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Northwood University

Northwood University is a historically white institution; 88 percent of the most recent graduating class was made up of middle-upper class white women and 97 percent of the faculty and upper administration is also white middle-upper class.

“I don’t know what to do next,” said Mustapha to his academic advisor. “I was a great student back home but here I am struggling. I am surely failing two of my three classes. I don’t know if this college right for me. Maybe I should consider transferring to another university, one that is more open to international students.”

Dr. Riley, Mustapha’s academic advisor, sighed. This was the second such case she had had to deal with this semester—being placed in the uncomfortable position of mentoring a student who feels gravely misunderstood, underestimated, and marginalized. Last semester, she had an advisee named Maria who was a journalist for a national newspaper in Brazil, but here she was told by professors that there were serious issues with the quality of her writing and who questioned her ability to meet her academic requirements. She was put on academic probation, something absolutely stigmatizing in her culture. Devastated by the ongoing negative feedback, low grades, lack of support and empathy, and her inability to express her understanding of key concepts in sophisticated English, she considered dropping out of the program. As an immigrant, Maria made a huge financial sacrifice to attend classes and, ultimately, she decided to drop out of the program altogether. Dr. Riley often wondered what she could have done to prevent Maria from dropping out.

Dr. Riley is a fierce advocate of diversity on campus. She feels it is an asset but knows that many faculty members feel differently. When students feel unwelcome here, it bothers her. To avoid a similar outcome, she asked Mustapha to tell her more. Mustapha relayed the most recent events.

“For your final assignment, you will work with a group of classmates to identify what you deem to be a pressing social issue of campus. Adopting the principles learned in this course, I ask you to co-author a strategic plan of action for resolving the issue. This assignment is designed to be meaningful and relevant, so please think carefully about a serious issue on campus and develop a solution and plan of action,” announced Professor Benson to his undergraduate Project Management course at

Northwood University. Students shuffled around into groups. As usual, Mustapha, the only international student and student of color in the class, looked over to find a semi-friendly face, usually a kind female, to give him a nonverbal cue that her group could use one more person.

It has been difficult for Mustapha to form social relationships with his American classmates. He feels that his ideas are often dismissed in class or that his professors and classmates secretly laugh at his accent or “inarticulate English,” as he defines it. Even though he is a respected member of a very successful family back home in Tunisia, he feels that he is not viewed with the same respect or intelligence as he is back in his home country. He lives off campus with a group of international students who attend other local area colleges.

Mustapha finally found a group of students to join. He is not at all accustomed to this style of learning. Back home, students would never work in groups on a final paper. How would the teacher know how much knowledge each student contributed? He felt this assignment was quite odd, but he tried to keep an open mind.

He was in a group with Jenny, Bob, Ashley, and Kim. Ashley and Jenny immediately insisted that rape on campus was the most important issue. Jenny proposed developing a strategic marketing plan of action to raise awareness of this issue. Bob agreed that this would be a good topic; he also thought that the terrible cafeteria food could be another topic. Jenny then suggested that they flip a coin between the two topics. Mustapha, never shy to share his opinion, immediately spoke up and said, “Although your proposals are also serious, they are not as important as the lack of integration of minority student populations, including foreign, immigrant, and Black students. Besides, I don’t think the females here will be too comfortable talking about rape in front of the men and we should be respectful of them. Besides, food is just not serious enough.” Bob replied, “No, I disagree. I think we will just stick to what is happening to everyone. This is too bad too but speaking about rape or food are topics that affect all students on campus.” Jenny concurred, “I totally agree.” Bob, Ashley, and Kim all rolled their

eyes and proceeded to plan a timeline for workload completion on a topic with which Mustapha did not agree. Not to mention, he caught their glances and eye roles and felt misjudged.

Feeling dismissed once more, Mustapha decided to speak to Professor Benson after class about the issue. He told Professor Benson, "I would prefer to choose a topic that is meaningful and relevant, and improving diversity and treatment on campus is very important." Professor Benson asked Mustapha what the students in his group felt about the topic. When Mustapha told them their proposals, Professor Benson replied, "Well, Mustapha, welcome to the democratic process. The majority wins. I am sorry but you will just have to settle on the topic your group has selected." Mustapha did not want to argue with his professor so he accepted his words but felt very upset about having his idea, yet again, dismissed. He did not want to mention how internally upset he felt about researching a topic as sensitive as rape alongside female peers. He did not want to mention that he was worried about his grade depending on successful group work.

Thus far, Professor Benson has assigned Mustapha two Ds and one C- on three of his four course papers. Mustapha is quite concerned about doing well on the final project so that he can improve his grade and bring up his GPA.

He never received such low scores in his home country. His English is intermediate/advanced and he makes frequent grammatical errors in his writing. However, when he looks at his feedback from Professor Benson, all he sees are lots of underlined sentences with the letters "akwd" written above it. When he looks at the grading rubric, he is often given the highest grade for content but the lowest grade for structure and coherence.

After hearing Mustapha's reflection, Dr. Riley knew something had to be done, but she didn't know what. She attended the associate provost's presentation on retention and enrollment issues, and the numbers (see Exhibit A) alarmed her. The university already has little diversity (see Exhibit B). As an employee of the university and an empathetic person, she was conflicted about how to best advise Mustapha. She felt as though she was caught between a rock and a hard place.

■ **Exhibit A: Retention Data**

Percentage of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students
(International and Immigrant Students) Who Drop Out
of Programs

- Academic Year 2017: 15 percent
- Academic Year 2018: 16 percent
- Academic Year 2019: 21 percent

■ **Exhibit B: Diversity Dashboard Data of Student Demographics**

- 88 percent white
- 8 percent BIPOC
- 2 percent international

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I. PRE-CASE DISCUSSION PROBLEM SETS

Complete the chart after reading the case.

Facts	
Opinions	
Assumptions	
Theories referred or connected to (if any)	
Ambiguous language	
Criteria you used in analyzing the case (e.g., emotional vs. rational)	
Emerging options	

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Write a pre-case discussion decision paper. Include these points:

- a. options for case resolution
- b. criteria (a rational decision should always be made with a set of criteria)
- c. analysis of options
- d. recommendation (of the best choice among the options)
- e. action plan

II. CASE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Big-Picture Analysis

Describe the context of the case.

- university climate
- classroom context

Stakeholders

In small groups, assume the role of one of the case stakeholders. Write a statement/dialogue expressing this person's or group's hypothetical feelings and perspectives. Be prepared to act out your roles to the large group.

- Dr. Riley
- Mustapha
- Maria
- Dr. Benson
- Jenny, Bob, Ashley, and Kim

Surface Issues

What are the surface issues in this case? What is happening here from an untrained perspective? What underlying assumptions or beliefs feed into this perspective?

Deep Issues

Discuss the real issues in the case. Try to categorize them in terms of language teaching curriculum and instruction.

Evidence-Based Solutions

In groups, develop evidence-based solutions for each deep issue listed. Whenever possible, refer to a theory or principle of language learning and teaching to support your proposed solutions.

Teacher Thinking

In what ways does this case influence and/or reinforce your beliefs and dispositions as a teacher? Consult the Further Readings and Resources section to help with theoretically informed solutions.

III. POST-CASE PROBLEM SETS

Post-Case Analysis

- A. Categorize what you learned as:
 - teacher knowledge and praxis (e.g., content knowledge, curricular knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and application)
 - teacher thinking (e.g., beliefs, problem-solving strategies, prioritizing objectives, values, professional ethics, attitudes)
- B. List:
 - learning objectives that you discovered in the case
 - potential learning outcomes
 - implications for your pedagogical practices
- C. The post-case problem sets introduce reactions from various perspectives. These quotes are from others who have read the cases for educational and pedagogical purposes. Read all of the quotes and then choose two quotes about which to write a short response (put the quotes at the top of each response). Use these questions as a guide:
 - What is the message the speaker is trying to convey? If possible, also explain why you chose the quote.
 - What examples can you think of that connect to the themes presented?
 - Can you relate the quote to a class discussion or to something you have read or experienced?

Quotes

1. "It would be valuable for the teacher and advisor to gather background information to support these two learners. We forget about the importance of identifying our learner's needs and backgrounds."
 2. "Dr. Benson shouldn't have to shift his entire pedagogical style to meet the need of one international student. After all, if these students come here, they should quickly adjust to our expectations."
 3. "Clearly, the teacher needs to incorporate flexible grouping and model expectations for effective and equitable collaboration. This embarrassing situation could have been averted with some careful planning or modifications."
- D. Write a reflection describing a take-away from the case in terms of praxis. Make sure to develop an action plan to resolve the case. Consider these questions as guidelines:
- In what ways did the case discussion influence your thinking about the case?
 - Did you change your original decision or did the discussion reaffirm your position?
 - What points had you not considered prior to the case discussion?
 - How might the information you gained from this case be applicable to your current instructional setting and/or future instructional settings?
 - What did you learn?
 - What are you inspired to learn more about?
 - How did the themes discussed in class apply to your experience?
- E. Discuss what theoretical basis there is for:
- the stakeholders' behaviors in the case.
 - the solutions you proposed.

Further Reading and Resources

- Carrol, J., & Ryan, J. (2006). *Teaching international students: Improving learning for all*. New York: Routledge.
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