## Working with Non-Native English Speaking (NNES) Students

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<tr>
<th>NNES Student Issues in Class</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
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<td>1. Not asking questions</td>
<td>• Tell them explicitly that participation is required and do not assume that they know what participation means in practical terms. Explain your expectations clearly in your syllabus and in class.</td>
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| 2. Not giving opinions                                                                       | • Make time regularly to encourage questions/comments/opinions  
• Call on NNES students by name (in many cultures that is acceptable)  
• Don’t feel bad if they appear to be embarrassed (tell them that they can pass if they really do not know)  
• Wait just a little longer for them to formulate ideas and respond  
• If they don’t respond, don’t give up, try again and again (they will get the message and respond)  
• Don’t give up when you don’t understand them, keep trying |
| 3. Not answering questions                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 4. Wait to be asked to participate                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 5. Not giving a view that might contradict the teacher                                        | • Reassure them that it is acceptable to disagree with teachers as long as it is polite  
• Model critical thinking through teaching  
• Assure them that we learn from our mistakes  
• Assure them that a wrong answer might give the teacher important feedback about what students have learned (or not) |
| 6. Afraid of giving the wrong answer                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 7. Intimidated by the presence of U.S. students or native English speakers                    | • Use short ice-breaker activities throughout the quarter  
• Group students carefully, okay to break up cliques  
• Encourage them/all students to sit in different seats each time  
• Call on NNES students to answer questions and encourage them  
• Ask NNES students for information about their culture  
• Ask NNES students to provide examples from their countries  
• Ask NNES students for different perspectives |
| 8. May not have studied in an environment where they had to give opinions, think critically, synthesize, apply knowledge, or make connections between different pieces of information | • Scaffold activities will help  
• Give group or class discussion assignments one day in advance so that students have time to think and prepare  
• Explain why critical thinking is important in your subject area  
• Teach students how to think critically  
• Explain how to synthesize  
• Demonstrate how to make connections between different concepts |
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<td>9. May not be used to</td>
<td>• Reassure them</td>
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<td>• taking risks or making errors in front of others</td>
<td>• Encourage them</td>
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<td>• showing off knowledge in front of others</td>
<td>• Be patient</td>
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<td>• drawing attention to themselves (they might believe that students who stand out are vulnerable)</td>
<td>• Show tolerance</td>
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<td>10. May be worried about</td>
<td>• Correct grammar of pronunciation when appropriate (they expect and appreciate this kind of help)</td>
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<td>• coming across as stupid of dumb</td>
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<tr>
<td>• pronunciation and grammar</td>
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<td>• being understood</td>
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<td>11. Language anxiety may interfere with their ability to think and produce language simultaneously. They might think and speak slower in a second language because they have to divide attention between content and language</td>
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<td>12. May feel invisible and ignored</td>
<td>• Group students carefully</td>
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<td>• Teach all students how to work together</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Draw NNES students out in class (call on them, ask them for information from their backgrounds)</td>
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<td>• Encourage them, be patient, reassure them</td>
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<th>U.S. Student Issues in Class with NNES Students</th>
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<td>1. Often lack an understanding of other cultures</td>
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<td>2. May think that U.S. classroom conventions and behavior is standard and universal (that includes group work, expressing opinions, talking a lot, volunteering opinions, etc.)</td>
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<td>3. May expect NNES students to integrate, speak English fluently, and behave like U.S. students</td>
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<td>4. May have different values, beliefs, and expectations and feel irritated or frustrated when NNES students do not act the same way</td>
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<td>a. Believe that self-expression is important and a sign of intelligence</td>
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<td>b. Believe that individuals sharpen their minds through debate</td>
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<td>c. They want to feel good and make others feel good and do this in very visible ways (e.g. praise and compliment)</td>
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<td>d. To many control means using inner qualities to change outer aspects such as social situations and public behavior</td>
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5. May feel threatened by NNES students’ presence
   a. Do not subscribe to their values and beliefs—don’t know how to behave in their presence
   b. Fear they may have to help them (time and effort)
   c. May not want to struggle to communicate
   d. May not want to provide all the answers or do all the work in groups
   e. May not want to get a lower grade when working with them in groups
   f. May feel uncomfortable with silence
   g. May be irritated by perceived NNES student passivity
6. May behave in politically correct ways, but may feel resentment or indifference toward NNES students in class

Conflicting Perspectives

1. When U.S. students demonstrate intellectual competence through talking confidently, some NNES students might see that kind of behavior as excessively active, showing off, risky, and brash

2. When NNES students do not speak, they might be seen by U.S. students timid and intellectually weak

3. NNES students feel an intense need for friendship (it is part of their social system and what they are used to—stronger social capital, they need to feel connected, they need help, support, and somebody to look out for them) but U.S. students might not have these needs

4. U.S. students might be more assertive while such assertiveness might be perceived as aggression or too powerful to NNES students that come from environments where people are more subtle

5. Many U.S. students expect others to take initiative and show leadership, while NNES students might not feel it their place in the host culture

6. Many NNES students might expect the U.S. students and teachers to act like hosts, while that idea might not even cross U.S. students and teachers minds
Some of the most common things students reported that helped them in their classes were:

1. **A welcoming class atmosphere**: When the teacher set the tone in class and modeled positive behavior toward NNES students, the U.S. students followed suit. NNES students noticed that these teachers
   a. Demonstrated tolerant and patient behavior toward NNES students through
      i. Giving them just a few seconds more to formulate their ideas before answering
      ii. Trying earnestly to understand them
      iii. Not giving up on them publicly
   b. Encouraged and nurtured NNES students constantly through spoken and written feedback
   c. Called on NNES students in class by name
   d. Showed interest in their cultures by asking them for information relevant to the course content
   e. Used information about other cultures in their classes to illustrate points in their lessons
   f. Did not see the NNES students as burdens but as assets to enrich the learning environment

2. **Clearly written and detailed instructions for assignments**: When students get assignments in writing, they are able to refer to them again and figure out what they need to do. They can look up words they do not understand. They know how to ask for further clarification.

3. **Thoughtful language assistance in class**: Just as teachers want students to deliver work that contain accessible and comprehensible language, exhibit clear and careful explanations, and demonstrate effort, students want teachers to reciprocate. When lecturing it will help if teachers
   a. Announce the title and outline of the lecture for the day
   b. Clearly state transitions between different parts of the lecture
   c. Carefully show the connection between different parts of the lecture or previous lectures
   d. Speak slower
   e. Write key terms and important definitions on the board
   f. Repeat important concepts or definitions
   g. Use meaningful visual aids when possible
   h. Give lecture handouts and study guides
   i. Avoid using examples from common U.S. culture without explaining the context
   j. Anticipate learning difficulties by identifying terms or concepts in advance and encouraging students to prepare by looking up the meanings or finding definitions

4. **Acknowledge NNES student effort**: They are studying under very difficult circumstances. They are far from home and familiar things. They have to deal with a different language and culture. They often feel insecure, ignored, or anxious in class. Many have to work harder than their U.S. counterparts and appreciate it very much when faculty acknowledge their extra effort.
5. **Do not lower academic expectations.** Teach students how to reach the high goals you set them. Give assignments that scaffold learning. Guide and encourage students along the way.

6. **Over and beyond:** If you want to do more, the following will help not only NNES students very much, but also U.S. students.

   a. Provide weekly study guides, especially before tests and exams.

   b. If the textbooks do not have guiding questions for each chapter, provide at least one.

   c. Provide glossaries with the most important vocabulary for your course during week one.

   d. Instead of encouraging study groups, form them and make sure to match the NNES students carefully with U.S. students.

   e. Be aware that it takes NNES students longer to understand and then answer exam questions in their second language. You might want to allow a little more time to write exams or tests if you have NNES students in your class.

   f. Teach all students how to work in groups, intervene and guide when necessary, and allow time for students to bond. Try to set up things so that everybody gets a chance to participate meaningfully.

   g. Avoid/minimize multiple choice-question tests because they are extremely hard for NNES students to decipher and understand.

   h. Teach students explicitly how to think critically and how to demonstrate that in their work. Explain the purpose of critical thinking and why it is important in the U.S.

   i. Give students enough time on written assignments to go to the writing center for help. Encourage them to go to the writing center.

   j. Diversity does not happen spontaneously, teachers need to make it a reality by doing some of the following:

      i. Creating learning goals that incorporate knowledge of other cultures in meaningful ways

      ii. Develop learning outcomes that incorporate relationship building components in non-threatening and non-punitive ways

      iii. Demonstrating tolerance and acceptance of everybody in class

      iv. Providing a balanced and mind-expanding lessons that expose students to different points of view

      v. Setting up groups so that students will learn from each other

      vi. Acknowledging that working in multicultural groups demands greater interpersonal skills than working in homogeneous groups. Teachers should help to create safe and trusting relationships and use their emancipatory authority to legitimate NNES students in their classrooms.