

Good Practice Principles in Practice: Teaching Across Cultures

A Quick Guide to Effective Professional Development of 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.

This guide shows the principles in practice for professional development of staff who teach in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. This guide may be used to check and affirm current practice and/or to identify areas for additional effort or activity.

Principles into practice: professional development

Principle 1: Focus on students as learners

Effective teachers consistently treat all students as learners. What might you look for as indicators that teachers are able to and actually do treat all students as learners?

What to look for

Program and course designers and teachers realise that approaches to knowledge and learning differ across cultures

Staff take some responsibility for the development of all students as learners

Program design supports the development of students as learners with shared responsibility for the development of their English language skills.

Programs are created which:

- develop students' learning skills. For example, programs scaffold academic writing across the first year, teaching it in several courses and returning to the skills when students later tackle their dissertation
- build students' self-awareness as learners. Perhaps several courses require reflective tasks or include discussion of assessment literacy
- track and map learning goals as students move towards graduate-level competence (graduate attributes).

Expert learning and language support staff work with teachers to integrate language development into learning and assessment tasks. Experts help teachers:

- unpack discipline-specific discourses and assessment practices
- develop their skills in presenting course material in various modes. Teachers learn to work on line, at a distance and transnationally before they become responsible for delivery.

Assessment and feedback supports the development of students as learners. For example:

- feedback is accessible and supports learning. Early in the program, assessment criteria related to language use and intercultural competence are explained to students and the reason they are included is discussed
- teachers provide clear statements to students of what is necessary for future improvement as part of feedback on learning activities and assessment tasks
- feedback highlights strengths as well as mistakes and gaps. This is done with care, selecting key points and providing a rationale.

Programs and courses focus on assessment

Teachers ensure students understand what will be assessed and how

Programs are regularly reviewed to ensure assessment tasks and practices are fair and inclusive. Examples of inclusive practices include:

- offering choices where possible
- making efforts to cater for different learning preferences. Many will date from students' previous learning experiences
- designing courses with a range of assessment modes. For unfamiliar modes, students are provided with exemplars and practice in first year and beyond.

Programs and courses focus on language learning

Teachers are trained and supported to enhance and develop their students' language capabilities in line with the requirements of the program/discipline. ([See Quick Guide to Developing English Language Skills](#)).

Care is taken, especially in the early stages of programs, to lower the language demands on students. This can be done in lectures, for example, by providing glossaries, recordings and by mandating pre-lecture reading for content and vocabulary. Teachers can deliberately slow their pace or check students' understanding of key points.

Teachers create safe and structured ways to help students to contribute in class. Methods might include: paired and small group discussion, modelling active listening and preventing native speakers from dominating.

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Principle 2: Respecting and adjusting for diversity

Effective teachers respect and make adjustments for diversity arising from students' cultural backgrounds or previous educational experiences. As a manager, what might you look for as indicators that teachers and others are being provided with professional development that will help them to make such adjustments?

What to look for

The department is collegial

There is an environment conducive to on-going peer sharing of knowledge and review of practice

Departmental and program leaders provide places and time for staff to meet and discuss issues, designating ways to harvest and share outcomes.

*Curriculum planning, designing and reviewing is done in a discipline-specific approach across a range of units by a team, rather than individually (CG6-37).**

Teachers are inducted into teaching in off-shore programs

Induction to transnational teaching is for both partners: those from the accrediting university and those in partner institutions

Teachers are provided with location-specific information: How things work here.

There is generic guidance on the design, delivery and evaluation of offshore programs.

Transnational program managers create communication strategies which encourage frequent, comfortable exchanges and discussion between colleagues in partner institutions offshore and those based at the accrediting university.

*Provide opportunities which support "effective and maturing cross-institutional relationships, shared understanding, collegial discussion and negotiation of assessment, institutional support and professional development" (PP8-906, p. 23).**

There are on-going, organised programs for professional development

Professional development programs are scheduled to facilitate attendance by staff with competing demands on their time. Repeats are regular.

Casual staff are paid to attend professional development. Their participation in professional development activities is encouraged and recorded.

There are minimum requirements for attendance at professional development activities which focus on teaching across cultures.

Professional development offerings are reviewed regularly to ensure alignment with any changes or new issues linked to culturally diverse students' learning needs.

In offshore programs, locally-employed staff have access to and attend professional development events.

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Principle 3: Providing context-specific information and support

Effective teachers are able to provide context-specific information and support to culturally diverse students in different modes of delivery, including onshore, offshore and online teaching. What might indicate that teachers and others are being offered professional development that will enable them to provide this type of context-specific information and support?

What to look for

There is a range of mechanisms for alerting teachers to information relevant to their students

Information on services for students is straight forward and easy to access.

Information on legal responsibilities is tailored to fit different national and international contexts

Teachers can check on their legal responsibilities, (e.g. Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act and Anti-Discrimination legislation in particular). Any link between onshore and offshore legal contexts is made explicit.

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

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What to look for

All teachers are provided with program and course specific information of relevance to culturally diverse students

Program information states all program arrangements, such as those covering course duration, assessment timetables, holiday entitlement, the use of dictionaries in examinations and mechanisms for adjustments for religious obligations.

Administrative and accreditation arrangements are clear and explicit, including those concerning admission, continued registration, progression and completion.

Students develop their own formal and informal support networks

Opportunities are provided for international students to learn about local cultures through, for example, informal interactions with Australian 'host' families, visits to rural areas/cities, interaction with local community and sporting groups, participation in volunteering.

Community groups are encouraged to interact with international students.

Diversity within the Australian student body is recognised and celebrated. Australian students are encouraged to assist international students to settle into the university and into the life of the community.

Information is provided which is specific to offshore teaching

Teachers' responsibilities are clear in relation to:

- participating in briefing and debriefing sessions, pre and post teaching assignments
- identifying and meeting professional development expectations or gaps. Professional development concentrates on contextualisation of teaching, assessment of language use and development, evaluation of materials and providing pastoral support in the offshore context
- clarifying the extent to which teachers will need to support students' language development.

Program managers ensure legal and contractual obligations in the Australian and local jurisdiction are stated and understood.

Program leaders and managers recognise that some procedures can be especially opaque for staff and students from culturally diverse backgrounds

Teachers are encouraged to reach out to all students (indigenous, international, refugee, migrant, offshore, rural and isolated) and keep them informed about their rights and entitlements as students.

In documents which students use frequently, such as course guides, there are simple explanations of processes and practices.

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Principle 4: Enabling/facilitating meaningful intercultural interaction, dialogue and engagement

Effective teachers can enable meaningful intercultural dialogue and interaction amongst their students. As a manager of others' professional development, what might you look for as indicators that staff can facilitate intercultural interaction and dialogue?

What to look for

Curriculum design incorporates activities for staff-student and student-student interaction

Teachers make use of specific guidance on curriculum design. See, for example, the detailed guidance in the [Quick Guide to Curriculum Design](http://ieaa.org.au/ltac) at ieaa.org.au/ltac.

Interaction continues in course delivery and assessment

Faculty based social gatherings are organised which students perceive as relevant. Staff attend these gatherings and encourage student attendance. Events are used to build networks.

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What to look for

There are events and provision designed to develop intercultural awareness

Events and training are aimed at staff and all students. In general, attendance is mandated and providers monitor participation.

All students are encouraged to develop their awareness and skills in their use of intercultural communication strategies.

Organisers review programs regularly to identify activities where dialogue and intercultural interaction are required. The requirement for interaction is explicit within programs; activities are linked to appropriate graduate attributes.

Leaders and managers recognise the staff development needs of teachers who are expected to encourage and support student interaction

*Lecturers should be very keen to employ appropriate technologies, e.g.: eLuminator, Blackboard, online demons, web20 applications and sites, short videos and movies, animated cartoons, intelligent software' (CG7-494, p. 131).**

There is provision for common issues to be addressed. Teachers' needs might include:

- how to evaluate and adapt resources and teaching materials
- how to check that activities give opportunities for students to draw upon their culture or previous experience
- how to assist language development of their students (See [A Quick Guide to Developing English Language Skills](#)).

Teachers are provided with specific opportunities to develop their ability to fully utilise IT and multi-media as teaching tools.

"Onlinetoolssuchasdisscussionboards,wikisorblogscanbeusedtcreateanonline community of learners" (CG8-725, p. 131).*

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Principle 5: Being adaptable, flexible and responsive to evidence

Effective teachers remain adaptable, flexible and responsive to their students and to the teaching context. What would show that teachers are able and willing to be adaptable, flexible and responsive?

What to look for

The program team collects and uses feedback

Managers and program leaders ensure feedback is collected in a variety of ways.

Feedback is processed, analysed and reported to relevant people and committees.

Feedback is acted on as need arises.

Where feedback has shaped and has impacted on programs, this is made clear to teaching staff and to students.

Staff engagement and satisfaction is monitored and supported

Data is gathered on teachers' personal needs and issues. Someone makes sense of findings and acts upon any that are significant.

There are rewards and recognition for responsive teaching.

Workload levels and levels of stress in staff teaching across cultures are closely monitored and adjustments are made to class size and workload where necessary.

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Principle 6: Preparing students for life in a globalised world

Effective teachers prepare students for life in a globalised world. Managers can look for indicators and evidence that staff are able and willing to do so.

What to look for

There are mechanisms for teachers to increase and update their knowledge of global issues within their discipline

Global issues are incorporated into student assessment.

Students are regularly gaining employment positions overseas.

Students are networking internationally and interculturally on campus and/or online.

Students take part in exchange programs with partner institutions.

Teachers can experience and learn from living and working in intercultural and globally interconnected settings

Teachers are supported in learning about the global issues of their discipline through for example: travelling to attend conferences, industry internships, discussing issues with staff in offshore partner institutions; they disseminate information to colleagues and incorporate it into their teaching.

Cultural and linguistic diversity is the norm in program teams.

Staff from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds teach in the core courses of the program. Care is taken that staff from different backgrounds do not find themselves predominantly teaching in non-compulsory or elective units and/or with no power to influence curriculum decisions.

There are opportunities to regularly discuss and share ideas about global issues and global citizenship with colleagues

Global issues are an explicit part of the discussion of program teams.

Global issues are an explicit part of the discussion of the curriculum.

Internationalisation of the curriculum is incorporated into the processes of program approval and review.

Related OLT Projects

CG7-378, *Enhancing frameworks for assuring the quality of teaching and learning in offshore education programs*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-enhancing-frameworks-quality-teaching-offshore-uwa-2010>>.

CG6-37, *Embedding the development of intercultural competence in business education*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/resource-embedding-development-business-usyd-2009>>.

PP8-906, *Moderation for fair assessment in transnational learning and teaching*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-moderation-fair-assessment-unisa-2008>>.

CG8-725, *Enhancing domestic and international students engagement: changing attitudes and behaviours*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-enhancing-domestic-international-melbourne-2008>>.

CG7-494, *Strategies and approaches to teaching and learning cross cultures*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-strategies-approaches-teaching-uts-2007>>.

CG7-453, *Addressing the ongoing English language growth of international students*, <<http://www.olt.gov.au/project-addressing-ongoing-english-monash-2007>>.

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>>.

Key References

AVCC 2005, *Provision of education to international students: code of practice and guidelines for Australian universities*, <<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/resources/337/324>>.

Barker, M, Hibbins, R & Farrelly, B 2011, 'Walking the talk: fostering a sense of global citizenry amongst staff in higher education', in V Clifford & C Montgomery (eds), *Moving towards internationalisation of the curriculum for global citizenship in higher education*, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, England, pp. 47-68.

Viete, R & Peeler, E 2007, 'Respectful encounters: valuing each other in teacher professional learning contexts', in A Berry, A Clemans & A Kostogriz (eds), *Dimensions of professional learning: professionalism, practice and identity*, Sense, Rotterdam, pp. 178-190.

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