Effective teaching and support for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds: Resources for Australian higher education.

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Guidelines for Teachers

University of Wollongong

16 & 17 October 2012

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Project Team Member

Conceptions of low socio-economic students in Higher Education

Conceptual framework

Project aim

a distinctive conceptual framework that acknowledges the diversity of students from LSES backgrounds

Looked to

–*Literature*

–*Student and staff interviews*

–*Practice across the sector*

The first deficit conception:
Students are the problem

- **Cultural capital** - proficiency in and familiarity with dominant cultural codes and practices (Aschaffenburg & Mass 1997)

- **Understanding/mastering the student role** Implicit expectations and tacit understandings that permeate the university study experience (Collier & Morgan 2008)

- **Socio – cultural capability**

  Appropriately seeking help and information, seeking and offering feedback and expressing disagreement. Help seeking in not always culturally valued or seen as appropriate (Lawrence 2005)

- **Resilience, self efficacy and motivation**

The second deficit conception:
Institutions are the problem

- Rather than requiring the students to 'fit', institutional culture should be adapted (Zepke & Leach, 2005)

- Non traditional students – frustrated participants in an unresponsive institutional context (Bowles 2001)

- Institutions creating and perpetuating inequalities (Tett 2004)

- Unfair to expect the burden of change to fall solely on the students and institutions should make changes (Bamber &Tett, 2001)

- Universities should make changes in terms of heralding the expectations of students (James, Krause and Jenkins, 2010)

The sociocultural conception:
Incongruence must be bridged

- Rejecting deficit conceptions that either:
  - Students are 'the problem' and/or
  - Institutions are 'the problem'
- Neither is in deficit, they are simply *incongruent*, at least initially.
- Socio-cultural incongruence adopted as away to conceptualise the differences in cultural and social capital between students from LSES backgrounds and the high SES institutions in which they study
- Proposes facilitation of student success as a 'joint venture' toward bridging socio-cultural incongruity.

An empathic institutional context

1. Values and respects all students
2. Encompasses and institution wide approach that is comprehensive, integrated and coordinated through the curriculum
3. Incorporates inclusive learning environments and strategies
4. Empowers students by making the implicit explicit, and
5. Focuses on student learning outcomes and success

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Project Approach & Method

Approach and Method

- Success-focused approach
- Data gathering
  - Literature review (2000-2011)
  - Structured interviews with 89 successful students from Low SES backgrounds (3 universities)
  - Structured interviews with 26 staff (6 universities)
  - An environmental scan of effective practice in teaching and supporting LSES students
- Total of 17 Universities representative of the sector (Vic, QLD, WA, Tas, NSW & SA); ATN, Go8, RUN; dual and single sector.

Analysis and Deliverables

Conceptual Framework: Socio-cultural incongruity

Literature Analysis	5 Principles	Data analysis framework
Student Interview Data	Characteristics of an empathetic institutional context	Guidelines for teachers

Key advice for institutional leaders

Repository of effective practice |
| Staff Interview Data | | |
| Environmental Scan | Examples of good practice | |

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Themes from the data ...

Student and staff data themes

Values and respects all students

The philosophical approach is that we shouldn't isolate LSES students

It's just good practice ...

All students are at different levels of learning & understanding

Always teach students with the assumption that they can excel

Student and staff data themes

An institutional approach that is comprehensive integrated and coordinated through the curriculum

I have three jobs and I still cannot manage

Our student cohorts are changing... and that means we need to adjust our assessment, our communications, and how we design curriculum, so that the students can see a clear, common sense, path for their studies

Student and staff data themes

Incorporates inclusive learning environments & strategies

*Make sure [the curriculum] ... actually **comes from where the students are from**, so it is flexible enough that they can bring in their world but then it challenges them to go beyond that*

Staff ... relate their experiences which is really good because you have something to go from ... And it really helps me [relate the content] to a real world context

Student and staff data themes

Empowers students by making the implicit explicit

Every student has [to have] the capacity to look at the task and if they understand it... they can advance to the next task

*just **clear instructions** of what is expected in an assessment item. It can be daunting to sit down and write your first five thousand word assignment...*

*Questions are answered and everyone can see all responses, that's critical in **demystifying** what's being asked of us*

Student and staff data themes

Focuses on student learning outcomes & success

*We know the reason that there is **a positive learning impact** on people who get scholarships is not just because we give them money*

*... But that being selected to get a scholarship has a positive psychological impact in that it makes them feel **special wanted, connected and motivated**...*

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Advice for Teaching Staff …

6 Pieces of Practical Advice

1. Know and respect your students
2. Offer your students flexibility, variety and choice
3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language
4. Scaffold your students' learning
5. Be available and approachable to guide student learning
6. Practice reflectively

1. Know and respect your students

LSES students are time poor, get to know your students, communicate with them, embrace and integrate their experiences.

You've got to try and understand the learner … In the context of the knowledge you are trying to teach (COL-016)

You could answer a question completely wrong but she will not belittle you… That's empowering … She will listen (STU-084)

Our LSES student tend to do better they are … motivated and capable students (COL-014)

1. Know and respect your students
Suggested Strategies

- Learn and use students names!

- Ask for and use student cohort demographics to understand and raise awareness in teaching teams of the characteristics of the cohort.

- Review your oral and written communication – is it inclusive?

- Include student contributions and presence (voice |ideas |opinions |views) in curricula and classes

2. Offer your students flexibility, variety and choice

While upholding academic standards, offer students flexibility, choice in assessment and variety in teaching and learning strategies.

... 25% of our students (mostly FIF and LSES) graduated with distinction last year [COL-023]

...the interactive lectures where they ask questions...[and] they might have quizzes throughout the lecture, that's helpful [STU_010].

...assessment ...relies too much on the formal written word ... in this changing world, we need to bring in more variety in modes of assessment [COL_012].

2. Flexibility, variety and choice... **Suggested Strategies**

- Harnessing technology and a learning and teaching tool – blended learning |on-line 'lectures'| recordings| resources | immediate response tools

- Range of teaching strategies to engage e.g.
  - Resources: video, photos, images, people
  - Pedagogies: experiential learning, peer learning
  - 'Flipped' curriculum: from known to unknown

- Variety in modes |types of assessment

- Clarity about expectations in terms of due dates & clear processes for reasonable requests for extensions

3. Make expectations clear, using accessible language

Speak and write in plain language to ensure students understand the concepts being taught, the expectations of them and what is required to be a successful student.

… It's good to know what [staff] want in assessments [STU-057]

… Everyone can see all of the responses, is critical in demystifying what is being asked of us [STU-057]

… You lay the guidelines out [COL-001]

… Students need to understand the rubic [COL-012]

3. Clear expectations, accessible language - **Suggested Strategies**

- Self review - record a lecture / class and review your use of language for the use of jargon, acronyms, complex vocabulary, specific terminology, overly long sentences, the absence of clear explanations...

- Peer or 360 review - a colleague or small group of volunteer students to listen to you teach and give you feedback about your use of language and your clarity

- Use labelled illustrations, stories, anecdotes & examples to help explain concepts ...

4. Scaffold your students' learning

A planned and structured approach to ensure students build on what they bring to higher education and are taught the particular discourses necessary to succeed.

...I try and structure [the information] so that every student has the capacity to look at the task and if they understand it ... To move onto the next [COL-013]

...what we need to do is to teach students chunking [COL-001]

... When I started I had a good lecturer who taught you how ... It was information that you don't know you need to know [STU-095]   ...[that] was invaluable [STU-046]

4. Scaffold learning - **Suggested Strategies**

- Feedback through formative assessment and immediate response mechanisms.

- Chunk information into set of 5 +/- 2

- Range of teaching strategies to engage e.g.
  - Resources: video, photos, images, people
  - Pedagogies: experiential learning, peer learning
  - 'Flipped' curriculum: from known to unknown

- Work with professional educators, ALL, Academic Skills, eLearning,

- Peer learning in and out of the classroom

5. Be available and approachable to guide student learning

… so that students may make use of your expertise and guidance to improve their learning and performance.

…it doesn't matter how many fancy electronic devices you've got, it you haven't got time for [students] you've got problems [COL-011]

… Support from the lecturers or the tutors helped me succeed [STU-074]

5. Available and approachable
Suggested Strategies

- Make physical and virtual 'office hours' clear & be present

- Review style and content of oral and written communication for clues

- Adopt time-efficient methods of feedback/forward
  - Generalized written summaries, prepared feedback tools
  - Via LMS / voice / video, Small group (tutorials) etc

6. Practice reflectively

Reflect and seek and act on your own reflections, those from peers and informal feedback from students, to continuously improve your teaching practice and your student's learning.

… I stepped back [COL-003]; I asked how can I do this better [COL-015]; I've really had to soul-search [COL-009]; we check for understanding [COL-025]

6. Be a reflective practitioner
suggested strategies

- Take 10 mins to reflect on each class – what went well – what could be improved

- Write your self post-it notes as you go …

- Know your strengths and weaknesses

- When designing ask – how will my students know / understand what I am asking them to learn or do?

...so students will experience ...

...my lecturers, my tutors, everybody is geared to help you. They're not here to see you fail. In saying that, when you do falter, they'll be there to lift you up.

*I think that one of the main factors...is the institution...is great. It's been so positive...the staff, the lecturers are really supportive...if you have a problem you can ring up and someone answers you, it's all very professional and it's a really good service, **so you really feel you're valued and part of it.***

6 Pieces of Practical Advice

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About us

Overview of project

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