Inclusive Teaching:

ideas and insights from linguistically integrated classrooms

UNDERSTANDING
SEUNGKWAN /JASON/ CHAE '17 REPUBLIC OF KOREA
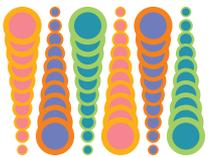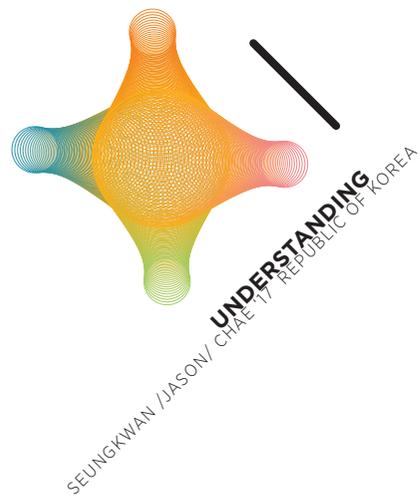
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Through the support of the Provost, MICA initiated a Teaching Circle consisting of faculty members from a variety of disciplines and offices on campus, who met during Fall and Spring, 2016–17. The Teaching Circle engaged in critical reflection and collegial support of best practices for integrating English language learners into studio and academic classes on the graduate and undergraduate level. We sought ways to value the contribution these students make to our school, and ways to address the challenges they face. Comprised of nine adjunct and full time educators, the Teaching Circle was able to share ideas that transcend departmental boundaries. Collected here are some of the insights and techniques gathered by the group. These ideas come from scholarly readings, discussions with peers, and practices that we tested in our own classrooms. Most of the ideas collected here yield inclusive learning experiences that benefit all students, not just English language learners.

Students coming to an art school in the US from a different part of the world may struggle to adapt to the school's academic demands and its customary views regarding creativity, originality, or authority. They may feel isolated or marginalized by students and faculty who represent the school's dominant culture. Similar challenges may face students coming from diverse cultural or economic backgrounds. Faculty may fail to recognize the problems newcomers are facing and the new energy they bring to the community. The ideas collected here aim to build sensitivity to the needs of all students.
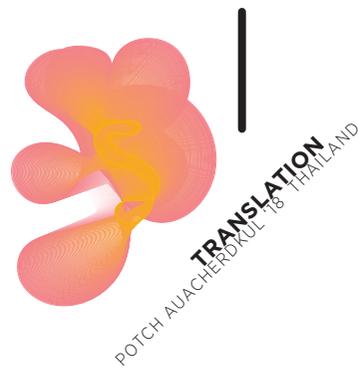
ATTITUDES AND MINDSETS

Research shows that high-quality interaction with faculty is the single most important factor in helping students succeed. It is not enough to say, "Students must adapt to the way we do it here." Change and awareness must happen on all sides. Listed here are some common attitudes and mindsets faculty and students should acknowledge.

The challenges faced by international students and other non-dominant groups include **language development barriers, academic differences, social exclusion, emotional issues, and financial pressure**.

International students may feel anxiety about the status of their **student visas in a new political climate and about currency values and tuition payment.**

English language learners (ELLs) are sometimes **ignored or overlooked by native US peers** during group projects or class discussions.

ELLs worry about **whether to assert their cultural identities or try to fit in.**

Some students suffer from shyness. However, shyness is not a permanent trait. Students can outgrow shyness if classroom settings help them feel comfortable. **Repeated practice can help students overcome their fears.**

International students need help **adjusting to new educational expectations and a new social setting.**

Because of their backgrounds, **some international students are not prepared to live independently.**

Some international students don't understand **Western concepts of academic misconduct, such as cheating and plagiarism.** These are cultural values that need to be explicitly taught.

Learners from some backgrounds may be very concerned with saving face in front of a classroom, compared to learners who feel open and relaxed with faculty and peers.

Students coming to the US might manifest cultural issues and psychological stress as physical symptoms. "Culture shock," a natural part of adjusting to life in a new society, will often surface several months into a student's first semester.

IMPLICATIONS TO CONSIDER

A student's **intelligence, talent, or commitment to learning** is not the same as their current language proficiency.

Students use of their native language with peers does not indicate a lack of interest in learning English.

Power structures exist among students, not just between students and faculty.

Many US-born students are unprepared for multicultural experiences. Some have never had friends or close peers who are different from them.

Ways to break down the power structure in your class **include closing the physical distance between faculty and students and moving around the room** to be with a group that has been silent or disengaged.

In China's education system, forty students move together in one cohort. Faculty come to the students. **One student emerges as the leader, who speaks with the faculty member.** Similar structures can emerge in a US classroom. One person becomes a de facto group leader.

English language learning is intersectional. A student might be a native Chinese speaker, a first-generation college student, and an English language learner.

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TRIUMPH
KAVYA SINGH BARTHWAL '18 INDIA
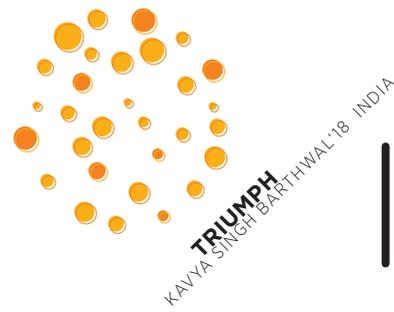
Most teaching strategies that help English language learners (ELLs) are helpful to all students. Courses that accommodate different ways to learn and different ways to participate yield better experiences for everyone. Creating varied experiences yields a more inclusive classroom.

Give students a choice. Design different projects for different students.

Don't assess everyone the same way. Account for different abilities and different modes of achievement.

Explicitly discuss your preferences for how students and faculty will communicate. Learners want to know what instructors expect. Should students communicate by text or email? Use last names or first names? Raise their hands or call out? **Clear expectations help students reduce anxiety and build confidence.**

Discuss the answers after a quiz. This provides a chance to display knowledge. Students can talk about their answers with a partner or with the whole class.

Build from low stakes *(ungraded quizzes and quick exercises)* **to higher stakes** *(exams and extended projects).*

Nearly every student benefits from one-on-one instruction. Students expect individual attention at a small private art college.

Guiding students actively through a task, such as learning a software technique or finding an online journal article, **is more helpful than just telling them how to do it.**

Be clear and brief in your syllabus. A syllabus that is too long and detailed can be overwhelming.

Use project sheets to provide information in depth, beyond what's listed in a syllabus. Learners can take the project sheet to the college's Writing Studio or to a peer for help.

Share project instruction sheets in a digital format to allow students to use translation software.

Add pictograms or other graphics to your syllabus and project sheets to reinforce understanding of instructions and due dates.

Include definitions of new vocabulary on project sheets.

Distribute assignments in advance so that questions can be raised and answered in class.

Create a **paper trail** of information conveyed in class. Share slides, PDFs, and handouts on a class website or via email.

Write key words and concepts on a whiteboard.

As a quick exercise, **ask students to try writing their names with their non-dominant hand.** After three or four tries, they will get better. **This demonstrates that their skills can improve**, including their language skills.

SUCCESS
YI PAN '18 TAIWAN
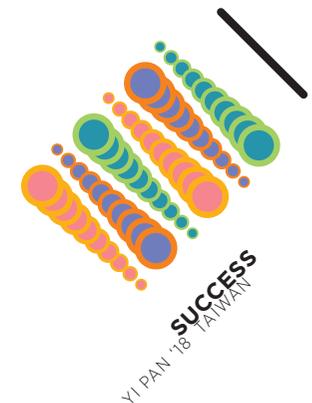
CRITIQUES

In many classroom critiques, the instructor goes through each project verbally one by one. The instructor leads the discussion, and students volunteer to contribute. Shy students may avoid participating, and confident ones may dominate. Lengthy critiques can leave all parties bored and disengaged. Experimenting with alternative critique methods can create more dynamic and inclusive experiences.

Write down student or faculty comments on post-it notes. Many students benefit from informal written feedback.

During a critique, encourage the student whose work is being discussed to take notes, or ask another student to do so. In the pressure of the moment, valuable comments can get lost or misunderstood.

Ask each student to print two copies of the project *(one to be left pristine, the second to be written on).* The sheets circulate around the room as each student comments on everyone's work. **Comments are anonymous. Students leave with all the notes.**

Before a group discussion, **ask each student to write down three comments,** including "compliments" and "suggestions," on individual sheets of paper. Shuffle and disperse the sheets. Take turns reading comments as a starting point for discussion.

To broaden participation, use "Talking Sticks" *(an idea developed by our colleague Shyla Rao).* **Each student gets several popsicle sticks or other simple objects, and everyone places a stick in a selected spot when they wish to comment.** If desired, color-code the sticks for "compliments" and "suggestions."

Pass an object around the room during the critique. Each student speaks or leads the discussion when it's their turn to hold the object.

PRIDE
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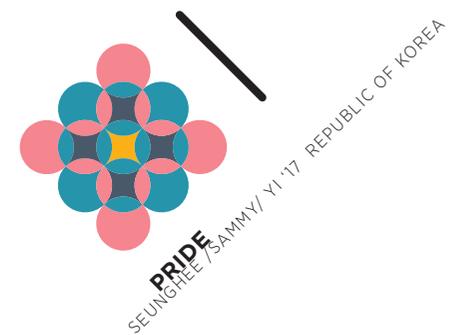
CONNECTION
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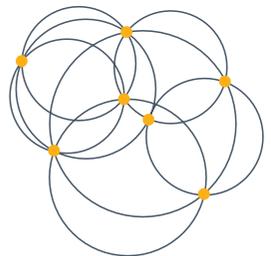
DISCOVERING
CHERYL TAM '18 HONG KONG

WRITING

Provide students with a clear and detailed **assignment sheet** so that students have a document to share with a writing tutor, instructor, or peer editor and to reread to ensure they understand the instructions and expectations.

Similarly, share your **grading rubric or criteria** before students submit their papers.

When possible, allow students to **submit a draft** for suggestions before they rewrite their final version.

GROWTH
REYNA CLARISSA '18 INDONESIA

SHARING
SEAN DONG '19 CHINA

Some writing errors inhibit understanding, while more local errors mark the writer as a non-native speaker. These more superficial errors are similar to speaking with an accent.

Write specific editing suggestions in clear handwriting *(preferably in print rather than cursive, since some language learners cannot easily read cursive handwriting).*

Provide students with **an editing key if you offer abbreviations or editing marks on student papers.** *(Not everyone knows what a frag. refers to).*

Use writing as a thinking tool. Be clear about the goal of the writing exercise. Is the primary purpose to communicate an idea, to brainstorm ideas, to take time for reflection, or to improve writing skills?

Academic texts often use ornate and indirect language. Articles riddled with jargon and complex sentences are challenging to any student. Find ways to help students get more value from assigned readings, and inspire them to use their own writing as a tool for thinking and communicating.

Provide students with **questions to think about while they read.**

Provide a list of **vocabulary words or concepts to define** as they read.

Provide students with **an outline of a text in advance.** This aids comprehension and helps students know what to look for.

Ask students to create an outline for an assigned text. It's helpful to see the instructor's outline first.

Help students learn to read selectively. How much of a book or article do they need to read? **What parts are most important?**

It may take domestic students 5 minutes per page to read a somewhat challenging reading assignment, **but it can take language learners 4 times as long. Try to assess the difficulty and length of reading assignments.**

Ask students to **identify the thesis in an article and then find evidence in the article that supports the thesis.** This prepares them to write their own papers.

Highlight key parts of an assigned text. This helps students focus on understanding the points that will be discussed in class.

Assess comprehension at the start of class with a **quick low-risk quiz or game.**

GETTING IT
PEI-AN /KIMMY/ TSAI '17 TAIWAN

WONDER
KATJA FLUEKIGER '18 SWITZERLAND

Some learners are uncomfortable working in groups because teacher-centered instruction is the norm in their culture of origin. Others are self-conscious about their language skills or feel marginalized by other members of the group. Research studies show, however, that many English language learners (ELLs) embrace group work after giving it a try. Groups provide a chance to interact with peers and test answers and ideas.

Over the duration of a course, **vary the sizes of groups—large/small/individual, or circles/squares/pairs.** Different experiences will work better for different students.

Use a variety of methods to build groups. Self-selected groups often lack diversity.

Assign a different task to each student in a group. This helps prevent one student from doing all the work.

Instructors should step in when there is trouble in the group. Forcing students to "work it out" can disadvantage ELLs.

Have a small group **"perform" a discussion in front of the whole class,** as in a talk show.

A **"lightning presentation"** is a quick presentation delivered by a group of 3–5 students.

Ask students in small groups to talk about life problems they are facing. Ask them to find connections between course material and life issues.

Ask students to stand up and form two lines in relation to an issue. **Then ask the two lines to face each other and pair off,** bringing students into contact with people they might disagree with.

Ask students to create **concept maps about a project, topic, or artwork** and share with a partner.

In jigsaw groups, students start their work in one group and then switch to a new group to share knowledge and progress.

Pause during a lecture or presentation and ask students to form note-taking pairs, where they will compare their notes and discuss what might be missing or unclear.

Make reading into a group activity. Divide an assigned text into three sections. Each person in the group gets a section and reads it for specific questions. **Readers explain their answers to their group.**

What does participation look like?

Participation isn't only answering a question or sharing an opinion with the whole class. It can also include responding to a question online, proposing a question for discussion, submitting comments in writing, or taking part in a small group discussion. Build an inclusive classroom by fostering different kinds of participation.

Pause after asking a question. Don't call on the first person who raises a hand. Give others a chance to gather their thoughts and their courage.

Ask good questions. These are succinct and appropriate to the language level of the students. Good questions for discussion call for new information rather than canned knowledge.

Ask students to generate discussion questions about an assigned reading or topic.

Before a critique, **let students look at all the work for a few minutes** and practice what they might say.

Create a Twitter hashtag specifically for your course. Use it to conduct a Twitter poll or ask a question during class. Twitter makes the class feel open and conversational.

"Turn to your neighbor and discuss" invites students to informally process information, connect with one another, and be active. This can expand beyond talking. Try "turn to your neighbor" and draw, mime, perform, sing, dance, etc.

MOMENTUM
VISHNU VENUGOPAL '18 INDIA
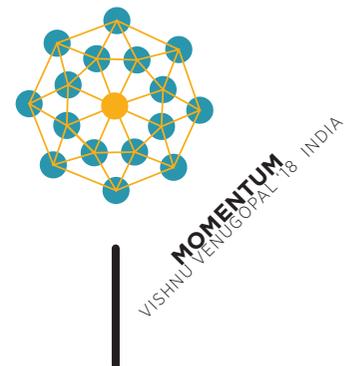
SOME TERMS

Active Learning: Pedagogy that seeks to decentralize classroom conversation. Students interact with one another, not just with the instructor. Students move around and take part in different pairs and groups. Participation happens everywhere, not just in front of the whole group.

Action Research: This form of research is conducted by and for the "actors" or practitioners who are directly affected by a given problem. Action research includes testing a pedagogical idea in a classroom and then sharing and applying the outcomes.

BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills) vs CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency): BICS refers to everyday communication, while CALP refers to expert communication in an academic setting. ELL's and native students alike may be confident with BICS but stymied by CALP.

ELL (English language learner): This term refers to any student who is not proficient in English and is working to improve their skills. ELL's include learners who are studying ESL (English as a second language). For many ELL's, English is a third or fourth language.

Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: This set of concepts was developed by the library community. It addresses the power dynamics around who has access to information. Principles include the following: authority is constructed and contextual; information has value; and searching is a strategic exploration.

Heritage Language Instruction: Students study a "home" language that is spoken by their family/cultural group as seen in Native American language revitalization.

Translingual Instruction: Here, students use their native language for some or all of a class session. Allowing students to use their native language can foster their success. For example, a learner in a given language group will sometimes ask another student to explain what the teacher is saying. Students may want to locate secondary sources in their native language in place of assigned texts.

EXCHANGING
ELISA HERKENHOFF BLOCH '16 BRAZIL

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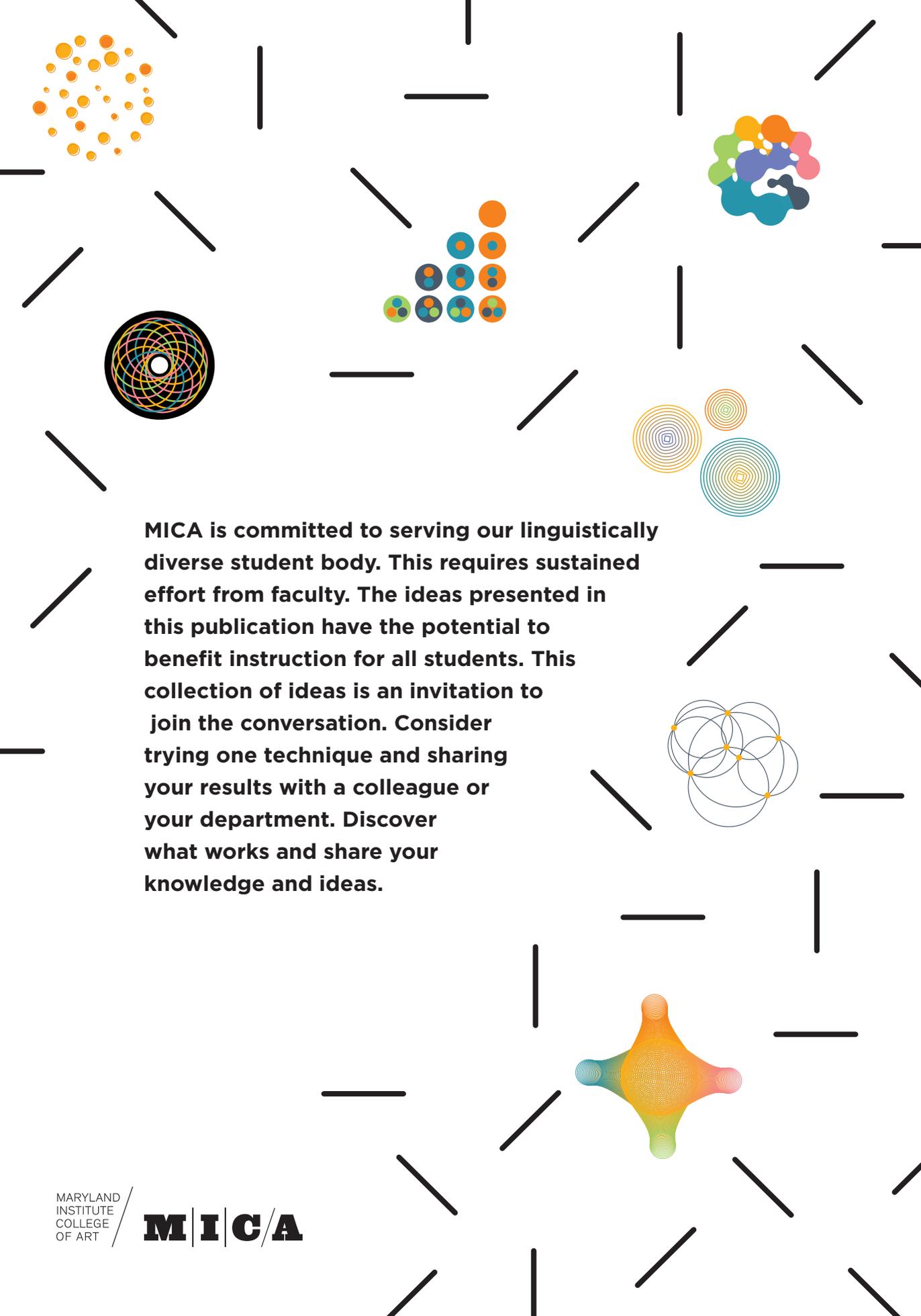
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MICA is committed to serving our linguistically diverse student body. This requires sustained effort from faculty. The ideas presented in this publication have the potential to benefit instruction for all students. This collection of ideas is an invitation to join the conversation. Consider trying one technique and sharing your results with a colleague or your department. Discover what works and share your knowledge and ideas.