

Curriculum Review – *Buddhist*

Published by *Buddhist Education Services for Schools Inc. BESS* © 2019
Version 1.0 Reviewed October 2020 Version 1.

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 Department of Education Queensland policy requirements. This report is a review of the curriculum materials used by many Religious Instructors, against 15 policy areas of focus. The review purpose and process is outlined in a separate document on the website multifaithsri.org.au.

Outcome:

Buddhist curriculum guidelines are highly compliant with Department of Education Queensland policy.

The Buddhist curriculum guidelines for instructors emphasise values and lifeskills that are consistent with teachings of Buddha. The instructor materials have three sections

- i) an overview of subject matter and topics for different age groups
- ii) advice about program design and responsibilities for instructors and
- iii) an instructor handbook that outlines general advice for classroom management and advice about being compliant with education department policies. Together these manuals enable the instructor to feel informed about the expectations of their teaching religious instruction in schools.

The instructors are expected to design lessons and materials for their own classes, supported by example lessons in an online portal. The instructor manual provides support for community members who may not be teachers to engage with students and schools in respectful and sensitive ways.

There are a few lessons or activities in the 2019 edition where an instructor would need to exercise caution. For example:

1. The curriculum suggests the importance of mediation and movement. Where the instructor plans to use walking meditation, or taking students outside, the instructor would need to work with the school authorities to ensure safety.
2. Instructors of RI need to be sensitive to students' needs, backgrounds and experiences, especially when family doctrines may differ.

A lesson-by-lesson analysis was not possible as the portal for resources is under development.

Reviewer:

Dr. Jill Willis, Associate Professor of Education,
Queensland University of Technology,
October, 2020.

Curriculum details

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Buddhist Religious Education

The Buddhist program for instructors outlines a sequence of topics suitable for year 1 to 10 students. It is published by Buddhist Education Services for Schools Inc (BESS). Materials have been prepared by Venerable Tseten who has a Masters degree in applied Buddhist studies, and Dr Jack Wicks.

Instructor's manual with broad guidelines

- There are four topics organised as strands.
 1. Buddhist foundations
 2. Buddhism in society
 3. Values and attitudes
 4. Life skills
- Each strand contains information for the instructor about suggested topics for each strand, with examples of how this might be explained to students. For example;
 1. Health mind – The importance of cultivating and training the mind in order to gain wisdom.
 2. Mindfulness – The awareness of what is happening for us right now.
 3. Compassion – Karuna (compassion) is an open heart that cares for everyone, wishing ourselves and others not to suffer.
 4. Patience and tolerance – allowing people or situations to change in their own time and understanding our negative emotions associated with things not being as we want them to be.
- Individual lesson materials are being developed and shared in an online portal that will be made available to instructors. These include games, activities, stories, and pictures.

Review Commentary

Strengths

1. The instructor guidelines provide helpful suggestions that align with Department of Education expectations.

- Program governance and expectations for religious instructors are clearly outlined and comply with Department of Education policies.
- Information is provided about the professional learning modules that support instructors. There are five modules that include:
 - Buddhism in Australia – to provide an overview of all traditions
 - Values and Life Skills – Introduction to the teaching framework
 - Working with children – Essential guidance on child protection procedures.
 - Classroom skills – Engaging and managing children of different ages.
 - Resources and lesson plans – Lesson planning and examples.

2. The instructor handbook provides practical advice to support community representatives in their roles.

- New instructors are encouraged to work with a mentor.
- A table of risk management includes suggestions for the instructor. For example,
 - i. if a child is frightened or disturbed by a story read by the teacher, for the teacher to reassure the student that the story has a positive ending.
 - ii. If a child is worried that they cannot meditate, the teacher can reassure the child that meditation is just relaxing, and suggest watching the breath for a few minutes.

3. A routine for each lesson is suggested.

Cautions

3. Cultural diversity will need to be approached with sensitivity.

- a. Denominational differences are noted, and instructors are encouraged to avoid mystical or mythical aspects which may be confusing and may contradict teachings from parents.

4. Activities related to food need to be carefully considered.

- a. Where discussions involve food, for examples in relationship to festivals, any activities regrading food would need to comply with the Smart Choices- Healthy Food and drink policy.

Considerations

- a. **Meditation** – Instructors are encouraged to get students moving, or to engage in walking meditation. Consultation with the school and teachers would be needed to consider safety.

Policy Compliance

The curriculum topics in the outline, and the advice to support instructors are highly compliant with the 15 policy areas of focus identified in collaboration with the Department of Education policy advisors, drawn from:

- The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006.
- The Department of Education’s Safe, Supportive and Disciplined School Environment Procedure
- P-12 curriculum, assessment and reporting framework
- Student Learning and Wellbeing Framework
- Inclusive Education Policy
- Statement of expectations for a disciplined school environment
- Smart choices - healthy food and drink supply strategy for Queensland schools
- The Code of School Behaviour
- Managing Risks in School Curriculum Activities
- Animal Use in Queensland state schools
- Smart choices - healthy food and drink supply strategy for Queensland schools
- Parent and Community Engagement framework

The curriculum outline points to 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 responsible, caring and global citizens are outlined.

Overall Comment from the review team:

The Buddhist curriculum foundation documents outline a clear foundation of topics that can be used by non-trained teachers (ie instructors who are volunteers in school classrooms) to design lessons appropriate for primary-school children. Specific lesson materials were not available for review, and may need to be reviewed by a school representative.