Introduction

The purpose of this short guide is to provide practical strategies for OTEN teachers and staff working with adult learners from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Teaching and learning in a multicultural environment provides both rewards and challenges. Learning by distance may place additional demands on all learners and can be especially challenging for those multicultural learners who need cultural and language support.

Both off-site and on-site OTEN staff are working hard to meet the needs of CALD learners who enrol with OTEN each year.

Approximately 20 percent of these learners require English language and cultural support. Some students indicate that they need English language support on their enrolment form, or are identified and referred to the OTEN Multicultural Community Engagement Officer (MCEO) or the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) section by their teachers.

This guide suggests simple and effective ideas and strategies for improving the quality of your interaction with your learners from multicultural backgrounds. This guide should be read in conjunction with the multicultural content on the Western Sydney Institute (WSI) and OTEN websites and intranet.

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Do...

✓ Use plain English when communicating with your learners.

✓ Make an effort to find out about the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of your learners.

✓ Find out what your learners need and encourage them to contact you for assistance.

✓ Use pre-assessment tools to identify gaps in foundation skills.

✓ Seek support from your Multicultural Community Engagement Officer and the ESOL staff.

✓ Provide clear and supportive instructions and feedback to your learners.

✓ Present resources that include a diversity of cultural and social perspectives and avoid generalisations that reinforce stereotypes.

✓ Use a variety of teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles.

✓ Encourage learners to use bilingual dictionaries.

✓ Guide learners to seek recognition of overseas qualifications.

✓ Monitor the volume and tone of your voice.
Don’t…

- Expect newly arrived learners from overseas to adapt to the Australian education system too easily.
- Treat CALD learners as an homogenous group.
- Wait for your learners to contact you. Make contact with them.
- Assume the learner on the phone or online session doesn’t understand what you say if they are not responding.
- Judge vocational and educational competence by language competence.
- Be impatient on the telephone with learners having difficulty communicating.
- Design assessments that impede learners’ understanding of the language and intent of the task.
- Assume the learner is difficult to help if they call you repeatedly. They may be needing reassurance.
How can I communicate more effectively with my learners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

Do you try to learn a little about the cultural backgrounds and life experiences of your learners?

• Try to pronounce the learner’s name correctly. (See: Naming Systems of Ethnic Groups: A Guide, available from the MCEO OTEN.)

• Ask the learner how they prefer to be addressed and respect their choice. Not all cultures are as informal as Australian culture.

• Consider your learner’s learning preferences rather than making assumptions about how students usually learn.

• Create an inviting and safe learning environment free from harassment, assumptions and stereotypes.

• Be aware that some of your learners may be survivors of war, torture or trauma, or have lost or been separated from family members. This could affect their learning and self-esteem.

• Seek advice immediately from the MCEO or Counsellors on serious issues affecting the learner.

When telephone communicating, do you think about your voice?

• The voice carries all the interpersonal meaning in telephone communication.

• Speak naturally at a reasonable speed and at a normal volume.

• Use pauses to allow time for processing of information.

• Avoid using complex language, jokes and idioms.

• Be aware that when communicating across cultures, messages are not always understood, particularly where they are not supported by non-verbal communication.
Are you making the effort to understand what your learners say?

• Put yourself in the learner’s shoes and think about how hard it is communicating by telephone in a second language.

• Allow time for the learner to answer. Consider contacting the Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 and quote Account Number C400442. Alternatively contact a staff member on the OTEN Bilingual Staff Register on the WSI intranet and OTEN website.

• Check and clarify the learner’s meaning and give positive feedback and encouragement.

• Do not say things like ‘I can’t understand you’ or ‘I don’t know what you are talking about’. Try ‘Could you explain what you mean?’.

• Allow for different cultural styles of telephone, email and online communication.

• Learners may expect teachers to direct learning (teacher-centred learning).

• Self-assessment and independent learning may be totally unfamiliar concepts to many learners from different cultural backgrounds.

• Teachers are often seen as the experts and their opinions are rarely questioned.
**Do you try to always use plain English?**

- Speak clearly and simply but remember you are communicating with another adult.
- Avoid complex or ambiguous language where possible.
- Try to keep your sentences reasonably short.
- Think about the vocabulary you are using. Use verb forms rather than abstract nouns (e.g. how to analyse and interpret rather than the analysis and interpretation).
- Keep instructions simple and concise. Saying less is often better than saying more.

**Do you check that the learner is following you?**

- The learner may feel that it is rude to interrupt or may be too embarrassed to acknowledge difficulty in following you.
- Tell learners that you want them to ask you questions during the call.
- Repeat or paraphrase key information.
- Asking ‘Do you understand?’ is too direct. Answering ‘No’ may make the learner feel embarrassed or inadequate.
- Use both open questions (when/where/how/why/who) and closed questions (Is it/Do you/Have you) to check comprehension.

**Are you providing the right amount and right kind of written feedback?**

- Ensure that learners understand the assessment process.
- Provide enough feedback for the learner to know how to improve.
- Unless assessing English language skills, discuss with the learner before correcting their linguistic expression.
- Be positive and encouraging. Writing in a second or foreign language is not easy.
Communicating across cultures

Do you mark according to what the learning activity is designed to demonstrate?

- Make reasonable allowances for the learner’s written expression unless it is interfering with communication.
- Make allowances for different writing styles. The way academic writing is structured varies from culture to culture.

Is your written feedback accessible?

- If handwriting, make sure that the comments are legible.
- Think about the difficulty of language used in comments.
- Make model answers available to learners needing support and upload them to the Online Learning Support (OLS) site.
- Provide very clear instructions on what will need to be done to pass when asking a learner to resubmit an assessment. Wherever possible, also discuss resubmits with the learner on the telephone.
How can I make my teaching inclusive and accessible?

How do you make learners aware of what is involved in studying online and by distance?

- Check that the learner understands the level of the course they are enrolling in and how that course fits into the overall VET system.
- Check that learners understand the OLS and where to find their learning resources on the OLS. Explain what they need to do for the first unit.
- Ensure that learners understand what self-paced learning involves.
- Remind your learner who may have overseas qualifications or experience to apply for recognition.
- Explain key terms like resources, learning activities, assignments, assessment tasks, recognition of prior learning and credit transfer.
- Encourage learners to regularly contact their teachers or support staff by telephone or email. Some learners may be reluctant to do this because of cultural or linguistic barriers.
- Get assistance from staff on the OTEN Bilingual Staff Register or TIS when learners need to use their first language to communicate important or sensitive information.
- Ensure your learners feel connected, supported and valued as individuals.

Remember learners’ English proficiency and vocational competence may or may not match one another.

- A learner may be more proficient in reading and writing English than speaking and listening or vice versa. The inability to discuss the subject on the telephone may not mean the learner cannot successfully complete a particular course.
• Learners may need opportunities to express what they already know. Drawing on their own knowledge and skills will engage them and give them confidence.

Do you think about your own cultural perspectives and how they impact on your teaching and writing materials?

• Focus on what is shared between cultures and on the benefits diversity brings to the teaching/learning experience.

• Accept that there could be alternative ways for learners to achieve the same goal.

• Avoid stereotyping and generalising. CALD learners are a diverse group of individuals with different life experiences, needs and skills.

• Avoid too many cultural references in learning materials. Learners will not necessarily be familiar with cultural events and stories, jargon or jokes that you may take for granted. If discussing a typical Australian event, such as Anzac Day, briefly explain its significance.

• Don’t forget that things that seem natural or commonsense to you may only seem so because of your own cultural experience.

How do you allow for different learning styles when designing learning materials and learning activities? Here are some strategies:

• Provide clear information on the purpose and value of activities that may be new to learners.

• Give detailed explanations and clear instructions. The learner may never have experienced certain kinds of activities before (e.g. simulations, case studies), or may not have written essays or assignments in certain genres (e.g. argument, report, narrative).
• Build in advice where necessary when discussing referencing and/or plagiarism.

• Allow for difference. Include alternative ways for learners to present information or viewpoints where possible (e.g. the learner can participate in an online forum or write a report on the same topic if encouraged).

Are you thinking about the language demands of the materials you produce?
• Avoid making learner materials too dense with text.
• Use visual means like pictures and diagrams to reinforce meaning.
• Present the same content in different modes (e.g. an oral activity then a written one).
• Give lots of examples and illustrations.
• Include clear summaries of the key points covered.
• Don’t use jargon or too much colloquial, idiomatic or complex language.
• Encourage learners to use bilingual dictionaries with their studies.
• Include glossaries paraphrasing difficult terminology.
• Get advice from the MCEO at OTEN on making materials accessible and culturally appropriate.

How do you reward effort and achievement?
• Think about the added effort and determination required to undertake vocational education and training in a second language.
• Be generous in your praise and encouragement.
• Pass on the achievements and experiences of your learners to the MCEO and other equity staff at OTEN.
• Promote successes in OTEN publications and nominate outstanding students for awards.
Are you giving your learners the information they need to access and benefit from educational technologies?

- Don’t make assumptions about the technical competence of your learners. They may be novices or experts!
- Give advice about where learners can go to access computers and the Internet (e.g. TAFE libraries, public libraries and Internet cafes).
- Refer learners to appropriate technology training.

Are the learning resources on the OLS suitable for LBOTE learners?

- Make learners aware of the OLS.
- Ensure your content on the OLS is accessible (e.g. not too text-dense, use plain English).
- Add a reference to your content or refer to the section of the OLS as a place where learners can access support.

When teaching through educational technologies, do you think about the language demands on your learners?

- Remember that live online sessions (e.g. Adobe Connect) can be very challenging for learners.
- Distribute topics or activities before live sessions so that learners can prepare their input.
- Suggest to learners that they can prepare points ahead of the session and cut and paste them in during the live session. Alternatively allow for the session to be recorded and accessed by learners later on.
- Use strategies that will promote interaction with your students without the pressure of live online communication (e.g. bulletin boards, emails and forums).
How can I help learners with the assessment process?

Do you ensure that learners have the assessment information they need?

- Ensure your learners have access to and understand all information related to the course and assessments. Check with the MCEO for updates to policies and information specific to CALD learners or check the internet on www.det.edu.au/policies/index.htm.

- Give examples of how different types of assessment will be conducted.

Are you informing learners about provisions available to assist them in assessment?


- Ensure English language support is sought for your learners well before the assessment is due.

- Find out about other support for your CALD learners in the assessment process. Contact the MCEO or Disability Support Services for advice.
Are the assessments you design and conduct accessible and fair to CALD learners?

- Encourage learners to work through past papers and use mock examinations to become familiar with the protocol, format and content of TAFE NSW examinations/assessments.

- Consider the language demands of the type of assessments you choose (e.g. multiple choice, short answers, essay, oral interview, etc).

- Provide alternative modes of assessments where practicable (e.g. an oral practical assessment instead of a written one).

- Be generous in the time you allocate to local assessment events so that learners have time to read the tasks, write the answers and check their work.

- Decide whether there are parts of the assessment in which the language needs to be simplified.

- Contact Disability Support Services about reasonable adjustments for CALD students with a disability.

“How come she is allowed to bring a dictionary to the exam?”
What support services are available for learners and how do I access them?

Do you realise that your MCEO will assist with the following?

- Advice or support with migration or cultural issues (e.g. the refugee journey)
- The different learning styles linked to cultural diversity.
- Strategies to overcome barriers to learning and enhance learners’ course completion.
- Integrated language support (e.g. ESOL or SEE programs).
- Access to the relevant TAFE policies, OTEN Bilingual Staff Register and use of the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS).
- Advice to learners on how to obtain the recognition of qualifications and skills gained overseas for entry to courses and/or advanced standing (refer to Counselling Unit for assessment) in a particular course.
Do you encourage learners to access and refer to available student support materials?

- Suggest tutorial or English language support for students experiencing difficulty.
- Make learners aware of sources of additional print/online resources.
- Tell learners about the OLS and encourage them to become regular users of the OLS.
- Contact Career Counsellors or Disability Support Services if your student seems to have learning difficulties or health issues. Issues contributing to the student’s lack of progress may include prior exposure to torture and trauma, social isolation or financial difficulties.
How do students get help?

Scenario 1:

Learner completes enrolment information about:
- country of birth
- language spoken at home
- requiring help with English.

Information goes to data reporting systems.

MCEO gets reports and analyses the data to identify students’ language and cultural backgrounds by course.

MCEO refers requests for help with English to ESOL teaching section for an individual integrated language support program.

Students may contact MCEO or teachers for advice on other issues (difficulties with course content, learning styles, visa status, cultural conflict).

MCEO liaises with teaching sections to resolve conflict or to promote effective learning strategies to enhance progress.

MCEO may discuss a customised program with teaching sections to address some unmet needs.

Learners progress in their courses and MCEO monitors and reports on overall LBOTE learners’ completion rates.
Scenario 2:

Learner is from a language background other than English but does not complete learner statistics on enrolment form.

Student accesses the learning materials.

- Gets a language shock: no work done/withdraws.
- Struggles with the materials and rings his/her teachers daily.
- Has no difficulty with materials and proceeds with the course.

Level of frustration builds up between them.

Teacher may identify the barrier as cultural/language.

Teacher refers student to MCEO or to ESOL teaching section for assessment and support towards enhanced course progress.

Overall LBOTE completion rates are monitored and reported by the MCEO.

LBOTE (Language Background Other Than English) is the acronym used for statistics and data collection and reporting in TAFE NSW.
**Glossary:**

- **CALD:** Culturally and linguistically diverse
- **ESOL:** English for Speakers of Other Languages
- **LBOTE:** Language Background Other Than English
- **MCEO:** Multicultural Community Engagement Officer
- **OLS:** Online Learning Support
- **OTEN:** Open Training and Education Network
- **SEE:** Skills for Education and Employment
- **TAFE:** Technical and Further Education
- **TIS:** Telephone Interpreting Service
- **WSI:** Western Sydney Institute, TAFE NSW

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