
PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL ENGAGEMENT & COLLABORATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

A Handbook by Centre for Teaching & Learning
Queen's University

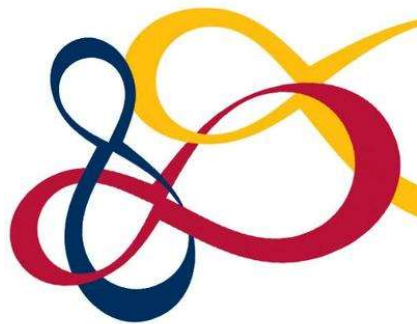


Table of Contents

Intercultural Collaboration for Learning Framework.....	1
Planning Collaboration.....	2
Forming Intercultural Groups.....	4
Supporting Collaboration.....	6
Creating An Environment to Collaborate	8
Incorporating Reflective Processes.....	10
Assessing Collaboration.....	12
References	14

Intercultural Collaboration for Learning Framework¹



(Adapted from Arkoudis, S., et al., 2010)

1. Planning collaboration
2. Forming intercultural groups
3. Supporting collaboration
4. Creating an environment to collaborate
5. Incorporating reflective processes
6. Assessing collaboration

1. Planning Collaboration

Planning is the first and foremost step to foster engagement and interactions among students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Formalizing intercultural collaboration in the classroom can be achieved in a number of ways¹.

1) Identify the instructional objectives²

- a. Determine what students need to achieve through group work, i.e., master academic knowledge of a topic or practice intercultural communication skills, etc.
- b. For group work to be effective, students need a clear sense that it is "serving the stated learning goals" of the course^{3, p. 280}.
- c. When deciding whether to use group work for a specific task or assignment, consider the questions:
 - What is the goal of the activity?
 - Does the goal align with the course objectives, and how?
 - Is the activity challenging or complex enough that it requires group work?
 - Will the activity require true collaboration that doesn't allow students to work individually and then put something together as one 'submission'?

2) Engage with subject knowledge¹

Group work needs to be used to encourage students' engagement with the subject knowledge through learning from each other's prior knowledge, experiences, and values. For example:

- Discussion-based activities requiring students to discuss a course-related issue, analyze a case study, present an argument and/or provide examples from their own experiences
- Problem-solving activities requiring students to pool their knowledge and work through a problem or set of questions
- Group projects requiring diverse perspectives and a range of skills
- Practical activities requiring students to work together to apply technical/practical skills (e.g., conducting a chemistry experiment, constructing a model, giving a presentation, preparing an artistic performance etc.).

3) Design collaboration in multiple forms²

Intercultural collaboration comes in a variety of manifestations in the classroom. For example, pairs, small groups, large groups, online synchronously, online asynchronously, and so forth. Please keep it in mind that some students might be better at contributing after they have had time to digest information or materials, while others might be better at thinking on the spot. Other students may defer to others in large groups but actively contribute when working in pairs. All roles should be valued and included.

4) Allow sufficient time for collaboration^{2, 4}

Estimate the amount of time that students need to complete the group activity. Start early in the semester, if possible, so that group members would have enough time to get to know each other and work on the tasks or assignments.

5) Create interdependence²

All group members should feel a sense of personal responsibility for the success of their peers and realize that their individual success depends on the group's success. This type of cooperative learning is referred to as positive interdependence which tends to result in learners promoting each other's success.

Suggested Strategies and Examples^{2, 5}

a. <i>Ensure projects are sufficiently complex that students must draw on one another's knowledge and skills.</i>	In one course on game design, group assignments require students to create playable games that incorporate technical (e.g., programming) and design skills. To complete the assignment successfully, students from different disciplines must draw on one another's strengths.
b. <i>Create shared goals that can only be met through collaboration.</i>	In one engineering course, students work in teams to design and then display a boat (assessed on various dimensions such as stability and speed, etc.) by applying engineering principles and working within budgetary and material constraints.
c. <i>Limit resources to compel students to share critical information and materials.</i>	In a short-term project for an architectural design course, the instructor provides student groups with a set of materials (e.g., tape, cardboard, string) and assigns them the task of building a structure that conforms to particular design parameters using only these materials. Because students have limited resources, they cannot divide tasks but must strategize and work together.
d. <i>Assign roles within the group that will help facilitate collaboration. (e.g., recorder, spokesperson, summarizer, organizer, editor, observer, timekeeper, liaison to other groups, etc.).</i>	In a semester-long research project for a history course, the instructor assigns students distinct roles within their groups: one student is responsible for initiating and sustaining communication with the rest of the group, another with coordinating schedules and organizing meetings, another with recording ideas generated and decisions made at meetings, and a fourth with keeping the group on task and cracking the whip when deadlines are approaching. The instructor rotates students through these roles, so that they each get practice performing each function.

2. Forming Intercultural Groups

Randomly assigning students to groups by counting off and grouping them according to numbers is the quickest approach, especially for large and cramped classes. To vary group composition and increase diversity within groups, here are a few main factors to consider²:

1) Decide on group size^{2, 5}

The size instructors choose will depend on the number of students, the size of the classroom, the variety of voices needed within a group, and the task assigned. Groups of four-five tend to balance the needs for diversity, productivity, active participation, and cohesion. However, there are no firm rules, and the size of a group should be shaped by the project's learning objectives.

2) Decide who has the responsibility for selecting group members⁵

The responsibility for selecting group members can be viewed as a continuum between instructors and students. Students tend to like choosing their own group members which may not support the learning objectives of the activity. Without student input, instructors may be able to choose groups that serve the project's learning objectives but may not anticipate interpersonal issues among group members.

As a hybrid approach, instructors might allow students to select their own group members within particular constraints (e.g., no groups have more than two native English speakers, etc.). Instructors can also solicit student input before composing the groups, i.e., asking students to complete a short questionnaire about their competency in relevant skills or if there are interpersonal issues with classmates that would prevent effective group interaction.

3) Decide on roles⁵

Some projects require that each group member plays a specialized role to mimic workplace environments (e.g., project manager, data analyst, spokesperson, etc.). Some instructors specify the roles that must be represented in every group and then allow students to join groups based on their strengths. It should be noted that if a course goal is for students to learn to play different roles, the opposite strategy might be effective: instructors can assign students to roles that move them out of their comfort zone and develop new skills.

4) Identify relevant characteristics of group members⁵

The characteristics of group members can influence how effectively students achieve the learning objectives of the project. There is no single set of relevant characteristics for group members because it depends on the course, learning objectives, student groups, and the nature of the project. Below are some common characteristics to consider when composing intercultural groups:

- **Prior knowledge, previous experiences, and skills.** If instructors want to structure groups to distribute particular types of knowledge (e.g., programming skills, design expertise, experience

with historical research) across groups, they can assess students' prior knowledge or ask them to complete a skills inventory.

- **Diversity of perspectives.** Diversity is often seen in terms of gender, culture, race/ethnicity, and native language, but instructors might also consider the relevance of socioeconomic, political, geographic, and other differences to the project's learning objectives. However, it is important to make sure that there is critical mass in every group (at best) so that members of a particular social category (e.g., race, gender) do not find themselves isolated in a group. For example, in a class that has four women and four groups, instead of placing one woman in each group, consider putting two women in two groups.
- **Students' familiarity with each other.** Students who have worked together effectively in groups before may be more likely to work together effectively again. Before students are placed in groups, instructors can ask students if they have worked effectively with classmates on previous group projects. If students are expected to focus more on the product than the process of group work, this may be a relevant characteristic. Similarly, if another group project will be assigned later, it may be useful to structure the group work in a way that helps meet the present project's learning objectives and prepares students to work together again in the future.
- **Personality.** Students' tendencies to act as extraverts or introverts are relevant to the roles that may be defined formally or informally. For example, an extraverted student may seem like a natural choice as a group leader. However, an introverted student who is detail-oriented may also be an effective group leader for ensuring that other group members are on schedule. If one of the course goals is to help students develop the skills required for different roles, consider assigning or encouraging students to choose roles in which they have less experience or proficiency. There are also several software programs (e.g., [CATME](#)) that help instructors create teams according to the criteria that they specify.
- **Motivation.** Mixing students with different motivations within a group sometimes cause tensions and problems. To counter this, some instructors group students by motivation. Distributing a questionnaire in which students reflect on their motivation, work habits, and desired grade—and then share the questionnaires with each other, but not with instructors—can help students identify classmates they would work well with.

5) Develop a contingency plan for changes in group membership⁵

Sometimes students may withdraw from the course or be dismissed from the group due to certain reasons. Both scenarios no longer allow for the group composition to continue whether it is decided by instructors or student themselves. Therefore, a contingency plan should be developed just in case group membership changes during the project. Consider in advance what alternative work is feasible for groups when a member withdraws from the course, as well as for individual students who have been dismissed from their groups.

3. Supporting Collaboration

The focus of this dimension is helping students understand the purpose of intercultural engagement and interactions and develop associated skills to work effectively with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds¹.

1) Introduce the group activity²:

- **Share the rationale for using group work.** Don't assume that students understand the benefits of intercultural engagement and interactions. Instead, explicitly explain how these activities are connected to learning goals.
- **Explain the task clearly.** Share with students what they need to do and describe what the final product of their group work will look like. Explain the big picture or final goal is important, especially when the group work will take place in steps. Prepare written or visual instructions (e.g., charts, sequential diagrams, etc.) for students, and remember to include time estimations for activities.
- **Set ground rules for group interaction.** For extended periods of group work, establish principles such as respect, active listening, and methods for decision making. Consider using a group contract.
- **Clarify instructor's role in support.** Communicate clearly with students what instructors can/cannot do to help with group work.
- **Let students ask questions.** Even if instructors often believe their instructions are crystal clear, students may have legitimate questions about the activity. Give them time to ask questions before they get to work.

2) Monitor the group task²:

- **Facilitate some form of group cohesion.** Students work best together if they get to know each other beforehand. For brief group activities, have students introduce themselves. For longer periods of group work, use icebreakers to build a sense of teamwork or community.
- **Monitor the groups but do not hover.** As students do their work, circulate among the groups, and answer any questions raised. Also listen for trends emerging from the discussions that are worth being referred to during the subsequent plenary discussion. Avoid interfering with group functioning; allow time for students to solve their own issues or problems before getting involved.

3) Build in individual accountability⁵

In order to gauge whether individual students have met the criteria, it is important to structure individual accountability into group work. In addition to evaluating the work of the group as a whole,

consider asking individual members to demonstrate their learning via self-reflections, weekly journal entries, etc. Not only does this help instructors monitor student learning, but it also helps to prevent the “free-rider” phenomenon. Students are less likely to leave all the work to more responsible groupmates if they know their individual performance will affect their grade. The individual portion might consist of a summary of the group’s decision-making process, a synthesis of lessons learned, a description of the individual student’s contributions to the group, etc.

4) Devote time specifically to teamwork skills⁵

Don’t assume students already know how to work in groups. Here are a few strategies that can be implemented in practice to help students develop necessary skills for group activities.

Strategy	Example
<i>a. Address negative or inaccurate preconceptions about group work.</i>	<p>If students haven’t taken group work or if their experiences were negative, it may affect how they approach collaborations in the course. Consider asking them to list positive and negative aspects of group activities based on their previous experiences and then to brainstorm strategies for preventing or mitigating potentially negative aspects of group work.</p> <p>Also explain how the task or assignment has been structured to minimize problems (such as the free-rider phenomenon students may have encountered in the past).</p>
<i>b. Provide guidance to help students plan the work.</i>	<p>Model the process of planning for a complex task by explaining the steps in detail. Build time into the project schedule that is specifically devoted to planning.</p>
<i>c. Set interim deadlines.</i>	<p>Break the project down into steps or stages and set deadlines for interim deliverables, e.g., a project proposal, timeline, bibliography, first draft. In addition to setting interim deadlines, give students a rough sense of how long various steps of the project are likely to take and warn them about matters they will need to attend that are earlier than they might expect.</p>
<i>d. Alert students to common pitfalls.</i>	<p>Point out potential pitfalls of group activities. Common pitfalls may include conflicts, coordinating access to resources, underestimating the amount of time required to schedule meetings, computer clusters, getting research done, preparing presentations, revising reports, etc.</p> <p>In addition, help students handle disagreements and tensions productively, provide language they can use to voice objections and preferences constructively and reinforce listening skills.</p>

4. Creating an Environment to Collaborate

Intercultural collaboration in higher education goes beyond pedagogical practices but focuses more on student experiences. Students generally feel more comfortable interacting with one another in a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment. In creating such an environment conducive to intercultural collaboration, it is important for instructors to start as they mean to continue¹:

- a. Purposefully generate situations, within learning and teaching activities, that require students to engage with one another
- b. Actively encourage students to move out of their regular social groups
- c. Support students to develop confidence in interacting with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds

1) Integrate icebreakers in the first class¹

The first class is crucial to set up the tone for the whole course. To create a supportive atmosphere in which intercultural interactions are both encouraged and expected, it is important to devote time particularly in the first class to do some icebreaking activities.

Icebreakers can help students feel comfortable with each other and establish openness and trust. When planning icebreakers, instructors need to consider the amount of time available as well as the academic level of their students.

- This may simply involve asking students to introduce themselves to their neighbours, perhaps with a focus on discussing a particular aspect of themselves, such as their cultural background, learning interests, or some aspect of their previous educational experiences
- Another example is asking students to talk to a peer to learn three interesting facts and report back to the whole class. This helps students become acquainted with others in their class thus weakening the barriers to interaction, which in turn will assist in creating a learning environment that welcomes multiple perspectives and stimulates interaction

2) Begin each class with a short peer-learning activity¹

Another very useful strategy is to ask students, in pairs or small groups, to spend a few minutes reviewing the main points from the previous lecture or tutorial, perhaps using one or two trigger questions as an incentive for students to assess themselves. This strategy is not specific to encouraging intercultural interactions between students. The benefits are broader in terms of engaging students with the subject knowledge and providing feedback for students and instructors alike on learning process.

3) Encourage students to move beyond their regular social groups¹

The establishment phase, whether of a course or a group work, is the optimal time to encourage students to move out of their comfort zone. For example, allocating seating or asking students to sit

with someone they have not met before can be effective. Structured activities that require students to work with peers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds also serve to encourage intercultural engagement.

When forming working groups, one helpful strategy is to allow students a few minutes to write down what skills or competence they could offer to a group, as preparation for talking to students whom they do not know and explaining what they could bring to a group project.

4) Create a welcoming and inclusive environment⁶

To increase students' willingness in interacting with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is also essential for instructors to create a classroom environment where students feel encouraged and secure to try new ways of learning, establish new friendships, and even make mistakes that will enable them to learn and grow. Here are some suggested strategies:

a. Get to know the students early

- Learn and use students' names as soon as possible; use name card/tag/tent as reminders
- Make good use of personal information/experience shared by students to shape how they participate in learning

b. Create a positive climate

- Encourage students to exchange contact information, i.e., email address to promote interactions after/outside of class
- Communicate at the outset of the course that intercultural interactions are encouraged and required
- Ask for student feedback on how they feel about the classroom climate using anonymous survey through out the term

c. Develop an inclusive environment

- Reduce students' sense of anxiety and increase their sense of inclusion through modeling respect for diverse perspectives and opinions
- Include and respond to all students equally in discussions and activities
- Intervene if any student demonstrates behaviors that are disrespectful to others

d. Build a physically welcoming environment (if applicable)

- Whenever possible, arrange the physical seating in the room so that instructors and students can all make eye contact with each other
- In a U-shaped seating arrangement, vary instructors' position so that they do not remain at the head of the U-shape
- Periodically arrange the room based on learning needs, i.e., circles, work groups, board room, etc.

5. Incorporating Reflective Processes

The specific objectives of this dimension are:

- promotion of higher levels of interaction and cognitive engagement
- enhancement of students' critical thinking
- reflection on the learning process

Intercultural collaboration for learning requires students to confront differences in each other's current understanding of a topic as well as their differing attitudes or perspectives. By exposing to alternative perceptions and/or conflicting views, students are offered opportunities to explain and/or defend their views to others, whereby to reconcile conflicts and arrive at "negotiated meanings"^{7, p. 37}.

To enrich intercultural collaboration, students need to take steps back and reflect on the learning process. Reflecting on their own role in making contribution to a group project, for example, encourages students to develop skills in self-assessment, which is critical for academic success both within and beyond the course. Through sharing reflections and exchanging ideas about learning experiences, students are encouraged to develop their own approaches to knowledge and are likely to develop a heightened sense of compassion for their peers⁸.

A few strategies that help students reflect on their learning processes are introduced below:

1) Encourage critical reflections¹

When students are intentionally involved in reflecting on what they have learned in an intercultural collaboration, they become more willing to:

- move beyond individual understanding and perceptions
- begin to look at the world from a non-self perspective
- develop open-mindedness
- utilize the knowledge base available within the community of diverse learners
- practice intercultural communication skills
- interact more effectively with students from diverse backgrounds

Effective critical reflections can be encouraged by asking students to:

- analyze and synthesize ideas to prepare feedback for peers
- offer constructive feedback that support their own learning
- reflect on their own approaches to knowledge and the different perspectives that informed them

The types of reflections vary in length and complexity, for example:

- complete a checklist
- itemized scoring sheet

- write reflective essays evaluating their own as well as their peers' involvement in and contribution to the collaboration

These kinds of reflective tasks require students to critically analyse and reflect on the group learning process, including how they interacted with each other and how they incorporated or negotiated diverse perspectives and approaches.

2) Use questions as triggers for reflection¹

Effective critical reflections can be encouraged by asking students prompting questions.

- a. Pre-activity: What are the skills and competence you can bring to the group? What are your biggest challenges of working in groups?
- b. During activity: What have you and your group been doing well? What could you and your group have done better? What will you and your group achieve through collaboration?
- c. Post-activity: What have you learnt about the way you work with your peers? What issues/challenges did you face in working with others? How could you do better next time?

Asking students to think about these questions can lead to increased self-awareness and the development of important skills in critical thinking and reflection. Encouraging students to share and discuss their reflections can also lead to more effective peer learning by promoting honest communication among students and increased understanding of others.

3) Use reflective written tasks¹

As previously alluded, reflective writing can be a useful way of encouraging students to analyse critically and reflect effectively on their assumptions, values, and beliefs in relation to group work. In reflective writing, students need to synthesise different perspectives they have learned from others and examine their collaboration with peers.

Examples of reflecting writing assignments include (but not limited to):

- a. Reflective essays requiring students to reflect on the group work process including their initial assumptions and attitudes to group work, their own roles within the group process, and how they worked with their peers in the group project.
- b. Learning journals requiring students to write frequently about their engagement in the subject knowledge including how they interact and engage with their peers to make learning happen.
- c. Short reports requiring students to write responses to a series of questions developed by instructors about their roles in the group work and what they learnt from the process of collaboration.

6. Assessing Collaboration

Most principles of assessment that apply to individual work also apply to group work as well but assessing group work has added challenges. First, depending on the objectives of the group project, instructors might want to assess the group's final product (e.g., report, presentation, etc.), the collaboration processes, or both. Second, group performance has to be translated into individual grades, which raises issues of fairness and equity⁵.

Complicating both these issues is the fact that neither group processes nor individual contribution is necessarily apparent in the final product. Therefore, in addition to evaluating the group's output, instructors may need to find ways to determine how groups functioned and the extent to which individuals contributed to the effort. This isn't always easy, but there are general principles in place that could offer some guidance or reference⁵.

1) Assess individual, as well as group learning and performance⁵

Diligent students can be profoundly demotivated by group activities if they feel that their own success is dependent on peers who don't do their share. One way to counteract the motivational hazards of group work is to assess individual student's learning and performance in addition to the group's output. Individual learning and performance can be assessed in many ways. Some instructors add an individual component to group projects (e.g., a short essay, journal entries, etc.); some combine a group project with an individual test or quiz.

Both group and individual performance are then reflected in the total project grade. For example, some faculty members make the group grade worth 50% and the individual grade worth 50%; others split it 80% and 20%. There's no perfect breakdown, but the grading scheme should:

- a. reflect the goals for student learning
- b. seek to motivate intercultural interactions

2) Assess process as well as product^{4, 5, 9}

To evaluate intercultural collaboration, instructors are encouraged to consider assessing both process (how students worked together) and product (the work they produced). Since instructors don't always have a direct window into the dynamics of group work, they can rely on groups to self-report via:

- a. group evaluation (each member of the group evaluates the dynamics of the team as a whole)
- b. peer evaluation (each member evaluates the contributions of their peers)
- c. self-evaluation (each member documents and evaluates their own contributions to the group)

Group work assessments can be either quantitative or qualitative. They can be done as reflective writing or short questionnaires targeting specific dimensions of the intercultural collaboration. To determine the ways of assessment, it is important for instructors to consider the following questions:

- which assessment tools suit the purpose and context of the group work?

- how to allow students to use various means (i.e., writing, video, presentation, portfolio, etc.) to demonstrate their learning?
- when the assessment will be used (in the middle of the semester or at the end or both)?
- who should see it (instructors only or other members of the group)?
- if the assessment should be anonymous?
- who assigns the grade (students, instructors, or both)?

The process of assessment is subjective, and students are not always straightforward when evaluating one another or themselves. However, the combination of process and product assessments can offer valuable glimpses into how the groups functioned and alert instructors to major issues (e.g., uncooperative group members or serious conflict), which helps inform instructors' grading.

3) Make assessment criteria and grading scheme clear^{5,9}.

It's always important to clearly articulate the criteria of intercultural collaboration to help students understand the goals and expectations. Criteria for evaluation or assessment should be communicated clearly by giving students a group work rubric before they start working together. In addition, the rubric should be used to provide meaningful feedback during and at the end of the collaboration.

If instructors are interested in assessing both the group process and final product, two separate rubrics need to be created. Process evaluation might include attendance and participation in preparatory meetings, time management skills, active listening, evidence of cooperative behavior, professionalism, engagement with the task, resolve differences, and communicate effectively, etc. To evaluate the product, the grading criteria should be more concrete and outlined based on content, structure, organization, accuracy, thoroughness, and general mechanics, etc.

It's also critical for instructors to contemplate how to weigh the various components of group work in the grading scheme. Consider the questions below:

- a. What percentage of the student's total grade will be based on the group's performance vs. individual components?
- b. What percentage will be based on assessments of product vs. process?
- c. How much weight will be given to group evaluation, peer evaluation and/or self-evaluation?

To sum up, a number of aspects or elements of group work can factor, either formally or informally, into a student's grade. What's essential is for instructors to think about what aspects or elements of student performance matter the most and how the grading criteria or the weighting of assessment components can help motivate the behaviors that are expected to occur. Finally, it's critical to clearly communicate the grading scheme to students before their collaboration begins.

References:

1. Arkoudis, S, et al. (2010). Finding Common Ground: enhancing interaction between domestic and international students. <http://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources/teaching-and-learning/teaching-in-practice/finding-common-ground-enhancing-interaction-between-domestic-and-international-students>
2. Implementing Group Work in the Classroom. Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo. <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/alternatives-lecturing/group-work/implementing-group-work-classroom>
3. Roberson, B., & Franchini, B. (2014). Effective task design for the TBL classroom. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25(3&4), 275-302.
4. Making Group Work Work in an Intercultural Class. Learning and Teaching Services, Alonquin College. <https://www.algonquincollege.com/lts/making-group-work-work-in-an-intercultural-class/>
5. What are best practices for designing group projects? Eberly Centre, Carnegie Mellon University. <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/design/teach/instructionalstrategies/groupprojects/design.html>
6. Guo, S., & Jamal, Z. (2007). Nurturing cultural diversity in higher education: A critical review of selected models. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 37(3), 27–49.
7. King, A. (2002). Structuring peer interaction to promote high-level cognitive processing. *Theory into Practice*, 41(33-39).
8. Welikala, T. & Watkins, C. (2008). *Improving Intercultural Learning Experiences in Higher Education: Responding to cultural scripts for learning*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
9. Arkoudis, S, et al. (2013) Finding common ground: enhancing interaction between domestic and international students in higher education, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18 (3). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13562517.2012.719156>