

## Section 4



# CURRICULUM MODEL

*'It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines.'*

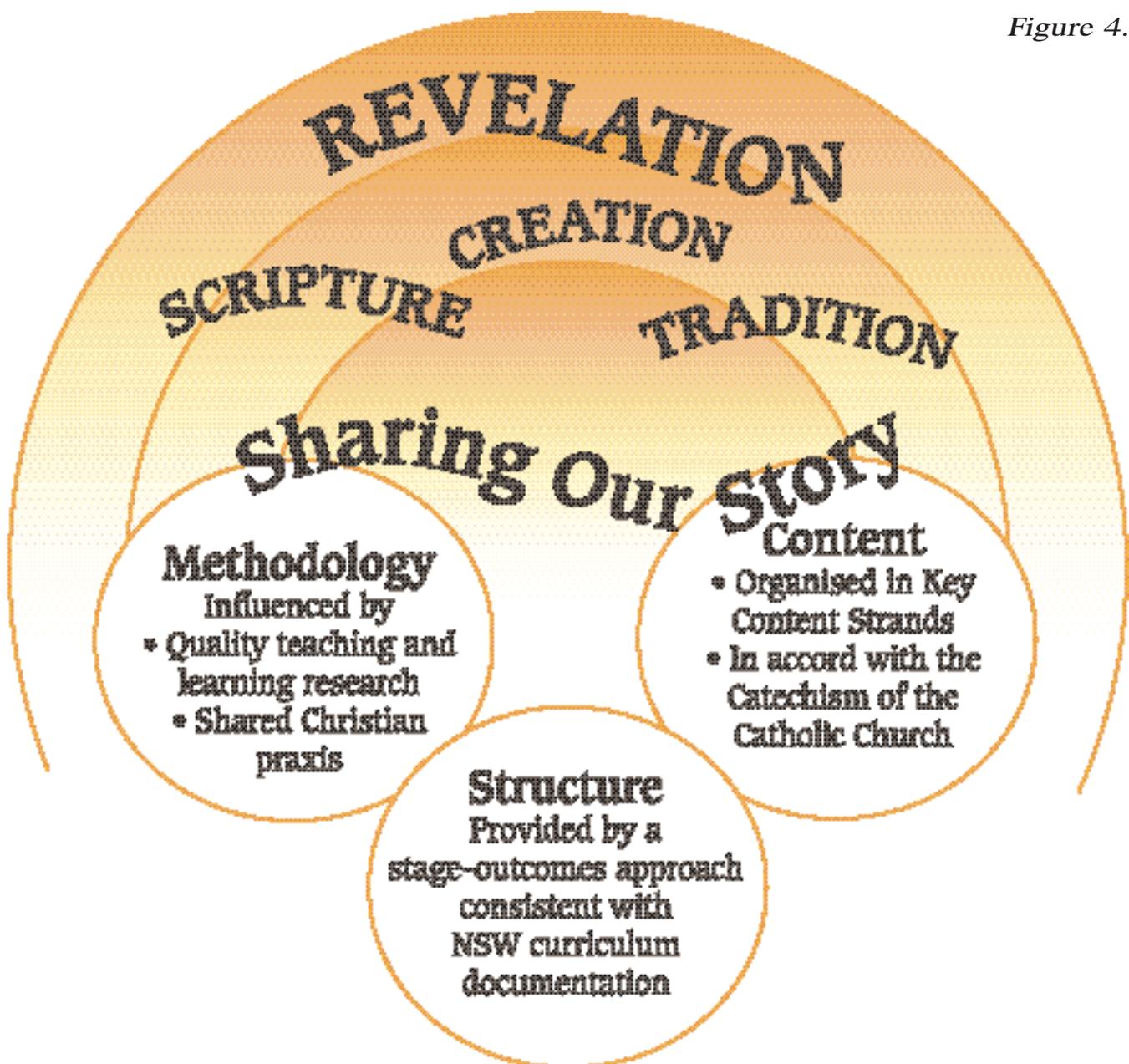
*General Directory for Catechesis, n. 73*

## 4.1 The Classroom Curriculum

At the heart of the curriculum processes are the students themselves who are growing through developmental stages and have various levels of readiness for learning. They bring to school a variety of experiences, previous learning and preferred ways of making sense of the world. This context was elaborated on briefly in Section 3.

With this as essential background, the focus in the present section is the formal, classroom-based Religious Education curriculum for which *Sharing Our Story* provides the syllabus.

Figure 4.1



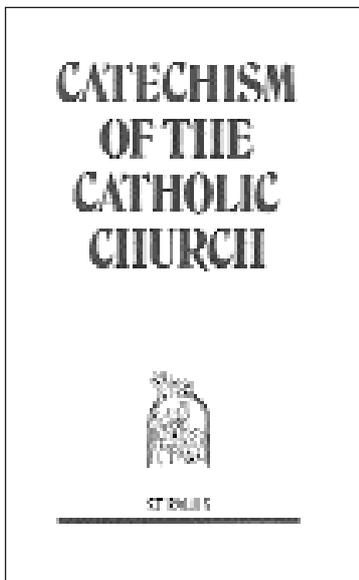
## 4.2 The Content

### The Catechism of the Catholic Church

One of the major influences on the revision of *Sharing Our Story* has been the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The *Catechism* was promulgated on October 11, 1992, by Pope John Paul II; the Australian edition was published in 1994. It is fundamentally ‘a statement of the Church’s faith and of Catholic doctrine, attested to or illuminated by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition and the Church’s Magisterium’. (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, 1992 Section 3). Its subject matter is the faith as believed, celebrated, lived and prayed.

Four fundamentals of Christian life – the profession of faith, the celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, and Christian prayer – provide the Catechism’s structure. These elements have one source, *the Christian mystery*.



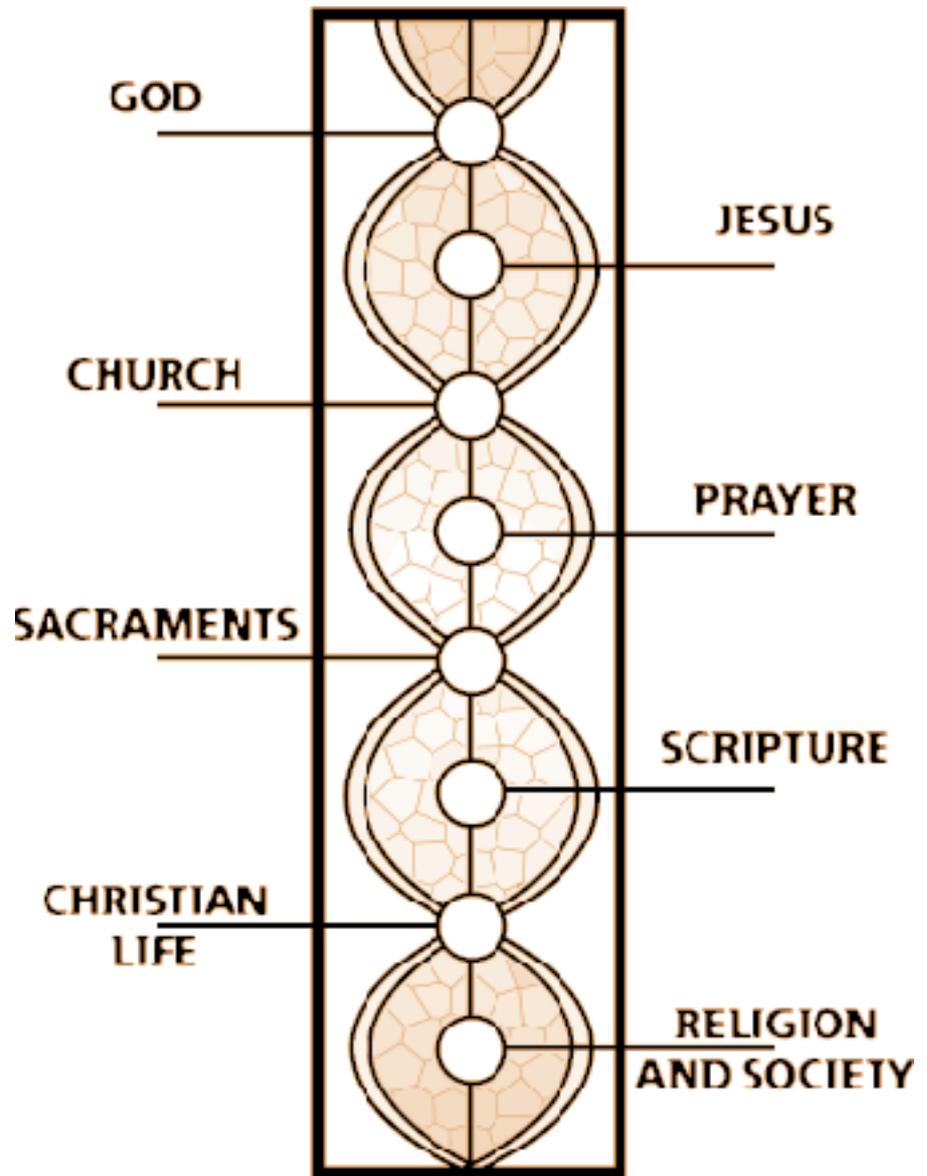
The purpose of the *Catechism* is to be an authoritative reference text for the Church as a whole. Within a diocese, the local bishop and those who act on his behalf, make appropriate adaptations of doctrinal presentations and teaching approaches in response to the needs, educational readiness, spiritual maturity and general background of individuals and groups of students. It is not designed to ‘provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the differences of culture, age, spiritual maturity and social and ecclesial condition amongst all those to whom it is addressed’. These important adaptations are ‘the responsibility of particular (local) catechisms and, even more, of those who instruct the faithful’. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 24)

For religious educators, then, the *Catechism* is a doctrinal reference point. It does not impose a particular structure or methodology for teaching. Indeed, ‘the best structure for catechesis must be one which is suitable to particular concrete circumstances and cannot be established for the entire Church by a common catechism’. (Ratzinger, J. and Schonborn C., *Brief Introduction to the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Rome, 1994, pp. 26–27).

Figure 4.2

The content of the actual syllabus is given structure by the following organising strands or content areas which reflect the themes common to Religious Education syllabuses across Australia.

The content of each strand generates statements of stage outcomes and key concepts. These are served, in turn, by unit outcomes.



*'Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing and move towards the same goal.'*

*Dei Verbum, n. 9 in The Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 80*

*'In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength ...'*

*The Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 104*

Continuity between the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and *Sharing Our Story* has been ensured by:

- referring constantly to the *Catechism* during the processes of identifying key concepts, developing stage outcomes and structuring syllabus scope and sequence
- including appropriate references to and quotations from the *Catechism* in unit outlines
- developing a grid which cross-references the doctrinal content of the two documents.

### Connecting The *Catechism* and *Sharing Our Story*

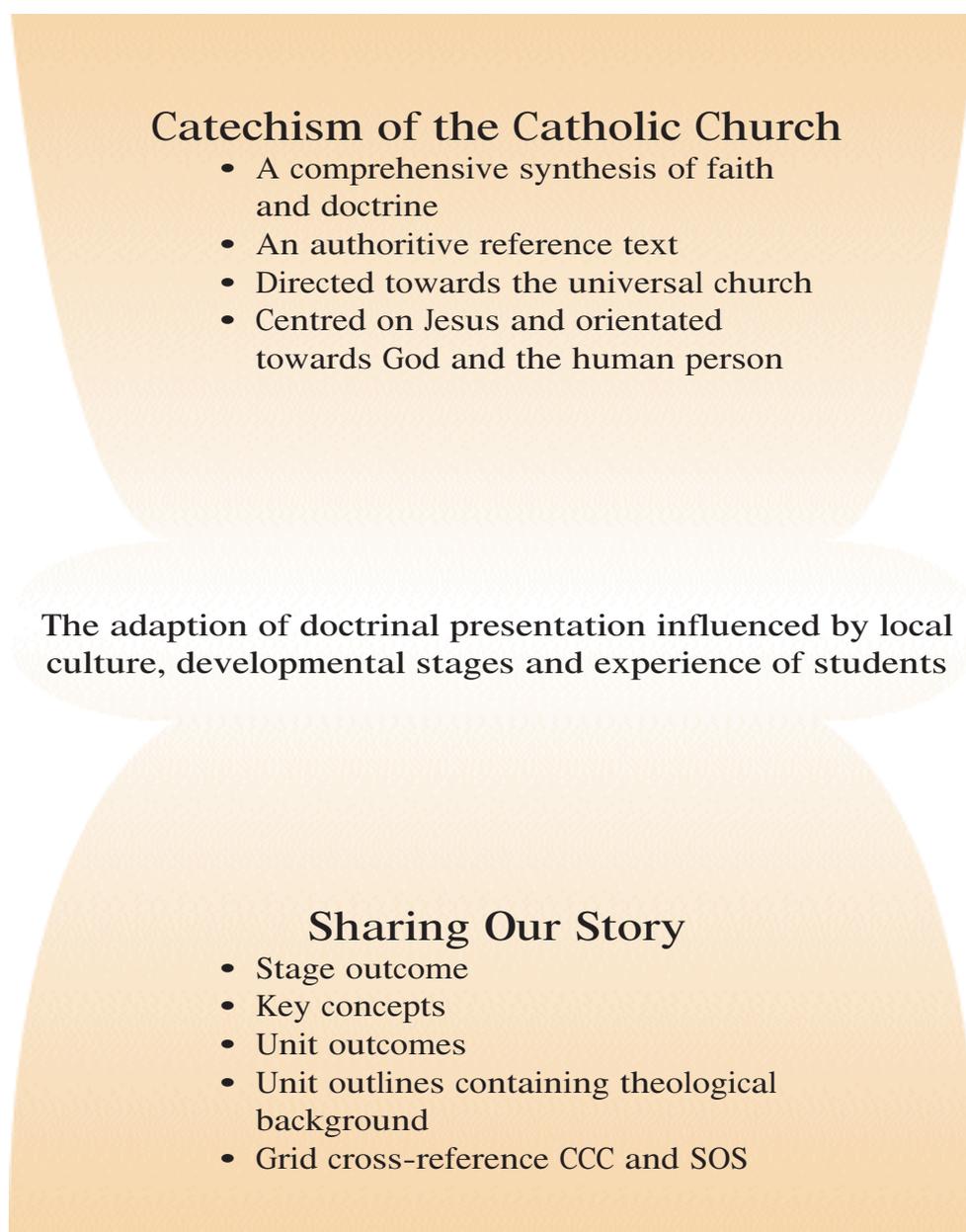


Figure 4.3

# Authentic Religious Education

‘The basic criterion... should be that of two-fold fidelity to God and to man, a fundamental principle for the whole Church. This implies an ability to marry perfect doctrinal fidelity with a profound adaptation to man’s needs, taking into consideration the psychology of age and the socio-cultural context in which he lives.’

Religious education programs must be

- ‘linked with the real life of the generation to which they are addressed, showing close acquaintance with its anxieties and questionings, struggles and hopes’
- try ‘to speak meaningfully to this generation’
- ‘really aim to give to those who use them a better knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, aimed at true conversion and a life more in conformity with God’s will’.

*Catechesis in Our Time n. 49 in General Directory for Catechesis n. 283 cf. also nn. 111-113, 203*

Figure 4.3



*‘Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.’*

*2 Timothy 1: 13–14*

## 4.3 The Methodology

The *General Directory for Catechesis* reminds us that classroom-based Religious Education should ‘appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines’ (n. 73). This means that contemporary research into quality teaching and learning should make an appropriate impact on the school’s Religious Education program. As with all other areas of the curriculum, the teacher is challenged to design classroom learning experiences that respect the integrity of the material to be studied while being appropriate to the developmental stage, background, experience and other personal qualities of the learners.

### (A) Quality Teaching and Learning

Many factors contribute to successful learning outcomes: individual ability and motivation, family background, personal choice, temperament, and so on. The school is relatively powerless in influencing these to a marked degree. It is within its scope, however, to intensify its impact on the quality of the teaching and learning in the classroom.



The research literature on quality teaching and learning, along with the lived experience of successful teachers, suggests a number of core principles or understandings which seem to underpin the quest for more successful classrooms. This has obvious implications for classroom-based Religious Education.

## Core Understandings

Quality teaching and learning are fostered by:

- **Quality relationships between teacher and students, and amongst students themselves**

Positive relationships based on respect, care and genuine affection help build a supportive classroom community where individuals feel safe enough to respect the opinions and feelings of others, and to challenge themselves.



- **Flexible teaching approaches designed to respond to individual differences in students' needs, abilities, interests and learning styles**

Students develop at different rates, come from different social, cultural and domestic backgrounds, and have different abilities, personal traits and preferred learning styles. A variety of approaches and activities maximise opportunities to capitalise on this rich diversity.

- **The encouragement of students to engage in independent planning, thinking and learning**

The more students take responsibility for their own learning, the more effective and meaningful this learning is likely to become.

- **The active engagement of students in activities that are purposeful and relevant**

Students are motivated and helped by having clear goals and in doing tasks that make sense to them.



- **Genuine interest in and enthusiasm about the topic on the part of the teacher**  
Students often take their cues from their teacher who in a number of ways, both overt and covert, defines the significance of a subject or topic.
- **Critical reflection by the teacher on his or her teaching practice, and by the student on his or her progress in learning**  
Learning is likely to be enhanced when teachers and students reflect on what is being taught and learnt, and the conditions that enhance or diminish the teaching and learning processes.



- **A classroom atmosphere that is characterised by interest, challenge and high expectations that are developmentally appropriate**  
Learning occurs when students respond to challenges to question existing ideas, to go beyond their present understanding and to develop new skills.

- **The assessing of student progress**  
Assessment is most effective when it is based on data gathered by a variety of strategies that include self and peer assessment. Students need to know the criteria and receive feedback on their perceived progress .
- **Students being assisted to make connections between old and new experiences and knowledge, and between different areas of knowledge**  
Students develop intellectually by reconstructing mental frameworks to accommodate new experiences and concepts. They need to see their development of knowledge and skills as an integrated whole.

- Students being encouraged to try new approaches and to solve problems in different ways

Students progress as learners by developing a range of thinking and learning styles which enable them to experience and integrate different ways of knowing.



- Teachers undertaking regular professional development

In the area of Religious Education this includes responding to opportunities for spiritual reflection and growth as well as ongoing development in Scripture, Theology and Religious Education.

*‘Modern men and women listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if they do listen to teachers it is because they are witnesses.’  
Evangelisation in the Modern World n. 41*

## *(B) Shared Christian Praxis*

The core understandings of how to foster quality teaching and learning are wholly consistent with the overall approach to Religious Education known as shared Christian praxis.

The term 'praxis' refers to the process of thinking about life and learning from it – reflection on action. People engage in praxis whenever they reflect on what is going on around them, including those events that they have initiated.

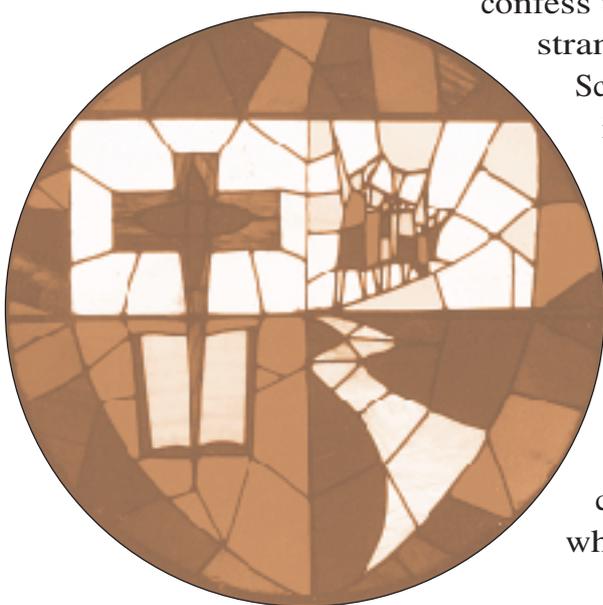
Praxis is shared when people reflect together on their lived experiences, on the wisdom of their community and, on the basis of this, shape their own future action.

Praxis is Christian when the Story and Vision is centred on the person and message of Jesus and the faith of his Church.

### **Praxis and Religious Development**

In the areas of catechesis and Religious Education, shared praxis has long provided an effective means of creatively bringing together life, culture and faith. The elements of this educative process can be identified throughout the teaching ministry of Jesus and are most obvious in his use of parables.

In the Emmaus story (Luke 24: 13–35) too, the dynamics of shared Christian praxis can be discerned. The disciples set out from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They confess their dashed hopes and tell their story to the stranger. Jesus listens before breaking open the Scriptures in relation to himself and his mission. He invites the disciples to renew their own understanding of salvation history and of his own passion and death in this light. They continue the conversation which culminates in the breaking and sharing of bread. The disciples recognise Jesus and make life-changing connections between their own experience and Jesus' words. With new insights and renewed faith, they return to Jerusalem, rejoining the community to tell their own story of transformation while hearing other stories of the Risen Christ.



Here are key movements: lived experience is reflected upon, the Scriptures are opened, links are made between life experience and the profound story and vision of Christ and the Scriptures, and the participants make a transformative response that is based on their reflection. In practice, of course, the journey in faith of students is both ongoing and recursive. Not every aspect of the Emmaus event will be present in every lesson.

*Table 4.1*

<p><b>SHARED CHRISTIAN PRAXIS</b></p>	<p><b>EMMAUS STORY</b></p>
<p><b>NAMING LIFE EXPERIENCE</b></p>	<p>‘Talking with each other about these things that had happened ...’</p>
<p><b>REFLECTION ON LIFE EXPERIENCE</b></p>	<p>Jesus said to them. ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’</p>
<p><b>CHRISTIAN STORY AND VISION</b></p>	<p>‘Jesus interpreted to them the things about Scriptures.’</p>
<p><b>INTEGRATION</b></p>	<p>‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?’</p> <p>‘Then their eyes were open and they recognised him.’</p>
<p><b>RESPONSE</b></p>	<p>‘That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem ... they told what had happened ...’</p>

*‘Intellectual development and growth as a Christian go forward hand in hand.’  
The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n. 51*

## An Overarching Approach

Around this core, Thomas Groome has developed an overarching approach to religious education and ministry called shared Christian praxis. While engaging in this, participants share a life experience which is then reflected upon; its meaning is deepened in the light of the Christian Story and Vision. In identifying the relationship between their personal and collective experience and the unfolding Christian story, participants are invited to consider appropriate responses.

Shared Christian praxis is not simply a teaching method or a series of strategies. Groome describes it as a 'meta-approach', 'a framework', 'a style of ministry', 'a way of being with people'. It is most appropriately understood as an overarching perspective and general way of proceeding that can be easily adapted in a great variety of situations.

The focus of shared Christian praxis is the whole learner – one who thinks, feels, relates, acts – who is making his or her own meaning in the context of a specific faith community. It is concerned with ways of knowing, with an emphasis on critical knowing which results from the critical analysis of ideas and practices in the context of group enquiry.



## The Local Context

Shared Christian praxis has been evolving since the late 1970s. It has been particularly influential in religious education in Australia where its impact is obvious in curriculum development and classroom practice.

In the classroom setting, it provides a powerful framework that can guide planning and interaction. Yet it is extremely flexible and open to adaptation in response to the varying cultural, faith and life experiences of different students.

Within the Diocese of Parramatta, shared Christian praxis has provided the overall approach to Religious Education since 1991. Here also it has been evolving: strengths have been built on, weaknesses and misinterpretations addressed. Central to it, as now pursued in the Diocese of Parramatta, are the five 'movements' which are preceded by a focusing activity. These are represented in Figure 4.4.



- **Focusing (F)**

The focusing activity introduces, orientates and motivates students to the study of the unit. It introduces the focusing theme or symbol and facilitates students' entry into the first movement. The focusing (or generative) theme or symbol provides a means of integrating and structuring teaching and learning. It relates both to experience and faith.

- **Naming (N)**

Participants are invited to name or express in some form their own or others' life experience that relates particularly to the topic.

- **Reflecting (RF)**

Participants are encouraged to reflect critically on what has already been expressed. Why do we do this? Why do others act the way they do? What options are there?

- **The Christian Story and Vision (CSV)**

Here the participants are given access to the Church's Faith and Tradition relevant to the focusing theme and topic. In *Sharing Our Story*, the content of the Christian Story and Vision is structured around the eight organising strands.

- **Integrating (I)**

Participants reflect on their own understandings, experience, views and questions in the light of the Christian Story and Vision; by placing the two in relationship they deepen their understanding.

- **Responding (R)**

In response to this integration, participants are challenged to identify appropriate ways of living the Christian life.

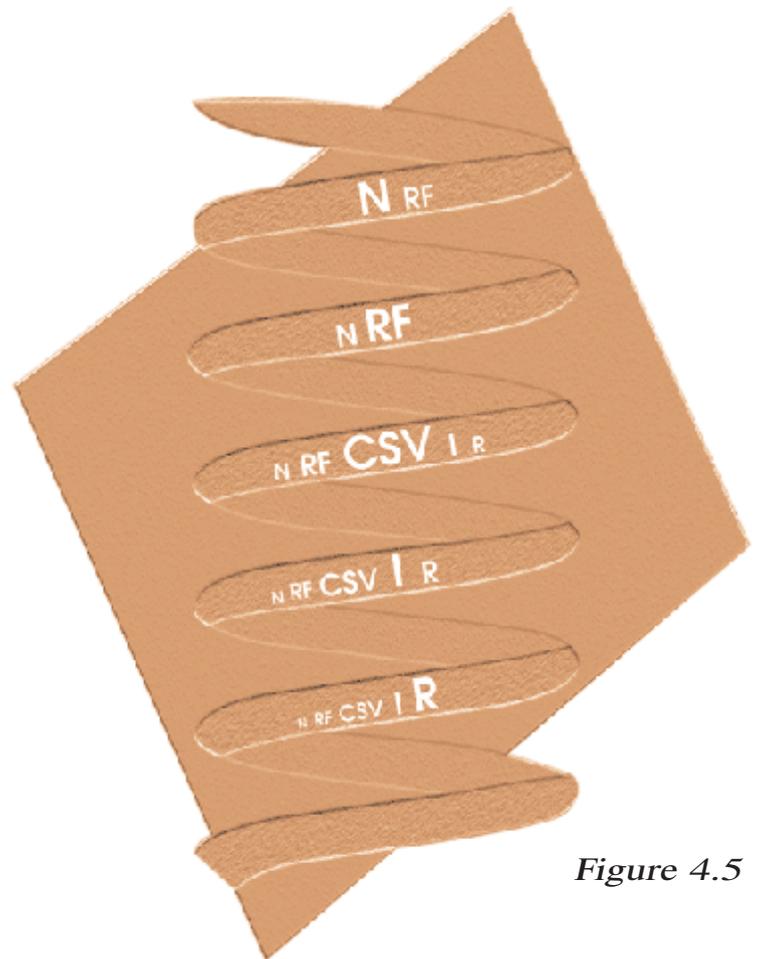


Figure 4.5

*The movements of shared Christian praxis should not be seen as a series of separate steps. While a particular lesson or strategy might focus on one movement, the others also have some influence, overlapping and blending in a dynamic process that supports the learner's search for deeper meaning.*

*In one sense, the teacher acts as a conductor drawing the different movements into a harmonious and unified relationship.*



The movements may occur within one lesson or over a much longer period, during the study of a unit or over several units. The movements are not necessarily focused on in sequence. It is the overall praxis ‘style’ that informs the teacher’s moment-by-moment initiative. In one sense, the teacher acts as a conductor drawing the different movements into a harmonious and unified relationship.

Actual methodology within or across a number of movements is neither prescribed nor limited. Teachers are encouraged to explore a comprehensive range of teaching approaches, to consider the extensive contribution of the research on quality teaching and learning, and to select learning experiences from as wide a range as possible.

*‘The Catholic teacher ... cannot be content simply to present Christian values as a set of abstract objectives to be admired, even if this is done positively and with imagination; they must be presented as values which generate human attitudes, and these attitudes must be encouraged in the students.’*

*Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, n. 30*

Here is one example of shared Christian praxis adapted from a suggestion by Thomas Groome. (*Sharing Faith*, p. 264)

Students are introduced to the notion of people having particular hopes and dreams for themselves and the world. They are invited to name and share some of their own hopes and dreams. Through discussion they explore and expand on what they and their companions have said.

Having named and reflected, they are given access to Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God as an empowerment of people's hopes and dreams.

As an aid to integrating the various movements, students are invited to engage in the following activity:

*Looking back at the hopes and dreams you shared at the beginning of class, and having studied how Jesus invites and empowers us to live into the dream of the kingdom of God, what are the hopes and dreams that you now see us being called to live?*

*Imagine you hear that Jesus is in a nearby city preaching on the kingdom of God. Write Jesus a short letter telling him your greatest hopes for your family, your neighbourhood, and for the world.*

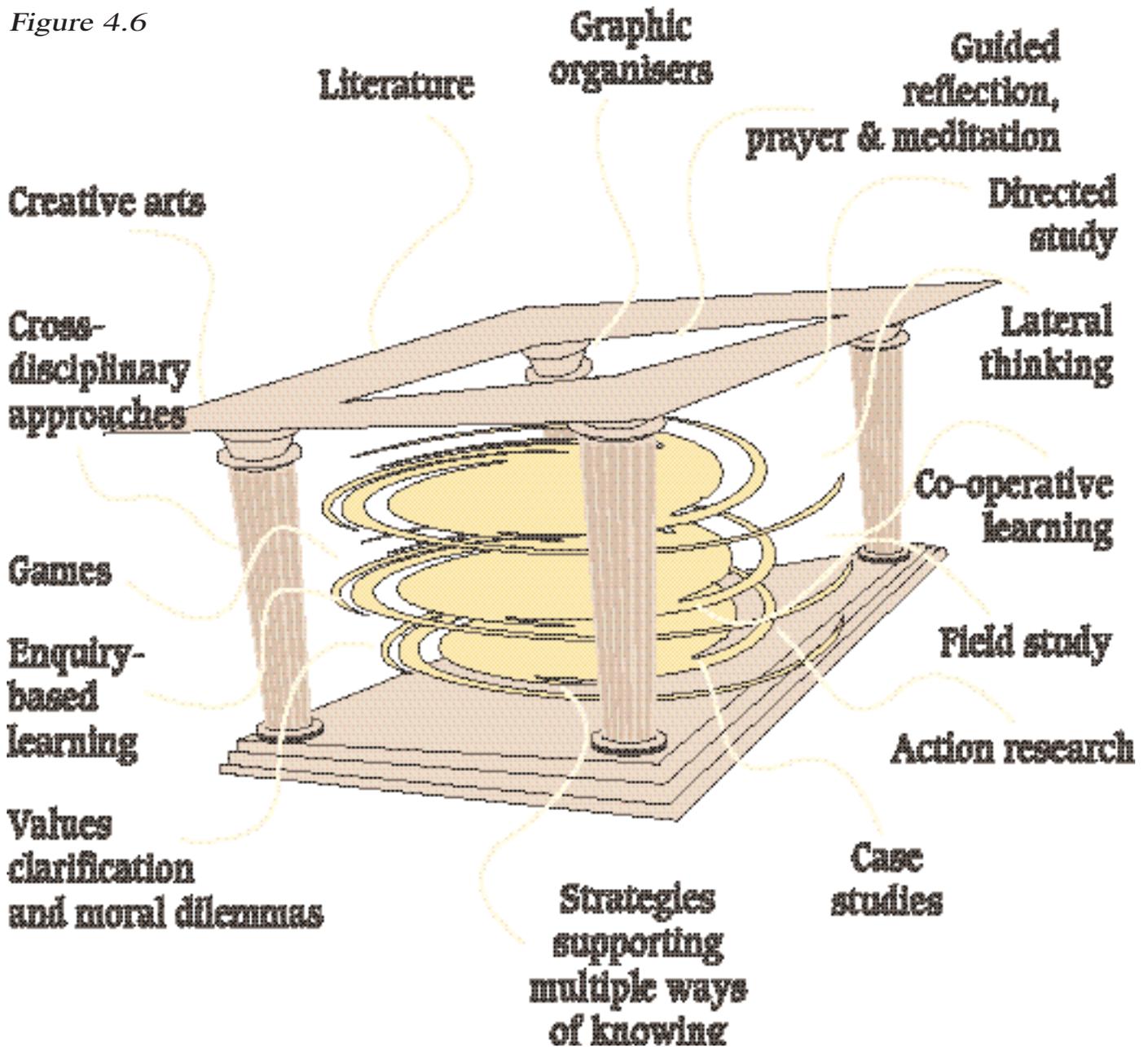
*Now write what Jesus might answer you.*

Finally, they are invited to respond to this challenge:

*Examine Jesus' answer to your letter. Choose some things you will try to do this week to help bring about the kingdom of God: in your family, in your parish, in your neighbourhood*

In the preparation of the published units, every attempt has been made to model diversity. Teachers at every stage are encouraged to extend this creatively so that the best of current classroom practice is in evidence in Religious Education lessons.

Figure 4.6



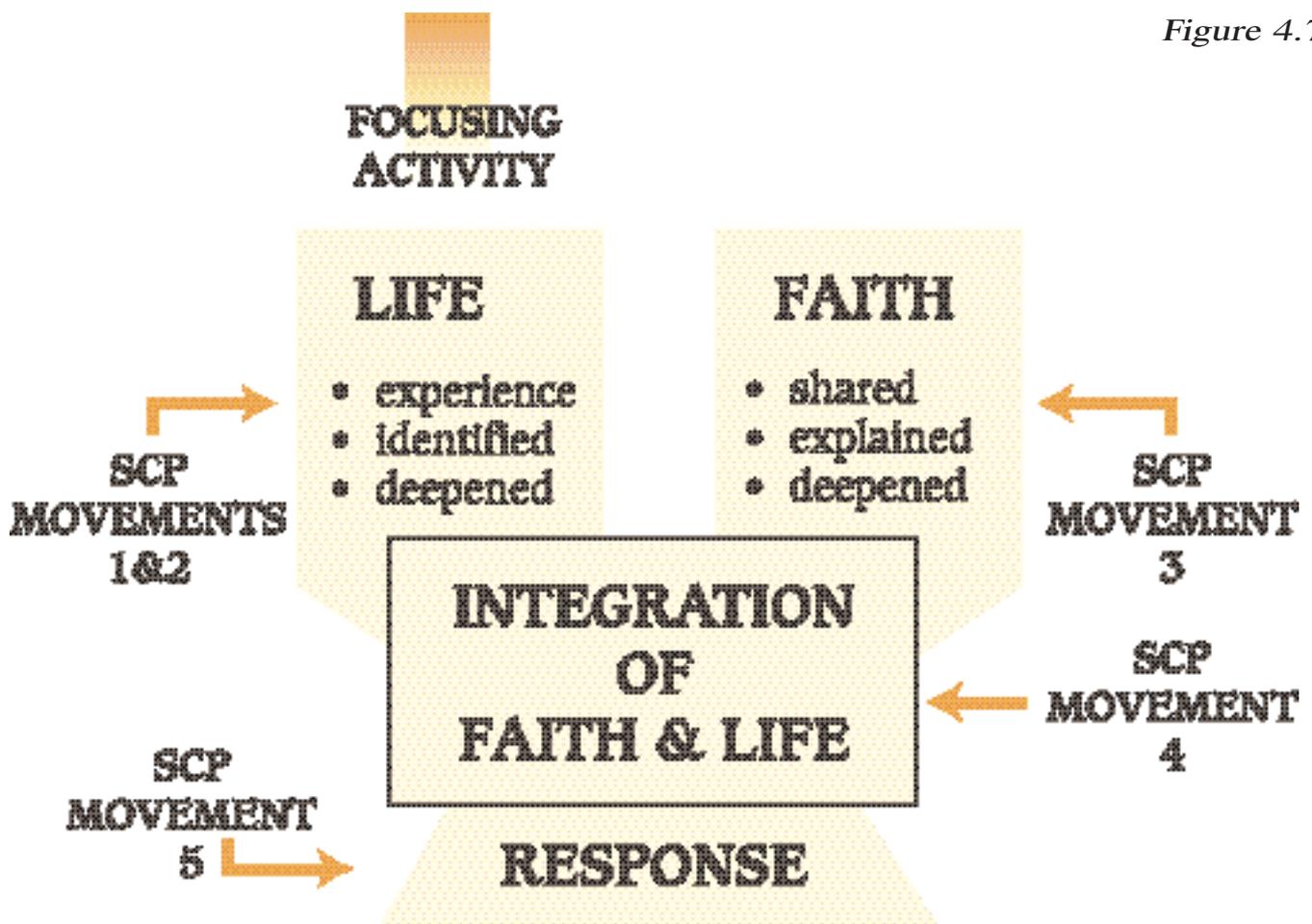
Shared Christian praxis is an overall way of approaching religious education. It is like an open-courtyard or market-place which accommodates many diverse teaching and learning strategies.

## Practical Implications

Conscious of the various complementary perspectives identified in this section, it is suggested that in classrooms faithful to the spirit of *Sharing Our Story*, the following will be in evidence:

- A faithful presentation of Church teaching.
- An overarching praxis mindset and style designed to develop students' capacities to think and know critically and to reflect on present experience in the light of knowledge of the Christian Story and Vision.

Figure 4.7



- A general atmosphere of safety, support, respect, enthusiasm and challenge.
- Student understanding of the nature and purpose of the Religious Education program, specific classroom activities and desired outcomes.

- Flexibility in teaching styles and a responsiveness to ‘the teachable moment’.
- New information and concepts being linked to students’ existing knowledge and experience.
- At different times, students working individually and in groups as well as within the whole class.
- Ongoing observation of students’ progress accompanied by appropriate feedback about progress towards desired outcomes, the evaluation of individual units and the program as a whole.
- Students taking some responsibility for their own learning, for planning, for exercising some choice in selecting activities and for reflecting on personal progress.
- High, but realistic, expectations of behaviour, commitment and achievement.
- Tolerance of different opinions and encouragement to struggle with challenging ideas and questions.
- Connections continually being made between the surrounding culture and the vision of the Gospel, and between Religious Education in the classroom and the life of the parish and the wider church.
- Attention to stage and unit outcomes in planning, teaching, assessing and evaluating.
- Appropriate opportunities for students to translate values and beliefs into actions.

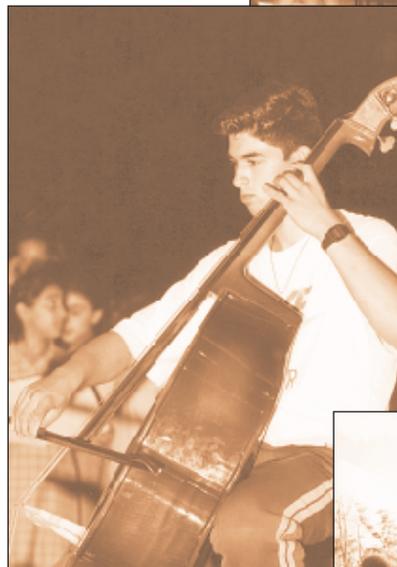
*‘Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.’*

*Luke 24:35*

## (C) *Ways of Learning and Knowing and the Selection of Activities*

Thomas Groome describes the intent of shared Christian praxis as ‘wisdom in the Christian faith’ (1991:296). The *active* and *reflective* aspects of shared Christian praxis promote the development within students of a critical consciousness of their own identity and interaction with the world. The *creative* aspect of shared Christian praxis promotes the students’ exploration of a new consciousness and way of being in the world inspired by the Christian Story and Vision. Religious Education, for Groome, is an enterprise of *information* and *formation* that empowers people to *transform* themselves and their world. The insights of shared Christian praxis are complemented by the contributions of many theorists and researchers who focus on the different ways in which learners process information and experiences.

Current educational research reminds teachers that learners can be expected to favour different ways of thinking and learning. Some, for instance, have a natural preference for learning through interaction with others, while others prefer to focus them on the experience itself and their more personal exploration of it. Some are quite spontaneous, responding readily to challenges and favouring environments that are unstructured where they can pursue goals that are open-ended. Others have a natural preference for tight structures which help them to know exactly what is required and where they can build from parts to the whole in a systematic fashion.



What is important is that learners have access to a range of ways of making meaning, of being more totally engaged in the learning process and therefore in knowing more fully. Understanding preferred styles of processing, and being able to extend different styles through different tasks, is a large part of what learning *how to learn* is all about. The teacher fosters quality learning by helping the student move around the full range of styles or modes of processing thus making personal meaning in a comprehensive way.

One researcher in this area is Julia Atkin whose Integral Learning model provides a synthesis of the many ways of understanding, thinking and learning, and prompts translation into very practical terms.

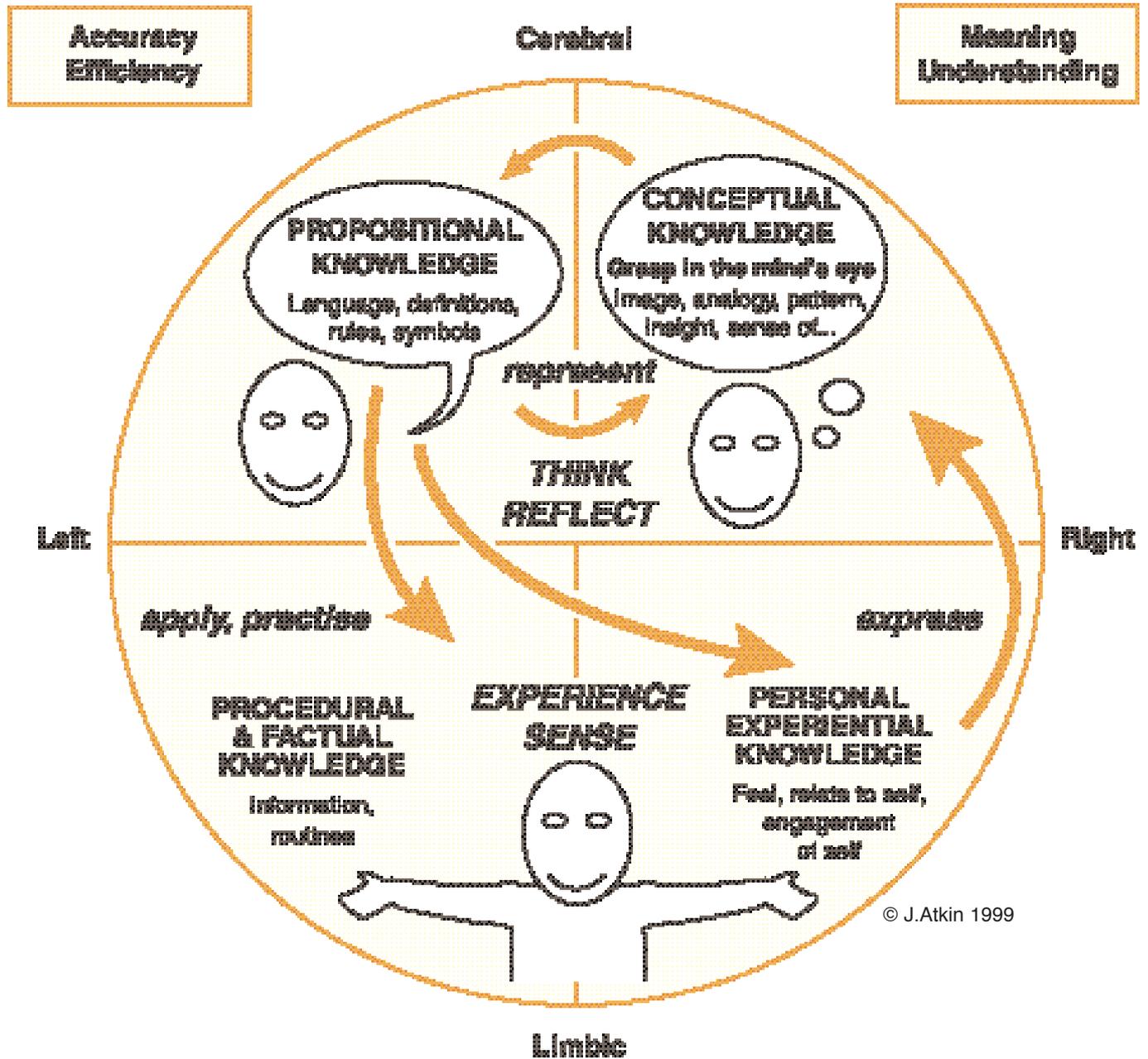
At its most practical level, this approach encourages the teacher:

- to recognise the different modes of thinking and learning
- to help students to identify their own preferred thinking and learning style, and become more efficient in using it
- to expose students to a range of learning experiences that extend their processing style to make personal meaning in a comprehensive way
- to help students identify and use the most appropriate thinking and learning styles for the task



# Learning as integration of experience, reflection, imagination, action

Figure 4.8



The model has been adapted by unit writers in the *Sharing Our Story* project to ensure a richness of suggested learning activities that help students to construct personal meaning in as comprehensive a way as possible. Hence, the suggested activities cover a range of thinking and learning styles and are clustered according to four major ways of knowing.

# The Integral Learning Model as adapted by Unit Writers

Figure 4.10

A. Knowledge based on fact, information, definitions, procedures and rules.

Asks: *What ...? What proof ...?*

D. Knowledge based on designing, exploring, connecting, patterning and metaphor-making.

Asks: *What ...? and What if ...?*

**Teaching, learning and assessment strategies**  
*Activities promoting knowing based on fact, information, definitions, procedures, rules. Ask "How?", "What?" and "When?"*

- List 10 things that you love being involved in. (05)
- Research information about the structure of your family. (05)
- Find out what the school motto and what it means. (05)
- List the groups to which you belong. (01)
- Complete a worksheet on groups. (01)
- Define the meaning of initiation. (01)
- Research initiation processes in a non-Christian religion. (01)
- Study the cartoon on initiation in the early church and present a sequence for the events. (03,4,6)
- Interview a parent or family member to find out details about your initiation. (01,4,6)
- Research in small groups the role and symbols of Baptism or Confirmation and report to the class. (01,4,6)
- Research in small groups rites of initiation in other Christian traditions and present to the class. (04)
- Brainstorm the meaning of belonging and commitment and list ways to live out the commitment. (01)

**UNIT OUTCOMES**

- Characteristics of the process of initiation across a range of cultures and religions.
- Initiation into the school as a Catholic community with a special tradition, nature and mission.
- Significance of the stages of catechesis with reference to liturgical rites.
- Compare and contrast Catholic RCIA with one other Christian tradition.
- The experience, challenges and opportunities of adolescence.

**Activities promoting knowing based on structure, order, planning, following rules, practising. Ask "How?", "What?" and "When?"**

- Research information about the members of your family. (03)
- Prepare a report about the school name or patron. (02)
- Describe some examples of initiation in secular groups. (01)
- Answer questions about "Kne-Deep-the-Frog". (01)
- Present in pairs form your research on initiation. (01)
- Read and answer questions about Aboriginal initiation. (01)
- Explain how the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist initiate a person into full membership of the Christian community. (01,4,6)
- Construct a time-line on the development of the sacraments of initiation. (03,4,6)
- Construct a find-a-word using key words from this topic. (04)
- Read and answer questions about the scripture passage (John 13:1-17). (03)
- Identify patterns of initiation across a range of religions and cultures. (01)

Sharing Our Story K-12 • Religious Education Curriculum

B. Knowledge based on structure, order, planning, following rules and practising.

Asks: *How ...? What ...? and When ...?*

**Teaching, learning and assessment strategies**  
*Activities promoting knowing based on designing, connecting, exploring, patterning, metaphor-making. Ask "Why?" & "What if?"*

- Create a seasonal badge related to the topic. (04)
- Draw a self-portrait linked to the topic. (05)
- Design a collage to represent yourself as a person experiencing initiation. (05)
- Design an advertising campaign to showcase your best talents. (05)
- Draw a diagram of your family tree. (05)
- Design a family crest. (05)
- Complete symbols for the groups to which you belong. (01)
- Dramatise passages such as Acts 2. (01,4,5)
- Draw a scene from "Kne-Deep-the-Frog". (04)
- Read Mark 1:9-11 and then design a baptismal certificate for Jesus. (03,4,6)
- Design a Baptismal Certificate for yourself. (03,4,6)
- Prepare a collage of the symbols of the Sacrament of Initiation. (01,4,6)
- Reflect on the scripture reading (Gal 1:21-24) and then create a visual response. (03)

**FOCUSING ACTIVITIES, THEMES AND SYMBOLS**

**ACTIVITIES:** group dynamics such as acceptance, hostility, relating, communicating, problem solving, drama or role plays where students must choose groups.

**THEMES:** belonging to a family, the family tree, community, relating, initiation

**SYMBOLS:** those relating to school's patron, crest and motto. These symbols could be displayed in the room. Symbols of initiation, instruction, atonement, sacramentality, culture, religion, spirituality.

**Activities promoting knowing based on sharing, discussing, experiencing, sensing, relating, relating to self/others. Ask "What meaning and significance does this have for me?"**

- Read and discuss "A Big Change" and "The Adversity Rabbit" in terms of key themes' concepts. (02,3)
- Write a letter of introduction for yourself. (05)
- Prepare an acoustic or mnemonic using the word BAPTISM. (03)
- Reflect on the school motto and compose a prayer based on the motto. (02)
- Design your own rite of initiation for adolescence. (01-6)
- Discuss the school crest designed and what it represents. (02)
- Discuss in small groups experiences of primary school's secondary school. (02)
- Discuss with a partner the groups to which you belong. (01)
- Read "Kne-Deep-the-Frog" and discuss in small groups its meaning. (01)
- Read "Priscilla's Thoughts about her Christian Initiation" and design a symbol capturing her experiences. (03,4,6)
- Write a song, poem or story about friendship, belonging or commitment. (05)
- Journal your reflections on what you know of your own Baptism. (02)
- Develop a role play about how the early church developed a sense of belonging based on Acts 2:42-47. (01)

Unit 4rc1 • Initiation and Belonging

C. Knowledge based on sharing, discussing, experiencing, sensing, intuiting, and relating to self and others.

Asks: *What has this to do with me?*

The application of this is based on the belief that, while individuals have preferred learning styles, 'human learning is deepened and amplified by integrating our multiple ways of knowing'. Effective educators, 'teach to *engage and integrate* all modes of processing regardless of personal thinking style'. (Julia Atkin, 1999)

The model itself has a particular relevance in Religious Education where some lessons will require mainly the exercise of logical, analytical thinking while others will call for a particular empathy or sensitivity and an ability to express oneself in a more artistic manner.



Just as students commit to memory the words of poems and songs, and learn significant formulas in the general curriculum, so the student of Religious Education learns certain prayers, texts from the Bible and the liturgy, and key statements of Catholic belief. Consistent with a contemporary understanding of learning, memorisation and a clear articulation of concepts always follows explanation and is based on understanding.

*'After three days, they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.'*

*Luke 2:46-47*

# *Characteristics of Desirable Classroom Religious Education Programs*

By way of summary and as a checklist for possible use in program evaluation, desirable Religious Education programs:

1. develop factual knowledge of the essentials of the Catholic faith: its story, teachings, worship and ways of living the Christian life
2. are professionally rigorous, featuring the elements common to all other courses of study: challenging content, continuity, relevance to learners, adequate resources, varied teaching and learning strategies, valid assessment and ongoing evaluation
3. reflect a critical discernment in drawing from the surrounding educational culture as they have their own specific aims and strong commitment to reflective practice and Catholic vision of the human person and world
4. are appropriate to the developmental stage of the learner and are sensitive to the claims of individual differences
5. connect at the point of learners' experience, building on prior personal knowledge and home experiences in recognition of the key role of parents
6. recognise the significance of the parish community in Catholic life
7. are attentive and responsive to the local context
8. can, at times, challenge students to reflect critically on how they lead their lives
9. are given appropriate prominence in the school's curriculum; this is reflected in the time allocated to the religious education program
10. are an integral part of the total curriculum and are linked to other religious activities including school prayers and liturgies, retreats, Christian outreach and social justice initiatives and parish-based sacramental programs.

## 4.4 Curriculum Structure

The syllabus in *Sharing Our Story* is structured around stage outcomes. This is the structural model of syllabuses issued by the NSW Board of Studies. Its use in *Sharing Our Story* ensures consistency in terminology and approaches to planning between Religious Education and other curriculum areas.

### Context

Since the 1980s curriculum development in general has been strongly influenced by international and national economic restructuring. The attention given to competing market forces in business and industry has been reflected in education where a strengthening interest has developed in indicators of performance, benchmarks and demonstrable outcomes.

The overarching educational approach or philosophy that has arisen in response to this wider political and economic agenda is outcomes-based education.

The NSW Board of Studies introduced stage outcomes into its syllabuses in 1991 in order to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Act 1990. It defines outcomes as 'explicit statements of the knowledge, skills and understandings expected to be learned by students' (NSW Board of Studies, 'Syllabus Model Using Stage Outcomes', Sydney, 1996, p.5). In Board of Studies syllabuses, outcomes are related to the stages of schooling and emerge logically from the aims, objectives and content of the syllabus.

### Advantages of an Outcomes-based Approach

1. It makes teaching and learning more precise and explicit.
2. It helps identify the individual student's progress in learning.
3. It links planning, teaching, assessing and reporting.
4. It respects diversity amongst students and allows for a variety of methods of organising and teaching.
5. It helps to identify gaps and overlap in the curriculum.
6. It clarifies expectations and strengthens the instructional dimension of the classroom program.
7. It provides a useful framework and a language for reporting.

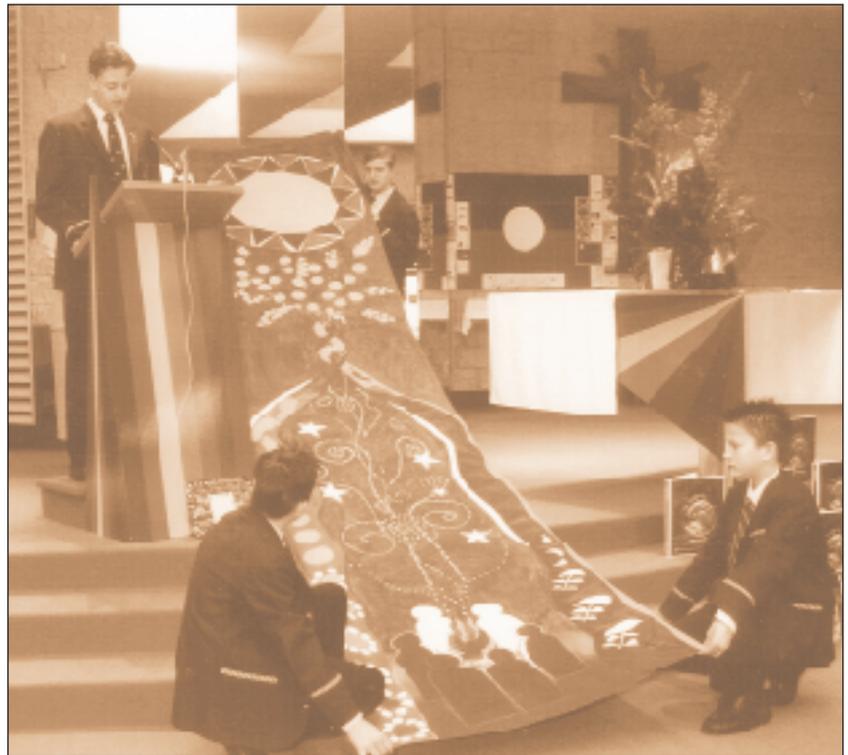
## Outcomes-based Approaches and Religious Education

In recent years, a new generation of Religious Education syllabuses in Australia has incorporated an outcomes-based structure. This has helped to establish the status of Religious Education within the formal, academic program of the school. At the secondary level, it facilitates the State accreditation of certain courses in the study of religion.

### The Need for Discernment

Religious educators need to place outcomes-based education within a total philosophy that is grounded in a Christian view of the nature of the human person, of culture and society, and of the purpose of Catholic schooling.

If implemented in a narrow and inflexible manner, an outcomes-based approach can fragment learning and distract teachers from holistic approaches so important in Religious Education, which often explores mystery and promotes the search for personal meaning.



Teachers know that very desirable outcomes of learning experiences are often not foreseen, and that the needs and experiences of individual students should be considered as important starting points for planning. They know, too, that an inappropriate preoccupation with assessing outcomes can diminish the significance given to education in values and attitudes which are more difficult to assess than knowledge and skills.

Nevertheless, an outcomes-based framework, when used with discernment and discretion, and in the context of Catholic educational philosophy, can provide a valuable curriculum tool that helps ensure continuity, and that links planning, teaching and learning, assessment, reporting and evaluation in a very productive manner.

*'Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of the prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.'*

*1 Thessalonians 5: 19-22*

As used in *Sharing Our Story* outcomes are:

- serving syllabus aims
- integrated with syllabus content and consistent with a shared Christian praxis approach
- linked explicitly to named values
- developmental, expressed in stages
- manageable in number.

## Unit Outcomes

Outcomes written for units contribute to progress towards the achievement of stage outcomes. They have a more specific focus and may require local adaptation and/or extension to ensure that they are relevant, meaningful and manageable. They articulate knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes and are linked to shared Christian praxis.

**Initiation and Belonging** 47C1

**Unit Focus**

*In this unit, students study initiation rites, drawing on their experience of 'passage' from primary to secondary school and their initiation into the community and life of a secondary school community. In studying rites of passage in other cultures, students will critically reflect on the experience and challenges of adolescence.*

**STAGE 4 OUTCOMES**

Students demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the sacraments, the sacramental history, symbols and rituals which are central to Catholic life, including the Church, initiation, reconcile and heal.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

**GOD**

4. speaking and calling us to be in all likelihood

**CHURCH**

5. containing various rites and cultural traditions

**UNIT OUTCOMES**

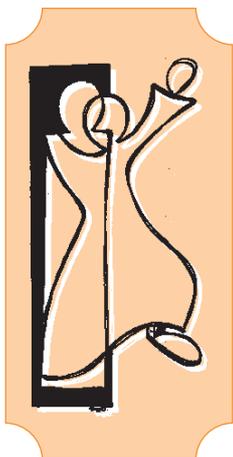
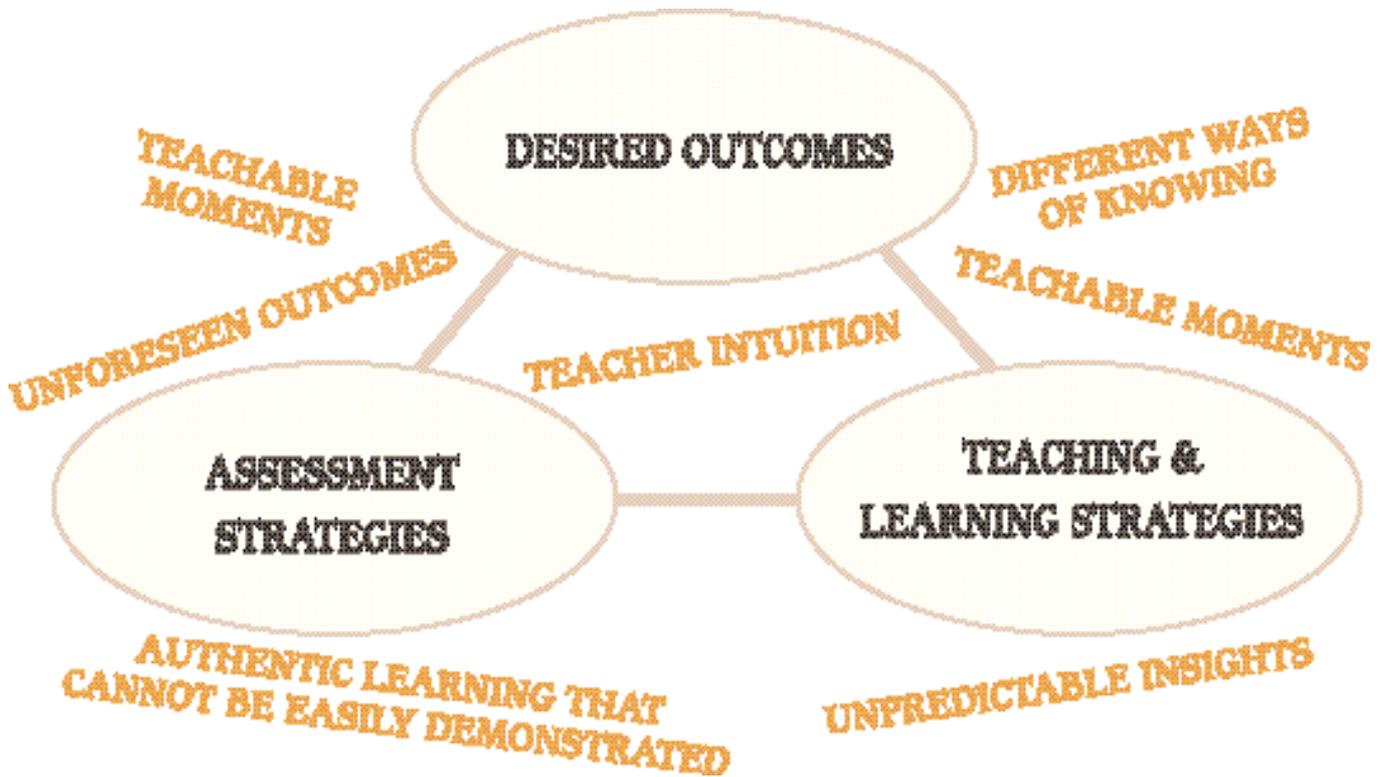
By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. describe and explain characteristics of the process of initiation into groups, by generalising from experience and the study of initiation rites in other cultures and religions
2. reflect critically upon their experience of initiation into the school as a Catholic community with a special mission, nature and mission
3. evaluate the significance of the various periods of the catechumenate with reference to its liturgical rites
4. compare and contrast the celebration of the sacraments of initiation in the Church with initiation in other cultures of the Catholic Church
5. analyse responses to the experience, challenges and opportunities associated with adolescence as a stage of development.

**DURATION:**  
5-7 weeks

# Outcomes and the Complexity of Teaching and Learning

Figure 4.9



Compose your own diagram indicating how you see the relationship between planning, teaching, learning and assessing. Share with a colleague.

In what ways can your most successful experiences in working with outcomes in other curriculum areas be applied in implementing *Sharing Our Story*?

## 4.5 Assessment

Assessment is a vital part of any curriculum process. Within the stage–outcomes structure adopted in *Sharing Our Story*, planning, teaching and learning, assessing and reporting are closely linked.



The goal of planning, teaching and assessing is student achievement; reporting is the communication of that achievement. Assessment itself is the process of gathering and interpreting information about student progress for a variety of purposes. These include:

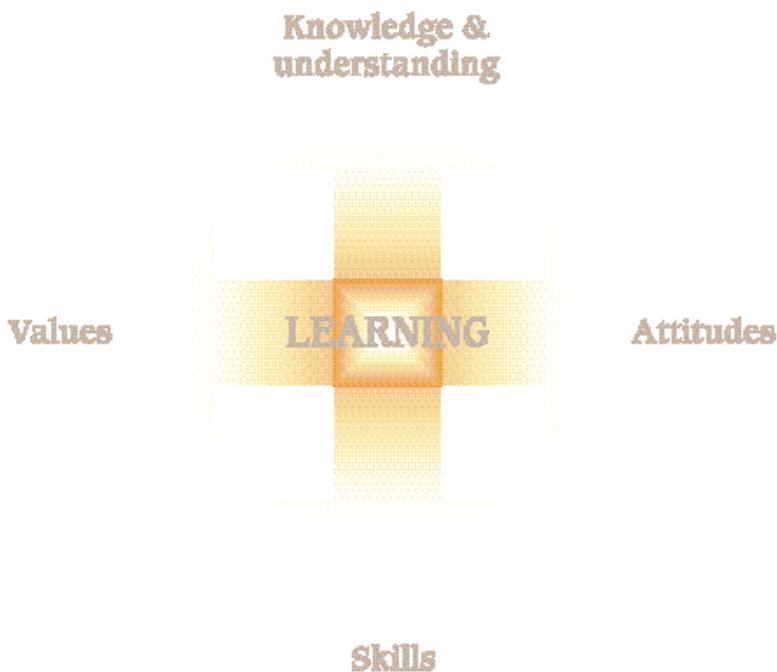
- to encourage more effective learning
  - to foster students' reflection on their learning
  - to indicate the degree to which students are progressing towards the achievement of program aims and stage outcomes
  - to highlight the needs of individual students
  - to assist teachers to improve their teaching methods
- to provide information that will assist in the evaluation of the Religious Education program and of individual units and activities
  - to provide a basis for reporting on student progress to parents and to the students themselves.

## Assessment in Religious Education

As in all other subjects, disciplines and curriculum areas, assessment has an important function in Religious Education. Here, two main areas require consideration: (i) knowledge and skills, (ii) values and attitudes.

While there is obvious overlap between the two, each retains its own distinguishing features.

*Figure 4.10*



Progress in knowledge and skills is appropriately inferred from what students can explain, demonstrate, make or perform. Skills, particularly, can be assessed by observation of the steps taken to reach an insight or solve a problem, or by the quality of a product (eg written assignment, illustration, project) or performance (eg dramatic presentation, group contribution.)

Teachers may gather appropriate data from quizzes and tests, and by requiring students to provide verbal or written recounts, narratives, reports and explanations, to carry out instructions, to create mind maps, to label, match, classify and analyse, to engage in role plays and present visual displays.

Students should understand that assessment in this area requires the demonstration of knowledge and skills that have been acquired or further developed before or during the course.

The second area is, in many ways, more challenging. Values and attitudes are integral to every genuinely educative curriculum and are at the heart of Religious Education. However, they do not lend themselves to precise assessment.

Useful observations can be made if teachers are alert to demonstrations of personal values and attitudes in classroom discussions and presentations, as well as in spontaneous comments and suggestions. Role plays and artwork, for instance, and conversations about them, provide valuable insights as do the day-to-day interactions of students working with others in a variety of situations. Also helpful are moral dilemma discussions, surveys, open-item questionnaires, rating scales and open-ended questions in general.

Assessment in this domain requires particular sensitivity since it touches the development of personal awareness, the emotional life and the pathway towards maturity. In general, it does not provide material for comparisons amongst peers, or for reports to parents and others, although it would be appropriate for teachers to discuss and report on students' levels of participation, cooperation and interest in the study of Religious Education. A student's personal faith is not the subject of assessment or reporting within Religious Education.

## Assessment and Outcomes

The advent of outcomes-based education has brought an increased emphasis on assessment. This is particularly relevant to this Religious Education curriculum, the syllabus component of which is given structure by a stage outcomes approach.

The focus of outcomes-based education is the demonstration of measurable achievement of pre-determined outcomes.

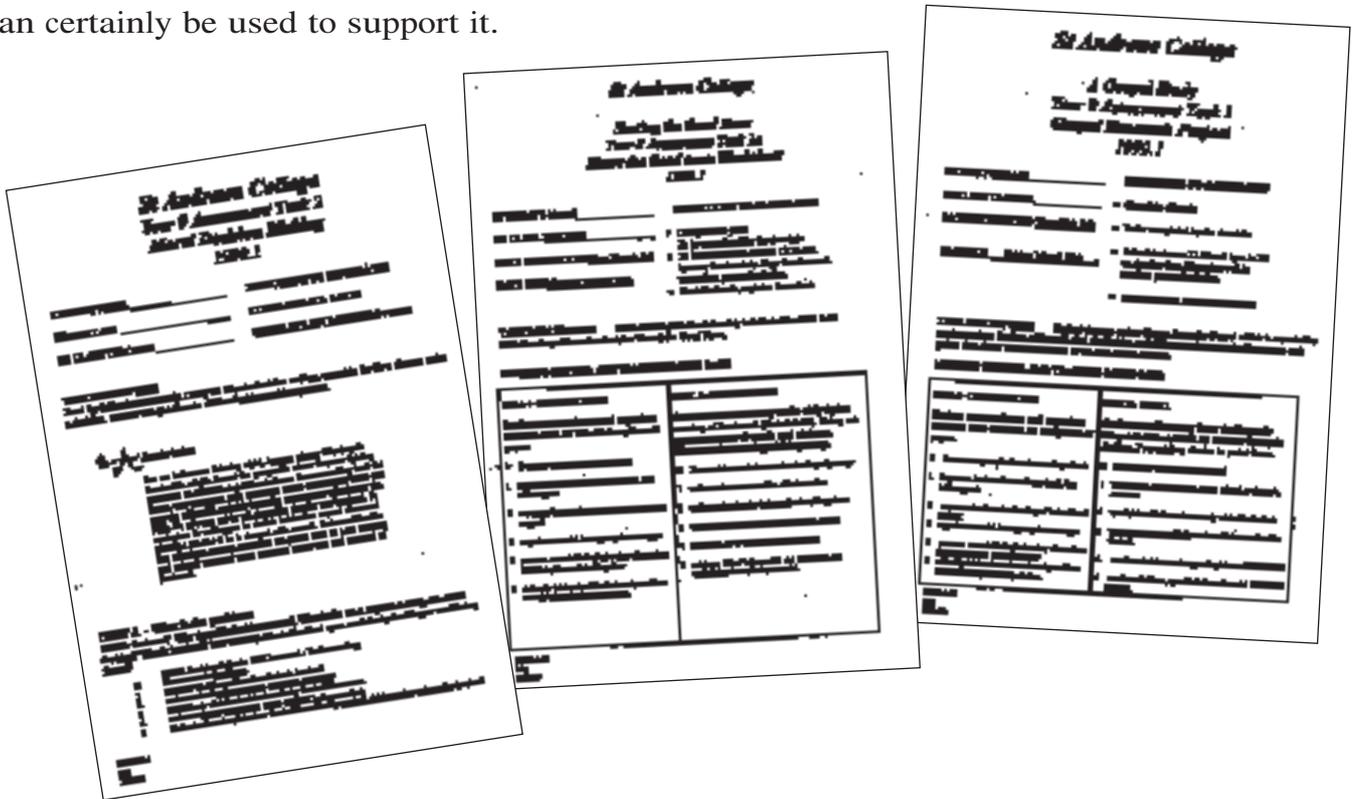
This has the advantage of making planning and teaching more explicit. It speaks the language of individual competence and achievement rather than pass and fail, and to that degree, respects the dignity of the learner and celebrates personal achievement.

In this curriculum, stage and unit outcomes, which are manageable in number, provide valuable reference points for planning, teaching and assessing.

Religious educators are aware of the limitations of this approach in adequately responding to the less tangible and highly personal aspects of religious development. Certainly, the cognitive aspects of religious education and some behaviours and skills are amenable to this type of assessment.

Certain aspects of 'knowing' and of critical reflection and integration, however, while being open to assessment, defy precise measurement.

The contemporary approach to assessment and the educational philosophy on which it is based, while not defining or dominating Religious Education, can certainly be used to support it.



### Unforeseen Outcomes

Many of the awakenings, achievements and new insights of students are intensely personal and individual. They may indicate very significant movement towards meeting the more profound aims of Religious Education. If shared Christian praxis is being successfully employed, individuals will find and express personal meaning in rich and varied ways.



Outcomes lose none of their significance because they are unforeseen. Such unanticipated outcomes are appropriately identified and incorporated into the assessment process.

## Assessment and Reflective Teaching

Assessment is best viewed as an aspect of genuinely reflective teaching based on *ongoing* observations. It is not confined to formal assessment tasks. Indeed, the most penetrating assessment often takes place during informal discussion or while individuals or groups are going about their normal work. Every activity within an RE lesson provides some data that will help an observant teacher to make some meaningful judgement about what and how learning is occurring.

## Assessment and Shared Christian Praxis

Approaches to assessment should support and strengthen the commitment to shared Christian praxis which sets the overarching style in this syllabus.

*Table 4.2*

<p>A praxis orientation, in particular, directs the teacher to indications that a student:</p>	<p>Movements of shared Christian praxis</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● reflects on personal experience, values and prejudices</li> <li>● is willing to respectfully hear and consider another's point of view</li> </ul>	<p>Naming and Reflection</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● has a knowledge and understanding of the Christian Story and Vision</li> </ul>	<p>Christian Story and Vision</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● makes connections between the experiences and actions of others and his or her own</li> <li>● uses imagination to express insights in words and symbols</li> <li>● brings ideas into a meaningful whole.</li> </ul>	<p>Integrating and Responding</p>

# Some Assessment Procedures

Table 4.3

Ways of Understanding	Typical Outcome Stems	Ways Students Might Demonstrate Achievement eg in a Scripture unit
Knowledge based on fact, information, definitions, procedures and rules	gather facts, recognise, name, label, list, recall, tell, recite, locate, identify, explain, recount, question	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● complete multiple-choice questions based on facts relating to biblical people or events</li> <li>● analyse the structure of Pauline letters</li> <li>● label a map of Judea in the time of Christ or a diagram of the Temple</li> <li>● match key words with illustrations or definitions</li> <li>● write an account of the passion and death of Christ based on Mark's Gospel</li> <li>● research the role of women in the early church</li> </ul>
Knowledge based on structure, order, planning, following rules and practising	outline principles, design, implement, organise, structure, practise skills, identify patterns in, summarise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● compare and contrast the literary features of parallel Gospel accounts</li> <li>● categorise selected scriptural passages according to their literary genre</li> <li>● locate scripture passages</li> <li>● design a data base to store information on the books of the Bible</li> <li>● sequence key events reported in the Acts of the Apostles</li> </ul>
Knowledge based on sharing, discussing, experiencing, sensing, intuiting and relating to self and others	participate in, perform, express, develop an appreciation of, debate, discuss, interview, dramatise, journal, empathise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● dramatise the parable of the Good Samaritan</li> <li>● role play a real-life situation or dilemma related to a gospel value</li> <li>● identify the personal thoughts and feelings of Moses at key points in his life</li> <li>● journal in response to a guided meditation on a Scripture passage</li> <li>● write a psalm using Australian imagery</li> </ul>
Knowledge based on designing, connecting, exploring, patterning and metaphor-making	predict, symbolise, visualise, explore, critique, evaluate, synthesise, experiment, integrate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● write a speech outlining a future based on Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God</li> <li>● design a symbol for the Good News</li> <li>● mind map the themes/events of John's Gospel</li> <li>● select music suitable for a liturgy of the Word</li> <li>● produce a slide/sound sequence on a biblical theme eg God's creative love</li> </ul>

## Partners in Assessment

Assessment is not the task of the teacher alone. Self-assessment and peer-assessment perform valuable complementary functions.

Self-assessment involves students in reflecting on and taking some responsibility for their own learning. For this to be effective, they need to understand the desired outcomes of units and specific learning activities and, also, to be open to unanticipated outcomes: personal insights, new knowledge, improved skills, growing appreciation of particular values.

Peer-assessment flourishes in a climate of cooperation and shared reflection. It is fostered by teachers who provide appropriate guidance and critical questions that will give focus to discussion.

The teacher's assessment role draws these other aspects into harmony. Its particular focus is on the growth of individuals and groups towards greater understanding, appreciation and competence and the greater effectiveness and fulfilment of teaching and learning. In reflecting upon the process, the teacher is led to evaluate both the effectiveness of his or her own methodology and the appropriateness of content.

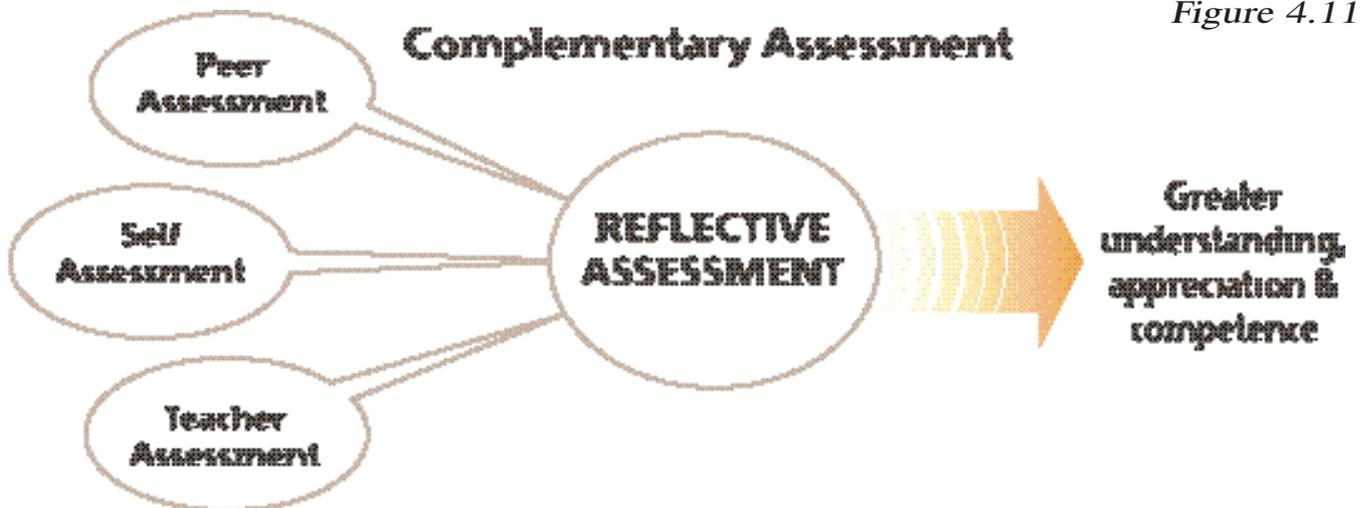


Figure 4.11

*'Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.'*

Mark 4:8

## 4.6 Reporting

Reporting is the communication of information about student progress. It can be written or verbal, formal or informal. It may have a range of audiences – the student, parents, school executive, the wider community – and a number of purposes including that of providing accountability. The form should be relevant to the purpose.

Reporting might take the form of:

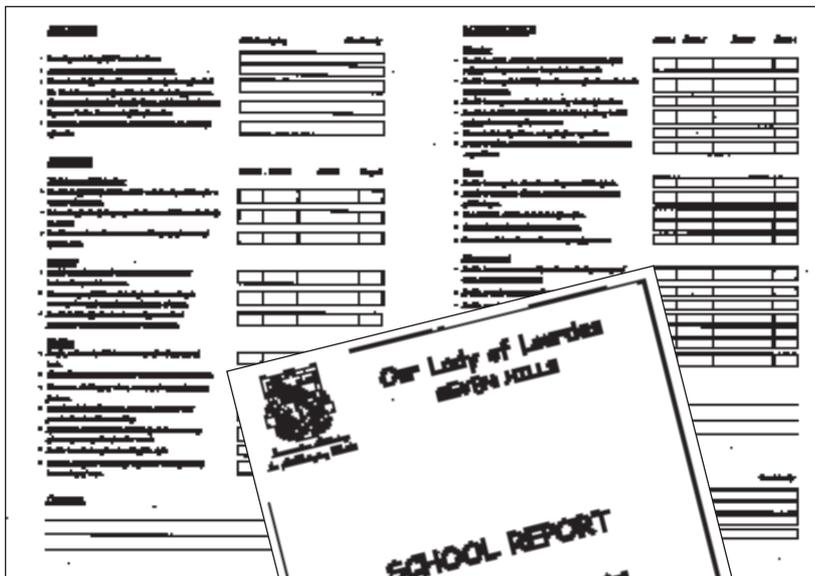
**Table 4.4**

A written statement	... often abbreviated through the use of scales, brief comments or marks. This provides parents and students with a summary of some learning achievements.
Interviews	... provide parents (and students) with opportunity to share observations, concerns and intentions, perhaps using student portfolios as a focus. They can also strengthen a sense of common purpose and partnership.
Information sheets	... provide parents and a more general audience with information about the learning opportunities and achievements of groups of students.
Newsletters and school annuals	... provide a wide audience with general information about major school initiatives taken in Religious Education.
Displays of work	... provide parents and students with demonstrations of achievement: productions, performances, exhibitions and portfolios.

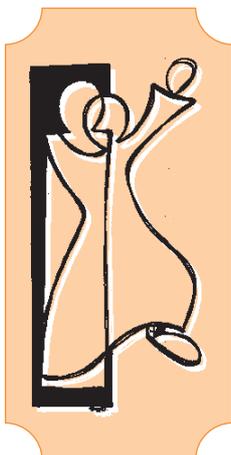
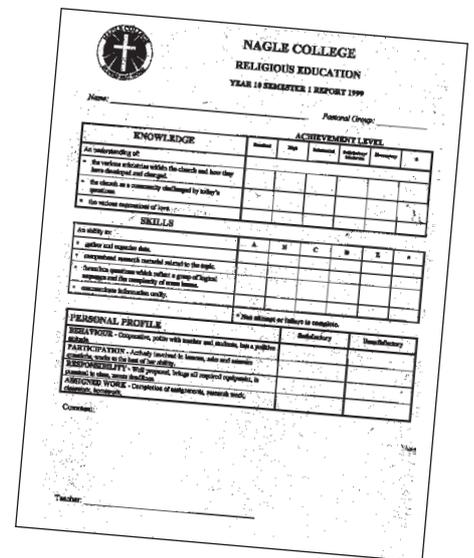
**NOTE :** For further information on outcomes-based assessment see the NSW Board of Studies publications, *Assessing and Reporting Using Stage Outcomes, (Part 1: Assessing and Part 2: Reporting)*.

If reporting is to reflect the spirit of *Sharing Our Story*, it should be done in ways that:

- are consistent with the school’s underlying philosophy and mission statement; for example, its commitment to individual worth, its understanding of ‘success’ and its attitude towards normative and/or competitive gradings
- acknowledge parents’ rights to be adequately informed of their child’s progress
- are meaningful, appropriate and understandable to the audience



- are appropriate to the stage of student development
- are sensitive to the individual student’s needs, seeking to build on achievements
- demonstrate links to stage outcomes
- foster productive school/home understanding and interaction.



What is the current approach to assessment in Religious Education at your school? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

# A Summary: Assessment and Reporting

Table 4.5

PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT & REPORTING	PROCEDURES WHICH REFLECT THESE PRINCIPLES...
1. Assessment procedures should be in harmony with the school's aims and especially with the aims of classroom-based Religious Education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● make explicit what is valued in the school, particularly in Religious Education.</li><li>● reveal a comprehensive understanding of learning and development, placing appropriate emphasis on values and attitudes.</li><li>● are subject themselves to regular evaluation.</li></ul>
2. Assessment procedures should respect the individual learner, foster self-esteem, encourage personal responsibility and enhance the relationship between teacher and student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● focus on individual achievement in moving towards desired outcomes.</li><li>● are based on criteria of achievement that are clear to the students.</li><li>● respect different needs, styles, abilities and cultural backgrounds.</li><li>● are appropriate to the stage of development of the learner.</li><li>● employ a variety of processes and are flexible in their application.</li><li>● foster a classroom climate of cooperation and shared responsibility.</li></ul>
3. Assessment should be part of the teaching and learning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● encourage students to reflect on their progress, to identify new insights, understandings and skills.</li><li>● clarify desired outcomes and, where appropriate, involve students in the selection of some assessment tasks.</li><li>● involve students in self-assessment and peer assessment as important components of the learning process.</li><li>● focus on how students are learning and making meaning as well as what they are learning.</li><li>● are flexible and responsive to emerging opportunities for observation and judgement.</li></ul>
4. Methods of reporting the results of assessment to students and parents should be clear, accurate, meaningful, supportive and sensitive to student needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● respond to parents' right to regular feedback.</li><li>● communicate clearly.</li><li>● reflect what is really valued in Religious Education, avoiding the trivialising of desired outcomes.</li><li>● encourage dialogue between parents, teachers and students.</li></ul>

## 4.7 Evaluation

In this context, evaluation is the process of reflecting on classroom practice, units and policies in Religious Education for the purpose of informing planning.

### Classroom Practice

- Is it appropriate to the stage of development of students?
- Does it exhibit an understanding of shared Christian praxis?
- Does it provide for the demonstration of desired outcomes by students?
- Does it encourage students to ask questions, make tentative formulations, explore ideas?
- Does it facilitate different types of learning and provide for different ways of knowing?
- Does it ensure an appropriate use of resources?



### Units of Work

- Are they practical and relevant?
- Do they generate student interest?
- Do they stimulate a broad range of activities?
- Do they stimulate teacher initiative and allow modification?

- Do they encourage linkage to other units and to learning areas other than Religious Education?
- To what extent were desired outcomes achieved? For which students?
- Do the assessment strategies assist future planning?

### Religious Education Policy

- Were the relevant people involved in its development?
- Does it ensure that syllabus requirements are met?
- Is it responsive to students' needs and to local conditions?
- Is it obviously inspired by the school's educational vision?
- Does it ensure a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate sequence of topics?
- Does it establish links between Religious Education and other areas of the curriculum and provide for the integration of Religious Education within the total curriculum?
- Does it link and identify classroom-based Religious Education with other aspects of Religious Education?

*'The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.'*

*Mark 6:30*