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

Antonella Poncini
The University of Notre Dame Australia

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CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS THREE AND FOUR

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents two key findings that emerged from the first phase of the study and address SRQ 2: How do religious educators respond to the administration and implementation of the BRLA as a large-scale, standardised assessment in Religious Education? The findings relate to data provided by the 238 religious educators in response to twenty-three online questionnaire items. The teachers and school leaders of RE mostly agreed about the process for administering BRLA, but groups of them responded in contrasting ways to the implementation of the assessment. These findings build upon the previous two findings and further suggest the influence of contextual factors relating to the religious educators' personal and professional experiences of teaching RE and using LSAs in education.

7.2 The Presentation of Findings Three and Four

The presentation of the two key findings in this chapter follow the order of the findings and associated sub-findings listed in Table 7.1. The findings are labelled Three and Four. Finding Three emerged from response data relating to five aspects about the structures and process involved in the administration of the BRLA. Information about each aspect is discussed as a sub-finding. The sub-findings identify the religious educators' experiences and responses to administering the BRLA to students. Finding Four consists of two sub-findings based on two procedural aspects of the implementation of the BRLA. These sub-findings consider the religious educators' perceptions of the organisation involved in preparing students for the BRLA; the time and pressure associated with the assessment; and the design, construction and relevance of the BRLA test items to the RE curriculum.

Table 7.1

Overview of Chapter Seven: Findings Three and Four

7.3	Finding Three: The religious educators perceived the administration of the BRLA as a straightforward and familiar process and indicated that school-based educators provided the most appropriate support to students.
7.3.1	Sub-finding 3.1: Most of the religious educators perceived the BRLA as easy to administer to students.
7.3.2	Sub-finding 3.2: Most of the religious educators perceived the instructions for administering the BRLA as appropriate and easy to follow.
7.3.3	Sub-finding 3.3: More than half the number of religious educators agreed students completed the BRLA within the allocated time.
7.3.4	Sub-finding 3.4: Groups of religious educators described contrasting experiences of administering the BRLA to students.
7.3.5	Sub-finding 3.5: The religious educators had mixed perceptions about the level of support offered to teachers and students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA.
7.4	Finding Four: The religious educators responded to the implementation of the BRLA in contrasting ways.
7.4.1	Sub-finding 4.1: The religious educators disagreed about the amount of time and pressure associated with the BRLA.
7.4.2	Sub-finding 4.2: The religious educators disagreed about aspects of the BRLA test items.
7.5	Chapter Summary

7.3 Finding Three

The collation and analysis of data from the religious educators to ten Likert scale and two open-ended items led to Finding Three. Various tables summarise the data. The items used to capture the data identify the religious educators' perceptions of their experiences of administering the BRLA to students; the instructions for administration; support documents provided by system administrators; student completion times; and the level of support offered to the religious educators and students leading up to and during the administration process. According to non-parametric testing, the religious educators' gender, age and employment role of responsibility in RE appear as probable factors influencing how they responded to the online questionnaire items.

Table 7.2

Perceptions of Aspects of the Administration of the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
I find the BRLA easy to administer to students. [Item 52 (n = 233)]	1 0.4%	15 6.4%	24 10.3%	166 71.2%	27 11.6%	3.87 (0.708) p = 0.029 age p = 0.007 role
The instructions for administering the BRLA are difficult to follow. [Item 53 (n = 233)]	29 12.4%	158 67.8%	26 11.2%	18 7.7%	2 0.9%	2.17 (0.773)
The CEOWA provides appropriate support documents to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA. [Item 43 (n = 233)]	7 3.0%	47 20.2%	33 14.2%	115 49.4%	31 13.3%	3.51 (1.047) p = 0.015 gender p = 0.026 age p = 0.006 role
My students completed the BRLA within the allocated time. [Item 55 (n = 232)]	9 3.9%	47 20.3%	25 10.8%	123 53.0%	28 12.1%	3.49 (1.065) p = 0.022 gender p = 0.000 role

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

The p value is the statistical probability of the rejection of a null hypothesis, 0.05 or less, in the non-parametric testing using the Mann-Whitney U Test to measure difference according to gender and the Kruskal-Wallis Test to measure differences according to age and employment role of responsibility.

7.3.1 Sub-finding 3.1. In response to Likert scale Item 52, most of the religious educators [193 of 233 = 166 agree + 27 strongly agree (82.8%)] agreed the BRLA was easy to administer to students (Table 7.2). Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.029 probability of difference in the response data to Likert scale Item 52 according to the religious educators' age and a 0.007 probability of difference according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE (Table 7.3). The results from the non-parametric tests suggest that religious educators aged between 24 to 30 years [46 of 52 (88.5%)] agreed more than other age groups that the BRLA was easy to administer to

students and that Year Five teachers [37 of 40 (92.5%)] agreed more than other sub-groups of religious educators that the BRLA was easy to administer.

Table 7.3
The Frequency of Data for Item 52 According to Age and Role

	Age						Total
	<24 (n=16)	24–30 (n=52)	31–40 (n=51)	41–50 (n=80)	51–60 (n=37)	>61 (n=2)	
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Disagree	0	3	5	1	5	1	15
Neither agree nor disagree	1	2	8	9	4	0	24
Agree	10	40	33	56	26	1	166
Strongly Agree	4	6	4	11	2	0	27
Total*	15	51	50	78	37	2	233

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Disagree	6	0	1	2	2	4	0	15
Neither agree nor disagree	5	2	8	3	0	4	2	24
Agree	39	27	38	25	17	17	3	166
Strongly Agree	5	10	5	6	0	1	0	27
Total*	55	39	52	36	20	26	5	233

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 52: I find the BRLA easy to administer to students ($n = 233$). APRE represents Assistant Principals as school leaders of RE in Catholic primary schools. REC represents Religious Education Coordinators as school leaders of RE in Catholic secondary schools. CPP represents Catholic primary principals and CSP represents Catholic secondary principals.

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

7.3.2 Sub-finding 3.2. Most of the religious educators perceived the instructions for administering the BRLA as appropriate and easy to follow (Table 7.2). This sub-finding is based on the analysis of response data to two Likert scale items (Items 53 and 43). Firstly, in response to the statement “The instructions for administering the BRLA are difficult to follow”, 187 of 233 religious educators disagreed [158 disagree + 29 strongly disagree (80.3%)]. Secondly, 146 of 233 religious educators [115 agree + 31 strongly agree (62.7%)] agreed the system administrators at the CEOWA provide appropriate support documents to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA. These support documents relate to the instructions for administration.

Non-parametric testing identifies statistically significant differences in the response data according to the religious educators’ gender, age and employment role of responsibility in RE (Table 7.4). In terms of gender, the Mann-Whitney U Test identifies a 0.015 probability of difference. The frequency of response data according to gender suggests males [56 of 80 (70.0%)] agreed more than females [90 of 158 (57.0%)] that CEOWA provided appropriate support documents. The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.026 probability of differences in response data according to age. The frequency of that data suggests religious educators aged between 51 and 60 agreed [30 of 37 (81.1%)] more than any other age groups agreed that the CEOWA support documents for the administration of the BRLA were appropriate. The Kruskal-Wallis Test also identifies a 0.006 probability of difference according to the religious educators’ employment role. The frequency of response data according to role suggests principals agreed [20 of 26 (76.9%) primary principals and 4 of 5 (80.0%) secondary principals] more than any other sub-group that the CEOWA support documents for administering the BRLA were appropriate.

Table 7.4
The Frequency of Data for Item 43 According to Gender, Age and Role

	Gender		Total
	Females (n = 158)	Males (n = 80)	
Strongly Disagree	5	2	7
Disagree	39	8	47
Neither agree nor disagree	22	11	33
Agree	72	43	115
Strongly Agree	18	13	31
Total*	156	77	233

Table 7.4 continued

	Age						Total
	<24 (n = 16)	24–30 (n = 52)	31–40 (n = 51)	41–50 (n = 80)	51–60 (n = 37)	>61 (n = 2)	
Strongly Disagree		1	2	4	0	0	7
Disagree	4	19	9	12	3	0	47
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5	7	13	4	2	33
Agree	8	24	22	37	24	0	115
Strongly Agree	1	2	10	12	6	0	31
Total*	15	51	50	78	37	2	233

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	AP (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	SPP (n = 26)	SPS (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	5	1	0	0	1	0	0	7
Disagree	14	9	11	6	5	2	0	47
Neither agree nor disagree	8	6	11	3	0	4	1	33
Agree	26	18	28	16	7	16	4	115
Strongly Agree	2	5	2	11	7	4	0	31
Total*	55	39	52	36	20	26	5	233

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 43: The CEOWA provides appropriate support documents to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA ($n = 233$).

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

7.3.3 Sub-finding 3.3. The religious educators agreed students completed the BRLA within the allocated time (Table 7.2). In response to the statement (Item 55), “My students completed the BRLA within the allocated time”, 151 of 232 religious educators [123 agree + 28 strongly agree (65.1%)] agreed. The Mann-Whitney U Test identifies a 0.022 probability of difference in the response data according to gender. The frequency of the data according to gender suggests that more male religious educators agreed [55 of 80 (68.8%)] than females

that students completed the BRLA within the allocated time. Also, the Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.000 probability of difference in the response data according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of the data according to role suggests secondary School Leaders of RE (RECs) agreed [18 of 20 (90.0%)] more than any other sub-group that students completed the BRLA within the allocated time. Table 7.5 shows the frequency of response data according to the religious educators' gender and role.

Table 7.5

The Frequency of Data for Item 55 According to Gender and Role

	Gender		Total
	Females (n = 158)	Males (n = 80)	
Strongly Disagree	9	0	9
Disagree	37	10	47
Neither agree nor disagree	14	11	25
Agree	80	43	123
Strongly Agree	16	12	28
Total	156	76	232

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	9
Disagree	23	7	1	8	2	6	0	47
Neither agree nor disagree	4	2	10	4	0	5	0	25
Agree	19	25	26	22	11	15	5	123
Strongly Agree	1	4	15	1	7	0	0	28
Total*	55	39	52	35	20	26	5	232

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 55: My students completed the BRLA within the allocated time ($n = 232$).

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

7.3.4 Sub-finding 3.4. Groups of religious educators described contrasting experiences of administering the BRLA to students. In response to Open-ended Item 12, 58 of 238 religious educators (24.4%) described administering the BRLA. Thirty-seven of the 58 religious educators (15.5% of 238) described the administration of the BRLA as challenging. In contrast, 21 of the 58 religious educators (8.8% of 238) described the administration of the BRLA as simple and familiar.

7.3.4.1 Challenging experiences. The 37 religious educators described their experiences of administering the BRLA as challenging. They used language to indicate that the preparation and organisation involved in the administration process were “overwhelming”. For one secondary school leader of RE the administration of the BRLA was a “logistical nightmare”. For another school leader, the administration was described as follows:

It is very time consuming to set everything up for the BRLA and getting it sent off properly. It is also an inconvenience to other subject areas as to the administration of the test and catching up with absent students takes time. I am, however, appreciative of test covers being pre-populated with information in advance.

This group appears to have considered the BRLA to be “time consuming”, and also a burden for Years Three, Five and Nine students. They perceived LSAs such as the BRLA “greatly impacts on students and teachers in those Year levels”. This group suggested that the administration of the BRLA was another task outside classroom practices that requires their “extra attention”. Teachers of RE within the group recommended the administration of the BRLA be changed to different year levels because students in Years Three, Five and Nine were also over-exposed to State and National LSAs such as WAMSE, the BRLA and NAPLAN.

7.3.4.2 Simple and familiar experiences. The 21 religious educators who described the ease and familiarity of administering the BRLA also described the instructions for administering the BRLA as simple to follow and the support documents provided by the CEOWA as appropriate. Seventeen of the religious educators were teachers of RE. As one of the teachers stated, “The whole administration process was simple to understand”. Similarly, another teacher said, “The BRLA was easy to administer because the instructions were clear and precise for the teachers and the students”.

School Leaders of RE expressed similar descriptions to teachers about the instructions for administering the BRLA to students. One school leader commented, “Over the years, the BRLA has become easier to administer”. Another school leader explained:

From an administrators’ point of view, the BRLA has been positive. The paperwork, organisation and instructions have been very clear and easy to follow. The RE Team at the CEO have always been responsive and helpful with any queries that I have had. From a teaching point of view, the BRLA has been easy to administer, instructions have been clear and the fact that staff have been able to keep and re-use previous test booklets for new classes each year, the familiarity of how the test is structured, has indeed assisted the children who are taking the test.

The school leaders indicated that the administration of the BRLA was a positive experience for them, one that was simple, familiar and well resourced.

The 21 religious educators also described the administration of the BRLA as “no different” to administering the NAPLAN and WAMSE assessments. The religious educators wrote that the administration of the BRLA was similar to the administration of NAPLAN, in terms of structures and process. As one of the teachers explained:

I found that the BRLA was a little intimidating for first timers but appropriate in that they now have some prior knowledge of the assessment. I think having it after NAPLAN was a great idea as they already had experience in such a formalised test.

Other teachers commented that the “BRLA reminds students of NAPLAN” and students in Years Three, Five and Nine are familiar with “sitting this style of testing as we have the NAPLAN testing in these year levels”. According to the group, the BRLA was a “God test” like NAPLAN but “not as tedious” to administer. The religious educators suggested that students and teachers knew what to expect in the administration of the BRLA and were “less stressed” by the “formal testing experience” compared to NAPLAN. This evidence aligns with Finding Two that identifies groups of religious educators who drew parallels between the BRLA and NAPLAN.

The analysis of numeric and written response data suggests that although most of the religious educators perceived the BRLA as easy to administer to students, some religious educators had challenging experiences. The arguments presented, are consistent with arguments identified in Findings One and Two that appear to have informed perceptions about the purpose and role of the BRLA.

7.3.5 Sub-finding 3.5. This sub-finding is based on the analysis of response data from six Likert scale and three open-ended items (Table 7.6). The analysis suggests that religious educators had mixed perceptions about the level of support offered to teachers and students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA.

Table 7.6
Perceptions of the Support Provided to Students and Teachers

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
The CEOWA provides appropriate support to teachers. [Item 44]	17 7.3%	67 28.8%	62 26.6%	69 29.6%	18 7.7%	3.02 (1.091) p = 0.043 role
People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA. [Item 45a: Me]	4 1.7%	14 6.0%	37 15.9%	140 60.1%	38 16.3%	3.84 (0.835)
People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA. [Item 45b: Teachers]	6 2.6%	28 12.0%	67 28.8%	112 48.1%	20 8.6%	3.48 (0.905) p = 0.018 gender p = 0.003 role
People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA. [Item 45c: Leaders]	8 3.4%	31 13.3%	56 24.0%	116 49.8%	22 9.4%	3.48 (0.956) p = 0.013 gender p = 0.000 role
People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA. [Item 45d: Parents]	14 6.0%	49 21.0%	119 51.1%	43 18.5%	8 3.4%	2.92 (0.877)
People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA. [Item 45e: Students]	14 6.0%	39 16.7%	117 50.2%	55 23.6%	8 3.4%	3.02 (0.886)

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

The p value is the statistical probability of the rejection of a null hypothesis, 0.05 or less, in the non-parametric testing using the Mann-Whitney U Test to measure difference according to gender and the Kruskal-Wallis Test to measure differences according to age and employment role of responsibility.

Table 7.6 is a summary of data to Likert scale Items 44 and 45. Likert scale Item 45 consists of five sub-questions. The Likert scale items required a response to statements about the perceived level of supported offered to teachers and students from the CEOWA, themselves, other teachers, school leaders, parents and students. The analysis of written responses to Open-ended Items 33 and 81 provide clarity about the religious educators' perceptions of the level of support given to teachers and students prior to and during the administration of the BRLA. This is because for Item 33, the religious educators were asked to describe their experiences of teaching RE. For Item 81, they were asked to explain the influence they believed the BRLA had in RE. Within the religious educators' written responses to the items they provided further information about their experiences of administering the BRLA to students.

7.3.5.1 Perceived support from system administrators. In response to Likert scale Item 44, similar numbers of religious educators agreed [87 (69 agree + 18 strongly agree) of 233 (37.3%)] compared to those who disagreed [84 (67 disagree + 17 strongly disagree) of 233 (36.1%)] that the CEOWA provided appropriate support to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA. A total of 62 religious educators (26.6% of 233) chose neither to agree nor disagree. Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.043 probability of difference in the response data to Likert scale Item 44 according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. However, the frequency of that data does not suggest clear differences exist between teachers and school leaders of RE about their perceptions of the level of support provided by the CEOWA to teachers. The analysis of response data to Item 44 suggests that religious educators appear to have disagreed about the level of support provided by the CEOWA.

According to written response data (Open-ended Item 33), 32 of 238 religious educators (13.4%) described how more support is required by the CEOWA for the administration of the BRLA. They provided comments recommending the RE curriculum be updated to support them in administering the BRLA to students. These religious educators are identified in Table 7.7 as teachers and school leaders of RE.

In support of the recommendation, ten other religious educators (4.2% of 238) specifically described (Open-ended Item 81) how the BRLA has had little influence in RE because the RE curriculum has not been updated since the introduction of the assessment. This group identified a lack of attention by the CEOWA to update the RE curriculum. The

religious educators seem to have assumed that the introduction of the BRLA in 2006 would have brought about a review of the curriculum.

Table 7.7

The Frequency of Data Regarding a Lack of Curriculum Updates in RE

Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		Total (%)
Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	AP (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	SPP (n = 26)	SPS (n = 5)	
10	13	4	4	0	0	1	32 (13.4)

Note. Partial responses to Item 33: Describe your experiences of teaching Religious Education (N = 238).

The arguments presented by the religious educators who suggested the CEOWA did not provide appropriate support to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA are reflected in the following three comments. As one primary teacher of RE wrote, “The RE resources we are supplied with continue to have draft written over them”. As another primary teacher explained, “The RE Units of Work” have “too many wonder questions” and not enough content that can be used to prepare students for the BRLA. Thirdly, as a Year Nine teacher stated:

I am happy to have a test such as BRLA, BUT the CEO needs to address the fact that Years Eight and Nine books are resources rather than text; they include more detail than can be reasonably covered; and that the BRLA can unfairly pick miniscule details from these resources.

The religious educators suggested teachers require a curriculum that explicitly identifies RE content “so that students can be better prepared for the administration of the BRLA”. They argued for more “student and teacher friendly” RE teaching resource material where the content is clearly defined, and teachers know what content is expected to be assessed. Furthermore, the religious educators recommended that any new curriculum developments in RE should address the needs of a contemporary Catholic school community where students and parents who may not be practising Catholics or belong to the Catholic religion are “well catered for”.

7.3.5.2 Perceived support from school-based educators. The analysis of response data to Likert scale Item 45 led to evidence suggesting that religious educators believed they, other teachers and leaders at their Catholic schools provided appropriate support to students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA. The cross-referencing of written response data to Open-ended Item 12 that led to Finding One provides similar evidence.

Likert scale Item 45 consisted of three sub-questions, labelled 45a, 45b and 45c. As shown in Table 7.6, the analysis of response data to Likert scale Item 45a, identifies 178 of 233 religious educators [139 agree + 39 strongly agree (76.4%)] who agreed they provided appropriate support to students. In response to Item 45b, 132 of 233 religious educators [112 agree + 20 strongly agree (56.6%)] agreed teachers, other than themselves provided support to students. The Mann-Whitney U Test identifies a 0.018 probability of difference in that response data according to the religious educators' gender. As shown in Table 7.8, the frequency of the data according to gender suggests more male religious educators [52 of 80 (65.0%)] compared to females [80 of 158 (50.6%)] agreed teachers at their schools provided support to students. Furthermore, the Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.003 probability of difference in that same response data to Item 45b, according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of the data (Table 7.8) suggests that more school leaders of RE agreed than teachers of RE that teachers generally provided appropriate support to students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA. For example, four out of five secondary principals (80.0%) and 14 out of 20 RECs (70.0%) agreed teachers provide appropriated support. Similarly, 28 of 37 Assistant Principals (75.7%) and 18 out of 26 primary principals (69.2%) agreed teachers provided appropriate support. In comparison, under a third of Year Three teachers [18 of 55 (32.7%)], almost half the number of Year Five teachers [18 of 40 (45.0%)] and over half the number of Year Nine teachers [32 of 55 (58.2%)] agreed that teachers in general provided appropriate support to students.

In response to Likert scale Item 45c, 138 of 233 religious educators [116 agree + 22 strongly agree (59.2%)] agreed school leaders provided appropriate support to students. The Mann-Whitney U Test identifies a 0.013 probability of difference in the response data according to the religious educators' gender. As shown in Table 7.9, the frequency of that data suggests that again more male religious educators [54 of 80 (67.5%)] compared to females [84 of 158 (53.2%)] agreed school leaders provided appropriate support. The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.000 probability of difference in the response data according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency

of that data according to role (Table 7.9) suggests more leaders of RE in Catholic primary schools agreed compared to other sub-groups that school leaders provided appropriate support to students. For example, 31 of 37 Assistant Principals of RE (83.8%) and 21 of 26 primary principals (80.7%) agreed appropriate support to students is provided by school leaders. This evidence suggests that school leaders may have felt the need to defend their level of support in preparation for the administration of LSAs.

Table 7.8
The Frequency of Data Regarding Support from Teachers

	Gender		Total
	Females (n=158)	Males (n=80)	
Strongly Disagree	5	1	6
Disagree	22	6	28
Neither agree nor disagree	49	18	67
Agree	68	44	112
Strongly Agree	12	8	20
Total*	156	77	233

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE						Total	
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)		CSP (n = 5)
Strongly Disagree	3	0	2	0	1	0	0	6
Disagree	11	3	5	4	3	2	0	28
Neither agree nor disagree	23	18	13	4	2	6	1	67
Agree	15	14	28	24	11	16	4	112
Strongly Agree	3	4	4	4	3	2	0	20
Total*	55	39	52	36	20	26	5	233

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 45b: Teachers at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA ($n = 233$).

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

Table 7.9

The Frequency of Data Regarding Support from School Leaders

	Gender		Total
	Females (n = 158)	Males (n = 80)	
Strongly Disagree	6	2	8
Disagree	26	5	31
Neither agree nor disagree	40	16	56
Agree	71	45	116
Strongly Agree	13	9	22
Total*	156	77	233

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	4	1	2	0	1	0	0	8
Disagree	13	2	10	3	3	0	0	31
Neither agree nor disagree	16	14	14	2	3	5	2	56
Agree	21	17	23	27	9	16	3	116
Strongly Agree	1	5	3	4	4	5	0	22
Total*	55	39	52	36	20	26	5	233

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 45c: School Leaders at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA ($n = 233$).

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

Further to the evidence identifying teachers and school leaders supported students in preparation for the BRLA, the analysis of written response data (Open-ended Item 12) found 79 religious educators who described how they systematically prepared for the administration of the BRLA. Table 7.10 represents the frequency of that data according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. As part of their descriptions, the religious educators explained how they particularly supported students in preparation for the

BRLA. The religious educators wrote comments such as “I have prepared students for the administration of the BRLA” and “I assist teachers and students with the administration of the BRLA”. The comment from one school leader of RE reflects the common expressions from the group:

My experience has been from an administrative point of view. I do the paper work, inform parents, inform teachers, prepare samples for students and teachers, organise the logistics of rooms, room changes, supervisors, timetabling, equipment. I have always had the support of staff, parents and students. They are quite compliant with the test [BRLA]. However, my perception is that they don’t give it much importance.

The school leader described not only the level of preparation and support they provided but also indicated that, although others in the school community were known to adhere to preparation requirements, they may not have fully perceived the BRLA as important. The analysis of data to Likert scale Items 45d and 45e substantiate the school leader’s claim by showing that fewer numbers of religious educators perceived teachers, students and parents as providing the same support to students that school leaders and teachers directly involved with the BRLA provide.

Table 7.10

The Frequency of Statements About the Administration of the BRLA

Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		Total (%)
Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
10	9	21	23	5	10	1	79 (33.2)

Note. Partial responses to Item 12: Describe your experience of the BRLA (N = 238).

7.3.5.3 Perceived support from students and parents. As mentioned, the analysis of response data in Table 7.6 suggests the religious educators may have perceived students and parents as less supportive during the administration phase of the BRLA compared to teachers and school leaders. Furthermore, the table also identifies statistically significant numbers of religious educators who appear ambivalent about the level of support provided by students and parents. For example, 119 of 231 religious educators (51.5%) chose neither to agree nor disagree that parents support students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA and

117 of 231 religious educators (50.6%) chose neither to agree nor disagree that students support each other. These results possibly indicate uncertainty from the religious educators or perhaps their desire not to be critical of students and parents by withholding judgement about the level of support students and parents provide those students who are involved with the BRLA.

The cross-referencing of written response data from Open-ended Items 12, 33 and 81 with the numeric data from Likert scale, Items 45d and 45e presents one possible rationale for the religious educators' ambivalence. Those religious educators who neither agreed nor disagreed about the level of support provided by students and parents for students preparing for the BRLA described how students and parents were disengaged with the BRLA and generally with RE as a learning area. This evidence aligns with evidence in Finding One and Two where religious educators also spoke about the dissatisfaction of students and parents regarding the BRLA and RE in general.

The analysis of data to Open-ended Item 12 found 15 of 238 religious educators (6.3%) who described their experiences of the BRLA as questionable because they believed students and parents did not take RE seriously as a learning area. Of the group of 15, six were Year Nine teachers. As one of the teachers wrote:

Each year I believe the test is becoming more difficult, yet our school population is becoming more and more unchurched. It is difficult for children to truly consolidate their learning when it is not a priority in many families. The church language while explained in teacher background and in some Units of Work is not recognised by the children and occasionally by the teachers.

The comment of one school leader of RE affirms the arguments presented by the Year Nine teachers. The school leader stated, "Hard work! It is very challenging to engage students in learning in RE. Often there is a negative or 'slack; it doesn't matter' attitude to the subject".

Similarly, in response to Open-ended Item 33, where religious educators were asked to describe their experiences of teaching RE, a group of 36 (15.1% of 238) described the challenges they faced teaching RE. Almost half the number of religious educators in the group (16 of the 36) were Year Nine teachers. As one of Year Nine teachers wrote:

There are very few Catholics at the school I teach, so it is quite difficult and sad that parents don't support or show interest in this learning area. Removal of this time and paper wasting imposition is needed because it makes it more difficult for teachers to maintain credibility in what is already a counter-cultural subject.

Further to the comments above, in response to Open-ended Item 81, nine (3.8% of 238) religious educators argued there seems to be a lack of support shown by students and their parents towards the BRLA because of its link to the RE curriculum. The group indicated that the BRLA did not have the power to influence policies or practices in RE because of the lack of support that they believed exists for the learning area. The comment by one Year Five teacher reflects the comments of others in the group:

Sadly, not all teachers have given it [Religious Education] the same importance as the other learning areas, so by the time I have the students, some don't approach the work with the same enthusiasm. Lack of parent support also makes it difficult for the children to apply what is learnt in class.

According to the three minority groups, students and their parents (as well as teachers who were not involved in teaching RE) were disengaged with RE as a learning area. They perceived RE not to be valued nor supported by students and parents. The religious educators suggested disengagement with RE as a learning area was due to a decline in the number of students from Catholic families and the increase of non-practising Catholics in the student and teacher populations.

The sub-findings that led to Finding Three indicate that religious educators in Phase One responded positively to the administration of the BRLA and believed they appropriately supported students in preparation for the assessment. However, the religious educators also presented arguments suggesting that they experienced challenges preparing students for the administration of the BRLA. The next section in this chapter discusses Finding Four and refers to how the religious educators responded to various aspects of the implementation of the BRLA prior to and proceeding the administration process. The religious educators' responses further highlight the personal and professional experience they had with the BRLA as a LSA and with RE as the learning area to which the assessment belongs.

7.4 Finding Four

Finding Four suggests that the religious educators responded to the implementation of the BRLA in contrasting ways. The collation and analysis of response data that led to the finding is based on the religious educators' response to three aspects of the implementation of the BRLA. The first aspect considers the perceived time and pressure associated with the BRLA. The second aspect considers the perceived construction of test items and student experience of the items. The third aspect considers how the religious educators perceived

students to perform in the BRLA compared to in-class assessments in RE and other LSAs such as NAPLAN and WAMSE.

7.4.1 Sub-finding 4.1. The religious educators disagreed about the time and pressure associated with the BRLA. The analysis of data to four Likert scale items and five open-ended items led to this sub-finding. Table 7.11 is a summary of the data in response to the Likert scale items. Table 7.14 identifies the frequency of written comments in response to open-ended items that support the numeric data. The written comments suggest that groups of religious educators felt pressure associated with using the BRLA and other LSAs such as NAPLAN.

Table 7.11

Perceptions of the Time and Pressure Associated with the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
The organisation involved prior to administering the BRLA is minimal. [Item 51 (n = 233)]	6 2.6%	37 15.9%	41 17.6%	141 60.5%	8 3.4%	3.46 (0.890) p = 0.000 role
Teachers at my school feel that it is necessary to spend time preparing students for the BRLA. [Item 48 (n = 233)]	11 4.7%	38 16.3%	46 19.7%	115 49.4%	23 9.9%	3.43 (1.028)
Students require a great deal of time to prepare for the BRLA. [Item 47 (n = 233)]	10 4.3%	69 29.6%	63 27.0%	78 33.5%	13 5.6%	3.06 (1.013) p = 0.003 gender
I feel that there is a great deal of pressure placed on teachers to prepare students for the BRLA. [Item 49 (n = 233)]	14 6.0%	69 29.6%	59 25.3%	74 31.8%	17 7.3%	3.05 (1.072)

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

7.4.1.1 Perceptions of organisational requirements. More than half the number of religious educators agreed preparations for the BRLA required minimal organisation. In response to Likert scale Item 51, 149 of 233 religious educators [141 agree + 8 strongly agree (63.9%)] agreed minimal organisation is required by teachers to prepare students for the BRLA. The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.000 probability of difference in the data according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of that data as shown in Table 7.12 suggests Year Three teachers [47 of 55 (85.5%)] agreed more than other sub-groups that minimal organisation was required. The majority of primary school leaders of RE [30 of 37 (81.1%)] and secondary principals [4 of 5 (80.0%)] also agreed minimal organisation was required.

Table 7.12

The Frequency of Data for Item 51 According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	6
Disagree	2	1	13	4	7	9	1	37
Neither agree nor disagree	6	10	14	2	2	7	0	41
Agree	45	21	21	30	11	10	3	141
Strongly Agree	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	8
Total*	55	39	52	36	20	26	5	233

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 51: School Leaders at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA ($n = 233$).

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

7.4.1.2 Perceptions of preparation time. More than half the number of religious educators agreed it necessary to spend time preparing students for the BRLA. In response to Likert scale Item 48, 138 of 233 religious educators [115 agree + 23 strongly agree (59.2%)] agreed teachers at their school felt that it was necessary to spend time preparing students for

the BRLA. However, the amount of time considered necessary by groups of religious educators seem to vary. For example, in response to Likert scale Item 47 the religious educators disagreed about the amount of time required to prepare students for the BRLA. More than a third [91 (78 agree + 13 strongly agree) of 233 (39.1%)] agreed students required a great deal of time. In contrast, almost a third of the number of religious educators [79 (69 disagree + 10 strongly disagree) of 233 (33.9%)] disagreed and slightly less than a third [63 of 233 (27.0%)] chose neither to agree nor disagree.

The Mann-Whitney U Test identifies a 0.003 probability of difference in the response data to Likert scale Item 47 according to the religious educators' gender. With reference to Table 7.13, the frequency of data according to gender suggests almost twice as many male religious educators [35 of 80 (43.8%)] compared to females [44 of 158 (27.8%)] disagreed that a great deal of time was required to prepare students for the BRLA. This result again suggests that male religious educators seem to have had more positive experiences of the administration and implementation of the BRLA compared to female religious educators.

Table 7.13

The Frequency of Data for Item 47 According to Gender

	Gender		Total
	Females (n = 158)	Males (n = 80)	
Strongly Disagree	6	4	10
Disagree	38	31	69
Neither agree nor disagree	42	21	63
Agree	59	19	78
Strongly Agree	11	2	13
Total*	156	77	233

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

7.4.1.3 Perceptions of pressure on teachers. The religious educators disagreed about the amount of pressure on teachers associated with preparing students for the BRLA. In response to Likert scale Item 49, 91 of 233 [74 agree + 17 strongly agree (39.1%)] agreed a great deal of pressure was placed on teachers to prepare students for the BRLA. Similar numbers of religious educators disagreed [83 (69 disagree + 14 strongly disagree) of 233 (35.6%)] or chose neither to agree nor disagree [59 of 233 (25.3%)]. Table 7.14 shows the

frequency of written comments by teachers and school leaders of RE that refer to their statements about the perceived pressure associated with the BRLA and with other LSAs such as NAPLAN.

Table 7.14

The Frequency of Statements About the Stress Associated with the BRLA

	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		Total (%)
	Yr 3 (n=55)	Yr 5 (n=40)	Yr 9 (n=55)	APRE (n=37)	REC (n=20)	CPP (n=26)	CSP (n=5)	
The BRLA causes stress and added pressure because it reminds students of NAPLAN and there is too much testing in these year levels [Open-ended Item 12]	6	5	4	2	1	0	0	18 (7.6)
Teachers are constrained by time because the BRLA is too early in Term 3 and not all the content in the RE curriculum is taught. [Open-ended Item 12]	0	5	4	2	1	0	0	12 (5.0)
Large-scale, standardised assessments are a source of stress and anxiety on students and teachers. [Open-ended Item 37]	19	14	8	7	1	2	0	51 (21.4)

Note. Partial responses to Item 12: Describe your experience of The Bishops’ Religious Literacy Assessment. (N = 238) Partial responses to Item 37: Describe your experience of large-scale, standardised assessments (N = 238).

As first identified in Finding One through the response data to Open-ended Item 12, 18 of 238 religious educators (7.6%) described the BRLA as stressful. They stated the BRLA caused stress by “adding pressure on students and teachers” and consumed “valuable in-class time to adequately prepare students for the BRLA”. Of the group, 15 were teachers of RE. Similarly, but in greater numbers, in response to Open-ended Item 37 where religious

educators were asked to describe their experiences of LSAs, 51 of 238 religious educators (21.4%) who were predominately teachers of RE, stated that LSAs were a source of stress and anxiety on students and teachers. The teachers described how the BRLA reminds students of NAPLAN and the perceived stress associated with NAPLAN. This group of religious educators also indicated that students in Years Three, Five and Nine were overexposed to LSAs. The concern of not having taught all content prior to the administration of the BRLA was stated by 12 of the group of 51 (5.0% of 238).

These groups of religious educators described how “the BRLA reminded students of NAPLAN” and that “there was too much of this type of testing in Years Three, Five and Nine”. As one school leader of RE stated, “The BRLA is A LOT of work, it disrupts classes and stress students out”. Similarly, one Year Five teacher explained:

As there are many standardised tests administered to Year Five which are out of the control of the CEOWA, I found the timing of the assessment in the week before WAMSE to be stressful and tiring for the children. I wonder whether the assessment could be later in Term Three just to give the children a bit of a breather?

The religious educators considered the BRLA, NAPLAN and WAMSE testing all in the same year levels as stressful for students and their teachers.

Twelve religious educators indicated in response to Open-ended Item 12 that the timing of the BRLA was too early in the year and did not allow teachers the time to ensure that the essential RE content had been taught. The religious educators felt they were “under pressure” shortly after the July school holidays [usually in the first few weeks of Term Three] to administer the BRLA. They suggested they adequately prepared students for the BRLA but were at times frustrated “seeing students flounder with questions”. They also believed the students would have easily been able to answer such questions if more time was given to teachers to cover the content in the RE curriculum prior to administration. The explanation provided by one Year Nine teacher reflects the common perceptions by the group of 12:

In my initial years, there was a lot of preparation involved, and helping students understand the BRLA and giving them the opportunity to practise going through past year papers. Over the years, the BRLA has taken place in early Term Three. The start of Term Three is usually a stressful time as there often were limited time for students to be well-prepared. As a result, I have created an information booklet based on the major themes of the BRLA and given to students in advance for their preparation.

The teacher described how attempts were made to help students deal with the pressure associated with the BRLA.

Besides feeling that they did not have the time to adequately prepare students for the BRLA, the religious educators believed the stress associated with the BRLA was also due to time wasted on the BRLA rather than on the “broader exploration of faith issues in class”. The group of 12 religious educators perceived the BRLA outside the scope of RE classroom practices. They explained that their focus in RE classes was more about ensuring students develop their faith and less about students demonstrating their knowledge of the faith. This evidence appears in Findings One and Two and will be explored further in the following chapters.

It appears that groups of religious educators seem to have treated RE as a catechetical rather than an educational activity. It also seems that the 51 religious educators who described LSAs generally as stressful activities, provide a context for their response to the implementation of the BRLA. Three contextual understandings are identified. Firstly, 41 of the 51 religious educators were teachers of RE and half that number were Year Three teachers [21 of 41 (51.2%)]. Secondly, the teachers argued that LSAs “created a lot of stress for children”, “add unnecessary pressure on teachers” and “students need to be adequately prepared to sit these types of assessments”. Thirdly, the religious educators provided explanations for why they perceived LSA to be stressful. They described the format of LSA as different to classroom assessments; the perceived “content driven” curriculum in Catholic schools that they were expected to teach; and how parent anxiety about LSAs contributes to student and teacher anxiety.

The teachers of RE described the “format” of LSAs as stressful and suggested that Year Three students in particular were formally exposed to standardised assessments at an inappropriately early age. As one Year Three teacher explained:

These assessments are too stressful for children, even though I endeavour to take the pressure off, it’s very difficult considering the scripts and environment we have to adhere to, to ensure they are standardised throughout all schools.

As another teacher explained:

They [LSAs] create a lot of stress for the children. As teachers, we waste a lot of time preparing them for these tests. Time that could be spent teaching content from the curriculum. Over the years I have found that a lot of children perform worse than expected (as they don’t know how to complete these tests in a test situation) this then causes more stress for the parents and teachers.

The teachers described LSAs as “taking up valuable teaching time” from what they believed was a very “content driven” RE curriculum.

Teachers of RE suggested they “wasted a lot of time preparing students” for LSAs and that their time could have been “better spent teaching the content from the curriculum”. They suggested the teaching of test techniques and strategies to prepare students for LSAs was “too time consuming”. They argued that LSAs were different to regular classroom work and required “a great deal of their time and energy” to ensure that students knew the essential content that may possibly appear in the assessments. As one Year Five teacher explained:

These assessments, particularly NAPLAN, cause great stress for many students. I was at pains to assist my students to be relaxed and comfortable and to put the assessment in perspective.

A school leader of RE made a similar comment to the teachers:

Standardised assessments such as NAPLAN put undue stress on students which is unfair for them and can cause much anxiety. Many teachers cancel their regular teaching programme to prepare which pushes core learning back and means playing catch-up for the rest of the term.

These religious educators said that parents also generally tended to become “nervous for their children” when participating in LSAs and that the parents’ anxiety about the assessment added to student and teacher stress.

Explanations by three other religious educators within the group of 51 reflect the perceptions of the group about the use of LSAs and the associated stress relating to the assessments. As one principal wrote:

I actually find it [NAPLAN] a complete waste of time. Parents are putting far too much pressure on their children and in turn children are put under unnecessary pressure. Too many schools teach to/for the NAPLAN test. How accurate are the results???

Similarly, one school leader explained:

I have experienced administering both NAPLAN and WAMSE testing. They are all quite easy to administer. However, students do become quite stressed over these tests. It’s good they are all very similar, in regards, to administering the tests from a teachers’ point of view and for students the layout of tests is similar.

As one teacher explained, suggestions were provided by the religious educators to assist parents to keep their children “stress free”. The teacher wrote:

Children need to be taught how to sit these tests and to work under time pressure. This can be very stressful for some children and I have seen a child have a panic attack from all the pressure. Young children do find it challenging to sit and focus for that

amount of time, and many of them worry about the clock and about just rushing through the test. As a school, we do get some useful information as to areas that we need to work on.

The religious educators' perceptions of LSAs were discussed in Chapter Five (Finding One) because their comments provide a context for the religious educators' perceptions of the purpose of the BRLA. The evidence that led to Sub-finding 4.1 suggests that how the religious educators perceived the purpose and role of the BRLA as a LSA may have influenced how they responded to the implementation of the assessment.

7.4.2 Sub-finding 4.2. Despite religious educators disagreeing about the amount of time and pressure associated with the BRLA, they did agree it was useful to review test items in the BRLA but disagreed about aspects of the BRLA test items. For example, they disagreed specifically about the construction of the test items.

7.4.2.1 Perceptions of reviewing test items. More than half the number of religious educators agreed it was useful reviewing test items with students. In response to Likert scale Item 66, as shown in Table 7.15, 140 of 231 religious educators [126 agree + 14 strongly agree (60.6%)] agreed it was useful to review test items in the BRLA with students. The review process was considered as time teachers spent with students answering past test items. Within the written data in response to Open-ended Item 12, ten (4.2% of 238) religious educators acknowledged the need for reviewing test items with students in preparation for the BRLA. Of the ten religious educators, seven Year Nine teachers wrote comments such as "Before the test [BRLA] we ensure that the children are aware of the content not yet covered in the year. We practise completing past test questions".

The Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.003 probability of difference in the response data to Likert scale Item 66 according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of that data according to role (Table 7.16), suggests that school leaders of RE and, in particular, primary principals [21 of 26 (80.8%)] and primary Assistant Principals of RE [27 of 37 (73.0%)] agreed more than other sub-groups that it was useful to review test items with students. Similar numbers of Year Nine teachers agreed or chose neither to agree nor disagree it was useful reviewing test items with student.

Table 7.15

Perceptions of Reviewing BRLA test items

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
I find it useful to review the BRLA test items with my students. [Item 66 (n = 231)]	9 (4%)	28 (12%)	54 (23%)	126 (55%)	14 (6%)	3.46 (0.926)
						p = 0.003 role

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

Table 7.16

The Frequency of Data for Item 66 According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	0	1	4	0	2	2	0	9
Disagree	13	3	7	0	3	0	2	28
Neither agree nor disagree	9	11	19	8	3	3	1	54
Agree	30	22	19	24	12	17	2	126
Strongly Agree	3	2	2	3	0	4	0	14
Total*	55	39	51	35	20	26	5	231

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 66: I find it useful to review the BRLA test items with my students (n = 231).

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

7.4.2.2 Perceptions of the construction of the test items. The religious educators disagreed that the BRLA test items were poorly constructed and that students found it

difficult to answer most items. Table 7.17 identifies that half the number of religious educators disagreed [122 (114 disagree + 8 strongly disagree) of 231 (52.8%)] that the BRLA test items were poorly constructed. Under half the number of the religious educators [103 (100 disagreed + 3 strongly disagreed) of 231 (44.6%)] disagreed that students found it difficult to answer most of the test items in the BRLA compared to 28.6% who agreed [66 (51 agreed + 15 strongly agreed) of 231] and 26.8% who chose neither to agree nor disagree (62 of 231).

Table 7.17
Perceptions of the BRLA Test Items

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
The test items in the BRLA are generally poorly constructed. [Item 63 (n = 231)]	8 3.5%	114 49.4%	74 32.0%	26 11.3%	9 3.9%	2.62 (0.875)
My students find it difficult to answer most of the test items. [Item 64 (n = 231)]	3 1.3%	100 43.3%	62 26.8%	51 22.1%	15 6.5%	2.89 (0.979)

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

7.4.2.3 Perceived difficulty with the test items. More religious educators agreed than disagreed that the BRLA test items contained difficult vocabulary (Table 7.18). In response to Likert scale Item 56, 164 of 232 religious educators [109 agree + 55 strongly agree (70.7%)] agreed that students experienced, difficulty with the vocabulary used in the BRLA test items. The Independent Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test identifies a 0.039 probability of difference in that response data according to the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE. The frequency of the data to Likert scale Item 56 as shown in Table 7.19 suggests Year Three [44 of 55 (80.0%)] and Year Five [32 of 40 (80.0%)] teachers, as well as secondary principals [4 of 5 (80.0%)] agreed more than other sub-groups that students experienced, difficulty with the vocabulary used in the BRLA test items. As a group, less

Year Nine teachers [22 of 55 (40.0%)] agreed students experienced difficulty with the test items.

Table 7.18

Perceptions of the Difficulty of the BRLA Test Items

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
My students experience difficulty with the vocabulary used in the BRLA. [Item 56 (n = 232)]	2 0.9%	33 14.2%	33 14.2%	109 47.0%	55 23.7%	3.78 (0.992) p = 0.039 role

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

Table 7.19

The Frequency of Data for Item 56 According to Role

	Employment Role of Responsibility in RE							Total
	Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		
	Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
Strongly Disagree	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Disagree	5	3	15	2	2	5	1	33
Neither agree nor disagree	6	4	14	4	2	3	0	33
Agree	24	22	18	17	12	12	4	109
Strongly Agree	20	10	4	12	3	6	0	55
Total*	55	39	52	35	20	26	5	232

Note. Response data to Likert scale Item 56: My students experience difficulty with the vocabulary used in the BRLA (n = 232).

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

The religious educators provided written comments in reply to three open-ended questions, indicating the vocabulary in the BRLA test items was difficult for students. For example, in response to Open-ended Item 83, a total of 81 of 238 (34.0%) religious educators suggested the vocabulary used in the BRLA was difficult for students. They provided the feedback about the test items as part of their final comments about the BRLA. Table 7.20 presents the frequency of those comments. A total of 65 of the 81 (80.2%) religious educators were in Catholic primary schools, with almost half Year Three teachers [29 of 65 (44.6%)]. The teachers wrote comments suggesting student with “high literacy levels” performed better in the BRLA compared to students with “poor literacy skills”. As one teacher explained, “Students may know the answers; however, as they are required to adequately read and write, some students tend to underperform”. Similarly, another teacher wrote, “The BRLA can be a useful tool to measure understanding of concepts. However, students with poor literacy skills struggle to do the test”.

Table 7.20

The Frequency of Comments about the Difficulty of the Test Items

Classroom Teachers of RE (n = 150)			School Leaders of RE (n = 57)		Principals (n = 31)		Total (%)
Year 3 (n = 55)	Year 5 (n = 40)	Year 9 (n = 55)	APRE (n = 37)	REC (n = 20)	CPP (n = 26)	CSP (n = 5)	
29	21	4	15	3	9	0	81 (34.0)

Note. Partial responses to Item 83: Please comment on any aspect of the BRLA you believe needs attention ($N = 238$).

The religious educators proposed two arguments about the perceived difficulty of the BRLA test items. Firstly, they argued that students with poor literacy skills were disadvantaged by LSAs such as “NAPLAN, WAMSE and the BRLA”. They argued the students’ inability to read and write effectively hinders student performance on assessments. The religious educators felt that LSAs made students “feel inadequate”. In turn, they perceived LSAs as “inaccurate measures of students’ true capabilities”. Secondly, the religious educators argued that the vocabulary in the BRLA was “content specific” and “too theological” for students. They argued they did not believe that teachers focused on the

vocabulary used in the RE curriculum. Furthermore, they suggested the vocabulary in the BRLA test items was unrelated to the RE curriculum. As one Year Three teacher explained:

I believe the language used in some parts of the BRLA is too complicated which impedes the children's understanding. I think if the language was reworded to a more basic form some children that may have known the answer would be more successful. For instance, in this year's test the word "covenant" was used. If that word was changed to "promise", some children may have had a better understanding. The teachers' own faith knowledge is vastly different as well, which will also result in differing levels of education that the students receive. This is the case with any subject area that is taught. I think able students achieve better scores in the BRLA and if the children come from a strong faith background, they may do better than those who do not. I think the results from the BRLA follow a typical "bell curve".

The religious educators recommended the vocabulary in the BRLA test items be "simplified" and replaced with "common, everyday language". They indicated that such a strategy would assist students with their "poor literacy skills" and those who lack the content knowledge that is expected to be known and understood in RE. Table 7.21 lists common expressions used by the group of 81 religious educators about the perceived difficulty of the test items.

Table 7.21

Statements About the Difficulty of the BRLA Test Items

The BRLA test items:

- are above the students' chronological understanding;
 - need to be more user friendly;
 - should be written less in a formalised style;
 - are far too complex, sophisticated and formal;
 - are very theological;
 - should use common everyday language; and,
 - are very difficult for students in Years Three and Five.
-

Similarly, and as previously identified in Chapter Five, 41 of 238 religious educators (17.2%) in response to Open-ended Item 12 also described the vocabulary used in the BRLA test items as challenging for teachers and students. Their descriptions referred to the perceived purpose of the BRLA. As part of their descriptions they argued the test items were "too literacy based and not suitable for the age or learning styles of students". The religious

educators seem to have believed that the BRLA had not influenced their practices in RE because the vocabulary in the BRLA test items was too difficult and irrelevant to the RE curriculum. Further discussions about the perceived difficulty and relevance of the BRLA test items is presented in the next section and the following chapters.

7.4.2.4 Perceived relevance of the test items. The religious educators disagreed about the relevance of the BRLA test items to the RE curriculum (Table 7.22). In response to Likert scale Item 58, 129 of 232 [125 agree + 4 strongly agree (55.6%)] agreed the test items in the 2013 BRLA were relevant to the RE curriculum. In contrast and in response to Likert scale Item 59, a total of 67 of 232, or less than a third of the religious educators [60 agreed + 7 strongly agreed (28.9%)] agreed that over time the BRLA test items were relevant to the RE curriculum. More religious educators agreed than disagreed that the 2013 BRLA test items were relevant to the RE curriculum but fewer numbers agreed past test items were relevant.

Table 7.22
Perceptions of the Relevance of the BRLA Test Items

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
The test items in the 2013 BRLA were relevant to the Religious Education curriculum. [Item 58 (n = 232)]	10 4.3%	38 16.4%	55 23.7%	125 53.9%	4 1.7%	3.32 (0.918)
Over the years, the test items in the BRLA have been irrelevant to the Religious Education curriculum. [Item 59 (n = 232)]	7 3.0%	78 33.6%	80 34.5%	60 25.9%	7 3.0%	2.93 (0.914)

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

In comments in response to Open-ended Items 12 and 37, groups of religious educators explained how LSA test items were generally irrelevant to their respective curricula. In response to Item 12, where the religious educators were asked to describe their experiences of the BRLA, 27 (11.3% of 238) religious educators stated that the BRLA was

irrelevant to the RE curriculum because the test items were dissimilar to test items designed by classroom teachers. Similarly, in response to Item 37, where religious educators were asked to describe their experiences of LSAs, 21 (8.8% of 238) religious educators, of which 13 were teachers of RE, suggested that LSAs such as NAPLAN were often not relevant to the respective “syllabus” because the vocabulary used in the test items was difficult for students to read and comprehend. Furthermore, they described how the structure of the test items in LSAs were foreign to students. A total of 28 of 238 (11.8%) religious educators also explained that given the irrelevance of the test items in NAPLAN, teachers “teach to the test”.

The religious educators who described the BRLA and the NAPLAN test items as different to what students experience in assessments designed by classroom teachers made comments such as “Large-scale, standardised assessments don’t always measure a student’s capability in a learning area. They focus on rote learning and not critical thinking”. As one school leader of RE wrote:

NAPLAN does not give an exact description of where a child is “at”. The test does not apply to what they are currently learning in class more so, what they “should” know at their age. I have several students with disabilities that can only fill out the front page with their name. This does not cater for them or any other student with a learning disability/difficulty.

These religious educators suggested they “felt strongly that LSAs were detrimental to the learning experiences of many children”. As assessment types, LSAs were considered “very unpleasant” for students and “sometimes emotionally damaging experiences” particularly for those students that “struggle with their literacy”. They labelled LSAs as “distractions” to regular classroom practices because the wording and structure of the test items was perceived as not understood by students. This evidence is consistent with and complements the previously discussed sub-findings that identify groups of religious educators who perceive LSAs as challenging. One perceived challenge is associated with an apparent difference between student performance in classroom assessments compared to assessments developed by educational system authorities.

7.4.2.5 Perceptions of student performance. More religious educators agreed than disagreed that students performed better in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers compared to the BRLA as a LSA. Two Likert scale items were used to investigate the

religious educators' perceptions of student performance in the BRLA. Table 7.23 is a summary of the analyses of that investigation.

Table 7.23

Perceptions of Student Performance in the BRLA

Item Description	Frequency of Responses					Mean (SD)
	SD = 1	D = 2	N = 3	A = 4	SA = 5	
My students perform well in RE assessments. Classroom Assessments [Item 74a (n = 231)]	1 0.4%	4 1.7%	48 20.8%	167 72.3%	11 4.8%	3.79 (0.567)
My students perform well in RE assessments. BRLA [Item 74b (n = 231)]	9 3.9%	67 29.0%	92 39.8%	61 26.4%	2 0.9%	2.91 (0.860)
I believe that students who perform poorly in the BRLA also perform poorly in classroom assessments in RE. [Item 75a (n = 231)]	8 3.5%	92 39.8%	37 16.0%	85 36.8%	9 3.9%	2.99 (1.032)
I believe that students who perform poorly in the BRLA also perform poorly in NAPLAN. [Item 75b (n = 231)]	1 0.4%	44 19.0%	56 24.2%	103 44.6%	27 11.7%	3.48 (0.946)
I believe that students who perform poorly in the BRLA also perform poorly in WAMSE. [Item 75c (n = 231)]	1 0.4%	43 18.6%	70 30.3%	93 40.3%	24 10.4%	3.42 (0.923)

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

Three inferences are drawn from the table. Firstly, 178 of 231 religious educators [167 agree + 11 strongly agree (77.1%)] agreed their students performed well in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers (Likert scale Item 74a). In contrast, 63 of 231 religious educators [61 agree + 2 strongly agree (27.3%)] agreed their students performed well in the BRLA (Likert scale Item 74b). Furthermore, in response to Likert scale Item 74b, 76 religious educators [67 disagree + 9 strongly disagree (32.9%)] disagreed their students

performed well in the BRLA and 92 religious educators (39.8%) chose neither to agree nor disagree. Secondly, 95 of 231 religious educators [86 agree + 9 strongly agree (41.1%)] agreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers (Likert scale Item 75a). However, similar numbers of religious educators, 100 of 231 [92 disagree + 8 strongly disagree (43.3%)] disagreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers. Thirdly, 130 of 231 religious educators [103 agree + 27 strongly agree (56.3%)] agreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in NAPLAN. In comparison, fewer religious educators [117 of 231 (93 agree + 24 strongly agree = 50.6%)] agreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in WAMSE assessments.

According to the analysis of data from Likert scale Items 74 and 75, the religious educators perceived student performance in the BRLA and other LSAs as different to student performance in assessments designed by classroom teachers. From this evidence, together with the other evidence that led to Finding Four, it appears likely that groups of religious educators had contrasting responses to the implementation of the BRLA because they were influenced by their perceptions of the purpose and role of the BRLA as a LSA. The religious educators' perceptions appear to have been shaped by their experiences of using LSAs.

7.5 Chapter Summary

Findings Three and Four were presented in this chapter. The findings are summarised separately in Figures 7.1 and 7.2. Overall, factors such as age, gender, and in particular, the religious educators' employment role of responsibility in RE, seems to have influenced how teachers and school leaders of RE responded to the administration and implementation of the BRLA.

Finding Three identifies the majority of religious educators as having responded to the administration of the BRLA in a consistent and positive manner. The religious educators perceived the administration of the BRLA as an easy process whereby the instructions were simple to follow and familiar. This is because the religious educators said they were involved with administering three types of LSAs: the BRLA, WAMSE and NAPLAN. As teachers and school leaders of RE, the religious educators felt they provided the most appropriate support to students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA compared to other teachers, students and parents. In terms of the level of support offered by students and parents, the religious educators appear ambivalent. One possible rationale for the religious educators'

ambivalence came from minority groups who described students and parents as disengaged with the BRLA and generally with RE.

In contrast to Finding Three, Finding Four reveals groups of religious educators with contrasting responses to the implementation of the BRLA. Although many of the religious educators felt it necessary to review BRLA test items with students, they disagreed about the amount of time and pressure associated with preparing students for the BRLA and other LSAs. Also, although many of the religious educators generally seem to have agreed that the BRLA test items were not poorly constructed, classroom teachers of RE, argued specifically that the BRLA test items contained difficult vocabulary and were irrelevant to the content they taught from the RE curriculum. Furthermore, groups of religious educators suggested that student performance in RE assessments developed by classroom teachers was much higher than in the BRLA, WAMSE and NAPLAN. These findings suggest a possible discrepancy between the religious educators' perceptions of the implementation of the BRLA and their perceptions of teaching and assessment practices in RE.

The next chapter presents a key finding from Phase Two that also addresses SRQ 2. The finding describes how groups of religious educators involved in the interviews responded to the administration and implementation of the BRLA.

Specific Research Question Two

How do religious educators respond to the administration and implementation of the BRLA?

Contributing Questions

I find the BRLA easy to administer to students (Item 52).

The instructions for administration are difficult to follow (Item 53).

The CEOWA provides appropriate support documents to teachers in preparation for the administration of the BRLA (Item 43).

My students completed the BRLA within the allocated time (Item 55).

Describe your experiences of the BRLA (Item 12).

The CEOWA provides appropriate support to teachers (Item 44).

Describe your experiences of teaching RE (Item 33).

People at my school provide appropriate support to students in preparation for the BRLA (Item 45).

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

Finding Three from Phase One

Finding Three: The religious educators perceived the administration of the BRLA as a straightforward and familiar process and indicated that school-based educators provided the most appropriate support to students.

Sub-finding 3.1: Most of the religious educators perceived the BRLA as easy to administer to students [193 of 233 (82.8%)]. Religious educators aged between 24 to 30 years [46 of 52 (88.5%)] agreed more than other age groups. Year Five teachers agreed [37 of 40 (92.5%)] more than any other sub-groups.

Sub-finding 3.2: Most of the religious educators perceived the instructions for administering the BRLA as appropriate and easy to follow [187 of 233 (80.3%)]. More than half the number [146 of 233 (62.7%)] agreed the CEOWA provided appropriate support documents. Males agreed [56 of 80 (70.0%)] more than females.

Sub-finding 3.3: The religious educators [151 of 232 (65.1%)] agreed students completed the BRLA within the allocated time. Males agreed [55 of 80 (68.8%)] more than females. Secondary School Leaders of RE (RECs) agreed [18 of 20 (90.0%)] more than other sub-groups.

Sub-finding 3.4: Groups of religious educators [58 of 238 (24.4%)] described contrasting experiences of administering the BRLA to students. Thirty-seven [37 of 238 (15.5%)] described their experience as challenging. Twenty-one [21 of 238 (8.8%)], described their experience as familiar to NAPLAN.

Sub-finding 3.5: The religious educators had mixed perceptions about the level of support offered to teachers and students in preparation for the administration of the BRLA.

Figure 7.1. Summary of Finding Three

Specific Research Question Two

How do religious educators respond to the administration and implementation of the BRLA?

Contributing Questions

The organisation involved prior to administering the BRLA is minimal (Item 51).

Teachers at my school feel that it is necessary to spend time preparing students for the BRLA (Item 48).

Students require a great deal of time to prepare for the BRLA (Item 47).

I feel that there is a great deal of pressure placed on teachers to prepare students for the BRLA (Item 49).

Describe your experiences of the BRLA (Item 12).

Describe your experiences of large-scale, standardised assessments (Item 37).

I find it useful to review the BRLA test items with my students (Item 66).

My students experience difficulty with the vocabulary used in the BRLA (Item 56).

The test items in the BRLA are generally poorly constructed (Item 63).

My students find it difficult to answer most of the test items (Item 64).

The test items in the 2013 BRLA were relevant to the RE curriculum (Item 58).

Over the years, the test items in the BRLA have been irrelevant to the RE curriculum (Item 59).

My students perform well in RE assessments (Item 74).

I believe that students who perform poorly in the BRLA also perform poorly in other assessments in RE (Item 75).

Describe your experiences of teaching RE (Item 33).

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

Finding Four from Phase One

Finding Four: The religious educators responded to the implementation of the BRLA in contrasting ways.

Sub-finding 4.1: The religious educators disagreed about the amount of time and pressure associated with the BRLA.

More than half the number [149 of 233 (63.9%)] agreed preparations for the BRLA required minimal organisation. Year Three Teachers of RE [47 of 55 (85.5%)] agreed more than other sub-groups.

More than half the number [138 of 233 (59.2%)] agreed it was important to spend time preparing students for the BRLA. The religious educators disagreed about the amount of time and pressure on teachers associated with preparing students for the assessment.

Sub-finding 4.2: The religious educators disagreed about aspects of the BRLA test items.

More than half the number [140 of 231 (60.6%)] agreed it was useful to review test items with students.

Half the number [123 of 231 (53.2%)] disagreed items were poorly constructed.

Less than half the number [103 of 231 (44.6%)] disagreed students found it difficult to answer most items.

More religious educators [164 of 232 (70.7%)] agreed than disagreed the test items contained difficult vocabulary.

More than half the number agreed [129 of 232 (55.6%)] the 2013 BRLA test items were relevant to the RE curriculum. Fewer numbers agreed [68 of 232 (29.3%)] past test items were relevant.

More religious educators agreed than disagreed that students performed better in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers [178 of 231 (77.1%)] compared to the BRLA [63 of 231 (27.3%)].

Less than half the number [95 of 231 (41.1%)] agreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in RE assessments designed by classroom teachers.

More than half the number [130 of 231 (56.3%)] agreed students who performed poorly in the BRLA also performed poorly in NAPLAN.

Figure 7.2. Summary of Finding Four