

Good Practice Principles in Practice: Teaching Across Cultures

A Quick Guide for Teachers

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Introduction

This guide is intended for teaching staff and for those who support the learning of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Cultural diversity in the student population is now the norm rather than the exception in Australian universities. Culture is not only defined by nationality or ethnicity. The term culture is a very broad concept that encompasses the lifestyle, traditions, knowledge, skills, beliefs, norms and values shared by a group of people. Cultures are most often recognised by shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and affective understandings. These are learned through a process of socialization. However, within different cultural groups, individuals are unique. Meaning is continuously constructed through human interaction and communication within and across cultural groups. Cultural learning is a dynamic, developmental and ongoing process for students and teachers. Cultural diversity in the student population has a significant impact on teaching and learning.

This guide draws on current literature on learning and teaching across cultures, on findings from relevant projects funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching and the Australian Learning and Teaching Council from 2006-2012. You can find full summaries of these projects in the Good Practice Report Learning and Teaching Across Cultures available at <http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-good-practice-report-learning-and-teaching-across-cultures-2011>.

This guide is one of a suite of Quick Guides on topics relevant to learning and teaching across cultures. Other guides are available from ieaa.org.au/ltac.

The Good Practice Principles: Teaching Across Cultures

This guide is organised around six principles of good practice for teaching across cultures. Each guide interprets the principles in practice.

Principle 1: Good teaching across cultures will **focus on students as learners**

Principle 2: Good teaching across cultures will **respect and adjust for diversity**

Principle 3: Good teaching across cultures will **provide context-specific information and support**

Principle 4: Good teaching across cultures will **enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement**

Principle 5: Good teaching across cultures will be **adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence**

Principle 6: Good teaching across cultures will **prepare students for life in a globalised world**

You can find a detailed description of each Principle at ieaa.org.au/ltac.

In this guide the focus is on teaching effectively in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. It may be used to check and affirm current practice and/or to identify areas for additional effort or action.

1

Principles into practice: teaching

Principle 1: Focus on students as learners

International and domestic students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds will bring a range of learning behaviours and styles into the classroom, perceive themselves in many different ways as learners and have different expectations of their teachers. Little can be assumed. All students, not just some students, are learners in a new environment. Particularly in the early stages of their program they will need to adjust to the disciplinary and academic cultures of their universities. Making expectations transparent can assist learning but transition can be difficult and may take some students longer than others. The learning of all students can be enhanced if a staged introduction to academic literacies, subject content and the expectations of learning in an Australian university are incorporated into teaching practices.

What to look for

Acknowledgement that teaching needs to take account of students as learners with a variety of skills and learning preferences

Teaching strategies accommodate a range of different learning style preferences and encourage fit-for-purpose approaches to learning in all students.

Explanations are scaffolded and signposted with frequent pauses for reflection by students and the opportunity to ask questions.

A variety of teaching activities are used and students are given some choice of topic and task.

Examples, models and suggestions of ways of approaching learning in the discipline are discussed early in the program.

Lectures are recorded and available for students to review online. Outlines are provided.

A focus on active learning techniques

*“Understand that students from different backgrounds value the opportunity to work with, learn from and contribute to richer understandings in the classroom” (PPS-43, p. 7).**

Teaching is student centred, for example, international and diverse cultured students are given specific non-threatening opportunities to contribute firstly within small groups and finally to the class as a whole.

Interest groups, debates, lectures and small group work with negotiated learning, peer learning and independent study are regular features of the learning environment regardless of mode.

Lectures are interactive, using a variety of techniques to ensure students are actively engaged. A range of technologies and questioning techniques are used.

Reading texts are appropriate to the level of study and, especially in the early stages of a program, guided questions are given to lead students to relevant points.

Note-taking skills, skimming and scanning techniques are taught and practised in class where appropriate. Academic language and learning staff are called on to assist with this where necessary.

Students are assisted to assess their own language and learning development. For example, in the early stages of the program teachers support students to become reflective and critical learners in formal reflective learning discussions.

Students actively build their own knowledge and awareness of behaviours which are valued in Australian universities

Students are assisted to understand specific communication scenarios such as participating in a group conversation, acknowledging a speaker before interrupting, making a contradictory point and how much eye contact is necessary.

Students are given opportunities to practise interactions and provided with peer or teacher feedback on their performance.

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Principle 2: Respect and adjust for diversity

Teachers can demonstrate and model a respect for diversity by adjusting their teaching strategies to the needs of students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Inclusive teaching strategies will accept that past experiences in learning impact on students' present performance and that all students bring valuable knowledge and experience to the classroom.

* Quote from ALTC/OLT project. Please refer to back page of this guide for project details.

What to look for

The teacher engages with diversity on a personal and professional level

The ways in which teaching staff present themselves to students early in a teaching unit is critical for students initiating effective working relationships (CG6-38 p. 11).**

The teacher prepares for his/her culturally diverse student group by:

- researching the cultural and linguistic profile of students
- learning how to pronounce students' names
- becoming aware of the general features of the education systems and teaching/learning practices of students' home countries
- having an understanding of the cultural norms and practices of students' cultures
- being familiar with the services available to international students and staff who work with them.

The teacher models appropriate intercultural behaviour and displays cultural awareness

The teacher makes allowance for religious events: e.g. Ramadan, such as starting earlier or accepting that Moslem students may be less alert because of fasting requirements.

The teacher is also aware that body language differs across cultures and factors this into their interpretation of students' behaviours.

Teaching is structured so as to incorporate the experience and knowledge that international students can offer

Some assignments and class tasks have an international component and students are encouraged to share experience and knowledge of their own countries and cultures.

Intercultural engagement is encouraged through use of strategies such as the 'jigsaw approach' which ensures that every student has a chance to contribute to the discussion of a topic. (See Hunt, Chalmers & Macdonald 2013, p. 31).

The teacher helps students understand what is expected of them as learners in this program of study

The development of English language, academic literacies and discipline specific discourse are specifically embedded into learning tasks, assessment tasks and weightings.

Glossaries and in class explanations of frequently used terms are provided.

Academic literacies are introduced by teaching or support staff and there are low risk opportunities for practising these. Feedback on performance is focussed on what students need to do to improve.

A variety of interactive activities are incorporated into lectures and small group tutorials.

Principle 3: Provide context-specific information and support

The demands on learners vary in different contexts and across disciplines, programs and courses. Students from diverse backgrounds must not only learn new knowledge, often they must also learn new ways of learning and new ways to demonstrate what they have learned. They need to understand what is required of them and integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge. Teachers can assist this process by scaffolding the development of skills and knowledge in courses and across the program.

What to look for

Teachers do not assume background knowledge in relation to expected ways of behaving in the classroom

The teacher is explicit about the purpose of lectures, the benefits of discussion based learning and links between out of class tasks and independent learning.

Expectations about participation in different types of learning activities are communicated early in the course to all students. These expectations are repeated in later stages of the program to ensure students who enter via different pathways at different stages are equally informed.

Teachers discuss the function of group work in learning, including intercultural group work in particular and how it will be assessed.

Teachers explain and model the behaviours most likely to lead to successful learning in the discipline.

Long reading lists identify key and optional readings.

3

What to look for

The development of academic literacies is embedded into program and course design

Teaching and learning strategies included the need for discipline-specific tasks, examples and resources (CG8-766, p. 22).**

Teachers work with support services staff with specialised knowledge on embedding the development of academic literacies into course and assessment design.

Explanations of what different task requirements mean in the context of the discipline ('evaluate', 'justify', 'analyse') are included in assessment task descriptions.

Teachers are clear on what good performance is (including the weighting of components such as: grammar, vocabulary, content and structure) and communicate this to students by, for example, providing marking rubrics, models and exemplars for specific assessment tasks.

The teacher helps students with the demands of academic reading by, for example, discussing skimming and scanning techniques, methods of coping with large amounts of literature and giving guide questions and notes, especially in the early stages of the program. This is reinforced at later stages of the program.

Answers to FAQs are posted online.

Students are provided with a variety of ways to ask questions about task requirements. For example, in class and in moderated online forums.

Teachers are approachable and accessible

Teachers invite questions during and after class, and online.

Expectations in relation to addressing and contacting lecturers and tutors are clearly and frequently communicated.

Consultation times are published and adhered to.

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Principle 4: Good teaching across cultures will enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement

Diversity has an impact on the dynamics of groups through its effect on the communication between students and between the teacher and the students. Creating environments conducive to interaction is an important foundation for meaningful intercultural dialogue and engagement. The quality of learning and success of students are enhanced when they feel valued and part of the learning process. Bringing dialogue into the classroom and valuing the knowledge and experience of diverse students is an opportunity for students to learn, socialise and make meaning from the new information that is presented to them.

What to look for

The teacher structures activities which empower all students and those from diverse backgrounds in particular, to participate in class discussion and learning tasks

*Provide opportunities for 'clarifying chatter' by giving students time to discuss their understanding of a task in a small group and then have one student ask questions on behalf of the group (PPS-43, p. 85,).**

Small groups formulate and discuss questions related to lecture content and one person asks unresolved questions of the tutor on behalf of the small group.

Teachers pose questions or issues that students can discuss in pairs or small groups and then report back to the class.

Where group tasks require that international and domestic students work together roles are assigned for each member of the group, including discussion leader, timekeeper, note-taker and person to report back. This allows everyone to have a role in the group.

Quizzes and pair work encourage interaction among diverse students.

4

What to look for

Both international and local students develop intercultural communication skills

In our course, it is always good to get a different point of view. Everyone has so many different ideas... Getting opinions and listening to people talk and think, wow I never thought about that!
(Student, CG8-725, p. 17).*

Different aspects of intercultural communication of relevance to professional practice are discussed in tutorials. For example, discussions about how to meet and greet in different cultures and how body language conveys different meanings in different contexts.

Intercultural awareness and communication skills are evidenced in assessment items through the inclusion of specific assessment criteria.

Case studies are used to present intercultural problems through stories and engage students in more contextualized discussions of culture.

Social interaction across cultures is encouraged, supported and rewarded in both the formal and the informal or co-curriculum.

5

Principle 5: Be adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence

Reflection and research form an indispensable arm of the scholarly process. Teachers should seek responses to their teaching from all students and analyse evidence and feedback provided by students from diverse cultural backgrounds. It may be necessary to seek advice from others on how best to respond to the feedback and in particular, on how to modify teaching approaches in order to maximise the learning of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Culturally inclusive teaching requires a certain amount of flexibility in planning, delivery and responsiveness to evidence showing a need for change.

What to look for

The teacher engages with ongoing evaluation of their teaching to improve student learning

"Diversity has changed the learning context in which academics operate"
(PPS-43, p.7).*

Teachers reflect on the success or otherwise of different teaching approaches considering, for example: How can I improve my approach? What engaged students the most this week?

Teachers give students opportunities to provide feedback on their teaching at different times and in different ways and tell students how they have responded to the feedback received.

Teachers monitor research into pedagogy and update teaching methods and approaches

Teachers engage in scholarly reading on teaching and learning.

Teachers conduct periodical action research projects which include monitoring the effectiveness of their teaching of linguistically and culturally diverse student groups and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions on these groups.

Teachers interact with peers at national and international conferences and seek peer feedback on their teaching practices.

Teachers monitor student engagement and satisfaction.

Performance review meetings include discussions of feedback on teacher performance provided by students from diverse backgrounds.

Principle 6: Prepare students for life in a globalised world

Globalisation provides many opportunities and challenges. Students benefit from being exposed to a global perspective in their studies as they need to be aware of the increasing connections between peoples of the world. Teaching practices and curriculum design that are essentially ethnocentric in focus are unlikely to challenge stereotypes, contribute to greater equality, enhance understanding and appreciation of other cultures or prepare students for the international, intercultural and global context of their future lives.

What to look for

The development of cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills is embedded into teaching and learning tasks

Intercultural communication strategies are practised in class and all students are required to reflect on their effectiveness in working in intercultural groups in class.

The way in which working in diverse groups in class has developed skills needed in a globalised world is emphasised to all students.

Teachers model appropriate intercultural behaviours in class.

All students are made aware through class discussions of how their implicit cultural assumptions may affect their judgement.

There is a focus on students' progressive development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required of global citizens and professionals across the program

Teachers model respect for differing ways of seeing and knowing in other cultures.

Students participate in international exchange, international internships and short term study tours

Students are encouraged to take part in exchange programs to help them develop an international outlook. Students who have returned, share their experiences with their peers and with students in earlier stages of the program.

A range of opportunities of varying lengths and intensities are provided for students to experience other linguistic and cultural contexts as part of their studies.

Teacher-led programs as well as more independent options are available.

Students receive credit towards completion of the degree for study undertaken abroad.

Program design encourages students to study a foreign language across the degree program.

Career services have an international division

Students can access employment opportunities overseas and are aware of the possibilities available in their field and are guided to do so.

Related OLT Projects

CG8-766, *Investigating the efficacy of culturally specific academic literacy and academic honesty resources for Chinese students*,

<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-efficacy-culturally-specific-academic-literacy-vu-2010>.

CG8-725, *Finding common ground: enhancing interaction between domestic and international students*,

<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-enhancing-domestic-international-melbourne-2008>.

CG6-38, *Diversity: a longitudinal study of how student diversity relates to resilience and successful progression in a new generation university*,

<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-diversity-longitudinal-study-how-ecu-2006>.

PPS-43, *Assessing students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian universities*,

<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-assessing-students-unfamiliar-rmit-2005>.

PP10-1810, *Internationalisation at home: enhancing intercultural capabilities of business and health teachers, students and curricula*,

<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-internationalisation-home-enhancing-intercultural-capabilities-business-and-health-teachers->.

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