

TEACHING STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS IN THE REMOTE CONTEXT

This is one of seven teacher guides in the series 'Teaching in Remote Australian Schools: Enhancing Pre-Service Teacher Education – A Resource Package'.

STANDARD

1.0 Know students and how they learn

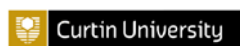
FOCUS AREA

1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds

GRADUATE DESCRIPTOR

Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



INTRODUCTION

A significant feature of Australian society is its rich diversity. Our nation's first people have developed a complex culture over the thousands of years they have lived in Australia. This development continues today. People from many nations have come to Australia adding to the cultural diversity of Australia in the 21st century.

Australia's linguistic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic and geographic diversity requires teachers to develop exceptional skills to ensure that all students, no matter what their background or where they live, achieve their full potential. This requires teachers to build on the contributions that diversity brings to the classroom, being able to use their pedagogical knowledge to ensure that teaching strategies, responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, are used.

Using the ARIA+ and the ARIA++ indices of remoteness, as discussed in the overview to this resource package, Baxter, Gray & Hayes (2011) notes that the percentage of the Australian population born overseas and now living in remote or very remote Australia is low i.e. 13% and 8% respectively. Nevertheless, some of Australia's remote towns are increasingly becoming multicultural.

One of the most demanding challenges for teachers contemplating working in remote communities is building a comprehensive understanding of Aboriginal culture as it is our first nation peoples who are highly represented in these communities. Considerable progress is being made in developing pedagogy that is responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds including Australia's Indigenous students.

The references included in this and other modules in the package direct you to some of these developments.

Being a quality Graduate teacher in the remote teaching context requires a good understanding of the concept of "funds of knowledge" and "responsive pedagogy". Responsive pedagogy is built on fundamental principles such as: respect for diversity, cultural competencies around understanding, empathy, sensitivity and awareness of issues and equality. For a teacher to be successful in remote communities these principles need to be built into not only their pedagogical practices in the classroom but also those beyond in terms of the way they live in a remote community and interact with all community members.

In their *Cultural Orientation Handbook (2009 p.8)* the *Rural Area Health Corporation* outlines the following expectations that remote communities have of health professionals:

The community expects you to perform your role as a health professional. This includes dressing, speaking and generally conducting yourself in a manner in keeping with the role, and having the knowledge and expertise expected of your profession.

You are also expected to be sensitive and empathic, and to recognise honour and respect vibrancy of another culture. The values detailed below have been endorsed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (2003) for conducting ethical research in Aboriginal health contexts. These values also serve as a sound guide for cross-cultural communication:

- **Spirit and integrity** – a respect for the spirit and integrity of all cultures, communities and individuals.
- **Reciprocity** – full recognition of the involvement and contribution of stakeholders, a dedication to the feedback of meaningful results, and the assurance that outcomes must be of equitable value to the communities and individuals involved.
- **Respect** – acknowledgement and affirmation of the inherent diversity that

exists within cultures and communities, and a commitment to extensive consultation and involvement.

- **Equality** – the promotion of distributive fairness and justice, affirming the right of individuals, communities and cultures to be different.
- **Responsibility** – to ensure that all practice is transparent and accountable, and will result in no harm to the individuals and communities involved.

The community also expects you to work with them in partnership. Franks and Curr (1996) provide the following summary advice on the ideal approach a non-Aboriginal health professional can adopt in building and working in partnership:

- I want to work in Aboriginal ways – show me.
- I want to cooperate with Aboriginal ways – educate me.
- I want to understand Aboriginal ways – help me.
- The clinic belongs to the community and I am here to work in a way that will suit everyone.
- We all work together and learn from each other how to do this the best possible way.

These expectations apply to teachers and in fact anyone who wants to work effectively in remote Aboriginal communities.

When designing teaching sequences it is incumbent of all Graduates to build a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds of the students they teach. More importantly, it is necessary to apply that understanding to develop a repository of content and teaching strategies that can be used in a responsive way to build on the learning strengths and cater for the needs of students. This is particularly so when teachers are designing teaching sequences that target gaps in learning and for those with learning difficulties.

A good starting point for pre-service teachers in building the linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds of Aboriginal people in remote Australia is by visiting the Centre for Aboriginal Studies located at their university. The Centres for Aboriginal Studies in Western Australia are:

- Curtin University: Centre for Aboriginal Studies/Curtin Indigenous Research Centre (CIRC);

- Edith Cowan University: School of Indigenous Studies/Kurongkuri Katitjin (Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research);
- Murdoch University: Kulbari Aboriginal Centre;
- University of Western Australia: School of Indigenous Studies; and
- University of Notre Dame: Nulungu, Centre for Indigenous Studies.

As noted in the other teaching guides, another important way for Graduate teachers to learn more about responsive teaching and learning is from professional colleagues that have proven expertise in structuring learning to address the strengths and needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

OUTCOMES

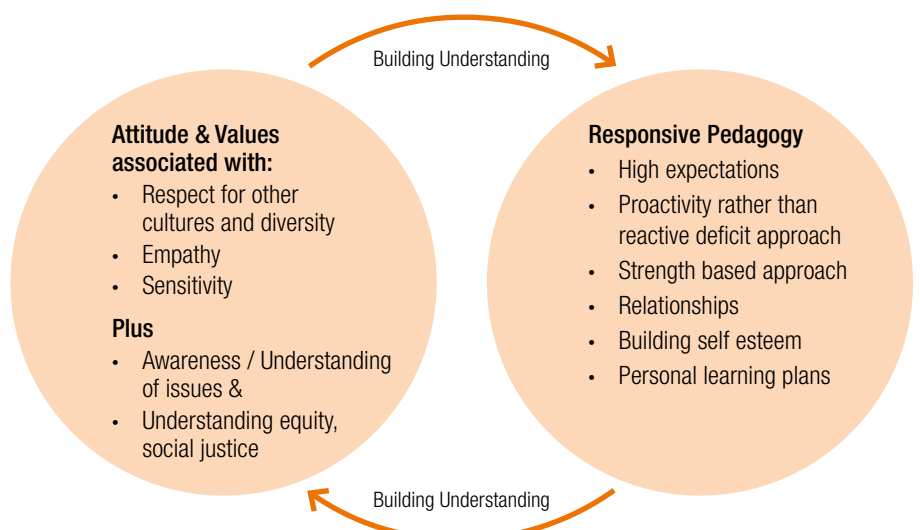
- Graduates reflect on their own experiences of diversity and their position as part of a dominant majority or minority grouping.
- Graduates can make links between the need to have a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic background of the students they teach in the remote context and developing responsive teaching strategies to cater for the learning strengths and needs of these students.
- Graduates can develop understandings of linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts of remote students.
- Graduates can identify resources that utilise the linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic diversity and address the needs of students in the remote context.
- Graduates can develop cultural competence for working with students, parents and community members of diverse backgrounds in the remote context.

- Graduates have commenced the process of building a comprehensive understanding of the strengths that students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds bring to learning in the remote context.
- Graduates have commenced the process of building a comprehensive range of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from remote backgrounds.
- Graduates can design a teaching sequence using content and strategies to support the needs and strengths of students in remote locations.
- Graduates can identify how others structure learning to address the strengths and needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

TOPICS

- Respect for diversity.
- Cultural competence – empathy, sensitivity and awareness of issues.
- Understanding different cultures.
- Identifying culturally appropriate content e.g. when dealing with topics that may be culturally sensitive, such as Western Australia Day (Foundation Day), Easter, Christmas.
- Bilingual/Multilingual and Bicultural/Multicultural schools and classrooms in the remote context.
- The impact of socio-economic factors on learning in the remote context.
- Policies and strategies for inclusion (e.g. approach to swimming lessons for Muslim girls - Arab Gateways Project).

Based on your research and practicums add other bullet points to both sides of the flow model.





TASKS

Understanding yourself:

1. Write your own racial biography, outlining your cultural heritage and how your heritage positions you in relation to the dominant culture. In what ways have you experienced privilege or disadvantage? What understanding or difficulties has this experience produced for you?
2. Recognise your own biases and blind spots. What language do you use which could be excluding students? What values and beliefs do you have that are in conflict with inclusive practices?

Design Teaching Sequences Using Content and Strategies to Support the Needs and Strengths of Students from Diverse Backgrounds.

3. Identify and critique resources (print, video, online sources) that have been developed to facilitate student learning for students from a variety of backgrounds in remote areas.

4. In developing curriculum content around diverse backgrounds:

- Adopt a cultural lens in the selection of resources. Of the resources used on your recent practicum how many refer to people from non-English speaking backgrounds, portray different ethnicity, use languages other than English? Find a substitute text to achieve the same purpose which is more culturally inclusive.
- Compile an annotated bibliography of culturally inclusive resources.

5. Take the quiz located on this page <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=displaySitePage1&subcmd=select&id=510>

6. How well do you understand the policy context for inclusive education? Identify legislation and policies that enshrine equity and diversity. What are the implications for teaching and learning?

7. Plan for the development of locally based resources e.g. use images of people and places within the local community, use bi-lingual language and display examples around the school.

Design Teaching Sequences Targeting Learning Area-Specific Literacy Needs of Students From Diverse Backgrounds.

8. Learning from the local environment – design learning activities to enhance literacy outcomes using the local external environment as a resource.

9. “Teachers are expected to adapt and use ESL strategies for most of the students throughout the school” (Fitzroy Valley DHS, 2012).

Develop a database of ESL teaching/learning strategies that suits the needs of your classroom:

- Include the strategy name and brief overview.
- A resource to support the strategy. For example, the Teaching strategies for English as a Second Language (Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2009), could be a good starting point for this activity.

Identify How Others Structure Learning to Address the Strengths and Needs of Students From Diverse Backgrounds.

10. How will you find out what your students' strengths are? Examples include:

- Observations – what do they do well/easily?
- Interest Survey – what do they like to do?
- Learning style assessment (Gardner's Multiple Intelligences) – how do they learn best?
- Gather data from your colleagues.
- Parent/teacher communication.

RESOURCES

Diversity

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Cultural and Religious Diversity

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Harrison, N. (2011). *Teaching and learning in Aboriginal education*. Victoria, Australia: Oxford University Press.

Teaching resources

Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2010). *The Little Red Yellow Black Book*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra. Retrieved from:

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Child Health Promotion Research Centre. (n.d.). *Welcome to Solid Kids - Solid Schools - Solid Families*. Retrieved from:

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Creative Spirits. (n.d.). *Teaching Aboriginal students*. Retrieved from:

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Linguistic Diversity

Australian Broadcasting Corporation. (2010). *Early language and reading skills in indigenous children in Australia*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/ockhamsrazor/early-language-and-reading-skills-in-indigenous/307679>

British Columbia. (1999). *English as a second language learners: A guide for classroom teachers*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/classroom.pdf>

Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Chow, P., Cohen, S., Giampapa, F., Leoni, L., Sandhu, P., & Sastri, P. (2005). Affirming identity in multilingual classrooms. *The Whole Child*, 63, 38 – 43. Retrieved from:

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This resource package has been produced for the Tertiary Educators Rural, Remote and Regional Network (TERRR Network) as part of an Office for Learning and Teaching (formally the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project titled *Developing Strategies at the Pre-service Level to Address Critical Teacher Attraction and Retention Issues in Australian Rural, Regional and Remote Schools*.