Integrating International and Domestic Students into Collaborative Work

Keywords
International students, group work, team work, collaboration, integration, diversity

Executive Summary

What? The main purpose of this teaching tip is to assist educators in supporting international and domestic students in integrating and learning during collaborative work.

So What? This is important because Conestoga expects to have over 6000 international students by Fall 2018 as well as diversity within the domestic student body.

Now What? This teaching tip will provide educators with concrete ways to support both international and domestic students in collaborating.

At Conestoga

With more than 6000 international students and thousands of newcomers to Canada, Conestoga classrooms are rich in cultural diversity. In 2018, the college has approximately 1 in 4 students who began their education outside of Canada. Some classes consist entirely of international students.

A diverse student group brings benefits and challenges to the classroom. Research shows that faculty need to take deliberate steps to embrace cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity as an opportunity for enrichment, specifically when it relates to collaborative work in the classroom.

The Challenge

Research suggests that domestic students prefer working with classmates of a similar background at a higher rate (79%) than do international students (29%) (Moore & Hampton, 2015). Domestic students identify language proficiency and awareness of academic requirements as reasons for their preference. Their hesitation towards working collaboratively with international students is not lost on their international colleagues (Moore & Hampton, 2015). Faculty at Conestoga comment on the fact that, unless there is an intervention, international students end up working on collaborative projects together rather than in a
diverse group. Consider adapting the handout provided at the end of this section so that expectations for group work are clear.

The Suggested Approach: Participative Pedagogy

By embracing a participative pedagogy, educators can encourage students in diverse classrooms to learn from one another’s experiences and ideas (Elliot & Reynolds, 2014). A participative approach is thought to “move dependency of a learner away from the teacher, and shift responsibility for learning to the learner” (Elliot & Reynolds, 2014). Projects that are designed specifically to require students to play an active role in group work, to be open-minded, and for tasks to directly benefit from inquisitive attitudes, result in the greatest learning for those involved (Moore & Hampton, 2015).

Transparency:

Educators can embrace transparency in the classroom

- Acknowledge the potential for students to have anxieties about multi-cultural collaborative work.
- Ease these anxieties by meeting students where they are.
- Share that while students often fear that multicultural collaborative work will lead to lower grades, research has found that this type of work results in higher grades for all parties when teachers support this process (Elliot & Reynolds, 2014).
- Explain the safety nets that you have built in to support writing skills and ensure clarity of expectations.

We know that when educators provide support and opportunities for open dialogue regarding group processes, students can gain from such opportunities increased competency in the areas of cross-cultural collaboration, interpersonal skills, and higher level learning (Elliot & Reynolds, 2014). These skills will be of great benefit when students are working in their multicultural placements and workplaces.

References
