'Promising practices' for inclusive teaching and learning

'Promising practices' are teaching practices that enable all students to become active confident learners. The literature on this topic stresses that there is no single set of practices that will be effective with every student.

Principle	Practice
1. Inclusive teaching creates a 'learning community' Learning should be largely a social, collaborative experience. Articulating and sharing ideas and responding to others' reactions increases confidence, improves thinking and deepens understanding. A supportive learning environment, where learners feel empowered to negotiate tasks and be part of a shared context, is necessary to develop cooperation amongst students.	Display a genuine interest in your students and their progress and enable frequent student-teacher and student-student contact. Provide opportunities for students to find out about and learn from each other. **Introductions - how?** • Address your students by name when you interact with them (check pronunciation with them, if uncertain; don't assume Western name forms – e.g. family name is not always last name). • Ensure that your students know how to address you. • Encourage students to learn each other's names in small classes. • Talk about and/or develop your own online profile where you talk about your approach to teaching and learning; include some information about your own cultural origin and any cross-cultural teaching and learning experience or research interests you have. **Establishing an inclusive teaching and learning environment – how?** • Use small group work, or think/pair/share activities in class time (even lectures)

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	• Move students between groups. • Use low risk (no assessment) in class pair or group activities. Use Blackboard and social networking to facilitate contact and interaction; if possible, to replicate a small class environment, invite uploading of photos, personal stories, sharing of useful general information, and so on.

2. Inclusive teaching is explicit
 	
The university itself is a dynamic culture, with a 'multiplicity of sub-cultures imbued with their own discourses, literacies, practices'. From this perspective every student's' transition to university is seen as a 'cross-cultural experience'. Research that shows that all students face similar challenges when they enter university, including the mismatch between student and teacher expectations; lack of access to staff, and managing workloads (Lawrence, 2003: 5).
 	
Teaching inclusively means making expectations explicit.
	Establish a shared understanding of class behaviour - how?
	
	• Clarify the format and purpose of the particular session type you are teaching and the type of student participation; for example, differences between lectures, tutorials, 'pracs' and clinical placements.
	
	• Establish inclusive class ground rules at the beginning of the semester and use them as a reference point for appropriate behaviour during classes:
	
	    o In small classes, guide students to negotiate their own code of conduct.
	
	    o In larger classes, provide a framework and ask for student feedback and ratification of ground rules.
	
	    o For RHD supervision, use a questionnaire completed beforehand and/or have a guided discussion between the student and all supervisors to develop shared expectations.
	
	Establish a shared understanding of learning objectives and assessment
	
	• Explicitly state and discuss the learning objectives so that students are aware of what is being asked of them as learners.

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	• Align and make direct links between the stated objectives, approaches to teaching and learning and the assessment tasks that will be used. (This will also help you focus on what is important.) • Make your marking scheme quite clear. Let students know if and how much the emphasis is on communicating information and ideas or on language accuracy.
3. Inclusive teachers show respect for, and value, diverse talents, ways of learning and personal histories Students bring different talents and preferred styles of learning to a formal learning situation. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or design studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do so well in theory or creative problem solving. Students need the opportunities to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. They also need to be extended to learn and work in new ways. The effective classroom acknowledges supports and uses this diversity appropriately to enhance the learning experience.	**Find out and acknowledge the value of the diversity of the class – how?** • Use hands up exercises, ice breakers and so on to assess diversity. • Draw your class's diversity wheel, or ask student to do it. • Ensure that students know who to contact to discuss confidential issues, such as mental illness. • In assessed group work, ensure that the task is designed so that all students will gain from it and none are advantaged or disadvantaged. • Ask students to draw on their own experience and backgrounds to apply, illustrate or question what they are learning and provide opportunities for sharing this with the class. • Consider giving students choice with assessment tasks, so they can investigate a topic that is relevant to them. • Emphasise the value of diverse teaching and learning environments in a global world. • Communicate all feedback with respect for the person receiving it. • Avoid tokenism: Ensure that no student is put into the role of being the

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	'token other' by being asked to comment on what a particular cultural group thinks. Consider using videos, and other media, to put forward experiences and perspectives of non-dominant groups (e.g. Indigenous people), rather than expecting students from these cultural backgrounds to speak.

4. Inclusive teachers communicate high expectations and provide appropriate support
 	
High expectations are important for everyone: for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves, and for the bright and well motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations for their students – if students are given appropriate support.
 	
Challenging students and developing in them a sense of independence and responsibility for their learning must be accompanied by the appropriate amount of support. Otherwise the development we strive for in the students may be hindered.
 	
This does not mean 'spoon feeding'. Inclusive teachers use 'scaffolding' to enable students perform at a higher standard than they are currently capable of doing; that is, they carefully design activities to help bridge this gap.
	Ensure that support is temporary and adjustable, designed to decrease as students' proficiency and confidence increases. Use an incremental, stepped approach.
	
	Providing support – how?
	
	• Calibrate tasks in class and for assessment
	
	• Provide and discuss models for problem solving, academic writing, oral presentation and so on, but explain the function of a model – it is not for direct copying.
	
	• Use 'feed forward' – let students know how they are going before submitting a piece of summative work; focus on solutions to difficulties rather than what is wrong.
	
	• Design assessment so that one piece provides the foundation for the next.
	
	• Give focussed effective feedback:
	    o Less is more.
	    o The same mistake repeated is one mistake – correct well once.
	    o Consider using 'snap shot' marking to allow for short sharp feedback with long documents (e.g. blogs, reflective journals).

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5. Inclusive teachers recognise and respond to the additional challenges of learning in an additional language English comes in many forms; for example, American English, Indian English. Non English-Speaking Background (NESB) students in Australian universities may have: • grown up in Australia • come straight from secondary school in Australia • come from a university or language school in Australia or overseas • come from a school or university in a non-Anglophone country where English is the 'language of instruction'.	**Improve oral communication - how?** • Make yourself understood. • Consider the causes of your students' reluctance to speak in class. • Explore students' expectations re oral communication and be explicit about yours. • Design non-threatening, 'low stake' interactions in class (short, fun, ice-breakers; think/pair/share; active games, such as ball-throwing to direct short easy questions to students). • Build up gradually from pairs to larger groups. • Design intercultural group work so there is mutual benefit. • Model respectful, scholarly dialogue – implicitly and explicitly • Allow students time for preparation before speaking – give time to write down answers first. • Design for inclusion and exploration of students' cultural and personal knowledge in oral activities. • Use a range of methods to explore topics (role play, brainstorms, debates) • Encourage students to supplement oral communication with written, visual and multi-media communication where appropriate. **Developing written communication skills – how?** • Assess your students' skill levels early (e.g. minute papers, short bios,

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	short assessment). • Be realistic – focus on what is important and achievable. • Scaffold skill development (in courses and across programs, if possible). • Explain and clarify academic expectations and standards regarding written work.
6. Inclusive teachers plan for and manage controversial situations in class Developing inclusive learning environments does not mean avoiding controversy. On the contrary, the discussion of controversial issues may help students to achieve desired learning outcomes. They may be used to raise the complexity of an issue about which students may believe there is only one perspective. They are an inevitable part of some teaching and learning, such as the discussion of ethical issues and religious beliefs. It is important to anticipate and plan for controversy, but unlikely that we can anticipate it all.	**Planning for manageable controversy – how?** • Find out about your prospective students' cultural and educational backgrounds as far as possible before the class. • Anticipate material that is likely to cause controversy and establish ground rules before introducing it. • Understand that some students can feel more uncomfortable than others because they believe that it is important that group members feel comfortable – find ways to discuss this with the class. • Include statements about classroom processes and expectations for discussing controversial material in the course guidelines. • Perhaps include assessment tasks which require students to reflect on their own development of skills for managing controversy. • Model the way to critically analyse and argue from evidence about an issue from more than one perspective. • Be open with students about the purpose of class discussion, including controversy. • Consider making classroom and online civilities one of the expected (and

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	assessed) learning outcomes of the topic.

Continuing in the Practice column:

- Develop the art of responding neutrally to statements which you find controversial by listening, paraphrasing, asking for evidence, analysing underlying assumptions and asking for other view points. Challenge the ideas without putting down the person.

- Be explicit about the conditional nature of knowledge in the discipline.

- Be explicit about the value of knowing what you don't know and encourage students to explore what they don't know and to set new learning goals.

- Reward exploratory, respectful discussion; for example, use criteria and standards to assess participation.

- Use discussion strategies which encourage students to listen carefully to each other, such as requiring the next speaker to paraphrase the views of the previous speaker.

- Ask students to interview a person with a different perspective and report their views either verbally or in a written piece.

- Use debates. Have students take one position one week and the opposing position the next week. Then ask them to reflect on the experience.

- Anticipate and debrief strong emotions such as anger; for example, ask students to signal when they are feeling uncomfortable with the direction of the discussion.

- Expect resistance and plan to return to some issues on several occasions.

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6. Inclusive teachers are aware of their own assumptions about learning and teaching, as well as those of their students
 	
'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.
	Find out about your students' prior experience in education and their expectations at university - how?
	
	• Use a modified cultural mapping exercise.
	
	• Use a discussion about expectations (of students and teacher(s)) to draw up a 'learning and teaching contract'.
	
	• For RHD supervision – use a questionnaire to be filled out by students and supervisors; revisit from time to time.
	
	Become more aware of your own assumptions, values, expectations - how?
	
	• Reflect and discuss with others: What surprises or troubles you about the behaviours of people from cultures different from your own?
	
	• Review your own practice, or seek peer review, using the following questions as a framework:
	
	    o What strategies/methods do I use to establish an inclusive
	
	    o teaching and learning environment?
	
	    o Which strategies/methods work well?
	
	    o What evidence do I have that these strategies/methods are
	
	    o successful?
	
	    o Which strategies/methods do I need to modify?
	
	    o What new strategies/methods could I adopt?

This set of promising practices has been collated from the following sources:

Carroll, J. & Ryan, J. (2005). *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

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Griffith University. *Good practice guide: Internationalising the curriculum*. Available from www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/resources-support/good-practice-guides

Lawrence, J. (2003). *The deficit-discourse shift: university teachers and their role in helping first year students persevere and succeed in the new university culture*. Available from http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/march03/ lawrence1.htm