



EDITION 4: PODCAST WITH A MENTOR

EDITION FRAMING QUESTION: HOW DO WE CARE FOR EACH OTHER?

Podcast Transcript

Kate Chinner & Benjamin Pisani

Kate:	00:12	Hi, welcome to the graduate teacher learning series podcast channel. I'm Kate and I'll 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 that you can hear the different perspectives on each topic. This podcast focuses on this editions framing question how do we care for each other. Okay, so sit back and relax and let's get on to this edition of the graduate teacher learning series podcast, talking to a mentor.
Kate:	00:55	Hi, thanks for being part of this podcast. Can you please introduce yourself and tell us a bit about where you are working and some of your experiences?
Ben:	01:02	Hi, my name is Benjamin Pisani and I work at the teacher learning at work. Up until recently I've been a classroom music teacher where I worked for 15 years at Sandringham college as a VCE, VET and year seven to ten music teacher, the director of music, digital technologies leading teacher as well as a VCAL teacher, a VET teacher and a VCAL student manager. I also worked on a variety of different committees within the school community to really work to help improve the learning outcomes for our students. One of the key roles that I did play at Sandringham College was that I was a graduate mentor where I worked with graduate teachers to support them during their first year of teaching and to really help them in this very, very exciting time in their career.

<p>Kate: 01:54</p>	<p>In the first section of this podcast, our discussion will focus on the framing questions for this edition.</p>
<p>Kate: 02:01</p>	<p>How do you get to know your students and what sorts of information do you look for?</p>
<p>Ben: 02:05</p>	<p>Getting to know your students I think is a very, very important part of teaching because it really fosters the learning environment and really encourages them to take chances and take risks in their learning because they know they're doing it, in a safe and supportive environment.</p> <p>To do that, I ask students about their likes, their hobbies, their interests and what they do outside of the classroom. I get to know them on a semi personal level where they share elements about their family, their friends, the interests so that you can find something to really connect to them. It might be a movie that you've seen recently or it might be a sporting team that you follow or it might be an interest in books or titles or audio books, or even from a musician's point of view, I used to connect with most students with this sort of CDs that they had, or the artists and bands that they were listening to or concerts or they may have gone to. Finding shared experiences in a classroom, in a learning environment can really help students to connect to a teacher which can really help to improve their learning outcomes because they're taking risks in their learning, they're trying new things and they're doing it knowing that they have a support base that not only cares about their education but also cares about their general wellbeing.</p>
<p>Kate: 03:28</p>	<p>How have you been using this information to form relationships?</p>
<p>Ben: 03:31</p>	<p>It's about remembering the students' interests and their likes and using this as a platform to start conversation. Something outside of the learning that's happening in your classroom so that they can have a personal connection with you.</p> <p>Remembering if a student told you that they play in a cricket team, for example, on the weekend, on Monday, asking them how did they go in their cricket match, or if they were talking about a movie they were really excited in seeing or a game that they were going to pick up on the weekend, asking them about their thoughts on the movie or how the game was or was it</p>

what they were expecting? It would be just so that you show the students that you did listen to the points that they were raising and that you do actually care and then it actually gives you an ongoing dialogue for you to build upon as you go through the year. And it also gives them a sense of ownership over the learning space so that they feel much more engaged in what they're about to do in your classroom or what they're about to learn. So it's about using that information to launch a safe and supportive learning environment for the lesson that's about to come and to get them connected to not only you, but the learning that you're about to share with them.

Kate: [04:48](#) What information do you share with your students about yourself and how do you choose what that information is?

Ben: [04:53](#) I remember when I was at university, we had a guest lecturer who came in and said that she didn't share any personal information with students at all. She quoted a story where she said that one of the students asked her, miss a, you married? And her response is, I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you. And then had a bit of a laugh. This is an approach that I really don't believe in. I think that if we are going to connect with our students and we're gonna ask them to be vulnerable in their learning, they need to do it in an environment where they feel supported and that the person teaching them is not just someone who has extensive knowledge in a particular topic or area, but is also a person who feels who experiences and who has family and others different components to their life to really make the learning a really rich environment.

So, with that in mind, I do share personal information about myself. My students know that I'm married. My students know that I have a cat. My students know my wife's name, my mum and dad's name, and I talk about things that I did on the weekend with my family. I'll talk about experiences that I've had, trips that I been on, concerts that I've been to, sporting teams that I follow, CDs that I had bought, movies that I had seen both good and bad. I think it's really important that students get to see that there's another side to teachers that teachers aren't just people who once the lesson has finished that they go and stand in the cupboard and white for the next bell to go so they can come out and then just teach. We're not robots, we're people and I think if students can see that we have lives and we have elements to bring to the classroom

outside of just our book smarts, connect to the learning, connect to us as teachers and really explore their abilities and where their knowledge could possibly go because they know it's a safe and supportive environment because I'm trusting them with information about myself. It is worth mentioning that the amount of information and the depth of the detail and the information would change depending upon the age group of my students.

The younger students that I taught may have been privy to things like the sorts of movies that are like sporting teams, that sort of general fun information that they can use to connect. However, with my senior students, particularly my year 12 that's where I was talking about my wife and my family a little bit more also because I would see them quite a bit more often. The year sevens and eights I might see once a week depending upon sport and other school activities. Whereas the year eleven's and twelves I would see for five periods, so I'd actually have a bit more time to invest in building personal relationships to really support the learning because of the contact hours that you have with the students. But at the end of the day you're smart people make a decision as to what you think is valuable information for them to know and use that information to form really strong bonds and relationships with the students in your classroom. Believe me, you won't regret it.

Kate: [07:53](#) What techniques do you implement in your classroom to create a caring and supportive environment?

Ben: [07:59](#) To me it's about honesty and trust and that comes through in the way in which you carry yourself and the tone of voice that you use with your students. Also, the sorts of language that you use if you come across as authoritarian students can really step back from you as a teacher and can also withdraw themselves from their learning environment, particularly when it comes to taking risks with challenges in their knowledge or their skills. One of the ways I did this was to take myself out of the position of power in some of the elements of my classroom teaching practice.

The position of power can be seen at the whiteboard or sitting behind the teacher's desk. When I was having classroom discussions with my students, I would take myself and sit amongst them, putting myself at the student level when we

		<p>were having discussions, created a symbolism that everybody's opinion counted, everybody's voice was equal, including my own, and that we could together explore the learning to really create a joint understanding about the topic we were talking about. To do this effectively. I needed to build respect between myself and the student and the student and myself and to do that I ran a transparent and fair classroom, meaning that all the processes that are used and implemented applied to absolutely everybody and that included myself as well. Working on a, I practice what I preach kind of mentality.</p>
Kate:	09:30	What could you do differently?
Ben:	09:33	<p>You have to be very careful when you building relationships with students because students cannot necessarily distinguish the difference between personal and professional. Sometimes students will start to see you as a really great friend, or they'll start to see you as someone who's not necessarily their teacher may be more like a personal mentor and they might start to share information with you that might make you uncomfortable.</p> <p>It's important that you outline the guidelines of your relationships with the students and that they understand that while it's okay to be a friendly teacher, that you're still a teacher none the less and that they need to actually start to control the sorts of information that they share with you and that they can start to learn what sort of information they keep personally to themselves and what information they share with others. So it's important that you established these guidelines relatively early in the relationship so that you don't create awkward situations for yourselves and the students further down the line</p>
Kate:	10:39	In the second part of the podcast, our guest, we'll share general reflections on their teaching practice to give you some tips that might help you in your first few years of teaching.
Kate:	10:48	What advice do you have for graduate teachers?
Ben:	10:51	Really get engaged in the school community. It's a really exciting place to be getting involved in sporting events, whether it be like, oh, lunch time activities, getting to know the students and the staff and really immersing yourself in the school culture can be a fantastic way to experience your first year of teaching. It

can be very easy to get lost in the classroom side of your teaching practice, focusing on lesson plans, getting worksheets or getting booklet printed, creating digital resources. All these sorts of things can take a lot of time and can draw you out of the school community. So, my first piece of advice is really immerse yourself in the school community. Get to know kids outside of your classroom, get to know teachers from other faculties and really experienced the amazing situation that you're in.

My second piece of advice is don't forget to stop and just remember that you are here. You've spent so many years at university working towards this point. You've applied for lots of jobs and you've been to interviews and you are now sitting in your classroom and you're planning your lessons and we get very caught up in the busyness of teaching and the preparing for lessons and marking work and been doing reports and all the other stuff that comes with it, but we forget to savor the moments. So, don't forget to take a breath and just to think about and reflect upon what you've done to get where you are and what has actually happened during the day that made you smile. These are really important points that will help you connect to your teaching.

And while I could go on and on and on about different pieces of advice, the last one I will give you will be, don't be afraid to ask for help. Graduate Teachers sometimes hesitate to ask for help or ask questions for clarification on school processes or on topics that are being discussed in a staff meeting or on how to address a problem student or an interesting situation in the classroom or how to get their head around presenting a tricky topic. Ask for help your colleagues are there doing the same job that you are doing for the same reasons that you're doing them. They love teaching and they love helping others learn and develop and grow. So, don't think about this as a journey you have to do on your own. You can reach out to the people in your team, to the people within your school community and even networks that you've created outside of your school to ask for help. Ask your Mentor, ask a principal, a leading teacher to feedback on your practice or to give you some suggestions about how you can improve your teaching or approach a topic or for clarification in that part of the staff meeting that you didn't understand or didn't really make sense. Ask for help because there are an amazing group of people around you who

are more than willing to help because at the end of the day, helping and providing knowledge is what we do.

Kate: [13:58](#) What are your time management tips?

Ben: [14:01](#) Get yourself a diary and live out of it. And I know that we're in the digital age and most of us have a digital diary, but for the first couple of years, having a diary and writing absolutely everything in it will make your life a little bit easier to navigate, particularly when you find yourself at having to deal with so many different elements of the school day outside of the classroom, particularly things like assemblies or sporting events or meetings and just trying to juggle all those things can be quite taxing.

So grabbing a diary and writing down all the different appointments that you have throughout the week can really help you to prioritize and can really help you to balance the time that you have in the day between doing the administration element of teaching to doing the classroom element of teaching, but also finding some time to do the preparatory stuff, getting yourself ready for the next class or photocopying those resources or watching that video before you showed it to the class. Those sorts of things. And I would do those sorts of elements of my teaching as much as I could at school if that meant I stayed back at work a little bit longer. That was okay because I was in that work environment. I was in that work mindset.

Kate: [15:24](#) In a new career, it can be sometimes tricky to ask for help. In your opinion, who should graduates turn to?

Ben: [15:30](#) I think you could turn to absolutely anybody in a school. Of course, you should turn to your mentor because that's someone you are going to form a relationship with, an ongoing relationship with as you go through the year. But other teachers in your department, teachers outside of your department, administration, staff, ES staff, everyone in a school works in a school because they want to help others. They want to support people growing and developing and that desire to help isn't linked to an age group. It doesn't stop when the student reaches 18 people work in schools because they like helping others and they like to making a difference.

So, anybody in the school we'll help you. It's just about making sure that you choose the right time to ask them for help or you choose the right location. You might find that one teacher is quite happy with that corridor conversation which you can just say, hey by the way, can I ask your opinion on? Whereas another teacher might prefer a quiet sit-down environment where they can really think through the problem and explore it with you. Everybody in a school, will help you and I encourage you to ask anyone. Just make sure that you're mindful of the location and the time and I guess the, the, the mental state of the person who you are asking help from. Because if they're in a place where they're not actually able to give it right then and there, or they're not comfortable giving it right then and there, it can create an awkward situation.

It doesn't mean that they don't want to help. It just means that they might not be able to help right at that second. But ask anybody, everybody's there help you. Schools, our teams, teams that work to improve and grow students and people, I think we forget that.

Kate: [17:25](#) Give us your words of wisdom

Ben: [17:26](#) There are lots of opportunities at the school to be able to connect to your community. And I think it's important that you take these advantages to do just that. Get involved in sporting carnivals, coach sporting teams. Go and see the productions, the drama, the theater, the music, concerts, the dance concerts. Get involved in extracurricular activities that seem like because it gives you the opportunity to not only in really enjoy what you're doing outside of your classroom, but to connect with people within your community. That's a really important fabric of schools is the communities that it created both in and outside of the classroom that really foster that positive, engaging learning environment.

Take stock of what you're doing and don't be afraid to say no. If you're feeling a little overwhelmed, you will be presented with lots and lots of opportunities at the school and you feel like that you, if you don't say yes, now you're going to miss out on that opportunity. But just take a breath and think about what responsibilities you have at the moment and whether or not you can actually take on that extra load or whether or not you're in a place that allows you to give the best to your

teaching as well as give the best of that extracurricular activity that you were going to engage in. So, think about whether or not it's something you want to say yes to right now, or whether it's an experience that you can save up and engage in a little bit later on in the year or maybe sometime in the future.

Get to know your students. Really connect with them, they're the reason why all teachers do what they do. And if we don't connect with our students and we don't build up really positive relationships, it's going to make the classroom environment, the learning environment and our jobs less enjoyable and less fulfilling. So really get to know your students and connect with them in any way you can and you will find that it's a really fantastic profession, a profession that really impacts people's lives, that helps to set them up for who they are going to be in the future and that you play a really big part in that. So just enjoy it and be really proud of the fact that you are a teacher and good luck.

Kate:

[19:47](#)

And that's it for the graduate teacher learning series podcast. Thank you to our guests for sharing your experiences and thank you for listening. We will see you next time. Bye for now.