opportunity, would have limited educational value. (1995, p. 12)

MacDonald's work advanced the need for school-based assessment across the RE curriculum like other learning areas during the 1990s. However, more recent developments in the use of assessments in RE provide guidance for a more rigorous process. Hyde and Rymarz (2009), for example, advocate for systematic and formalised procedures. They state:

One can make a strong case for assessment in RE and at the same time maintain that there are some areas of RE that should not be assessed. These largely pertain to the affective or spiritual domains. This is not to say that these domains are not important or that they emphatically cannot be assessed …. Rather it means that assessment should be primarily directed to the cognitive dimension of the discipline. (p. 105)

Hyde and Rymarz (2009) provide religious educators with examples of a range of assessment types, from presentations to tests, to work diaries, summaries, structured plays, posters, assignments, projects, writing letters, dialogues, quizzes, tests and exams. The extent to which the religious educators in this study applied such educational assessment practices in RE is evident in the findings.

3.4.6   Context summary. The literature reviewed about RE provides a global definition as well as a specific Australian Catholic perspective aligned to the experiences of religious educators in this study. Historically, the teaching of RE in Australia has followed educational trends but has kept to the missionary task of spreading and developing the Catholic Faith Tradition (Ryan, 2013). RE is a complex area, marked by perceived differences among religious educators about titles and teaching approaches (O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014). These differences have caused debates inside and outside the Catholic religion Scott, 2016; Shanahan, 2016). Tensions between the religious and educational focus of RE continue to fuel the debates. For example, some religious educators associate RE as Catechesis and a faith-based activity. In contrast, other religious educators focus on the educational dimension of RE. Church documents and contemporary scholarship advocate a balanced focus between approaches (Rossiter, 2010; Rymarz, 2012). Such a balance requires collective understandings about RE within the context of Catholic schools and whole Catholic education systems. A more educational alignment of RE with other learning areas

has meant that assessment and measurement principles are considered in RE more than in the past (Hyde & Rymarz, 2009; White & Borg, 2002). These developments have seen the use of formal assessments such as the BRLA. The extent to which religious educators interpret their understandings of RE and apply these understandings to their teaching and assessment practices in RE is the reality in Catholic schools. This reality is significant to this study and aspects of this reality are made known through the findings of the study.

3.5   Context Two: The Use of Large-scale, Standardised Assessments

This section of the chapter deals specifically with LSAs that are compatible with the BRLA. Assessments similar to the BRLA are used locally, nationally and internationally in educational systems including Catholic education systems in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. The literature reviewed within this context identifies those assessments and specifically addresses the language of educational assessment and the place of those LSAs within that language. The purpose and role, and the properties and processes of LSAs are discussed. However, the literature does not include discussions regarding student performance data from LSAs as these discussions are beyond the scope of this thesis. The educational assessment literature that is presented is grounded in an evidence-based curriculum reform agenda that considers the use of LSAs as measures of accountability for improving student learning (Masters, 2013). Stakeholders such as system leaders, school leaders, teachers, parents, students and the wider community are responsible for the learning that takes place in schools (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

3.5.1   Assessment defined. Assessment comes from the Latin word, *assidere* (Stevenson & Waite, 2011, p. 78) meaning "to sit beside" to evaluate worth (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013, p. 18). The word crept into the field of educational testing mainly through psychology (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005). In recent years the term assessment has taken over from the term testing mainly because of its broader inclusion of a variety of tasks and to avoid many of the negative and anxious connotations associated with intelligence type testing in psychology.

Gardner (1999) explains that the study of human knowledge within the field of cognitive psychology has helped shape assessments used in education. For example, cognitive theories have identified knowledge as mental representations where ideas are linked in hierarchies; sets of propositions that are connected in networks; and schemata or structures that help people actively engage in comprehension and guide the execution of processing.

Whatever the theory, scholars now agree that human knowledge is about a complex storage, retrieval and interpretation of facts and ideas by the human brain (Reynolds et al., 2009).

In education, the act of assessment is part of an evaluation process that involves judging and estimating the nature and attributes of a person or object (Wu, Tam, & Jen, 2016). For example, Athanasou and Lamprianou (2005) define assessment as the "process or processes of collecting and combining information from tasks (e.g. tests on performance or learning) with a view to making a judgement about a person or making a comparison against an established criterion" (p. 3). For these scholars, assessment involves the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about students' learning.

Reynolds et al. (2009, p. 3) suggest that the term "assessment" needs to be considered alongside the term "measurement", and that often these terms are commonly used interchangeably. For these scholars, there is a clear distinction between the terms that educators should acknowledge. Assessment refers to the systematic collection of information or data used to make judgements and inferences whereas measurement refers to the rules used in the design of tools or instruments and methods for scoring or techniques for assessing. Student learning is assessed using various measurement tools (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Examples of measurement tools used in education include classroom tests, assignments, projects and standardised assessments. Other measurement tools with built-in rubrics that are used to assess student learning include observations, surveys and oral presentations. Both the learning of students and the tools used to measure their learning should be assessed (Andrich, 1988).

Masters (2010) argues that assessment should be explicit and implicit in the teaching and learning process. The expectation is that through effective assessment practices, aligned with other components of the curriculum (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Kelly, 2005), teachers are provided with information that enhance instruction and promote learning (Timperley, 2013; Volante, 2010). Effective assessment practices ensure that students develop deep understandings of disciplines; the ability to analyse and synthesise; and make inferences that reflect critical, problem solving skills (Segers, Dochy, & Cascallar, 2003). Furthermore, effective assessment practices that evaluate assessing and measuring processes collect valid and reliable data (Earl & Timperley, 2009).

Effective assessment practices are based on three aspects (Blumberg, 2014, p. 44). First and foremost, assessment should convey a commitment to helping students to acquire knowledge, skills and values. Secondly, assessments should act as learning events. Thirdly, assessment should enable students to recognise and monitor their own progress. If these three

aspects are kept in mind when designing and constructing learning opportunities, assessment may improve the quality and impact of those opportunities, enabling students to become independent, confident and motivated to learn. The extent to which religious educators in this study considered these aspects within their assessment practices in RE was explored and is evident in the findings presented in Chapters Five through to Ten.

To ensure the ideals of assessment practices are achieved, national governments overseeing education jurisdictions in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, Scotland and Japan are focused on the development of professional standards in assessment practice (Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski, & Colbert, 2014). The development of professional capabilities of teachers (Gardner, Harlen, Hayward, Stobart, & Montgomery, 2010) as well as school and system leaders (Dinham, 2016; Fullan, 2016) in the area of educational assessment is a priority for these countries. The desired outcome for teachers and leaders is to collect valid and reliable data so as to better measure and assess student learning and bring about growth as sustained improvement of the learning (Hill & Barber, 2014; Wu, 2016). One of the major changes in assessment practices since the 1990s to ensure desired outcomes are achieved is the introduction of LSAs (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). These assessments have been a system-wide response to an apparent drop in student standards in education (Fullan, 2016; Gardner, 2012; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009).

In the absence of data about standards in student performance in RE, the BRLA as a LSA was developed and implemented for measuring student learning in RE at a time when the focus on improving standards in education arose (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006a). Like education systems around the world, the Catholic education system in WA is committed to improving effective assessment practices in all learning areas they offer (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2013a), in particular, RE (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013b). The CEOWA developed the BRLA to assist religious educators at the classroom, school and system levels to diagnose student learning in RE and consider future planning in RE (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006a, 2013).

3.5.2   Large-scale, standardised assessments defined. The history of assessment helps to understand how and why formalised or large-scale assessments are perceived by people today (Gardner, 2012). Testing practices of this kind can be traced back over 4,000 years ago to Sumerian civilisations. In 2200 BC the Mandarins in China set up a civil service

testing program via oral examinations. This practice was used until the late 1800s to evaluate achievement. In Britain, much of the early and formal educational assessments were based on rote memorisation as set up by Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838). Written tests dating back to around the 1860s identify formal testing practices.

The introduction and widespread use of formal testing such as LSAs can be traced back to the early 1900s within the field of psychology, when scholars such as Alfred Binet and his colleagues started working on intelligence testing (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Gardner, 1999; Reynolds et al., 2009). The intelligence tests that were produced and administered were biased heavily on linguistics and logical mathematics. People who faced difficulties in either or both of these areas tended to fail the instruments. The study of psychometrics arose from the testing of intelligence and was concerned with the theory of the evaluation of psychological measurement, including the measurement of knowledge abilities, attitudes, personality traits and educational measurement (Cotton, 1995).

Wang et al. (2006) provide a comprehensive definition for LSAs and the surrounding landscape:

> Standardised assessment extends beyond norm-referenced tests to include standards-based tests typically used for high-stakes purposes. This means that such assessment (a) is externally imposed by the State and [National] governments; (b) assesses state-prescribed content standards; (c) follows a uniform procedure in administering, scoring, and interpreting the test; and (d) the results are often used to determine rewards and sanctions for students, teachers, schools, or districts. Note that under this definition, standardised assessment is not necessarily limited to multiple-choice questions, as some standardised testing advocates have assumed. Authentic performance assessments can and should be standardised to minimise abuses and inequities and to give us a common language for describing different children in different classrooms … although such work has been shown to be more challenging and less successful than multiple-choice tests …. (pp. 308–309)

The use of the term "large-scale" refers to students across entire educational systems, locations or States participating in a common assessment program (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Reynolds et al., 2009). The term "standardised" refers to an approach used by educators to measure the performance of students using consistent administrative procedures, assessment items and strategies for scoring items (Andrich, 1988, Popham, 2005). The use of the term "standards" considers how well students perform relative to prescribed sets of content rather than relative to a norm group comprising students of the

same age and ability (Wang et al. 2006). In Australia, the content from core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science are generally assessed using LSAs (Matters, 2006).

The advent of large classes and organised education has meant that dramatic changes to assessment have occurred (Linn, 2000). LSAs are thought to have emerged from industrialisation and universal schooling at the turn of the twentieth century and as time went on evolved with the rise of the middle class and capitalism. In education today, assessments have become more formal, more quantitative in nature and have involved greater standardisation (Gardner, 2012). Administrators of LSAs appear to be seeking ways of identifying and describing the cognitive development of students' understanding at a macro level.

Gardner (2012) believes that various countries began using LSAs from the 1990s. Over time LSAs have been developed externally to schools and classrooms by educational system administrators as part of a series of educational reforms (Harrington, 2013). These reforms include strategies focused on the development of national curricula and standards for teaching and leading student learning in schools. Evidence gathered about teaching and learning from LSAs has paved the way for "evidence-based" reforms (Forster, 2009; Fullan et al., 2006; Hattie, 2009). These reforms have focused on the use of data to enhance instructional and assessment practices.

3.5.3   Evidence-based curriculum reforms. The term "evidence-based" is at times synonymous with "assessment-driven" reform, "standards-based" assessment, "assessment-centered accountability", and "high-stakes consequences" (Wang et al., 2006). Terms such as "accountability", "standards" and "alignment" are emphasised (Hill & Barber, 2014). The reforms promote the collection of student data using a range of measurement tools including LSAs (James & Pedder, 2006). The purpose for such reforms is to inform and to raise standards in student learning, teaching and assessment practices, and to maximise ongoing improvements of those standards (Shaddock, 2014). Classroom teachers, school and system leaders are deemed responsible and held accountable for student learning (Linn, 2003). Collaboration between educators is endorsed to optimise efficacy. As part of the evidence-based reforms, classroom teachers and school and system leaders are encouraged to look beyond the superficial view of assessment based on a distinction between the purpose and role of LSAs and classroom assessment (Guskey, 2007).

A perception by educators in recent times is that the focus on externally produced assessments such as LSAs (considered "summative" in nature) has been greater than the

focus on classroom assessments (considered "formative" in nature) (Harlen, 2007). Stiggins (2008) suggest that a refocus is in order. The refocus targets classroom assessment practices to better provide quality information on student learning.

Masters (2013), who is an advocate of evidence-based reforms in education, in particular, in Australian education, recommends an alignment between classroom and system wide assessment practices. As part of the alignment he discourages the use of words such as "formative" and "summative" and other limiting phrases so that a mutual appreciation for teacher-designed assessments and LSAs is established. Within this context, the intended role of LSAs is to generate data that can inform and assist teachers and school and system leaders with student learning. Information from classroom assessments together with information from LSAs may lead to broader and comprehensive assessment practices. It is expected that such practices also lead to sustained improvements in student learning (Forster, 2009; Hill & Barber, 2014).

Decker and Bolt (2008) also suggest educators refocus their thinking around assessment practices and in particular, the use of LSAs. They believe that the role of LSAs (as one form of assessment), should be aligned to curriculum standards in a way that reflects the range of content and level of knowledge students are exposed to and can master as skills. If alignment is achieved (Herman & Webb, 2007) standards will be met. Decker and Bolt (2008) state that the aim for implementing LSAs as accountability measures is fourfold. Firstly, to produce gains in student learning and achievement. Secondly, to increase teacher and student motivation. Thirdly, to improve curriculum and instruction. Fourthly, to provide for the recognition of equity among historically at-risk groups of students.

Research literature suggests that when external measures such as LSAs are used to assess student learning, there can be more of a focus by teachers, school leaders and administrators on collecting and analysing quality data about students' learning (Forster, 2009; Wildy, 2004; Wu, Tam, & Jen, 2016). The data generated from LSAs informs decisions about assessment policy and practice (Craig & Craig, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2009). For example, educators who use longitudinal data from LSAs identify strengths and weaknesses of student learning and increase opportunities to improve and modify instruction throughout the school year and across Year levels (Webb, 2007).

Such evidence-based reforms that include the use of LSAs, can encourage teachers, school leaders and system authorities to work collaboratively within schools, across school settings and with educational systems to improve professional learning programs (Rowe, 2005). The educators work together to interpret data from classroom assessments and LSAs

(Earl & Timperley, 2009; Timperley, 2009, 2010, 2013). This use of data assists educators to consider a variety of pedagogical strategies (Fullan et al., 2006; Hattie, 2009) and use multiple assessment methods including LSAs (Athanasou & Lamprianou, 2005; Stiggins, 2008; Volante, 2010) to help them make fair and consistent judgements about students' learning (Forster, 2009; Timperley, 2005). The professional learning programs developed from the evidence-based reforms aim to instruct teachers how to better evaluate their teaching and assessment practices, unite them in their review processes and become "classroom managers of the system" (Wilson & Draney, 2004, p. 139).

Generally, school and system leaders are recognised as the keepers and interpreters of student assessment data; including data collected from the administration of LSAs. Advocates of evidence-based reforms argue there is opportunity for cohesion from different professionals to work together, in bridging the gap between classroom and system wide assessment practices (Forster, 2009). The aim is to bridge the gap between data collected from classroom measures and data collected from system accountability measures such as LSAs (Forster & Masters, 2004; Heritage & Yeagley, 2005), and the effective use of data from those measures to improve student learning (Heritage & Chen, 2005; Pettit, 2009; Thompson & Mockler, 2016; Timperley, 2013).

The aim of bridging the gap between classroom and system accountability measures is to promote sustained improvements in student learning. The focus is capacity building for whole school and educational systems (Fullan, 2016). These reforms aim to bring about an "educational revolution" or "renaissance" directed at assessment practices in schools (Hill & Barber, 2014, p. 3). In the midst of the arguments for and against evidence-based reforms that use LSAs, Fullan (2016) states:

> I want to provide an advanced organizer. Governments can push *accountability*, provide *incentives* (pressure and supports), and/or foster *capacity building*. We will see that if they do only the first and second, they can get, at best, some short-term results. Many governments have put all their eggs in the accountability basket; a few have been good at integrating pressure and support; and even fewer have seriously affected capacity, although several are now working on it. (p. 210)

Fullan identifies some countries as currently focusing more on "capacity building" rather than the use and misuse of data from LSAs, which was considered the issue about educational accountability in the past and led to the increased use of LSAs today. Wang et al. (2006) assert:

Standardised assessment has so far failed to deliver the promise of effective school reform because we do not now establish a tight connection between the cognitive learning theory, the curriculum, the classroom activities, and the assessment items. Authentic assessment that bridges this link between classroom learning and standardised assessment is held by many as the key to assessment-driven reforms. (p. 309)

Further to the assertion, Wang et al. (2006) suggest:

No standardized assessment—or any assessment, for that matter—is perfect. It is in this imperfection that controversies lie. Without attempting to win the battle for one side or the other, we call for all constituencies—government officials, school administrators, community leaders, teachers, parents, students, and researchers—to come together and engage in meaningful dialogue and genuine collaboration. (p. 314)

Wang et al. (2006) also recommend that classroom teachers and school and system leaders to better understand and accept the philosophical underpinnings of LSAs otherwise evidence-based reforms will not work.

The arguments posed by evidence-based advocates have implications for assessment policies and practices in the Catholic education system in WA. The perceptions of religious educators about the BRLA as a LSA, provide understandings about the extent to which evidence-based reforms are considered in RE in Catholic schools in WA.

3.5.4 Examples of use. Local, national and international examples of the use of LSAs are presented. These examples are similar in structure and process to the BRLA. Given that full details of the BRLA are discussed in Chapter Two, this section identifies LSAs similar to the BRLA used in education systems across Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. In contrast to the BRLA, the identified examples of LSAs used in Western education systems are run by government authorities (Gardner, 2012) and perceived as "high stakes" initiatives (Wang et al., 2006). These initiatives are considered accountability measures used to assess the quality of teaching, leadership and school effectiveness (Harrington, 2013). Proponents of accountability measures believe that teachers, leaders and schools need to be audited for performance and that progress regarding measurable outcomes must be monitored and reported (Wang et al., 2006, p. 315). In this study the implications from these perceived high stakes initiatives are explored through the personal and collective experiences of religious educators.

3.5.4.1 Local examples. At the time of the study, students and teachers in schools in WA had experience of the LSA program called WAMSE (Department of Education, 2011). The assessment program was developed by the education authority in WA as part of an evaluation and accountability policy enforced by the state government. However, in 2013 WAMSE was discontinued due to the implementation of the national assessment program called NAPLAN (Department of Education, 2010).

WAMSE comprised a series of standardised assessments used to measure students' knowledge and skills in Science and the humanities subject Society and Environment. The assessments were administered each year in August to students in Years Five, Seven and Nine in government and non-government schools in WA, such as Catholic schools. Until 2013, the administration of the BRLA coincided with the administration of WAMSE (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006a).

Prior to 2008, state-wide, standardised assessments were used to measure student learning in literacy and numeracy. Known as the Western Australian Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (WALNA), the assessments involved students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine (Department of Education, 2010). The BRLA was initially developed from the assessment design and principles used by WALNA and WAMSE (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2006a). In recent years, the developments of the BRLA have mirrored some of the design features and principles from national testing (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2013).

3.5.4.2 National example. NAPLAN is an Australia wide, standardised assessment program (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008a). The assessment program began in 2008 and was developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), a national education body. The State, Territory and Federal governments have, through their education jurisdictions and systems, mandated the implementation of NAPLAN. Each year in May, students in Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine are administered literacy and numeracy assessments as part of NAPLAN. Selected student groups also participate in sample assessments for Science literacy, Civic and Citizenship, and Information Communications Technology (ICT) literacy. Sample assessments began in 2003.

The use of LSAs across Australia stem from initiatives that began with the *Adelaide Declaration of Educational Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 1999). Within these initiatives, the

Federal government as well as the State and Territory governments endorsed a set of national benchmarks for aspects of literacy and numeracy for Years Three, Five, Seven and Nine (Cumming & Maxwell, 2004; Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016). Following on from the earlier initiatives was the *Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008a). This declaration further led to the administration of nation-wide assessments. According to the ACARA website, the aim of NAPLAN is:

> The measure through which governments, education authorities, schools, teachers and parents can determine whether or not young Australians have the literacy and numeracy skills that provide the critical foundation for other learning and for their productive and rewarding participation in the community. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013, para. 2).

In 2010, the My School website was launched by the Federal government to display the NAPLAN results achieved by schools. The website is a means for stakeholders such as education authorities, school leaders, teachers and parents to visibly identify school results as well as to make comparisons with those results and the results from similar schools (Gorur, 2016). According to Rudd and Gillard (2008) and ACARA (2010), the purpose of the website is to improve the equity and excellence of educational outcomes in Australian schools.

The initiative grew out of Australia's first National Plan for education, titled *Literacy for All: The Challenge for Australian Schools* (Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998). In April 2009, the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) announced a decision to develop a system for comparing the performance of schools using NAPLAN results and other sources of data. The Federal government reported high levels of parental support for this initiative, proposing that it provides transparency and accountability of student learning.

Disputes about the implementation of the My School website are ongoing (Gorur, 2016; Thompson & Cook, 2014). The disputes suggest that the website promotes unintended consequences for the use of LSAs because schools in Australia are compared and unjustly identified. No such comparisons of school results are available for similar stakeholders of the BRLA.

3.5.4.3 International examples. Four examples of the use of LSAs that are common to most educators (Fullan, 2016) are presented: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD); the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA); the United Kingdom; and the United States.

The OECD is an international organisation whose mission it is to promote policies that improve the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2011). Educational policies implemented by the OECD support this mission. One such policy includes the use of a LSA program called the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA). This program consists of a series of standardised tests that are administered to students every three years. In 2015, "twenty-eight million, 15-year-old students in schools across 72 countries and economies" participated in a "two-hour test" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017, para. 2). Every three years the results of the assessments are released as data for educational systems to review education standards in their country and compare these standards with other countries. At the time of the study, and currently, the PISA program is applicable to the education context in WA. Comparisons between student performance in learning areas such as Mathematics in Australia are made with student performance in other countries. These comparisons often lead to new educational policies.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is a standardised assessment program developed by the IEA in the United States within the International Study Centre located at the Boston College's Lynch School of Education. There is also a specific reading assessment program called Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2017). Like PISA, these assessment programs are conducted regularly using students in various countries around the world in the fourth grade (8–10 years of age) and the eighth grade (13–15 years of age). The assessment programs provide international comparative data about student achievement in Mathematics, Science and Reading from different countries. Using the data generated from the assessment programs, participating countries are given opportunities to make decisions about student learning in Mathematics and Reading.

International comparative data provided by both the OECD and IEA about student achievement in various countries around the world is subject to further discourse. Arguments for and against the public release and use of such data have emerged, heightening global competition and making an impact on teacher perception of the use of LSAs (Gardner, 2012). The extent to which the religious educators in this study take heed of these debates and influence their perceptions of the BRLA are of interest to the study.

The current use of LSAs in the United Kingdom is an initial response to the Educational Reform Act (ERA) introduced in 1988. Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, legislated wide-ranging changes in education across the United Kingdom. One educational change was the introduction of a national curriculum with an associated national assessment program (Daugherty & Ecclestone, 2006). The program administers standardised assessments across the core subjects of the national curriculum to students aged seven, eleven, fourteen and sixteen. Incentives and penalties for schools and individual teachers are reported that argue for and against the use of LSAs in the United Kingdom (Fullan, 2016).

The use of LSAs in the United States is an initial response to legislation known as the Elementary and Secondary, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed in 2001 as Public Law No. 107-110 (United States Education Department, 2002). Since 2006, State education agencies and local school districts in the United States have implemented policies regarding standardised assessments to generate periodic, local and national data about the performance of elementary and secondary school students (Gill, Lerner, & Meosky, 2016; Reynolds et al., 2009). The students that participate are in Year levels ranging from Three to Five, Six to Nine and Ten to Twelve (United States Education Department, 2002). The goal has been to ensure that all students achieve success in education (Wang et al., 2006). Arguments for and against the use of LSAs in the United States are based on this goal. According to Fullan (2016, p. 214) the use of data from the nationwide assessment programs has been associated with "punitive accountability". The original Act required all 50 states in the United States to comply with the legislation by the end of 2006 and produce district or school report cards. Abrams, Pedulla, and Madaus (2003) identify 19 states as having attached high-stakes sanctions and rewards to their assessment results, including accreditation and financial incentives.

As educators of RE, the teachers and school leaders involved in this study are possibly aware of the developments and debates about LSAs in the United Kingdom and the United States. The extent to which the religious educators were influenced by the developments and debates about LSAs in other countries is of interest to this study. This is because the findings in this study identify the religious educators' perceptions of LSAs and how these perceptions may have shaped their perceptions of the BRLA.

3.5.4.4 Examples of use in Religious Education. The use of LSAs in RE is evident in Catholic education systems in Australia and the United States. Three examples of use in Australian dioceses are identified. The BRLA and other LSAs used in RE across Australia

emerged from initiatives based in the United States. The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) in the United States has been developing LSAs in RE since the late 1970s (National Catholic Education Association, 2001).

The LSAs developed by the NCEA are designed to measure students' knowledge of the RE content taught in Catholic schools and parishes across the United States. The NCEA developed these RE assessments to consist of multiple choice items focused on faith knowledge (cognitive domain) as well as beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and practices (affective domain). Different forms of the standardised assessments are designed for students in different Year levels. All forms of the standardised assessments are administered either as paper-based or computer-based tests (National Catholic Education Association, 2018).

The first LSAs administered in Australia to students in Catholic schools for the purpose of measuring student learning in RE involved Year Six students across the Archdiocese of Sydney in New South Wales in 1998 (Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 1998). The assessments were introduced to measure students' knowledge and faith of the RE curriculum implemented across the Archdiocese. Originally, there were 50 multiple choice items and 20 short answer items in the Year Six test. In some cases, a faith response was asked of the students. Changes have been made to the structure of the RE assessment since it was first introduced because of difficulties that arose in marking these faith responses (Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 2008). In recent years, the RE assessments consist of 50 multiple choice items administered online to students in Years Six and Eight. Student, school and system reports are generated from student performance (Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 2011a).

The Parramatta and Wollongong dioceses in New South Wales developed similar assessments. Their LSAs used in RE have been administered online and in paper form to students in Years Four, Six and Eight (Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Parramatta, 2011; Catholic Education Office of the Diocese of Wollongong, 2011). The assessments have consisted of multiple choice items. These RE assessments aim to measure students' knowledge of the RE curricula offered in each diocese. Catholic schools in the Parramatta Diocese have also completed a faith-based assessment. The results of this assessment are combined with the results of the online assessment. Since 2012, the online service providers of the LSAs used in RE in Parramatta, also facilitates the online administration of the BRLA (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2016a).

The LSAs operating within Catholic education systems outside WA are similar to the BRLA in terms of their purpose but differ in design and structure of test items. The reason for

these differences is that although each assessment administered in the various Catholic dioceses aims to measure student content knowledge in RE based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the educational model used to teach the RE content may differ from one diocese to the next (Hackett, 2006; O'Donoghue & Byrne, 2014; Ryan, 2013). As previously identified in Chapter Two, the BRLA is designed in structure and process consistent with educational assessment principles developed and used by State, Territory and Federal government run education jurisdictions and systems (Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, 2013; Hackett et al., 2017).

The LSAs developed for RE in Australian Catholic education systems and the United States have structures that assess students' knowledge and religious or faith responses of the Catholic Faith Tradition (e.g. Catholic Education Office of Sydney, 2008). In contrast to these LSAs, the BRLA is more in keeping with the LSAs developed in general education in the United Kingdom, which concentrate only on assessing students' knowledge and understandings of content taught. Hence, the focus of the test items in the BRLA is to measure students' knowledge and understanding of the content in the RE curriculum that is derived from the Catholic Faith Tradition.

3.5.5   Perceptions of use. The increased use of LSAs across learning areas, within the context of evidence-based reforms in education, has either reinforced or undermined the goals of transformation or curriculum renewal that is intended by system administrators as measures of accountability in education (Gardner, 2012; Hattie, Brown, & Keegan, 2003). Fullan (2016) describes LSAs as "wrong drivers" of accountability that place pressure on teachers and schools (p. 209). Since the initial yet separate educational policies in the United Kingdom and the United States were established, which included the use of LSAs, new policies have been developed that continue to use LSAs. The new policies aim to improve LSA regimes and further develop and support evidence-based reforms that consider whole system and local school curriculum accountability (Hill & Barber, 2014).

There is an assumption by system and jurisdiction authorities that LSAs are designed objectively, without bias and accurately assess student academic knowledge (Popham, 2001; Wu, 2016). However, due to punitive measures on classroom teachers as a result of the perceived use and misuse of student performance data from LSAs, teachers may not have the same understanding of the intended goals of transformation or curriculum renewal (Kohn, 2000; Fullan, 2016). In contrast to teacher perceptions of the use of LSAs, politicians, business leaders and parents support their use because they perceive LSAs to provide

valuable data (Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016; Phelps, 2005). School leaders also appear more receptive to the use of LSAs than teachers (Pettit, 2009; Thompson & Mockler, 2016). Earl and Timperley (2009) argue that there are unintended consequences of LSAs in an era of increased accountability in education where LSAs are mandated by governments. Such unintended consequences, for example, where school results are tied to funding, can have "far-reaching" implications for future decisions (p. 5). Given the unintended consequences of LSAs, Earl and Timperley (2009) suggest a need to investigate the student performance data that is generated from LSAs. Teachers are directly responsible for student learning and preparing students for LSAs. As such, teacher perceptions of LSAs may influence the student performance data and, in turn, reduce the data's reliability.

       3.5.5.1 Arguments in favour of use. The advocates of LSAs support evidence-based reforms. They identify the use of LSAs as a justified measure of accountability (Lobascher, 2011; Phelps, 2005) that assists in the development of effective teacher instruction, pedagogy and assessment practices (Popham, 2009). Furthermore, they believe that the transparency of student performance data is necessary for appropriate education policy development (Decker & Bolt, 2008; Timperley, 2013).

       The arguments by advocates of LSAs deem the role of educational accountability through the use of LSAs as necessary. For example, Popham (2001) argues that LSAs are necessary because they help determine whether "educators are performing satisfactorily" (p. 34). Teacher input into student learning is measured by students' achievement scores and these scores are justifiably made visible for all to see, including parents and policy makers. Similarly, Lobascher (2011) states, "If students and teachers are held to account, they will each work harder to achieve better results … schools, teachers and students will strive to do their best to receive the rewards and to avoid punishment" (p. 1). Burgess et al. (2011) suggest that in Britain the use of LSAs as accountability measures to report student learning actually assists student performance. The removal of measures such as LSAs that are developed externally to classrooms and the reporting of student learning from these measures completely may actually hamper student performance.

       Australian studies indicate that school principals like to use data from LSAs to track student performance (Thompson & Mockler, 2016). For principals, teacher accountability is one way of gauging teaching performance. Within the Catholic school context in Australia and abroad, principals are becoming more data literate and confident in their analysis of student performance data (Holter, Frabutt and Nuzzi, 2014). However, Australian school

principals and other school leaders seem to require further assistance to interpret and use data from LSAs (Pettit, 2009, 2010). Yates (2008) reports that teachers and school leaders in education neither trust nor value the large-scale statistics that aim to provide objective evidence on which to base practice. The international studies suggest school leaders be given more appropriate tools to systematically use data to make important decisions about student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

The proposal is that more work is required in the area of data analysis to strengthen intended evidence-based reforms (Timperley, 2013; Wu, 2016). Teachers and school leaders who make judgements about student learning that are based on identifying, gathering and interpreting a wide range of student data (Axworthy, 2005; Heritage & Chen, 2005) appear to improve student performance (Earl, 2005; Hattie, 2009). These teachers and school leaders become better informed about the structure of effective assessment processes (Volante & Beckett, 2011) and are supported in their future planning of teaching and assessment practices (Heritage & Yeagley, 2005).

Those that argue in support for the use of LSAs focus on improving student learning as well as assessment design and assessment practices (Hill & Barber, 2014; Masters, 2013). The extent to which religious educators support the use of the BRLA as a LSA (in an effort, to improve student learning as intended by the WA Bishops and the CEOWA) is significant in this study. Furthermore, the perceptions that teachers and school leaders of RE have about the BRLA is relevant to the national and international research about the identified differences between teacher and school leader perceptions of the use of LSAs in education and builds upon that research.

3.5.5.2 Arguments against the use. Contemporary research points to a range of unintended consequences of the use of LSAs (Cizek, 200; Lingard, Thompson, & Sellar, 2016) that are influencing student learning and teacher expectations on learning (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). The rationale for arguments against the use of LSAs are based on two opposing expressions. Firstly, the overemphasis on what system administrators regulate in terms of the administration of LSAs (Brown, 2004; Shepard, 2004); and secondly, how predominantly data generated about student learning from the assessments is used by the various stakeholders (Brown & Harris, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

LSAs are perceived as "high stakes" (Thompson & Cook, 2014) accountability measures (Apple, 2005; Biesta, 2010) that are driving an emergent audit culture and causing serious consequences (Ball, 2003), such as pressure on students and teachers. It is argued that

the audit culture stems from educational accountability that emerged from globalised educational policy (Lingard, 2010). Gill et al. (2016) suggest LSAs are recognised as aggressive, market-based ways to create accountability. According to Klenowski and Wyatt-Smith (2012), accountability is considered a modern "buzzword" used in education to fuel debates.

Governments and education systems are increasingly collecting, analysing and distributing data about student learning (Shaddock, 2014). Opponents of LSAs argue that governments appear to focus on identifying, contextualising and theorising the rise of global and complementary national modes of test-based, top-down accountability in school systems (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). Teachers, school leaders and scholars who oppose the use of LSAs perceive LSAs as limiting intellectual freedom, student diversity, local autonomy and teacher empowerment (Wang et al., 2006). The impact of the audit culture is currently addressing school leadership (Australian Council for Educational Leaders, 2009; Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011) after an initial focus on teacher efficacy to improve standards in student learning (Hattie et al., 2003). Literature is now available about teacher efficacy based on student results from LSAs (e.g. Hattie & Anderman, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) and about school leadership (e.g. Blackmore, 2011; Pont, Nusche, & Hopkins, 2008; Thompson & Mockler 2016).

Kohn (2000), who in his 1993 work concluded that extrinsic sources of motivation in schools such as stickers and stars undermine student learning, speaks of the undermining potential of LSAs. Kohn's argument is based on the context of the United States. Kohn refers to the use of the assessments as punitive consequences that on "Teaching and learning alike …. come to be seen as less appealing when someone has a gun to your head" (p. 21). Similarly, Ryan and Weinstein (2009) refer to LSAs as simplistic accountability strategies used to improve schools as a "a carrot and stick" approach. Lingard, Creagh, and Vass (2012) identify LSAs as neo-liberal education regimes where "data and numbers are central to this new mode of governance" articulated within educational policy (p. 316). The media and politicians of countries are often blamed for the perceived use of LSAs as accountability driven initiatives (Thompson & Mockler 2016).

Opponents of the use of LSAs identify students and teachers as dissatisfied and stressed by LSAs and the use of student results from LSAs (Abrams et al., 2003). A major force in shaping perceptions about student performance and the quality of individual schools is the manner in which students' results from LSAs are compared to State and National proficiency levels or benchmarks (Reynolds et al., 2009). The use of league tables,

comparisons of students' performance and ranking of schools (Rowe, 2000) is considered distressing for teachers, particularly when students are not achieving well (Mulford & Silins, 2011). Stress on teachers and students is also a factor when schools are punished for underperforming in LSAs (Caldwell, 2010; Gill et al., 2016). The student performance from LSAs is considered not to address equality, vindicating socio-economic differences and accentuating mental capacity (Klenowski, 2016; Kohn, 2000). Shepard (2004) argues that fear and anxiety felt by teachers and students leads to a decrease in morale (Abrams et al., 2003), which, in turn, leads to negative and unproductive classroom environments (Lingard, 2010; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Decreased morale can sometimes lead to teachers cheating (Thompson & Cook, 2014).

Teachers also perceive the use of LSAs as creating a "teaching to the test" mentality (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Shepard, 2004) that narrows the curriculum (Au, 2007; Thompson, 2012) by reducing teaching time and limiting classroom instruction and student learning (Resnick, Rothman, Slattery, & Vranek, 2003; Roach, Niebling, & Kurz, 2008). They identify LSAs as "snapshots" of learning, with limited scope due to the inclusion of multiple choice test items that are believed not to adequately measure student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010). In a local Western Australian study of teachers who administer NAPLAN, 67% argued that the literacy and numeracy assessments were not having a positive impact on student learning. NAPLAN was perceived as disconnected from the curriculum implementation, instruction and the life-contexts of the learners (Thompson, 2012, p. 69).

According to Australian researchers, NAPLAN is perceived as an issue for teachers. Doecke, Kostogriz, and Illesca (2010) suggest teachers regard NAPLAN as an additional task, which has an impact on school-based curriculum, pedagogical practices and student– teacher relationships. Polesel, Dulfer, and Turnball (2012) claim that teachers perceive NAPLAN as "a school ranking or a policing tool" with "lower than expected results" that affect student enrolment and retention. The Australian studies suggest the publication of results on the My School website affects how teachers and schools are perceived by parents, which in turn causes stress for teachers (Gannon, 2013; Hardy & Boyle, 2011, Mockler, 2013). For example, the use of the term "high-stakes" was attached to NAPLAN after the introduction of the My School website (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). Researchers believe that it is important to consider the margin of error surrounding test scores when scores are used for such comparative purposes (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012). The extent to which the religious educators perceive the BRLA in light of their experiences of NAPLAN is significant to this study and has the potential to further build upon the Australian studies

about NAPLAN. Furthermore, the extent to which the religious educators identify with one or both sides of the debates regarding the use of LSAs is also significant to this study. This is because the findings suggest that the religious educators' perceptions about LSAs may have influenced their perceptions about the BRLA.

3.5.6   Context summary. Like RE, the area of assessment is complex, involving multiple disciplines with their own specific language and approaches. Assessments were introduced to education through the field of psychology. Governments around the world began using LSAs as measurement tools for collecting data about student learning in response to perceived lower than expected achievement standards in schools. Today the purpose for using LSAs in education is in response to evidence-based curriculum reforms addressing the need to raise standards in education (Gardner et al., 2010). A common agreement about the use of LSAs for this purpose is not evident. A possible forerunner for focused and improved intervention on student learning using LSAs is better understanding of stakeholder perceptions of LSAs (Brown & Harris, 2009) and training in data collection and analysis (Timperley, 2009). The next section reviews literature about religious educators. The religious educators in this study instruct students in RE, in particular, students in Years Three, Five and Nine, and are involved in preparing those students for the administration of the BRLA. These religious educators are the conduit between the implementation of the Catholic RE curriculum in WA and the effective use of LSAs as part of that implementation.

3.6   Context Three: The Religious Educator

This context reviews Catholic scholarship regarding the importance of the role and the professional training of religious educators working in Catholic education. Given that the local context of the role and professional training of religious educators was discussed in Chapter Two, this section discusses a broader Catholic perspective also relevant to the religious educators involved in this study.

Teacher efficacy is considered in education to be an influential factor in contributing to evidence-based reforms (Hattie & Anderman, 2013). Considerations about teacher efficacy in RE is no different (Gellel & Buchanan, 2015; Hackett, 2010; Rymarz & Hyde, 2013). The Catholic Church, universally and locally, perceives the role of the teacher and school leader as fundamentally important in determining whether or not a Catholic school achieves its aims (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, paras. 91, 96, 94, 95; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 40, 1982, para. 65, 1988, para. 96; Vatican

Council II, 1965d, para. 25). Teachers and school leaders are regarded as professionals who act as communicators of the Catholic faith culture (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982).

3.6.1   Role. Religious educators working in WA or elsewhere in Catholic education belong to a team of educators who contribute to the religious life of their schools (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, para. 6; Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, paras. 51–65). The religious educators contribute by firstly, supporting parents in their role as primary educators (John Paul II, 1988; Vatican Council II, 1965c, para. 52). Secondly, the religious educators have a significant role or vocation as lay faithful men and women, not consecrated religious or clergy (Vatican II, 1965a) to responsibly and successfully learn and understand their own roles of implementing the RE curriculum. Thirdly, religious educators are required to give clear leadership and guidance to their communities regarding RE (Catholic Education Commission, 2009, paras. 94, 95; Sayce & Lavery, 2010).

Teachers and school leaders of RE fulfil their vocations in two ways. Firstly, they are called, as are all Catholic educators, to give witness to the Gospel message of Jesus (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 59; Paul VI, 1975, para. 41). This is the first act of evangelisation to be Christ-like in the presence of others (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 43, 1982, paras. 32, 33, 1988, para. 110; Vatican II, 1965a). They do so through their "instruction and enthusiasm for living the Christian message" (Hackett, 2006, p. 41). Secondly, by "imparting the teaching of Jesus" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 59, 1988, para. 66; John Paul II, 1979, para. 6). As they instruct students about Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and manage to carry out this instruction effectively, they contribute to the development of students' knowledge and understanding of the Catholic Faith Tradition (Congregation of Catholic Education, 1988, para. 26).

In order for religious educators to individually and collectively share in their school community's responsibility to promote the religious dimension of Catholic education, adequate educational training (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 25–32) and formation (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, paras. 78, 79) of these professionals, particularly in the area of RE, is required (Buchanan & Rymarz, 2008; Hackett, 2010; John Paul II, 2001). Vatican documents (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) describe the need for professional training:

> Everything possible must be done to ensure that Catholic schools have adequately trained religion teachers; it is a vital necessity and a legitimate expectation. In Catholic schools today, these teachers tend more and more to be lay people, and they should have the opportunity to receiving the specific experiential knowledge of the mystery of Christ and of the Church that priests and Religious automatically acquire in the course of their formation. We need to look to the future and promote the establishment of formation centres for these teachers; ecclesiastical universities and faculties should do what they can to develop appropriate programmes so that teachers of tomorrow will be able to carry out their task with the competency and the efficacy that is expected. (para. 97)

Nuzzi (2015) references the recommendations of the Church to adequately train religious educators, suggesting specific attention be made to spiritual formation and educational requirements:

> To prepare teachers well for this type of ministry, which goes beyond the classroom teaching to call forth discipleship and witness, the professional preparation for teachers and leaders for Catholic schools has expanded in recent years to include explicit spiritual formation and Religious Education in addition to the more standard and general requirements of classroom pedagogy or educational administration. (p. 249)

In addressing the significant role that religious educators have in Catholic schools, Nuzzi (2015) identifies the professional training that will support teachers as well as school leaders in their important roles. Capacity building beyond the classroom RE lesson is considered important in developing leadership in RE and within the Catholic community (Rossiter, 2010; Rymarz, 2012).

3.6.2 Professional training. Catholic literature regarding the professional training of religious educators is focused on professional formation comprising spiritual and religious formation in the Catholic faith as well as knowledge of this Faith Tradition (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2011, Hackett, 2006, 2008, 2010; Ryan, 2013; Rymarz, 2012). The spiritual and religious formation involves personal and collective relationship building with God and community. The emphasis is on reflective prayer and broader, liturgical celebration. Formation in terms of knowledge of the Catholic Faith Tradition involves Catholic theology and educational theory. Training is focused on advancing common literacy (Prothero, 2007). The training should involve expanding a religious educators' "ability to understand and use

religious terms such as symbols, images, beliefs, practices, scriptures, heroes, themes, and stories that are employed in … public life" (Prothero, 2007, p. 13). Religious educators are expected to know and develop students' content literacy in RE (Rymarz and Hyde, 2013). By doing so, religious educators better align RE with contemporary educational theory. The introduction of the BRLA is an example of an initiative aimed at improving RE literacy within the context of educational assessment theory (Reynolds et al., 2009).

D'Orsa and D'Orsa (2011, p. 123) argue the necessity in today's globalised, pluralistic and secularised world for aligning the work of religious educators and more broadly Catholic education as a whole with work from the scientific community. They believe this type of alignment is a search for truth that generates knowledge for students that is seen as more plausible, reasonable and reliable. However, they stress that caution is required because there is more to consider in RE and more broadly in Catholic education than scientific inquiry. Religious educators have a duty within the Catholic school setting to know and defend the Catholic Faith Tradition in a way that uses a balance of scientific and religious inquiry. Integration of science and religious thought will engage the student in ways perhaps not previously considered.

Recent documents from the Vatican such as *Educating Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014) build on previous documents such as *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican Council II, 1965d) regarding the role of Catholic institutes in offering professional training to Catholic educators in educational theory and religious formation. For example, the recent Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) document advocates "The promotion of research as a rigorous commitment towards truth, being aware that human knowledge has its limits, but also with a great openness of mind and heart" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014, para. 1). The document discusses the value of teaching students how to learn content that is relevant to the student:

> In a number of countries, Catholic religion courses have been threatened and risk disappearing from the syllabus. Since religion courses fall under the responsibility of bishops, it is extremely important to always remember that this teaching cannot be neglected, although it should constantly be renewed. Religion courses require an in-depth knowledge of young people's real needs, because this will provide the foundation on which the proclamation can be built, although the difference between "knowing" and "believing" must be respected. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2014, para. 1)

Professional competency is discussed as necessary for developing the students' educational potential. By adequately preparing teachers and school leaders to attend to the educational needs of their students, those students should be sufficiently prepared for the challenges of the workforce.

Rossiter (2010) and other researchers have also proposed professional training and leadership within Catholic education that is beyond the RE classroom, exposing all teachers, school leaders and their students to the experience of "religiosity or religious spirituality" (p. 7). This ideology is about revisiting the mission of the Catholic schools (Rymarz, 2012). The outcome of such a revisit is for a focus on the religious formation of all Catholic educators, as well as students and their parents. This type of formation attempts to build knowledge of the Catholic Faith Tradition, which in turn leads to better engagement (McKinney, 2013; Rymarz, 2014). Successful implementation involves the entire Church community. As D'Orsa and D'Orsa (2011) explain:

> For many Catholic educators, today there is a perceived gap between the way mission is expressed with the school and what they regard as the challenges of mission revealed in their encounter with students and their parents. An essential task in effective school leadership is to help teachers make sense of this experience in such a way that the school community can move towards a coherent understanding of its own mission. This understanding needs to guide not only decision making, but also the entire life of the school, therefore is the concern for all. (p. 134)

The purpose intended is a fully integrated curriculum that is person-centred and builds capacity. The building of a capacity of knowledge and engagement that develops the Catholic school culture beyond the RE classroom is no different to what is being advocated in education more broadly today regarding whole system reforms (Fullan, 2016).

The aforementioned complexity of the study of RE brings about a complexity also in the role of religious educators and the execution of their role (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, para. 24; Sullivan, 2016). Research suggests that religious educators have mixed perceptions about the meaning and purpose of RE (Buchanan, 2005; Hackett, 2006, 2008). These findings have implications for the role of religious educators in the implementation of effective teaching and assessment practices in RE. These implications are consistent with findings from educational research in other learning areas, recognising the implications teachers' beliefs, expectations and practices have on student learning (Fullan et al., 2006; Hattie, 2009; Hill, Stremmel, & Fu, 2005).

Research about RE focused on whole school and system-wide improvements of student learning that are consistent with evidence-based, curriculum reforms (Healey & Bush, 2010) suggests that some teachers have deeply ingrained beliefs and misconceptions about RE (Malone, 2002). RE teachers, particularly in Catholic primary schools, appear to be utilising different educational philosophies and employing a limited range of pedagogical practices when teaching RE, as compared to the ideologies they express and the approaches to teaching they use in other learning areas (White, 2004).

Catholic researchers argue that religious educators' perceptions of and practices in RE are due to a lack of professional training (Healey & Bush, 2010; Hill, 2004; Meehan, 2007). Religious educators require more professional development in theological understanding (Hackett, 2010; Rymarz, 2007), RE pedagogy (Barry, Elliott, & Rush, 2003; Hackett, 2010; Malone, 2002) and assessment practices (White, 2004; White and Borg, 2002). Hackett (2009, p. 3) argues teacher training coupled with teaching experience improves the chances of RE teachers delivering the RE curriculum as intended by system administrators.

Hackett's (2006, 2008, 2010) studies specifically target the formation of the RE teacher in WA, and the pursuit of improved content knowledge. Hackett believes teacher training about the knowledge of the Catholic Faith Tradition and the formation of the faith from the Tradition is a "crucial component of the quality of Religious Education" (2010, p. 3). He identifies not only the value of content and pedagogical knowledge of the teacher and the integration of that knowledge, but also the lived Catholic experience or the "experiential content knowledge" of the teacher as significant to teaching RE. There is an expectation that religious educators have an understanding of the RE curriculum, and the vocabulary commonly used in the curriculum. As part of this expectation, religious educators should know how to appropriately employ methods for teaching the content of the curriculum according to the students' needs. The challenge for the religious educator is to harness their "self-knowledge": knowledge of students and the learning area. This expectation extends to the religious educator being aware of the knowledge of the broader integrated Catholic curriculum (D'Orsa & D'Orsa, 2011, 2012, 2013).

In Catholic schools in WA, the efficacy of religious educators is reliant on these educators knowing, understanding and teaching the content in the RE curriculum and leading the curriculum (Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia, 2009, 2013b). The teaching and assessing of student knowledge and understanding of the RE content is expected to have the same academic rigour as other learning areas. For the religious educators involved in this study, they prepared students for the administration of the BRLA (Catholic Education

Office of Western Australia, 2013). Initial undergraduate and ongoing professional training is provided for these religious educators for them to effectively execute their role. The extent to which the religious educators applied and demonstrated their training as part of their teaching and assessment practices in RE is of great interest to this study. This is because the findings from this study suggest that the religious educators' personal and professional understandings of the nature and role of RE, as they carried out their roles, influenced how they approached the teaching of RE. In turn, these approaches may have shaped their perceptions of the BRLA. These findings are a source of data that have the potential to inform recommendations for future professional training in RE.

3.6.3   Context summary. The literature reviewed in this section identified the role of teachers and school leaders in Catholic schools in their implementation of the RE curriculum. Church documents (e.g. Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988) provide signposting for the type of role that is expected by the Catholic Church community and required to be demonstrated within Catholic education. Contemporary research and literature support efforts to assist religious educators in effectively carrying out their role (e.g. Buchanan & Rymarz, 2008). Much of the literature is based on teacher efficacy and more broadly on whole school and system approaches for capacity building that is consistent with educational theories presented in Context Two and applied to RE in Context One. The research on teachers and school leaders of RE suggests that there appears to be a disparity between the teaching and assessment practices that are mandated and expected by Catholic education system leaders and supported by professional courses and ongoing development in RE (Hackett, 2010). The findings from this study build on the identified research literature regarding the nature and purpose of RE and the expected role of religious educators who work in Catholic schools that implement mandated RE curricula.

3.7   Chapter Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter was limited to a Catholic educational perspective that is relevant to the experiences of religious educators involved in the study. The chapter begins with the conceptual framework that outlines the major parameters of the study. The experiences of the religious educators are based on three contexts as the parameters of the study. Firstly, the context of teaching the RE curriculum and assessing student knowledge of the content of that curriculum. Secondly, understanding and using LSAs within the educational context. Thirdly, the professional training and role of religious

educators working in Catholic schools. As teachers and school leaders involved in preparing students for the administration of the BRLA, the religious educators are required to have knowledge of the content in the RE curriculum and effectively teach students about that content as well as effectively assess their students' learning. Applying academic rigour to teaching and assessment practices in RE (as in all learning areas) is part of that role. Successfully engaging students that now attend Catholic schools with the content of the RE curriculum is also important in that role.

The review of literature suggests religious educators have a significant role to play in Catholic education. The literature also points to an alignment of ideologies in RE and the broader educational scholarship. The ideologies are focused on teachers and school leaders applying academic rigour to the teaching and assessment of all learning areas including RE. The purpose is to improve student learning. To achieve this purpose, whole school and whole system capacity building is implied. For improvements in student learning to occur in RE and to be sustained, a culture of collaborative leadership for learning advocated through evidence-based curriculum reforms is required. The extent to which religious educators in this study effectively understand the intended purpose of the BRLA, execute the administration of the BRLA and consider adapting and changing teaching and assessment practices to achieve the desired outcomes of the RE curriculum in Catholic education in WA has implications for this study.

The next chapter describes the research design and methods used in this study. Given that the religious educators are the focus of the study and also given the complexity of their role within Catholic education, a multi-dimensional and pragmatic approach to research was adopted. This approach considers the contexts of the study: the RE curriculum; the use of LSAs as part of this curriculum; and the role of religious educators in effectively implementing the curriculum.