



# Know students and how they learn

When teachers know and understand their students they can create a psychologically safe environment, tailoring instructions for individual needs. This fosters trust, mutual respect and motivation, which are essential for student engagement and academic achievement.

## Building relationships

Strong teacher-student relationships are at the heart of effective teaching. Research suggests that when students feel valued and understood, they are more likely to participate and take risks in their learning. Building positive relationships involves getting to know students' interests, strengths, and areas for growth.

*"Being authentic with your students is essential. They love hearing your stories, knowing you're not just their teacher but someone who trusts them. In Australian classrooms, there's high value placed on relatability. It's not top-down; it's about creating connections with students. It's crucial to focus on building relational trust. It's not about being hierarchical but about having high expectations to earn respect."*

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**Highly Accomplished Teacher - Primary**

## Understanding how students learn

Teachers in Australia are required to understand how students learn. This involves structuring teaching programs based on research and collegial advice about effective learning strategies. By staying informed about the latest educational research and collaborating with colleagues, teachers can develop programs that are both evidence-based and tailored to the specific needs of their students. This approach not only improves student engagement and retention but also fosters a more dynamic and responsive learning environment.

Understanding the physical, social, and intellectual development and characteristics of students is a requirement for teachers in Australia. This knowledge allows educators to tailor their teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of each student, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. For instance, teachers use their understanding of human development to create age-appropriate learning activities that engage students effectively. By recognising the diverse developmental stages and characteristics of their students, teachers can implement strategies that cater to different learning needs, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

*"I focus on understanding individual needs, abilities, and backgrounds. Each of my students may hold cultural traditions, family dynamics, language barriers, and varied learning experiences. By unpacking this through strong relationships with students and families, I shape lessons to be equitable, culturally relevant, and inclusive."*

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**Lead Teacher - Primary**

## Addressing diverse learning needs

Addressing the needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds is another critical aspect of teaching in Australia. Teachers design and implement strategies that are responsive to the varied strengths and needs of all students. This includes incorporating culturally relevant materials and activities into the curriculum,

as well as using inclusive teaching practices that promote equity and respect for all students. By doing so, teachers help create a learning environment where every student feels valued and supported.

Effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are essential for promoting their educational success. Teachers in Australia are expected to design and implement strategies that are responsive to the cultural settings, linguistic backgrounds, and histories of these students. This includes incorporating First Nation perspectives into the curriculum and using teaching methods that are culturally appropriate and engaging.

*“By reviewing prior assessments, classroom observations, and work samples, I identify patterns or trends. This informs targeted and differentiated learning experiences, ensuring that each student receives tailored support. I embed emotional welfare in teaching to support students dealing with challenges, ensuring they feel safe, ready, and confident to learn. This holistic approach fosters both emotional and academic success. Using strategies such as visual aids, group work, and technology helps me connect with various learning needs, making lessons more accessible and engaging for every student.”*

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#### Lead Teacher - Primary

### Differentiated instruction

A key requirement for teachers in Australian classrooms to plan and provide differentiated instruction to meet the diverse needs of students by tailoring their teaching strategies, content, and learning environments. Differentiation involves adjusting various aspects of teaching, such as the complexity of tasks, the types of resources used, and the methods of assessment, to cater to the individual readiness, interests, and learning profiles of students.

For example, teachers might use tiered instruction, where students work on tasks that are appropriately challenging for their ability levels, ensuring that all students are engaged and learning at their own pace. This approach helps in addressing the varying levels of understanding and skills within a classroom, making learning more effective and inclusive. Teachers might also use a variety of grouping strategies to support differentiated learning. This can include pairing students with different abilities together or creating small groups based on similar learning needs.

By doing so, teachers can provide more targeted instruction and support, allowing students to collaborate and learn from each other. Through these differentiated practices, teachers create a dynamic and responsive learning environment that caters to the unique needs of each student.

*“It’s important to find different ways that work for different students and not be rigid in teaching or assessment modes. Visuals through PowerPoint help with daily routines and setting up lessons so students know what to expect. Audio books, audio texts, and podcasts are great for students who struggle with reading, allowing them to gain knowledge in different ways. Sometimes we do this as a class, and other times students may access a podcast independently while others are reading.”*

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#### Highly Accomplished Teacher - Secondary

### Students with disability

Teachers in Australia are required to cater to the needs of students with disabilities by implementing inclusive education practices that ensure all students can access and participate in learning on an equal basis. AITSL has created a [range of resources](#) to help teachers and leaders understand and meet their obligations under the [Disability Standards for Education \(DSE\) 2005](#). Supporting full participation of students with disability involves making reasonable adjustments to the curriculum, teaching methods, and classroom environment to accommodate the diverse needs of students with disabilities. For example, teachers might use assistive technologies, modify classroom layouts, or provide additional support such as one-on-one instruction or tailored learning materials. These adjustments are made in consultation with the students and their families to ensure they are appropriate and effective. The goal is to create a supportive and inclusive learning environment where all students can thrive.

#### Take action: Differentiation

Watch [AITSL’s In the Classroom video](#) to see how Tom uses a differentiated instructional approach that meets the diverse learning needs of his students. He shares the assessment strategies he uses to understand where students are in their learning.

