



WELCOME

To the inaugural issue of SRE News!



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Teaching Tip

If you want children to participate and talk with each other during the lesson, seat them in a circle or horseshoe.

If you want them to listen to you, seat them in rows.

WELCOME

We are delighted to bring you the very first edition of the Buddhist Council of NSW SRE newsletter. It is a great privilege to work with so many dedicated SRE teachers. This first edition will provide an update of recent events; the material comes largely from SRE team and Buddhist Council members. Hopefully, that will change in the near future!

In March 2011, SRE team membership was revised. You will find an account of who we are and what we do elsewhere in this newsletter. We have consolidated

the databases to find we have more than 60 active teachers and more than 60 schools currently participating in the programme. Unfortunately, we still have more than 50 schools on our waiting lists and we still have a few potential teachers where no school requirements are known. If you know of potential teachers or schools, please let us know so we can spread the Dharma more effectively.

During the year, we have conducted one workshop for current teachers and two Induction

workshops for potential teachers; 22 new people have joined the SRE teaching community. In addition, an improved website is expected to streamline our work as is a new library borrowing system. Both of these are currently being finalised. Watch this space! You will need your password to access copyrighted materials so register ASAP or miss out!

Our aim in producing a newsletter is to enhance the lines of communication amongst everyone concerned with the program. We want to provide greater opportunities for sharing. To be successful we need to hear from you – your ideas, thoughts, strategies, and dilemmas. Please see elsewhere for suggestions about how you can contribute.

We look forward to having your feedback on this newsletter and all aspects of your work as an SRE teacher. Thank you very much for being part of the valuable work we do.

Eileen Sellers
SRE Coordinator

Message from the President

What a pleasure it is to see the growth and development of the Buddhist Council's SRE Program. This newsletter is another example of the amazing work which is happening behind the scenes, not only to improve support to our volunteer SRE teachers, but also to inform the families who select Buddhist SRE for their children.

For some years now, we have been building up the SRE Program under the theme of "Values and Life Skills". This is not to downplay the excellent and profound teachings, but rather to emphasise that if the teachings of the Buddha are to benefit our young people, they will better understand and apply the teachings as values and life skills. So in SRE classes, children learn and discuss important values such as kindness, truthfulness and generosity. They also learn skills to cope with the inevitable challenges and obstacles in their lives. In this way, SRE teachers are giving our children a foundation for life.

Let me reassure all of our dedicated SRE teachers that the Buddhist Council is here to support you in your important work for our community, so please don't hesitate to contact us if you need something, or would like to discuss an issue.

To all the parents and guardians of children in Buddhist SRE classes, can I say that we would like to keep in touch with you, particularly through our new website. A quick glance at buddhistconnection.org will reveal that there is a lot happening in the Buddhist community.

With loving kindness to all,
Brian White
President



New teacher's Induction Workshop in October



A session with Ajahn Brahm

On 13 August, SRE teachers had the privilege of engaging in discussion with the well-known Buddhist monk and delightful Ajahn Brahm.

It was thanks to an invitation from the Sharing the Dhamma Group and the Buddhist Library that some 25 SRE teachers attended a talk by Bhante. The talk took the form of a question and answer session, making it relevant to the teaching experiences we've all had. In the comfort of an intimate forum, teachers described past difficulties and were given helpful suggestions to address their problems.

A few helpful hints made by Ajahn Brahm were:

Watch your audience. Check the mood of the room. If they are looking at the floor or at their watches then you know you have lost their attention.

Engage kids by asking for questions. For example:

- Do you have any questions about Buddhism?
- Why do monks wear dresses?
- Why are monks all bald?

To start a talk, crack a joke or talk about yourself. It makes you more "real".

Don't stick to the curriculum – it's boring. If you need to cover certain points of the curriculum, cover them quickly and get it out of the way. For example, if you are teaching about the Buddha's life, let his life be the skeleton and add flesh onto it.

Make it fun! The kids will remember and learn from it.

Be willing to get off the course work and explore issues that arise in the lesson.

Australians don't like organised religion. This is why they like Buddhism – it is a disorganised and chaotic religion.

Try and get the "cool kids" on side. Get them meditating, joining discussions, and then others will follow.

CLEVER IDEAS

by Terry Redmond

Parting Gift

One of our veterans, Elisabeth Barrett (Karangi Public), has a lovely send off for her year 6 students when they leave. She gives them a gift of a Buddhist book to take with them. The book she gives them is "I Wonder Why" by Thubten Chodron and it is available free from the Buddhist Council.

It is said that 'great minds think alike.' I was attending a regional meeting and telling all about this when Fiona Clarke (Clovelly Public) said she does the same, just with a different book. Fiona's choice was "Heart of the Buddha" (also free from BC).

Fiona also presented each student with a graduation certificate. Eileen has made one up and it has been emailed out as an attachment so we can all have the choice to do the same.

Walking Meditation

I really appreciate my walking meditation but have only once been brave enough to get a class to do it, and that was on a day when half the class was away on an excursion.

I was impressed to see that Beatrix Copello (Leichardt Public) uses it with her junior class of 14 kids. She instructs them to form a circle and walk clockwise while reciting a chant. This seems a great way to introduce little ones to this style of meditation without it becoming an exercise in chaos.

Teaching the Precepts

My own humble idea is for teaching the precepts to year 4 kids and older. Form the class into small groups, appointing a spokesperson for each. Then get the spokesperson to write down what his group think the five precepts should be.

They manage to come up with all the precepts, plus some other important considerations, like avoiding racial vilification. Their precepts are summarised on the board, compared and discussed. The entire group could also discuss which are most important and why.

Later, the Buddhist Precepts are put on the board and compared. If the difficult precept is phrased as keeping respect for our bodies, it should go quite smoothly.

'Only Kindness Matters' (song title by Jewel)

I was sitting in with one of our new teachers, John Barclay (Campsie Public). This school, to our knowledge, had never had a Buddhist scripture teacher before. In his first lesson, John was trying to convey to the kids just what Buddhism is all about. He summed it up so beautifully. "It is all about KINDNESS....."

What a beautiful way to introduce a child to Buddhism.

NEW TEACHER EXPERIENCES

'Today I went ... to teach scripture. What a wonderful experience. [The school] had organised for only 16 pupils to attend the classes because [they] did not want me to be "swamped". ... The children were so interested and an absolute delight to teach. At one stage some of them wanted to take notes and rushed to the classroom next door to get a pen and piece of paper. Thank you for organising this. This is truly one great day. I really look forward to teaching them next year.'

Sara - New SRE teacher

REGIONAL MEETINGS

by Terry Redmond

We are trying to introduce these since we have seen how well they have worked in country areas. In the Lismore-Coffs Harbour, Ulladulla-Milton and Blue Mountains regions our teachers have nourished each other with impromptu meetings, while in Sydney mostly each teacher operates alone.

If we include a social aspect to our teaching then:

- It gives us a sense of belonging, of camaraderie.
- It lets us share the good and bad times that teaching gives us.
- It allows us to learn from each other and become better teachers.

So when you get your invite to your own Regional Meeting, please don't dismiss it as a time waster. Go along and support your fellow teachers, and they will support you too.

Inner West Regional Meeting

(Sunday 17th July 2011. Present: Beatrix Copello, Wilson Tan, Terry Redmond)

This was our first Sydney meeting. I was hoping that every teacher would be there and worried that I might not have bought a big enough cake. There were just three of us, so there was plenty of cake!

Despite the small numbers, the energy and synergy was there aplenty. Beatrix shared with us how she manages the feat of leading her kids in a walking meditation. Wilson gave us an insight into how Chinese and

Vietnamese Buddhists have incorporated Confucianism into the moral teachings. Wilson also brought along useful books that are available from the Amitabha Association. We currently have ordered multiple copies of some of these. Contact details were swapped and am sure all are looking forward to the next meeting.

Eastern Suburbs Regional Meeting

(Sunday 18th September 2011. Present: Fiona Clarke, Cris Bessers, Geoffry Fakes, Chan Snith, Leo Birch, Debbie Whitney, Terry Redmond)

Another meeting, another cake (it is a rough life). This cake suffered in transit and before Fiona's rectifications, looked more like fruit salad than cake.

A lively and bubbly group of seven attended. It gave new teacher Leo, a pleasant intro to his fellow local teachers. Also, Chan got to meet other local teachers for the first time.

A very energetic and fruitful discussion was had relating to teaching teenage Buddhists and hopefully a regional weekly meeting for them can be arranged, much like the Christian youth groups, which do a great job.

Once again, found it humbly enjoyable to share time with fellow teachers and am sure all got a "buzz" out of the meeting.



Eastern suburbs regional meeting

Welcome Aboard

John Barclay
Campsie Public

Cris Bessers
Clovelly Public

Leo Birch
Double Bay Public

Michael Mera
Paddington Public

Lianne Ngo
Bankstown Public

Well Done & Thanks

A warm thank you to our retiring teachers for their selfless efforts.

Lael Evans-Morrissay
Retiring for health reasons after teaching for seven years in the Ulladulla region.

Sam Fok
Although only with us for a short few months before going back to uni, Sam impressed all by taking on four schools.

Deidre Niar
Taught at Burwood Public. Have not been able to replace

Notices:

Have you always had a wish to become famous? Now is your chance! We are offering a voucher from Bodhi Books to the person who creates the best name for our new newsletter. Your entry should be short, sweet, snappy, and memorable - and of course it should reflect our mission to teach the Dharma to schoolchildren.

Entries close Friday 13th January. All SRE teachers are invited to submit as many entries as they like to the SRE coordinator eileensellers@bigpond.com. Be sure to include your name in the submission. Your entries will be kept confidential. The board will select the winning name. Good luck!

And don't forget to send us stories and questions about your teaching experiences!

SRE Team Members

Eileen Sellers	Coordinator and Trainer
Kerrie Kiem	Library and General Assistance
Les Tscherne	Curriculum and Resource Management
Mei-Ann Lee	Newsletter and General Assistance
Terry Redmond	Database Coordination
Toby Seeto	Website

*The lotus flower is not possible without the mud.
Understanding and compassion are not possible
without suffering.*

Thich Nhat Hanh

