

Integrating Non-Native English Speakers into Mainstream Classesⁱ

Outlined below are some of the most common concerns faculty have expressed about having non-native [English] speakers (NNS) in their classes together with insights and strategies that may be helpful in addressing these concerns. The goal is for all to benefit from the cross-cultural experience these highly motivated students can bring to their classes.

Concerns	Insights/Strategies
<p>Communication Difficulties</p>	<p>Insights: Students who have passed the TOEFL/IELTS, completed the AEP, or are in Pathway may still experience difficulties with academic listening comprehension and spoken expression; difficulties associated with listening comprehension will often be most pronounced in the first weeks of the semester and most likely will be less problematic as the semester progresses.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <p>Improving oral communication:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop awareness of your speaking speed. 2. Develop awareness of the language you are using, i.e., slang, idioms, cultural references, vocabulary (academic and technical). 3. Consider activating close captioning when using videos in class. 4. Be aware that NNS students may not feel confident enough in speaking ability (at least initially) to respond to questions in class and to ask questions or initiate conversations. Consider asking all students to write down ideas for a minute, before asking for answers. This allows students to formulate an answer before speaking. 5. Paraphrase student questions and comments to help all students follow class discussions. <p>Improving written communication:</p> <p>Develop awareness of comprehensibility of writing on whiteboards and feedback on papers, especially if you write in cursive.</p> <p>In general:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage students to come to office hours for clarification. 2. Consider using lecture capture or allowing students to record lectures. 3. Consider surveying students early in the semester to identify any communication difficulties (see attached example).
<p>Cultural and educational differences</p>	<p>Insights: Because students may come from cultural and educational backgrounds that differ significantly from the U.S. academic environment, they may have difficulties adjusting to a new set of expectations. This is especially evident in the area of class participation, the role of rote memorization vs. critical thinking to demonstrate learning, group work, and interacting with students and instructors of the opposite gender.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Any expectations with regard to class participation, demonstrating learning, and group work should be made explicit. 2. Consider cultural knowledge students must have to understand texts, materials and assignments. What assumptions are you making about background knowledge?
<p>Academic Integrity</p>	<p>Insights: There is no universal standard about what plagiarism is. Western countries, and the United States in particular, are unique in the value they place on intellectual property rights. Therefore, for many international</p>

<p>Quality of written academic assignments</p>	<p>students, there is a lot of confusion about what constitutes plagiarism in an American academic/university context. Full understanding takes education and time. Further, in those cultures which value the needs of the group over the needs of the individual, students are obligated to assist group members who request their help. In U.S. academic culture, this ‘help’ is perceived as cheating.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer students to the plagiarism tutorial at http://abacus.bates.edu/cbb/quiz/index.html; 2. Clearly define what cheating is in your class and the consequences. <p>Offensive Strategies (before the assignment is turned in):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure that assignments are well-designed with explicit expectations (including the grading rubric) and instructions (oral and written). 2. Encourage international students to come to your office hours for further clarification. (If possible, show students examples of successful assignments.) 3. Encourage international students to go to the Writing Center for additional clarification about the assignment. 4. If possible, provide opportunities for submitting the assignment in stages or for submitting one complete draft prior to turning in the final assignment. 5. Suggest that an international student use an editor during the <i>final stage</i> of their drafting process. (The editor should NOT be writing the paper for the student.) <p>Defensive Strategies (after the assignment is turned in):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before you start grading, be clear about the goals/objectives for the assignment. How important are grammar and other writing mechanics in the rubric? (If you are not teaching an English class, can you overlook issues with grammar and mechanics?) 2. Grade holistically. Consider content and organization, specifically, whether the student has understood and met the objectives of the assignment, before focusing on writing mechanics. 3. If mechanics are (visually) preventing you from grading holistically, read the paper out loud. (You might also read the paper out loud to a colleague for feedback.) 4. Be aware that cultural background can influence text organization (especially essays) and can be commented on for the next assignment.
<p>Fairness</p>	<p>Insights: Faculty members often express concern about fairness: balancing adherence to standards, on the one hand, and compassion for the challenges that NNS students face, on the other. The following strategies may help address this concern.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <p>Evaluating Assignments:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It takes years to acquire academic skills in another language, and very few NNS students will be able to produce academic work that is free of language

Lobbying	<p>errors, i.e., grammar, punctuation and word choice. As noted in the previous section, decide whether the student has understood and met the objectives of the assignment, before focusing on writing mechanics. Grading NNS student work harshly because of errors in writing mechanics when the overall objectives of the assignment have been met is not compassionate.</p> <p>2. If it is clear that a NNS student has not understood the assignment and/or has not satisfactorily met the content objectives of the assignment, the assignment should be graded accordingly. We are not doing NNS students any favors by giving them passing grades on assignments when it is clear that they did not meet or understand the content objectives. It is more compassionate to give them feedback that will help them improve their ability to produce quality assignments in the future.</p> <p>3. If you are teaching a graduate level course, it is even more important for international students to be held to high standards and referred to appropriate resources if they fall short.</p> <p>Test-taking:</p> <p>Insights: Although taking exams for any student, native English speaker or not, can be a stressful experience, it is understandably more stressful for many non-native English speakers. Even if these students know the material, they may not be able to demonstrate their knowledge successfully because they do not have time to finish the exam in the allotted time. Because they are processing information in their 2nd or 3rd language, it may take them longer to read the exam questions and answer them, and they may not be familiar with some of the academic vocabulary (not the specific terminology being tested) used on the exam.</p> <p>Strategies: 1. If feasible, consider allowing non-native English speakers more time to complete exams and to use bilingual dictionaries. Research has shown, assuming a test is valid to begin with, that allowing extra time and bilingual dictionary use for non-native English speakers does not confer an unfair advantage to those students.</p> <p>Insights: In some cultures, the perceived power of authorities to control one's fate is more important than personal choice or achievement. In other words, relationships (who you know) are more valuable in achieving success than individual performance. This value orientation coupled with the pressures associated with meeting the academic expectations of parents and government and corporate sponsors can lead to the practice of lobbying, in which students request (repeatedly) higher grades on assignments and exams even though their performance does not merit higher grades. Often the lobbyist is accompanied by a number of friends or will send a delegation to lobby on his/her behalf.</p> <p>Strategies: 1. Calmly (in a friendly, yet firm manner) point out that (1) grades are determined by student performance and that the student's performance, in this</p>
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<p>Group work</p>	<p>case, does not merit a higher grade. Go over the exam/assignment with the student and show the student why it does not merit a higher grade.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Explain that to raise the student’s grade in this case would be dishonest and unfair to the other students in the class. (When the student is asked directly if the student is asking the instructor to be dishonest and to confer special treatment to the student, the student will usually say ‘no.’) 3. If the student continues to lobby for the grade change, explain that while you know you are not giving the student the answer s/he wants, it is the only answer you can give, and you will not be changing that answer. 4. Let the student know what options, if any, are available for appealing grading decisions and make it clear that discussions with you are over. <p>Insights: Group work provides a collaborative experience whereby NNS students can problem solve alongside NES students. In addition, working in groups can help to increase self-confidence, which can result in greater class participation and can promote NNS students to integrate into the discipline-specific community.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Utilize meaningful tasks that encourage collaboration. 2. Ensure that the workload and responsibilities are divided fairly. 3. Create groups that are diversified with members who are likely to co-exist. 4. Have students choose roles (or assign them) to distribute the workload. 5. Model how you want students to participate. 6. Provide feedback to group (as a whole) and individuals.
<p>Time</p>	<p>Insights: Concerns about increased demands on your time when NNS students are in your classes are valid. Keep in mind that many of these students are highly motivated to succeed, and because there is a lot at stake for them, they may seek your help more so than American students. Working with such highly motivated students can be very rewarding for an instructor. However, if it is clear that the students are only interested in you doing the work for them, it is certainly legitimate to set limits on the amount of time/help you are willing to provide.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set clear expectations. 2. Ensure that assignment instructions are clear. 3. Encourage students to join study groups. 4. Refer students to appropriate resources, such as the Writing Center and the Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning, or recommend tutoring/editing help.

Sample Survey

1. Is English your native language? Yes No

2. I understand the instructor. (Circle one.)

All the time Most of the time Half of the time Less than half of the time

3. When you do not understand the instructor, why not? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. The instructor speaks too quickly.
- b. The instructor uses slang and unfamiliar expressions.
- c. The instructor uses difficult vocabulary.
- d. The instructor uses examples specific to American culture that I do not understand.
- e. I don't understand the ideas the instructor is talking about.
- f. Other _____

4. I feel comfortable in the classroom. (Circle one.)

All the time Most of the time Half of the time Less than half of the time

5. When you don't feel comfortable in the class, why not? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. I don't feel confident participating in class discussions.
- b. I don't know what I need to learn for tests.
- c. I don't feel accepted by the other students in the class.
- d. I don't like working in groups.
- e. Other _____

6. I have visited my instructor during office hours. (Circle one.)

Several times More than once One time Never

7. If you have not visited your instructor during office hours, why not? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. I don't have any questions.
- b. I have another class at that time.
- c. I am nervous about talking to the instructor.
- d. Other _____

8. I am able to complete the assignments required for this class. (Circle one.)

All the time Most of the time Half of the time Less than half of the time

9. When you are not able to complete the required assignments, why not? (Circle all that apply.)

- a. The instructions are not clear.
- b. I don't understand the textbook.
- c. I cannot complete all of the reading.
- d. Other _____

10. What other information would you like to share with the instructor about this class?

Selected Readings (by topic)

Accommodations

- Abedi, J., Hofstetter, C., & Lord, C. (2004). Assessment accommodations for English language learners: Implications for policy-based empirical research. *Review of Educational Research, 74*, 1-28.
- Kanel, K.L. (2004, Winter). Accommodating the ESL students in the university. *The NEA Higher Education Journal, 61* -68.

Classroom Culture

- Huang, J., & Brown, K. (2009). Cultural factors affecting Chinese ESL students' academic learning. *Education, 129*, 643-653.
- Rubenstein, I.Z. (2006). Educational expectations: How they differ around the world: Implications for teaching ESL college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 30*, 433-441.
- Snow, A.M. (2009). The effects of English language proficiency on adjustment to university life. *International Multilingual Research Journal, 3*, 16-34.

Fairness

- Teemant, A. (2010). ESL student perspectives on university classroom testing practices. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 10*, 89-105.
- Whitley, B.E., Perkins, D.V., Balogh, D.W., Keith-Spiegel, P., & Wittig, A.F. (2003). Fairness in the classroom. Retrieved from <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/teaching/tips.html>

Group Work

- Chiang, M.H. (2005). Interactions in small-group, communication-oriented, freshman English classes. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, 9*, 59-77.
- Fushino, K. (2010). Causal relationships between communication confidence, beliefs about group work, and willingness to communicate in foreign language group work. *TESOL Quarterly, 44*, 700-724.
- Melles, G. (2004). Understanding the role of language/culture in group work through qualitative interviewing. *The Qualitative Report, 9*, 216-240.

Plagiarism

- Bamford, J., & Sergiou, K. (2005). International students and plagiarism: An analysis of the reasons for plagiarism among international foundation students. *Investigations in University Teaching and Learning, 2*, 17-22.
- Flowerdew, J., & Li, Y. (2007). Plagiarism and second language writing in an electronic age. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 27*, 161-183.
- Hayes, N., & Introna, L.D. (2005). Cultural values, plagiarism, and fairness: When plagiarism gets in the way of learning. *Ethics and Behavior, 15*, 213-231.

ⁱ This handout adapted from presentation given by Tony Becker & Nancy Berry at Professional Development Institute (Colorado State University) in September, 2013.