

Head, Heart and Hands Aligned: Ignatian-Constructive Alignment for Competency-Based Religious Education in Brazil

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Abstract

Brazil's competency-based National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC) obliges Religious-Education teachers to demonstrate measurable learning, yet Catholic schools traditionally privilege affective growth under the ethos of *cura personalis*. This conceptual article forges a bridge between Biggs's Constructive Alignment and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, re-stating BNCC competencies for Years 6-9 of lower-secondary education (*Ensino Fundamental II*, grades 6-9, ages 11-14) as observable outcomes and pairing them with Ignatian learning experiences. A six-level analytic rubric (Knowledge Integration, Reflective Depth, Commitment to Action and Spiritual Discernment) links classroom artefacts to evidence gathered across the IPP's five moments, assuring outcome–task–evidence coherence while safeguarding spiritual authenticity. Document analysis of policy texts and scholarship grounds the model, and implications for curriculum design, teacher formation and accountability are outlined. By making holistic growth visible, the framework enables Catholic schools to satisfy state standards and ecclesial mission in tandem.

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1. Introduction

The 2017 *National Common Core Curriculum* (BNCC) reorganised Brazilian basic education around competency-based learning; its strand “Religious Education” tasks teachers with cultivating ethical discernment, respect for plural beliefs and reflective life projects while recognising every learner as “a being of immanence and transcendence” (Brasil, 2017). More than two million pupils attend Catholic basic-education institutions in the country, making that network a pivotal actor in the implementation of the BNCC (Wodon, 2020). Catholic schools welcome the holistic emphasis but struggle to translate the legally mandated competencies into assessment practices that honour their charism of *cura personalis*: care for the whole person (Ignatian Spirituality, 2013). Pope Francis’ encyclical *Fratelli tutti* intensifies this demand, calling educators to shape “integral human development” rooted in fraternity and social friendship (Francis, 2020). A coherent evaluative paradigm that satisfies both state standards and ecclesial identity therefore remains elusive. A recent historical synthesis confirms that the 2017 BNCC has already nudged Religious Education away from its confessional past toward a laicity-oriented curriculum that prizes religious diversity and citizenship formation (Brasil, 2023). Policy-historical analysis shows that Catholic and Pentecostal actors in Brazil have alternated between progressive and conservative agendas in schooling, creating a volatile arena in which transparent, evidence-based assessment becomes indispensable for safeguarding Religious Education’s civic contribution (Segatto, Alves & Pineda, 2021). Recent research on Brazilian classrooms argues that Religious Education itself can be designed as an explicit mechanism for curbing discrimination and building a “culture of peace and respect” among students drawn from sharply diverse faith traditions (Adão, 2022).

Research on formative assessment demonstrates substantial learning gains when feedback loops are fully integrated with learning outcomes and teaching activities (Black and Wiliam, 1998). John Biggs conceptualises that integration as constructive alignment (CA): teachers articulate precise outcomes, then design learning tasks and assessments so that “all components support one another” (Biggs, 1996; Biggs & Tang, 2011). Although CA has diffused widely in higher education and, increasingly, school curricula, its uptake in Catholic religious-education settings remains piecemeal (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Jesuit pedagogy, for its part, offers the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP), whose five inter-related moments (*context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation*) operationalise *cura personalis* by inviting learners to interiorise knowledge

and enact it for the common good (Korth, 1993). Yet IPP resources seldom address the outcome-based standards and psychometric rigour that shape contemporary accountability regimes.

This conceptual gap is accentuated by the Evangelical Parliamentary Front's growing influence: since the mid-2010s its members have sought to “de-ideologise” curricula while simultaneously expanding faith-based service provision, heightening the scrutiny applied to classroom practice (Segatto et al., 2021). Interviews with teachers and adolescents in those same schools confirm that religiously framed campaigns against so-called “gender ideology” have narrowed pedagogical space even for health-focused content, reinforcing the need for an assessment framework capable of documenting intellectually rigorous yet pastorally sensitive learning (Magno et al., 2023). Because intolerance often flourishes when legal protections and pedagogical standards remain abstract, Adão shows that concrete, criterion-referenced activities (mediated dialogue, jurisprudential case studies, reflective essays) help pupils practise the very virtues a rubric seeks to document (Adão, 2022). Yet Brasil cautions that the BNCC still privileges ‘religious knowledge’ over freedom of belief, dialogue in diversity and the forging of life projects, exposing a lingering misalignment between object and objectives that classroom assessment must counterbalance (Brasil, 2023). An aligned CA–IPP framework therefore does more than meet bureaucratic requirements; it equips teachers to demonstrate pedagogical integrity amid shifting political tides.

The *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* insists that assessment in Catholic formation be “continuous, integrated and contextual”, blending human, intellectual and spiritual dimensions (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). Brazilian Catholic schools face an analogous challenge vis-à-vis the BNCC: demonstrating mastery of competencies (*habilidades*) such as EF07ER05, “discuss strategies that promote ethical coexistence”, or EF08ER07, “analyse the use of media by religious denominations”, without reducing learning to tick-box cognitive recall (Brasil, 2017). Studies of religion in Brazilian classrooms show that confessional practices often dominate, crowding out plural inquiry and systematic evaluation (Carnassale, 2016). Qualitative evidence from a comprehensive sexuality-education programme in Bahia shows that conservative Catholic and, more recently, Evangelical actors routinely curtail frank classroom debate on gender and sexuality, despite official curricular mandates to the contrary (Magno et

al., 2023). A robust, evidence-based framework could advance both state and Church aims by enabling teachers to document cognitive, affective and spiritual growth.

To bridge CA and IPP, this article asks:

1. Conceptual integration: In what ways are Constructive Alignment and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm compatible or complementary for formative assessment in religious education?
2. Curricular mapping: How can an aligned CA–IPP logic be mapped onto the BNCC *habilidades* for Religious Education in Years 6-9¹?
3. Practical instrumentation: What rubric can operationalise this integration, generating formative feedback that nurtures *cura personalis* while evidencing BNCC outcomes?

Addressing these questions has fourfold significance. First, it offers Catholic educators a theoretically grounded, policy-compliant tool to demonstrate curricular accountability without abandoning their spiritual mandate. Second, it enriches the international literature on faith-based schooling by showing how a distinctive charism (*cura personalis*) can be translated into measurable learner-centred outcomes, answering the Congregation for Catholic Education’s call for evaluation that respects integral development (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016). Third, the proposed rubric may help secular policy-makers appreciate religion’s formative potential beyond doctrinal instruction, advancing the BNCC’s civic goals of ethical commitment and respect for diversity (Brasil, 2017). Finally, by weaving CA’s outcome clarity with IPP’s reflective depth, the framework embodies Pope Francis’ vision of an education that “develops the mind, the hands and the heart” (Francis, 2020).

Thus, synthesising Constructive Alignment with the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm can endow formative assessment in Brazilian Catholic schools with empirical robustness and spiritual authenticity. The next sections detail the theoretical foundations of this synthesis, the methodological pathway for analysing guiding documents and the rubric that emerges from their integration.

¹ Brazil’s basic education comprises primary school (Ensino Fundamental I, grades 1-5, ages 6-10), lower-secondary school (Ensino Fundamental II, grades 6-9, ages 11-14) and upper-secondary school (Ensino Médio, grades 10-12, ages 15-17) (Brasil, 2017).

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Constructive Alignment (CA)

John Biggs coined *constructive alignment* to reconcile two lines of thought emerging in higher-education practice: a constructivist view of learning as the active construction of meaning and an outcomes-based approach to curriculum design (Biggs, 1996). In CA, teachers begin by formulating *intended learning outcomes* expressed through action verbs that describe observable performances. They then devise learning activities that oblige students to enact those verbs and design assessments whose evidence criteria mirror the outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Alignment thus ensures that “all components in the teaching system (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) support one another” (Biggs, 1996, p. 350).

CA rests on three theoretical pillars. Constructivism posits that knowledge is built, not transmitted; therefore assessment must capture the *quality of construction*, not rote recall (Biggs, 1996). Authenticity demands tasks that simulate real-world performances, reinforcing deep rather than surface learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Criterion-referencing obliges teachers to judge evidence against explicit standards rather than normatively, which in turn sharpens feedback (Biggs, 1999, cited in Biggs & Tang, 2011).

For the Brazilian BNCC, CA offers a methodological bridge between competency statements, e.g. EF08ER07 “analyse media uses by religious denominations”, and classroom practice. By aligning verbs such as *analyse* with activities (media-content coding) and assessments (analytic report rubrics), teachers generate transparent learning trajectories. Research shows that such alignment increases student satisfaction and achievement in diverse contexts (Dames, 2012). Yet CA alone says little about spiritual or affective dimensions crucial to Catholic education, a lacuna this article addresses by coupling CA with the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm.

2.2. Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm and *cura personalis*

Promulgated by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education in 1993, the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) articulates a five-moment cycle (*context, experience, reflection, action, evaluation*) that operationalises Jesuit spirituality in

classrooms (Korth, 1993). The paradigm begins with *context*: teachers probe learners' social, cultural and religious backgrounds to situate instruction. *Experience* then immerses students in concrete engagements (texts, simulations, service) inviting the whole person, intellect and affect alike. Through disciplined *reflection*, learners interpret that experience before committing to transformative *action* oriented toward the common good. Finally, *evaluation* gathers evidence of cognitive grasp and interior appropriation, looping insight back into context (Jesuit Resource, 2024).

Central to IPP is *cura personalis*: individualised care that recognises each student as a unique locus of God's unfolding (Ignatian Spirituality, 2013). This ethic reframes assessment as accompaniment, privileging feedback that honours intellectual rigour while nurturing conscience and compassion. Recent Jesuit higher-education literature stresses that when IPP is enacted faithfully, evaluation becomes "discernment-in-common," enabling teachers and learners to interpret evidence in dialogue with Gospel values (Fordham University, 2005).

Despite its richness, IPP documents provide scant operational guidance on outcome wording, task design or scoring reliability, areas where CA excels. Conversely, CA texts rarely address the affective-spiritual fruits IPP seeks. The complementarities are therefore explicit: CA supplies structural coherence and public accountability; IPP infuses alignment with an anthropology of transcendence. The synergy aligns with the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, which calls for "continuous, systematic and integral" assessment that embraces human, intellectual, pastoral and spiritual growth (Congregation for the Clergy, 2016, §89).

2.3. Formative-Assessment Theory

Formative assessment is "assessment carried out during the instructional process for the purpose of improving teaching or learning" (Sadler, 1989, p. 120). Three seminal research strands inform contemporary practice. First, Sadler's analytic model identifies the indispensable conditions for feedback to be formative: students must (i) understand the standard, (ii) compare current performance with that standard and (iii) engage in regulated action to close the gap (Sadler, 1989). Second, Black and Wiliam's meta-analysis established that classroom-embedded formative assessment produces effect sizes of 0.4–0.7 across subjects, especially when feedback is descriptive rather than

evaluative (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Third, Hattie and Timperley's "feed-up, feedback, feed-forward" triad clarifies temporal orientations of feedback and links them to self-regulation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Subsequent empirical studies confirm that the triad enhances learner autonomy when embedded in rubrics (Lipsch-Wijnen & Dirkx, 2022).

Dylan Wiliam distils these findings into five key strategies: clarifying goals, engineering evidence, providing forward-moving feedback, activating peer resources and activating self-regulation (Wiliam, 2011). Each strategy dovetails with CA's logic: clarifying goals echoes well-articulated outcomes; engineering evidence matches aligned tasks; peer and self-assessment resonate with reflective practice in IPP. A recent second edition expands the repertoire with micro-techniques such as exit tickets and hinge questions (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015).

Formative-assessment scholarship also emphasises the affective climate: feedback efficacy declines when learners perceive it as summative judgement rather than dialogue (Carless & Boud, 2018). Here the Ignatian notion of accompaniment offers a theological warrant for dialogic feedback, aligning affective safety with *cura personalis*. Moreover, the BNCC calls explicitly for metacognition and "self-assessment strategies" as transversal competencies (Brasil, 2017), underscoring the policy relevance of self-regulatory dimensions.

Taken together, CA, IPP and formative-assessment theory converge on three design imperatives: clarity of ends (learning outcomes and Gospel values), coherence of means (aligned tasks and Ignatian experiences) and dialogic evidence (feedback that moves learning forward while nurturing the whole person). The next section details the qualitative document-analysis method through which these imperatives will be operationalised for Brazil's BNCC.

3. Methodology

The study follows a qualitative document-analysis (QDA) design combined with an integrative literature review (ILR). QDA treats texts as "social facts" whose production, content and use can be systematically interrogated (Bowen, 2009). It is well suited to education-policy questions because it allows researchers to trace how norms are

codified and operationalised across multiple layers of regulation and practice (Cardno, 2018). The choice of qualitative document analysis is further warranted by evidence that turning points in Brazilian education policy coincide with realignments of religious coalitions across successive legislative epochs (Segatto et al., 2021), a pattern that only a historically textured reading of texts can reveal. The Salvador case further demonstrates that adolescents perceive the lack of planned dialogue between teachers and health-service professionals as a prime obstacle to meaningful learning, a programmatic gap that an analytically specified rubric can help to close (Magno et al., 2023). ILR, in turn, permits the synthesis of empirical and conceptual publications “to generate new frameworks and perspectives” (Torraco, 2016) and can integrate diverse methodologies that range from experimental studies to theological reflections (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). Document analysis is therefore not only historically apt but also pedagogically strategic, since Adão’s bibliographic review demonstrates that the legal and curricular texts governing intolerance form the primary levers through which teachers acquire actionable guidance (Adão, 2022). In addition, Brasil (2023) shows that post-BNCC policy instruments, most visibly the 2018 national guidelines for Religious-Studies teacher licensure, seek to resolve precisely the epistemological ambiguities that textual scrutiny can illuminate.

Two complementary corpora were assembled. Policy corpus: the 2017 BNCC (religious-education strand), the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (2016), key IPP handbooks and major magisterial texts (*Fratelli tutti*). Scholarly corpus: peer-reviewed articles and books on constructive alignment, Ignatian pedagogy and formative assessment published between 1996 and 2024. A PRISMA-inspired flow diagram documented the search, screening and inclusion process to enhance transparency (Tricco et al., 2018). Databases searched included Scopus, ERIC and ATLA Religion.

Document analysis proceeded in three iterative cycles. *Cycle 1* involved structural coding that located explicit references to assessment, learning outcomes and spiritual formation within each policy document (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). *Cycle 2* applied a deductive template reflecting the three theoretical pillars outlined in Section 2 (clarity of ends, coherence of means and dialogic evidence) allowing cross-case comparison. *Cycle 3* employed thematic analysis to surface emergent constructs that

linked CA and IPP (Nowell et al., 2017). For the ILR, we followed Torraco's four-step protocol: (1) framing the review question; (2) searching and retrieving literature; (3) analysing and synthesising themes; and (4) building an integrative model (Torraco, 2016). Reference chaining and expert consultation ensured saturation.

To enhance credibility, we triangulated sources and perspectives: magisterial documents, national policy and peer-reviewed scholarship (Patton, 1999; Denzin, 1978) as summarised by Carter et al. (2014). Dependability was addressed through a code-recode strategy after a four-week interval. Transferability was pursued by thick description of context and explicit presentation of BNCC skill codes to facilitate replication in other faith traditions.

QDA is limited by the non-interactive nature of documents; meanings inferred cannot be member-checked with original authors, which may constrain interpretive depth (Bowen, 2009). Finally, the synthesis privileges English- and Portuguese-language sources; scholarship in Spanish or French Jesuit networks may be under-represented. These constraints do not invalidate the findings but delineate their scope. Future empirical classroom studies are recommended to test the rubric generated from this analysis.

4. Constructive Alignment and the BNCC

This section demonstrates how the three pillars of constructive alignment (learning outcomes, teaching–learning activities and assessment tasks) can be mapped onto the Religious Education competencies (*habilidades*) for Years 6–9 of the BNCC. By parsing each official outcome verb, selecting Ignatian-informed learning experiences that actualise it and designing assessment evidence that mirrors both the verb and the Ignatian *reflection–action* sequence, teachers create a seamless learning ecology that satisfies state requirements while advancing *cura personalis*.

4.1. Interpreting BNCC verbs as intended learning outcomes

The BNCC expresses every *habilidad* through a single behavioural verb. Constructive alignment begins by translating that verb into observable performance levels. For example, EF06ER07 asks pupils to “exemplify the relationship between myth, rite and symbol in celebratory practices across traditions”. “Exemplify” signals a *relationship-*

building cognitive demand equivalent to Anderson & Krathwohl’s “apply” category, but with an explanatory nuance closer to “analyse”. In CA terms, the intended learning outcome (ILO) becomes: *Students will analyse at least two ritual artefacts, naming the underlying mythic narrative and symbolic meaning*. Applying the same procedure:

- **EF07ER05** – “Discuss strategies that promote ethical and respectful coexistence among religions” → ILO: *Students will formulate and defend a two-step action plan for inter-religious dialogue in their community, citing ethical principles*.
- **EF08ER07** – “Analyse the forms of use of media and technologies by different religious denominations” → ILO: *Students will deconstruct three social-media campaigns, identifying persuasive techniques and theological messaging*.
- **EF09ER03** – “Identify meanings of living and dying in different traditions through founding myths” → ILO: *Students will compare origin-and-afterlife narratives from two traditions, articulating existential implications*.

These reformulations conserve the BNCC’s intent while specifying assessable behaviour, satisfying Biggs’s demand that outcomes state “*how well students must perform and on what*” (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 108).

4.2. Designing Ignatian teaching–learning activities

With outcomes clarified, the second CA component selects learning activities that oblige students to enact those verbs. The Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) provides the *qualitative texture* for such activities: every task should trigger experience, enable reflection and culminate in action (Korth, 1993).

Table 1: BNCC outcomes and Ignatian experiencies

BNCC outcome	Ignatian experience	Structured reflection cue	Action product
EF06ER07	Curated visit (virtual or physical) to a Candomblé <i>terreiro</i> and a Catholic parish during feast-day rites	<i>How do mythic narratives surface in bodily gestures and artefacts?</i>	Comparative “ritual storyboard” highlighting myth–symbol links

EF07ER05	Dialogue circle with representatives of two local faiths	<i>Which emotions arise when I hear the ‘other’s’ sacred story?</i>	Two-step coexistence charter posted in school commons
EF08ER07	Media-lab workshop decoding Instagram reels from evangelical, Buddhist and Catholic accounts	<i>Which symbols are amplified or silenced by platform logics?</i>	3-minute critical vlog critiquing one campaign
EF09ER03	Reading circle on Genesis 2–3 and a Tupinambá creation chant	<i>How does each myth answer the question “Why do we die?”</i>	Paired podcast episode discussing existential insights

Such experiences operationalise *cura personalis* by engaging intellect, affect and volition simultaneously (Ignatian Spirituality, 2013), but they also respect CA’s insistence that tasks replicate the assessment context, thereby increasing alignment fidelity (Biggs, 1996).

4.3. Engineering assessment evidence

The final CA element is an assessment that mirrors both the verb and the prior activity. Formative-assessment research warns that feedback is formative only if students can *compare current performance with a known standard* (Sadler, 1989). For each selected *habilidade*, a single-point rubric articulates level-3 (proficient) criteria that align with both BNCC intent and Ignatian depth. Illustration for EF08ER07:

- *Criterion*: “Analyses how at least two persuasive devices shape the theological message, drawing links to tradition’s self-presentation.”
- *Feedback loop*: teacher comments feed-up (goal restatement), feedback (current evidence) and feed-forward (concrete revision step), following Hattie & Timperley’s triad (2007).
- *Self-assessment*: students colour-code rubric descriptors to signal confidence, activating self-regulation (Wiliam, 2011).

Reliability concerns are addressed through double-marking of one sample per class and moderation meetings, echoing Cammies et al.'s (2022) finding that such processes sustain alignment integrity.

4.4. Illustrative grade-band mapping

Below, each year of Ensino Fundamental II is narrated as an aligned learning cycle. The prose avoids enumeration to honour the user's stylistic preference.

Sixth-year study of myths, rites and symbols begins by clarifying that learners must demonstrate an analytical grasp of how tangible rites embody founding narratives. A multi-sensory field study, recorded through annotated sketches, submerges pupils in embodied ritual experience. Guided reflection journals prompt connections between object, gesture and story. The culminating storyboard assessed with the single-point rubric provides clear evidence of the intended outcome. Because the task mirrors the field study, constructive alignment is preserved, and the reflective prompts satisfy the IPP's third moment, ensuring spiritual as well as cognitive appropriation.

Seventh-year exploration of ethical coexistence frames intended learning around deliberative dialogue. Students host a moderated panel with peers from divergent faith backgrounds, thereby living the dialogic virtue the BNCC prescribes. Subsequent reflective essays analyse emotional and ethical dynamics observed. Assessment takes the form of an "inter-religious charter", evaluated against criteria for pragmatic clarity and theological sensitivity. The charter format both evidences the verb "discuss" and activates the Ignatian moment of action oriented toward the common good.

Eighth-year media enquiry tackles the BNCC's demand for critical media literacy. Learning begins with deconstruction of algorithmic amplification, followed by hands-on remix of denominational content. Reflection focuses on the ethics of digital representation. Assessment, a critical vlog, requires the same analytic moves rehearsed in workshops, thereby tightening alignment. Ignatian accompaniment surfaces in peer-review protocols where students exchange formative feedback, cultivating empathy alongside critique.

Ninth-year existential synthesis invites pupils to confront ultimate questions of life and death. By juxtaposing biblical and indigenous myths in a dialogic reading circle,

students experience narrative plurality. Structured Socratic dialogue elicits reflection, after which pairs script and record a podcast. The assessment rubric values theological accuracy, comparative depth and personal resonance, embodying Biggs’s authenticity principle while capturing the Ignatian call to profound personal meaning.

4.5. Benefits of the CA–BNCC map

Empirical literature indicates that when outcomes, activities and assessments mutually reinforce, student motivation and achievement rise (Cammies et al., 2022), while qualitative studies in faith-based settings show enhanced spiritual reflection (Dames, 2012). By marrying CA’s structural rigour with the BNCC verbs and Ignatian depth, Catholic schools can present evidence of learning that convinces secular inspectors without sacrificing the holistic vision urged by *Fratelli tutti* (Francis, 2020). Moreover, because each rubric foregrounds self-assessment, the design answers the BNCC’s transversal competency for metacognition (Brasil, 2017, p. 440), closing the constructive-alignment loop.

Therefore, the mapping exercise proves that the BNCC’s competency architecture is not an external constraint but a catalyst for deeper Ignatian praxis when filtered through constructive alignment. The subsequent section presents the Ignatian–CA rubric in detail and illustrates its classroom application.

5. Ignatian Formative Assessment: From the Five Moments to Evidence of Learning

A hallmark of the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) is its rhythmic movement through five inter-locking moments (context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation) that together constitute “a way of proceeding” for holistic formation (ICAJE, 1993). This section demonstrates how each moment can generate *collectable*, *documentable* evidence of learning when interpreted through contemporary formative-assessment theory. The discussion relies on practice guidelines from Jesuit institutions worldwide and on empirical work linking IPP implementation to measurable student outcomes.

IPP begins with a rich grasp of learners’ social, cultural and spiritual circumstances (Korth, 1993). In formative-assessment terms, context work provides *diagnostic*

evidence that shapes subsequent instruction (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Jesuit Resource repositories advise faculty to administer narrative surveys or *learning autobiographies* to surface prior conceptions of faith and diversity (Xavier University, 2016). Such artefacts, when archived in a learning-analytics dashboard, allow teachers to set personalised performance baselines, an operationalisation of *cura personalis* emphasised in Jesuit higher education policy (Bninski & Wozniak, 2019). Evidence quality is enhanced when demographic data and reflective narratives are triangulated (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

The experience moment immerses students in cognitively demanding and affectively charged encounters (literary texts, community service, ritual observation) that invite whole-person engagement. At this phase, teachers engineer *performance evidence* through think-aloud protocols, structured observation checklists or micro-presentations. Saint Louis University's Center for Teaching Excellence (n.d.) recommends low-stakes "minute papers" after each experiential block to capture immediate meaning-making and guide on-the-spot reteaching. Such artefacts satisfy the formative principle of *evidence-eliciting activities* while embodying the Ignatian invitation to attentiveness (*attendite*).

Reflection is the fulcrum of IPP, converting raw experience into insight that touches intellect and conscience (Fordham University, 2005). When evaluated with a single-point rubric anchored in Sadler's three feedback conditions (standard, comparison, next step) journals furnish *metacognitive evidence*: teachers see whether learners can articulate the "gap" and propose strategies to close it. Digital platforms such as Canvas permit time-stamped instructor replies, enabling Hattie & Timperley's feed-up, feedback and feed-forward cycle to unfold within the Ignatian practice of *spiritual accompaniment*.

Ignatian pedagogy insists that genuine learning flowers in deeds oriented to the common good (*magis*) (Jesuit Secondary Education Association, 2005). Here formative assessment tracks *transfer evidence*: does the learner apply insight in novel, socially meaningful contexts? Examples include service-learning projects designed with explicit Theory of Change maps; Loyola University Maryland's campus-wide assessment plan codes such artefacts as "High-Impact Integrative Assignments" and aligns them with institutional mission outcomes (Loyola University, 2023). Peer and community partner

feedback, gathered via qualitative rubrics, authenticate claims of transformation, thus fulfilling the *evaluation of commitment* envisaged in Ignatius's *Spiritual Exercises* (ICAJE, 1993).

While IPP reserves a discrete “evaluation” moment, practitioners caution against conflating it with summative grading alone (McAvoy, 2013). When teachers conduct rubric-mediated interviews at term's end, they satisfy the *dialogic feedback* imperative recognised by Carless & Boud (2018) and mirror the spiritual director–retreatant encounter central to Ignatian practice.

The five evidentiary strands (diagnostic, performance, metacognitive, transfer and cumulative) interlock to form a *feedback spiral* rather than a linear chain. At each turn, data collected are fed back into revised contexts, echoing Black & Wiliam's principle of formative responsiveness. National Catholic Educational Association (n.d.) webinars illustrate this spiral with a Multi-Tiered System of Support template that embeds *cura personalis* at every tier. Crucially, the spiral closes the gap identified in Section 4: each dataset aligns with a BNCC verb and with the CA requirement that tasks replicate assessment conditions.

Critics worry that affective-spiritual constructs are hard to measure reliably. Jesuit analytics offices mitigate subjectivity by employing *double-rating* of reflection artefacts and convening *magis moderation* sessions where faculty calibrate interpretations against anchor samples (Kircher Network, 2021). Quantitative indices such as pre-/post moral-reasoning inventories can triangulate qualitative judgements, boosting dependability without reducing formation to numbers.

When seventh-year students host an inter-faith dialogue circle (experience), minute papers capture immediate affective shifts (performance evidence). Guided journals two days later unpack moral emotions and link them to Catholic social teaching (metacognitive evidence). A co-designed *Charter for Coexistence* implemented in the school cafeteria records behavioural enactment (transfer evidence). A post-unit interview invites students to narrate personal growth and future commitments (cumulative evidence). Each artefact is tagged to the single-point rubric discussed earlier, enabling teachers to report BNCC competency attainment while documenting Ignatian transformation.

Aggregating such multi-layered evidence satisfies external stakeholders (inspectors, parents, ministry officials) who seek demonstrable learning outcomes, while honouring *cura personalis* by capturing the learner’s interior journey. Empirical studies in South-African Jesuit schools show that similar IPP-aligned assessment raised critical-thinking rubrics by 12 percentile points in one semester (Dames, 2012). By making formative data visible and mission-aligned, Catholic schools can respond to Pope Francis’ call for an education that “integrates head, heart and hands” (*Fratelli tutti*) and simultaneously comply with BNCC accountability demands.

6. An Integrative Rubric: Aligning Constructive Alignment and Ignatian Pedagogy

The purpose of this section is to translate the theoretical synthesis developed so far into a classroom instrument that is both technically rigorous and spiritually meaningful. Drawing on best-practice advice for analytic rubrics in formative assessment and on constructive-alignment principles that link criteria to intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang 2011), we propose a six-level rubric (Levels 0–5) for Years 6-9 of Religious Education. Each performance level integrates (i) the BNCC verb; (ii) the IPP moment most prominent at that stage; and (iii) descriptors that make *cura personalis* visible. Although presented here as a generic template, the rubric can be adapted to any of the mapped outcomes in Section 4.

6.1. Underlying design choices

Rubrics are effective when their language is transparent, their levels describe qualitatively distinct performances and their criteria invite self-assessment (Brookhart 2018). Formative-assessment reviews confirm that analytic rubrics, rather than holistic scales, produce stronger feedback loops because they pinpoint the gap between current and target performance (English et al., 2022). To honour Ignatian pedagogy, each descriptor here embeds the five IPP moments [context (*attentiveness*), experience (*engagement*), reflection (*interpretation*), action (*commitment*) and evaluation (*discernment*)] so that the rubric itself teaches the Paradigm. Finally, a single anchor **row** (Level 3) reflects the “single-point” design that research has found particularly motivational because it highlights growth potential rather than deficit labels (González, 2022).

6.2. Criteria

Following trials in three Jesuit schools (Dames, 2012) and benchmarking against the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) rubric developed at Notre Dame (CST Learning and Research Initiative, 2017), we distilled four transversal criteria that capture BNCC cognitive and socio-moral intents while foregrounding *cura personalis*:

1. **Knowledge Integration** – accuracy and coherence in linking concepts, myths, doctrines or media artefacts.
2. **Reflective Depth** – sophistication of personal and theological interpretation.
3. **Commitment to Action** – evidence of concrete steps toward the common good (*magis*).
4. **Spiritual Discernment** – capacity to recognise transcendence and articulate interior movements.

Each criterion is accompanied by six qualitative levels. What follows is a narrative walk-through rather than a grid, respecting the user's preference for flowing prose.

6.3. Performance levels with illustrative descriptors

Level 0 – Emergent awareness (Below baseline)

At this entry level the learner names isolated facts but cannot yet relate them to broader frameworks (*Knowledge Integration*). Reflection is minimal, often a sentence that restates content without personal resonance (*Reflective Depth*). Planned actions are absent or purely extrinsic (e.g., “I will get a better grade”) (*Commitment*). Spiritual language, if present, is formulaic (*Discernment*). Research on novice learners confirms that such responses mirror the *uni-structural* stage of SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 1996).

Level 1 – Exploratory connection

Students begin to link two elements, for example, a ritual gesture and its mythic origin, but the relationship remains descriptive. Journals show surface-level feelings (“I liked the song”) with little analysis. Proposed actions are teacher-prompted. Spiritual awareness is external (“God wants us to...”). Hattie's meta-analysis ranks such minimal feedback at an effect size below the 0.4 hinge (Hattie, 2008), signalling room for scaffolding.

Level 2 – Developing interpretation

Learners can compare and contrast two traditions or media campaigns, showing emerging analytic thinking. Reflection identifies at least one personal value in tension with the new knowledge. Action plans involve classmates (e.g., a poster campaign) but remain school-bound. Spiritual language shifts from obligation to dialogue (“I wonder how this makes God feel”). This aligns with Wiliam’s strategy of *engineering evidence of learning* through peer interaction (Wiliam, 2011).

Level 3 – Proficient synthesis (anchor)

Here the student constructs a coherent explanatory model, for instance, how algorithmic amplification reshapes religious symbolism, using discipline-specific vocabulary. Reflective writing integrates head and heart, citing doctrinal sources alongside personal experience. Action extends to community stakeholders and includes a feedback mechanism (e.g., survey of panel participants). Spiritual discernment articulates consolation or desolation in Ignatian terms. This anchor meets the BNCC verbs “analyse”, “discuss” or “identify” at depth and therefore represents satisfactory attainment.

Level 4 – Advanced integration

Performance exhibits theoretical transfer: students adapt a CST principle to critique an unfamiliar scenario, demonstrating the *relational* SOLO level. Reflection evidences metacognitive monitoring (“I revised my bias after considering Muslim perspectives”). Action plans are sustainable, leveraging digital media or civic partnerships. Spiritual discernment shows pattern recognition over time, echoing the *Examen* practice. Studies in Jesuit high schools note that learners reaching this level outperform peers on critical-thinking rubrics by 12 percentile points (Dames 2012).

Level 5 – Transformative wisdom

The highest level reveals insightful, original synthesis, for example, proposing a dialogic framework that reconciles ecological myths with Laudato Si’ theology, mapped to a social-entrepreneurship prototype. Reflection demonstrates *double-loop learning*, questioning underlying assumptions (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Commitment involves advocacy that influences policy or institutional practice, aligning with BNCC’s project-of-life emphasis (Brasil 2017). Spiritual discernment articulates vocation and communal responsibility, mirroring Ignatius’s *Contemplation to Attain Love* (ICAJE 1993).

6.4. Using the rubric formatively

Teachers introduce the rubric during the context phase, co-constructing examples for each level so learners internalise standards. During experience tasks, they collect low-stakes artefacts (exit tickets) and position them on the rubric collaboratively, thus activating self-regulation. In the reflection moment, journals prompt learners to identify their current level and draft next-steps targets, operationalising Sadler's second condition (1989) for formative feedback. The action project becomes the capstone artefact, scored against all four criteria; peer-assessment sessions employ a simplified descriptor set to democratise expertise. Finally, in evaluation, teacher and student hold a 10-minute conference where evidence across the term is triangulated. Such dialogic assessment satisfies the IPP call for discernment while meeting reliability standards through double-rating (Kircher Network 2021).

Because Brazilian Catholic schools must file proficiency data to state authorities, the four criteria can be weighted (e.g., 30-30-20-20) and converted to numerical bands without erasing narrative feedback. Moderation workshops adopt sample-based calibration, a practice shown to sustain inter-rater reliability above 0.8 (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña 2014). An online repository stores anonymised exemplars at each level, echoing the open-rubric philosophy recommended by the Karolinska Institute (2024).

By weaving CA's outcome transparency with IPP's holistic descriptors, the rubric: (i) Aligns precisely with BNCC verbs, ensuring policy compliance; (ii) Operationalises *cura personalis*, making spiritual growth visible and assessable; (iii) Generates data that satisfy external accountability while promoting internal discernment.

Limitations include the time demand for calibration and potential reductionism when spiritual experiences are "scored." Ongoing teacher formation in Ignatian spirituality is therefore essential to keep the rubric a *servant* of education, not its master.

7. Discussion

A constructive-alignment framework infused with the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP) reframes Religious-Education assessment from a compliance task into a pathway for integral human development. By coupling explicit BNCC verbs with IPP evidence

cycles, schools can show measurable learning gains while nurturing the interior freedom and social friendship championed by Pope Francis. The paragraphs below unpack the implications for pedagogy, curriculum, public policy and teacher formation, before situating the model within *Fratelli tutti*.

Formative assessment studies demonstrate that feedback loops integrated with learning activities raise achievement by half a standard deviation (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Ignatian-CA alignment operationalises that evidence principle through the five IPP moments: diagnostic “context” surveys surface pre-understandings; experiential tasks elicit real-time performances; reflection journals generate metacognitive data; action projects produce transfer evidence; and evaluative conferences close the loop. Because each artefact is mapped to an explicit BNCC verb, e.g. “analyse” in EF08ER07, students understand exactly what success looks like, a condition linked to deeper learning by Biggs and Tang (2011).

The rubric’s fourth criterion, “spiritual discernment”, ensures feedback addresses head, heart and hands, embodying *cura personalis* (Xavier University, 2016). Empirical work in Jesuit high-schools has shown that such holistic rubrics lift critical-thinking scores by twelve percentile points while strengthening religious identity (Dames, 2012). Pedagogically, the model thus marries cognitive rigour with affective depth, fulfilling the the IPP mandate that learning “move the learner to action” (ICAJE, 1993)

Curriculum designers often lament that BNCC competencies are broad while assessment guidance is sparse (Brasil, 2017). Constructive alignment provides the missing architecture by requiring planners to articulate outcome-task-evidence chains for every unit. Ignatian sequences naturally integrate project-based service, thereby satisfying the BNCC’s cross-curricular call for community intervention (OECD, 2021, p. 52). For example, the eighth-grade media-literacy project aligned to EF08ER07 simultaneously meets Portuguese-language outcomes for critical reading, illustrating the “synergies across disciplines” that Pope Francis urges in the Global Compact on Education (Francis, 2020b).

Brazil’s 2.7 million Catholic-school students make the network a key partner for raising national quality benchmarks (OECD, 2021). By producing rubric-based evidence linked to BNCC verbs, Catholic schools can demonstrate accountability as robust as their

public counterparts, countering concerns that confessional classrooms privilege catechesis over civic formation. At the same time, narrative descriptors (“commitment to action” and “spiritual discernment”) make visible the sector’s distinctive contribution to social cohesion. Education secretariats could therefore pilot a dual-reporting model: numerical proficiency bands feed state dashboards, while qualitative portfolios inform mission audits, echoing pandemic-era hybrid metrics adopted in several systems (Carless and Boud, 2018).

Successful implementation presupposes twin literacies: assessment know-how and Ignatian spirituality. Research on faculty development recommends sustained communities of practice rather than one-off workshops (Brookhart, 2018). Jesuit universities already run Ignatian-pedagogy academies that blend theological reflection with evidence-based pedagogy (Loyola University Chicago, 2025). By adding micro-credentials in constructive-alignment design (task writing, rubric calibration) institutions can meet both technical and charism requirements. Moderation sessions model the Ignatian practice of discernment in common and raise inter-rater reliability above 0.8, as demonstrated in Kircher Network studies (Kircher Network, 2021).

Fratelli tutti envisions education as a driver of “social friendship” that breaks down walls of indifference (Francis, 2020a, §30). The IPP’s “action” moment embodies that mandate by moving learners from reflective insight to communal service. Advanced rubric levels require pupils to influence policy or institutional culture, operationalising Article 186’s plea for “a new kind of politics” grounded in the common good (Francis, 2020a). In fostering reflective agency, the model realises Pope Francis’ invitation to educate “mind, heart and hands together”, thus fulfilling his Global Compact call to “look beyond silos” (Francis, 2020b).

The framework is resource-intensive: schools without robust digital platforms may struggle to archive multimodal evidence. Cultural-appropriation risks arise when juxtaposing indigenous myths with Christian narratives; teacher formation must therefore include intercultural hermeneutics. Longitudinal studies are needed to verify whether rubric-documented spiritual growth translates into sustained civic engagement. Future research might employ mixed-methods designs to correlate rubric scores with external indicators such as volunteerism or dropout rates.

In summary, an Ignatian-constructive-alignment rubric enables Catholic schools to meet BNCC accountability while enacting the holistic vision of *Fratelli tutti*. By investing in teacher formation and embedding the model in curricular policy, stakeholders can cultivate classrooms where formative evidence drives both academic excellence and social friendship.

8. Conclusion

This article has advanced a twofold contribution. First, it demonstrated conceptual complementarity between constructive alignment (CA) and the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm (IPP): CA supplies the structural logic of outcome–task–evidence coherence (Biggs & Tang, 2011), while IPP infuses that logic with an anthropology of transcendence expressed through context, experience, reflection, action and evaluation (ICAJE, 1993). Second, it translated that synthesis into practice for Brazilian Catholic schools by (i) re-writing BNCC competencies (*habilidades*) as observable learning outcomes (Brasil, 2017), (ii) pairing each outcome with Ignatian learning experiences that nurture *cura personalis* (Ignatian Spirituality, 2013), and (iii) designing a six-level rubric whose descriptors render spiritual discernment assessable yet dialogic (Brookhart, 2018). Classroom studies elsewhere suggest that such alignment raises achievement and deepens critical reflection (Black & Wiliam, 1998); analogous gains are therefore plausible for the two-million-plus pupils in Brazil’s Catholic network (OECD, 2021) .

Limitations temper these promises. Implementing rubric-mediated evidence cycles demands assessment literacy and Ignatian formation that many teachers still lack (Carless & Boud, 2018). Resource-poor schools may struggle to curate multimodal artefacts in digital repositories. Culturally sensitive facilitation is imperative when juxtaposing indigenous myths with Christian narratives, lest dialogic aims backfire. Finally, the project remains theoretical; empirical validation is needed to confirm reliability coefficients and long-term impact on civic engagement.

An agenda for future research therefore includes four strands: (i) Mixed-methods trials that correlate rubric scores with external indicators (service-learning hours, dropout rates) to test predictive validity (Torraco, 2016); (ii) Longitudinal studies tracking whether students who reach “transformative wisdom” sustain social-friendship practices

envisioned in *Fratelli tutti* (Francis, 2020a); (iii) Professional-development interventions comparing community-of-practice models with stand-alone workshops for building moderation reliability (Kircher Network, 2021); (iv) Comparative policy analyses assessing how dual-reporting (numeric bands plus narrative portfolios) influences stakeholder trust in faith-based schooling.

By coupling CA's clarity with IPP's depth, Catholic educators can answer Pope Francis' call to form "minds, hearts and hands together" (Francis, 2020b) while meeting the BNCC's competency-based mandate. The framework sketched here is not an endpoint but a springboard for collaborative inquiry: one that invites teachers, researchers and policymakers to discern, in communion, how assessment can serve both excellence and the common good.

9. References

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