

4.2 Personalise and connect learning: Connect learning to students' lives and aspirations

Essence >

The teacher ensures that learning builds on the resources, skills, knowledge and goals that students develop in their homes and communities.

Key actions: Teachers

- Genuinely acknowledge the personal significance of my students' contexts, cultures and aspirations
- Recognise learner interest is both what the students bring through the door and what is generated in the classroom
- Support students to know themselves and their passions and strengths as learners
- Focus on essential questions and big ideas that inspire students
- Listen open-mindedly to students' perspectives, and encourage discussion to help explore reasons for differing views
- Pose guiding questions that lead students to view familiar topics in more complex ways
- Create space in the program where students can investigate and share their learning interests
- Identify and develop topics that demonstrate relevance to life beyond the classroom
- Encourage students to connect learning with issues of personal, local or national significance
- Use contemporary technologies (eg podcasts, social networking websites) in meaningful ways
- Actively seek opportunities for linking the community with programming and planning
- Enrich learning by ensuring a range of purposes and community audiences for students' work
- Create opportunities to involve families in ways that acknowledge and support their contexts, cultures and aspirations for their children
- Value individual self-expression and capitalise on students' unique strengths to convey their meaning

Key actions: Students

- Understand we're all different and say what's important to me
- Listen to my classmates and try to understand their views
- Be confident to talk about my hopes and dreams, fears and concerns
- Link my classroom learning to the things I do at home
- Use technology skills to help my learning
- Understand that learning happens everywhere, not just at school, and try new activities in the community



When students are able to use their own cultural information and experiences to connect to academic lessons, they develop a deeper understanding of the content.

Geneva Gay

Justice alert

Whose goals are seen as legitimate and whose are questioned?

Ways to connect learning to students' lives and aspirations

Community-based learning:

Access programs and connect students with people/organisations that promote lifestyle choices, community involvement, and career and job opportunities. Make connections with role models in the local and wider community.

Have a go: Talk with students about their interests, and link with community groups and sporting clubs. Plan 'have a go' sessions for some of the identified activities. Encourage students to seek out more of these opportunities. Support them to make contacts and coordinate new sessions.

Student leadership: Promote SRC/forums/committees and student governance as important vehicles for all students to have a say when issues arise. Facilitate activities where all students can have levels of leadership in their class, school and community. Use current issues for students to take a lead role in change, and be flexible in programming to capitalise on emerging learning opportunities.

Strengthening aspirations: Support programs where students are able to visit workplaces and/or have first hand experience in the workforce (eg work experience).

Invite visiting speakers from allied health professions, volunteer organisations and education institutions. Engage in follow-up activities, such as Driver Education programs for secondary students. Integrate these into the subject offerings. For example, liaise with community representatives for sessions on vehicle maintenance/insurance/drivers' legal obligations.

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Multicultural or Eurocentric?

My own schooling had been Eurocentric, my background was European and my tertiary studies were based on European, American and white Australian 'dead, white, male' artists.

Our school is a very multicultural school in an outer suburban region. Vietnamese and Cambodian families have made this area their home over the past twenty years, and a strong community has evolved.

Until three years ago, racial harmony had been the norm in our community. Then a serious incident occurred. For me, that upheaval was the catalyst for significant curriculum reform.

Initially, I was incensed at the disruption that the incident caused for our school, the untrue claims and the way in which prejudice was fuelled. I began to think more deeply about prejudice. I reflected on and, for the first time, really questioned my own values and beliefs.

Was I providing learning opportunities that built on the diverse cultural understandings of students in my classes? I realised that even though many of my students were of Asian background, what I taught was predominantly Eurocentric.

In reality, I knew very little about my students' cultural identity—their history, religion, language and arts. There was a gap in my own understanding of a major part of the world's geography and history, despite Australia's close proximity to Asia and my pivotal role in the learning journey for my Asian students.

That disruptive incident was an awakening for me. I now recognise that my students have rich cultural backgrounds that we can explore in developing curriculum that connects to their experiences, interests and enthusiasms.

Adapted from McRae (2001)

Cultural competency means becoming aware of the cultural differences that exist—appreciating and having an understanding of those differences and accepting them and being prepared to guard against accepting your own behaviours, beliefs and actions as the norm.

Dominant culture behaviour is 'unthinking behaviour' because the dominant culture prevails.

Members of the dominant culture are granted automatic presumption of innocence, worthiness and competence.

connect learning to students' lives and aspirations

4.2

