Designing culturally inclusive teaching and learning spaces

Staff and students at USC have a variety of ideas about what constitutes good teaching and learning. These ideas are influenced by their own culture and life experiences. For many students and staff, the educational environment at USC could be a new and possibly challenging experience. Much of what we do in education is actually framed by cultural 'rules' that are often tacit. This includes the ways we teach and learn, the curriculum intent, design and content, and our attitudes and values about schooling and education. Culture is the basis of what people 'take for granted' or what they notice about others but is largely invisible to themselves. The invisibility of culture in educational settings can have unintended consequences. Despite the best of intentions, teachers and students might be unaware that what they say, do or teach in the classroom could seem strange or offensive to others. Sometimes doing what seems 'normal' means unintentionally excluding others from participating fully.

What do I know about my student and staff colleagues?

• What do I know about the cultural and education systems of my student and staff colleagues?

• How current/accurate is my information?

Strategies and tips for designing a culturally inclusive teaching and learning environment

Introductions

 • Set up an introduction system so that all students can get to know something about you, their class colleagues and the diversity of experience in the class.

• Use Blackboard to talk about your approach to teaching and learning; include some information about your own cultural origin and any cross- cultural teaching/learning experience you may have had.

• Provide opportunities for students to introduce themselves to you and other students.

Establish appropriate modes of address

• When you interact one on one with students, ask what form of address they prefer.

• Use inclusive language that doesn't assume Western name forms - 'family' name, not 'last' name - 'given' name, not 'Christian' name.

• Students from more formal educational cultures, where status differences related to age or educational qualifications are important, might be uncomfortable in addressing teaching staff by their given

names. A compromise can be for students to use your title and given name eg 'Professor Marie', 'Dr Ivan'.

• If in doubt, ask.

Treat diversity positively

• Avoid over generalising behaviour (expecting particular culturally based behaviour from an individual because that person comes from a certain cultural group) or having stereotypical expectations of people (positive or negative) eg, 'All Asian students are quiet in class'.

• Don't expect any individual student to speak as a representative of his/her culture.

• Utilise diverse experiences and perspectives as a resource.

• Plan opportunities for all students to contribute input related to their own culture (but avoid making any student a cultural representative).

Establish clear expectations in the classroom

• Explain and clarify academic expectations and standards regarding written work.

• Check that your students understand the Australian university context and what is expected of them.

• Clarify the format and purpose of the particular session type you are teaching, and the type of student participation expected.

• Explain the written topic outlines, objectives and outcomes that are provided to students, checking that everyone understands.

• Teach appropriate citing, referencing and how to avoid plagiarism in papers. Provide relevant information and resource

Thinking about culture

A good start for thinking about culture, your own and others', is noticing what you find surprising, or perhaps offensive, about differences in everyday behaviour between someone from a different cultural group and yourself. When this happens think about what cultural 'rules' the other person and you might be using (Carroll 2000). Expectations about roles, responsibilities and relationships of teachers and students can vary.

Consider the 'rules' as used by the student and the lecturer in this situation.

"If the lecturer does not answer a student's questions in class, but asks the other students what they think, in my country we would think that teacher is poorly qualified or lazy. But in Australia this way of not giving the answer ... is common in our class, even when the Professor is our teacher." (3rd year Botany student from Thailand). Ballard and Clanchy, 1991 p1.

Questions to guide reflection
What can I say about myself and my own culture?

• What national, ethnic or religious group(s) do I belong to? How does my teaching reflect this?

• What seems normal or strange to me? What sort of student/staff behaviour am I most familiar or comfortable with? What surprises or challenges me?

• What experiences do I have as a result of studying/working in different cultures and how can I use this?

Rise, and shine.

• Make your marking scheme quite clear. Let students know if the emphasis is on communicating information and ideas or on language accuracy. Sometimes students can be anxious about being penalised for poor English expression.

Developing a checklist for reviewing your teaching practice

For information on Student Evaluation of Teaching and Courses (SETAC) visit www.usc.edu.au/university/learning-and-teaching/learning-and-teaching-quality

The following questions can be used as a framework for developing a checklist to either monitor your own practice or as a peer review instrument.

• What strategies/methods do I use to establish an inclusive teaching and learning environment?

• Which strategies/methods work well?

• What evidence do I have that these strategies/methods are successful?

• Which strategies/methods do I need to modify?

• Which new strategies/methods could I adopt?

References and Resources

Ballard, B., and Clanchy, J. (1991). Teaching Students from Overseas: A Brief Guide for Lecturers and Supervisors. Longman Cheshire, Melbourne Boice, R. (1996). First-Order Principles for College Teachers: Ten Basic Ways to Improve the Teaching Process. Anker Publishing Company, Bolton, MA Carroll, J. (2000). A Way of Thinking About Culture: An Exercise. Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Oxford www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/resources/ culture_exercise.html Accessed November 2011 Liu, J, Yao, J, Chin, KL, Xiao, J and Xu, J (2010) Strategies and approaches to teaching and learning cross cultures, Australian Learning & Teaching Council, www.olt.gov.au/resourcestrategies-and-approaches-teaching-andlearning-cross-cultures-uts-2010 Accessed November 2011 Perry, W. G. (1999). Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in College Years: A Scheme. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco. Santoro, N. (2009). Teaching in Culturally Diverse Contexts: What knowledge about 'self' and 'others' do teachers need? Journal of Education for Teaching, Vol.35, No.1, pp.33-45. The University of Sydney, Inclusive Teaching, www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/inclusiveteaching Accessed November 2011

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Rise, and shine.

Reviewing your approach to teaching Where might you stand on the following statements?

Do you have a fixed view, or does it vary with the situation?

Is your teaching consistent with your viewpoint?

Teacher role	The teacher's role is to guide students toward independent learning, by encouraging self-directed learning and peer teaching and learning.	Your comments	The role of the teacher is to provide disciplinary expertise and to cover all the skills and knowledge that students are required to learn.
Student role	Students are expected to develop expertise in the accepted disciplinary knowledge via the teacher's explanations and demonstrations.	Your comments	Students are expected to develop their own ideas by questioning and critiquing what teachers present in class.
Academic role	Classroom interaction should be informal, where teachers and students converse on a first name basis as colleagues in the higher education environment.	Your comments	Good academic behaviour includes understanding competing explanations for differing phenomena and formulating a theoretically defensible rationale for one's own opinion.
Tone of classroom interaction	Classroom interaction should be informal, where teachers and students converse on a first name basis as colleagues in the higher education environment.	Your comments	A degree of formality in class is important because students need to trust and respect teachers as they are the experts who will ultimately assess and grade student work.
The curriculum	The curriculum is for an Australian university and therefore the content must be essentially Australian.	Your comments	The curriculum is for a global environment and market and therefore care should be taken to ensure that the content, illustrative examples, theorists and readings reflect diverse world views.