

## Intercultural group work: From alienation to collaboration

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## Group work

- Due to differences in educational backgrounds, educational culture, and linguistic abilities, problems arise amongst the students
- Students attribute lowered levels of learning to the presence of international students in their groups and report harbouring resentment about the experience (Osmond & Roed, 2010)
- Domestic students and international students report favouring in-group associations (Montgomery, 2009)
- Even in faculties where courses on diversity and equity are explicitly taught non-mainstream domestic students also report being marginalized (Dunn, McKean & Hoang, 2014)

## Problematic aspects of intercultural work with students

- Mainstream undergraduate Canadian students
  - tend to espouse the virtues of "colour blindness"
  - denying privilege
  - believing that they only judge others by their abilities (Lindo, 2011)
- Some students even equate discussions about culture with racism (Halualani, 2008)
- At the institutional level,
  - administrators tend to localize the "problem" of cultural differences in international students
  - refer to them as "intercultural students" (Planning Task Force, 2014, p. 290)

- Arguably, the way group work is being undertaken is not achieving a primary goal of internationalization – "improved intercultural understanding and communication" (Knight, 1999, p. 20)

## Four stages of research

- Research focus: to learn more about the perspectives of students on campus who have already participated in group work.
- Stage One:
  - focus groups and/or individual interviews
  - advertised on posters across campus
  - 15 undergraduate
  - 6 graduate students (who requested to be involved)

Cultural background	Age	Time in Canadian ED	Discipline
Romanian/Austrian	18	10 Y	Bus
Jamaican	18	All	Arts
Chinese (HK) - M	19	15 Y	Bus
Chinese (HK)	19	16 Y	Bus
Chinese-Canadian	19	12 Y	Bus
Korean-Canadian	20	13 Y	Bus
African-Canadian	21	14 Y	Bus
Chinese-Canadian	22	All	Global studies
Ghanaian	21	All	Arts
Guinea	21	5 Y	Health Science
Chinese	21	3Y	Finance
Armenian	22	All	Bus
Filipino-Canadian	22	All	?
Chinese-Canadian - M	22	All	Bus
Chinese	23	3 M	Finance
Chinese	29	1 Y	Communications
Franco-Ontarian	29	All	Seminary
Nepal	33	1.5 Y	FSW
Pakistan	37	3 Y	FSW
Pakistan	41	2.5 Y	FSW
Kenyan (S. Asian/Muslim)	64	1 Y	FSW

## Some findings

- Not one “mainstream” – most mainstream = Franco-Ontarian
- All participants new to Canada -- or parents were
- 8 undergraduates reported “bridge” activities
- Concepts of culture included: full/part-time students/students with families/Economics vs. finance, gender, 1st year vs. 4th year, etc.
- No mention/recognition that group work assignments privilege students who have been educated within the Canadian academic culture
- Every participant mentioned “communication”

## Distinction between North & South Chinese

- “... our south people think [being straightforward] is impolite so during this project we south people just feel uncomfortable because the north people will just say the ideas in opposite to us, and though we know this difference in culture, but sometimes we also feel very uncomfortable, and then the next time if we needed to pick up the team members, we could prefer to choose the people from the same culture.”

• - F/MFin/Chinese (3mo)

## Silence when witnessing exclusion

- “... when I hear some students complaining that they’ve re-written the whole part, ... I usually don’t say anything to their face, cause I don’t want to – cause they’ve worked hard to get their mark ... they have a reason for ... rewriting that, ... but at the same time... I don’t mention it to [my international friends] that I know ... cause then it will just ... hurt their pride. And I think it ... blocks their ... ability to learn more ... it makes them shy away from their ... desire to learn. And it makes them go back to ... being friends with ... their own ethnic friends.”

- F/Korean-Canadian/20

## Implicit vs. explicit feedback

- “if I say something, ... my classmates will say, ‘oh, that’s a great idea, however, I think in this context it might work better in this way’ or ‘great idea ... let’s maybe explore a little bit more on that one’ ... it’s a very round-about way to say, ‘hey, I don’t think your idea will work but let’s try something else.’ ... in China if I work with you, we have this concept that ... you are a group member and ... now we are all insiders of this group ... once you establish that bond, I will tell you, ‘no, this idea will definitely not work ...’ I’ll be very straightforward with you.”

- F/29/Chinese

## Exclusions hidden under “respectful” implicit feedback

- “If we are given a task or we are doing something together, we will express our opinions really freely and we will be direct ... I will not go the other way around that, ‘okay I’m listening to you, I’m trying to be respectful’ but [then] not respect your opinion at the end ... I feel that immigrant students are very direct, and that’s ... one of the main reasons for the conflict that develops within the group”

- F/41/Pakistani

- “they [exclude you] surreptitiously; they exclude you without actually telling you the reasons why they think [something] is not relevant”

- F/64/Kenyan



## Stage 2

- a) a textbook unit on delivering effective feedback for inclusion in the curriculum of a large first-year (2100 students) business class,
- b) an online module about culture and its impact on approaches to feedback
  - 20 minutes long (*really* hard to limit to 20 minutes)
  - Importance of feedback/ Culture – emphasis on intersectionality/ impact of culture on feedback / fundamental attribution error / direct-sandwiched-indirect feedback / group as culture & opportunity to create culture of feedback in group

## Stage Three:

- a pretest and a post-test of these business students' awareness of feedback in group work;
- 8 multiple choice questions
- 1 demographic question
- Of 2100 students in course
  - 343 took pre-test
  - 256 took post-test
  - Permission to use: 189

Group	Pre-test Mean	Post-test mean	N	Significance
Newcomers K-12	45%	66%	41	p<.001 Effect = .42 (large)
Domestic students	50%	64%	100	p<.001 Effect = .34 (large)
International students	54%	60%	48	p<.05 Effect = .11 (moderate)

Method utilized, paired t-test

## Stage Four

- Currently sending out survey to all BU111 students
- Determine whether they (or group members) watched module & whether it had any influence on their feedback in groups
- Data collection has been complicated

## Questions / comments / feedback?



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