

MAKING THE MOST OF MENTOR CONVERSATIONS

By: Susan Vissenjoux

Assistant Principal Susan Vissenjoux from Noble Park Primary School explores practical tips for graduates and their mentors

As a graduate teacher, you will have most likely spent the first term of the school year navigating the protocols, procedures and terminology of your school, as well as developing positive relationships with colleagues who act as mentors and friends. You may also have played more of an observer role during staff briefings and in team planning as you watch, listen and learn from your more experienced colleagues.

Now as you move through your second term as a teacher, you are probably more familiar with daily and weekly routines and requirements, as well as feeling increasingly confident about contributing to professional conversations. You may find this is the time that your personal style starts to make an appearance. It is also a great time to really focus on the quality of your lessons.

Three Conversations to have with your mentor

1. Our core business is to implement high quality teaching and learning and so we need to have a common language to understand and discuss the most effective strategies for teaching, learning and assessing. We have to make time to reflect upon individual and collective practice and deepen professional conversations. We are all time-poor and team planning can often feel rushed and confusing. But taking the time to develop a shared understanding of high-quality teaching practices, within a teaching and learning model, will ensure that all teachers in a team, and even within a school, are 'on the same page'. Students will feel supported when all teachers are following a similar format with consistent expectations.

Discussion question with mentor:

- How can I effectively utilise my time during planning?
- What supports can I access to assist with my planning?
- Is data utilised to assist in the formulation of planning?
- How can my skills be utilised during planning sessions?

2. A teaching and learning model provides a safety net for a graduate teacher. It is a recipe for each lesson. It will ensure that you are including all the elements of an effective lesson, like a checklist of sorts, at a time when you can feel overwhelmed with your extreme learning curve. The teaching and learning model will also provide a basis for lesson observations and feedback from colleagues about your teaching, something that is an important and required aspect of your VIT full registration process.

Discussion question with mentor:

- Does the school have any formalised documentation to structure and sequence a lesson?
- Are you able to observe my teaching practice and can I observe a lesson and get some constructive feedback?
- Can you recommend an experienced staff member in the school to view best practice?

3. It is a great time to be a new teacher. The Department has many wonderful initiatives that support excellence in teaching. [The Victorian Teaching and Learning Model](#) is a framework for improving student outcomes and links whole school improvement and classroom practice. There are four components of the model which include a [vision for learning](#), [practice principles](#), the [pedagogical model](#) and [high impact teaching strategies](#). Continued improvement in teacher practice and ensures professional dialogue can thrive between teachers. It also means that the knowledge and skills you are developing now will be transferable to other schools.

Discussion question with mentor:

- What do I know about the Victorian Teaching and Learning Model?
- What do I use currently in my planning and teaching?
- What could I begin to implement in my classroom and how should I do this?
- What would I like to know more about?

As your confidence continues to develop and your personal style of teaching emerges, you will be able to add your own flavour to the teaching and learning model structure. But for now, continue to become familiar with the teaching and learning model that is used at your school so that you can develop a deep understanding of what learning looks like.