



EDITION 11: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAD?

Transcript

Ben Pisani & Laura Zinghini

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 that 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 mentor.
Ben:	00:54	Hi, thanks for being part of this podcast. Can you please introduce yourself and tell us a little about where you were working and some of your experiences?
Laura:	01:08	I'm Laura Zinghini and I am the head of arts at Melba College. I'm also the mentor of Lauren Santalucia. My methods are Drama and English and I teach them from seven right through to VCE.
Ben:	01:29	In this first section of the podcast, our discussion will focus on the framing questions for this edition. What do you think makes a great teacher?
Laura:	01:37	I think that a great teacher is somebody that loves what they teach, so they're passionate about it. They need to demonstrate certain key skills to be able to demonstrate that knowledge across to students. So, in particular, I see patients as being a key

element of good teaching, a sense of humor, um, good communication verbally and written, being able to be flexible or malleable to different situations and consistency right across the board. So consistency in the expectations in your classroom and consistency in your dealings with students mean that then they understand that it's a, a free sort of environment and space where they can be free to learn in the best way possible and that you're going to be flexible enough to help them if there is something that they maybe don't feel comfortable with.

Ben: [02:38](#) Looking back over your year, what are the top five achievements that you are proud of?

Laura: [02:42](#) Okay, so my top five achievements would be that this year I directed the college musical, my 13th show for the school and created a show that we had a few challenges that, that he just, this she, but we were able to rise them and, the kids came together to create a fantastic show. So, that would be one. Creating growth in my arts domain. So, as the head of the domain, one of the things I've been setting this year is to try and change the dynamic of the department and how we work together as a team because we're separate subjects within one area. So, trying to find a common ground has been one of my key things this year I've been focusing on. And I think that we're really starting to make change there. I've had a few situations with students where they've come to me with personal problems, like, so not going anecdotally, but some issues that might've occurred for them. I've helped them work through that, fix that problem and um, move forward and come out of it with a positive result. So, I felt like that was something that I really achieved. So, number four was having, two articles published by the TLN for the Graduate Teacher Learner Series which I'd never had actually done before. And my fifth one would be that I have created the sense of, I feel our work and, um, and family life balance and, and getting better at finding a way to juggle my obligations professionally with my obligations personally as well.

Ben: [04:27](#) Success. What does it look like in the classroom and how do you celebrate it?

Laura: [04:31](#) Okay. So, it's, I think it takes a number of different forms. It can be the light bulb moment where a student finally understands a concept that you're trying to teach them. It can be planning

what you think is the world's greatest lesson and then it actually working in a classroom. Um, it can be when you've had a bad lesson, a couple of lessons beforehand and you've changed the way that you work in your dynamic and how you're going to approach things and then the next one changes that group or that class in a positive way, um, it can be the student who does slightly better on the next test or student that asks you how your day is going. It demonstrates that like you're building relationships with kids, right across the board. And I think it's, it's really key to being able to demonstrate success. I think we have to celebrate it in the way that we can. We celebrate it with humor, positive reinforcement. Sometimes you're celebrating in class with the students or drawing attention to it. You might be rewarding behavior if it's an academic or if it's something that you know, that just builds pride in them or pride in your school, you might tend to bring that to the attention of the network outside of the classroom. So, it might be something that you publish in a school magazine or a newsletter, um, or to the print class. yeah, I think that, um, sometimes we just, we, we sometimes we can get caught up in not, not looking at success So when we see it, we should celebrate it in whatever way it feels comfortable to us to do

Ben:

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Moving forward, what changes are you going to make to your practice based on the experiences that you have had this year to improve student learning outcomes?

Laura:

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Okay, so I think that one of the key things having taught for quite a while now is that constantly, we need to shift and change our attitude each year based on the cohort of kids that come through. It's always different. There's always different changes to society and the way that kids handle things. So, we need to constantly reassess things. So, the first thing that I would be looking to do from my practice would be to reassess what worked and what didn't work from this year's curriculum. And then figure out whether or not this, there's things from that that I can take forward in a broad way until I know the cohort of kids I'm dealing with next year and the subjects that I'm teaching next year and how they could be applied. I think that, if I have a broad range of classroom management strategies as well too, I can put them into practice based on the kids' personalities and how they deal with things as well too. You can use your own teacher judgment to work out what's going to work and what's not going to work to get the best practice out.

Utilizing data is something that I like to do. I like to get the data that's been collected by the department, by the school, by myself and by the students as well too, within the classroom to then work out what has worked and what hasn't worked and how best to adapt it. And I think also too, utilizing technology and social media in a secondary environment in particular, social media is something that we can utilize in a controlled way that works really well to create communication lines with our VCE students. So, utilizing technology in a way that we can move forward with, I think is also another way that I would put that into, into my practice.

Ben: [08:13](#) What advice do you have for graduates out there?

Laura: [08:16](#) I think sometimes we get caught up in this belief that everybody else that's teaching knows more than we do. And I think really nobody knows everything all the time. And I think especially graduates might be overwhelmed by seeing, you know, teachers had been teaching for a long period of time and thinking they really know what they're talking about. The reality is that the nature of education and kids in general means that it's going to change every single year. The first year I started teaching, I was working with chalk on chalkboards and now we're using interactive whiteboards. So, I think in 10 years' time what you're like now in 10 years' time is going to be completely different again. And we all feel that whether your teaching and it's your first year out or whether you've been teaching for 30 years, really nobody knows it all. And so, you should just concentrate on making sure for yourself, and that's certainly what I try to do. Just try to do the best I can and just try to shift and change with the times. Keep up to date with reading the policies and information that the department puts out so that, you know, trust that they are also moving forward and helping us in that capacity as well too. And just remember that not to be overwhelmed and to ask for help. Always ask for help because we need each other and it's a good way of relying on each other and getting tips and I certainly find, you know, ideas coming from, from young graduate teachers that are really helpful as well too. So yeah.

Ben: [09:51](#) What are your time management tips?

Laura: [10:01](#) My time management tips have changed over time. So, when I first started teaching, I used to stay late, as in try to complete all

work here and take no work or as minimal work home as I could. Then as time changed in and my life changed and families happened, children happen etc., now I've had to learn to work out how to balance that a little bit better. So it might be that I'm working to a certain point here, taking home what's priority work that needs to be done, but waiting until after my children might have gone to bed for example, and then sitting down and doing it at my own pace and not, not being hit with the, the everyday things that, you know, at work you can, you can say that you're going to plan to, to do stuff, but then you know, something happens or you get pulled away in that free period that you were planning to do stuff in. You don't necessarily get to. So, I think my biggest piece of advice for time management is that you just have to work around what works for you. I, for example, keep a post it note on my laptop of tasks I need to get through in the day and prioritize. And as long as I'm making sure I'm meeting the deadlines; I'm feeling that I'm on top of things. But really, I don't know whether anyone is really, we just need to, you just need to give yourselves a break and make sure that you're know, going to burn out because you're not planning around the things that are priority as well outside of your profession, so you know, family time and, and the things that are your, other obligations, responsibilities, etc. Making sure that you've got a nice balance between your home life and your professional life.

Ben: [11:47](#) What department resources have you found to be particularly useful in your classroom practice as a teacher?

Laura: [11:52](#) I find that I utilize the practice principles daily, especially when I'm planning my curriculum, even at the start of the year. But then you're putting it into place in your daily lesson plan. So, I find that it's, it's good for aligning with my day to day curriculum because it, it makes sure that the curriculum that we are teaching is following what the practice principles are. I use the high impact teaching strategies. This year, per term I've been tackling two a term to try and change around and I've been implementing that with my team as well too. So, the ones that we're focusing on at the moment are explicit teaching and feedback. So explicit teaching is a school wide initiative as well to, here at Melba we utilize the learning intentions and success criteria in every single classroom. It is written in every classroom on the board. And I find that that's really great at keeping students on track with what they need to be doing. So that fits

in with that explicit teaching. And we also utilize different types of review strategies at the end for myself, I'll utilize exit tickets or Q and A to revisit what was covered in the lesson or in the previous lesson. For feedback because I also teach drama, a lot of it is verbal then in there on the spot, but we do also give written feedback as well. And I think it's really important to assist students' progress. So, the high impact teaching strategies are probably the, the one that I utilize most. But I've also, um, been really reading up and utilizing amplify, which is all about giving students voice and agency in the classroom. I think the issue that we have sometimes as educators is understanding what the difference between giving students voice and agency are and what the differences even between voice and agency so amplifies a great document for really helping me work out, you know, how I can utilize that within the classroom and it's not always just being about giving them voice outside of the classroom, which I think a lot of schools tend to do. So it's, it's made me more, understand how I can help them choose to or align with having choice around curriculum and assisting mean planning curriculum, assisting mean having their choices put forward into what they would like to see while making sure that it fits within what the VCE or Vic Curric is asking us to do. From a personal perspective, so there're sort of the department ones I would use, from a personal perspective, I find associations that have been formed with regards to the subject areas I teach. So VATE which is the Victorian Association of Teachers of English and Drama Victoria, which is the association of Victorian drama teachers. I find them really helpful and useful for sharing resources, um, for professional development sessions and for assisting me in, I guess just feeling like reaffirming me that what I'm actually doing is okay and if I feel like I'm kind of going track, they're really good at being able to give me, sort of feedback on how I can then turn it in another direction and, and give me advice and, and ideas.

Ben: [15:02](#) In a new career can sometimes be difficult to ask for help. Who should graduates turn to?

Laura: [15:14](#) I think that first and foremost, they definitely need to turn to their mentor. You need to have that relationship with your graduate and remember our, what it was like to be a graduate and how overwhelming it can feel to them to be coming straight out of university and into a school environment where they've gone from listening and learning about how they're going to be

teachers to being the person that's in charge of 20, you know, 25 kids in a classroom. So really, they need to be able to come to you and bounce anything and everything off you at any point in time. I think also to directing them to the right people when there's questions that maybe you as a mentor, can't ask it, can't answer, sorry. So it might be, if it's subject specific, it might be assisting them to find somebody else that's either within the school or outside of the school, so it might be building a partnership with another school, to find people that can assist them with answering the questions they might have. It's also ensuring that there is a clear relationship between the principal class in the college as well as the graduates. So that the graduate can feel like they can go and have that, have conversations with the assistant principals or the principal about things that are concerning them and bring them up as soon as possible and work them out. Because I guess for graduate teachers, they don't necessarily know that it's okay to go in and ask for things and it's okay to be clear and assertive about what they need in their work environment. Some of them are on contracts or they are still establishing themselves within a classroom. So they might feel really intimidated by going in and talking to a principal or assistant principal and they might just need a little bit of a nudge from their mentor to say, hey, it's okay, they're people too, they were certainly in a classroom too and they really understand that you need that kind of assistance. That's why they're in those positions. So, don't be afraid to go in and ask for what you need from them. They will certainly support you in any way that they can. So, I think it's really crucial that as mentors we are constantly asking too, what our graduates need. And then deciphering who, who would be the right person to send them towards.

Ben: [17:37](#) And finally, give us your words of wisdom.

Laura: [17:40](#) Okay. Remember to the kids in your class, you're going to be in indented into their memories for the rest of their lives. One of the key pieces of feedback that I've received from a parent that I take forward with me every single year is that, this particular father said to me, my grandchildren will know who you are one day because my child will talk about how they had this English teacher at school and then will share a memory. So, remember that students always remember good and bad teachers. You want to be the good one that they remember. You need to listen to them, and you need to hear what they're saying and

build relationships with them. It's so crucial because classroom management relies solely on these students to want to learn anything in your classroom. And they will, if you have a good relationship with them. Don't punish yourself for their failures. Even the most experienced of teachers can be caught in this and I certainly have to remind myself of this all the time. But the reality is, is that we do what we can to deliver the curriculum to try and get it across to them as, as much as possible. But you know, students' days don't just consist of the class that they have with you. Sometimes there are outside influences that affect them, that they don't talk about with you and you can't see them. So, if they failed that math test, maybe it wasn't because of your teaching or your curriculum. Maybe it was because there was something bigger going on in their mind that they just couldn't get past the day that they were doing that test. So be kind to yourself and remind yourself it's not all on you. So, we don't take that anything that doesn't go right on to you be kind to yourself in every sense of the word, within a school environment, without. So outside of a school environment, it's okay to laugh and it's okay to cry and it's okay to just take it forward and go and find people that are going to support you in every sense of the word. Try to be kind to your fellow staff as well too, you know, so that you are actually supportive of them and push, like pay it forward if you will, to future graduate teachers as well too, once you've become out of the graduate bubble, remember that and try and pass that forward to and find the humor in any situation because everything and anything will get better if you can find a way to laugh about it, whether it's in a classroom or whether it's outside of a classroom, things go wrong, but have a laugh and you'll feel 10 times better.

Ben:

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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.