Principle 4
Provide learning experiences that develop inter-culturally capable graduates who can make a difference as socially and ethically responsible global citizens

Case Study 2

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By adapting theories in applied linguistics and social psychology to the field of intercultural communication we have developed a coherent integration of skills and disciplinary content that fosters the intellectual development of the student cohort across the three-year progression of the degree because we hold the view that students' graduate skill development needs to be approached by increments in distinct stages.

We have adopted an intercultural approach to skills development, where we discuss academic conventions through the comparison and contrast of skills, expectations and rhetorical structures across cultures. To make this experience authentic, we draw on the rich resource of our students by facilitating engagement between international and local students.

Despite the proliferation of international students in Australian universities, research indicates that there are low levels of contact and high levels of disinterest between the international and local students, so we endeavoured to develop and implement coherent and imaginative teaching resources to bring together disparate groups of students. The experiences of international students became the subject of two specific teaching activities. Our two forty minute films, From Australia to the World and Dreams, Expectations & Other Realities, were developed to draw on the value of international and local students as sources of cultural input. These films are used in our intercultural communication class as a springboard for reflection on, and discussion about intercultural adaptation processes.

We have also developed an innovative approach to International travel or study abroad for students, drawing on the experience of our undergraduate courses to develop a cultural exchange project (2002) at the postgraduate level.

This cultural exchange project for Chinese language students titled ‘Culture in everyday life’, consisted of a structured exchange between Masters degree students from China and Australian students learning Chinese. Each week we gave students a task sheet with questions about the ‘invisible’ culture of everyday life. The activities in the worksheet, written in both languages, were sequenced according to a set format. The six weekly topics were: establishing first contacts, developing friendships, expectations in academic settings, what is negotiable in academic settings, seeking help and how to deal with conflicting motivations. The activities were structured to stimulate reflection, particularly, in regard to human variables that play a significant role in modifying expected behaviours. This experiential approach to teaching showed students cultural interactions in specific contexts so that they could then recognise the conscious and unconscious acting out of cultural mores as situational, not necessarily as universal.