



Session

LEARNING IN A DIFFERENT CULTURAL CONTEXT

At the end of this session, international students will be able to:

- Recognise that culture and beliefs impact learning and teaching
- Appreciate how lecturers' expectations, and that of particular disciplines, preference certain behaviours from students
- Recognise behaviours and strategies associated with different learning approaches

How and when to use this material

This is the third introductory session on teaching and learning in Australia and is intended as part of Day One on a pre-semester program, rather than delivered as part of weekly teaching on a media/communication unit.

It follows the session on **Communicating with and across cultures** and should be followed with the session on **Being in control and learning by reflecting**.

Having been sensitised to key aspects of difference with respect to culture in general and university in a broad sense, here students consider different ways of learning and teaching and how these are influenced by lecturer and discipline expectations. The session is designed to highlight how beliefs affect learning and teaching so that students can appreciate difference and commonality and use this information to support their transition to their new learning environment.

The following Briefing Notes may be useful background information before you begin running this session:

- **Intercultural communication**
- **Knowing about your Chinese students: A quick reference guide for Australian academics**

Student activity 1: Characteristics of being a good student and a good lecturer

- Ask students to list what they consider these to be on separate A4 sheets or sticky notes, with one characteristic per piece of paper.
- Students should then add their ideas under the headings of 'good lecturer' and 'good student' (either on the whiteboard or on the floor).
- The lecturer should highlight the most common characteristics and discuss these with students. What information can be drawn from this with respect to education in students' home country context?

Note to lecturer

This activity is designed to elicit practices and beliefs that may be particularly significant within Chinese / home country education. This is done in order to help students articulate their own beliefs and values so that they are better positioned to understand and negotiate differences that they may encounter in their new learning context.

Student activity 2: Different learning contexts

- Show slides / video clips of a whole range of different classrooms (here and China).
- Get students to identify what is familiar or otherwise to their own teaching context back home.
- Draw out initial impressions of the ones that are less familiar.
- Identify features of these and possible implications for the students (e.g. possible apprehension about debate and argument in a seminar).
- Students to make a list of these in their notebooks, under the heading 'Teaching and Learning Differences in Australia'. This can be used as a point of reference for future topics and discussions in the program. Students will be able to tick things off or highlight them as needing additional attention as they embark or progress with their study.

Student activity 3: Diversity in learning and teaching

- Give each student a quotation from interviews with students and lecturers (see **Handout: Student and lecturer comments**). Each comment should be on a separate strip of paper.
- Now find some space in the classroom (or even go outside to do this exercise). Make a large line on the floor with masking tape (you might want to run the tape from one side of the room to the other). Using the masking tape to indicate continua, place the above comments onto relevant positions on the masking tape, or write them in text on the masking tape itself). These comments can then be placed on a range of continua on the floor with masking tape. (Note: Decisions about continua will depend on the profile of particular student cohorts.)

For example:

China < ----- both ----- > Australia

Agree < -----> Disagree

Student has responsibility < -----> Lecturer has responsibility

Note to lecturer

Continua are useful tools as they force participants to make judgements / commitments. Follow up discussion will highlight aspects of diversity as well as possible challenges for students. Asking students to physically position themselves on the continuum with their comment is a good way to get them moving. It helps them to 'speak out'.

Students may be reluctant initially to do this exercise because it forces them to commit. It is important, however, that they understand early in their program that they have to have, and use, a personal voice in their work in Australia. This exercise can be identified as an example of a particular strategy associated with learning in the Australian context.

Lecturer input: Lecturer expectations

- Demonstrate different teaching styles e.g. stand behind a lectern and read, sit on a desk and talk, flick up a PowerPoint, move around the room asking questions (without necessarily expecting a response), mention the continua exercise.
- Ask students which ones they like / feel more comfortable with. Why?
- Explain that different lecturers have different teaching styles and students will have to adjust how they respond to each lecturer rather than taking the same approach all the time.
- Demonstrate other examples with a focus this time on what is said, and what is expected in reply. For example:
 - some lecturers talk at you and expect you to hang on every word
 - others give lots of examples, possibly from their own experiences and you have to work out what the message/point behind the example is
 - others want interaction and engagement with the audience and expect you to call out questions or answers
 - some want to know what you think about what you are reading and hearing or learning which they consider more important than talking themselves
 - some will be good at linking what you are studying to the whole course or application to the real world
 - some will be better than others at giving clues about what will be important to learn for exams and assignments
 - some lecturers will welcome you seeking them out after class and getting them to explain more and others will be too busy and expect you to find out from other students
- Point out that lecturers in different disciplines will expect different things. Lecturers in Screen Production may structure their small group sessions differently from Philosophy lecturers, for example, because the former may encourage you to try out practical skills with broadcast equipment whereas the latter may expect you to engage in theoretical debate.

Student activity 4: Learner expectations

- Ask students to use all the information from this session to write short responses to the following:
 - Good lecturers in Australia will
 - As a student in Australia I will
- Students then compare what they have written now with what they wrote at the beginning of the session. Are there any differences? Why/why not? Use the words below to help structure the discussion:

beliefs values expectations experience knowledge

Lecturer input: Chinese proverb

Ask students if the following Chinese proverb resonates: 'Someone who teaches you for just one day deserves your lifelong respect as if he is your father.'

This ancient saying suggests that there are responsibilities from both sides: a lecturer should care for his or her students like a father cares for his son (or a mother for her daughter!); a student should be grateful to their lecturers as if they were their father or mother. But if a student says this to their lecturer, most likely they just want to show their gratitude rather than demanding more care.

Lecturer input for more advanced students: Different learning approaches

The below activity is appropriate for students with advanced levels of English.

Explain that both the lecturer and the student bring different expectations, experience and knowledge to any classroom setting. Note that in Australia, we teach and learn within a cultural context which is informed by particular ideologies which may differ from those in students' home country.

Talk about the work of Biggs who researched international students studying in Hong Kong and noted three different approaches to the way they learnt: Deep, Surface and Achieving (see attached **Teaching note: Three prototypical ways to learn**). Surface learning may start as a pragmatic approach for students but can become a stepping stone to the development of deeper thinking over a period of time. Note the way a course is constructed can bring out a more surface approach.

Discuss with students the way they think best reflects their own approach. Possibly they can recall using different approaches for different lecturers back in China.

Note that it's possible to use some aspects of students' previous learning experiences to assist them in Australia - although they will have to develop new skills too.

Student activity 5: Expectations associated with different units

As a way of developing a little more specificity with respect to Media and Communications units, have students read extracts from unit guides relevant to their courses, or alternatively use the three example extracts from unit guides. You may wish to show these as PowerPoint slides:

Communication management and professional perspectives.

The essential readings in this unit have deliberately been kept to a minimum to ensure students do them BEFORE the lectures and seminars. Doing the readings in advance enhances your learning experience considerably. Taking in different arguments on a topic is at the core of learning in the social and human sciences. Hence, you are encouraged to read as widely as possible.

Media audiences and the public.

This unit is built on four complementary activities: lectures, readings, seminars and assessment. Although it is tempting to focus on the assessments, the readings and lectures will be critical avenues for understanding the material covered in the assessments. You **will** be expected to cover the **required** readings and any additional readings the lecturer or unit coordinator assign. Thoughtful questions are encouraged when they dig deeper into the topic, and I am happy to discuss your questions about media, audiences and the public after lectures or during consultation times.

Cultural & media policy.

Each week you are expected to complete the readings in advance of seminars. It is recommended that you follow readings on a week-by-week basis, rather than reading too far in advance.

Set aside a regular study/reading period each week to devote to this unit. To make sense of the unit you should do ALL the readings. Particularly difficult material will have to be re-read. You should feel challenged by new concepts and theories. Take detailed notes in outline form on readings and other unit materials; write definitions of the terms and concepts to gain familiarity with them.

Individually, or in pairs, students now record the following information about each of the above units:

- What the units say students have to do / When / Why they have to do it
- Ask students to discuss any similarities and differences compared to their undergraduate study
- Now students should identify any challenges they think they will face because of these expectations. (Note: in the following session, students will have an opportunity to start to think about strategies they can use to confront challenges)

Student activity 6: Personal glossary

Students to add new / key vocabulary / phrases to their personal glossary from their learning in this session. They might also look over their current unit guides and note down any unfamiliar words in their glossary.

Each student to share one phrase with the whole group.

Note to lecturer

The creation and ongoing development of a personal glossary enables students to build a working vocabulary - with definitions - for important, unfamiliar or frequently encountered concepts, idioms and metaphors that will be useful during their study of media and communication.



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Additional materials and resources are available from
<http://chinapostgraduates.murdoch.edu.au>

Project Team

Christine Daymon (Murdoch University, Project Leader)

Lindy Norris (Murdoch University)

Maree Keating (Victoria University)

Fiona Henderson (Victoria University)

Haixia Yu (Communication University of China)

Dawei Wang (Communication University of China)

Jennie Bickmore-Brand

Linda Butcher (Murdoch, Project Manager)

Yibing Liu (Research Assistant)

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