

“Problem-based learning in multicultural group work – an introduction”



This introduction forms part of the project “Internationalization, PBL and multicultural group work”, 2017 (participants: Hanne Tange, Kirsten Jæger, Annie Aarup Jensen & Lone Krogh).

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Introduction</i> | 3 |
| The university -a world of difference | 7 |
| <i>Problem-based learning at AAU</i> | 9 |
| What does 'problem-based' mean? | 9 |
| Interdisciplinarity | 10 |
| Group work | 11 |
| Supervision | 13 |
| Creativity in diverse groups | 14 |
| <i>Issues in multicultural group work</i> | 15 |
| <i>Language and Communication</i> | 16 |
| 'Talking (too much)' vs. 'being (too) quiet'. | 20 |
| Culture-related issues | 21 |
| 'Not all that is different is cultural' | 23 |
| <i>Group work and Assessment</i> | 24 |
| <i>Ethical issues in multicultural group work</i> | 27 |
| <i>Multicultural group work, internationalization and employability</i> | |
| <i>Conclusions</i> | 32 |

Introduction

This “Introduction to problem-based learning in multicultural group work” was written to help students benefit more from their project work and to develop valuable academic and job-oriented skills through group work. The purpose is also to provide supervisors of multicultural groups with useful background knowledge of the research on this topic.

This introduction emphasizes the learning potential related to working in diverse groups. Diversity takes many forms, for example cultural, religious, linguistic and disciplinary diversity. Diversity represents (mostly untapped) learning opportunities and a set of challenges. This introduction will present both sides! Hopefully, it will also help students and supervisors reap the gains of multicultural group work and equip them better to address and handle the challenges.

The introduction was written for students at Aalborg University. But it intentionally draws on research from different parts of the world in order to illustrate that group learning is used extensively throughout the world, and that the problems faced by students and supervisors are very similar whether the group work takes place in Denmark or in Australia. It has also been important for us to add international and intercultural perspectives to the introduction and to avoid drawing exclusively on group work knowledge taken more or less for granted at Aalborg University.

In line with other texts presenting research, this introduction will quote various studies conducted by different scholars, including the authors. However, as you will see, we often quote the participating students because what *they* say about their own experiences of multicultural group work is often directly relevant to group work at Aalborg University. Statements reflecting the lived group work experiences of university students around the world are probably more likely to inspire discussions among students and supervisors at Aalborg University than statistics and theoretical discussions.

The goal of this introduction is to make students more aware of learning perspectives in group work and to change the way that most of us think about working in groups with people who are different from ourselves. It will conclude by suggesting that we need to consider learning in a broader perspective than exam-focused academic learning aiming at gaining good results in terms of grades and earned ECTS points. Students learn so much more than their grades and transcripts reflect. Aalborg University offers the student the possibility of registering and documenting extracurricular intercultural learning through the Global Graduate Certificate program (for further information see <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/education/global-graduate/>). In the Global Graduate Certificate program, participation in multicultural group work features as a mandatory activity precisely because the ability to work in a multicultural team is considered important.

Hopefully, this introduction will expand and broaden your understanding and knowledge of group work in multicultural settings. However, we also strongly encourage you to use this introduction as a form of reflective tool that can help you put some of the sometimes puzzling and confusing experiences in multicultural group work in perspective. Thus, the introduction highlights a range of themes that both supervisors and the group members should consider and discuss openly when needed at supervision meetings. It is also important that the group itself recognizes its responsibility for addressing the sensitive issues described in this introduction, for example:

- How do we communicate in the group? Do language problems seriously impede our communication?
- Have we devised our project in a way that will allow the different group members to contribute to the process and the final result?
- Are our meetings productive? Or do we have endless discussions and make little progress?
- Are we good at managing group meetings?
- How is the burden of work distributed between members?
- Are we managing the time well so as to avoid typical problems related to such issues as time pressure, uneven distribution of work, low-quality work, and plagiarism?
- Do we use the allocated supervision resources in the most optimal way?

Such questions may convey the impression that multicultural group work calls for a more professional approach to group work than ‘mono-cultural’ group work. This may well be the case. It will often be necessary to make explicit agreements about issues that might have been taken for granted in groups with members who know each other well and share the same background. However, as pointed out in the literature on multicultural group work, in a job context employees will rarely have the opportunity to work in a mono-cultural group or be allowed to pick team members who are like themselves.

Currently, Aalborg University offers 10 Bachelor’s degree programs and more than 80 Master’s degree programs (including joint degree programs) in English. This gives students vast opportunities for developing an intercultural and international skill set, such as the ability to work and learn in multicultural groups, the ability to communicate effectively in multilingual settings, and personal qualifications such as curiosity and openness. We hope that this introduction will support you in benefitting from these opportunities. It is part of a series of small publications addressing multicultural group work and provides the background knowledge for seven practice-oriented leaflets. The leaflets provide short presentations of specific topics and concrete tools for working with these topics in your project groups.

Diversity

Different student roles in project groups

How to use supervisors

Group work and inclusion

Group formation

Global English

Benefitting from diverse capabilities in the project group

Group work and problem-based learning at the multicultural university

At Aalborg University, international students make up 15 % of the student body. The influx of international students is welcomed by universities across the world, not least because of the positive effect this has on the general study environment. All universities are making an effort to offer an international study environment to both their international and domestic students. At the same time, domestic students as a group are highly heterogeneous; they are ethnically diverse and come from many different disciplinary backgrounds and educational cultures. This means that the study environment is characterized by a multitude of cultural, ethnic, national, disciplinary and personal resources and differences. Learning how to use these resources and differences in a positive and productive way is a challenge for the students and for the University itself, not least because of its problem-based approach to learning. However, it is also a challenge to the world outside of the University, and university graduates who thrive and grow in multicultural, multidisciplinary and interprofessional contexts are sought-after resources in most organizations. In Diamond, Walkley, Forbes, Hughes and Sheen's study, which asked 12 leading employers in the UK about their priorities when hiring graduates, the "ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of backgrounds and countries" was ranked at the top of a list of 14 competencies. The recruiter from a large multinational corporation said that the company needs

People who can relate to people at all levels, people from all different backgrounds, because our customers certainly come from all walks of life – the opposite gender, people with different ethnic backgrounds, different cultural backgrounds, different religious backgrounds, people with disabilities (p. 10)

A study environment that is conducive to the development of such qualities in students and graduates exists if the university itself and its programs become sites of mutual social and academic engagement and of intercultural learning. In order to strengthen the development of such a study environment, inclusive, open-minded, and multicultural collaboration must be encouraged and supported. Student-centered and group-organized teaching and learning offer students and teachers optimal conditions for developing and benefitting from a study environment that is international and intercultural in precisely this sense.

Some AAU programs already have regulations in place demanding an international/intercultural composition of student groups. In other programs, students are allowed to form mono-national/cultural groups if they prefer this. Students' choice of collaboration partners is motivated by many different factors: for example a feeling of safety because they know their collaboration partners well and trust them, a shared level of ambition etc. These considerations often lead to mono-cultural groups, groups of students collaborating for several subsequent semesters, and groups in which the team roles are stable and well-defined throughout the project period. Such groups may help students achieve good results, but they only develop students' collaborative skills to a limited extent. Moreover, working in stable, mono-cultural groups does not prepare the student for a working life in which employees most likely will be required to function in shifting and culturally and professionally diverse teams.

One purpose of this introduction is to make students aware of the necessity of reaping the benefits from engaging in multicultural teamwork whenever possible. A second purpose is to help students overcome

the obstacles that may emerge during the course of group work involving students representing diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and disciplinary affiliations.

The university – a world of difference

In this introduction, the word ‘multicultural’ has been chosen as shorthand for a variety of differences. Students are different in multiple ways; for an introduction to the notion of diversity, see the leaflet Diversity on the topic (<http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/academic-networks/c-inter/resources/>). Only the most prevalent types of difference can be addressed here. Obviously, today’s students form an extremely diverse group of people, nationally, ethnically, culturally, religiously, linguistically, economically, and educationally. Denmark does not have a long history of significant immigration to the country, which means that many institutions and workplaces still assume that they serve a relatively homogenous group (of ethnic Danes). However, most institutions, and not least higher education institutions, are turning into multicultural environments in which every student regardless of national, ethnic, religious and/or linguistic background should feel welcomed and find that their needs are being met, whether these are in relation to the food offered in the university canteen or to the language of university websites. The elimination of practices and artifacts that exclude or even offend particular student groups is of course an important step towards creating a positive multicultural study environment. The next step is to understand how difference provides access to knowledge and resources that are not only personally and socially enriching, but also constitute opportunities for academic and professional learning and competence development. It has always been an important PBL principle that project work should be linked to the student’s personal life-experience. Whereas this was once thought of as the practice of analyzing student-experienced social problems in a scholarly perspective, we may now see more clearly another potential of the PBL and group work approach: PBL and the project group are considered arenas in which each student’s unique resources can add to the depth and complexity of the work of the group as a whole. During the course of a university education, group work offers one of the best opportunities for students to learn about their own strengths and capabilities, as well as the forms of contributions they personally are able to make, as citizens and as professionals (Walker, 2012).

Multiculturalism takes many forms. First, students differ in terms of their status as domestic or international students. Some programs only accept international guest students who will study at Aalborg University for one or two semesters. Guest students may register for different classes in different programs, or they may follow the curriculum of a specific program and thus be affiliated with the specific group of domestic students enrolled in this program. Especially for guest students, it is known to be very difficult to establish relations with domestic students because of the short duration of their stay at the university, and sometimes also because of the somewhat complicated and fragmented way in which they are attached to individual programs. Although international degree students study on the same terms as domestic students, a few typical differences between international and domestic students are found that may influence social and work relations. In Denmark as well as in other countries, domestic students tend to spend a significant number of hours on their spare time jobs. As it is often more difficult for an international non-Danish-speaking student to get such a job, the international student is more likely to prioritize university life, including spending more time on reading and group work. Also, domestic students may have more social relations locally, causing them to be less dependent on establishing social relations with fellow students. For example, Peacock and Harrison (2010) observed that “a significant

proportion [of international students] struggle to socialize into the host culture, in particular finding it difficult to make friendships with home students and within the wider community” (p. 879).

Unfortunately, these apparently insignificant differences contribute to a segregation of the student group and to international students seeking out each other’s company rather than that of domestic students, who appear to be preoccupied with outside-university activities¹. International students may find it difficult to understand why Danish students work so much, given the rather favorable economic conditions they enjoy. In this context, it is important to be aware of a shift in the discourse on the balance between studying and working. Whereas having to take a part time job was considered a career drawback a few years ago, it is now thought of as an integral part of career promotion by both students and employers. Thus, the decision to prioritize spare time jobs is not only motivated by economic considerations but also by long-term strategic concerns.

Perhaps one of the least described forms of difference is the interplay between different educational and disciplinary cultures found in many programs, especially in interdisciplinary master’s degree programs accepting students from a broad range of educational backgrounds. The scientific disciplines have been compared to ethnic tribes because of their strong tradition for cultivating discourses and practices that are sometimes as incomprehensible to outsiders as other types of cultural communities (Becher, 1994). Such cultural differences may result in debates on the theories to be applied, on what counts as valid and legitimate research methods, and how project reports should be written. Students may also bring different forms of professional experience into the project group. Not all students come directly from high school or a university Bachelor’s degree program. Some students are admitted on the basis of a vocational/professional Bachelor’s degree, or may have extensive work experience under their belt before starting university education. Such backgrounds typically result in students emphasizing the practical applicability of their acquired knowledge and sometimes prioritize applicability over theoretical depth. Again, the challenge in multicultural group work is to exploit the resources represented by group members and accomplish work that demonstrates both practical applicability and the stringency afforded by the use of advanced academic theories and methods. Obviously, the ability to combine (for example) applicability and academic depth and rigor will be highly appreciated by examiners and external co-examiners (the latter group often representing knowledge users rather than knowledge producers).

¹ At Aalborg University, we only have personal experience/anecdotic evidence on this issue. However, it has been reported as a significant obstacle to multicultural group work both at Australian and British universities (e.g. Kimmel & Volet, 2012).

Problem-based learning at AAU

To many students, the organization of teaching and learning at Aalborg University will come across as untraditional and unusual, not least because the semester project takes center stage in the organization of the semester. Even the ‘traditional’ courses offered often relate to the topic of the semester project, and in many programs, courses are short and concentrated in order to free time for students’ self-directed work on their projects. Several universities around the world practice problem-based learning, but often in the context of a course and under the direction of a tutor or as PBL case work, with problems defined by teachers. At AAU, ‘student-directed learning’ literally means that the students themselves are in charge of their project work. Students plan, manage, and carry out the research involved in producing a semester project. In the course of their project work, they use teachers as supervisors, academic resources, process facilitators, and consultants. This will be described in detail below.

What does ‘problem-based’ mean?

Characterizing academic work as ‘problem-based’ means that it takes a problem as its point of departure and not, for example, a particular level of a discipline or a broad topic. Disciplinary knowledge and broad insights in particular phenomena are still essential to problem-based learning. However, the problem-based approach implies that in addition to acquiring disciplinary and thematic knowledge, students must be able to *organize* this knowledge in a way that renders it productive to a deeper understanding of the chosen problem. This involves processes of reorganizing, sorting, and selecting knowledge. It also involves recognition of the research that the students need to conduct on their own in order to come as close to an answer or solution to ‘their’ problem as possible. Evidently, processes that go beyond acquiring knowledge and move into the domain of analyzing and evaluating knowledge in terms of its usefulness in relation to a particular problem are intellectually demanding. Engaging in such processes is clearly more productive on a group basis than individually.

In many PBL courses offered outside of Denmark, relevant research problems developed by teachers are presented to students, and the PBL literature reflects much debate concerning the ways in which teachers should design good problems that trigger relevant student learning. This indicates the importance of the problem for the learning process. Barrett (2011) characterizes good problems in the following way:

Quality problems in problem-based learning are authentic, real-world engaging, motivating, challenging, deliberately ill-structured and multidimensional and they challenge students to develop specialist knowledge together with key skills and to develop their ability to understand key concepts and work with common practice problems. (p. 521)

Notably, at the two Danish PBL universities, Roskilde University and Aalborg University, students are expected to generate their own research problems. They do so in collaboration with teachers and supervisors. Often students experience that this is the most demanding part of the entire project writing process. Gram, Jæger, Liu, Qing and Wu (2013) quote a Chinese Master’s degree student’s account of the demanding experience of arriving at a good problem formulation: “Actually, our group spent almost half of our project time on trying to formulate a proper problem last semester. Seeking a problem itself is a learning process” (p. 767).

The ‘good problem’ fulfills several criteria:

The problem takes its point of departure in a particular disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary field, in which students are required to engage. This is defined in the curriculum, taught in lectures, tutorials, discussion sessions etc., and is addressed in the course literature.

It also requires students to engage in independent research activity, in other words cause students to explore “what is not yet known”. This is perhaps the most challenging criterion. Once the research problem has been identified, students are expected to have a sense of the research work required to arrive at an answer or understanding of the problem. However, the problem must also be non-trivial, in that it cannot be answered by just finding a specific source or piece of information. Some authors (e.g. Barrett 2011) use the term ‘liminality’ about the ‘space’ that the problem creates, in other words, the distance between what is known and what needs to be investigated in order to solve or understand the problem. Describing the space as liminal means that the learner must ‘travel’ this distance in order to move from one level of knowledge (the level of knowledge acquired in courses) to another (the level of more specialized knowledge pertaining to the research question that the students themselves have constructed).

Finally, the defined problem should also have a form that allows students to find an answer or develop an understanding of the question within the given timeframe.

Interdisciplinarity

From its foundation in 1974, Aalborg University has practiced interdisciplinary, problem-based and project-organized learning. Interdisciplinarity is sometimes presented as an inevitable consequence of problem-based work. It is important to bear in mind, however, that problem-based approaches are also applied in mono-disciplinary programs precisely in order to train students in the discipline’s ways of seeing, understanding, and discussing an issue; for example, when medical students are asked to analyze a medical condition presented by a patient. In such contexts, the strength of the PBL approach is that it may help students overcome the theory-practice divide, but it does not force them to engage other disciplines than the one they are studying (e.g. Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2006). However, if the medical students were to discover why a specific disease presents itself more frequently in a specific social or ethnic group, this would require the students to engage the disciplines of anthropology or sociology – or to collaborate with students of these disciplines. Advocates of interdisciplinary approaches to research and education (e.g. Lattuca, 2002) argue that many of the most urgent problems faced by humanity today have this complex and multifaceted character and call for the expertise of several different disciplines. In response to the widespread recognition of the relevance of interdisciplinary approaches, many study programs have become interdisciplinary and expect students to be able to work on problems from different disciplinary angles. Today, we see the emergence of many Master’s degree programs, for example, which are addressing specific social, cultural, and ecological challenges from different disciplinary perspectives (for example security studies, risk management, sustainability studies, human rights studies etc.). In these programs, but also in many more ‘traditional’ programs, students from different disciplinary backgrounds engage in problems that require the combination of multiple disciplinary perspectives in order to be adequately understood.

Often, interdisciplinary work is described in a very positive light, emphasizing collaboration, innovation, and synergy. However, in reality, different disciplines have different traditions in terms of academic practice, which may result in tensions around both practical questions (what should a project report look

like), and more fundamental theoretical and methodological issues. For you as a student, it may be comforting to know that when you are expected to work in an interdisciplinary manner in a project group, you are being asked to do something that educated researchers also find very difficult. Fish (1994) wrote an essay with the title “*Being interdisciplinary is so very hard to do*” in which he argued that members of a discipline avoid asking themselves certain very fundamental questions. These difficult and fundamental questions are more likely to come up in interdisciplinary collaboration, in which some students may feel that they need to defend their specific disciplinary perspective. Students may therefore prefer the monocultural context of a mono-disciplinary project group in which their theoretical and methodological approaches are unlikely to be challenged.

Group work

Arguments for including collaborative processes in higher learning are multiple. Even students who prefer working alone are dependent on some form of social interaction around their work in order to acquire inspiration, new perspectives, critique and other types of feedback, and these resources are only available from their supervisor. In the project group, these resources are available in abundance. We may understand learning as complementary processes of individual acquisition of knowledge and an ever evolving capacity to participate in diverse and shifting communities. Each individual represents a ‘repertoire’ of experience and acquired knowledge, but unless this repertoire is shared and utilized in a practical social context, it will not be transformed into what is often termed ‘competences’ or ‘qualifications’: the ability to apply acquired knowledge for a given purpose, in a practical/professional or academic context. Importantly, this does not mean that working in project groups is the only method of sharing and utilizing knowledge in ways that give acquired knowledge the quality of being accessible and applicable for others and for the learner themselves. For example, learning through internships or engaging in discussions with teachers and supervisors are also valuable social applications of acquired knowledge that help transform acquired knowledge to shared insights and/or new understandings of academic and professional issues. However, project groups represent a systematic and well-organized framework for these processes. Participation in a project group offers learning methods that prepare students better for both professional and academic careers than adhering exclusively to individualist learning arrangements. Consequently, access to working in a project group could be considered a ‘learning right’ at a problem-based, project-organized university because of the broad variety of learning opportunities that group work offers (Wiberg, 2013).

Group formation

Rights are almost always accompanied by obligations. In order to enjoy the rights of participating in a group, students need to take on the responsibility involved in project group work. It is well known that students have different degrees of commitment to their own learning and to the program in which they are enrolled. We may talk about different levels of ambition and motivation. Ambitious, hard-working students may avoid cooperating with students who send out signals of low engagement and potentially poor performance. However, it is important to realize that successful collaboration is not dependent on finding the students who have precisely the same level of ambition and motivation as oneself. Rather, every student should realize how dependent they are on each other. In a project group, students constitute each other’s learning environment. Hence, what *the individual student* brings into the group in the form of acquired knowledge, sense of responsibility and dedication, and various social and organizational skills, heavily influences *their* learning opportunities

In multicultural environments, judging who will be optimal working partners is even more complicated. Students come from different educational backgrounds emphasizing different areas of knowledge and skills. Different cultural conventions may also be involved. However, handling situations in which participants are relatively unknown to each other and at the same time are required to engage in relatively close and highly salient relationships is probably uncomfortable and awkward in all cultural contexts. As Strauss, U and Young (2011) point out, “Perhaps ... intercultural skills are most tested in tertiary classrooms where students from a variety of ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are required to work together in high-stakes group projects” (p. 816).

At many universities pursuing the development of intercultural skills in students, teachers simply form the groups, and the students have no influence on which group they will be assigned to. The effects of this approach have been studied by (among others) Strauss, U and Young (2011) and Harrison and Peacock (2010). Understandably, this approach is not popular among all students. Strauss, U and Young report that “such an approach often causes resentment, particularly if students feel that they are being ‘used’ to help peers whose mastery of the language of instruction is in question” (p. 817). In the literature on group learning in higher education, it has been discussed whether it is best for the students that they work in groups formed by the teacher, or that they select their own project group partners (for a presentation of different principles of group formation, see leaflet on Group Formation <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/academic-networks/c-inter/resources/>). Some scholars argue that it is actually best for students to work in teacher-selected groups because this challenges the students more and triggers processes of social and intercultural learning. Scholars have expressed concerns that groups composed of relatively similar individuals who work with each other over a long time will not succeed as well as diverse groups. These concerns are based on research showing that when faced with the choice, human beings generally prefer interaction with individuals that they perceive as similar to themselves (the so called ‘homophily principle’). Strauss, U and Young conclude on their study showing New Zealand domestic students to prefer self-selected monocultural groups:

Most of them want comfort and security, and are quite willing to forfeit a possible opportunity to broaden their horizons to ensure this comfort and security. These students are choosing a “sure thing” rather than taking the risk of working with someone who has a work style and work ethic with which they do not have a personal experience (p. 825).

At Aalborg University, the predominant approach to group formation is to let students decide for themselves to which groups they want to belong. Clearly, if the university and/or individual programs want students to benefit from group diversity, certain incentives or requirements must be in place to break the habit of selecting group members with the same background as one’s own, or of selecting the same group members semester after semester. As mentioned above, some programs follow the self-selection principle but regulate self-selection by requiring that students form multicultural groups. It is important that programs prioritize the group formation process and set up frameworks (specific events, publicly announced selection procedures) that allow students to choose group membership in a way that minimizes the ‘threat’ or ‘risk’ experienced by the individual student, especially when approaching ‘new’ potential project partners, and which support the formation of multicultural groups.

Supervision

It is a key principle in AAU's approach to problem-based learning in project groups that the group's work is supervised by a (relevant) academic member of staff. Supervisors are generally expected to strike a fine balance between supporting students' work in an optimal way and avoiding to interfere too much in the group's independent research process. Supervisors play a key role in achieving the dual goal of the students' learning of in-depth knowledge in their subject area and their development of independent research skills, a much valued academic competence. Obviously, it is impossible to set up precise regulations for the supervisor to follow in order to achieve this delicate balance. It differs from program to program and even from supervisor to supervisor how they balance freedom and 'control' (specific requirements, clear recommendations etc.).

Today, most supervisors supervise a relatively large number of groups, and they have a limited number of supervision hours for each group, making it important for students and supervisors to spend their time together well. Three different approaches to supervisor-student group collaboration can be observed:

- Groups who are well organized and utilize their supervisor's time with them in a systematic way: First and foremost they contact their supervisor early on in the project writing process and arrange meetings regularly, leaving enough time for students to move forward in the process and for supervisors to give feedback and prepare supervision meetings.
- Groups who are less capable of organizing their time and draw heavily on their supervisor in the final weeks and days before project submission
- Groups (but often students working individually) who contact their supervisor very late (or on rare occasions not at all) and benefit little from the supervision because it is too late to follow the supervisor's directions.

It is important to understand that supervision is a resource allocated to students, and that this is wasted if not utilized for their benefit. Precisely because of the wish to strengthen self-management skills and independent research skills, in most programs, students are expected to be able to manage the collaboration with their supervisor themselves. In other words, students are expected to schedule, plan and prepare supervision meetings and other forms of contact with their supervisor. Most programs have informed the students of program expectations in terms of the students' interactions with their supervisors: Students should prepare the questions that they want to discuss with their supervisor; drafts to be commented on by the supervisor should be sent to the supervisor well ahead of a meeting, etc. Well organized groups spending their supervision time wisely are more likely to produce good projects and do well at exams. Students who contact their supervisors shortly before project submission risk that the supervisor's critique is so extensive that the group does not have the time to change the project accordingly.

Studies have shown that teacher support may make the difference between successful and unsuccessful group work, especially in case of multicultural group work. Wang (2012) states directly: "It is unlikely that unguided multicultural groups will provide much learning potential and may even raise anxiety and a sense of threat" (p. 532). The fact that project groups and supervisors are acutely aware that supervision time must be spent efficiently places additional pressure on both internal group collaboration and on the collaboration with supervisors. Perhaps students are more likely to choose to stay in 'safe' groups and work with people they know well rather than running the risk of working with students who may be

perceived as ‘different’ if they feel that they are highly dependent on *each other* and cannot fully trust supervisors to help them sort out collaboration problems. Students may also prefer to work alone if they feel that this is their safest choice. The supervisor-student group relation is not only professional but also interpersonal, evolving around a process influenced by many different emotions ranging from excitement and joy to anger and frustrations. The stakes for all participants are high: Programs, supervisors, and students want the groups to achieve good results, one reason being that grades are monitored as a parameter of quality assurance. Thus, students and supervisors sometimes experience tensions, conflicts, and disappointment in the supervision process or the exam. This may lead students to believe that they cannot rely on supervisors in general to provide academic assistance or to help sort out problems as regards group collaboration or other more process-related issues. This type of mistrust is a serious obstacle to group learning because it increases students’ propensity to ‘play safe’ in terms of their choice of project group members. Supervisors are obliged to take seriously any type of concern that students express, both in relation to academic requirements and collaboration issues. If students feel that they do not receive the kind of support and help that they need, it is important to react and turn to semester or program coordinators for help, rather than letting such issues affect both exam results and future study behavior.

Creativity in diverse groups

Because of the predominance of team-organized work in organizations, and because of the pressure on modern corporations to be innovative and forward-thinking, the research interest in creativity in diverse teams is considerable. Stahl, Masnevski, Voigt and Jonsen’s meta-analysis² of research on culturally diverse groups found that “cultural diversity is positively associated with creativity” (Stahl et al. 2010, 699). The study also found that the level of task-related conflict was higher in this type of group. Thus, this study supports the argument on which this introduction is based: Multicultural group work may require more of students in terms of collaborative and conflict-solving skills – however, the gains in terms of learning and results achieved will often be more significant, especially when working in environments where the tasks are complex and loosely defined. Different cultural backgrounds, different forms of professional and educational experience, variety in demographic parameters (gender and age) are all factors that contribute to the enlargement of the collective knowledge pool from which the group can draw. This obviously increases the chances that the group may deliver adequate or perhaps even novel and creative solutions to the problems and issues that they address.

Summary

Problem-based learning at Aalborg University is based on the principles of problem-orientation, interdisciplinarity, and group work, and is supported by supervision provided by academic members of staff. One feature unique to the Danish PBL universities is the emphasis on student autonomy as regards the definition of the problem that governs the students’ research work (Christensen, 2016). The collaborative development of a good problem undoubtedly strengthens students’ analytic and creative skills and requires inclusive, democratic, and effective communication among group members (Jæger & Jensen forthcoming). Despite the fact that student groups at most universities around the world work within predefined frameworks with questions formulated by their instructors, they share with AAU students the conditions that the stakes are high, and that they depend on each other in order to create a

² A study reviewing and evaluating the results of the total amount of research conducted on a particular topic in a specific time period in order to ‘distill’ the accomplished research and let the most significant results emerge.

good result. As mentioned above, this creates situations where students prefer the safety of monocultural groups. In the following, we address the various challenges in multicultural group work and suggest how these challenges may be used as avenues for intercultural learning.

Challenges in multicultural group work

Popov, Brinkman, Biemans, Mulder, Kuznetsov and Noroozi (2012) define multicultural group work as:

a collaboration of two or more individuals from different (national) cultural backgrounds, who have been assigned interdependent tasks and are jointly responsible for the final results, who see themselves and are seen by others as a collective unit embedded in an academic environment and who manage their relationships within a certain educational institution (p. 303).

Research on multicultural groups does not give a homogeneous picture of the functioning of such groups. Perhaps the best way of summarizing our knowledge on the matter is that multicultural groups are susceptible to the problems and challenges that monocultural groups are also facing, but in addition to this, multicultural groups often have to find solutions to an additional ‘layer’ of challenges caused by the diverse backgrounds of the participants. In a similar vein, monocultural groups benefit from the advantages of working and learning in a group (e.g. feedback opportunities, multiple perspectives on issues etc.), but the potential benefits to be reaped from multicultural group work are even more extensive. The learning potential of working in a multicultural group is larger, because, as Kimmel and Volet (2012) argue, working in a multicultural group requires “a sophisticated set of skills to successfully manage multiple relationships, navigate unfamiliar communication styles, and coordinate different expectations and work habits.” (p.158).

The following table gives an overview of the differences in learning potential between monocultural and multicultural groups and the different sets of challenges that monocultural and multicultural groups may encounter in project work:

| | Monocultural groups | Multicultural groups |
|------------|--|---|
| Advantages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge sharing and application enable the development of competence in the field (as opposed to mere acquisition of knowledge). • Acquisition of job-relevant skills such as team-working skills and planning and organization skills (employability) • Learning how to engage a problem from multiple (professional, personal and social) perspectives (to develop a nuanced view of a matter) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of knowledge and experience across national/cultural boundaries, knowledge on how acquired knowledge applies to different cultural contexts • Acquisition of job-relevant <i>intercultural</i> collaborative skills (global employability) • Learning how to engage a problem from multiple (professional, personal, social, national, and cultural) perspectives (to develop a nuanced view of a matter) • Learning how to reach a compromise among people with different cultural backgrounds and perspectives |

| | | |
|------------|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback opportunities • Enlarged knowledge pool | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning how to adapt language and communication styles to different listeners (listeners using other varieties of English) • Enlarged and diverse knowledge pool, including access to knowledge and data in different languages. |
| Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication issues • Different levels of ambition and motivation • ‘free-riding’ • Conflicts and conflict solution. | <p>Language and communication related issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • problems caused by participants’ different language varieties (accents) or different levels of language skills • Quietness/silence on the part of some students mirrored by other students’ tendency not to listen or to talk too much <p>Other issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different levels of ambition, commitment, and motivation. • Different approaches caused by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differing cultural norms • Economic conditions • Different educational cultures and traditions • ‘Involuntary free-riding’ |

(inspired by Spencer-Oatey & Dauber 2016)

Language and Communication

Globally, universities are competing to attract as many international students as possible. This means that most universities, also in non-Anglophone countries, offer English language programs. In many international classrooms, English functions as lingua franca, but may only be the native language of a few of the students and of a small number of teaching staff. This means that many varieties of English are spoken, which in itself can be a barrier to understanding (see leaflet on Global English: <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/academic-networks/c-inter/resources/>). For example, a Chinese student may have a relatively advanced English language competence but still find it difficult to understand the variety of English spoken by his teacher – who happens to be a native German. Perhaps the largest challenges concerning language-based collaboration problems are found at Anglophone universities where the medium of instruction – English – is also the first language of the majority of the students. Turner (2009), for example, writes: “UK papers universally identify English language issues as a major concern” (p. 249). Some of the most negative results concerning collaboration in multicultural groups have been found at British universities, where domestic students have expressed serious concerns because of the level of English spoken by their international peers. An example from Harrison and Peacock’s study illustrates this. According to Harrison and Peacock (2010), the context makes it clear that the

following situation is caused by ‘Sven’s poor English language abilities’. The excerpt is from a focus group discussion:

“Student 1: This is gonna make us sound really bad. Sven was in our group and I wrote his section for him because...we were like, ‘this doesn’t make sense, this doesn’t fit in with the rest of the report’ and I dictated it.

Student 2: I ended up writing it, I think.

Student 1: It was like, so bad, but we were getting really stressed...But we spoke about it without him and said, ‘we’re not letting Sven write this’, cos...

Student 2: well, no, ‘cos he couldn’t, because it was our marks” (p. 888).

The excerpt is from a published study conducted at a British university. However, the situation might have occurred at Aalborg University, and in fact at all universities offering group work as part of their learning activities. The key issue is that all students in the group depend on each other’s performance in order to achieve the result that they aim for, and this result is graded collectively. However, the quote illustrates a set of very problematic issues that can be understood as academic malpractice. Harrison and Peacock also describe the line of action adopted by students 1 and 2 as ‘falsification’ of Sven’s work. The quote illustrates that Sven is excluded from making a contribution to the group work. Thus, he is denied the opportunity to learn from the feedback to the group project. The experience of receiving a grade that he has not deserved is poor compensation for engaging in actual learning and collaboration. The evaluators get a false impression of Sven’s qualifications, and Sven’s fellow students have to deal with the stress and the extra burden of producing Sven’s section of the report.

One of the most cited and detailed studies on multicultural group work is Leki’s study published in 2001. The strength of the study lies in its extensive collection of qualitative data including both observation of group work and in-depth interviews. Thus, the study may serve as an eye-opener to researchers and teachers because it shows details of group processes that are never revealed to the instructors. In fact, the group work assignments from which Leki reports received very good marks, leaving the teachers with the impression that all went well. However, very little actual learning took place in the groups that Leki studied, and the participants who did not speak English as their first language were marginalized and excluded from contributing in the way that they felt they could. In the following, a conversation reported in Leki’s study is quoted in some length because it illustrates ‘what not to do’ in multicultural group work, but also the learning opportunities missed by the group as a whole because of the dismissive behavior of the two domestic students. The context is that the class has been asked to work in groups of four. The assignment is to investigate and compare two newspapers’ coverage of different countries. In other words, they are asked to write an assignment on media bias. The only non-native speaker of English in the group, a Chinese girl called Ling, has suggested that she can analyze a Chinese newspaper. However, the dominating participants (both domestic students) in the group seem to be uninterested in Ling’s suggestion. Leki’s research is focused on Ling, but this was unknown to the other participants, who were named ‘the Boss’, ‘the Writer’, and ‘the Outlier’ because of the roles that they took in the group work.

Writer: After I get it done, someone can look it over. [up to that point the Boss and the Writer have not consulted the other two at all. Now the Boss turns to them for the first time and explains what she and the Writer have decided and asks which numbers of the exercise each of them wants to take. The Boss asserts that Number 4 is the longest/hardest one to do. There is some exchange between the Boss and Ling that prompts the Boss to say, unconvinced]

Boss; Do you want to do it?

Ling: Maybe we can discuss about Number 4. [the Boss then again explains that the Writer will go and look at the newspapers and that after the Writer has tabulated everything, they can just answer the questions from that...The Boss starts to divide up the questions...]

Ling: If you want we can look at newspapers in other languages. I could do Chinese.

[awkward pause]

Boss: Would you want to go to the library and do all that work? If you want to, that's fine.

Writer: Are you going to have time to do all that? See, I have time to do it this week.

Boss: There's not that much time, but if you have free time[pauses] Are you going to?

Ling: No. [With everything settled now, the Boss and the Writer get up, gather their things, dismissing Ling and the Outlier from their attention, and leave.] (p. 53).

Given Ling's struggle to become a recognized member of the group, it might be surprising that she did not fight more to defend her suggestion. However, as she later explained to the researcher, the three others did not seem to be interested in her suggestion. The fourth member, with whom Ling had built the closest relation (the 'Outlier') did not openly support Ling's suggestion, even if she probably silently agreed with it. The quote and the study as a whole demonstrate many important aspects of multicultural group work. First, Leki notices that domestic students tend to construct themselves as 'experts' and international students as 'novices', even in advance of their cooperation. Furthermore, in the cases that Leki investigates, the international students had very relevant contributions to make that would have taken the group's work to a higher level. For example, the ability to include Chinese language newspapers would have made this group's work stand out from the other groups in the class. Finally, the role of the 'Outlier' is interesting. When the two dominating girls were absent, Ling and the Outlier exchanged ideas on equal terms. In principle, the 'Outlier' could have played the role of mediator and supporter of Ling's inclusion in the group, but failed to do so. Other studies (e.g. Burdett, 2014) mention students who are apparently stronger than 'the Outlier' and take on the responsibility of mediating between international students and skeptical co-nationals.

Universities offering English language programs demand that international students have English language capabilities allowing them to operate successfully in an academic English language environment. Normally, English language abilities must be documented through a language test (IELTS, TOEFL etc.). This ensures that certain basic requirements are met, but it does not level out the very different language and communication prerequisites that students have when entering a new academic environment. Students may for example be unfamiliar with a classroom culture which expects students to

be active and engage in discussions. They may also be unfamiliar with communicating in groups, despite a generally good command of the English language. In such situations, a student may tend to be more reluctant and 'silent' in class and in group settings, which is likely to have a detrimental effect on their communicative skills. It is well known that for an average student who has passed the required language test it may take two to three months to gain the level of language competence that will enable the student to participate fully in class discussions and group work. In a study of Chinese students at Aalborg University, Jæger and Gram (2017) found that all participants ended up enjoying group discussions and even looked forward to the oral project exam, which required of them to present and discuss advanced ideas in a language that only a few months earlier had been a serious obstacle to their successful participation:

I have experienced a process from being afraid of the project to somewhat enjoying it [...]. When the progress has been made or your advice is treasured after a tough communication, a sense of fulfillment followed [which] could make you more confident and productive (Chinese master's degree student at Aalborg University)

The study showed that initially, the Chinese students felt that they were prevented from contributing fully in the group work because of their difficulties with expressing advanced ideas on, for example, programming or international politics in English. However, once they felt confident communicating in English, their disciplinary knowledge proved to constitute a valuable contribution to the project. Thus, for all students, helping each other overcome language barriers is an investment in the group process that is likely to pay off in the end. However, in cases where communication problems are severe and persistent, it is important to consult the project supervisor.

Obviously, all students are interested in making their final product appear as perfect as possible. Reading and correcting each other's work as part of a thorough proofreading process does not count as 'falsifying' another student's work as described in the example provided by Harrison and Peacock (2010) above. In most cases, communicating openly and politely about communication problems within a group will be appreciated, also by the students who struggle with language-related problems. Kimmel and Volet quote a French student studying in Australia. "My English was not very perfect. They noticed my impact was not as good as theirs. So, that is why I got some remarks, (...) and critics at first" (p. 169). Initially, this student experienced communication problems to be a severe obstacle to his academic performance, and he received much criticism from his peers, but "he was appreciative of and grateful for the support of local group members, because their feedback contributed to improving his academic skills and knowledge of local conventions" (p. 169). Being able to address delicate problems and to give and receive criticism in a constructive way is perhaps one of the most important skills to be learned from group work. Dealing with communication problems and language barriers in a way that improves the functioning and performance of the group as a whole is a very important step towards achieving this skill. As a help for the discussion of language resources and potential challenges, you may want to use the leaflet on Global English: <http://www.en.cgs.aau.dk/research/academic-networks/c-inter/resources/>, which includes advice on how to map the language abilities available in the group as well as a self-assessment test. When participants learn to tackle communication problems caused by different language varieties and competence levels, they will have acquired a competence that is much sought after in the job market: the ability to "adapt one's use of language to the needs of one's interlocutor" (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016, p.13). This, Spencer-Oatey and Dauber state,

is a capability that many companies are now looking for in their new recruits. Developing this competence requires practice over time, and mixed national group work at university offers an ideal opportunity to hone such capability. So it is probably unwise to aim to eliminate, or even significantly reduce, communication challenges, as then students will not gain the experience of interacting in the kinds of contexts that they are likely to face in the world of work. (p. 13).

‘Talking (too much)’ vs. ‘being (too) quiet’.

Quite a few studies find that students experience a discrepancy between the desired level of communicative participation (‘talk’) in group work and the communicative behavior of the foreign-national group members. Especially in UK studies, it is a characteristic feature that British students find the silence of their international counterparts disturbing and provocative. The silence is interpreted negatively as ‘free-riding’ and lack of commitment. Of course, lack of participation on the part of international students largely derives from lack of confidence in language use, as illustrated by the following quote from Ippolito’s study (2007):

Well it makes it difficult to explain ourselves to other members... Words are not translated as effectively as I think I can in my own language... They [domestic British students] know how to find all the nice words, all the fine words, the funny words and we’re like uh uh uh. We know what we want to say but we can’t express ourselves in the way they would (Chinese student) (p. 758).

It is worth noting, however, that non-domestic students may also have problems with the communicative behavior of native English-speaking group members. A number of studies have been conducted on interaction in British-Chinese groups. These have revealed that Chinese students have found the British students to be too dominant and inclined to interrupt the contributions of less confident speakers of English (Turner 2009). A highly interesting study carried out by Cotton, George and Joyner (2013) in fact confirms that both gender and ethnic differences are reflected in the amount of talk produced in a mixed ethnicity (British-‘overseas’) group. UK male students produced more statements and took up more speaking time than UK female students and overseas male and female students. UK female students were also more talkative than overseas students. However, the study also considered the ‘impact’ of the utterances in terms of whether these were accepted, rejected, or ignored by the group. This resulted in a completely different picture, with UK female students and overseas female and male students having more impact than the ‘talkative’ UK male students. The strategy used by the group when confronted with the large number of utterances produced by UK male students was to ignore a large proportion of the statements and avoid overt rejection (and potentially conflict).

The assumption that being (relatively) silent is a helpful and appropriate strategy in unfamiliar environments is confirmed by Wang (2012), who quotes a Chinese student in the UK and illustrates how the mix of a cultural value (of not standing out) and a feeling of uncertainty caused by the unfamiliar environment result in ‘silent’ group behavior:

UK is not our home. I tend to take a low profile and do not want to be challenged in group discussions. Also, we feel inferior because of differences in language, academic background etc. We do not want to expose ourselves too much to be criticized. We are told that the Chinese people often gather together and talk too loudly and make too much noise. (p. 527).

The quote demonstrates how important it is that the general study environment is welcoming towards international students, and that all types of negative stereotyping are avoided. Because of the critical remarks encountered by this student and fellow Chinese students here at the university, a feeling of insecurity and inferiority develops, which *in itself* prevents the Chinese students from participating actively in group work. 'Being silent' could be understood as a culturally learned reaction to an environment that is to some extent perceived as hostile. Importantly, this reaction is not evoked by the students' background, but by the signals that domestic students (and potentially academic members of staff) send.

Furthermore, striking a balance between talking and being silent is not just a matter of cross-cultural contestation (and perhaps even conflict) within the multicultural group. In any group, it seems to be important to be aware of the talk/silence balance and to try to make sure that this balance is conducive to the group result. Reporting on relatively negative comments made by UK students on multicultural group work, including on the 'silence' of international group members, Turner finds that the UK students realized that talking too much did not contribute to a positive outcome of the group work. This became clear to them because they had to write reflective reports on an assignment written in multicultural groups. Turner concludes:

The reflective aspects of the writing in many accounts shows that students recognized the limitations of continuous discussion unsupported by thinking time [...] and identified groups as uneasy, pressured environments that compromised effective intellectual engagement in favour of continuous noise." (p. 251).

The notion of 'thinking time' in relation to group work is valuable. What Turner's students discovered was that there is not necessarily a direct link between the amount of speech produced in group meetings and positive working results. It is important to avoid that communication turns into 'noise' in endless group meetings. Groups seem to be well advised to be aware of how they spend their time together, and how they ensure 'thinking time' in relation to meetings. The application of classic time management and meeting techniques such as fixed starting and ending times, a set agenda, and a moderator probably help creating a sound balance between talk and quiet working periods and perhaps also between the amount of speech produced by different group members. Although the introduction of more structured forms of interaction may be unfamiliar and awkward, it may also add a sense of seriousness and professionalism to the group's approach to project and team work. And there is also a chance that structured forms of interaction are equally awkward to all participants, hence creating a more level playing field for participation.

Culture-related issues

As indicated above, 'culture' is understood broadly in this context as a given student's linguistic, ethnic, disciplinary, professional, and religious background. As in most contemporary approaches to cultural theory, culture is also understood as dynamic. In the international study environment, this can be seen, for instance, in the cultural dynamics observed at British universities. This may forge a (temporary) sense of community among otherwise ethnically diverse 'international students' vis-a-vis the group of domestic students, which is also comprised of multiple ethnic groups, who may, however, share the cultural advantage of being familiar with the educational system and of speaking English as their first language.

The same dynamics can be observed at Danish universities in the international classrooms if Danish students seek each other's company, or if international students prefer to act similarly. Of course, cultural affiliation is also felt *across* the domestic/international boundary, as illustrated in the following quote from Ippolito's study:

Cos ****'s from [originating country] but I'm the same religion as her, so my culture and her culture are very similar. And she felt quite comfortable with me because it was during the time of the Ramadan and obviously both me and her were fasting and so, in a way, she knew that I was the same. Not that if you're not the same religion it matters, but sometimes when someone's from a different country and they've got something in common with you it does make them feel a bit more comfortable. (Domestic student) (p. 756).

A vast amount of scholarly literature exists on the importance and consequences of cultural difference. The best known and most frequently cited scholar on cultural difference between national groups is the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede, who has advanced the idea that cultural behaviors vary in relation to a specific set of parameters (the most prominent being: individualism-collectivism; masculinity-femininity; the degree of uncertainty avoidance, and the acceptance of power distance). This somewhat generalizing approach has received much criticism, and it does not take into account how rapidly cultural identities and senses of affiliation may change when individuals find themselves in new contexts (such as the study-abroad context); it does not take into account how quickly individuals (for example students) adopt new approaches, values, and behaviors in the process of learning to navigate in a new environment, and it does not consider the heterogeneity of ethnic and national groups. For all these reasons, such an approach does not offer much help in terms of understanding cultural difference in multicultural study environments. In fact, literature describing cultural difference as something concrete and almost tangible may have contributed to the idea that behavior, and especially the behavior of what is perceived as out-groups, is guided by cultural norms that are so strong that members of such groups may easily be offended if something 'wrong' is unintentionally said or done. It has been found that students, and domestic students avoid contact with international students because they are afraid of violating cultural norms, of offending fellow students, and of being perceived as clumsy, ignorant amateurs in terms of intercultural contact (e.g. Harrison and Peacock, 2010; Harrison, 2015).

For everybody, being a part of a multicultural study environment and not least of multicultural groups may involve incidents that can be perceived as intimidating and offensive, and such feelings might be connected to cultural background and identity. Perhaps the most problematic forms of behavior are those which, intentionally or unintentionally, contribute to a feeling of being excluded from the various communities that form part of a university student's life: the community of the class they are taking, the study group, the project group etc. For example, as demonstrated by the examples above, non-native speakers of English may literally be excluded from group work because they are labeled as less competent language users. Even well-meaning initiatives to remedy 'deficiencies' and offer help to particular groups can contribute to a sense of exclusion and stigmatization among members of the targeted group.

In Denmark and in other Western countries, alcohol often plays a role in events that – ironically – are aimed at enhancing inclusion and social cohesion in student groups. However, precisely the practice of drinking large quantities of alcohol is not culturally acceptable in many parts of the world. Harrison and Peacock found that the 'detail' of alcohol consumption in fact contributed to segregation of the student

group into domestic students and (many) international students with a more moderate or no intake of alcohol. Not only were the domestic students unwilling to change their drinking practices in order to include international students in social events (nights out etc.); small-talk in class or in groups after parties or nights out would often evolve around such events, and the international students would again feel excluded because they did not share the drinking/partying experience in the first place. Gram, Jæger, Liu, Qing, and Wu (2013) also found that partying late and drinking were practices that Chinese students would avoid, even if they knew that this was probably one of the easiest ways of establishing contact with the Danish students. Both the British and the Danish students thought that international students should adapt to the domestic ways of socializing. Harrison and Peacock (2010) quote a statement by British domestic student:

[International students] have to make a choice at the end of the day. They have to accept that they are coming over here, it's a different [drinking] culture and if they don't like it, they're going to have to accept it or they are going to be isolated...The culture's not going to change to suit them.' (Domestic student in a focus group interview) (p. 890).

The fact that the home student rejects changing their own behavior in order to accommodate international students is not the only interesting aspect of this quote. Also, this student seems to feel slightly threatened by the attitude of international students: It is imaginable that the culture could change because of the influx of non-drinkers. This seems to be a widespread thought pattern among students as regards the perception of cultural difference in international study environments: The domestic students are 'at home' and thus assured of their the role as 'hosts' in relation to incoming international students. Obviously, the feeling of being 'at home' and of being familiar with the educational culture and the many procedures and practices that are taken for granted creates an asymmetric power relationship between home/host students and international/guest students. Turner (2009) makes the interesting comment that, in principle, no one should feel more at home than others: "Within a highly diverse international learning context, the notion that any group of students is somehow "at home" is dubious." (Turner, 2009, p. 243). We might also say that in the international study context, i.e. at the international university, in the international classroom and in the multicultural group, everybody should feel at home to the *same* extent.

At universities in non-English speaking countries, domestic students do not have the advantage of the medium of instruction being their first language, which creates a more even playing field in multicultural group work. Domestic students still have the advantage of being more familiar with the educational culture and its norms and practices. A clear example is that Danish students at Aalborg University will already be very familiar with group work and even with project work from their high school education (Kolmos, Fink & Kjær-Rasmussen, 2004). Christensen (2016) presents findings from a study of two Danish PBL-organized Bachelor's degree programs. In this study, students' competences in group work strongly impacted processes of inclusion and exclusion (Christensen, 2016).

“Not all that is different is cultural”

A vast amount of literature is found on the importance of the recognition of cultural difference and of being interculturally competent, also as a university student. It is beyond doubt that imagined and real cultural differences impact multicultural group work. For example, domestic students may avoid multicultural groups simply because they anticipate that cultural differences, for example in relation to work ethics, will impede the group's performance. They may also fear that they unintentionally offend

other group members because of their lack of knowledge on the involved cultural backgrounds. Thus, they prefer to work in monocultural groups (Kimmel and Volet, 2012; Harrison and Peacock, 2010). However, it is important to be aware of the fact that what is perceived as ‘cultural difference’ often comes down to practical conditions. For example, domestic students are often more involved in their outside-university lives: They may have family close by, have student jobs that take up much of their time, or be more involved in local leisure time activities (sports, music etc.). International students will have fewer outside-university activities to attend to, one of the reasons being that it is often difficult for them to get a student job. Therefore, they may be more interested in spending time at the university, preferably with fellow students. Domestic students may perceive this attitude as a difference in work ethic and avoid multicultural groups because they prefer to free as much time as possible for their non-university activities. At the same time, international students may perceive domestic students as ‘lazy’ or non-committed because they seem unwilling to spend much time at the university (Kimmel and Volet, 2012).

In some countries, including Denmark, domestic and (some) international students are under different financing schemes. Research from countries where students pay tuition fees, for example the UK, has demonstrated that this influences study behavior, potentially contributing to differences in study behavior between fee-paying and non-fee-paying students. Not only do fee-paying students demand more from the university in terms of ‘service’ from teachers and administrative personnel; more importantly, fee-paying students often think of themselves as ‘investors’ in their future employability and will be very dedicated to making use of every opportunity in order to secure that the investment will pay off upon graduation. A student in Tomlinson’s study on the effects of dramatic fee increases in the UK in 2012 described the level of responsibility felt by students who have had to make a significant financial investment in their higher education program: “I do have to go out of my way to make sure I’m using the library resources, to make sure I’m using all the other services that are available, get involved;...” (Tomlinson, 2016, p. 159).

Group work and Assessment

Assessment researchers typically distinguish between ‘formative assessment’ (process assessment; assessment as the learning activity is progressing) and ‘summative assessment’ (outcome or product assessment). At AAU, projects are subjected to summative assessment: final reports and oral exams (typically lasting 30 minutes per student) form the basis of the assessment. There are both advantages and drawbacks associated with summative project assessment. In accordance with the Western (and especially the Northern European) university tradition, much effort goes into securing the validity and objectivity of an exam, for example through the use of external co-examiners. However, in summative assessment there is not necessarily a direct link between the effort made by individual group members in the writing process and the result obtained at the exam; for example, a group member may have contributed extensively to the writing of the report, but may be too nervous to perform optimally during the oral exam.

One of the most frequently encountered arguments against group work in general and multicultural group work in particular is the problem of fair assessment of group work (Kjær-Rasmussen, 2017). It can be perceived as unfair that all students in a group receive the same grade if group members feel that they have contributed to a different extent to the outcome. If group members are assessed individually and receive different grades, students may also feel that they have been treated unfairly because it is difficult for a teacher to assess the group process and the contributions made by students when the

teacher/supervisor is not present. Different approaches have been adopted in order to address the fairness/unfairness issue. For example, it has been suggested that students should have a say in the allocation of grades within a group because the students themselves know how much each individual member has contributed to the work in the group (Strauss, U-Mackey & Crothers, 2014). Obviously, such an approach is also likely to generate tensions and conflict within a group. Others have suggested more frequent use of portfolio and formative feedback (Jensen & Kjær-Rasmussen, 2013).

It would be naïve and even irresponsible to deny that exams, evaluations, and grades have an enormous influence on the study environment and on relations between students and between students and teachers. Study environments have become more competitive. In Bachelor's degree programs, grades are important in order to obtain a seat in a Master's degree program, and in Master's degree programs, good grades may help in terms of gaining access to internships and the first job. In a PBL-organized university such as Aalborg University, this means that there is a direct link between the performance of the project group and individual career aspirations. Sometimes, students choose to opt out of group work because they need a top grade in order to gain access to a given Master's degree program. This is understandable as the stakes are high for everyone involved.

The literature shows that the competitive study environment does not constitute a welcoming climate for multicultural group work. The fear that participation in a group with students who may have poorer English language skills or poorer academic skills will bring one's grades down is mentioned in almost all studies on multicultural student groups. For example, Strauss, U-Mackey, and Crothers quote one student for saying: "Group assignments mean that ONE person has to work harder and put in effort to make up for other group members NOT to bring down the overall mark. I feel that MY hard work is contributing to other people's degrees" (p. 238)

Very few studies have investigated whether it is in fact correct that participation in culturally mixed groups on graded group assignments will bring down the grade of individual students. Actually, De Vita's much cited study (2002) *disconfirms* the expectation held by many students that participation in groups that are academically and linguistically heterogeneous has a negative effect on grades. On the contrary, the findings suggest that in group work, the grade reflects the grade level of the best performing student in the group. Importantly, De Vita's results do not contradict the student statement quoted above regarding the extra effort put in by well achieving students in order to avoid a lower grade because of the quality of contributions by some group members. The extra work done by strong students in order to achieve a good result is confirmed in a qualitative study conducted by Burdett (2009), who reports that "Some local students believed that increased demands on "time", "additional workload" and responsibility were "the reality of groups with international students" (p. 21). Again, it should be emphasized that studies (such as Burdett's) reporting negative domestic reactions to group work with international students are from English-speaking countries, where the local students have the triple advantage of speaking English as their first language, of being familiar with the educational context, and of benefitting more extensively from teaching because of their mastery of the language of instruction.

Among students, domestic and international, there seem to be two strategies for dealing with the combination of group diversity (in terms of language abilities, for example) and the pressure to achieve high grades in collectively evaluated work. The first strategy is to more or less exclude the student who is perceived as 'weak' from the group's decision-making process and simply write or rewrite his/her part.

The second strategy is to recognize that some group members are facing language challenges, and to invest time and energy in efforts to support these group members in overcoming the language barriers. The many studies of group work at different universities show examples of both strategies. Obviously, the second strategy is the one preferred by teachers, supervisors, and even employers because of its valuable learning potential. It might be argued that it is very idealistic to assume that well-achieving students will invest time and energy in supporting other students, and it has also been argued ‘altruistic’ behavior should not be expected or demanded in today’s stressful and competitive study environment (Strauss, U-Mackey & Crothers, 2014). For students, however, it is important to be aware that building up an attractive competence profile does not only involve achieving high grades. As shown in recent research (e.g. Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016), it is also a question of acquiring desirable job skills such as the ability to collaborate in teams composed of people who are different in terms of language, ethnicity, culture, disciplinary background etc.

Interestingly, the literature does in fact provide examples showing how domestic students (being privileged language-wise in English-speaking countries) have taken on the roles as mediators, thus paving the way for non-domestic students’ participation in the group’s work. Burdett (2014) brings two examples of students who, in an apparently relatively ‘hostile’ environment, made sure that the ideas of participating international students were heard: “They [the other domestic students in the group] wouldn’t relate to [the international student] – they weren’t interested in his ideas. But he did have good ideas. I used to take the conversation for him. I took control (Dee)” (p. 22) and “He [international student] would email me instead of the entire group and say, “This is what I think; could we talk to the others about it? (Anne)” (p. 22).

Burdett also mentions how these ‘mediating’ students were concerned by the ‘rude’ and ‘dismissive’ attitudes of their co-nationals, indicating that these students were more interculturally sensitive than their British fellow students, and that they found ways to transform their concerns to action. Wang (2012) reports how “Group members’ encouraging behavior helped the Chinese students to build their self-confidence in putting forward their views” (p. 529). The effect of a supporting group environment is clearly illustrated by the following quote:

“I tend to express my views when I am with those friendly group members, who are willing to communicate and accept my ideas; with those stubborn and very defensive ones, I choose to be silent and just go with the flow. I find myself becoming more open and more brave than when I studied in China.” (Chinese student at a UK university) (p. 529).

Difference in terms of educational background may also manifest itself as what seems to be different academic abilities. Not all educational cultures prioritize the same aspects of academic work. In most Western social science traditions, methodological precision, awareness and reflection have become key elements of scholarly work, and thus in many programs, students are demanded to be able to demonstrate these virtues. Methodological considerations do not hold center stage in all educational traditions, though. Some traditions and institutions place more emphasis on in-depth knowledge and understanding, and thus students coming from such traditions may be puzzled by the strong demands for methodological reflection articulated in their study abroad program, for example at Aalborg University. However, most likely, most students will be happy to accept the challenge of acquiring new knowledge, such as the Chinese student quoted in Gram et al. (2013):

Some Danish students said that the most difficult part of the project is the methodology part. At the beginning I was even afraid of writing this hard part, because in Chinese thesis we never have this part. We didn't know anything about the definition of methodology and what should be included, it sounded very abstract and impossible to handle well. I know that in some other groups this part was written by the Danish members who had experience about writing methodology, even for them it would take long time to write. But [name of student] and I decided to face up with this challenge. In fact, it was not as difficult as we had imagined, after reading many models and a few hours discussion, we wrote it out in one single day, which made other members surprised and satisfied (Chinese Master's degree student) (p. 769).

The cases and examples provided by Gram et al. (2013) and especially Wang (2012) are positive stories in that they show how students from different university cultures scaffold each other's learning of both disciplinary knowledge and (new) academic standards. These groups clearly adopted the second strategy and shouldered a heavy workload and tough discussions to arrive at a stage where the knowledge of each participant could contribute to the quality of the project. One group illustrated this particularly clearly because the group members (Chinese and Danish students) started out from highly divergent positions on the chosen problem, which apparently both spurred an extensive work effort and contributed to the final quality of their work:

The biggest challenge in my project was cooperating with the foreign group members who have totally different academic and cultural backgrounds, opinions and working styles. When we thought about our topic for the project, we couldn't agree with each other at all. One member criticized everything... At the very beginning, every member was influenced by the information which they have already known or been familiar with, and thought in their own ways ... After our exchange of different opinions through positive communication, we became objective instead of subjective ... Finally we found a balance among the four of us; we started to put effort to arrive at the same destination (p. 766)

Students are obviously strongly encouraged to adopt the second strategy and avoid the strategy of falsifying other students' work in order to obtain a higher grade.

Ethical issues in multicultural group work

As emphasized above, participation in multicultural groups involves a combination of rights and obligations. The right to be included, to be taken seriously as a member of a learning community is crucial, but as the literature on multicultural groups has revealed, this is certainly not regarded as self-evident everywhere (e.g. Burdett, 2014).

This section will address in detail some of the challenges around the set of obligations that participation in any form of group work involves, especially the obligations involving aspects of academic integrity as opposed to academic malpractice and 'free-riding'.

Plagiarism

Students occasionally express the concern that a contribution written by one of their group members may be categorized as plagiarism. In projects written at Aalborg University, plagiarism constitutes perhaps an even more serious problem than at other universities because the project report is seen as a product of the

joint efforts of all the students. If instances of plagiarism are detected, this is likely to affect every participant in the group, also the student who inadvertently submits a project with plagiarized parts, simply because he or she happens to be working with a fellow student who plagiarizes. The plagiarism rules at Aalborg University declare that

“plagiarism exists if an examination assignment in full or in part appears to have been produced by the student personally, even though the examination assignment

- 1) includes identical or almost identical reproduction of formulations or works of other authors without the text being marked with quotation marks, italics, indentation or other clear indication including that of source, page number etc. (copy)
- 2) includes major passages with a choice of words so similar to the formulation of other works etc. that when comparing, it appears that the passages could not have been written without the use of the other work (paraphrasing etc.)
- 3) includes the use of words or ideas of other authors without giving due credit to these other authors (other plagiarism), or
- 4) reuses text and/or central ideas from the student’s own previously assessed or published works without observing the above rules in Nos. 1 and 3. “ (Guidelines on Rules regarding disciplinary measures for students at Aalborg University)

Importantly, the rules distinguish between blatant (“gross”) plagiarism and ‘mild’/ (“simple”) plagiarism. If students inadvertently forget a reference, they will not be expelled from the university for a period of time, which is the most serious sanction for plagiarizing. However, it is up to supervisors and program administrators to make decisions on the severity of plagiarism cases. Thus, students are strongly encouraged to make every effort to avoid plagiarism charges.

The research on plagiarism in higher education suggests that the phenomenon is on the increase globally. The causes are many but include easy access to sources that match the students’ needs for relevant, well-written English language material to copy from. Students themselves often mention external pressure (Stuhmcke, Booth & Wangmann, 2015; Park, 2003) as the strongest motivation. Teachers and administrators also believe that students’ attitudes to plagiarizing have changed towards a more accepting approach. This is in contrast to the strong language used by researchers, university administrators and teachers when characterizing plagiarism. Park describes how plagiarism is condemned using a morality discourse, such as in the following phrases: a ‘sin...against originality’ and ‘the theft or misappropriation of intellectual property’ (Park, 2003, p. 472), emphasizing the undermining effect that plagiarism has in relation to hard academic work and the trust in its results.

Park defines plagiarism as “literary theft, stealing (by copying) the words or ideas of someone else and passing them off as one’s own without crediting the source” (p. 472). Whereas one might think that it would be relatively easy to phrase an unambiguous definition of plagiarism and to institute more or less the same regulations at all universities, understandings of the concept of plagiarism and anti-plagiarism rules differ to a high degree from university to university, and especially from one country to another. On a practical note, this makes it important for students to check the rules at the university where they are currently working. However, in terms of principle, this diversity in understandings contributes to the widespread experience that international students are more frequently involved in plagiarism cases than domestic students. Quite a few studies address the difference between Asian/Chinese and Western

understandings of plagiarism (especially Australian or US American) and conclude by suggesting that Asian/Chinese universities, faculty members and students are more accepting of plagiarism than for example American universities. Stuhmcke, Booth and Wangmann emphasize that this is a stereotype. First, institutions and faculty members seem to be equally consistent in their condemnation of plagiarism. Only, they may understand plagiarism slightly differently. In their study of teacher attitudes, Lei and Hu (2015) distinguish between ‘blatant’ and ‘subtle’ plagiarism and find that the Chinese (English Foreign language) teachers participating in the study understood blatant plagiarism in the same way as it is understood at Western universities. However, the group of teachers did not agree to the same extent on what would constitute ‘subtle plagiarism’. For example, paraphrasing without mentioning the source in the text would not be categorized as plagiarism by the teachers in the group who had no experience with teaching outside of China. In contrast, the teachers who had worked abroad categorized this as plagiarism. Lei and Hu’s study confirms that there are cultural differences in plagiarism understandings, and that international students moving from one university system and culture to another risk being punished for behavior that would not have been noticed at their home university.

Poor English language skills may also be a factor that pushes students to plagiarize in order to achieve the results they need for the degree that they (in some cases) have paid a considerable amount of money to achieve. This problem that has been reported by both British and Australian universities (McGowan & Potter, 2008). This problem seems to be linked to the involved universities’ questionable admission practices, which occasionally allow students with inadequate English language skills to be admitted. McGowan and Potter argue that in an Australia context, such practices should be seen in light of the universities’ increased dependency on revenues from tuition fees paid by international students³. Notably, McGowan and Potter published their critique at the height of a widespread debate on the combination of Australian university admission practices and immigration policies resulting in the problem that international students were sometimes able to graduate with an attractive degree (for example in accounting or IT) but lacked the necessary language skills to practice in the professional field. Because of the media attention, many universities started to address the challenge of poor English language skills and introduced comprehensive initiatives to make English language testing and training an integral part of their programs (Read, 2015). To date, no such issues have been reported at the – largely government-funded – Danish universities.

Although most plagiarism cases at AAU probably concern students working alone on individual projects or assignments, the problem is addressed in the context of multicultural group work because of the consequences for the group if one student intentionally or inadvertently plagiarizes. The literature emphasizes that the institutions themselves must address the problem from a positive angle and do what they can to promote correct academic practice, rather than policing student work and sanctioning transgressions. Emphasizing good supervisor-student contact, appreciating good academic conduct, offering courses on academic writing, and demanding that students follow internationally recognized style

³ See also Tony Tysome’s thought-provoking article on British universities accepting students with insufficient English language skills: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/english-deficit-leads-to-cheating/204142.article>. Apparently, even students with a recognized international language test may have trouble writing longer texts in English. In a similar vein, Naghdy (2014) writes “Inability to articulate and present their thoughts often leaves them [international students in Australia] with no option but to plagiarise with severe consequences and penalties” (p. 142).

manuals are positive initiatives that reach out to students who are unfamiliar with the academic standards of a particular university or discipline (Stuhmke, Booth & Wangmann, 2015). Many plagiarism cases occur because of lacking knowledge of correct academic practice or because of sloppiness or time pressure, and not because of an individual's intention to do something 'criminal'. This also means that the issue is one that can and should be addressed openly in the project group ("Do we all agree on what constitutes plagiarism?"; "How do we make sure that it will not be an issue when we submit?"; "How do we plan the working process in a way that does not put an intolerable pressure on individual group members?" etc.). Students are also advised to consult their supervisors on preferred style manuals and on where to find them. Generally, if you are in doubt whether a piece of the group's work might constitute plagiarism and want to know how to avoid this, speak to your supervisor about it.

Free-riding

Another ethical problem encountered in relation to group work is probably equally complex. The problem of 'free-riding', i.e. the problem that some group members contribute unacceptably little to the group's work, is reported in some studies on multicultural groups (Turner 2009; Harrison & Peacock 2010). Hassanien (2007) reports from a focus group study on group work, quoting one participant:

"I felt that certain members of the group were relying on other group members to complete tasks, and basically were not pulling their weight to provide an equal contribution. The bottom line is, they were in for a 'free ride'." (Hassanien, 2007, p. 142)

The unequal distribution of the work load in group projects and the resulting unfair assessment of the group's result (typically all group members receiving the same grade) are some of the most serious problems in group work. Group work is generally perceived as one of the most effective and successful pedagogic methods in higher education today because of its potential in fostering a multitude of positive skills in students. However, the optimistic evaluation of group work outcomes is somewhat modified by the fact that teachers, program designers and even supervisors know little about what is happening 'inside' the project group. From a pedagogical point of view, there is an inherent dilemma in desiring access to and some control of students' group work processes and the overall goal of letting students develop collaboration and project management skills by maintaining autonomy over their own work process. Little research-based knowledge is found of internal group dynamics. However, existing research suggests that the unequal distribution of the workload is a relatively widespread problem among many students. Aggarwal and O'Brien (2008) state that "Social loafing or free riding has been cited as the single most important factors that can derail a group's effectiveness, thereby resulting in a negative experience for the group" (p. 255).

Aggarwal and O'Brien define free-riding or social loafing as "a behavior pattern wherein an individual working in a group setting fails to contribute his or her fair share to a group effort as perceived by group members" (p. 256). Free-riding is often presented as a 'moral failure' on the part of the students who seem to shirk their responsibilities in group work. However, scholars taking an interest in the causes of free-riding point to both individual and group-related causes of the problem. Firstly, like plagiarism, free-riding is undoubtedly often related to the lacking ability of students to contribute on a par with their fellow students. Obviously, not all students perform at the same academic level, and the emotional stress of feeling unable to meet peer expectations motivates a passive behavior in group contexts. It is important to remember, however, that a student's status in a group reflects group dynamics. In other words, the way

that the group functions contributes to the generation of different forms of group roles and status positions, for example “high-status, hard-working, and good” students and “low-status, free-riding, and poor” students. Hall and Buzwell (2012) draw on Vernon’s concept of the ‘involuntary free-rider’ (Vernon 2008) in order to explain a type of statements that frequently occurred in their data material. These statements were made by ‘diligent’ students who tended to always be dissatisfied with the contributions of other group members. Hall and Buzwell quote the following student as an illustrative example:

Group projects in an ideal situation, where work is divided up evenly and all participants are enthused about the project, would ultimately benefit each individual member. Realistically though, this is not the case. Generally one or two people do the majority of the work, and [other] group members prove to be apathetic, willing only to do the bare minimum, or lack the initiative to take on work unless directed, which is not only frustrating but also unfair. All in all my personal experience with the [group] project was that I did learn new things and was interested in the subject but the amount of work, time and effort I had to put in due to the inefficiency of group work made the overall experience fairly un-enjoyable at times (p. 44).

Drawing on Vernon’s concept of involuntary free-riding, Hall and Buzwell suggest that it can in fact be difficult for some group members to achieve a position that allows them to contribute because high status members act in a way that discourages even well-intending but more insecure members from participating. In a Danish context, one of the few existing studies of group processes (Christensen 2013) confirms the importance of social dynamics in determining students’ ‘standing’ in terms of being an attractive partner in group work. In her study of two Danish PBL universities, Christensen found that students related four different group roles (“the stupid”, “the lazy”, “the dominant” and the antisocial”) to a lacking ability to participate in group work. Being stigmatized as an undesirable collaboration partner may have severe consequences for academic results and might even cause the ‘ostracized’ students to drop out from their programs.

In extreme cases, group members perceived as ‘weak’ may even be barred from making a contribution, as happened in the case described by Harrison and Peacock (2010), where an international student was prevented from writing his part of the project. The negative attitude towards multicultural groups that is often found among domestic students in English-speaking countries is linked to the alleged silent and passive behavior of international students. As both the literature on multicultural groups and on free-riding suggests, silence, passivity and free-riding are phenomena that are related to the social dynamics of the group, rather than to the intentions or the academic abilities of the silent and less active students.

Conclusions

As many studies cited in this introduction demonstrate, a student's outcome from participating in multicultural group work are not only associated with context factors but to a considerable extent also with the student's own approach – to learning, to collaboration and to the purpose of education. The purpose of this introduction is to encourage students to reap the learning potential offered by multicultural group work, while acknowledging that such group work may require more effort, time, and resources on the part of the individual student. Another purpose of the introduction is to provide supervisors of multicultural groups with useful background knowledge and ideas for further reading on the subject.

Group work in general and in diverse groups in particular offers the individual student the chance to challenge themselves and their existing knowledge. Many students think of themselves as good English-language communicators. In multicultural environments, an opportunity is offered to develop these abilities by learning to understand different versions of English as it is spoken in different parts of the world. Student will develop their own communication skills if they need to explain an idea or a point of view in different ways in order to be understood. As explained above, such mediation skills are highly valued in today's globalized labor market.

In a similar vein, many (especially Danish) students feel that they are well-versed in group and project work because of their background in the Danish high school system. Again, collaboration in diverse groups forces all students to take an open and flexible approach to how group and project work should be conducted and to learn how to negotiate a shared understanding of this as a point of departure for their working process. A shared '*code of conduct*' may prevent some misunderstandings and also help solving problems during the work process. Many collaboration problems in group work are triggered by misunderstandings and lack of communication about mutual expectations, but also by practical matters such as punctuality, frequency of meetings etc. In a similar vein, most of us think that everyone knows how to run a meeting. However, as demonstrated by many of the above examples, many participants in project groups and other types of teamwork feel excluded because meetings are run in a way which allows a few individuals to dominate the conversation. A mutual agreement on meeting formats ensures that all participants can contribute. Moreover, the use of professional meeting tools such as a moderator, a set agenda and clear goals for each meeting might be helpful.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that institutions of higher education are responsible for creating the best possible conditions for collaboration in multicultural teams. This is in fact a comprehensive requirement. Firstly, universities should not apply too lenient admission requirements as regards English language requirements because this may cause students to become trapped in a situation where the only way out seems to be to adopt questionable (and sometimes illegal) study practices such as free-riding and plagiarism in order to pass their exams. Secondly, universities should offer tests and training to students who want to improve their language skills after entry into their programs. Thirdly, the literature on multicultural teams also emphasizes the importance of supervision, implying that groups should be offered assistance by a supervisor to solve serious collaboration problems.

Finally, universities and programs can do more to encourage multicultural teamwork through explicit recognition of the skills required and fostered by this form of group work. Curricula regulate student behavior very strongly. If objectives related to multicultural group work were addressed more directly in curricula and rewarded more explicitly in relation to coursework and exams, students would have more

incentives to engage this opportunity. National and international qualifications frameworks demand that curricula require collaboration skills and the ability to work with a broad variety of group members (peers, non-specialists, users). Such skills and competences are developed in multicultural group work at the university.

References

Aggarwal, P. & O'Brien, C. L. (2008). Social loafing on group projects. Structural antecedents and effect on student satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 30(3), 255-264. doi: 10.1177/0273675308322283

Barrett, T. (2013). Learning about the problems in problem-based learning (PBL) by listening to students' talk in tutorials: a critical discourse analysis study. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 37(4), 519-535. doi: 10.1080/0309877X.2011.645464.

Becher, T. (1994). The significance of disciplinary difference. *Studies in higher Education*, 19, 151-161. doi: 10.1080/03075079412331382007

Burdett, J. (2014). Students achieving intercultural competence through group work: realized or idealized? *Journal of International Education in Business*, 7(1), 14-30. doi: 10.1108/JIEB-05-2013-0017.

Christensen, G. (2016). A poststructuralist view on student's project groups: possibilities and limitations. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 15(2), 168-179. doi: 10.1177/1475725716643925.

Cotton, D.R.E., George, R. & Joyner, M. (2013). Interaction and influence in culturally mixed groups. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 50(3), 272-283. doi: 10.1080/14703297.2012.760773.

DeVita, G. (2002). Does Assessed Multicultural Group Work really pull UK Students' Average down? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 27(2), 153-161, doi: 10.1080/02602930220128724.

Diamond, A., Walkley, L., Forbes, P., Hughes, T., & Sheen, J. (2011). Global graduates into global leaders. Accessed at <http://www.ncub.co.uk/reports/global-graduates-into-global-leaders.html> August 2017.

Fish, S. E. (1994). Being interdisciplinary is so very hard to do. In S. E. Fish (Ed.), *There's no such thing as free speech* (pp. 231-242). New York: Oxford University Press.

Gregersen-Hermans, J. (2015). The impact of exposure to diversity in the international university environment and the development of intercultural competence in students. In A. Curaj et al. (eds.) *The European Higher Education Area*. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_6.

- Gram, M., Jæger, K., Liu, J., Qing, L. & Wu, X. (2013). Chinese students making sense of problem-based learning and Western teaching – pitfalls and coping strategies. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(7), 761-772. doi:10.1080/13562517.2013.836096

Hall, D. & Buzwell, S. (2012). The problem of free-riding in group projects: Looking beyond social loafing as reason for non-contribution. *Active Learning in Higher Education* 14(1): 37-49. doi: 10.1177/1469787412467123.

Harrison, N. & Peacock, N. (2010). Cultural distance, mindfulness, and passive xenophobia: using Integrated Threat Theory to explore home higher education students' perspectives on 'internationalisation at home'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6), 877-902. doi:10.1080/01411920903191047.

- Harrison, N. (2015). Practice, problems and power in ‘internationalisation at home’: critical reflections on recent research evidence. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 20(4), 412-430. Doi: 10.1080/13562517.2015.1022147
- Hassanien, A. (2007). A qualitative student evaluation of group learning in higher education. *Higher Education in Europe*, 32(2/3), 135-150. Doi: 10.1080/03787720701840633.
- Hmelo-Silver, C. E. (2013). Creating a learning space in problem-based learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 7(1), 24-39.
- Hmelo-Silver, C. E. & Barrows, H. S. (2006). Goals and Strategies of a Problem-Based Learning Facilitator. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-Based Learning*, 1(1), 24-39.
- Ippolito, K. (2007). Promoting intercultural learning in a multicultural university: ideals and realities. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(5), 749-763. doi: 10.1080/13562510701596356.
- Jensen, A. A. & Kjær-Rasmussen, L. K. (2013). Aligning collaborative learning with individual exams? In L. K. Kjær-Rasmussen & A. A. Jensen (Eds.) *Visions, challenges and strategies. PBL principles in a Danish and global perspective* (pp. 351-366). Aalborg: Aalborg University Press.
- Jæger, K. & Gram, M. (2015). (Self)Confidence or compliance. Students’ experience of academic quality in study-abroad contexts. *Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences*, 8(3), 37-59. doi:10.3167/latiss.2015.080303.
- Jæger, K. & Jensen, A. A. (2018). Opening the PBL game – problem construction in interdisciplinary project work in multicultural groups. In Ravn, O., Stentoft, D. & Jensen, A. A. (Eds.) *PBL and Interdisciplinarity in Higher Education*. Springer Series: Innovation and Change in Higher Education.
- Kimmel, K. & Volet, S. (2012). University students’ Perceptions of and Attitudes towards Culturally Diverse Group Work: Does Context Matter? *Journal of Studies in International Education* 16(2), 157-181.
- Kjær-Rasmussen, L. K. (2017). Assessment of students: A look at validity in emotional situations. In T. Chemi, S. G. Davy & B. Lund (Eds.) *Innovative pedagogy: Recognition of emotions and creativity in education* (pp. 71-89). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Kolmos, A., Fink, F. K. & Kjær-Rasmussen, L. K. (2004). *The Aalborg PBL model: progress, diversity and challenges*. Aalborg: Aalborg University Press.
- Lattuca, L. (2002). Learning interdisciplinarity: Sociocultural perspectives on academic work. *The Journal of Higher Education* 73(6), 711-739.
- Lei, H. & Hu, G. (2015). Chinese university EFL teachers’ perceptions of plagiarism. *Higher Education*, 70, 551-565. doi: 10.1007/s10734-014-9855-5.
- Leki, I. (2001). “A narrow thinking system”: Non-native-English-speaking students in group projects across the curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly* 35(1), 39-67.

McGowan, S. & Potter, L. (2008). The implications of the Chinese learner for the internationalization of the curriculum: An Australian perspective. *Critical perspectives on Accounting*, 19, 181-198.

Park, C. (2003). In other (people's) words: plagiarism by university students – literature and lessons. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28(5), 471-488. doi: 10.1080/02602930301677.

Popov, V., Brinkman, D., Biemans, H. J. A., Mulder, M., Kuznetsov, A. & Noroozi, O. (2012). Multicultural student group work in higher education. An explorative case study on challenges as perceived by students. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 36, 302-317.

Read, J. (2015). Issues in post-entry language assessment in English-medium universities. *Language Teaching*, 48(2), 217-234. doi: 10.1017/S0261444813000190.

Spencer-Oatey, H. & Dauber, D. (2016). The gains and pains of mixed national group work at university. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*. doi: 10.1080/01434632.2015.1143549.

Strauss, P., U., A. & Young, S. (2011). “I know the type of people I work well with”: student anxiety in multicultural group projects. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36(7), 815-829.

Strauss, P., U-Mackey, A. & Crothers, C. (2014). 'They drag my marks down!' – challenges faced by lecturers in the allocation of marks for multicultural group projects. *Intercultural Education*, 25(3), 229-241. doi: 10.1080/14675986.2014.905361.

Stuhmke, A., Booth, T. & Wangmann, J. (2015). The illusory dichotomy of plagiarism. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. doi: 10.1080/02602938.2015.1053428.

Tomlinson, M. (2016). The impact of market-driven higher education on student-university relations: investing, consuming and competing. *Higher Education Policy* 29, 149-166. doi: 10.1057/hep.2015.17.

Walker, M. (2012). Universities and a Human Development Ethics: a capabilities approach to curriculum. *European Journal of Education*, 47(3), 439-461.

- Wang, Y. (2012). Mainland Chinese students' group work adaption in a UK business school. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(5), 523-535. doi:10.1080/13562517.2012.658562
-
- Wiberg, M. (2013). Learning rights, participation and toleration in student group work. In L. Krogh and A. A. Jensen (Eds.), *Visions, Challenges and Strategies. PBL principles and methodologies in a Danish and Global Perspective* (pp. 103-116). Aalborg: Aalborg University Press

Woodward-Kron, R. & Remedios, L. (2007). Classroom discourses in problem-based learning classrooms in the health sciences. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* 30(1), 1-18. doi: 10.2104/ara10709