

Enhancing Intercultural Group Work

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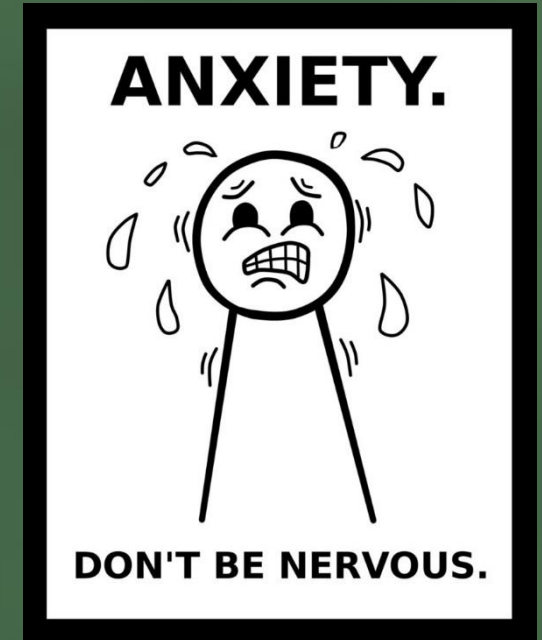
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“When I heard we were doing group
work again I shouted ‘Oh my God, not
again’ in my mind...
It means I still need to be tortured
again and again”



Sources of Anxiety

- Division of work (freeloaders)
- Scheduling
- Academic standing
- Working with strangers
 - Lack of control
 - Language proficiency, communication, culture (International students)



Research Questions

How are students' experiences of group work influenced by intentional formation and preparation of groups?

How are students' experiences of group work influenced by evaluation that includes the process of working with others?

TMGT 3010 Community and Cultural Issues in Tourism

Intercultural Content

- Intercultural 101: Communication / Dimensions
- Content without application
- _____

Original Group Formation

- Student selected
- Encouraged to work across cultures

Revised Approach

- Focus on valuing diversity in teams
 - Developing intercultural competencies (cultural self-awareness, communication styles & patterns)
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- Intentional formation of groups
 - Formation based on diversity, skills and student input
 - Group charter

TMGT 3010

Evaluation

- **Product of group work**
 - Fully evaluated by instructor based on academic quality

Revised Approach

Process as part of evaluation

- 30% for product (15% presentation, 15% paper)
- 20% for process (10% guided self-reflection, 10% guided peer evaluation)

Data Collection

Data from students' guided self-reflection

3 semesters (76 participants)

- 30 domestic students
- 46 international students



Method

Qualitative data from students' guided self-reflections
(7 questions)

Responses were coded in Nvivo to measure shifts in
attitudes toward groups work (negative, neutral, positive)

Responses specific to pedagogical interventions were
coded and quantified to measure the impact of each

The Influence of Intentional Group Formation

- Skills part of selection
- Diversity valued – multiple perspectives
- Not feeling pressure to work with friends

Intentional group formation

- “The formation of the groups was very beneficial because people weren’t able to work in their cliques, and this definitely allowed us to learn new things from each other as well as make friendships we otherwise wouldn’t have made.

(domestic student)

- I think the Canadian students in our group really tried to appreciate that different students have different life experience and backgrounds. Both of us believe diversity can add depth and breadth and produce a completely new understanding of the ideas discussed.

(international student)

The Influence of Intercultural Preparation

- 40% of reflections directly referenced the intercultural preparation from class.
- Comments were self-reflective demonstrating an awareness of their own preferences and styles
- Learning about intercultural communication prior to the group work was key to negotiating diversity



- “I started noticing almost immediately how each person in my team has a different way of communicating as well as how they work. I tried to take this into account in how I communicated and treated my team members”

(Domestic Student)

Evaluation

- “Doing the evaluations influenced my experience because it made me look at what I am bringing to the group and what I should be doing for the group”
- “I learned so much through this process of self-reflection and peer evaluation...it is important to listen and consider the ideas and inputs of others. I have learned that diversity is alive and important”

Findings

Start of Semester		End of Semester	
Negative	42	Negative	6
Neutral	14	Neutral	11
Positive	20	Positive	59
Total	76		76

74% Started with negative or neutral attitudes and at the end of the semester 78% reported a positive experience

Shifts in Attitude

Before

- “When I heard we were doing group work again I shouted ‘oh my God, not again’ in my mind. It means I still need to be tortured again and again”
- “Throughout university group work has been a challenge for me. When you said you would be picking group members, I was concerned”

After

- “Such an amazing experience. This time the group experience was impressive and enjoyable”
- “The experience opened my eyes though. I believe this exercise will stick with me and keep me from avoiding new partners of different nationalities”

Outcomes

- “I used to think saving face was the priority when working in the group. As long as I did not bring shame on the group, I would work in harmony with other members. However the group taught me that task accomplishment was the core goal of the group and that respect and dignity is earned through excellent work”
- “I felt nervous about being put in a group with three international students but after working with them I feel horrible about ever doubting their capabilities”

Outcomes

- “I learned that we may be from different cultures and have varying perceptions but we can make these differences work to our advantage”
- “Diversity takes my lead. Not only diversity in countries and cultures, as we were four international students and one Canadian student, but it was diversity in ideas, perspectives, worldviews and suggestions”
- “I would take the whole experience as a learning and self-discovery exercise”

How did this process influence the way you will approach group work in the future?

- “I have learned to be aware of other ideas & preferences instead of just my own – important to listen and consider other ideas - collaboration = success”
- “This process like no other before, showed me how attitudes and mindsets differ around the world and taught me how to deal with these differences”

Conclusion

- Preparation is key
- Intentional group formation
- Process as part of the evaluation for group work

Okay, but how can we make it better?

Refined approach

- Pre-assignment survey on group work
 - Instead of asking at the end of the semester
- Intercultural preparation - 2 class visits with specific focus on world views, cultural perceptions and communication.
- Self reflection questions focused on which aspects of the intercultural content contributed directly to student development
- Peer evaluations prior to self –reflections

If you are interested, we will keep you posted on our progress

Thank you !