

Empathetic Student Management

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The increasing diversification of student cohorts within the scope of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) learners has witnessed a paradigm shift within the tertiary education industry both within Australia and Internationally. Our students are more diverse than any other point of recorded history and therefore bring with them a wealth of “culturally informed” experiences that broaden and enrich the learning environment. Understanding this shift requires empathetic student management and student support by those who teach and act as student administration services.

CALD learners may not always adhere to the “Eurocentric” standards that have been the paradigm of our education system. However, their wealth of cultural experience can enrich the learning environment. Many of these learners are international students juggling a complex life within the frameworks of both the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) framework, the Migration Act, and the increasingly complex guidelines and requirements around the Australian Visa system.

There are times where these students may find themselves in unfortunate and often unthinkable situations for a domestic student. It is important when these situations arise that we act with empathy towards them. For many English is not their first language and it is easy to take for granted the fluency of our mother tongue for those of us born in Australia. However, look far enough back and all our ancestors have migrated to this great country. Some as the Indigenous peoples and custodians of the land, some as ‘first fleeters’ or postwar migrants, and some as new migrants looking to make a new life.

Our overall paradigm as leaders in Higher Education should be empathy when liaising with our students. Our decisions have very real human impacts. It is important to remember that in a different world we would be the CALD learner faced with the choice to acculturate or enculturate. An increasingly globalised world where distance is no longer an inhibiting factor is the new normal. A little empathy and understanding makes the difference.

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