

Curriculum Review – Connect B1

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Reviewed April 2021. 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 Department of Education Queensland policy requirements. This report is a review of the *curriculum name* curriculum materials used by many Christian 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.



<https://www.cepstore.com.au/IdaSearchAYW?menu=Primary+School&submenu=Connect+B1>

Outcome:

Connect is highly compliant with Department of Education Queensland policy.

There are two themes, each with ten lessons; “Who is Jesus”, and “God’s big promises”. The lessons are organised around important people from the Bible, and the lessons that can be learned from their lives. There are 3 instructor manuals for different age groups, each with lessons organised around the same idea and bible concept. The 3 manuals enable the instructor to choose activities that are appropriate for the ages and interests of their groups, and easily differentiate for student needs.

There are quality colour magazines for students with engaging activities aligned to each lesson. The instructor manual provides support for community members who may not be teachers to confidently organise themselves, and engage with students and schools in respectful and sensitive ways.

There are a few lessons or activities in the 2018 edition where an instructor would need to exercise caution. For example:

1. Instructors of RI need to be sensitive to students’ needs, backgrounds and experiences, especially when teaching about stories that include natural disasters, conflict and death. Instructor manuals provide a range of ideas.
2. Contextualise bible stories that refer to culturally historical activities like arranged marriages with acknowledgments that while cultures change, the promises that are being taught still apply when cultural traditions change.
3. Metaphors and illustrations should reflect inclusive and safe communities. Boxing matches may not be appropriate, and instructors are encouraged to use names for children in drama scripts that reflect familiar names for students in the school community.

A lesson-by-lesson analysis and details about any areas of concern and recommendations are provided in this report to support RI instructors in complying with Department of Education policy.

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Curriculum details

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Connect B1 Infants Teacher's manual ISBN number 978-1-925725-13-1,
Connect B1 Infants Student activity book ISBN number 978-1-925725-14-8
Connect B1 Lower Primary Teacher's manual ISBN number 978-1-925725-15-5
Connect B1 Lower Primary Student activity book ISBN number 978-1-925725-16-2
Connect B1 Upper Primary Teacher's manual ISBN number 978-1-925725-17-9
Connect B1 Upper Primary Student activity book ISBN number 978-1-925725-18-6

Connect B1

Connect B1 is a one-year program for instructors. It is published by Christian Education Publications that is affiliated with the Youthworks Media, part of the Sydney Anglican Diocese.

Instructor's manual with detailed instructions

- 268 pages for the Infants, 232 pages for the Lower Primary, 241 pages for the Upper Primary.
- There are two themes, each of 10 lessons. The first is organised around "Who is Jesus?", and the second theme of "God's big promises".
- The same curriculum themes feature across the 3 age/stage versions. The three age/stage versions are published as separate instructor's manuals and student booklets. As the lessons are organised around the same idea and bible concept, the instructor can choose activities that are appropriate for the ages and interests of their groups.
 1. Infants
 2. Lower primary
 3. Upper primary
- Each one page lesson plan contains information for the instructor about
 1. Lesson aim
 2. Lesson outcomes
 3. Memory verse
 4. Bible Background
 5. Other resources
 6. Before you start
 7. Teacher's prayer
 8. Ideas for warm up called "way in"
 9. Bible focus with scripted teaching sections and links to visual aids.
 10. Connections to activities that invite students to apply their learning,
 11. Concluding prayer
 12. Taking it further extension ideas.
 13. Teacher reflections
 14. For next lesson prompts.

Student Magazines

- Quality colour magazines for students include engaging activities aligned to each lesson.
- The magazines have activities that are highly visual and include joining the dots, drawing illustrations, completing mazes, and solving puzzles. Song lyrics are included.

Lesson by Lesson Review

- Reviewed as compliant.
- Reviewers noted that while these activities are compliant, RI instructors would need to take additional care with these activities.
- Reviewers indicated that caution should be exercised and that this lesson or part of the lesson may cause compliance concerns.

- Sections of this lesson were not compliant.
- N/A Not applicable.
- * Updates in new edition have addressed the issues raised.

The codes refer to the Infants manual (i), Lower Primary (LP), and Upper Primary (UP).

Unit	1										2									
Lesson	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Appropriate age and lesson time																				
2. Supporting a cooperative arrangement. No leaving of materials																				
3. No proselytizing or promotion of outside school activities and publications																				
4. No activities or content that would cause harm to a child (physical, psychological or emotional well-being)	UP			UP	iP	UP	iP LP UP		LP UP				iP	iP LP UP				LP		
5. Supports and promotes a safe, supportive and disciplined learning environment																				
6. Responds to diverse learning needs – level and age																				
7a. A safe physical and cyber learning environment - supports wellbeing																				
7b. Fosters behavioural strengths																				
7c. Builds positive relationships (peers, staff, parents, community) and promotes positive social interactions																UP	UP	UP		
7d, e. Encourages inclusivity, diversity	UP				iP										UP			UP		
8. Safe supportive environment, free from bullying, discrimination, harassment																		UP		
9. Responsive to school behaviour plan, safe supportive and disciplined learning environment																				
10. Smart choices - healthy food and drink																				
11. Consistent with Code of School Behaviour																				
12. Risk - suggests undertaking an assessment and identifies where risk assessment is needed																				
13. Promotes responsible care and use of animals																				
14. Does not include activities using items that may cause allergic reactions																				
15. Supports effective communication between students, parents communities that is inclusive and valued																				

Review Commentary

Strengths

- 1. The instructor handbook is detailed and well designed.** The lessons are clearly outlined with scripted suggestions for instructors, that are in clear and child-friendly language.
- 2. The instructor handbook provides practical advice to support community representatives in their roles.**

There are clear guidelines for each lesson with choice of activities. This is so that the RI instructors may choose appropriate activities based on the students' needs within the class. The introductory pages of each of the manuals provides tips on behaviour management and reminders that each student has a unique life story that may impact on their experiences during RI lessons. There is a clear emphasis on the use of appropriate language and respect for students by the RI instructors. The expectations that instructors should undertake training, and also refrain from adding unauthorized lessons into the materials is clearly outlined.

During the weeks when there are parts of the Bible story that may have potential to cause some discomfort for the students the need for instructors to be sensitive is highlighted and suggestions are made for recognising and dealing with student emotions. For example, there is information provided for RI instructors about pain and suffering so that the RI instructors might be better prepared to answer student questions in a sensitive way. The lesson plans also give advice to instructors about how to teach including advice to:

- Exercise care in language (iP p. 266, LP p 230, UP, p. 240).
- Familiarise themselves with specific school policies like checking the school's policy for showing YouTube clips (LP p.62), and
- Be inclusive of students within the RI classroom by choosing names for stories that suit the class (LP p. 91) or by providing '2 ways in' with consideration for students who may not want to take part in a drama / role playing activity to by selecting an alternative engagement activity (e.g. UP lesson 18).

- 3. The lessons have a variety of interactive learning activities.**
 - a. A number of different teaching strategies are suggested to elicit student engagement and interaction, such as using visual aids, songs, puppets, drama, crafts, and real-life case studies.
 - b. Mostly uses age appropriate language for students to explain biblical stories and implications.
 - c. Each lesson contains numerous options for the teacher to select from depending on the diversity of each class. The activities and resources are aligned with age appropriate material.
 - d. Lesson plans are clearly scaffolded. All lessons are planned for an indoor classroom with no specialist equipment needed. The usual resources that children would have and regularly use in their classrooms are used such as glue, scissors, pencils, crayons. They are low risk.

Cautions

- 4. Representations of cultural diversity will need to be approached with sensitivity.**
 - a. Teachers of RI need to use language that is sensitive to students' needs, backgrounds and experiences. UP lesson 15 (p.148) – "There are some things in life that you just don't expect. You would never expect to see a luxury hotel in the middle of the African jungle! That would be opposite to what you'd expect." This example is an outdated view of many African jungles and its use as an example can be construed as being Anglo-centric and not particularly inclusive or promoting positive social interactions.
- 5. Contextualise historical representations of family structure.**
 - a. In the UP Lesson 1 (p.15), the instructor script includes: "Normally, babies come from a mother and father. Normally, these parents are reasonably young when they have their babies. Well there is nothing normal about the way these two babies were born." Even though this content is included in the upper primary curriculum, it may need to be reworded to be more appropriate for the RI-classroom. Use of the word 'normally' could cause concern for students whose situations to not reflect this scenario. Questions specifically about the immaculate conception of Jesus could be difficult for an RI teacher to answer and may detract from the overall point of the

lesson about Jesus and John. A suggested rephrase could describe John and Jesus more specifically, e.g. "John's parents were very old, much older than most parents are when they have a baby", and "the bible says that God himself is Jesus's father".

- b.** In the UP lesson 17 (p.168) the text for instructors reads: "When it came time for Rachel and Jacob to get married, Rachel's Dad tricked Jacob. And instead of being given Rachel as his wife, Jacob was given Leah instead". If the story is going to be told with this level of detail, instructors would also need to mention how inappropriate this type of behaviour was and that, despite this trickery, "even very bad decisions made by people cannot get in the way of God answering his promises". Without this clarification, students may develop misunderstandings about the relationships of women and their fathers.

Recommendations for instructors:

- Contextualise the Biblical stories within their historical settings and discuss how the values may compare to modern society. 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:

- Revisit the highlighted instructor scripts with suggestions to frame the Biblical stories for understanding in modern contexts.

Considerations

7. Find relatable metaphors. UP lesson 16 (p.160) – Although included to be a metaphor to understand conflict the use of a boxing ring analogy may not be seen to be promoting a safe and supportive learning environment, nor promoting positive social interactions, especially when phrases explicitly mention dirty fighting tactics. Consider other game-based metaphors where there is competition and strategy.

8. Be sensitive to the experiences of children in the classroom. Instructors need to be sensitive to students' life experiences. In most cases this is already noted for instructors in the manual.

- a) **Life histories:** Some students may have experienced trauma as a result of natural disasters such as storms that will inform how lesson 6 is explained. Some may be experiencing trauma related to family history. Students who have known family disruption, dislocation and loss may have difficulty drawing a family tree for lesson 14. Lesson 7 with a focus on sickness and death, and lesson 9 in which a servant has his ear cut off before being healed, and Jesus' death is the focus, already have warnings for sensitivity. In the UP Lesson 4 there may be some reluctance for some students to vote themselves as good or bad.
- b) **Sensory needs:** Some children with heightened sensory concerns may need alternative engagement activities. For example in LP lesson 9 playdough activity – creating characters be aware that some students may have sensory issues with the material. In UP Lesson 7 before making use of a balloon popping check for sound and latex concerns. Lesson 5 - Students on the Autism Spectrum may not recognise emotions in the emotions shown. A note could be made in the text to add words underneath or a discussion is needed about feelings and what each of the faces means.

Recommendations for instructors:

- Consideration of the histories and sensitivities of the children in the class will maximize safety, engagement and demonstrate the respect and care that is an overall aim of the curriculum. There are multiple suggestions for alternative activities in the materials in the workbook.

Recommendations for publishers:

- The teacher notes do highlight areas for caution. These important notes for instructors could be highlighted more so they are not missed.
- There is opportunity for instructors to make more connections to life principles and values that students can apply to their own relationships and actions. These are not always highlighted as strongly as they might be in the lessons.

Policy Compliance

The curriculum materials 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 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 responsible, caring and global citizens are outlined. The activities that were noted as considerations are flagged as blue in table 1, while activities requiring some greater caution have been noted with an orange flag and are explained in detail. These cautions could be addressed by the publishers in future editions, and easily adapted by instructors to ensure current policy compliance.

Chapter 5 - Section 76 of the Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 requires that materials are for Year 1 students or older ages. While the Connect B1 manual does have lessons for kindergarten ages 4-6 these lesson materials may support Year 1 instructors to differentiate their activities. They would not necessarily imply that RI classes would be conducted with Prep students.

Overall Comment from the review team:

Connect B1 is a well considered resource that aims to provide clear scaffolding and appropriate pedagogies for non-trained teachers (ie instructors who are volunteers in school classrooms). The lessons are appropriate for primary-school children. The lessons provided ample opportunities for all children to get involved and contribute through discussions, reflections and activities.