

Finding other cultures at home

To uphold ethically, culturally and socially acceptable behaviours and values in our personal and professional lives, we need to know what is acceptable and how to enact it. This involves:

- Accepting responsibility for our work, decisions and actions;
- Upholding the ethics and values of our profession, community and workplace;
- Upholding and encouraging responsible behaviour towards the community and the environment;
- Upholding and encouraging responsible behaviour in our digital profiles; and
- Upholding and encouraging ethical behaviour in digital domains.

Much of this can be fairly straightforward when we are in our own families and familiar environments, but what happens when we are somewhere new?

This resource contains four short role-play scenarios involving international students. Many students choose to study away from their home countries; there was a 50% increase in the number of foreign students enrolled in tertiary education worldwide from 2005 to 2012. In 2012 more than 4.5 million students were enrolled in higher education outside their country of citizenship (OECD, 2017).

You might be an international student; if not, you will find many international students at your institution. Have you ever thought about or experienced what it is like to work in a different cultural, physical and/or linguistic setting?

Read the four role-play scenarios or act them out with friends, and then ask yourself the questions which follow.

Make it count!

Culturally responsible behaviour is a primary concern for employers. If you have experience in working with people from other cultures, write a short account and store it with your CV. Look for opportunities to engage with (other) international students over lunch or in a work team. Become mindful of your behaviour and practise respect and tolerance.

Scenario 1

Below, an international male student refers to the supervisor in a GP-based pathology lab where he is a 1st year nursing intern. The student describes how the practice sessions at university differed from those in the workplace. In particular, he found it difficult to work with older clients.

This student perceived older generations with great respect; however, he found that clients were easily annoyed when he asked lots of questions. The student reflected on the difference an approachable supervisor would have on his ability to manage client liaison.

... when you're practising with each other [in class], you kind of know the person... [but] on the placement you usually handle all the generations. You have different beliefs and values in the younger generation, so it's kind of difficult really because what they're saying might not be, you might not understand, not [be] on the same page ... they kind of get agitated a lot, quite easily, so it's something that I have to kind of look closely ... so with all my powers and abilities I'll be helping them, and just smile really so they don't actually show you any frustration or anything.

... probably if you get a good supervisor, that would be a positive because you can talk to them very easily, and probably just ask a lot of questions ... you actually have to ask them what it is so we can learn from it and get an understanding ... as long as the supervisor is approachable it makes it easier for me to ask questions.

If you would like to improvise a role play on this scenario, you need four actors. Improvising means reading the scenario, allocating roles and then acting it out straight away. No preparation or scripts

Characters

Workplace supervisor/mentor - Practice nurse in charge of blood tests and immunisations, very busy and with little time to engage

Student - First year nursing student

Academic supervisor - Lecturer/academic who is on site observing the practicum

Client - Mr/s Smith, 83, has been sent for blood tests but doesn't understand the forms

Questions

1. What is happening?
2. Why is it happening?
3. How would you prepare students for work placements where there are multiple cultures?
4. How does this scenario make you think differently about working in another cultural setting?

Scenario 2

In this scenario, a female student engineer from Brazil at the end of her first year of study describes her concerns about gaining a work placement in a very competitive market. In this scenario, the student responds to questions posed by a visiting researcher.

This role play is scripted, so you need just two actors.

Characters

Student - First Year Engineering student, female

Interviewer - Researcher conducting an informal interview

Interviewer: What has the university done to prepare you for this work placement?

Student: Ok, we only had a meeting about the internship and work placement at the end of the year, last week. ... I am here at this university since last February so I was expecting to have this meeting before last week!

Interviewer: What do you think will be the likely challenges?

Student: The challenges, first because I'm not an Australian or New Zealand citizen so it's a challenge to get an opportunity being an international student ... because I know from the other areas it's really hard to find a company that accepts international students...

The second challenge I think is going to be to work in an English environment ... to explain myself in English all the time.

... [Also], I don't think I'm ready yet to do a presentation alone - for the placement interview.

Interviewer: What have you done to prepare you for this work placement?

Student: I am really studying hard, I've been crazy this week, so I think that it's what I'm doing best for my preparation - more study.

Questions

1. How would you feel if you were this student?
2. How would you advise the student to prepare, other than "studying hard"?
3. How might you change the internship preparation to avoid these challenges?
4. What could you do to help this student?

Scenario 3

A final-year education student from Kenya is on teaching practice in a prestigious private primary school. He is on his final third practicum, which is three weeks in duration. His next work placement is a 10-week internship, which he needs to arrange himself, so he is hoping to perform strongly in this placement in the hope of being offered an internship place.

Two children in the class are constantly disrespectful and poorly behaved, which disrupts learning for the entire class. There is a perception that the two students are echoing racist attitudes from home, and he is finding it difficult to gain their respect and attention. This is impacting both his confidence and the classroom dynamics, and it goes on for some time. Here's an excerpt from his account.

There was a kid in the class and he was very, very active and he never stops, he was always yelling and distracting everyone so it was very difficult to deal with him. And I try to talk to him, but I was just the intern teacher so I couldn't talk to his parents - so I just, I saw my supervisor and I explained the situation and I told him, "Look, please! You need to help me because I can't do my work like this". And he did a meeting with the parents and everything was ok.

If you would like to improvise a role play on this scenario, you need three or more actors. Improvising means reading the scenario, allocating roles and then acting it out straight away. No preparation or scripts!

Characters

Student - Fourth year education student, male

Supervising teacher - Experienced teacher and supervisor

Academic supervisor - Experienced teacher and student supervisor providing feedback on performance to student.

Other - You may choose to include the parents and/or pupils in the role play.

Questions

1. What is happening in this situation?
2. How would someone be feeling in a situation like this?
3. What strategies could have supported the student in this particular scenario?
4. Have you ever heard people making racist comments? What did you do, and how might you rethink your actions in the future?

Scenario 4

A 1st year Master of Occupational Therapy female student from China is placed in a live-in aged care facility where many of the patients suffer from dementia or are non-communicative. The student previously studied medicine in China, so she has experience in a Chinese setting working with diverse clients. This is her first experience in an Australian workplace environment. The student is unaware of acceptable strategies for engaging with and assisting clients in Australia.

“The role at the aged-care home is practical and what I’ve learned from the course is theoretical - so I need to link them! Actually, the real situation is not totally in accordance with what you read in the books so I need to ask the workplace supervisors.”

I ask them how to deal with different people because at the aged-care home so many people have severe dementia, and they are really hard to cope with because they cannot understand me and they are totally silent - so it’s really difficult to communicate with them. That is different to my previous experience because the residents don’t have families around them, and when I was a doctor even though the patient was unconscious or had severe dementia, or some were severely injured, they had families around which can speak for them.”

Scenario 4 Role Play

Student - First Year Master of Occupational Therapy Student

Patient - Patient with early onset dementia

Workplace supervisor/mentor - Experienced occupational therapist

Academic supervisor - Onsite academic supervisor observing student with limited workplace experience.

Questions

1. What are the challenges in this situation?
2. Why are they occurring?
3. What strategies could support the student in the workplace learning in this particular scenario?
4. In the scenario, how could preparation sessions prior to placement better prepare the student?

These scenarios were developed by Dawn Bennett (Bond University) and Sonia Ferns (Curtin University). Support for the research from which these scenarios were drawn was provided by the previous Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. For more information, visit the [project home page](#) and refer to the support materials in the team’s [book publication](#).