

Strategies that University Educators can use when working with CALDMR Students

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The increasing numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse migrant and refugee (CALDMR) backgrounds in Australian universities has had a significant impact on teaching and learning. The COVID-19 crisis has created a sense of uncertainty that can influence the behavior of CALDMR students in different ways. In the return to face-to-face classes, connection and relationship are key. Students who have trauma histories, as well as those who are experiencing high levels of stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, might be less likely to engage in the classroom. Educators can create a safe and welcoming experience in the transition back to university by modeling a calm and caring approach. The return to face-to face teaching offers fresh opportunities for university educators to develop insights into ways in which they can successfully support their CALDMR students' participation and retention in higher education (Naidoo, 2019). This fact sheet offers some strategies that you can implement to improve the outcomes for students from CALDMR backgrounds.

What do I need to consider?

1. Consider students' Prior knowledge and the Language demands of the new work

An awareness of students' diverse cultural and educational backgrounds will help you to develop a deeper understanding of how students' past experiences may have an impact on their current university study. For example, students from refugee backgrounds may have experienced war and persecution resulting in gaps in their knowledge due to disrupted schooling.

Classroom expectations and ways of learning differ from culture to culture. For example, a teacher-centered approach, with no tutorial or group work, is typically adopted in African and Afghan classrooms (Earnest, Joyce, de More & Silvagni, 2010). Some CALD students may therefore need to learn general study skills required in the Australian higher educational context, such as time management skills and how to be an independent learner. You will need to be explicit about course requirements and expectations, including for instance the purpose of lectures and discussions.

2. Reinforce techniques for Reading and Development of core ideas

You can help your students understand what is expected of them by embedding language development and academic skills into learning and assessment tasks.

Explicit teaching of core vocabulary and key concepts enables students to develop a clearer understanding of how they are used in the context of the discipline. For example, you can clarify the meaning of different assessment task requirements by explicitly teaching frequently used terms such as 'evaluate', 'analyze', and 'justify'. In addition, glossaries of important terms are a valuable resource for students.

You can also assist students with the demands of academic reading. For example, key and optional readings can be highlighted on reading lists. In addition, skimming and scanning techniques and note-taking skills could form part of in-class discussions, possibly with the assistance of academic language and learning staff. Guided questions can also be formulated to direct students in their reading. To minimize undue stress, it is advisable to avoid classroom activities that require extended pre-reading in class.

The provision of model responses, as well as checklists, can also be beneficial for CALDMR students, especially in their first year of university study.

3. Scaffold Discussion and Encourage Student Participation

Providing non-threatening opportunities will help to empower CALDMR students to share from their knowledge and life experiences. It is, for instance, often easier for students from a language background other than English to discuss questions related to the lecture content in small groups rather than in the whole class. This can provide opportunities for peer support. Group roles should be assigned when international and domestic students work together to ensure that all students participate (Leask & Carroll, 2013).

It may also be beneficial if you explicitly teach about communication strategies so that tutorial and group discussions can be more effective. This may include, for instance, how to take turns in a discussion offering a contrasting viewpoint, and how much eye contact is necessary.

Student participation can be further developed through different questioning techniques. For example, informal teacher-initiated chats with individuals.

4. Modify Delivery of Content to take account of students' needs

It is helpful if you reflect on how you communicate with students. This may include modifying your speed of (spoken) delivery when conversing with or lecturing CALDMR students. You may also want to consider reducing the use of colloquial language, Australian jargon, and abbreviations, or ensuring that explanations are provided.

It is also helpful if you develop communication strategies when seeking to clarify learners' meanings without causing embarrassment. This may include rephrasing what they have said.



5. Review and Adapt Teaching and Assessment Practices

Culturally inclusive teaching involves reflecting on feedback, for instance from CALDMR students, to analyze what is working well and to modify teaching practice to maximize student learning.

To encourage students to be more actively engaged in class, you can use a variety of interactive teaching activities. For example, multi-modal approaches such as visual and kinesthetic can complement auditory input. Using a range of technologies and questioning techniques also helps to maintain student interest.

Course content and assessment tasks may need adaptation to incorporate an international component so that students with limited knowledge of Australian culture and history, such as CALDMR students, are not disadvantaged.

It is beneficial when lectures are recorded and available online for students to review. Similarly, it is easier for students to follow lectures when outlines are provided, and to undertake assessment tasks when they can refer to a marking rubric for that specific task.

6. Collaborate and Engage in professional learning

As some CALDMR students may be unaware of the services available to them at university, you can let them know of support services, such as academic writing support, library support, and counselling. Therefore, it is worthwhile to become familiar with what services are available for CALDMR students at your university, as well as the staff who can be contacted.

It is important to collaborate with other academic staff or team members to exchange experiences and to learn from each other about the most effective strategies when teaching CALDMR students. In addition, university support staff may be able to provide advice, about embedding academic literacies into course and assessment design, as well as assisting in auditing coursework and assignments for their cultural and linguistic inclusivity.

It would be beneficial for academic staff to undertake cultural safety and awareness training when available, to develop more inclusive teaching and learning practices (Earnest, de Mori & Timler, 2010).

References

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