Study on how to cope with cross-cultural learning styles

WITH more and more students around the world venturing abroad to study, what does a lecturer need to do when faced with a class full of different nationalities, learning styles and behaviours?

To help both teachers and students become more aware of the growing diversity in the classroom, a group of academics from four countries undertook a two-year study on cross-cultural learning styles.

The team of seven – from universities in Singapore, Thailand, Austria and Germany – said the aim was to study these differences in detail, and they will present their findings at a two-day conference here. Over 2,800 business students from the four countries, including 601 from Singapore’s three universities, were surveyed.

In Singapore last week to attend the first Intercultural Communication Competence conference, Professor Gerhard Apfelthaler from Austria said Singaporean students held their instructors in high regard.

“I taught at the Singapore Management University in July. During the class, the students ... didn’t speak up much. But once the lecture was over, they became very active and talkative. I realised that there was a tremendous amount of respect for the instructor,” he said.

He said Austrian students typically have a very relaxed attitude in the classroom, which might cause practical problems in a Singapore setting when students from the two countries meet.

The results of the study will be compiled into a brochure for students, teachers and administrators to refer to, and will be ready by the end of the year.

— LEE U-WEN