



Learning 'how we do it around here': current practices in facilitating students development of cultural competence.

Key Words

cultural and linguistically diverse, cultural competence, transition,

Abstract

The transition to tertiary study can present serious challenges for all students as they have to adapt to new academic cultures in new educational environments. This can also be the case when moving between disciplines or between undergraduate and post-graduate study. Often these transitions bring with them academic, interpersonal and personal challenges. While culture is defined in many ways, common to most definitions are the notions of common values, beliefs and perspectives as well as rules and norms or 'the way we do things around here'. When Bennett (2013) states that 'A particular culture is maintained by people who interact with one another within a boundary of some kind', it raises the question about how people who are not 'within' that boundary manage. Universities in Australia attract students from diverse backgrounds including, for example, from different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic groups as well as from other groups who may be considered to be culturally different. Especially for these students, periods of adaptation and adoption can be very stressful for students potentially affecting their grades, retention rates and potentially causing mental health issues. According to Matsumoto & Hwang (2013), 'successful intercultural adaptation and adjustment involves the adoption of behaviors that accomplishes goals and achieves tasks while at the same time minimizing negative adjustment outcomes and maximizing positive ones'. Referring specifically to international students, Nash suggests that students need enhancement of their interpersonal skills to help them adjust socially and academically and emotionally (2011). Students need to learn new skills and develop qualities to help them survive independently in a range of new settings (Gu, Schweisfurth & Daya 2009). Many universities have specifically identified the need for the development of students' cultural competence and academic language and literacy practitioners are regularly tasked with helping students understand and adapt to new contexts. This workshop will review current practices in facilitating the development of students' cultural competence and consider their effectiveness with the aim of better meeting the needs of all students.

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