



# EDITION 7: PODCAST WITH A GRADUATE HOW DO I COPE WITH A CHALLENGE?

## *Transcript*

Ben Pisani & Belinda Dennis

Ben:	Hi, welcome to the graduate teacher learning series podcast channel. I'm Ben and I will be hosting this session. In this podcast series, we will be talking to graduate teachers, mentors and experts about a variety of different topics that relate to each editions framing question. We will also get the graduates and mentors to share some reflections on their practices that may assist you in yours. In each podcast, the graduates and mentors will be asked the same questions so you can hear the different perspectives on each topic. Okay, so sit back and relax and let's get into this edition of the graduate teacher learning series podcast, talking to a graduate teacher.
Ben:	Hi, thanks for being part of this podcast. Can you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about where you were working in some of your experiences?
Belinda:	Hi, my name is Belinda Dennis. I'm from Bendigo Senior Secondary College. I'm a graduate teacher. I teach psychology. Year 11 and 12. I have two year 11 classes and three 12 classes and Isabel is my mentor
Ben:	In this first section of the podcast at discussion will focus on the framing questions for this edition. What have been some challenges you have had to face in your career thus far and how did you overcome them?
Belinda:	Some difficult students I suppose at the start of the year, the students that like to test you, I think they can figure out pretty quickly if you're a younger teacher and those students that like

to push the boundaries. So, I was really firm at the start of my first few weeks, so I made the expectation really clear. I called parents' home straight away as soon as things got out of hand or just you know, students that weren't concentrating in class and getting a bit disruptive. I just had a chat to him in class outside of class and then I called home and the call home was probably the best thing I did because parents are really supportive. That was kind of nerve wracking for me as well. Calling parents' home, I didn't expect or know what to expect from them, calling up saying that their students are, their kids aren't behaving in class. So that was the best thing I could've done because they were really on board to help me as well. And then there's, yeah, the parents were obviously reinforcing it at home and the students just got it all together. I suppose, they knew I was serious about it. If I threatened to say last warning and you're out, I had to make sure I'd follow through with you're out, not just saying all these things. So, firm at the start and now I've really been at ease off and have a really good relationship with my students. Definitely get along with them all now and they know what my expectations are and what the boundaries are now, so they don't have to push it too much. And the other thing, disengaged students, so they're students that just don't want to learn, don't, I have one student that has only picked up his pen once last term and that did work for the whole lesson. That was the biggest win I had last term because he attempted to work at it because he'd had so many, he told me how he failed everything, every single assignment last, at all his school and he was really scared to fail, and that was probably his biggest thing coming into school for VCE, scared to fail so he wouldn't attempt to anything. And this term has been attempting work again. So, all those small wins that seem like nothing to other students, the student coming to class and opening the book and writing things down, which is a really big win for him. So that's, yeah, those little challenges of how to, how to re-engage students are just so disengaged and get them back on track and find their own little motivators to reengage him.

Ben

That's great!, How did you manage that?

Belinda

I really, he had to trust me first, so I had to form that relationship and then really encouraging that I believed in him because he had no self-belief in what he could do and he said he's parents don't care and he's parents don't think he can do

well. And obviously he'd been discouraged earlier on in schooling because he didn't have a very good belief in what teachers believed in or not. So, I had to be very, very expressive in the way that I thought he could do this. And I set work that was capable of, of his achievement. And I never once told him that he like, it was too hard. He just says, I can't do this. And I'm like, and I'd said that he, I knew he could and always reinforce that. So, he definitely eventually listened, and I think he's listening now. But yeah, reinforcing that if he didn't believe in himself, I believed in him, until now and he's starting to believe in himself, which is good

Ben:

Challenging conversations. What are some examples of experiences you have had and some tips you can share to help others to get through them?

Belinda:

So calling home when I had to call home, different parents and students and that sort of thing, I think there'd be a scene I prepared for the worst. I kind of expected that the parents were out there to get me, and it definitely was the opposite. They were very supportive, and parents really care that you care about the students. If you didn't care about the students, you wouldn't be calling home. You wouldn't be chasing it up and trying to get some improvement from them. Particularly those students, I even call home about the students that I think could be achieving more and aren't putting the effort in in class after having conversations with them, so it follows through. But the parents want to know that too because really, kids will go home and tell the parents that they're doing great at school and they're doing this and that. But they're all, you can kind of tell if a student's capable of doing more or achieving more. So, having those conversations with parents in a positive way rather than a negative, not calling up and saying your students doing this and this and this wrong saying this is what they could be doing better. This is what I want them to be able to achieve, and they can and really frame it in a positive way so that parents know that it is a, you are there to help them. And you want to help them and that you care. So that was the biggest thing I've found. And also, conversation with students in general, day to day activity. I just had it, taught a class then and had a student start to cry during the class. I don't know what brought it on but having to have those conversations while you're teaching and deal with that as well during a lesson I suppose. So, I had to take her to my office and have a conversation with her and I haven't

been taught how to, any sort of wellbeing, classes or anything like that at uni. I have no experience in that. I taught, I've learned about psychology but not counselling, so very different things. So, those conversations are hard when you don't have experience. I definitely wish I had a class that taught me those difficult conversations because he just going off your own experiences of talking to people that are crying. So difficult conversations have, and you really cautious of what to say and what not to say. So, if you do have to have those conversations I recommend to talk to our wellbeing and staff as well. We have a really good wellbeing team here at our college, but this student did not want to go there today so I couldn't refer to them and in the future I'm probably going to seek out and see what I can do for those students when they don't want to go down to the wellbeing center. How can I approach it?

Ben:

Balance, in regards to your teaching practice, what does this look like and how do you work to realize it?

Belinda:

The advice I always got was to make sure I take time for myself a lot like what Isobel was talking about, and it's really important to take on. I do have my days; I go to the gym every day and I have that as my time to not think about school for an hour. Going for a walk with my dog as well. I think it's important to remember that every teacher has those days, whether you've been out for three months or whether you've been out for 30 years. Every teacher has those days where they go home, and they have just overwhelmed, and they can't switch off sometimes. So, I definitely have a lot of different strategies that I use to make sure I have my time. I don't go home until my work is done because unless I have like a deadline with my SACs, I try and not mark at home. So, I like to get up and go for a walk and then I come to school earlier. So, I'll be here at 7:30. So I can get my marking done and start the day because I am pretty much, my brain won't work after 5:30 at night. So, once I'm home, yeah, it's important to know when you work best or as some people are very good at marketing at night and those sorts of things. But switching off, so having that balance and knowing when you need a break as well, taking that break for yourself. So, weekends are my time to catch up with my friends and my family and my friends and family are very supportive. Knowing that during the week I need to get through work and then weekends are for me. So, I plan everything on a Friday before I go. I know exactly. Everything's ready, everything's

printed, everything's organized before school so I can come to school on a Monday and not have to be here at 7:30. I can push it out to eight o'clock if I want, 8:30, but I know that everything's organized.

Ben:

How do you prepare yourself for parent teacher interviews?

Belinda:

Sorry. I've just had parent teacher interviews and I was really nervous going into it and they came out a lot better than I expected because I teach VCE, so year 11 and 12, my parents, each interviews were very based around the student, straight away, before even going into the interviews, I was prepared in knowing my students well, I check over their grades, if I was a bit unsure of how they are coping and what they're doing at the moment. Checked if they had any overdue work, so I could have those conversations while they were there. So, knowing where they're at and also thinking about what they probably could be achieving. SACs sometimes aren't as representative of what they, the students could be achieving. So, having those conversations about it when the parents are there too. So, when the parents and students got to the interview, I'd always directly straight away, ask my students how they felt, they'll go the class, how they were finding psychology, how they'll coping with the fast-paced nature, cause it's a really full long class. It's very pushed for time with the content. So, having that conversation, putting it on them, I always ask them, particularly because I think some parents come in and are really asking the teachers for what are you doing for my child? You know, you kind of get it directed on you. Whereas it's the teacher and the student need to meet in the middle. There's only so much I can do. She didn't need to work as well. So, you can lead a horse to water, whether it makes a drink or not. So, putting it on the student as well, asking them what they think they're doing really well, what they think they could be doing better. And students were really honest as well and I think it was really good for the parents to see because the students need to be honest while I was there because I'm very aware of what they do in class and what they don't, and what they tell their parents might be different. So, it was good to see they were honest, being really approachable as well. I think you know, having that conversation with the parents beforehand, I'd always check to see what their name was cause he can see on Compass I am check with the name was so I could greet them by name just to make them feel a bit more welcomed and ask them how their

day was, those sort of things. Checking to see if there was anything I could be doing for the student as well. So sometimes it's hard to have those conversations in class and get through everything. So, I was always making sure I could, if there was anything else, I could be doing for the students.

Ben:

What are the key points you focus on sharing with the parents to help improve the students' learning?

Belinda:

So I talked about student strengths because the parents, do want to know what the students are doing well and I allowed that to students to identify their own weaknesses because they need to be on our own. It, if I was telling them what they are doing wrong or not doing well, they probably just going to ignore it. It's really important that they can own that. And it was good for the parents to see that too. So, I made sure that the parents knew what they could be doing as well. A lot of parents were writing notes about, I was given a lot of different teaching, sorry, revision strategies and talking about how the parents could help at home. So, if they're making cue cards, I'd ask mum if it was okay. She tested Lucy every now and then on a cue card and those sorts of things. So, posters, I get my students to make posters as well. I was asking the parents if it was okay if they could put the posters up, around the room, all around the house for revision, those sort of things and all the parents were really excited and taking on those provisioned strategies as well because that way they can get involved. I've given my students a study schedule as well, so they've all completed that in class and all been asked to do that and put it on at home, on the fridge or in their room. So, following that up seeing if the parents know where that is. And the parents were able to monitor that. I suppose they can check and see, you know, it's 4:30 you're meant to be studying humanities right now, whatever it is. So that way the parents can help out as well and letting the parents know where they're at school and those sorts of things and offering that support for parents, particularly in VCE. It can be overwhelming for parents too because the students are stressed out and so you know, you generally blame your stress on the people closest to you, the parents at home cop it. So, reassuring them that it's all going to be okay. It's just one of those years.

Ben:

The Department of Education and Training aim to provide all graduate teachers with the best possible supports to start their

career. The graduate teacher induction portal is a great way to find all the resources available, such as the High Impact Teaching Strategies, and the Pedagogical Model. What department resources have you found to be particularly useful in your classroom practice as a teacher?

Belinda:

In terms of HITS that I use, we implement them all as teachers into our lessons, but main ones that I am very aware of are setting goals, So, my students, I get them to set a goal at the start of each term so that'd generally be more of a long term goal based on what they want to achieve by the end of the term, whether it's say certain score on their SAC or something like that. They will also set a weekly goal every Monday or Tuesday, depending on what day I see them. They set their goal for the week, the psychology, so, whether it's going to be get this much done, review of revision this week, or they're going to work on their time management and they're expected to do three to four hours of homework for psych in year 12 each week, where they're going to fit that in. So, they'll write that down or tell me in class and making sure I check in with that at the end of the week as well. Structuring lessons, I always have a very same structure of my lessons. My students know what to expect, so as soon as they come in, we'll do like a five-minute activity, whatever that is, a revision. It might be a little Kahoot quiz, something like that, get them excited or generally revises last week or the last lesson so that they're reinforcing that. It's funny how quickly they can forget what you did last lesson. So, going back over that and then we get through our content. Psychology or any VCE subjects hard in the way that you have to get through all the study design, all the dot points and you're very pushed for time. But making sure you do separated a little so I'll always adjust what key content I want to get through for the lesson. We'll work through that dot point or half that dot point for the lesson, get through the key content. They'll write their notes and then they have the application time. So, they'll do some sort of activity. It's always very self-directed in that way. They will all be doing different things at the same time. Some will jump on and watch videos, some will be writing their cue cards, some will be testing each other on cue cards. Some will be answering questions; some will be making posters. It's all very, everyone's doing something different. I think that's where differentiated teaching comes in as well because I'm very aware all my students learn differently, and they all have different styles that they like. And I think it's important that they know

that. I spent the first term really enforcing that in their heads and getting them to identify what they like, what they don't like because a lot of them would be writing notes and their book and think that was best for and have actually found out later on in the term that it was not effective for him. That's not how they weren't learning from it and they weren't, it wasn't an effective revision tool. So, they are all aware of what they need to be doing now. So, I definitely implement that in my teaching to all be doing what's best for them. And I'll always say that, okay it's you know, activities time, you need to pick what's best for you, don't do what the person next to you is just because it looks fun. Make sure you're picking what's best collaborative learning as well. Psychology is good in the way that you can get those group discussions going. That's generally where students learn most and working with the person next to you. I've very chatty students so they like to talk so it's good that they can talk to the person next to them about the content, making sure I have room around the classroom and get involved in that too. Keeps them on track and it gets more conversation going. And feedback. So, we give our students feedback on their essential learning activities and their SACs. And also, homework as well as going around in class can feed back on their revision tools and what work they're doing.

Ben:

It sounds as if you have really found a flow in your work and that you are enjoying it very much, hearing the passion with which you talk about teaching. What advice do you have to graduate teachers out there?

Belinda:

Believe in yourself. You have this role because you're very deserving of it and you're very capable. Don't be so hard on yourself just because you're a graduate teacher. It's, you're at a benefit being a graduate because you're passionate, you're willing to go, you're fresh on your. So, use that as an advantage to yourself. Every teacher's going to have those hard days, not just you. So, make sure you reach out for those people that are around you as well. You can have a supportive team or get to know the other people in the school, make sure you get to know the key people you need, like ICT people when your laptop stops working. And the wellbeing team and the leadership team so they know who you are. Particularly I'm in a very big school, was 2000 students, 150 staff, so very massive. So, I feel comfortable the fact that I know a lot of the staff, sometimes you got to go out of your comfort zone to do so.



Preparation and organizations, very big. So, if you go into a lesson on prepared or not organized, you're going to feel very flustered the whole lesson. So always be over prepared rather than under prepared. And he can always continue on with the lesson the next lesson over. So always be prepared, always be organized and know that you're in control of the lesson. Students aren't. Take a breath when you need it and particularly, I found very valuable, was spending a lot of time forming those relationships with my students. At the end of the day it's them and me all in it together, where in the big race, so the exam and those sorts of things. And it's good that I have really good relationships with them. And that took a long time. I suppose that whole first term was really working on building those relationships. So, from the first lesson and for every lesson now on, I am always asking them about their lives. I know where they work, I know what sports they play, I know what teams they play for. I have 130 students, so it's a lot of student's scenario, but making sure I put that effort in. Um, whenever I see him outside of school, which is quite often because it's a small town compared to the school and making sure you ask them about that next week and those sorts of things. Asking how their sport competition went, how they're Nan's birthday was because then they know that you care about their life. It's important that they know that you think they're more than just a student. They, and it's important they know that you're a person too. So, you know, I tell them about my life and those sorts of things, they know who I am and who's my family and what I do my weekends and those sorts of things because they don't just want to see me as a teacher. They want to know that I'm more than that. And it's important that we have that two-way trust and relationship. So really important that you form those relationships with people around you and your students and yeah, believe in yourself.

Ben:

What are your time management tips?

Belinda:

So I have my own personal diary outside of school so that I can have, I need my work and my life balanced out so that my work is balanced too. So, making sure I'm organized with what I have to do on weekends and those sorts of things. With work, I have a teacher diary, I always have my lessons very prepared. I'm pretty, I don't go into a lesson not knowing what I'm doing, so I always have them scheduled out. It's hard when lessons change or it takes longer to get through some content, but I've finally

figured out how to plan for my lessons. I don't write lesson plans. I write dot points. I know exactly what I need to do, but each class, so for my three-year 12 Psych classes, each class will be different even if I had the same amount of time. So, it's hard to prepare in that way. But just knowing exactly all my resources there and knowing the content, particularly with a VCE subject, knowing what I'm teaching is really important. It's probably one of the biggest things. I've actually found difficult because I didn't really get taught the study design when I was at uni. I learned about psychology research reports and things like that, but what we teach at the school is very different to what I'd learned at Uni. So, I have to learn the content before I teach it. So, I spent a lot of time reading textbooks and watching videos before I teach it because you needed to have a very good understanding of it to be able to teach it effectively to students. I also, I made sure I block some time in my week to ensure that I can prepare for that. So I know that on my Fridays I have a double off cause that's my spare time, which is very convenient and I always, always, always plan my next week before the weekend so that I have my weekend off and also on a Monday I have another double off then. So that's when I would get onto my marking and other things that need to be done. Come to school earlier so that I can do those nitty gritty things. I think the Admin side of school or teaching was something that shocked me a little. I didn't realize how much time I would spend on my emails and chasing down students and those sorts of things. I thought I just spend all my time in a classroom and that's what you do on placement. You don't do the Admin side of it, so that was a shock, I suppose, and that's time-consuming part of it, so making sure I spend my time doing that.

Ben:

In a new career. It can sometimes be tricky to ask for help. In your opinion, who should graduate to turn to?

Belinda:

I have a very supportive Psych team in my office is me and four other Psych teachers, so very helpful in the way that I can always ask them questions throughout the week or throughout the day. There's always someone around, but it's really important to know, to ask for help. So, first few weeks I didn't want to be that annoying person who was always asking questions, whereas now I realize we all ask each other questions all the time. It's no different just because you're a graduate. So, making sure you know, those people. For me particularly getting on, I'm very keen on getting on leadership

teams and things like that. And so, it was important for me to know the leadership team and I know all of them now and I know my coordinators for my students because the coordinators deal with any sort of behaviour management problems and things like that. So, it's good that I know them now that I can flick them an email and they know who, how to address that. So, hand balling items that you shouldn't have to deal with as well. There's always someone above you. So, making sure if you know you're in over your head, not trying to handle it, you know, push it off to someone that is qualified and is capable of doing that.

Ben: [25:17](#) What are your words of wisdom?

Belinda: [25:19](#) Believe in yourself. Teaching is the most important job in the world and with importance often comes struggle. So, know that it's not always going to be easy, but know that you're capable of dealing with it. And the best thing you can do is be a teacher. But the best thing you can do as being a teacher is to prove to your students that you really care and actually want to help them with their learning. That's often hard for students to differentiate between a teacher that's there for just a job and a teacher that's there because they love teaching and they love, to have the passion to make, help people learn and help people become who they want to be.

Ben: [26:01](#) And that's it for the graduate teacher learning series podcast. Thank you to our guests for sharing their experiences. And thank you for listening. We'll see you next time. Bye for now.