

Different Cultures/Different Classrooms

1. Undergraduate classrooms in many countries are highly structured and teacher-centered with large numbers of students and high stakes year-end exams instead of problem sets and quizzes.

What adjustment problems might an international TA from such a country have teaching an MIT recitation? What adjustment problems might an international student from such a country have in participating in an MIT recitation?

2. One of your students—a minority student—seems passive and distant. She doesn't answer any questions you ask in class and is reluctant to participate when you call on her.

What are some possible reasons for her behavior? How can you encourage her to become more active in her own learning?

3. You are a TA for a course in which students work in teams to complete a semester-long assignment. One of your teams is composed of two U.S. students and two international students who, coincidentally, are from the same country. Halfway through the semester, the two U.S. students come to you to complain that the international students aren't doing their share of the work. You meet with the international students, and they tell you the U.S. students won't give them the time they need to do the tasks they've agreed to take on—it takes them longer because English isn't their first language. What do you do?

4. You are a TA for one section of a large introductory science course. A group of students who are in the course (but not in your recitation) comes to talk with you during your office hours. They ask if they can switch into your recitation because they aren't learning from their TA: He is an international graduate student who has a strong accent. They tell you they don't think he even knows the material. What do you do?

5. You recently cold-called a student in class. He gave an incorrect answer. You had responded, "No, that's not right. Can anyone provide the right answer?" Another student answered the question correctly.

By the end of the week, you've noticed that the student is withdrawn and detached from the class. He arrives late, is unprepared, and doesn't participate in group-work. What should you do?