These suggestions for integrating linguistically and culturally diverse groups into the academic community come from nonnative English-speaking students at Boise State University and from the English Language Support Programs. The comments are grounded in second language acquisition theory and in multilingual students’ knowledge of the ways in which their second-language status affects their learning. (The suggestions are not listed in any step-by-step order but appear simply as a variety of suggestions.)

**CLASSROOM STRATEGIES**

1. Identify those who need language support.
   
a. Early in the semester, let all students know that you are happy to talk with any student who feels he or she needs some extra help. That simple step lets students know they are all welcome in your class while it also can assure native English speakers that you do not give “special treatment” to a few students.

b. Assign a short piece of in-class writing early in the semester—for example, have them spend 5 minutes summarizing that day’s lecture or activity. You can then talk to those students whose writing might reveal some second-language needs. First, by asking, you can confirm that they are indeed second-language users, rather than students who write in a nonstandard variety of English. In either case, students should not simply be sent to a tutor, particularly because they might not identify themselves after all as second-language learners or as being in need of help. Rather, have a brief conversation with them, asking how they’re doing in the class. You notice that they’ve made some errors in their writing, and you wonder if there is anything you should know about their educational or language background, or if those errors were a result of the short period of time allotted for producing a sample writing piece. Simply opening up the dialogue can pave the way for directing the student to appropriate campus resources or for providing important support as an instructor. (You can also use such quick in-class summaries to find out whether any review of the material might be necessary for the whole class!)

c. Ask the whole class if anyone has any particular needs the instructor should be aware of. Of course, don’t ask for a show of hands. Students needing assistance can identify themselves to you by email or after class.

2. Recognize that nonnative speakers do not become native speakers. Grammatical perfection in a second language is an impossibility for most nonnative speakers. See http://www.boisestate.edu/esl (“For Faculty and Staff”) for additional suggestions regarding such expectations. This is true even if the student sees a tutor.
3. Allow nonnative English speakers some extended exam time. Writing and reading in a second language can take considerably longer than writing and reading in one’s native language.

4. Allow nonnative English speakers to take exams in a separate room. Some students find it helpful to read questions and multiple-choice options aloud as a way of processing the language in them.

5. Give permission to use bilingual dictionaries. Students are far more likely to look up words like “analyze,” “exception,” “subsequent,” or other typical academic words than they will to look up words they’re being tested on. Indeed, students recognize that they sacrifice valuable exam time if they use a dictionary, but the same students have found the occasional dictionary search for general academic expressions to be quite useful. Moreover, if they don’t know what a discipline-specific term, such as “oxidation” or “meta-linguistic,” means in their native language, a mere translation from their native language wouldn’t help them anyway. Thus, the chances for abuse of the dictionary-use privilege are slim.

6. Allow students to record your lectures. This strategy should also be available to native English speakers who simply require time to absorb information and fill in sketchy notes.

7. Put lecture notes, charts, visual aids, course outlines, and details of writing assignments and projects on Blackboard.

8. Pair a native English-speaking student to study with, and perhaps take notes for, a nonnative English speaker in the same class. This strategy benefits the native-speaking “tutors” as well because they, too, are trying to synthesize and remember new ideas.

9. Write an outline on the board or provide another visual means of understanding how the lecture or class period is organized. Nonnative English speakers often miss intonational, syntactic and lexical cues, such as stress on particular words to highlight a contrast or phrases such as “now what you don’t want is . . .,” which help fluent speakers of English identify important points or relations between points. (Who are “you”? Why “now”? etc.)

10. Allow take-home exams or create group exams for all students. With the latter, students collaborate as teams, with each member of the team responsible for a different set of material.

11. Periodically throughout the semester, invite students to register concerns or ask questions about the class. This can be a blanket invitation.

12. Be willing to offer extra explanations occasionally or offer review sessions before exams.

13. Tape-record and listen to your own lectures occasionally. Ask a committee of second-language learners to talk with you about phrases or speech patterns they might find difficult. A little awareness goes a long way.
14. Assign all students to study groups or strongly encourage them to form their own. Study-group facilitators are available through the Gateway Center.

**DEPARTMENT-LEVEL STRATEGIES**

**Tutoring/Mentoring:**

1. Assign a peer advisor/mentor to each incoming ESL student in your department. These mentors may be people with the same ethnic/cultural/language background or they may be any patient, interested student who is majoring in that field. The mentor would simply be there to help the student navigate program requirements.

2. Arrange for majors in your department to serve as tutors for nonnative speakers in lower-division classes. *ESL specialists can provide assistance and training for such discipline-specific tutors.* As one student says, “We need help on most of the classes and not just the English classes.”

3. Offer internship credit for discipline-specific tutoring.

**Other suggestions:**

1. Select a faculty member to be a liaison to the English Language Support Programs. That person would learn about the kinds of English language support currently available and serve as an advocate or advisor for nonnative English-speaking majors.

2. Offer ESL-only or balanced, cross-cultural sections of large core courses. The departments of Communication, History, Biology, and English have offered such sections with great success.

3. Encourage language diversity training among faculty in your department. English Language Support Programs periodically offers workshops through the Center for Teaching and Learning on working with nonnative English speakers. We can also set up a department- or college-specific workshop.

4. Encourage faculty to offer online or hybrid sections of a course. These can be useful for giving students time to formulate answers to discussion questions.

5. Consider linking an introductory level core course to an ESL course or an English 101 course. The students would be required to take both courses concurrently. Talk to the Coordinator of the English Language Support Programs about such possibilities.

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