Australian Hindu Association

Teachers Manual

Contents

1.	**Context**	3
2.	**Teacher Knowledge**	5
3.	**Teaching Practice**	7
4.	**Professional Learning**	18

SRE in schools

CONTEXT

The NSW Government, through legislation and related policy, recognises the diversity of Australian society and supports parental choice in educating children about their faith. The delivery of Special Religious Education (SRE) is managed by religious persuasions, which are approved as SRE providers by the Department of Education.

SRE is mandated by the Education Act (1990) and gives parents the choice to have children formed in the faith of their family. Section 32 of the Education Act says that 'In every government school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion.'

The provision of SRE is not funded by government.

The Departments Special Religious Education Procedures are available online for the school community and other interested members of the public. The procedures provide guidelines for the delivery of SRE in government schools.

SRE providers are approved to access schools, determine teachers and the curriculum.

Legislative Provisions
Education Act 1990, Sections 26, 30, 31, 32 and 33 and 33A

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct clarifies the standards of behaviour that is expected of all staff in the performance of their duties. It gives guidance in areas where staff need to make personal and ethical decisions.

The Code of Conduct is located in the Teacher Authorisation Processes policy. It is the responsibility of all SRE teachers that this policy is read and acknowledged.

Role of the SRE teacher

All SRE teachers contribute to the delivery of religious education in public schools in NSW. An SRE teacher's role is vital to ensure that the message of all faiths is properly disseminated to the students who attend SRE classes. In 2015 there were over 11,000 SRE teachers delivering SRE lessons.

It is important that SRE teachers are familiar with the policies and procedures to ensure quality education. All approved providers have documentation that supports SRE and it is the SRE teacher's role to ensure that these have been read and acknowledged. Among others, these are:

- Teacher Authorisation Processes: Code of Conduct, WWCC and Child Protection.
- Teacher Review Process: Self-reflection questionnaire, self-evaluation and classroom observation.
- Complaints Policies and Procedures: Types, management, flowchart, complaints and compliments form.
- Social Media Policy & Audio-visual Material in Schools: Classification and directions for use.
- Interactive Whiteboards and Digital Projectors.

SRE teachers are to only use their authorised curriculum. The scope and sequence provide the outcomes or aims for each lesson or unit taught. This must be accessible and visible on the approved providers website as it informs parents of what their child is learning in SRE classes.

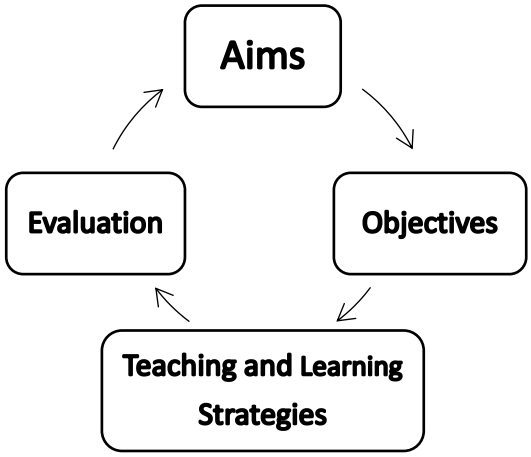
A detailed list of an SRE teacher's responsibilities can be found in the **Teacher Authorisation Processes** under the heading *Responsibilities*.

TEACHER KNOWLEDGE

SRE curriculum

Approved providers provide each teacher with an SRE curriculum.

A curriculum sets out what students should be taught and achieve. It should always be cyclical as follows:



The SRE curriculum should answer these four questions:

1. What is being taught?
2. What are the outcomes or aims?
3. What are the effective teaching methods to engage the diverse range of students?
4. How can the SRE teacher evaluate his/her own teaching?

Each step is important to develop a comprehensive and age/stage appropriate curriculum and outcomes.

An SRE curriculum should include the following:

- Scope and sequence
- Unit or module outline
- Lesson plan
- Lesson aim
- Teaching strategies
- Resources required for the lesson

SRE lesson preparation

Lesson preparation is an important skill in effective teaching. Lesson plans provide the SRE teacher with a framework to support delivery of an effective lesson.

What are lesson plans and why should we have them?

- **Clarity:** Lesson plans clarify what is to be taught. Teachers are required to make decisions about the strategies and resources they will use to achieve the lesson aims and objectives
- **Framework:** Lesson plans give teachers an outline
- **Reminder:** Lesson plans remind teachers where the lesson is up to at any point of time
- **Commitment:** Lesson plans reflect a level of professionalism and real commitment.
- Lesson plans have a **positive impact** on both the teacher and the student.

For the SRE teacher, lessons plans:

- Support SRE teachers in delivering with confidence what is expected of them from the approved provider
- Provide clear procedures to follow
- Build on previous teaching to enhance deeper learning

For the student, lesson plans:

- Demonstrate that the teacher cares for their learning
- Provide structure so that it is easy to follow and participate in
- Reflect a well organised teacher.

SRE resources

Students are more likely to achieve their goals if SRE teachers draw on a variety of resources. This means that SRE resources supplement, and occasionally replace, the most traditional forms of information.

Resources can include posters, photos, music, worksheets and workbooks, interactive activities, IT, videos and on-line learning etc.

If teachers are planning on using multi-media in the classroom, the **Social Media and Audio-Visual Materials in School policy** must be read and followed.

Student engagement and participation

TEACHING PRACTICE

When a student is positively engaged, they are more inclined to stay on task and have increased attention spans. Their thinking skills improve as well as their understanding of concepts.

The following information provides some guidelines of what is typical and appropriate at different age levels. This will assist SRE teachers with student engagement. The list is not exhaustive. It is important that SRE teachers get to know the students in their classes as every child is unique and there is a diverse range within any class.

Children aged 5-6 years

- Physical Development
  - physical activity is an outlet
  - sitting is difficult
- Cognitive development
  - like to paint and draw
  - practice skills in order to become better
  - understand concept of numbers
  - know right and left hands
  - can copy complex shapes, such as a diamond
  - can understand commands with three separate instructions
  - can explain objects and their use
  - like to play board games
- Social development
  - prefer small groups
  - identifies with others
  - individual friendships and loyalties are important
  - concerned for others
  - models adult behaviour
  - friendly and affectionate
  - begin to understand and appreciate humour
  - enjoys tricks and jokes
  - difficult to laugh at themselves
  - cooperate and share
- Emotional development
  - enjoy responsibilities and privileges that they can handle
  - easily discouraged and has difficulty accepting criticism
  - seek praise and encouragement
  - respond readily to affection, warmth and a sense of humour
  - difficult to accept losing and prefer games that are non-competitive
  - tend to dawdle and become upset if hurried

- shy, need encouragement to participate and protection from aggressive children
- sense of safety and belonging is important
- fearful of imaginary creatures

Children aged 7-9 years

- Physical development
  - enthusiastic about games
  - begin to play team sports
  - fine motor skills are increasing
- Cognitive development
  - can count backwards and know the date
  - read more and enjoy reading
  - understand concept of space
  - enjoy collecting objects
- Social development
  - form close friendships
  - tend to become cliquish with 3 to 8 members
  - shift in/out of groups on again/off again friendships
  - sensitive to what other children and adults think of them
  - want to please
  - enjoy helping with chores
  - like cleaning
  - play in a socialised manner
  - adhere to game rules rigidly
  - able to solve arguments with peers
  - Like competition and games
- Emotional development
  - struggle to become competent and productive members of society
  - react poorly to being teased and ridiculed
  - difficulty accepting criticism
  - more argumentative and spirited
  - eager and capable of participating in rule-making
  - enjoy competitive games, but keep at reasonable limits with simple rules
  - requires support to self-regulate behaviour

Children aged 10-12 years

- Physical development
  - introduce varied and complicated movement i.e., jumping rope
  - can become self-conscious with their body image
- Cognitive development
  - Like to write letters
  - Read well
- Social development
  - desperately want to "fit in"
  - increasing need for peer recognition and approval
  - shift from dependency on parents to dependency on peers
  - friendships are important. On again/off again relationships are common
  - develop loyalty, standing up for each other

- can be insensitive or cruel to others. Need strong adult models of kindness and compassion
- like to discuss social problems
- interested in working on community projects

➢ Emotional development

- adult support is crucial during this period
- seeking independence
- increasing questioning of issues
- need to develop strategies to maintain self-control
- need adults to respect their ability to make sound judgements

Thinking Skills – Keeping it Real

Although, during middle childhood (6 years to 12 years of age), children's ability to think becomes more flexible, their understanding is still tied to what is real and what they experience.

In order to learn, they still need learning situations to be very concrete with concrete or real materials. New learning situations should be connected to their own past experiences or what they have seen themselves.

Children in middle childhood still find it difficult to think about abstract ideas. For example, the concept of world economy or working in a particular occupation for a living would be very difficult for school-aged children to understand, as these types of things are beyond their experience and not real to them.

The ability to use logic and strategies to play a game develops gradually. For example, a six-year old will play a very different game of chess or monopoly or card games to that played by a twelve-year old.

Self-concept and self-esteem

The development of self-concept is a significant milestone of the children aged 6 to 12 years. **Self-concept** is the picture that we have of ourselves in terms of our skills, qualities and abilities. **Self-esteem** is the value we place on our skills, qualities and abilities and how we believe others value us in terms of our skills and abilities.

During middle childhood, children need to learn skills and to be involved in tasks where they feel a sense of achievement and responsibility. They need to feel important to other people and valued by other people.

It is important to measure success in terms of effort, not only in terms of achievement. Coming first, winning awards or being the best are someways of being successful. Children need to learn that success can be looked at in different ways. The amount of effort or playing fairly or sticking at a task are all ways children (or adults) can be successful.

From about six-years old children move from the enjoyment of playing to producing something real.

For children to feel successful and competent, their *efforts* and *achievements* are to be praised, respected and encouraged. Children will feel a failure and incompetent if their efforts and achievements are laughed at, criticised or ignored.

Communicating with students

Good communication makes learning easier, helps students achieve their goals, strengthens the connection between the student and the SRE teacher and creates a positive learning environment.

It is important that SRE teachers create a happy, engaging atmosphere and interact with their students in a warm and positive way. SRE teachers must initiate and maintain communication with their students in ways that are respectful and promote equity.

Warm and respectful communication with students involves:

- Maintaining eye contact
- Giving students full attention
- Using a courteous tone of voice
- Allowing wait time for students to think
- Listening to their answers
- Asking appropriate and open-ended questions such as Who, What, Why, When and How
- Knowing student's names and using them

It is recommended that SRE teachers:

Listen: demonstrate active listening skills through maintaining eye contact, asking questions and seeking confirmation.

Empathise: say words such as "I can see that you are feeling very excited" and "if you are feeling worried…"

Be assertive: encourage thoughts such as "That's it, what else can you think of? You have so many great ideas."

Be supportive: offer support when things are going well and provide alternate ideas.

Increase students' self-esteem: every student must feel they have been successful. Praise the action not the person e.g. 'thank you Samuel for that interesting idea' (rather than 'good boy, Samuel'.)

Classroom management

Classroom management is about creating an environment so that all students can learn. Management implies finding solutions, anticipating situations and working with the environment and the diversity of student responses. To manage is better than to react.

The best discipline is one that nobody notices, not even the student being disciplined.

Practice Positivity

Students perform better when they feel better not worse. All of us like to be given attention and recognition. However, for some students they have found that negative attention in the form of reprimands and shouting is better than no attention at all.

It is important that SRE teachers accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative.

The following are examples of changing the negative phrases to positive phrases for primary school students. Remember comment on the student's action rather than on the student him/herself:

Negative	**Positive**
Don't run inside	Remember to walk inside
Don't shout	I like your quiet voices in the classroom
How many times have I told you to sit down	Let's see who is sitting quietly

The empowerment of choice

By offering students choice, SRE teachers enable students to have ownership, independence and a sense of empowerment. Examples of choice can be: "who would like to read this passage?" OR "we have this activity to complete or this one, which one do you choose?" Teaching students about choice-response thinking may be one of the most valuable thinking patterns SRE teachers can provide.

Encourage reflection

Reflection is simply the act of thinking about our relationships, desires and our behaviours. The purpose of reflection is to stimulate our internal motivation. Controlling others is counterproductive to what teachers want to achieve. It is far more important to have students *want* to change. Therefore, asking effective questions and encouraging a reflection process is more successful in changing a student's behaviour. Remember that when you tell, the teacher does the thinking. When you ask, the students do the thinking

Changing behaviour	Getting on task
What do you want? *This question stimulates thinking and leads to reflection*	Does what you are doing help you get your work done? *i.e. what's the problem*
What are you choosing to do? *This question leads to evaluation on one's behaviour*	If you would like to get your work done, what would be your first step *i.e. what's your problem*
If what you are choosing is not getting what you want, then what is your *plan*? *This question encourages the making of a plan. It must be the student's plan not the teacher's*	What do you like to do that you can apply to this task? *i.e. why are you doing this?*
What are your *procedures* to implement this plan/ what steps will you take to make this plan work? *This question leads to mental imaging and specific steps that will be required to carry out the plan*	Do you need help with this task? *(solution focused. Student makes a choice regarding the solution)*

Questions for students to reflect on are:

- What **did** I do? (acknowledgment)
- What **can** I do to prevent it from happening again? (choice)
- What **will** I do? (commitment)

The following management tips can assist SRE teachers:

Use a normal, natural voice: Raising our voice to obtain students behaviour is not the best approach and causes stress. Student will mirror the SRE teachers voice so avoid using that semi-shouting voice.

Speak only when students are quiet and ready: It can be tempting to start but eventually students will cue each other to quieten down.

Get to know the students: Learn students names, likes and dislikes and what they like to do in your class. Then progress to a student seating plan so that students who tend to misbehave sit close to the front.

Use hand signals and other non-verbal communication: Holding one hand in the air and making eye contact is a great way to get students attention. Many schools use a sequence of claps as a tool for students to listen. If in doubt, ask the classroom teacher for tips that the school uses.

Ensure you can see everyone: If you cannot see a student that means they cannot see you so ensure you always sit or stand in order to see the entire room.

Address behaviour issues quickly and wisely: Ensure confidentiality when dealing with a student. Don't embarrass anyone so a quiet word away from ear shot of other students is appropriate. Use 'I' words when speaking e.g. "How can I help you?" "I can see that something is troubling you today"

Nurture the 'I don't care' student: Give him/her time to cool down before talking. Help the student save face by not scolding and shaming him/her.

Always have a well-designed, engaging lesson: Stick to the lesson plan and stay on task.

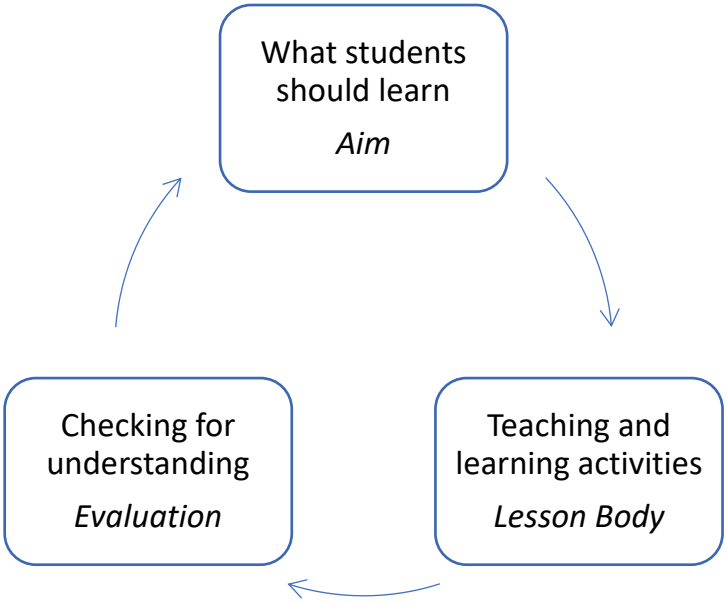
Know the rules: Three simple rules to start every lesson can be:

(a) We respect ourselves (b) We respect others (c) We respect property

Remember to ask the classroom teacher what the school/class rules are and refer to them to ensure consistency.

SRE lesson plans

A lesson plan is the teacher's road map of what students need to learn and how it will be done effectively during the class time. A successful lesson plan addresses and integrates these three key components:



What students should learn

This can be referred to as aims or objectives. In order to decide what these are, questions to think about are:

a) What is the main point of the lesson?
b) What will the students accomplish during the lesson?
c) What are the most important concepts, ideas, or skills students need to be able to understand?

School principals offer a range of patterns to organise SRE in schools. Students can either be in streamed classes (students in the same grade) or composite classes (mixed age groups). It is important that SRE teachers adapt to their class and any special circumstances. Most lesson plans commence with an **introduction** to creatively stimulate interest and encourage thinking. A variety of approaches can be used to engage students (e.g., personal anecdote, historical event, real-world example, short video clip, probing question, etc.)

Teaching and learning activities

The body of the lesson should enable the SRE teacher to use several ways of explain the aims or objectives. These can include real-life examples, reference to historical information and visuals to appeal to different learning styles. **Teaching resources** are vital to keep the students stimulated and engaged.

Lessons are planned with an **estimation** of time required for each activity. Ensure there is time for extended explanations or discussions but be also prepared to move on quickly to ensure that the objectives are met for each lesson. The average amount of time per SRE lesson is 30 minutes, which can fly by.

The questions below will assist with the lesson plans:

- What is required to explain the topic?
- How will the students be engaged in the lesson?
- What do the students need to further understand the lesson?
- Will the resources add or detract from the lesson?

Checking for understanding

How will teachers know when students have understood their lessons?
Checking for understanding is vital to ensure that the content of the lesson is pitched at the student's level. In a composite class this is more difficult as the range of students can be from year K to year 6 in the same classroom. It is advisable that teachers ask themselves the following:

- What questions need to be asked in order to check for understanding?
- What activity do students need to complete to check that the aims/objectives have been met?

Effective conclusions must be part of the lesson plan because it ties together the principles and important points that have been discussed. The following is a list of suggested conclusions:

- Give students the opportunity to describe the key points of the lesson (this can be via direct question and answer or visually illustrating their thoughts)
- Ask students when they can use the new information learnt
- Encourage students to predict what the next lesson will be
- Students can create a quick quiz for their peers
- Allow students to make a short jingle that summaries the lesson

A **scope and sequence** is an important step in the design of effective teaching and learning programs for SRE. It summarises what is to be taught and the sequence in which it will be taught. A scope and sequence show the order of the units within a year or stage, and the syllabus outcomes that each unit addresses. Generally, a subject scope and sequence plan for a year should include:

- Title of each topic/unit of work
- Duration of each topic/unit of work
- Syllabus outcomes for each stage/age

Lesson adaption

SRE teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching all students, regardless of their academic, social, and developmental levels. Any SRE classroom will contain a mix of students with various ability levels and educational needs. For this reason, teachers must adapt their lesson plans to meet the needs of all students, and provide all students with the opportunity to learn and grow.

All students deserve individualised attention that helps them achieve the best possible learning. Teachers know how the personalities, challenges, and strengths of their students can fundamentally change the flow of a classroom. Adapting to this diverse body of learners is both challenging and rewarding. Slight modifications to lessons can work to help all learners in the classroom, but it's important not to make the changes and adaptations so large that advanced learners are left on their own and the main aims or objectives of the lesson are lost.

The following are some tips to reach the needs of all learners:

- Know your students
- Identify what you want all students to learn
- Use activities effectively to allow the teacher to focus on the student's needs
- Have a back-up plan for students to receive assistance if they finish their work early or require extra assistance
- Deliver instructions clearly

It is easy to run out of time and not cover all of the many points teachers had planned to cover. Lesson plans are often required to be adjusted during the class depending on what the students need. Having additional examples or alternative activities will also allow teachers to be flexible. A **realistic timeline** will reflect flexibility and readiness to adapt to the specific classroom environment. Here are some strategies for creating a realistic timeline:

- Estimate how much time each of the activities will take, then plan some extra time for each.
- Plan a few minutes at the end of class to answer any remaining questions and to sum up key points.
- Plan an extra activity or discussion question in case there is time left.
- Be flexible – be ready to adjust the lesson plan to students' needs and focus on what seems to be more productive rather than sticking to the original plan.

Teaching the lesson

Lesson preparation ahead of time allows for flexibility. Experienced SRE teachers can testify that by preparing well ahead of time, they have been able to reflect and think and have their lessons run well.

Tips and Tricks

Be prepared for the lesson and other contingencies by using a dedicated bag or box for SRE that contains everything you are likely to need in teaching. Then you only have to grab the bag/box as you go out the door.

A good attitude is important. Teachers should reflect if teaching SRE classes is an obligation or an opportunity? If teachers are serious about the opportunity SRE presents, they should be evaluating their priorities in order to focus on this opportunity.

Generally, the time available is about 30 minutes. The school timetable is outside the SRE teachers control, so after marking the roll and settling the students sometimes the time available will be even less. Teachers should try and be very sure of what they aim to do and make just one point. Its then easy to build or scaffold upon that one point in the next lesson.

Use appropriate language. Classroom language should not be too technical or abstract.

Check if the students understand. Remember students in SRE classes come from various cultural backgrounds and sometimes from other faiths. Don't assume too much prior knowledge on the topic being taught so teach in bite-sized chucks.

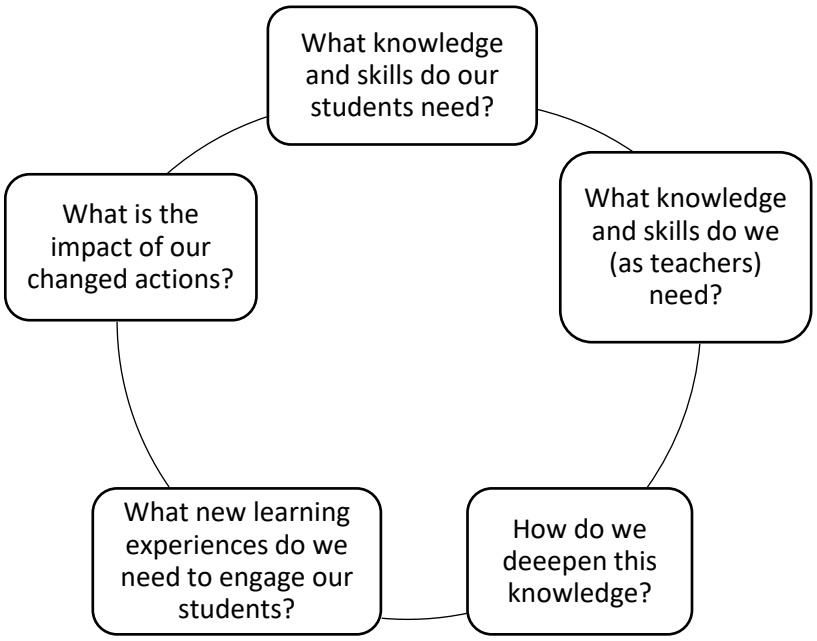
Remember to refer to the class rules to assist with behaviour management.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Support structures

Professional learning comprises of activities and experiences which guide development and improve performance. It is the formal and informal learning experiences undertaken by SRE teachers that improve their individual professional practice and the approved providers collective effectiveness. One can measure this success by improved student engagement and learning outcomes.

Effective teaching is the most powerful influence on a student's achievement and effective professional learning focusses on developing the core attributes of an SRE teacher. This means that when SRE teachers engage in effective professional development, their enhanced knowledge and skill improves their teaching and their improved teaching then enhances their students' outcomes. An example of questions to ask ourselves is below:



Where to go for support?

Your approved provider will ensure that you have the tools necessary to conduct your first lesson and they will arm you with appropriate information.

One way to obtain knowledge and skills is via peer-to-peer learning. SRE teachers are encouraged to observe one-another's teaching methods in order to learn from each other. SRE teachers will then have the opportunity to give and receive feedback about teaching practice and develop awareness about their own teaching.

Participating in the regular team curriculum planning activities will provide teachers with the necessary educational support. Both formal and informal professional learning opportunities should be provided in response to the feedback.

Feedback

SRE teachers can obtain feedback from a number of sources:

1. Their supervisor: By completing the **SRE Teacher Audit Process** teachers will have the opportunity to speak to their supervisor about ways to improve their teaching. At this time, it is advisable to discuss further professional learning ideas and topics.

2. Other teachers: Peer feedback is when SRE teachers offer advice to one another. This is an opportunity to discuss what has worked in SRE classes, what still needs to be achieved and advice of how to achieve that improvement.

3. Their students: Students offer valuable insights into the teacher and the curriculum. No matter what age or stage the student is, their thoughts are critical to the ongoing success of a lesson. Ways to obtain this are:

a) Give students exit slips saying *"what I like is…..? I would like more information on…."*
b) Provide students with checklists to complete such as, "*rate the lesson today"*
c) Have a class discussion "*what activities do you like to do?" "what would you like to learn next week?"*

Self-reflection

SRE teachers are encouraged to reflect on their teaching.

Reflective teachers are those who give time to analysing both teaching and learning experiences in order to make decisions about their teaching in the future. While it is possible to dwell only on negative feedback, reflection is actually a hopeful activity in the sense that it focuses on improvements for the future. Sometimes, lessons that go badly give rise to excellent lessons following reflection.

For the new SRE teacher, reflection involves developing a habit of self-evaluation, trialling new strategies, and asking questions. It is often the case that skilled, experienced SRE teachers know intuitively what the right action to take is. This is due in part to experience and reflection. Often their actions are connected with experiences on which they have reflected and thereby learnt from.

Some helpful questions teachers might ask as they reflect on their teaching experiences include:

- What worked well in the lesson?
- Why did these features work well?
- What have they learned about their teaching from these points?
- What aspects of the lesson could be improved?
- Why have these aspects been identified?
- How can teachers capitalise on their strengths and improve on their weaknesses?

Using the **SRE Teacher Audit Process** will enable SRE teachers to assess themselves and their way of working.

Version: 7 June 2024