



Enhancing professional capital and career progression

Skilled migrant teachers entering Australian classrooms often encounter a 'hidden curriculum' that can potentially impact their professional integration and effectiveness. The hidden curriculum refers to the existing unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that are not formally taught or explained but instead are conveyed through the culture and practices in a school environment.

For migrant teachers, this can include understanding the social norms, behavioural expectations, and cultural nuances that are not explicitly studied during initial teacher education but are crucial for successful classroom management and student engagement. These implicit aspects of the educational environment can be challenging to navigate, especially when they differ significantly from the norms in the teachers' home countries. Navigating and understanding the hidden curriculum are challenges that all teachers face, regardless of their background. It's a part of the teaching profession that we all learn to manage and grow through. Your unique perspectives and experiences as migrant teachers can bring valuable insights to these situations, and as teachers we are here to support each other in this journey.

"My first piece of advice is to ask questions, we are always learning regardless of how experienced we are. Whenever teachers commence at a new school, asking questions will help the transition into the new role go smoothly. For example, understanding lesson timings, stage meetings or where to access sports equipment. These things can be daunting when you're starting out in a new teaching role, but being open and saying, 'I don't understand, can you explain?' is a breath of fresh air for school leaders because it shows you are willing to learn and not tackle things alone."

Highly Accomplished Teacher - Primary

Classroom management

One major pedagogical component of the hidden curriculum is the expectation of classroom behaviour and discipline. In Australia, there is a strong emphasis on student-centred learning and fostering a collaborative classroom environment. This can be quite different from more traditional, teacher-centred approaches that some migrant teachers might be accustomed to. Understanding and adapting to these expectations requires migrant teachers to be flexible and open to learning and applying new pedagogical strategies. Additionally, the informal interactions and relationships between teachers and students, which are a key part of the Australian educational culture, can be unfamiliar and require adjustment and guidance from a mentor.

"With the modern generation of young people and students, the authoritarian approach doesn't work, and it just creates a lot of tension and hostility in the class. So, for teachers in Australian classrooms it is very much about negotiating expectations."

"Getting to know your students, getting on their level and asking them questions about themselves opens up relationships really quickly. You can connect with students very quickly if you provide that human approach. It's not about me as the teacher being higher than them in the hierarchy; we're in this together as a class, we become a team with different roles, and I find that works better."

Highly Accomplished Teacher - Secondary

Understanding and navigating school dynamics

A key aspect of the hidden curriculum involves the relationships and connections within every school community. Migrant teachers need to navigate the informal networks and social structures that influence decision-making and professional development opportunities. Building rapport with colleagues, understanding the school's culture, its history as well as its current context and participating in extracurricular activities are all part of this hidden curriculum. These elements are crucial for professional integration and career progression but are often not explicitly addressed in formal employment induction programs. Engaging in induction and seeking out ongoing mentoring as a migrant teacher in your school is a proactive approach to enable you to have meaningful collegiate conversations. Learning through mentoring and guidance is essential for positive integration into school and community.

Most schools will also have opportunities for formal and informal socialising. Taking advantage of these social opportunities gives migrant teachers the chance to get to know colleagues and a wider circle of acquaintances on a personal level. Increased personal interactions can help uncover fundamental characteristics about a school community like understanding the socio-economic and cultural diversity within the school which will assist a migrant teacher to effectively engage with and support the diverse needs of their students and promote a positive learning environment. Importantly, on a personal level, establishing new friendships in a new community can ease the stress of finding your feet as a newcomer and growing new roots.

As in any work environment, from time-to-time conflicts between colleagues will occur. Managing conflict with colleagues is an essential skill for teachers to maintain a positive and productive work environment. One effective strategy is to foster open communication through creating opportunities for dialogue where concerns can be expressed and addressed constructively. This involves active listening, where each party feels heard and understood, and using "I" statements to express feelings without assigning blame. Additionally, setting clear expectations and boundaries can help prevent misunderstandings that often lead to conflict. By establishing a culture of transparency and mutual respect, teachers can navigate disagreements more effectively.

Another important approach is to seek collaborative solutions. When conflicts arise, teachers should aim to find common ground and work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. This can be achieved through mediation, where a neutral third party helps facilitate the discussion and resolution process.. By prioritising collaboration and continuous learning, teachers can turn conflicts into opportunities for growth and improved teamwork.

"We have collegiate discussions in my school - talking with colleagues about what's working and what isn't in our classrooms, and collaboratively problem - solving. Sometimes these discussions aren't formal; it could just be in the morning tearoom but having these conversations about our practices are so valuable."

Highly Accomplished Teacher - Secondary

Aligning with Australian values

A crucial component of the hidden curriculum encompasses the broader societal values and expectations that are reflected in the school environment. For example, Australian schools often emphasise inclusivity, diversity, and equity, which may manifest in various school policies and practices. Migrant teachers need to understand and align with these values to effectively support their students and contribute to the school community. This requires ongoing reflection and adaptation, as well as seeking out professional development opportunities that address these themes.

Through recognising, understanding and responding to the implicit expectations around classroom behaviour, professional relationships, and broader societal values, migrant teachers can effectively adapt and acclimatise to their new educational environments. Schools can support this process by providing comprehensive induction programs and ongoing mentoring that address these hidden aspects. By fostering an inclusive and supportive atmosphere, schools not only help migrant teachers succeed but also enrich the educational experience for all students. Embracing the hidden curriculum ultimately leads to a more cohesive and dynamic school community, benefiting both teachers and students alike.

"In my school, we were talking about values and the importance of teaching students how to be great human beings and how to solve real-world problems. That was a joy and a big moment for me as a teacher. The Australian education system is set up to educate the whole child."

Lead Teacher – Primary & Secondary



In Practice

- **Build genuine connections:** Establishing strong, authentic relationships with colleagues can help create a supportive network. This involves being approachable, showing interest in others' perspectives, and participating in school activities.
- **Focus on collaboration over competition:** Emphasise teamwork and shared goals rather than competing with colleagues. This can foster a positive work environment and reduce conflicts.
- **Address any issues privately and promptly:** It's important to discuss conflicts directly with the colleague involved, rather than letting the issue fester or discussing it with others. This helps maintain professionalism and respect.
- **Stay calm and positive:** Approach conversations with a calm demeanour and a positive outlook. This can help de-escalate any challenging situations and make it easier to find a resolution.
- **Listen actively:** Make sure to listen to your colleague's perspective without interrupting. Understanding their point of view can help you find common ground towards identifying solutions to any challenges and building a collaborative relationship.
- **Focus on solutions, not blame:** Frame any conflicts as a problem to be solved together, rather than focusing on who is at fault. This collaborative approach can lead to more effective and lasting resolutions.
- **Seek mediation if necessary:** If a conflict cannot be resolved, consider involving a neutral third party, such as a supervisor or Human Resources representative, to mediate the discussion.

Further reading

Talukdar, J & Datta, P 2013, 'Prospects of the exploration of a hidden curriculum in Australian higher education', *Learning and Teaching: An international journal in classroom pedagogy*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 19-31. <https://doi.org/10.7459/lt/6.2.03>

Sun Yee Yip, & Saito, E., 2024. Immigrant teachers in Australia: experiences of differential adaptation. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 54(2), pp.239-256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2024.2343686>

