

Glen Pearsall at the Victorian Institute of Teaching Twilight Seminar in February.



ENGAGING TEACHERS

“Would this idea work on a hot Friday afternoon double period?”

That question was Glen Pearsall’s constant companion as he filtered years of teaching experience and academic research into the production of *And Gladly Teach* – a classroom handbook that sets out to create and foster more effective and engaging classrooms. No mere theoretical treatise, the handbook contains a series of activities and strategies that have been trialled in the classroom, with clear instructions, diagrams and variations to suit different teaching circumstances.

Glen was the guest speaker at the Victorian Institute of Teaching’s first Twilight Seminar for 2011, held at the Institute in February. Currently teaching at Eltham High School, Glen is an acclaimed presenter of professional development for classroom teachers across Australia, and continues to receive rave reviews for his presentations, channelling his expertise in high quality instructional practice, and the development of classroom cultures based on sound pedagogy and educational research.

The title of Glen’s handbook comes from the Chaucerian phrase “And gladly would he learn and gladly teach”. And those simple words aptly describe Glen’s infectious zeal for the profession, and his desire to pass on knowledge.

Professional PRACTICE



Value learning. Value teaching.

NEWSLETTER

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Professional Practice is the official newsletter of the Victorian Institute of Teaching and is used to communicate important policy decisions and developments that may affect a teacher’s registration. It provides a forum for the discussion of professional issues most relevant to teachers: their learning, their practice and values. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not of the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

And Gladly Teach espouses five key techniques that lead to more effective teaching: student engagement, cooperative classrooms, staying on task, personal learning and a collegial approach across the school community. What makes the handbook and Glen's presentations resonate so strongly with teachers is their firm basis in experience. The ideas in the handbook are Glen's, but they draw on the work of many influences, from day one in his career:

"Teaching is so deeply collaborative. When I started teaching I was lucky to work with an experienced staff. They were very open and supportive. And then I combined that with travelling around doing professional development, and all the kinds of advice I got. I decided to synthesise it in one place."

Glen drew on the experience of his colleagues to become a better teacher. And he devotes a chapter in his handbook to what he sees as a collegial approach to engagement:

"Honouring the experience of other teachers is an effective way to draw on the full resources of the school community."

The handbook contains a sample of the several hundred classroom ideas that Glen employs in his day to day teaching. His thinking draws on a rich background of educational research and his own experience in teacher training. Glen believes we have an embarrassment of riches in Victoria when it comes to educational expertise, and while *And Gladly Teach* focuses on very specific, achievable classroom outcomes, behind it is a broader aim based on sound theory: creating more engaged, responsible learners.

Glen introduces and explains a range of interesting classroom activities, such as Line Debating, the Word Cloud Splash, and the Resource Auction, which are designed to alter the often unproductive dynamics of the classroom, while still challenging students – possibly even more than they might be used to:

"Engagement is not about making work easier, just more accessible."

From there, *And Gladly Teach* goes on to challenge students even further – working on what education author Roger D. Goddard calls "collective efficacy" – by getting student groups to increase their perceived ability to reach goals, and thus take on more challenging ones.

In the chapter titled "Staying on Task", Glen explains very specifically how teachers can use techniques to praise good learning practice rather than focusing on bad practice. It is a theme that runs through the handbook, and Glen's presentations:

"It's what you say 'yes' to, not what you say 'no' to that counts."

And Gladly Teach has proved a success, selling over 8,000 copies already. Glen is currently working on a sequel, due in August, which will include more activities based on student engagement and a strong focus on feedback.

Glen's work reflects his understanding of the twin goals of effective teacher education: to draw on high quality educational knowledge, but to make it accessible and flexible to suit the everyday teacher's various needs. Glen Pearsall is a teacher first and foremost, and his empathy and respect for the profession are obvious:

"Teachers demonstrate incredible impact in small, everyday ways. A teaching commitment is moral and deeply personal. But the question is how to get the most out of that commitment? It's about developing small everyday strategies."

These are the strategies that underpin *And Gladly Teach*, strategies that have been used in the classroom, no doubt on hot Friday afternoon double periods.

"These are 'in case of emergency, break glass' strategies. They work."



A 'word cloud'.

A NEW APPROACH TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The days of the teacher as 'Lone Ranger' are long gone. Once, classroom discipline drew on a teacher's naturally assumed position of authority, with the unconditional support of parents. Society's attitudes have changed. So how could the same discipline methods still work?

That is the belief of Latrobe University education author and researcher Professor Ramon Lewis, who has developed the Developmental Management Approach to classroom behavior. This approach formed part of the Achievement Improvement Zones [AiZ] <<http://www.aiz.vic.edu.au/>> – a four year project charged with improving the literacy and numeracy achievement levels in 55 Northern Region Schools.

Classroom behaviour was seen as an intrinsic part of improving achievement. As part of the region's 'Powerful Learning' strategy, the AiZ sought to make individuals active partners in their learning by building respectful teacher / learner relationships. And that relationship lies at the heart of Professor Lewis's thinking on classroom discipline.

Professor Lewis's approach focuses on the importance of fostering responsibility in students, over and above obedience. It is this fundamental shift in thinking that underpins the theory, and challenges what we instinctively expect teachers to do in a classroom situation.

What is the definition of responsibility in Professor Lewis's opinion?

"I mean that students should act to protect and defend the rights of all students to learn without distraction and to be physically and emotionally safe in schools."

The idea that students can develop collective as well as personal responsibility is one that some might find challenging. It might imply a sharing of the 'running' of the class, and the abdication of some of the teacher's traditional power in the classroom. It is certainly a shift in approach, but Professor Lewis makes it easier to understand by referring to different kinds of power that teachers knowingly or unknowingly draw upon.

The use of 'legitimate' power, inherent in the position that teachers occupy, and 'coercive' power from the students' desire to avoid punishment, should be minimised. 'Referent' or relationship power, drawing on trust and respect for the teacher, and 'expert' power, from the teacher's ability to pass on valuable knowledge, are far more effective when employed in the long term.

But the difficulty is how to achieve this seemingly ideal relationship in the classroom. Fortunately, Professor Lewis's approach sets out clearly achievable steps. The key to this is his definition of four main kinds of student behavior categories. Each category requires its own distinct approach.





Students who generally tend to manage themselves in the classroom can be directed by the use of visual and verbal hints. The most often quoted example of this in action was that of the teacher who simply stepped onto a green dot on the floor whenever he felt that students were not respecting the rights of others to learn. Although seized upon for its gimmicky nature, this example shows a teacher getting the students to think for themselves about what should happen next.

This example, however, is illusory when viewed out of context. A very detailed process was necessary to get to that point. And not all students manage themselves. For those that need more teacher input, systematic rewards and consequences come into play. Then there are the students who, for whatever reason, need to be isolated, or removed from class. These students need one-on-one 'adult' discussions. Here Professor Lewis distinguishes between the use of an 'adult voice' and that of a 'parent voice':

"A parent voice can be sometimes nurturing, but mainly bossy or controlling. The benefit of an adult voice is that the student being addressed is more likely to respond from their adult state, hear what is being said, and respond sensibly."

Finally, the most extreme category of behavior involves the student who appears 'unmanageable'. According to the Developmental Management Approach, a detailed and systematic process is required, to rebuild the student's self-concept by focusing on their feelings of competence, usefulness and belonging.

Overarching themes emerge. The approach is inclusive, not coercive, and at every turn it emphasises the need to de-escalate, not escalate. Professor Lewis asks teachers to let students save face, separate the deed from the doer, and as a handy reminder:

"Fight your first impulse".

Professor Lewis' thinking has not gone without its critics. But the results of the AiZ make interesting reading.

There is hard data to suggest that, far from the 'pie in the sky' criticisms raised in a newspaper article last year, when the approach is adopted whole heartedly, change occurs.

At Broadmeadows Primary School in 2008, there were over 120 incidents of a child being asked to leave the learning space. Since adopting the Developmental Management Approach, that number has plummeted. In 2010, it was two. When asked to comment on the effectiveness of the approach (and the fears that classroom discipline would be eroded), Principal Keith McDougall was very clear:

"Ramon Lewis gave us a definitive approach to managing classroom behavior. We applied it to our own idiosyncratic requirements, and we got really serious about it. We relentlessly highlighted to children that their behavior impacts unfairly on others. We deliberately avoided confrontation. With confrontation, there are no winners. It ups the ante, and the teacher has to win – but at what cost?"

"Track our data on behavioural problems, and incidents have gone down. Track our NAPLAN data, and results have gone up. It's not rocket science. The environment becomes more conducive to learning."

ACCOMPLISHED TEACHERS AT WORK

Learning by example: as a form of professional development, it mightn't seem all that new. But the benefits of seeing accomplished teachers in action cannot be underestimated, and were crucial to the development of the Professional Standards for Accomplished Teaching of School Geography.

These standards were made possible by observing the work of accomplished teachers, and identifying what made them accomplished. Established last year, the standards were the culmination of four years research work undertaken in partnership between the University of Melbourne, the Australian Geography Teachers' Association, the Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria and the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

The importance of this research is not just in developing professional standards for teaching school geography, but also in the generic qualities that emerged, which can be applicable to all teachers. What was achieved is of vital interest. How it was achieved is equally instructive. The methodology, which focused on video evidence of accomplished teachers in action, was backed by rigorous research, yet a simple premise – that quality teaching leads by example.

The results of this filming can now be viewed at < www.geogstandards.edu.au >.

Even for non-geography teachers, there is plenty to learn from the teaching styles on display.

Melbourne Graduate School of Education lecturer Jeana Kriewaldt was one of the academic researchers responsible for the project. Their approach to standards development was grounded in the actualities of practice:

“The aim was to articulate what is special and important about geography teaching. The way to start was by seeing accomplished teaching in practice. Not what we *say* we can do, but what we *are* doing.”



The skills of accomplished teachers are not confined to their subject area.

Flyers were distributed in Victoria, NSW and SA, asking for nominations of highly accomplished geography teachers.

The teachers nominated were mostly 20 or so years into their career, so the team identified a younger teacher to provide some balance. Eventually, ten teachers in different schools agreed to take part, and were filmed in action. Principals, students and parents involved also signed an agreement to participate.

In the classroom, there was a camera on the teacher, one on the class as a whole, and one on selected students. The teachers were interviewed on camera before and after the lesson, and students were interviewed off camera. The footage was given to geography teachers to comment on, and a project team ran sessions with these teachers, to identify what made these teachers accomplished. From this, standards were developed and circulated for comment and refinement.

There was strong consensus among teachers over what characterised accomplished geography teaching. According to the published standards, accomplished geography teaching engages students in the classroom and in the field and is built on substantive knowledge of the discipline, continual planning, evaluation and renewal of teachers' professional knowledge and practice. A set of materials was published, describing in detail the nine standards, and the website was developed, where samples of the filmed lessons can be viewed, along

with the teacher interviews and detailed descriptions of the lesson highlights.

The nine standards encompass the following categories:

1. Knowing geography and geography curriculum
2. Fostering geographical inquiry and fieldwork
3. Developing geographical thinking and communication
4. Understanding students and their communities
5. Establishing a safe, supportive and intellectually challenging learning environment
6. Understanding geography teaching – pedagogical practices
7. Planning, assessing and reporting
8. Progressing professional growth and development
9. Learning and working collegially

For Jeana Kriewaldt, the process brought some revelations:

“I expected greater differences between the states, for example in NSW where the curriculum drives teachers to teach more towards an exam. But we found there were more commonalities between the teaching approaches.”

“The benefits are clear – novice teachers look at the samples on the website and take notes. But, although it wasn't our intention, there are generic skills on display, not confined to the subject area. One sample particularly challenges viewers to think about how discussion can be effectively facilitated, and another example has promoted reflection on the role of formative assessment through monitoring and listening.”

Importantly, “when teachers watch the samples, debate ensues – and through this, it inspires teachers to change the way they have been looking at things.”

Fran Cosgrove, Group Manager of Standards and Professional Learning at the Victorian Institute of Teaching, sees the wider benefits for the profession:

“This project has been very important in developing our understanding of what accomplished teacher practice looks like. What is not surprising is that the professional attributes of accomplished geography teachers that have been identified through the standards can be applied to teachers in any grade or subject area. The video evidence of this provides a fantastic resource for teachers to use at any stage of their professional lives.”

AND THE WALLS CAME DOWN

Imagine a classroom as big as the world. It might seem surreal, but effectively that's what happened when teacher trainees, teacher mentors and students at Hawkesdale P12 College participated in a virtual project that worked so well, it made classroom walls – and other conceptual barriers – disappear.

Three final year teacher trainees – Abby Shultz, Bianca Evans and Michelle Iro – undertook a virtual placement pilot last year, teaching classes from locations outside the room, the school, and even the country, while their teacher mentors looked on. And the positive effects were greater than any of the participants had imagined.

This unique and previously untried virtual teaching experience was developed by Country Education Projects Rural Educators Network in partnership with the University of Ballarat, Hawkesdale P12 College, and the Innovations and Next Practice division of DEECD, with endorsement from the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Over a seven week period the teacher trainees developed their online skills and the use of tools that would enable them to deliver lessons from afar. The first few weeks were spent at the school, with their students and mentor teachers, teaching, developing and practising their ICT skills to eventually deliver their classes virtually. By using Skype, Elluminate and many other web tools, lessons could be delivered without a teacher trainee in sight.

Then the fun began! Students could only guess where the teachers were, and the truth of the matter varied considerably. One lesson was delivered with the teacher trainee sitting just outside the classroom. On another occasion, the teacher trainee was actually in China! Another example highlighted the practical potential of this virtual technique, with a lesson on floristry delivered from inside a real florist, utilising both the expertise of the florist as a guest presenter, but also the visual benefits of seeing floristry in action in a real setting, without having to take a whole class of students there. For a country school where distance creates logistical barriers to frequent excursions, this has exciting implications.



Abby Shultz delivers a virtual lesson.

For those unfamiliar with programs such as Elluminate, it might seem that such an approach, removing the physical presence of the teacher from the classroom, would lead to a static and unproductive experience for the students. But in fact the student experience was actually enhanced in many ways. Each student sat at a computer screen with a headset and was able to communicate verbally, see and be seen, and, for social network-savvy students here is the big plus – participate in a forum similar to that of a chat room.

Lesley MacGregor, Project Manager of the Country Education Projects Rural Educators Network, described the results, which she found at times surprising, but immensely positive:

“There were about eight things happening at once, which really appeals to students, and they were totally into it. Normally, there’s a pattern with class discussion, where a certain few can tend to dominate. Here, the dynamic changes. It brought out the introverts. It gave everyone a platform to contribute.”

And the potential for students to stray off task without a teacher there to guide them? Not a problem, according to Lesley:

“It was quite overwhelming, actually. I sat in the classroom and students were so busy and totally engaged in the conversation and learning being presented.”

The teacher trainees’ teacher mentor was with the students at the time, and presumably in an everyday teaching situation, some form of team-teaching might need to come into play. However, this partnership project clearly shows how the conventions of the classroom can be re-thought, and at the very least, it allows for guest presenters and people in the workforce to enrich a lesson with real interaction. Anne Mirtchin from Hawkesdale P12 college sees many positives:

“It creates a truly global classroom. You can bring in experts from wherever you choose. And it gives you the possibility to run subjects you wouldn’t normally consider due to a lack of numbers, by teaming up with other schools.”



Teaching online from the local florist.

And the walls came down. The initiative challenged perceptions of what teaching and learning looks like, and what the role of the teacher, student and community (local and global) is in that learning. For the teachers, it created an interesting shift, with the teacher taking on a stronger facilitator role rather than always being the fountain of knowledge. Maxine Cooper from the University of Ballarat was impressed with how this created a true community of learners, while at the team debrief teacher mentor Graeme Poynton reflected:

“The relationships that were forged with all the stakeholders, teacher trainees, mentor teachers and students created a whole school approach that generated infectious enthusiasm. True team teaching occurred. Both trainees and mentors were learning, and in turn mentoring each other.”

Walls of perception came down, but you don't literally need to knock walls down to create an open learning environment that is rich and engaging for students. Nor do you need to have a school that has unlimited resources. A traditional school set up and timetable was no barrier either, and being in a small country town with no mobile service was not a problem.

This partnership project also created a number of professional development opportunities for teachers and teacher trainees and enabled individuals to extend knowledge and skills. Many new things were trialled. Of course there were the usual problems of technology not working when it should, but that helped to create the best trouble shooting team in the school! This in itself built confidence and created more willingness to take more risks and try more.

Students with special needs also responded positively. Teacher mentor Carlee Vize noted that “many of my students don't cope well with change, but this really didn't worry them”. The engagement of the students was obvious. The number of questions asked was significantly higher than usually expected from more traditional lesson delivery, and this directed the teaching and learning. There was a lot of incidental learning.

For the team involved and their various partners, it had been a huge undertaking, a leap into the unknown. While there was some initial apprehension the results speak for themselves, reflecting the enormous commitment and vision for education, of all concerned. Teacher mentor Britt Gow was so inspired by her involvement she is running VCE Environmental Science online for 2011, catering for a number of students from different schools.

When teachers with many years of traditional teaching under their belt say “I'm really excited about this!” and teacher trainees tell you “it is the best thing I've done in my four years at Uni” you know you are on the right track.

Virtual learning – the possibilities are very exciting. To find out more about how the project actually worked, talk to Phil Brown from Country Education Projecton 0428 171 145 or Lesley MacGregor on 0411 643 890.



Top: Michelle Iro online and ready to teach.

Middle (left to right): Bianca Evans, Michelle Iro and Abby Shultz hone their online skills.

Bottom: The team with their certificates of participation.



LATEST UPDATES

National Professional Standards for teachers

You may have read in the recent media that the National Professional Standards for Teachers have been released following endorsement by all state and territory education ministers in December 2010.

The standards will be managed through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) who will work closely with local teacher regulators, such as the Institute as the administrator of the standards framework within Victoria.

As you know, Victoria already has a standards framework which underpins key activities such as entry into the profession, the progression from provisional to full registration and renewal of registration.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers comprise four key levels, the first two aligning closely to the Victorian standards:

- Graduate Teachers (standards for entry to the profession); and
- Proficient Teachers (provisional registration).

Two further levels have been described for teachers at higher levels of proficiency:

- Highly Accomplished Teachers; and
- Lead Teachers.

It's important to note that the implementation of the national standards in Victoria will not happen immediately—implementation will be phased, with a range of support materials to be provided.

The Institute will work closely with AITSL to make sure that the support material for Victorian teachers is comprehensive and will support a smooth process of transition.

If you'd like some more information on the National Professional Teaching Standards, you can visit the AITSL website at < www.aitsl.edu.au >.

For the Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities (ATRA) response visit < www.atra.edu.au <<http://www.atra.edu.au>> >.

Congratulations

Registered teachers across Victoria are involved in a broad range of projects and practices that build knowledge and strengthen the practice of the teaching profession. Every year awards and scholarships are granted to teachers and principals whose professional work has been recognised by their peers and who have been nominated for an award.

On behalf of all registered teachers, the Institute congratulates the teachers who in the past term have received awards and scholarships. The full list of award recipients can be found in *Professional Practice online*.

Institute website

The new look Institute website has been up and running since last year. We hope you are finding it comprehensive and easier to navigate. Don't forget if you have changed your contact details you can update your information by going to *Update my details*.



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