

Teaching Roles at DRZC

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The label “teacher” has many meanings and connotations. A teacher is usually defined as a person who teaches, instructs, or imparts knowledge to others. In common parlance, “teacher” usually refers to a professional, someone who is paid to teach. “Teacher” also is used to designate a role that one fulfills in specific circumstances (e.g., as parents teach their children), and may also be applied to inanimate objects or abstract concepts that cause or inspire learning (e.g., books, life, experience).

In Buddhism generally, and Zen in particular, the word “teacher” has significant spiritual and personal dimensions. A teacher is someone who serves as a spiritual mentor and guide for others. Such a person has trained under a teacher in particular conditions, and their spiritual development and accomplishment is recognized by their teacher(s) and seniors. After such recognition, a person may be formally authorized to lead others in their spiritual development. In Zen, teachers are direct spiritual descendants of the Buddha himself. The teacher-student relationship is central to Zen history and literature, and is a significant part of contemporary practice in the West.

At Dharma Rain, there are many circumstances in which members give talks, lead classes or workshops, and in other ways occupy teaching roles, even though they are not teachers in the formal sense just described. The purpose of this document is to clarify these teaching roles as they are used at Dharma Rain. Roles are defined, qualifications for functioning in each role are described, and the party responsible for oversight of each role is indicated.

These roles are meant to be distinct and contextual; a single individual may occupy several roles at different times and places. Although some roles have

more stringent qualifications than others, no hierarchy or progression between roles is implied (except for Instructor and Apprentice Instructor). Individuals occupying any of these roles should be mindful of how they present themselves and the language they use to describe their role, especially when speaking to newer members, visitors, and the community at large. In particular, one should not present oneself as a “teacher” associated with Dharma Rain unless one has been given explicit permission to do so.

Transmitted Dharma Teacher

Definition: A transmitted Dharma teacher functions as spiritual mentor, advisor, and guide for individual students/disciples. An individual practitioner initiates a formal relationship with a teacher by making a series of requests. The teacher may accept or deny the request, treating each case individually for the benefit of the student. If the teacher accepts, the relationship is one of mutual commitment: the student commits to practicing in the lineage traditions held by Dharma Rain, and the teacher commits to the student's spiritual development. Teacher-student interactions occur in both formal (e.g., sanzen, sesshin) and informal settings (e.g., conversations, email).

Qualifications:

- 1) Formal Dharma transmission
- 2) Service as shuso
- 3) Additional requirements at the discretion of transmitting teacher (e.g., completion of DRZC's seminary program or equivalent)
- 4) Ordination as a monastic or lay disciple

Oversight: Transmitted Dharma teachers are overseen primarily by their own teachers. The Ethics Council may also have oversight responsibility should a Dharma teacher be involved in a grievance. Dharma Rain teachers form a cohort within the sangha and provide guidance and support to each other. They are also part of the larger Dharma Cloud lineage, which includes teachers who have trained at Dharma Rain but left to form independent sanghas.

Instructor

Definition: An Instructor leads classes and / or workshops on Dharma topics. This broad category includes persons who lead:

- Public classes on Wednesday evenings
- Dharma Studies / Seminary classes
- One-time or occasional classes on specific topics (e.g., death and dying, ethics for Lay Disciples)
- Introductory Workshops (Zen Meditation, Starting a Practice)
- Dharma School
- Dharma School parents' classes

The scope in which an Instructor teaches may be limited; for example, someone qualified and approved for teaching Wednesday evening classes is not automatically qualified and approved for teaching Dharma School or leading Introductory Workshops. Likewise, a person approved to lead the “Introduction to Zen Meditation” workshop is not automatically approved to lead the “Starting a Practice” workshop.

Qualifications vary according to the type of teaching responsibility.

Oversight is provided by the Dharma Rain teachers’ cohort, by an individual’s own teacher if they are a disciple, and by the Dharma Council, the Workshop Coordinator, or Dharma School Steering Committee, depending on their position.

Apprentice Instructor

An Apprentice Instructor assists Instructors in leading classes and / or workshops on Dharma topics. An Apprentice Instructor's scope (the contexts in which they work) is similar to an Instructor's. Although Instructors in different categories are generally required to serve as Apprentices first, serving as an Apprentice is not sufficient to qualify someone as an Instructor.

Qualifications vary as for instructors.

Group Leader

Group Leaders function in settings less formal than those led by Instructors. Examples include Sunday morning discussions (in lieu of a Dharma talk), cohort groups or affiliated sitting groups when no Dharma teacher is present. Group Leaders may provide some degree of instruction (e.g., in meditation) or present a topic from a Dharma perspective. An individual may find him/herself in this role simply because they're available at the right time and place.

Qualifications vary depending on the event, but at minimum:

- 1) A member of Dharma Rain who has taken the Precepts
- 2) Recommendation / approval by the party responsible for coordinating the event (e.g., the shuso for Sunday discussions).

Oversight is provided by the party responsible for coordinating the event.