

# **DUKE UNIVERSITY THOMPSON WRITING PROGRAM**

## **Facilitating Inclusivity of Students with Diverse Linguistic and Cultural Backgrounds: Context and Strategies for Enhancing Learning and Participation**

### **Context**

Our multilingual students have a diverse array of backgrounds. Classroom experiences of some students arriving at Duke may have been characterized by large enrollment and a focus on covering a set amount of information without interruption. These students might rarely have answered questions or otherwise spoken in class. Adjusting classroom management as well as taking time to better understand your students' backgrounds and concerns will enhance students' ability to learn from you and to participate in your course.

### **Relationships with authority**

Some students view professors and other authorities (e.g., authors of articles), as having correct answers that should not be challenged. In some cultures, asking questions during class could be perceived as a possible signal that the professor is not teaching the material well or as a rude interruption.

When asked a yes/no question ("Do you understand?"), some students will feel obligated to either reply "yes" or not respond. Saying "no" to someone in authority could be considered impolite. You might ask students which parts of class they would like you to explain more thoroughly or for which parts they need more examples.

### **Questions to professors**

In some cultures, questions should be asked before class, after class, or during a break in a longer class. "Anyone have questions?" would be considered a rhetorical question and met by student silence.

While professors in some cultures might invite students to office hours, those hours might not actually exist. If they do exist, going to see the professor there might be seen as an admission that the student is not studying enough or applying himself enough.

### **Your student's culture**

Might require leaving a seemingly long pause after professors ask a question to demonstrate that it is being carefully considered. Or require that someone not speak just after someone else has spoken, let alone interrupt.

Might consider it inappropriate to criticize official policy or the government, provide a correct answer after a classmate has erred, or disagree with views of an authority figure.

### **Your student**

Might not be sure she clearly heard and/or understood a question

Might need some time to translate an answer into English

Might be worried about pronunciation issues

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## Strategies to Increase Student Inclusivity, Learning, and Participation

Consider how your pedagogical choices throughout class might support students with different learning preferences and strengths. The suggestions below will likely benefit all students.

### Adjusting pace of class and speech

Consider slowing the pace of your class and of your speech. Repeat and rephrase key points. Be aware of using idiomatic and metaphorical language (“please weigh in,” “it’s a lemon,” “through the lens of,” “off the top of my head”) as well as making cultural references that might be obscure for students. Consider which references or idioms you might explain. When students speak rapidly, quietly, use extensive idiomatic and metaphorical language, or use obscure cultural references, consider paraphrasing what was said.

Allow a long pause time after you ask a question for students to digest it, consider how to respond, and possibly translate. Schedule adequate time for reading, writing, and peer review.

Provide time for questions and answers at the end of class. Questions could be shared orally or via classroom software such as Socrative, which allows for greater anonymity. Invite students to make audio recordings of classes so they may review what was said.

### Providing materials in writing (on board, projected, handouts, Sakai).

Written support can enhance absorption of course content, assignment details, and deadline information. When someone is going to read text aloud, share that text in writing to scaffold aural comprehension.

Provide a written overview of class on the board or projected slide. Consider posting your overview or more detailed class notes on Sakai.

### Monitoring who speaks

Let students know that you want to hear from those who have not yet spoken. Encourage students to help create a balance in participation, whether talking as a full class, in pairs, or in small groups. Do not allow a few students to dominate air time.

### Inviting students to speak

Assist hesitant students to participate by posing questions to them that they seem prepared for, perhaps first after a pair/group discussion. Provide positive reinforcement.

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## **Prepping for discussions**

Provide major discussion questions early enough for students to consider those while reading course materials. Ask them to sometimes bring short written responses to class.

## **Including pair and group work**

Schedule time for students to participate through pair and group work. Students are often more comfortable sharing ideas in smaller groups before joining a wider discussion.

## **Helping students value intercultural writing norms**

When conducting peer review on writing, consider encouraging everyone to value the cultural diversity of writing norms. Individual cultures privilege different writing norms, including structure, sentence length, clarity of pronoun referents, and wordiness.

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