

TIPS FOR MANAGING AN INTER-CULTURAL CLASSROOM

Specific strategies for managing an inter-cultural classroom are important because:

- students arrive in classrooms with a diverse range of expectations and experiences about what education will be like in Australia; and
- international students can face a variety of personal challenges (Arkoudis, 2006):
 - learning and living in a different culture;
 - learning in a foreign university context;
 - learning while developing English language proficiency; and
 - learning the academic language, norms and expectations of their host institution.

Managing the learning and teaching environments

1. In any teaching activity

- Clarify your role as a teacher/lecturer in class, in your course materials and on the course website. Especially make clear what students should call you and how you expect them to contact you (see <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp#appointments>).
- Provide explicit information about your expectations for student behaviour in contexts such as lectures, tutorials and on-line discussions.
- Define or paraphrase difficult or key concepts or unfamiliar words in lectures and written materials.
- Explicitly highlight the main points or key questions of a lecture.
- Provide a lecture outline to assist students to follow the lecture and guide their note taking.
- Make explicit links between current, past and planned topics: visual concepts maps can be useful.
- Summarise important content at regular intervals during the lecture.
- Include a range of examples, case studies, etc from different cultural contexts.
- Pre-teach key vocabulary, particularly technical or discipline jargon; e.g. provide a glossary of the terms during lectures or on the Study Desk.
- Avoid use of slang, particularly if it involves culturally embedded references that hinder understanding.
- Be aware of derogatory connotations of labels for particular cultural groups.
- Understand students' reluctance to ask questions (see <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp#lectures>).

2. In tutorials/ seminars/ small group discussions

To prepare a class for small group discussion – oncampus and online

- Ensure that the atmosphere is respectful and that responses from all students are encouraged.
- Make your expectations about group or student participation clear to students.
- Clarify your role as a teacher/lecturer in class and on the course website, emphasising active student participation, (rather than teacher action), as the means for students to achieve course objectives.
- Explain the process of group discussion, laying the ground rules for participation and shared responsibilities (see <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp#tutorials>).

- Make explicit your reasons for asking questions. Explain that errors are a part of learning and that you do not expect “perfect” answers (see <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp#class>).
- Build an environment where students feel confident and “safe” about asking questions, for example, explain that “*there is no such thing as a dumb question.*” You could provide a question box where students can submit written questions.
- Ask students to prepare responses for the next class in advance; this allows second language learners adequate time to prepare.
- Provide opportunities early in the semester for students to interact with each other, through structured icebreaker activities on campus, and “introduce yourself” and “coffee shop” online forums.

To encourage contributions in small group discussions - oncampus and online

- Ensure that all students know you value their contributions.
- Know students’ names. An easy way is to write their names on a name card for the first few weeks. If a safe atmosphere has been developed then invite students personally to speak.
- Provide brief summaries of the discussion from time to time, highlighting key points.
- Involve students in decisions about the materials used in a session.
- Pose questions or raise issues that students can discuss in pairs and then report back to the class.
- Give students time to respond to a question – wait before moving on to another student.
- Encourage students to think of practical uses of the theory in their own cultural context or ask students to give examples of recently explained theories and concepts using their own experiences.
- Provide both good and poor answers to assessment tasks, and follow up with analysis, discussion and short activities.

3. In teamwork/ group activities

- Give students a clear rationale for working together. (See <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp#groups>)
- Manage group expectations by requiring groups to develop learning or group participation contracts.
- Structure the progression of the work, beginning with small group tasks that give students the opportunity to develop their group-based skills (negotiating, setting priorities, delegating responsibilities, giving effective feedback) and build to more heavily weighted group assignments.
- Where possible, organise group activities so that international and domestic students are grouped together to increase opportunities for domestic and international student interaction.
- Clarify marking criteria and grading standards before commencement of group work.
- Provide regular opportunities for groups to demonstrate that they are on task and to receive constructive feedback.

Source: adapted from McLean and Ransom (2005) and Arkoudis (2006)

Further Resources

Arkoudis, S. (2006). Teaching International Students: Strategies to enhance learning [Electronic Version]. Retrieved 4 April 2008, from <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/pdfs/international.pdf>

McLean, P., & Ransom, L. (2005). Building intercultural competencies: Implications for academic skills development. In J. Carroll & J. Ryan (Eds.), *Teaching International Students: Improving learning for all* (pp. 45-62). Park Square: Routledge.

QUT (2008). The Cultural Bridge to Classroom Project <http://www.qutic.qut.edu.au/about/projects.jsp>