

Curriculum and Pedagogical Review of Access Ministries CRE Materials

25 March 2013

I have been asked to evaluate the teaching and learning materials produced by Access ministries as part of the CRE – SRI Program in Primary Schools in Victoria.

The evaluation will be based on my expertise and experience as former school Principal and in my current position in the Faculty of Education at Monash University, the largest teacher education faculty in Australia and ranked equal first in Australia and 16th in the world based on international surveys.

I am a Senior Lecturer in curriculum and pedagogy for primary education, and a recognised expert in school education, curriculum and pedagogy both nationally and internationally, an Australian Research Council Research Fellow and recently requested to give expert evidence to the federal House of Representatives Education Committee in relation the Australian Education Bill 2012.

ACCESS ministries Christian Education program serves students and school communities in Victorian government schools by providing Christian Special Religious Instruction (SRI), which we refer to as Christian Religious Education (CRE).

ACCESS ministries provides SRI under the provisions of the Victorian Education and Training Reform Act (2006) and in compliance with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Service Agreement and School Policy and Advisory Guide (SPAG) for SRI.

Access ministries states on their website that:

Christian SRI program reinforces the value of each individual student, fostering their enquiry and reflection about spiritual matters and tenets of the Christian faith and how it can pertain to them. Our program actively focuses on the development of personal and community values, such as integrity, resilience, empathy and respect¹.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development also states that such classes is approved by the Department of Education actually complements “lesson themes and current Departmental policy; builds on the Victorian Essential Learning Standards”.



Dr David Zyngier
Senior Lecturer in Curriculum & Pedagogy

¹ <http://www.accessministries.org.au/creteachers>



Faculty of Education Peninsula Campus

PO Box 527 Frankston 3199

McMahons Road

Frankston 3199

Telephone +61 39904 4230 Facsimile +61 39904 4027

Email david.zyngier@monash.edu

www.monash.edu

ABN 12 377 614 012 CRICOS Provider #00008C

Executive Summary

The Appendices contain typical examples selected at random that are reflective of the material across the various student workbooks based on the instructor's manuals.

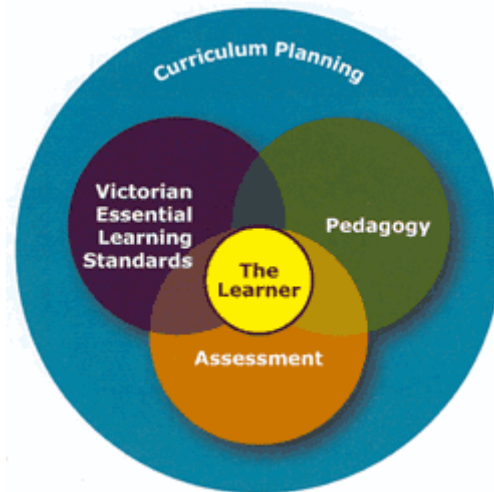
Students across all the student workbooks are not being challenged to think independently as the vast majority of student tasks are based on what we in the profession call *busy work*.¹

The illustrations from the student work books are exemplars of such busy work. Typically these activities minimise student intellectual growth, provide no scaffolding support to guide students through the learning process as there are no explicit or clear statements about the purpose or rationale for the learning.

Moreover there does not seem to be any logical selection and sequencing of the content, nor is the content broken down into manageable instructional units based on students' cognitive capabilities. The related instructional delivery in the Instructor's Manual also does not appear to support clear sequencing, clear descriptions and demonstrations of skills to be acquired, nor are the student activities followed by practice and timely feedback – the essence of good pedagogical practice which should focus initially on high levels of teacher involvement. The teaching materials do **not** support the AusVELS, nor do they reflect the recommended Victorian teaching and learning principles (POLTs). There is very little evidence that the CRE curriculum supports as recommended intellectual quality of learning as proposed by Bloom or that the Instructors are following the recommendations of the E5 Framework of what constitutes high quality teaching and learning practice in the classroom.

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation of the teaching materials – both the instructor’s manuals and the student workbooks - will be based on the **Principles of Learning and Teaching²** (POLT) framework that articulates six principles that can be used by schools, teams of teachers and individuals to reflect on practice and support professional dialogue to strengthen pedagogical practices. The Principles build on other Victorian research projects that have focussed on pedagogy. The Principles have been extended to include all domains and stages of learning.



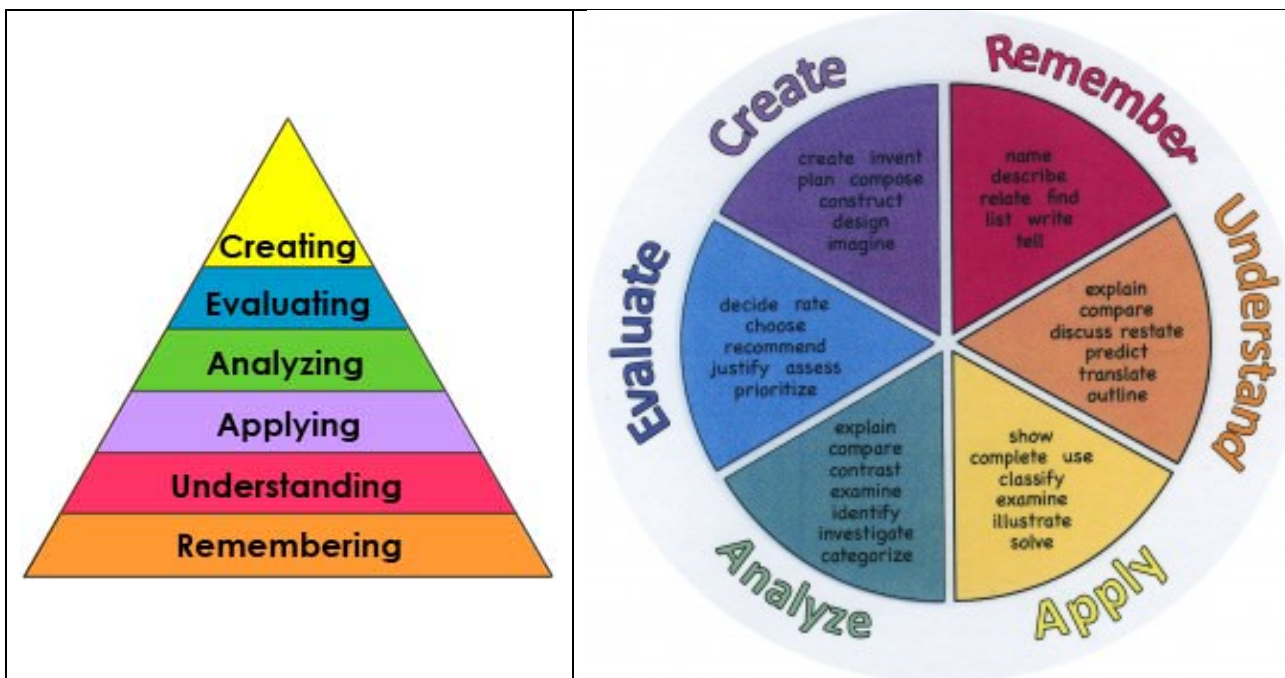
The evaluation will also refer in detail to the **e⁵ Instructional Model³** which is a reference point for school leaders and teachers to develop a deeper understanding of what constitutes high quality teacher practice in the classroom.



² <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/Pages/teaching.aspx>

³ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/pages/e5.aspx>

Reference will also be made in this evaluation to the commonly used Thinking Skills Framework of Bloom's Taxonomy which provides a structured questioning method that allows for students to engage in higher order thinking processes. The Six Levels of Questioning based on Bloom's Taxonomy⁴ provides an excellent starting point for teachers wanting to move beyond the basic question and answer techniques. In the 1950s, educational psychologist Benjamin Bloom developed a hierarchical classification of behaviour important in learning that can be depicted as a pyramid (click image on right to enlarge). The bottom of the pyramid indicates simple cognitive behaviour of recall and fact recognition. This leads up to more complex behaviour, involving increasing mental abstraction⁵. In 1991 the Taxonomy was revised by Dr Lorin Anderson (a former student of Bloom), to reflect relevance to 21st century work.



Bloom also classified the types of questions used by educators in assessing students by verb form. The type of action required by the verbs used in an assessment question indicate the cognitive demands being placed on students.

⁴⁴ <http://www.teachers.ash.org.au/researchskills/Dalton.htm>

⁵ <http://w3.unisa.edu.au/gradquals/staff/program/blooms.asp>



Thinking Skills Framework

	Bloom Level	Verbs	Starters	Tools
HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS	 Design Acting like Thomas Edison , always improving, designing, planning	Create Improve Invent Plan Predict Propose Rewrite/write Synthesise	Design an improved...for... Formulate a set of criteria to judge... Compose a song, jingle or rap to... Modify...in order to create a fairer... Develop an argument to persuade people... Generate key questions for... Create a role play/experiment to... Adapt a project studied so that... Design a personal action plan	1:4-P-C-R MAS Picture Association Problem-Solution SCAMPER Word Association Y Chart
	 Evaluate Acting like a Judge based on the evidence	Argue (for) Assess Critique Decide Judge Justify Prioritise Recommend	Which of the two...would be better for... Choose and justify a theme song for... Justify the decision of... Determine which is the more effective... Evaluate the effectiveness of... Select which is the best option...or... Rank the following from...to most... Debate the issue... Defend the decision to...	Decision Making Matrix Extent Barometer Human Continuum Judge-Jury PCO Problem-Solution Tournament Prioritiser Y Chart
	 Analyse Acting like a Sorting Tray examining & breaking up an issue into its component parts	Argue (about) Categorise Critique Debate Differentiate Discuss Distinguish Identify	From at least 4 peoples' viewpoint, analyse... Discuss the similarities and differences of... Compare and contrast... Investigate all the factors that could influence...in... Summarise the reasons for... Deduce how the parts interact in... Conduct research on the issue of... in order to gain a deeper understanding of... List the pros and cons of...	Decision Making Matrix Double Bubble Map Icon Prompt KWL & KWHL PCO Problem-Solution SWOT Analysis T Charts & Y Charts
FOUNDATION THINKING SKILLS	 Apply Acting like a How to Manual - applying previously learnt data in similar or novel situations	Calculate Compile Complete Demonstrate Dramatise Illustrate Operate Solve	Applying previously learned knowledge, construct... Using your knowledge of... formulate 6 questions... Write a letter to the editor pointing out... Classify the following...into their correct... Write a news report... Construct a flow chart for... Interview a group of people...to identify...	Human Continuum Flow Charts Role Plays Silent Card Shuffle POE
	 Understand Acting like a Dictionary understanding words, concepts, cause-effect, and 'spaces for'	Classify Comprehend Discuss Interpret Outline Recognise Summarise Translate	Explain how...has impacted on... Describe in clear logical steps... Paraphrase in your own words... Give reasons for... Using words, pictures and icons, restate what you know about... Use the metaphor of...to help you understand... Research songs to help you understand... State three things you know about...	Concept Map Cause-Effect Map Double-Bubble Map Metaphor PCO Silent Card Shuffle
	 Remember Acting like an Encyclopedia where one finds information, facts, data	Define Find Label Match Memorise Quote Repeat State	Describe what happened at... List all the... Name all the... What is... (facts/definition etc)? List the attributes of... Write 10 facts about... Make an A-Z list of... Recall... Is what way are you like...	3:2:1 RIO Acronyms KWL Mnemonics Flash Cards Rhymes & Music Silent Card Shuffle Pairs and RAS Alert

Note: The Round Robin, Rat Patrol, Zigzag, Judge-Jury, 1:4-P-C-R and other collaborative tools can be used in most levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. For example, a Round Robin can be used to list facts (Remember), then with a PCO can be used to Analyse and Evaluate and with the MAS to Design new ideas.
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⁶ <http://www.mindworksteam.com.au/Publications.htm>

Evaluation

This evaluation is based on a thorough reading of the instructor's manuals and the student workbooks from the Launch (VELS Level 1 - Early Years – ages 5-6) through to the Quest (VELS Level 4 -Middle Years (ages 10-12) ⁷ currently provided to CRE instructors to use in Victorian primary schools.



The [Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 \(PoLT\) and related components](#) state that students learn best when:

1. The learning environment is supportive and productive
2. The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation
3. Students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program
4. Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application
5. Assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning
6. Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom

The PoLT initiative aims to:

- build consistent, comprehensive and improved pedagogical approaches within and across schools, while still allowing flexibility, innovation and local decision making at the school level
- focus teaching to meet the diverse needs of students
- strengthen learning communities within and beyond the school.

⁷ <http://www.accessministries.org.au/resourceshop/curriculum-yellow>

For the purposes of this evaluation particular focus will be on the following POLTs:

The learning environment is supportive and productive

The teacher builds positive relationships with and values each student. Through teacher modelling and classroom strategies based on cooperation and mutual support, an environment is created where students feel comfortable to pursue inquiries and express themselves. They take responsibility for their learning and are prepared to pursue and try out new ideas.

The student work in all of the 4 workbooks is predominantly individualised learning activities that need to be done in silence. They are very few times when students are asked to share their ideas with others or pursue their own understanding. Students are never given the opportunity to take any initiatives or responsibility for their learning which is instructor directed and focussed.

The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation.

Teachers model practices that build independence and motivate students to work in an autonomous manner. Students are involved in decision making within the classroom in relation to what and how they learn and are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Team building skills are also explicitly taught so that students learn to collaborate, negotiate and contribute to joint assignments and experience the sharing of roles, responsibilities and ownership.

The CRE program is based on dependence and instructor directed learning activities. Students are rarely if ever able to make autonomous decisions not are they permitted to take responsibility for their own learning. There is little or no evidence of team building activities planned for in the Instructor Manual nor in the Student Workbooks. In fact there appears to be very little opportunity made in the CRE Curriculum for collaboration, negotiation and individual or group contribution to learning activities. Students would not experience any sense of ownership or responsibility based on the evaluations of these documents.

Students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program

A range of strategies is used to monitor and respond to students' different learning needs, social needs, and cultural perspectives. Students' lives and interests are reflected in the learning sequences. A variety of teaching strategies are used to accommodate the range of abilities and interests, and to encourage diversity and autonomy.

There seems to be little or no evidence of the need to cater for differentiated learning styles or abilities in the Instructor manual beyond using additional BLM handouts for "early finishers". In other words more "busy work".

Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application

Students are challenged to explore, question and engage with significant ideas and practices, so that they move beyond superficial understandings to develop higher order, flexible thinking. To support this, teaching sequences should be sustained and responsive and explore ideas and practices.

In my evaluation this is clearly the most obvious area that is totally absent from the CRE “Curriculum”. Students as can be seen in the Appendices are rarely if ever intellectually challenged to explore, question and engage independently with “big ideas”. These activities are based on superficial understandings and counter the opportunity of higher order thinking that is recommended by Bloom’s Taxonomy. Invariably the student activities never move beyond superficial recall responding to questions like who, what, when. When a Why question is asked, again the answer is predetermined by the Instructor’s manual. Students in the CRE program are not given the opportunities to evaluate, synthesise or create and apply new knowledge and understandings.

Assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning

Assessment contributes to planning at a number of levels. Monitoring of student learning is continuous and encompasses a variety of aspects of understanding and practice. Assessment criteria are explicit and feedback is designed to support students' further learning and encourage them to monitor and take responsibility for their own learning.

From my evaluation of both the Instructors’ Manuals and the Student Workbooks there is actually no evidence of assessment of, for or as learning as suggested is necessary for good learning by the Assessment and Evaluation Policy of the DEECD. There is no opportunity for students to receive feedback on the work that they do especially as the Instructors are suggested to ask the supervising teacher to leave the student workbooks in the classroom – therefore the work the students do in the CRE classroom is never evaluated in any way. This breaks the powerful learning cycle and can only reinforce a student view that the work they do in the CRE classroom has no value.



Supporting the Principles of Learning & Teaching is the e5 Model which details domains that constitutes high quality instruction so that we can describe what effective teachers do in the classroom to engage students in intellectually demanding work. These 5 domains are:

1. Engage
2. Explore
3. Explain,
4. Elaborate
5. Evaluate

Therefore what the teacher is doing with the children will:

- foster positive relations with and between students and develops shared expectations for learning and interacting. They stimulate interest and curiosity, promote questioning and connect learning to real world experiences. The teacher structures tasks, elicits students' prior knowledge and supports them to make connections to past learning experiences. They present a purpose for learning, determining challenging learning goals and making assessment and performance requirements clear. The teacher assists students to consider and identify processes that will support the achievement of the learning goals.

My evaluation of the CRE Instructors' Manuals found that there is too often a clear lack of establishing links between the real world of the child and the teaching materials. There is little evidence to show that the teaching materials or the detailed instructions for CRE instructors support the making of connections to past learning experiences. The Instructors' Manuals do not establish challenging learning goals for the students and as there is an absence of assessment and performance criteria clearly established the instructors would be unable to support the student in learning or achieving satisfactory achievement beyond a simple and crude right and wrong assessment.

- present challenging tasks to support students to generate and investigate questions, gather relevant information and develop ideas. They provide tools and procedures for students to organise information and ideas. The teacher identifies students' conceptions and challenges misconceptions. They assist students to expand their perspectives and reflect on their learning. The teacher is mindful of the learning requirements of the task, attentive to student responses and intervenes accordingly.

The Instructor Manual and the Student Workbooks do not present challenging tasks essential for student exploration – the students tasks as demonstrated by the typical examples in the Appendices do not expand on prior learning, or give students and instructors an opportunity to reflect on student learning or intervene if there is a lack of student learning.

- provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their current level of understanding through verbal and non-verbal means. They explicitly teach relevant knowledge, concepts and skills. This content is represented in multiple ways. The teacher provides strategies to enable students to connect and organise new and existing knowledge. They assist students to represent their ideas, using language and images to engage them in reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing. The teacher explicitly teaches the language of the discipline. They progressively assess students' understanding and structure opportunities for students to practise new skills.

There is no evidence that the Instructor Manual presents content in a variety of educative ways that explicitly teach knowledge, concepts and skills. On the contrary, the Student Workbook activities are only variations of a theme presented in colourful and seductive images. Students are required to fill in blanks, connect sentences, un-jumble words, decode a message using a simple key, complete find-a word. Students are not engaged in writing or speaking about new knowledge but responding to external stimulus to give a pre-determined (correct) response. This is not learning but training. There is no evidence of instructors progressively assessing students' skills or understandings

engage students in dialogue, continuously extending and refining students' understanding. They support students to identify and define relationships between concepts and to generate principles or rules. The teacher selects contexts from familiar to unfamiliar, which progressively build the students' ability to transfer and generalise their learning. The teacher supports students to create and test hypotheses and to make and justify decisions. They monitor student understanding, providing explicit feedback, and adjusting instruction accordingly.

The Instructors Manual explicitly inhibits dialogue between children but limits it to typical Q&A or call and response. There is no evidence of students being given tasks that will enable the development and testing of hypotheses or to justify decisions. The instructor is not given any opportunity to give students explicit feedback.

- support students to continuously refine and improve their work using assessment criteria in preparation for a performance of understanding. They integrate evidence from each phase, formally recording students' progress against learning goals. The teacher provides feedback and assists students to evaluate their progress and achievements. They support students to reflect on their learning processes and the impact of effort on achievement. The teacher guides students to identify future learning goals.⁸

Students due to the nature of the Instruction Manual and the Student Workbook and reliance on BLMs are seldom if ever evaluated on the basis of the work completed in the CRE classroom. As there are no assessment criteria or performance standards the students in the CRE classroom would not be aware of instructor or learning expectations or learning goals. There is also no evidence in the CRE Curriculum of the instructor guiding students to identify learning goals in the present or future as all the material is pre-determined and fixed.

⁸ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/Pages/e5model.aspx>

The DEECD also outlines what it has called the **Six Dimensions of Quality**⁹ which reflect and support Principle of Learning Teaching 4 *Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application*

1. Cognitive challenge of the task

This dimension describes the level of thinking required for students to complete the task. Specifically, it describes the degree to which students have the opportunity to apply higher-order reasoning and engage with grade-appropriate academic content material.

For example, an assignment given a high score for cognitive challenge might require students to synthesise ideas, analyse cause and effect, and/or analyse a problem and pose reasonable solutions using content-area knowledge (eg, comparing themes from different books, etc). An assignment given a low score on this dimension, in contrast, might only require students to recall very basic, factual information.

Invariably the material as presented in the CRE Curriculum is based on recall and very basic factual information – there is little opportunity for students to apply higher order thinking skills and typically the material as presented in the Student Workbooks is patronising and not age appropriate.

2. Clarity of learning goals

This dimension describes how clearly a teacher articulates the specific skills, concept or content knowledge students are to gain from completing the assignment. The primary purpose of this dimension is to describe the degree to which an assignment could be considered a purposeful, goal-driven activity focussed on student learning. An assignment given a higher score on this dimension would have goals that were very clear, detailed and specific, and it would be possible to assess whether or not students had achieved these goals.

*There is a lack of evidence in the CRE Curriculum that demonstrates the Instructors actually articulate specific learning goals to students. Too often there is no direct purpose or recognisable goal for the student learning that are clear and specific. There is no opportunity for Instructors or students to know whether these goals as stated in the Instructor manual are achieved except in a **right** or **wrong** form.*

3. Clarity of the grading criteria

The purpose for this dimension is to assess the quality of the grading criteria for the assignment in terms of their specificity and potential for helping students improve their performance. Raters consider how clearly each aspect of the grading criteria is defined and how much detail is provided for each of the criteria.

⁹ <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/support/Pages/e5quality.aspx>

An assignment given a high score for this dimension would have grading criteria that clearly detail the guidelines for success and provide a great deal of information to students about what they need to do to successfully complete the task.

There are no grading criteria attached to the Student Workbook or Instructors' Manuals.

4. Alignment of goals and tasks

This dimension focuses on the degree to which a teacher's stated learning goals are reflected in the design of the assignment's tasks. Specifically, this dimension attempts to capture how well the assignment appears to promote the achievement of the teacher's goals for student learning. An assignment given a high score on this dimension would involve tasks and goals that overlap completely.

There are no grading criteria attached to the Student Workbook or Instructors' Manuals.

5. Alignment of goals and grading criteria

This dimension is intended to describe the degree to which a teacher's grading criteria support the learning goals (ie, the degree to which a teacher assesses students on the skills and concepts they are intended to learn through the completion of the assignment). Also considered in this rating is whether or not the grading criteria include extraneous dimensions that do not support the learning goals, as well as the appropriateness of the criteria for supporting the learning goals.

There are no grading criteria attached to the Student Workbook or Instructors' Manuals.

6. Overall quality


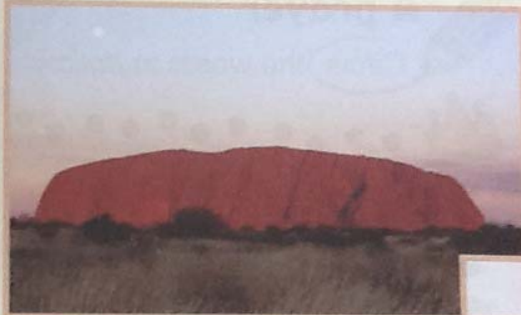


This dimension is intended to provide a holistic rating of the quality of the assignment based on its level of cognitive challenge, the specificity and focus of the learning goals, the clarity of the grading criteria, the alignment of the learning goals and the assignment task, and the alignment of the learning goals and grading criteria.

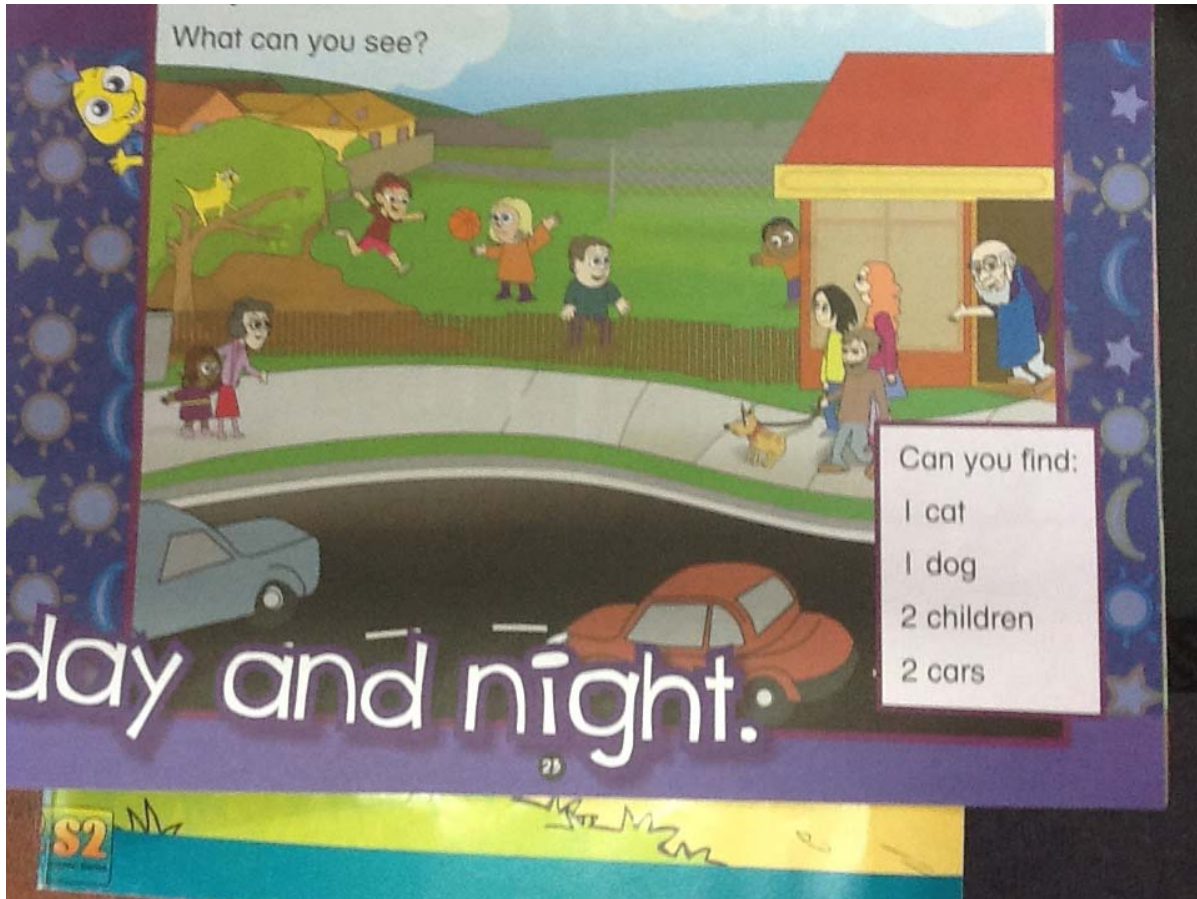
As indicated above the majority of the material presented in the Student Workbooks is of very superficial intellectual quality and is non-intellectually challenging material. There are no grading criteria attached to the Student Workbook or Instructors' Manuals. Therefore there lacks an alignment of any learning goals with the tasks beyond the superficial re-call of information.

Appendices: Typical Examples of Student Work in CRE workbooks and BLMs

Rock, rocks, rocks

Are the rocks helping to keep something safe?
Put a tick in the box if the answer is yes.





Decode the words

Starting from the letter 'G' in the word 'GOSPEL' and moving in an anti-clockwise circle, take the second letter of each word to decode the message to find why Jesus died.

3:16

A reflection on Jesus' death

Who? Jesus

What? gave up his life

Where? on a cross

Why? to bring God forgiveness to all who believe in Jesus

When? always

9



Why do Christians celebrate on Easter Sunday?

Subject: **Email from Mary Magdalene**

Tick the box in this email to choose the words that Mary might have used if she lived today.

Hey **guys** **friends** **family**

I've got to tell you about what happened today. I went down to the **room** **tomb** **house** where Jesus' body had been put. The **door** **skateboard** **stone** had been rolled away from the doorway. So I ran to tell some of the **disciples** **soldiers** **kids** . Two of them went to **listen** **ask** **look** . Well, I was **singing** **crying** **yelling** . Then I turned around and Jesus was standing there! When he said **woman** **Mary** **Hey listen** . I knew it was him! He is alive!

Jesus' impact on the world

Match the two parts of the sentences to find some of the ways Jesus' resurrection has had an impact on Christians and on our world. Draw a line to join the two parts.



I knew it was him! He is alive!

Jesus' impact on the world

Match the two parts of the sentences to find some of the ways Jesus' resurrection has impacted on Christians and on our world. Draw a line to join the two parts.

Christians believe that they	laws of their country
Christianity has spread around the world. In 2005	will have life after death
Many Christians have worked to have the	there were 2.1 billion people in the

world.

Can you add one more sentence about how Jesus has influenced the world for good?

11



The worksheet features four keys, each with an acrostic message:

- Purple Key:** PCKCKZCP RGKCO WMS
FYTC ZCCL DMPEGTCL
- Yellow Key:** AFMMQC LMR RM RYIC
PCTCLEC.
- Green Key:** YQI EMB RM FCJN WMS.
- Orange Key:** AFMMQC RM DMPEGTC.

Handwritten notes on the right side of the page:

- Remember times you have been forg
- Choose not to take revenge.
- Ask God to help you.
- Choose to forgive

A red banner at the bottom of the worksheet reads: "Forgiveness shows God's love in action."

Below the worksheet, there are two sections: "Why it's so difficult" and "Forgive who?"



A promise for Abraham
 God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. Think about how Abraham and Sarah might have felt as they moved from place to place. Would God be with them? Over the years Abraham and Sarah learned that God, the creator of the universe, was with them always.

The spaces between the words in these sentences have been put in the wrong places. Draw a line to separate the words correctly. Find what God promised Abraham.

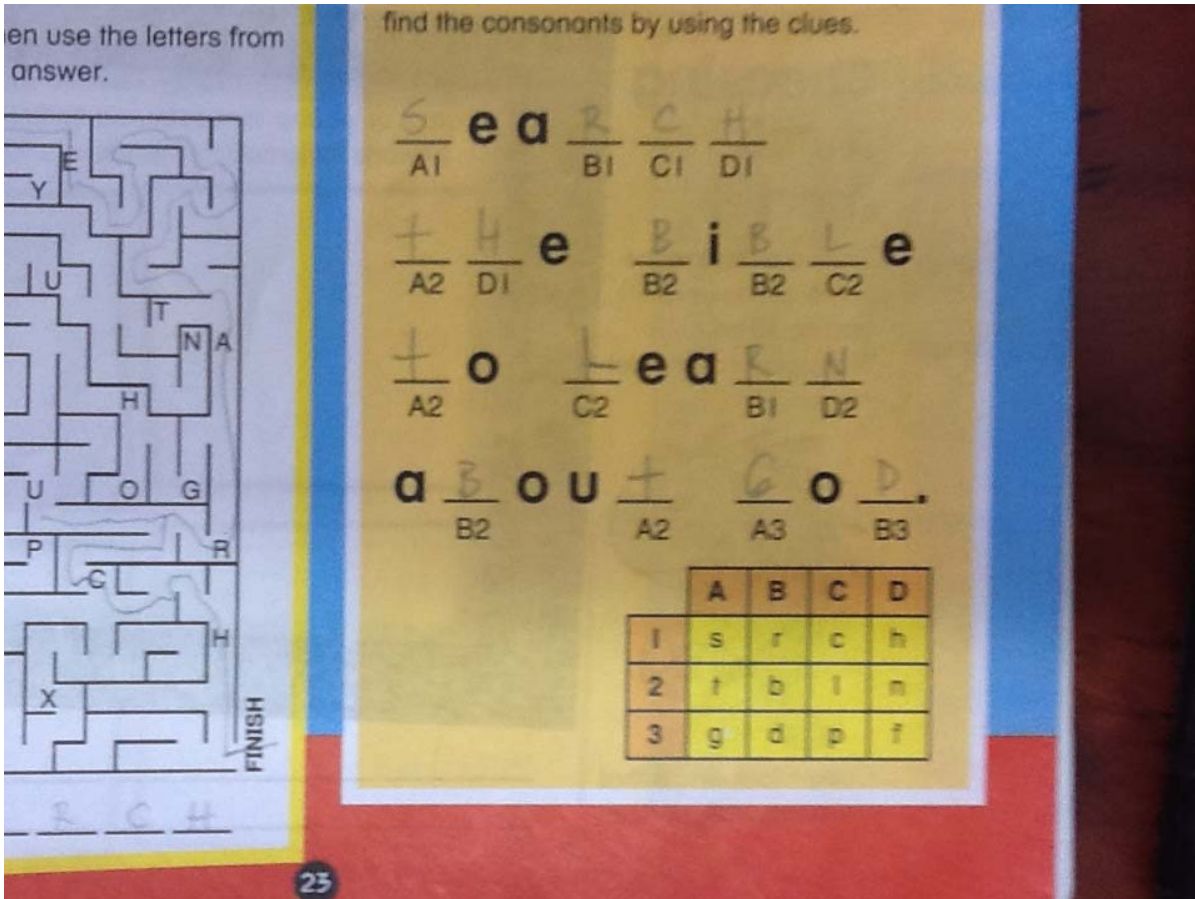
**Eve ryon eonea rt
 hwil lb ebless
 edbecau seo fyuu.**

(Genesis 12:3)

19

What important information would you like to pass on to future generations?

Do you have a story from your family's past to tell? Tell it here.



ⁱ “In the context of education, busy work allows students to work independently, to test their own knowledge and skills, and to practice using new skills [learned](#) in the educational setting.^[1] It can consist of various types of [schoolwork](#) assigned by a teacher to keep students occupied with activities involving learning and cognition while the teacher focuses upon another group of students.^[1] The functionality of busy work is associated with levels of interest students have with the content of the work, levels of enjoyment students have in performing the work, how purposeful the work is, and how accomplishment of the work is perceived by students.^[1] The perceived results of the work by students is significant: when students feel that they've succeeded in accomplishing a functional task, it's congruent with learning and the attainment of new skills.^[1]

Busy work can also be used to keep the students occupied with educational tasks during idle times, such as instances when time in school remains but the day's curriculum has already commenced.^[1] This application of busy work to consume idle time was common in [primary education](#), but the need for work to have educational content, rather than existing just to consume time, is now preferred.^[2]

Busy work has historical precedent in [primary education](#). Entire books have been published that document various busy work activities and curricula per student grade levels, types of activities and how the work is



associated with various types and stages of learning. Examples include [Plans for Busy Work](#) (published in 1901) and [Education by Doing: Occupations and Busy Work for Primary Classes](#) (published in 1909)".
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Busy_work