

Developing 'Well-Rounded'  
Graduates: Embedding  
Intercultural and Professional  
Communication skills in Tertiary  
Programs

## Session overview

- Key attitudes and skills
- Kaplan's embedded programs: overview
- What do the students and academics say?
- What have I learned from this work?
- The future?

## Key attitudes and skills

- Intercultural awareness and sensitivity
- Culture general intercultural communication skills
- Awareness of and interest in culture specific knowledge
- Awareness of educational differences across cultures
- Development of meta-understanding of language including importance of audience, purpose, topic, register, appropriacy in language usage

## Key attitudes and skills

- Research skills
- Ability to analyse structure and functions of the parts of a variety of academic and professional written and spoken text types
- Ability to understand question words, their meanings and the text types of responses

## Key attitudes and skills

- Ability to think critically
- Ability to read critically
- Problem solving skills
- Development of professional habits and attitudes e.g. punctuality
- Ability to work collaboratively and in teams

## Support programs overview

- Intercultural orientations
- Embedded credit unit: Business Communication (UG)/Professional Communication Practice (PG)
- Collaborative segments of discipline units
- Linguistic analysis of exam and assignment questions
- Optional Study Skills sessions
- One-on-one consultations

## Intercultural orientations: key elements

Held in Orientation Week: Groups of mixed culture discussing:

- Cultural norms, values, behaviours, verbal and non verbal communication styles
- Educational cultures, learning and teaching “norms”: e.g. What is a good/bad student? What is a good/bad teacher?
- Individual learning preferences

## Intercultural orientations: key elements

- Students' expectations of Australian tertiary culture, life and academic standards
- Kaplan's/lecturers' expectations of students
- The nature and extent of culture
- Culture general and culture specific intercultural awareness and skills

## Embedded credit unit: Business Communication (UG)/Professional Communication Practice (PG)

### Topics covered:

- Communication theory
- Effective business/professional communication
- Intercultural communication
- Organisational communication
- Virtual communication and teams
- Meetings

## Embedded credit unit: Business Communication (UG)/Professional Communication Practice (PG)


- Communication in teams
- Business/professional text types:
  - Academic essays and reports
  - Emails
  - Letters
  - Business reports
  - Oral presentations
  - Interviews
  - Curriculum vitae and cover letters

## Collaborative segments of discipline units

Process:

1. Discussion between discipline academic - DA - and language specialist – LS - re areas of concern
2. Negotiation of appropriate embedded segment e.g. higher level thinking: analysis vs description
3. Development by LS of powerpoint, class activity, handout, feedback template, homework task.
4. Above sent to support staff in Melbourne and Adelaide campuses

## Collaborative segments of discipline units

4. Presentation in class by LS on collaboration with DA
5. Detailed written feedback for each student on homework
6. Discussion by DA and LS of feedback  
 re-development of segment by LS as necessary

- [Solo Model](#)
- [Solo Taxonomy](#)

## Keys to success of collaborative support programs

- Open-minded academics with knowledge of workplace realities
- Development of trusting relationships between DAs and LSs
- Diplomatic skill and sensitivity of LS
- High level linguistic analysis skills of LS
- Ability of LS to teach/present effectively
- Willingness of DA and LS to experiment and adapt

## Optional Study Skills sessions

- Held twice a week - one hour each.
- Topics – still evolving to meet additional needs identified by DAs and/or LS:
  - Academic culture
  - Time management
  - Reading skills
  - Summarising
  - Research skills, including referencing and plagiarism
  - Listening to lectures and note-taking



## Optional Study Skills sessions

- Critical reading
- Critical thinking
- Understanding question words
- Academic essay writing
- Topic sentences and paragraphs
- Business writing
- Analysing text types
- Oral presentations
- Grammar and punctuation
- Vocabulary extension

## One-on-one consultations

Language specialist (=lecturer on this unit in Masters program): half an hour to one hour, by appointment on:

- Professional Communication essays, reports and oral presentations
- Discipline assignments e.g. Business Law cases, Finance oral presentations, Accounting business letters, Economics presentations etc.
- Grammar and punctuation
- Pronunciation and intonation
- IELTS Test preparation

## What do the students say?

### Hana, Japan - Master of Accounting Studies:

“I think the intercultural communication knowledge will be very useful for our futures, in our lives and in our jobs ... Before I did this [topic/unit] I did not know that I did not know about cultural aspects of behaviour and language and non verbal communication. I find it is very interesting to talk to people from another culture now, and I think a lot more about culture and how we all have our cultural beliefs and ways of speaking and behaving that is not bad or good, just different because of where we grew up. I am very aware now of how I should try to be clear about my meaning, and also that if I do not understand or another person does not understand me, it could be our cultural differences and I think I know now some ways to overcome this cultural barrier.

## What do the students say?

### Embedded session - Accounting Information System,s MAS - on higher level thinking - analysis

- It gave me a framework to approach analytical thinking.
- It helped me with key question words that relate to different levels of knowledge.
- Gave us an idea to give answers [more complex than just] describing.
- It introduced new ideas using graphics. This helped us understand [the] explanation.
- It showed us how important critical thinking [is].

## What do the students say?

### **Kushal, Nepal - MAS: one-on-one consultations**

I knew that what to answer for the assignments but I was not sure how to structure the [case studied] or to write in a proper and clear manner. Your help for this that you gave me was really really helpful towards my high distinction in that Law subject.

## What do the students say?

### **Julio, Peru: Professional Communication unit and one-on-one consultations**

My colleagues [at work] say I am different now. I have really changed. Even in Peru I did not speak very much at work. I know that I can speak up in meetings and give my ideas. I did not know how to say these things before and so I was very quiet and did not talk to other people at work. But now I feel confident to discuss all the ideas and problems.

## What do the academics say?

Support provided: written feedback by LS on oral presentations

Lecturer, Management unit, Diploma of Business

I thought you would be happy to know that all students went extremely well in their final results.

Your participation in their learning was of great value. The feedback on how to use positive and engaging body language, and pacing in their communication was evident in their final group presentations as they all took your advice and seemed to present with more purpose and sense of confidence.

## What do the academics say?

Lecturer-in-Charge, Financial Reporting, MAS/MPA

I know a number of [the students] have really "made use" of your [availability] for consultation in addition to your own Professional Communication classes and that work is really achieving results.

Usually I don't look forward to listening to student presentations because I often struggle to understand what they are saying but these were very different. Most (nearly all) of the presentations were well researched with good quality power points to go with their clear delivery. They would have been very acceptable in the workplace ... I think it was a very beneficial exercise in putting into context all the consolidations "stuff" they struggle with so much.

## What do the academics say?

Lecturer-in-Charge, Accounting Principles,  
MAS/MPA:

I am much more aware of making my  
questions clear and unambiguous.

## What have I learned from this work and our students?

Hana's comparison of Anglo-Western  
academic culture with her own (Japanese)



## What have I learned?

**Intercultural considerations can be integrated into much of what we do with our students**, for example:

Written feedback provided by LS on Financial Accounting business letter assignment

Your final paragraph is very helpful in tone, but you probably do not need to put in too many offers of help. Assuring your client that you are "only too happy to answer any further questions on these complex and serious issues" and that you can be emailed or meet with the client, **is probably sufficient in the Australian business context, particularly if you know the client quite well. Australians do not generally respond well to what they might perceive as too much "hard-sell", especially from professional advisers such as their accountants. You perhaps include this number and type of politeness forms in business letters in the Peruvian culture? Please come to tell me about this. Our Nepalese students also use many polite forms, appropriate for Nepalese business culture but less so for Australia.**

## What have I learned?

- We should not underestimate the difficulty of becoming a “different good student”
- Latest cognitive research: repetition is vital for learning new concepts
- We should provide ample opportunity for repetition of new concepts/complex material

## What have I learned from our students?

No one educational culture/system does it all best - yet!

e.g. Our Japanese students:

- power of concentration
- deep thoughtfulness
- repetitive learners
- Believe genius = 1% innate, 99% hard work

e.g. Our Nepalese students are group-oriented and have drawn other cultures (including Japanese) into their informal study groups

## What have I learned? Repetitive learning is useful in the longer term

- Studies in the late 1980s and 1990s of school and university students from Asia showed that while they did indeed spend a lot of time memorising large amounts of information, they did so in order to gain a deep understanding of the information and important concepts. (Kember and Gow 1989, Biggs 1992, Marton, Dall’Alba and Tse 1993, Tang 1993, Renshaw and Volet 1997, Chalmers and Volet 1997)

## What do we know? Rote learning is not useful in the longer term!

- Australian students use rote learning in a ‘surface approach to learning’ (Kember & Gow 1989, p. 89)
- The Asian students’ approach of memorising large amounts of information reduces the study load of (non native speaking) students
- This should actually not be regarded as a deficit (as still happens) but rather as an approach to learning that could well be adopted by other students. (Dale & Lubbers, 2005)



## What have I learned? Working memory and cognitive overload

- *Cognitive load theory*: Once information is in long-term memory, it can be brought back to working memory in very large amounts.
- *Working memory* = the part of the brain that provides temporary storage and manipulation of information necessary for complex cognitive tasks, such as language comprehension, learning and reasoning.

John Sweller, UNSW, 'Father of cognitive Load Theory' (1991, 1994, with van Merriënboer, J 2005, 2008)

## Cognitive overload

- Most teaching doesn't take into account the way we think and learn, and so it fails. (Sweller, 2008)
- Are we not overloading our non English background students with insufficient language skills when we also demand they master many new and complex tasks while struggling with the language, itself a cognitively highly demanding load?

## Working memory and cognitive overload

Everything we are aware of goes through working memory, which has a limited capacity of only three to four items of information that can be held for only three to four seconds without rehearsal. Almost all information goes after 20 seconds, **unless there is rehearsal**, Sweller J (1991, 1994, with **van Merriënboer, J** 2005, 2008)

## Usefulness of *worked* or solved examples

Problem-solving places a great demand on working memory, so teachers are better off giving students **solved problems** so they have the learning to take home. The reason is that the cognitive processes involved in learning and solving problems are different, so we need to cater to the way the brain works. (Sweller, J 2008)

## TESOL/Applied Linguistics, *cognitive load theory & worked models*

- Value of developing text type analysis skills in students
- Usefulness of TESOL/Applied Linguistics theory and practice of past 20 years:
  - Deconstruction and joint reconstruction of written and oral models with genre and text type approaches relate closely to the *worked examples of cognitive load theory*, as does the theory and practice of scaffolding learning
  - Teacher as master = expert learner, apprentice = novice
  - Value of scaffolding learning: Bruner and Vygotsky and cognitive load theory: our working memory can only take in smallish amounts at a time of complex new material

## The future?

The ideal:

- Extension of embedded segments across ALL UG and PG units
- Development of intercultural competencies - in progress
- Continuation of one-on-one consultations

## The future

### The reality?

- An ideal model of support does have to be paid for
  - major cost is sufficient highly-qualified language specialists, plus some time from discipline academics
- Growth of Kaplan and funding issues: demonstrating cost-benefit for a profit-driven institution
- Will Kaplan continue to fund sufficient support as student numbers grow?