**Professional development: from Israel to Switzerland...to the whole world!**

So how do a teacher from Switzerland and a teacher from Israel find themselves regularly discussing common issues as part of the same virtual teachers’ room?

Vicky Loras: It was around four years ago when I first moved here to Switzerland and I was full of dreams for my new life. I had found a job before I came – or so I thought. The crisis arrived in Europe and then Swiss employers decided to stop employing people for a period of time. So I was suddenly without a job.

One day, when I was feeling sorry for myself, I decided to Google *ELT materials* and look at things I like, so as to feel better. [**Ken Wilson’s blog**](http://kenwilsonelt.wordpress.com/) came up and I started to read it. Then I got in touch with him and he told me not only to start my own blog, but to create a Twitter account to connect to more teachers. Up until then, I hadn’t had any contact with technology apart from emailing and googling. *Twitter?* I thought. *A social media platform where people share details of their lives…to connect with teachers?* I did it, not without hesitation though. I wasn’t sure how it would help me – not at all doubting Ken, but I wasn’t sure if I’d have anything to say. I started connecting to other teachers and seeing what they posted: useful links, their blog posts and posts of others too, new tools in technology to use in class…I loved it so much!  And I haven’t looked back.

Naomi Epstein: I began blogging because I was searching for a means to reflect on my experiences in the classroom, both the highs and the lows. At school everyone is too busy for such discussions, yet I need them. Unsure how to begin, I listened to the right advice, joined Twitter and discovered the 30 Goals Project (http://shellyterrell.com/30goals/30-goals-2014/). Reflecting on those 30 topics gave me the push I needed, and helped me build my own online virtual teacher’s room.

Here are our two different ways of reflecting on GOAL Number three:

What do YOU Believe about Learning?

Naomi:

My first reaction to today’s goal at the [30 Goals Challenge](http://teacherbootcamp.edublogs.org/2011/02/02/goal-3-what-do-you-believe-about-learning-30goals/)was; ”there are SO many aspects and ways to look at learning, where do I begin”?

Tweeting with Lisa Dabbs today gave me the “handle” I needed – mentoring! She has a lovely [**post**](http://teachingwithsoul.wordpress.com/2011/02/03/goal-3-reason-to-believe-30-goals-challenge/) on it. I’d like to highlight a different aspect which is what the MENTOR learns from mentoring.

I had the experience of mentoring a brand new teacher, straight out of college, who at the same time also became my colleague, teaching the same pupils I do (we teach in the format of a learning center. I teach full time and she teaches part time in addition to my hours).

I’ve been teaching for **25**years yet I found I was learning a great deal from the experience. First of all, because she repeatedly asked “WHY?”. I had set into motion all kinds of ways of doing things, some of which I had been doing so long that I no longer remembered why I had decided to do them in this particular way. Suddenly I had to re-examine everything! Sometimes it was tiring, but it was always useful. Some strategies or practices I realized that I felt good about them because now I remembered why they were planned just so. Others turned out to be “dusty” and were tweaked or even replaced.

Of course, as a talented young teacher, she came with suggestions of her own which have enriched my teaching!

But the thing I thank her most for is helping me to continue THINKING about what I am doing and why!

\*Originally posted on Visualising Ideas Blog here: http://visualisingideas.edublogs.org/2011/02/03/goal-3-what-do-you-believe-about-learning/

Vicky: Learning – my favourite topic. I love the mottos **Learning can happen anywhere** and **a good teacher is also a good learner**. But I will just put all my thoughts in order…

**The Teacher as Learner**

The best thing teachers can do for themselves and for their students as a consequence is keep on learning, about and through anything. What I have found fundamental to my learning and motivating myself are:

* **Twitter**. I never thought, when I first joined in 2009, what a great school that would be. I learn through other teachers who post links, from reading their blogs and from participating in a weekly chat English teachers have every Wednesday, [**ELTChat**](http://eltchat.com/).
* **Workshops and Seminars**. I am very fortunate for the reason that here in Switzerland we always have something going on. I know it can be costly, but it is definitely worth it. I always learn something and come back super-motivated, especially if the workshop or seminar was a good one!
* **Observing other teachers**. You can learn a great deal from other educators, if you get the chance to sit in on their class. You can get great ideas, or even (and I hope this does not happen too often) learn from the mistakes they make.

For students, I am a great believer that learning can happen anywhere and sometimes even when we have not planned it!

* **Hit the road, Jack!** Last year I was working with my kiddos on plants and suddenly I thought: hey, why don’t we put on our jackets and go out? We have a cornfield nearby the school and the children got to see the plants, learn what a stalk is, where the corn they eat comes from and what happens after they cut off the corn. They still remember this lesson and keep asking when we can go outside again! Which reminds me, we should do it soon…
* **Go ahead and use the tech!** Students can learn a great deal from technology. Start a wiki or blog with them. Skype with other classrooms (numerous educators on Twitter have done this and the results are great! The kids love it and learn about other classes all around the world). Explore new apps. Books are fantastic resources of learning, but not the only thing kids can learn from.
* **Try to visit libraries as frequently as you can**. “My kids don’t read”, say some teachers. Have you provided them with the stimulus, if you have not got a library in class or the school? Let them roam through the aisles and you will see them picking up books on subjects they like (or a specific one if you are teaching a particular unit) and immediately taking them to tables…or even sitting on the floor! I love images like this.

Learning opportunities are great both for teachers and students. Classrooms become hubs of learning and knowledge!

(Vicky’s article, originally posted on her blog: <http://vickyloras.wordpress.com/2011/03/13/number-three-what-do-you-believe-about-learning-the-30-goals-challenge/> )