

Findon Primary School literacy coach
and teacher mentor Jo Tornese



SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF TEACHING

Supporting beginning teachers in their first year of teaching is vitally important. It should not be left to chance – and that's why the work of teacher mentors is so valuable. Teacher mentors are a critical factor in effective teacher induction, supporting ongoing professional learning and reducing the focus on survival.

The mentor–teacher relationship is reciprocal, based on classroom practice, and benefits not only the beginning teacher, but the mentor and the school. It is designed to help new teachers become good teachers, and then keep them in the profession longer.

It is a legislative requirement that provisionally registered teachers must meet the standards of professional practice in order to achieve full registration. In developing policy around this requirement, the Victorian Institute of Teaching was also aware that a high proportion of teachers were leaving the profession during the initial years of service. The high demands, overwhelming workload, physical and professional isolation, conflict between expectations and reality, difficult teaching assignments and inadequate induction were all seen as contributing factors to this attrition rate.

The problem was twofold: how to support teachers to achieve the necessary standards, and also increase the retention rate of teachers.

Professional PRACTICE


victorian institute
of **teaching**

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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.

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Victoria
The Place To Be

The Institute looked at induction and mentoring for provisionally registered teachers as the way to help achieve this. The strategy built on what many schools were already doing and brought teaching in line with other professions that ensured supportive entry for new members.

The Teacher Support Program is a combined program between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Victorian Institute of Teaching. It is designed to give mentors the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of the skills of mentoring, and provide the necessary support for beginning teachers to build their capacity as practitioners.

The program incorporates mentor support seminars – annual two-day statewide training and support programs for teacher mentors and mentor coordinators who support provisionally registered teachers. They run at various locations around the state and have been in operation since 2004.

One teacher who continues to attend these sessions is Jo Tornese, literacy coach at Findon Primary School. Jo has the role at her school of guiding graduate teachers through their registration process, and she attends the sessions regularly to keep up to date and remind herself of the benefits of the collegial process.

“Each year I learn something new. I really enjoy working on strategies for collegial teaching.

“My main role, rather than being an individual mentor, is across the whole school, helping teachers through the process, to plan and document their professional learning. I facilitate meetings, act as a resource and help document evidence. It’s important to make sure it is a reflection of their classroom teaching, and not creating more work for them.

“I always encourage graduates to seek opportunities to learn from colleagues. There are enormous benefits for them in crossing over with colleagues. My aim is to keep them on task, keep their focus realistic. At times they can over-do it, and they need to take a big step back or they can buckle under the expectation and pressure.

“I learn from them too. They have different styles and bring ideas they have gained in their training, which contribute to the mix. I have to learn how to manage different personalities and levels of confidence. Our big enemy is time – the lack of time to really scratch below the surface, so I try to work with them at the least pressurising time. For example, third term, when reports aren’t due, is a really good time to get stuck into these things.”

How do you ensure that mentoring has real benefit?

“You need commitment, to be positive about teaching as a career, and to be open to learning, because there’s always something new. And for me there’s great satisfaction to be gained in seeing teachers gaining confidence and getting better at their craft.”

“There’s also a responsibility to make sure the school is setting up processes to help them demonstrate the skills needed.”

What exactly do teachers get out of mentoring that they haven’t already learnt?

“There are very different skills needed, much more ‘real’ skills. At uni they’ve done their teaching plans, but obviously, they are abstract. Management of students in their learning is one example of a skill they need to develop, and once they can do that, they really see it as a milestone.



“In our last session, I always try to encourage a sense of achievement and celebration.”

What does the profession as a whole get out of it?

“We hope it means graduates see teaching as a solid career, not a passing by career. At our school we’ve managed to keep most in the profession, by giving them a really strong foundation on which to build.

“Graduates are a really valuable resource to each other. They become really supportive, and it’s another layer to collegiality. Sometimes our mentors are formal, and sometimes it is an informal process, which might include team teaching, depending on like needs.”

After teachers gain full registration, what happens then?

“The process continues, because everyone is part of a team. And I have found that the teachers who have gone through this process are more receptive and feel less threatened by peer observations.

“For mentoring and collegiality to work, it’s a matter of being rigorous and supportive. There needs to be integrity in the process, not a whitewash or formality. This is not just ticking the boxes: it is a learning opportunity.”

Jo Tornese’s role, working right across the school, is one good example of how a school can put structures in place to really give the process some weight. Mentoring is not just about the graduates: it involves the whole school. The school can enable the mentoring relationship to work, by setting up joint planning time, close proximity in physical location and subject area between the mentor and graduate, and offering support for the mentor.

A pleasing indication of the importance of mentoring has been the continued increase in the number of schools with a mentor program in place. At the last survey, over 70% of schools had a program in place, with a further 16.9% indicating that a program is in development.

In the last year attendance figures at mentor support seminars have shown a 9% increase in the number of Leading Teachers and teachers in positions of leadership. This might suggest a new cohort of teachers undertaking a new role, and could also suggest a change in the way schools are viewing support for provisionally registered teachers and the allocation of responsibilities.

There has been a drop in the total number of teachers attending the seminar. The number of trained mentors has been steadily increasing and it is presumed that numbers are starting to reach a threshold point. Teachers with one to ten years of teaching experience form the largest group of mentors, but it is significant to note the steady increase since 2008 of teacher mentors with 30 plus years of teaching experience.

The program will continue to be monitored and reviewed, but one thing is certain: support for beginning teachers is a must. And it must be done by design, not chance.



“In our last session, I always try to encourage a sense of achievement and celebration.”

Introducing our new CEO

Victorian Institute of Teaching Council Chairperson Susan Halliday is pleased to announce the appointment of Ms Melanie Saba as Chief Executive Officer.

Ms Saba brings a wide perspective to the role of regulation, having worked for several professional registration boards and directly with the Victorian government. Formerly the Chief Executive Officer of the Psychologists Registration Board, Ms Saba has also held senior positions with the Nurses Board of Victoria and Consumer Affairs Victoria.

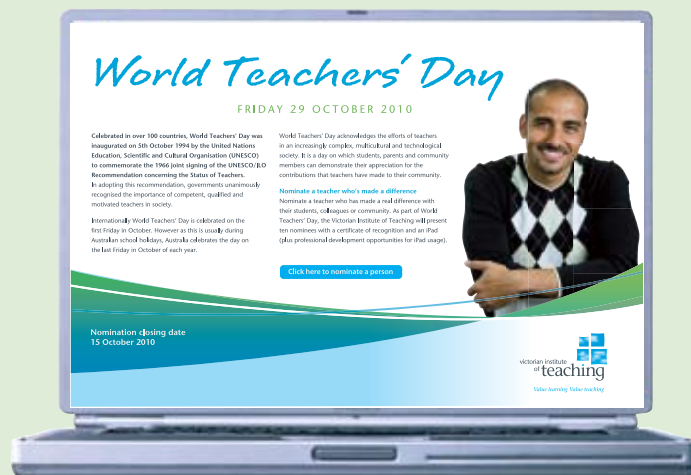
Ms Halliday would like to thank inaugural Chief Executive Officer Andrew Ius, who retired in April 2010. Mr Ius successfully delivered on the Victorian government's ambitious agenda to regulate the Victorian teaching profession. His historic contribution and personal commitment to excellence have ensured the public interest in Victoria, and across the nation, will be well served for many years to come.



World Teachers' Day 29 October

Celebrated in over 100 countries, World Teachers' Day acknowledges the efforts of teachers in an increasingly complex, multicultural and technological society. It is a day on which students, parents and community members can demonstrate their appreciation for the contributions that teachers have made.

On Friday 29 October, the Victorian Institute of Teaching, as part of the celebrations for World Teachers' Day, will present awards to ten Victorian teachers. These awards will recognise teachers' professional contribution for work they have done with their students, with their colleagues or with their community. The Institute will present a certificate of recognition and an iPad (plus professional development opportunities for iPad usage) to the award winners who have been nominated by a member of the school community. More details at www.vit.vic.edu.au/wtd10.



Nomination closing date 15 October 2010
To nominate a teacher or for more details
visit www.vit.vic.edu.au/wtd10.

EXPERIENCE IS THE KEY

Great teachers come from all kinds of backgrounds – and sometimes even via non-traditional paths. This is the thinking that underpins the Career Change program, a state government initiative giving experienced members of the wider workforce the opportunity to bring their life learning to the teaching profession, offering them a secure new career path and addressing skills shortages in the teaching workforce.

In operation since 2005, the program was developed in partnership with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and Victoria University. It trains suitable candidates over two years to become fully qualified teachers, duly recognised by the Institute.

The Program is one of a range of recruitment initiatives that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development currently has in operation to meet the staffing needs of Victorian government schools, particularly in rural and remote areas and in hard to staff subjects. Other initiatives include Maths/Science Scholarships, Teaching Scholarships, Teach For Australia, Special Education Scholarships and refresher courses for returning teachers.

The Department also hosts the Teacher Supply and Demand Reference Group, with all major Victorian stakeholders represented, which is a forum for the consideration and coordination of teacher workforce planning matters across the government, independent and Catholic sectors.

Dr Jim Tangas, Manager of Research and Workforce Planning in the Department highlights the unique nature of the Program:

“This program is the original employment-based pathway into teaching in Australia. It is fully funded by the Department and provides an intensive pre-service course followed by two years of on the job training leading to a teaching qualification.”



A defining feature of the program is that it is demand-based. That is, it fills vacancies that have been identified by individual hard-to-staff schools. It helps find the right candidate, gets them the right training, and places them in a school with a need. It has worked well in country schools where the person is known in the community already, has roots, and tends to stay.

Generally, schools will advertise for a qualified professional, perhaps with a trade or science background. Sometimes, particularly in rural areas, the schools actually have an ideal candidate in mind – for instance the local plumber, pharmacist or agriculturalist – someone who is known in the community or has been involved in the life of the school.

Mark Newton is the Senior Project Officer in Research and Workforce Planning. A major focus of his role is assisting schools to recruit into their hard-to-staff areas. He gives an overview of how the program operates:

“We advertise in August. Schools do the interview and selection and the VIT checks their qualifications. Victoria University has provided alternative teaching pathway programs, built into their existing programs. On average the program accepts about 30 participants each year.

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that participants in the program are more likely to assume leadership positions within the school. They’ve been successful in their field. Now they want to help teach the next generation.

“The demographic is predominantly over 35, normally with families and mortgages, looking for stability, and very motivated. Some women, after having children, have seen it as a way to break back into a career. We’ve seen a large number in the technical areas, but really there is quite a range. For instance, hospitality trades are on the increase, due to demand generated by schools.”

Apart from helping address staff shortages, what has been the effect on schools?

“In a number of cases it has been instrumental in rejuvenating not only the curriculum, but even the whole school. We’ve seen a woodwork teacher who has brought new ideas into the school’s technology area, and numbers have gone up. People with an engineering background have come in to teach maths – bringing innovation and creativity into the teaching, but also making it more REAL.

A building professional has come in and his students are building a yacht. Another one has had kids building skateboards. Another developed online teaching in their subject area, linking schools.

“These are people who are not confined by the classroom.”

What attracts these people to the program?

“Tradespersons are attracted by the role because teaching offers security, and guaranteed pay.”

“They are often the only technological person in the school. One female participant has come in and been given the responsibility for establishment, development and coordination of the school’s brand new technology wing, in her first year of teaching, while learning to be a teacher.”

The greatest demand for candidates has been in technology-based subject areas. Typical reasons for this include ageing faculties, shutting down of technical schools and subsequent loss of technology teachers to TAFE colleges, plus the advantage of government technology grants. Through this program, schools are getting the chance to recruit new blood.

Candidates generally arrive in schools mid-November, and have their orientation during this period. They attend an intensive pre-service summer school in December and January at Victoria University, before reporting back at their school for day one of first term. During that period they obtain their Permission to Teach. Term One is mainly a period of team teaching, and by Term Two they move to general supervision, which sees them teaching with basic oversight by a mentor or subject area leader.



The Victorian Institute of Teaching obtains documentation of the candidates' experience and qualifications to determine eligibility and establish appropriate teaching areas for them. If there is a shortfall in qualifications, the Institute specifies what units they need to study, and coordinates with Victoria University to work out a study pattern. The process is closely monitored, and the Institute's Standards and Professional Learning and Registration and Accreditation branches go out to the university and talk to the cohort, helping them through the process.

Bonding among the groups is important, whether through weekend classes or in a chat room via their online lectures. Candidates get together and share ideas about their experiences, asking the kinds of question they might be too embarrassed to ask in their schools for fear of seeming naïve. This can be very important, because while some have had experience training apprentices, or have coached local sporting teams, for others the classroom environment or the experience of dealing with a principal might present very new challenges.

From Mark Newton's perspective, the feedback has been positive:

"We've had 12 schools already wanting to join before it's been publicised for this year, which is half the cohort.

"A lot of schools have come back year after year, some for an extra teacher in that area, because they now have more demand at the school for that subject. Some schools are finding their own teachers to go through the program because maybe they don't fit into a priority subject or geographical area.

"In general, the schools and individuals have been positive. It's like a calling. They want to be teachers. They enjoy the camaraderie."

Cobden Technical School is an excellent example of the Career Change program

in its element. One of the few technical schools by name remaining in the system, it runs a range of VET programs and, according to principal Peter Rock, came to a crisis point six or seven years ago when it addressed the problem of an ageing technical teaching force:

"We were getting to the point where it was an empty bucket. Who to replace them? We were growing as a school, so we decided to identify people we wanted in the community and sponsor them to take up teacher training.

"These people have incredible life experience, in a diversity of career paths, with first rate, recent, relevant industrial experience.

"In all, we've had nine teachers go through the program: from plumbers and welders to an environmental engineer, a financial planning accountant, a journalist and a musician.

"They have run their own businesses, so nothing can be better in terms of what they can offer to the students. All of them had worked with young people, including sports coaches who had already worked at the school, so they brought with them a fantastic capacity to deal with kids."

"They have bedded down all the stuff they needed and now are readymade leaders. Two are Leading Teachers already. Because their paths to success have been many and varied, they offer terrific role modelling for the kids, and for us, they have a wider significance. They were already part of our community, and understand that the school's success is critical to the community, and owned by the community.

"In the six years since we started the program, we have grown by a third and a demographic where less kids are available – roughly 20% less in the catchment area. We now run all our VET programs on site.

The program has clearly had an effect on the viability and longevity of the school."

At Yarrowonga Secondary College, the music program has clearly benefitted. The school has taken on three new teachers as part of the Career Change program, including two who were already working at the school as music instructors. Principal Scott Dellar describes an immediate and measurable impact:

"The program has been absolutely sensational. They've gone from strength to strength as teachers, and we have seen a music program which has been running on a 60 student participation rate with no real pathway to further education, grow to the stage now where 160 students are doing instrumental music. That's one out of three students in the school.

"We've now got a high level school band with an excellent reputation in the community, and our music program is one of the most exemplary in the region. We have bands running every second lunch time in the common area, and our school band is out there playing at community forums for the elderly, at the agricultural show and at clubs in the area.

"The teachers are on a pathway of progression, and they'll end up as Leading Teachers and could well go further. We're looking at another Career Change candidate next year in the Maths area.

"We've had incredible outcomes from the program."

The future of the program looks bright according to Dr Tangas, with future intakes funded by the Victorian government for 2011 and 2012 and the current Commonwealth Government indicating that it would fund a similar program nationally beyond that period.

"As long as the program continues to meet the needs of hard-to-staff schools, I think it will continue to be supported by governments."

LATEST UPDATES

Twilight Seminar

On Thursday August 26 we were privileged to have three guest speakers for the third in our 2010 Twilight Seminar Series entitled 'Supporting the Professional Conduct of Teachers'. Jane O'Shannessy, Chairperson of the Institute's Standards and Professional Learning Committee, member of the Disciplinary Proceedings Committee and member of Council, chaired a panel comprising Maria Kirkwood, Assistant Director, Catholic Education Office Melbourne; Dr Anne Sarros, Principal of Firkbank Grammar School; and Dr Jim Tangas from the Research and Workforce Planning Unit at DEECD.

The focus was on developing a conversation between panel members and the audience on the topic of the professional conduct of teachers. Much is written in the Victorian media on this topic with a high percentage of negative reporting. The seminar discussed issues confronting Victorian teachers and identified proactive solutions.

The work of teaching is overwhelmingly positive and should be celebrated, which was the purpose of this seminar. You can view the seminar online at <www.vit.vic.edu.au>.

The next Twilight Seminar will be held on 25 November. If you'd like to be included on the invitation list, please contact Valmai Lee at the Institute on (03) 8601 5849 or email <valmai.lee@vit.vic.edu.au>.

Field Officer's Note

Field Officers are available to visit your school and talk to teachers about the Code of Conduct or other areas of the Institute's work. To make a booking, contact Mary Walker at <mary.walker@vit.vic.edu.au> or (03) 8601 5845.

CRT Connection

If you are a casual relief teacher (CRT) or a teacher returning to the profession, you may be aware of the role of the Institute in supporting you in your professional development through the facilitation of seminars. However, you may not be aware of the CRT networks that are springing up around the state.

These networks are being developed in response to your need for free, easily accessible, appropriate professional learning in your local area. The leaders of these networks are innovative CRTs who, with support from the Institute and DEECD, organise and facilitate gatherings of teachers at local schools. These learning communities share ideas, resources, concerns and solutions as well as being engaged in high quality professional development facilitated by educational consultants on a range of topics.

If you have been out on leave for a while and need to step back in slowly, or you are a provisionally registered teacher (PRT) entering the profession or a career CRT, you will find a group of teachers nearby that you can meet with professionally in a supportive environment.

Details of these networks can be found on the CRT page of the website headed 'I am a casual relief teacher'. Any other queries concerning the support for CRTs can be directed to Dawn Colcott on (03) 8601 5842 or <dawn.colcott@vit.vic.edu.au>.

Inside Teaching

The August issue of *Inside Teaching* is now online. This month, *Inside Teaching* goes on the road with the Queensland School for Travelling Show Children; talks with Stephanie Alexander about her best teachers; looks at collaborative action research on the efficacy of online professional learning; interviews the stronger, smarter Chris Sarra; discovers how teachers are using NAPLAN data to inform their teaching; reports the latest research on cyberbullying; looks at behaviour management in the middle years; and much more.

You can access it at <www.vit.vic.edu.au>. Click on <News Room> then <Latest News>.

www.vit.vic.edu.au

Keep an eye out for changes on our website, as we work towards making it more informative and easier for you to find information.

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Contact us:

Telephone: 1300 888 067
Fax: (03) 8601 5801
Email: vit@vit.vic.edu.au

Write:

PO Box 531
Collins Street West
Victoria 8007 Australia

Visit:

Level 24 Marland House
570 Bourke Street
Melbourne 3000

Website:

www.vit.vic.edu.au



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