

EDITION 7: PODCAST WITH A MENTOR

HOW DO I COPE WITH CHALLENGE?

Transcript

Ben Pisani & Isobel Houghton

Ben:	00:03	Hi, welcome to the graduate teacher learning series podcast channel. I'm Ben and I will be hosting decision 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 in 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 mentor.
Ben:	01:00	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?
Isobel:	01:08	My name is Isobel Horton and I teach at Bendigo Senior Secondary College. I teach VCE Psychology. I teach VCAL Literacy and I am a mentor to Belinda Dennis.
Ben:	01:27	In this first section of the podcast, our 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?
Isobel:	01:39	I've had, I suppose like anyone, differing challenges in my career so far. When I first started teaching, I was teaching in Kalgoorlie and obviously a lot of challenges there are based around behavior management. So, my two years there I think I learnt a

lot very, very quickly in terms of how to deal with things in the moment and how not to, I suppose overreact and make the situation worse. Coming back to Victoria, one of the biggest challenges was just getting a job. I think it's really competitive here and especially in the Bendigo region where we've got a university and there are a lot of people competing for jobs when they come out of university straight away. So getting a job here, it was amazing and I feel very lucky,

Ben: [02:33](#) Challenging conversations. What are some examples of experiences you have had and some tips you can share to help others to get through them?

Isobel: [02:41](#) One thing that was a big issue in Kalgoorlie, was being sworn it happened a lot more than it should. So, over there we were taught pretty quickly how to deal with that, and you, I suppose, kind of figure out what you're willing to put up with and what you're not in terms of your limits with the students. And I guess having the relationships with the students really helps with that, but I think in those situations where the kids are swearing at you, you need to take a deep breath because the kids aren't reacting at you. They're reacting at the situation and it's more often than not, it's not about you, it's, they've got their own stuff going on. So, it's important to remember that even though you feel really angry and frustrated that it's, you know, they are going through a lot. So, don't forget that. Another challenging conversation in Kalgoorlie, again, asking for hats to be taken off of heads of your eight boys is always a challenge and taking phones off. If they had their phones out, they were asked to hand them over, which they were reluctant to do. So again, just reacting in a calm situation, in a calm way, and I suppose being able to just remind yourself that it's not about you.

Isobel: [03:50](#) So at Bendigo senior I haven't had the same sort of challenging conversations. It's different here because it is a VCE and VCAL environment and the kids, sorry, young adults, you know, 16, 17, 18, the struggles here and more about motivation and getting them throughout, getting across the year and throughout the, through the year. and I suppose the phones and the hats on the heads and being sworn at, it's not an issue here because they've got different priorities and I suppose the hormones have died down a bit as well to some extent. But yeah, different issues, different issues here in different

		conversations to be had just because of the age difference in those cohorts.
Ben:	04:39	Balance, in regards to your teaching practice, what does this look like and how do you work to realize it?
Isobel:	04:45	I think teaching is an all-consuming job. I think it's almost like a disease, hahaha. If you're not doing it, you're thinking about it or your reflecting on what went, usually you're reflecting on what went terribly in the class. You'd quite often forget to think about the things that went well. But I think it's important in teaching to do something for yourself and to find time to do that for yourself, otherwise you'll go insane, I think. Because yeah, I think all the tapes that they know that if you're not in the classroom, you're thinking about being in the classroom, you're planning something or you're thinking of activities that you could do or that you could do better or, so I think taking time out for yourself is really important. To help with my balance in terms of teaching and my own life, I do yoga, which helps to kind of just stop thinking for a bit. I like it because while I'm doing yoga for the hour and a half or however long it's not teaching, it's just me being in the moment, I suppose. It's not reflecting, it's not pondering about how terribly things could go, it's just switching off.
Ben:	05:55	How do you prepare yourself for parent teacher interviews?
Isobel:	05:58	I always take my diary and that has the grades and any notes I need to talk about in it. Something that I like to take with me as well is the unit timelines, so that way if I run out of ideas we can look forward and talk about the assessments that are coming up or how well the students have gone on previous assessments. I always think it's important to look at, if I mean if it's possible to look at who's attending in the night so that way, you're aware of the sort of conversations that are ahead of you. Like if you know you've got little Jimmy coming along and he's been a bit disruptive in the last few weeks, you've kind of mentally prepared for that conversation as opposed to just, them just showing up out of the blue and a bit of stress running through your veins. But yeah, I think it's important to take the diary, grades, notes and be aware of who's attending, if that's possible.

Ben:	06:51	What are the key points you focus on sharing with the parents to help improve the students' learning?
Isobel:	06:57	I think it's important to mention, probably early on in the interview what their student is doing well because they love to hear that of course. And it's nice to start on a positive. It's also important to have some specific feedback for that student. Not just to say something generic like you keep doing that revision that you're doing. You think of something specific that that student is doing or that they can do better and that kind of, shows, I think it shows a bit more that you've put more thought into it and you're prepared and you know your students really well as well.
Ben:	07:37	What department resources have you found to be particularly useful in your classroom practice as a teacher?
Isobel:	07:43	We make goals at the start of every year around the HITS, around the high impact teaching strategies. Mine for this year is multiple exposures. So, in psychology we find that it's generally pretty easy to do that if you're reflecting on things if your, we do a visual diary. Typically, each lesson where the students refer back to last lesson, they draw a visual, so that's a different exposure. I like to work a lot with vocabulary as well, which is of course a multiple exposure because you are exposing to the terms over and over and over again. And in psychology where it's a very definition heavy subject, I find that it's really important because if the kids don't get it initially, then when are they gonna get it? Like they have to work, put in the effort to really understand those words, those terms. Feedback as well, we work really hard on here. I know in the English department over the last two years, they've worked really hard on rubrics, not just summative, but also formative rubrics in terms of, not just chucking it at the kid, at the end of the assessment and go, all right, this is what you're doing well, this is what you need to improve, but sitting down with them before the assessment, after the assessment, and kind of throughout the unit thinking about this is where you're sitting, this is where, this is what you'll be doing next. And that's been really valuable as well with the students so they can actually see, okay, I'm able to do this, that is my next step, how do I get there? Talk to the teacher and have those really purposeful and meaningful discussions as well.

Isobel:	09:10	So the practice principles, a positive climate for learning. We are lucky at this school because we have students that are in the VCE and the VCAL year, so they're 16, 17, 18, and they're generally, typically a bit more mature than those earlier high school years. And something that we have at this school is instead of saying mister or miss or misses, we just use the, the students use our first names. So, it kind of helps to establish that relationship is, you know, we're all equal and no one's better or more important than anyone else, were on the same kind of playing field I suppose. And that does lead to building some pretty strong relationships as well. And I suppose it's important to, you know, ask kids how they're going, what they did on the weekend. And it does, I mean that obviously takes away from learning time, but without those relationships you can't really do much in the class. They're not going to want to engage with what you're talking about. So, I suppose relationships are really, really important. If you're ever going to get anything done,
Ben:	10:16	What advice do you have to graduate teachers out there?
Isobel:	10:19	I think the most important thing, especially as a graduate teacher, is that when you first start the profession, it is, like I said earlier, all-consuming and it can drive you insane. So it is important to have that thing that you do for you, which I know I've already said, but like whether it's a sport, whether it's reading, whether it's listening to a podcast, whether it is just being creative or hanging out with friends and family. But you need to have something regularly where you don't think about teaching. And I know that that's hard, but I think, just for the sake of your sanity, you need to have something for yourself.
Ben:	11:02	What are your time management tips?
Isobel:	11:04	I think it's important to be able to separate school and work so that your time at school doesn't bleed into your personal time. So, it is really important to use your time when you're at school wisely. So not just sit on Facebook for an hour, which you can do on your own time. So I suppose in the time that you get that is the duties, other than teaching time, you use that, you check your email, you use that to plan next week so that you don't have to stress about it over the weekend. So, I suppose, use the time that you get at school as best you can so that you don't have to stress too much outside of school

Ben:	11:50	In a new career, . It can sometimes be tricky to ask for help. In your opinion, who should graduates turn to?
Isobel:	11:57	So in our office there's myself, there's Belinda, and there's a few other Psych changes as well. So, we're really lucky to be in that close-knit environment where we can bounce ideas off each other, we can ask silly questions and we can have a whinge. And I think that's really important as well. You're allowed to whinge, you're allowed to moan, and you're allowed to complain, because not everything's perfect and it is really hard. Teaching is difficult and it's challenging and it's okay to feel challenged because the people around you are there to help you as well. So, if you've got questions, ask them. They once asked those exact same questions. So, they're there to help. But it's good to have your people. So if it's someone you've made friends with, if it's just the people in your office, if you have to go and ask, you know the principal, then just do it because it's, you know, we're all here to do our job and we all want to make the students' lives better. And if you have to ask question, then it's just what you gotta do.
Ben:	12:58	What are your words of wisdom?
Isobel:	13:00	So I'll say it again. Find time for yourself. So I know that it feels like, especially in the first year of teaching, you just have to be planning, you have to be reflecting, you have to be teaching the whole time, but that's not what you have to do. You're allowed to take time off for yourself. You're meant to take time off for yourself, and you should take time off for yourself. So find something to do once a week or maybe just 20 minutes each night to just switch off, stop thinking about teaching, and just do something for yourself.
Ben:	13:37	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.