Good Practice Principles in Practice: Teaching Across Cultures

A Quick Guide to Curriculum Design

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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 of particular relevance 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 principle is explained then illustrated in action. Here, good practice is interpreted in relation to curriculum design.

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.

The focus is specifically on catering for cultural and linguistic diversity in university classrooms. This guide may be used to evaluate current activities and identify areas for improvement as well as examples of best practice.

1

Principle 1: Focus on students as learners

Students do not start university with the same skills, knowledge or experience of the world. Curriculum design needs to work with and value students' diverse experiences, skills and learning preferences. Curriculum decisions are most effective when discussed and coordinated at the program level.

All students will benefit from regular and appropriate feedback on how they are developing international and intercultural competencies.

What to look for

The program is designed in line with inclusive learning practices **There are opportunities for all students to develop international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes** *It's important to align the informal and formal curriculum to enable skills to be developed and practised in both (CG6-37, p. 2).* *	An inclusive curriculum is relevant, meaningful and accessible for all students regardless of their linguistic or cultural background. Because this is difficult to do staff who design programs are provided with information and assistance to put inclusive practice principles into practice. Curriculum is defined in the widest sense to include everything that shapes the student's learning experience. Formal opportunities are used (learning outcomes, course content, student placements, examination questions, etc.); informal opportunities are acknowledged (social events, volunteering, meetings with students, careers workshops, etc.). The hidden curriculum is also significant but less available for manipulation – for example, how the seats are organised in a lecture theatre, the ways teachers and students communicate. The formal, informal and hidden curricula are all considered during the planning process. Students are alerted from early in the program that they will need to develop international and intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. Explanations include a rationale. Planning takes into account students' willingness and ability to develop and change over time. All students' identity, awareness and competence will evolve.
Program level planning encourages cohort identity **Learning outcomes for individual modules are planned in line with progression towards agreed exit-level capabilities ('graduate attributes')** **Skill development is embedded into program design**	Intercultural interaction is encouraged both as important in its own right and as a way to enhance learning across the program. Responsibility for developing students' intercultural knowledge and skills is shared across the program. Students' progress toward graduate attributes will vary, in part due to their diverse entry level skills, knowledge and experiences. Programs, courses and assessment need to be designed sensitively to reflect this variety. Teaching staff are aware of support services, use them and encourage students to do the same. Teachers consult support staff with responsibility for learning (for example, librarians, study skills advisors, language teachers and writing specialists) on strategies to develop skills across the program. The same service staff also help ensure assessment tasks are clear and inclusive. For example, language specialists can suggest how to write multiple choice questions that test content knowledge rather than student vocabulary. Teachers provide feedback to students on how to improve their skills.
Early, close student monitoring encourages positive learning behaviour	The early stages of a program serve as a transition period to a new learning environment during which support is provided. Teachers recognize the value of knowing students as individuals, especially early in the program. The effort to get to know students is shared within all courses and across the program as a whole. Teachers recognize the value of learning and using students' names. The fact that this is impossible in very large groups does not negate the significance of using names whenever possible. Teachers intervene where negative behaviour is displayed. Attendance is monitored and triggers action and intervention when students are at risk. Students are provided with a range of options for asking questions of teaching staff. These include time after lectures where possible, in seminars, during scheduled office hours, on line and through course representatives. Students are made aware of these options.

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

1

What to look for

All students are assisted to broaden the range of learning strategies that they employ	Teachers encourage students to become more aware of the value of different learning strategies and help students identify their particular preferences. A range of fit-for-purpose learning strategies are modeled and encouraged. Learning is approached as a process rather than a product or the accumulation of discrete facts and ideas. *"Appreciate that, in many cases, students are more likely to behave as individuals in their approach to learning and assessment, rather than as a homogenous group, based on their cultural background"* **(PPS-43, p. 7).***
Across the program assessment tasks and standards keep pace with students' evolving levels of competence and understanding *"Recognise that improvements to accommodate one grouping or classification of students inevitably leads to improvements for all students"* **(PPS-43, p. 7).**	Standards and expectations in relation to the use of professional and academic English develop throughout the program. As students' expected performance improves, teaching and assessment reflect this improvement by also increasing expectations and standards. The aim is to ensure students achieve exit-level competence by the time they graduate. Students leave as confident and competent in the communication skills required for professional practice or further study. Assessment tasks and marking criteria are reviewed, year on year, to ensure progressive development. Generic academic skills (critical thinking, academic writing, research capabilities, communication skills, etc.) are addressed in teachers' feedback alongside discipline-specific and professional skills as appropriate. Teachers take account of good practice guidance on making feedback useful. For example, comments are specific, supported by examples from the student's work and focused on future improvements. Opportunities for self and peer assessment are included in the program, guided by appropriate criteria.

2

Principle 2: Respecting and adjusting for diversity

Students in diverse classrooms bring individual previous experiences, varied knowledge and developing language skills. This variety poses particular challenges for teachers. How should they ensure fairness to all? What can they do to maintain standards? What adjustments to curriculum design can ensure all students have a chance for success?

The challenge is to discover how the cohort as a whole can use, value and draw upon students' multiple perspectives and values. Curricular adjustments can turn apparent diversity problems into assets by maximizing opportunities for students and teachers to learn about their own and others' knowledge, beliefs and values.

What to look for

Diversity is used as a valuable and positive aspect of the student demographic	Examples, case studies and assessment tasks are designed to use and build upon students' previous experiences and to develop all students' awareness of multiple perspectives. Group work tasks are designed to specifically highlight the importance of context-specific problem solving and decision making (See A Quick Guide to Group Work). *"Consider... diversity as an opportunity to develop a truly global approach to educating... students"* **(PPS-43, p. 7).**
There are opportunities for students to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. **Students evaluate themselves in relation to program requirements and expectations** **'Getting to know you' activities are frequent and planned**	Diagnostic activities are scheduled early in the program for all students. Students use the outcomes to understand their strengths and weaknesses as learners in general and as new entrants to the discipline and program. When discussing skills and expectations teachers use language that acknowledges there are many ways to be a successful student, but that there are particular ways that are expected in this program. Students' previous educational experiences are acknowledged and discussed in relation to current requirements. Feedback in early assessment activities is focused on language skills as well as discipline specific knowledge. Data are collected and used to evaluate the appropriateness of entry level requirements, including English language entry level requirements. When programs are redesigned, adjustments take findings into account (See A Quick Guide to Developing English Language Skills). Planning decisions take account of available accessible support and where this is deemed insufficient, designers advocate for more. Support is geared to meeting students' individual needs and helps them plan their own development. There is a focus on interacting across cultures from the first day of class. Activities to structure interaction include a rationale for making the effort. Where appropriate, students are alerted to cross cultural skills as part of their prospective profession. Students are able to describe how social interaction across cultures supports and enhances their own learning. *Be aware of student learning preferences, for example, refugee students may prefer collaborative learning involving group discussions but their participation may be limited by their lack of confidence in their language skills* **(CG7-496).**

What to look for

Skills are taught, practised and assessed *Students respond to learning opportunities which are scaffolded, 'just in time' and delivered over longer periods of time so that information can be synthesized and applied within their specific disciplines* **(CG7-496).***	Students are not assumed to arrive with a full repertoire of academic and professional skills. Students are helped to hone skills, identify those which are less useful in their new educational setting and learn new ones which are more appropriate to their new context. Support staff for academic and language learning are called upon by program and course designers to identify and implement strategies to embed the development of academic writing and research skills. Interventions are placed in teaching activities at all levels of the program as necessary.
A range of assessment tasks are included in course and program design	Students are provided with a variety of options to demonstrate their learning across the program (such as portfolios, simulations, case-based evaluations, presentations, self and peer assessment). Teachers are aware of forms of assessment commonly used in their students' previous educational settings. Exemplars of each form of assessment are provided. Students are given feedback on early attempts at demonstrating their learning. Early feedback is especially useful for novel forms of assessment.

Principle 3: Provide context-specific information and support

Students in different programs and locations will require information and support that is tailored to their needs and to the context within which they are studying. Planners themselves will need access to support and information that helps them to do this in different contexts – offshore, onshore and online, for example. In turn, they need to think about how to provide context-specific information to the students on the program they are designing and in its constituent courses. Much good practice exists on how to design programs that meet the learning needs of diverse students.

What to look for

Where staff development is provided on curriculum design, it takes account of the context	Professional development of teachers includes guidance on good practice in effective teaching of diverse student cohorts in different teaching contexts (e.g. on-line, in class, offshore, undergraduate, postgraduate, research). Location-specific teaching preparation is provided for academic staff prior to them teaching in a transnational program. Teachers are aware of the dangers of stereotyping, making assumptions and over-generalising on the basis of students' language skills and cultural background. It is clear to casual and permanent staff where, how and from whom to seek advice on professional, cross cultural or other aspects of program design and delivery.
International and intercultural learning outcomes are related o the discipline and professions *Recognise the particular imperatives in each discipline for developing intercultural skills* **(CG6-37, see p. 111, where you will find a taxonomy for planning).***	Planners use systematic ways to scaffold students' developing competence in intercultural communication. Planning happens across the program and at all levels. The program includes assessment tasks which check students' international and intercultural knowledge and skills. Tasks are designed to be relevant to the discipline and to students' prospective profession. Staff are provided with guidance on writing and setting assessments which are sensitive to students' developing language competence and understanding.

3

What to look for

All students are prepared for intercultural interactions	All students are trained in intercultural communication prior to the requirement to work in intercultural groups. Where students are required to work on assessment tasks in intercultural groups, the process as well as the product is assessed (See A Quick Guide to Managing Group Work).
Program design takes account of learning support and referral services	Program designers, teaching staff and students are regularly consulted on the scope and relevance of the services provided to students (A Quick Guide to Working with Student Learning Services). Someone checks regularly that the students are given up-to-date information on academic and language support services. Examination tasks and coursework are sensitive to students' developing language capability. Task requirements are explained in detail and assessment criteria are clear and explicit (See A Quick Guide to Assessment).

4

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

This principle works at two levels: within the program team itself and within the student group. Within the program team, members of the team will be diverse, bringing multiple perspectives and different values to the planning process. The process of curriculum design and review will be inclusive of and value team diversity.

For students, interaction helps them discover each other's perspectives. Multiple perspectives, in turn, help students realize how important taking the context into account can be. The importance placed on context varies between disciplines. In the so called 'soft sciences', where context is at the centre of disciplinary knowledge and skills, interaction helps students become context-aware. In the hard sciences, context is often viewed as being less important, though it's relevance to understanding and applying new knowledge never disappears completely. Without context awareness, learning is unlikely to transform students' understanding or build skills appropriate to the global, interconnected world in which students will live and work.

Dialogue and interaction are often difficult, especially across cultures and will require skill and resilience to manage moments of confrontation, misunderstanding and confusion. Students and staff will need to be helped and supported to turn such moments into those which support learning. Programs are the vehicle for designing the context-specific knowledge, skills and attitudes students will need to develop effective intercultural skills.

What to look for

Teachers and students share experiences **Experiences are treated as valuable resources for learning** *Harness the potential of shared knowledge (CG8-725).**	The program team models and exemplifies productive intercultural interaction. Team members refer to and draw upon their own and their peers' cultural and linguistic diversity. Teachers who have particular interest in and knowledge about cultural and language diversity issues are recruited and participate in program planning. Teachers follow up statements about the value of diversity with activities and tasks which overtly use and value students' diverse experiences and knowledge (See A Quick Guide to Assessment, Group Work and Teaching). The benefits as well as the challenges of engaging in intercultural dialogue are specifically outlined in course and program materials. Teachers plan activities and tasks in ways that are sensitive to students' needs to feel confident and unthreatened, especially at the start of a program. Confidence is a key factor in feeling able to work safely and effectively with other students. Cross-cultural dialogue is choreographed and managed by teachers who are aware of and sensitive to students' prior experiences.

What to look for

Interaction is planned into module design, projects and assessment tasks as appropriate **Interaction is treated as a normal and valuable way to learn but also, one which requires planning and support**	Tasks are designed in such a way that interaction across cultures is necessary in order to complete the task successfully. Students are guided to become aware of and work with difference without resorting to ranking, judging or otherwise acting as if the task is to decide whose perspective is 'best'. No one way of doing or seeing things is presented as 'universal'. The value of different approaches and perspectives is discussed. Group work assignments are designed to include cultural knowledge where appropriate (See A Quick Guide to Group Work). *"We had to go around and talk to everyone in the class to decide who is in our group for the project. Each group had to have people from at least two different backgrounds"* **(Student CG8-725, p. 15).***
Students are expected to regularly reflect upon and show awareness of cultural and language differences	Students take responsibility for ensuring their style of communication is effective and respectful of those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students recognize that everyone in a conversation helps ensure understanding. Responsibility for checking meaning is shared and includes those who are native speakers of English and those who are using English as an additional language. Teachers model this. Students' communicate with people with various language capabilities and accents over the life of the program. (See A Quick Guide to Developing English Language Skills). Self and peer assessment of communication skills is incorporated into tasks across the program. Students reflect upon the utility of their communication skills for life after graduation.

Principle 5: Be adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence

There are many ways to evaluate the impact of curriculum design on students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Individual teachers and university managers can collect data both systematically and as one-off exercises to investigate a particular event or concern. When the student cohort is diverse, data can be collected which looks for patterns in achievement and/or impacts of program design decisions or course interventions. Evidence can be geared to identifying impacts for particular groups or cohorts. Evidence from multiple sources needs to be carefully analysed, cross-referenced and then used to modify or adapt curriculum design.

What to look for

Evaluation and review processes are in place and the results are monitored *"Different cohorts rely on different combinations of support networks, depending on their diversity, multiple responsibilities and commitments"* **(CG6-38, p. 10).***	Evaluation at course level specifically focusses on inclusive teaching practices. The curricula of individual courses and the total program are checked regularly for accessibility and relevance. Evaluation and review are regular, ongoing and iterative. Changes both anticipate and respond to feedback and emerging themes. Program leaders and their teams regularly discuss the results of evaluation and review any issues that need to be addressed. Results of course and program evaluation activities are used to shape future curriculum design and professional development. Data collected at program and course level feeds into university level review and planning.

5

What to look for

Curriculum design is linked to institutional goals related to internationalisation and the development of intercultural competence and global citizenship	Data is collected at course at program level on satisfaction, success and post-university use of awards. Senior management are aware of, supportive and involved in responding to the results of data analysis.
Academic staff are rewarded for performance and innovation that responds to data analysis	Adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness to data are rewarded. Performance reviews include discussion and documentation of the extent to which the program supports coherence, quality and consistency in students' experiences and achievements, regardless of their linguistic and cultural background. Sufficient resources are provided to support high quality program design and delivery. Workload allocations provide sufficient time for data analysis, curriculum review and redesign.

6

Principle 6: Prepare students for life in a globalised world

Nations and their peoples interact with each other now more than ever before. In their future lives as professionals and citizens, today's students will contribute to this globalised world. Universities have a responsibility to ensure students graduate with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to make positive, ethical contributions as citizens and professionals to their global, national and local communities. Most universities have statements of graduate qualities or attributes related to global citizenship which, if they are used to inform course and program design, will ensure that diversity in the classroom is seen as a valuable resource to develop the skills and knowledge that staff and students need to thrive in a globalised world.

What to look for

Decisions on curriculum are shaped by a shared understanding among the program team as to what globalisation means in the context of the discipline and related professions	Time is routinely set aside for discussion, interaction and consultation on program goals in relation to global citizenship. This might occur, for example, as a specific part of regular annual program review. Program goals related to preparing students for life in a globalised world are accepted, supported and owned by the whole program team. They are also clearly articulated and communicated to all staff and to students.
Graduate Attributes related to the development of international and intercultural knowledge are described with specific reference to the important values, skills and knowledge of the discipline and related professions *Link curriculum planning and review to other relevant drivers or levers for change (eg. graduate attributes, accreditation or audits, guidelines for teaching and learning assessment policies) (CG6-37, p. 2).**	An agreed and appropriate Graduate Attributes profile which incorporates international and intercultural skills and knowledge is used to shape program design. Program learning outcomes include, for example, that graduates are able to: • identify global issues in the discipline and related professions, address global questions • work in a globalised workplace • communicate effectively in a culturally diverse workplace • collaborate internationally on research and knowledge generation projects effectively • work productively in a variety of roles in multi-cultural work teams • communicate complex information related to the discipline and related professions with culturally and linguistically diverse clients, partners and colleagues • generate new knowledge drawing upon diverse values and perspectives.

What to look for

A range of stakeholders inform curriculum design decisions	Alumni and employers are included on advisory groups or consulted in other ways on the knowledge, skills and attitudes graduates require in a globalised world. Their views are incorporated into program design. *"Seek feedback from employers as to the skills and attributes they want in new graduates, the strengths and weaknesses they see and any areas of deficiency in generic capabilities"* **(PPS-43, p. 75).***
Real world cases, problems and tasks are included in the curriculum	Cases, problems and tasks are authentic, located in diverse contexts and challenge students to explore how approaches to the profession vary in different social and political conditions. Teachers and students refer to global data, databases and/or research. Teachers are assisted to develop and expand their own discipline specific knowledge of global and international professional issues. Textbooks and resources include a diverse range of views from within the discipline; emerging paradigms are acknowledged and explored by staff and students.
The development of graduate attributes is linked to both citizenship and employment	Program-level learning outcomes relate to global citizenship, stewardship, addressing global problems and making the world a better place for all. Careers services are embedded into program design. Students are given advice on tailoring CVs for different national contexts and assistance to develop the skills required to identify the expectations of employers in different national and cultural contexts. *"Students in non-professional generalist degrees would benefit from the embedding of some kind of workplace experience and strategic career advice"* **(CG6-38, p. 11).***

Related OLT Projects

CG8-725, *Finding common ground: enhancing interaction between domestic and international students,*
‹http://www.olt.gov.au/project-enhancing-domestic-international-melbourne-2008›.

CG7-496, *Life: learning interactively for engagement,*
‹http://www.olt.gov.au/project-life-%E2%80%93-learning-interactively-murdoch-2007›.

PPS-43, *Assessing students unfamiliar with assessment practices in Australian universities,*
‹http://www.olt.gov.au/project-assessing-students-unfamiliar-rmit-2005›.

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›.

CG6-37, *Embedding the development of intercultural competence in business education,*
‹http://www.olt.gov.au/project-embedding-development-intercultural-sydney-2006›.

Key References

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Chalmers D & Partridge L 2013, 'Teaching graduate attributes and academic skills', in L Hunt & D Chalmers, *University teaching in focus: a learning-centred approach,* ACER Press, Camberwell, Victoria, pp. 56-91.

Nicol D 2007, 'Principles of assessment design and feedback: theory and practice', *Assessment design for learner responsibility,* pp. 1-9, ‹http://www.reap.ac.uk›.