

Curriculum Review – Beginning with God

Beginning with God (2018) is published by CEP
(Christian Education Publications).
ISBN 978-1-925725-33-9

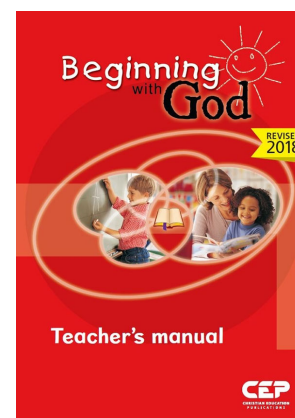
Review completed October 19th, 2019. Version 1.
RI Curricula are referred to by the Department of Education Qld as
RI Program Materials.

Executive Summary

In 2019, the Multi-Faiths RI Peak Body Network commissioned an independent review of common curriculum materials used by Religious Instructors in Queensland Schools. The focus of the review was to assist Principals to be confident that curriculum materials comply with the Department of Education policy requirements.

This report is a review of the **Beginning with God** curriculum materials used by many Christian Religious Instructors for Year 1 students, against 15 policy areas of focus. The review purpose and process is outlined in a separate document on the website

multifaithsri.org.au



www.cepstore.com.au/IdaProductQAYW?Id=01t0K000005mwFAQAQ

Outcome:

Beginning with God is highly compliant with Department of Education policy.

Each of the 40 lessons is organised around the major events and concepts of the Bible. Each lesson is designed for Year 1 students, and to take 20 – 25 minutes. Quality colour magazines for students include engaging activities aligned to each lesson. The instructor manual provides support for community members who may not be teachers to confidently engage with students and schools in respectful and sensitive ways.

There are a few lessons or activities where an instructor would need to exercise caution. For example:

- Some of the featured bible stories include a person experiencing violence. This could cause distress for students who have lived with experiences such as domestic violence, trauma or war. Suggestions are provided.
- Some of the activity options may not be suitable for children with sensory issue. Alternatives are included in the lesson materials, and the instructor is advised to consult with the school.
- A teacher tip encouraging instructors to make a connection to the lesson by referring to church activities beyond the classroom is not compliant with policy.

A detailed overview of the policy criteria, a lesson-by-lesson analysis and details about any areas of concern and recommendations are provided in the report to support RI teachers as they comply with the Department of Education policies.

Reviewer:
Dr Jill Willis, Associate Professor of Education,
Queensland University of Technology.

Curriculum details

Beginning with God (2018) is published by CEP (Christian Education Publications). The publisher's website indicates that the materials are used widely in Australian and New Zealand schools for religious education and Study of Religion.

There are 40 lessons that are planned around 7 units.

1. God and his world
2. A troubled world and God's remedy
3. Jesus as God's son and is always with us
4. Jesus cares for people.
5. Responding to God and Jesus
6. People in God's unfolding plan
7. God's plan fulfilled.

The teacher guide includes the statement "The curriculum has as its foundation the belief that it is important to allow the Bible's own theological framework to determine what is taught and how it is taught. It is therefore content-centred, teaching the major events, concepts and doctrines of the Bible." The expectations that religious instructors undergo appropriate training and do not add unauthorized material to the program are made clear in the teacher guide.

The lessons are designed to take between 20 – 25 minutes.

- Each lesson contains background information for the instructor about
 1. Lesson aim
 2. Learning outcomes
 3. Memory verse
 4. Lesson background for teachers
 5. Bible timeline
 6. List of resources
 7. Preparatory notes
 8. Teaching tips and a teacher's prayer
 9. List of resources
 10. Teaching tips.
- Each lesson plan is structured around phases – Welcome, Way in, Bible focus, Student responses and a concluding prayer.
 - There are options for activities in each lesson.
 - Questions and suggested instructor scripts are given for each step.
 - Various activities include songs, crafts, visual aids, dramas and activity booklets.

The student activity booklet is of high quality colour printing, with puzzles, activities and photographs of people from a diverse range of cultures, ages and disabilities.

Review Commentary

Strengths

- 1. The topics are appropriate for a Year 1 introduction.** Beginning with God is designed for first year of formal schooling. This could be used as a stand-alone course for Year 1 students as it introduces students to concepts without assuming any prior knowledge. The activity booklets for students would be easily completed by Year 1 students in their second year of primary school, as the activities are designed for children aged 5-6.
- 2. The teacher handbook provides practical advice to support community representatives in their roles.** For example, instructors are reminded to:
 - p 179 "Look out for all students to be given opportunities to answer questions. Encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and honesty, acknowledge all contributions and respect students' opinions."
 - p 257 "Show acceptance of the student".
 - p 255 "Create a safe space where students feel welcome".
 - P 255 "Be ready to modify for students who need support. Consider the needs of the students in your classroom carefully."
 - p 250 "Encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and honesty".
 - p 149 includes suggestions for redirecting students who are disruptive by reminding students about rules to develop respect.
- 3. The lessons are clearly outlined with choices to support diverse learners.** The lessons are clearly outlined with each one including options for activities that are engaging and have clear outcomes. Each lesson contains numerous options for the teacher to select from depending on the diversity of each class. There are choices in all lessons to cater for students with a disability, gifted and talented students and EAL students. For example students are always given a choice of whether to participate in dramas.
- 4. The curriculum materials contribute to inclusive educational goals.** There are lessons that teach students to look out for classmates who might feel lonely, and how to repair relationships and say sorry. Instructors are reminded to
 - Look out for students who may need encouragement during the lesson time.
 - Be aware of student's individual experiences in relation to having illness in the family.
 - Consider a variety of experiences with the term "loving father" and to be sensitive in their approach.
 - Keep a record of children participating in dramas or activities so that you do your best to ensure everyone has an opportunity.

Cautions

- 1. References to violence in stories:**
 - a. Lesson 23 - The lesson focuses on the story of the good Samaritan, and mentions that he was kicked and punched. This may be distressing for some students.
 - b. Lesson 26 - May be some distress about Joseph being put in the well by his brothers.

- c. Visual of Jesus on the cross (pg 225) may upset children.

The instructor scripts are very careful in talking about some of the Old Testament stories that in reality are quite violent. Some students who know the bible stories already may reveal some of the more chilling aspects of Joseph's treatment by his brothers or Pharaoh's edict regarding Hebrew baby boys and later the final plague in Egypt which the curriculum does not specify.

Recommendations for instructors:

- a. Check with the teacher to see whether there are students in the group who have additional sensitivity to violence through experiences such as domestic violence, trauma or war. If this is the case, do not use these lessons.
- b. Emphasise the positive outcomes.
- c. Firmly redirect discussion that students may raise that could cause distress for classmates.

Recommendations for publishers:

- d. In the next edition, review the chosen stories and address the cautions above.

2. A teacher note encourages instructors to let students know about church

activities: On page 259 instructors are encouraged to inform students about church activities in their local communities. This is not allowed under section 3c of the Education Act & General Provisions & Policy Act that outlines a program should "not promote religious and denominational activities that are organised outside the school".

Recommendations for instructors:

- o Do not promote church activities during RI.

Recommendations for publishers:

- o In the next edition, remove this teacher note.

Considerations

1. Activities may be of concern to students with sensory difficulties or allergies:

- a. Lesson 2 - A note needs to be added to the playdough activity to monitor students with sensory issues.
- b. Lessons 14 & 24 - Some children with sensory issues may not want a sticker or stamp on their body.

Recommendations for instructors:

- c. Check with the teacher to be aware of student needs. An alternative activity to playdough has been provided. An alternative to placing a sticker or stamp on the child's hand would be to add stickers to their worksheet.

2. References to differences need sensitivity to encourage inclusivity:

- a. P 25. It would also be good to see a mention of teachers needing to be aware of students with physical disabilities being included in this lesson.
- b. The visuals printed on the posters could present more diversity.
- c. In the lesson on "Exodus from Egypt", some students could interpret the biblical story as being derogatory of the Egyptians.

Recommendations for instructors:

- a. Become informed about the physical abilities and disabilities of students in the class and adjust activities so everyone can participate on an equal basis.

- b. Become informed about the cultural backgrounds and practices of students within the school. Highlight that where there are cultural differences, people can misunderstand and judge others. Highlight that Jesus didn't judge others by their cultural differences.

Recommendations for publishers:

- c. Consider more inclusive visuals on posters.
- d. Correct minor typographical errors:
 - p 237 "Video Vibes" - "Simeon knew exactly WHO not HOW"
 - p 150 para 10. "students" should be changed to "children"
 - page 25 of the teacher's manual needs revising to match new activity page. "Students to draw the missing features " is incorrect.

Policy compliance

The curriculum materials are highly compliant with policy.

The curriculum materials offered many opportunities for students to consider issues and develop values that are identified as desirable educational goals within the Australian curriculum. Some of the strengths of the curriculum in helping students develop as caring global citizens are outlined below. The activities that were noted as considerations, and flagged as blue in table 1 are explained in detail. Activities requiring instructor caution have been noted with an orange flag and explained in the detail above. These cautions could be addressed by the publishers in future editions, and easily adapted by instructors to ensure current policy compliance. Recommendations for instructors are included for each of the considerations or areas noted for caution.