



Intercultural Group Dynamics

Activity 1 Constructively Creating Groups

Activity Description

Purpose

Activity 1 is an icebreaker when the module is run as a stand-alone module, which can also be used (as group work) to energise the group at the start of the integrated module. It has the purpose of (i) creating diverse groups (through the snowball activity), (ii) stimulating discussion surrounding the creation of student groups (through group and plenary discussions on issues surrounding the creation of intercultural groups) and (iii) contextualising intercultural competence as a graduate attribute (through presentation slides 16-21).

No preparation is required for this activity. It facilitates the creation of diverse groups but is also intended to stimulate personal reflection concerning the form that intercultural learning can take through group interaction. This exercise addresses the issue of designing a learning environment (in this particular case group formation) that stimulates positive intercultural dialogue, learning and the sharing of perspectives and prior knowledge.

The facilitator can therefore focus on different aspects of the activity (group formation; the meaning of intercultural learning; sharing of prior knowledge) by adapting the topics for the group discussion and steering the plenary discussion according to the needs/experience of the participants.

Please also note that as this activity necessitates some form of personal space interaction which some participants may find uncomfortable, variations are suggested in the section below entitled "*Possible variations*".

Procedure

1) Snowball activity

- Participants enter the room and sit in the group formation they are already allocated to or sit in group formation of their choice.
- Ask the participants to clear their desks of any clutter except an A4 sheet of paper and a pencil.
- Ask the participants to write the answer to a simple question in the middle their sheet of paper i.e.:

"What is your favourite dish from the country in which you live?"



- Ask participants to take their A4 paper with them and either stand in the middle of the room in a circle or take the participants to an open space near the classroom where they can stand in a circle.
- The facilitator crunches the paper up into a snowball shape and instructs participants to 'Make a 'snowball' out of your sheet of paper & throw the snowballs at each other until facilitator shouts "stop"'.
- A paper snowball fight ensues.
- Following the mock snowball fight, participants pick one snowball, look at the answer & find the person with this favourite dish (if they get their own dish that is OK, they can be joined to a group at the end of the activity depending on the need to supplement a group to produce a required size).
- Participants link up with this person and find more members to add to the group, ending up with 3-5 people per group.
- Return to the classroom and sit in snowball groups.
- For the rest of this module, the participants work in their snowball groups.

2) Group discussion and plenary

- The facilitator has the opportunity (if it was facilitated by the same person or if there is an opportunity to do so) to link back to the module on *Introduction to the International Classroom*, relating to some of the issues which were identified by the group concerning the challenges of operating in an international classroom (i.e. to engage all students for example) → issues on post-it notes on slide 10.
- Play the video "*Intercultural Group Dynamics*".
- The Good Practice principles on slide 12 (Carroll 2015; Leask 2015) are reiterated by the facilitator.
- Participants are handed a worksheet with 4 topics/questions:
 - In a first meeting with a culturally diverse group of students, you want to form small groups. How will you do that? Which criteria will you use?
 - How could you assign groups that support and strengthen students' motivation?
 - If you reflect on challenges that might affect intercultural group work, what would be your top issue(s)?
 - Why is group work important for intercultural learning?
- Participants are asked to reflect on the questions/topics, and to discuss the topic in their groups to resolve the issues identified.
- The groups should then select a member to write on the flipchart the discussion points raised and orally present the results in a plenary session.
- Oral debriefing in the large group. The facilitator invites one participant from each group to present the group's findings.



- A plenary session discussion can take place following the presentation of all the groups supported by the slide which includes some points for further reflection:
 - The difference between forming groups in an intercultural and non-intercultural context.
 - Diverse expectations and experiences on working collaboratively in multi-cultural groups.
 - Diverse bodies of knowledge and experience pertaining to the group's academic project.
 - The impact of assessment on the collaboration in the group.
 - Other didactic interventions to enhance intercultural engagement and learning.

3) Presentation

The facilitator gives a short presentation on the meaning of intercultural competence as a graduate attribute following the slides 18-22 (this is supported by the thematic text to this module and by the thematic introduction *Enhancing Intercultural Learning in the Curriculum*).

Resources needed

1. Activity 1 worksheet
2. Activity 1 PowerPoint presentation
3. 1 blank A4 sheet + 1 pen per participant
4. Flip charts or similar (1 per group) + pens for flipchart

Timeframe

60 minutes (flexible). Works with anything from 6 up to 25 participants (5 groups x 5 people max) and minimum (2 groups x 3 people min).

Possible variations

For snowball activity

- Regarding the finding of group members following the snowball activity, be aware of cultural sensitivity here. Participants can link arms, touch shoulders, walk behind each other or choose themselves how they would like to make visible that they are linked.
- To make it less active (or with a very senior group) people could pass the balls around instead of throwing them.
- If the facilitator is not confident that they can shout "stop" loud enough, use a bell or online tune instead.



- Groups may be formed of unequal size and the rest of the activity can be carried out with unequal sized groups or you may prefer to stop the search after the groups have reached a critical mass (i.e. 4 per group).

For the group discussion

Other topics of discussion could include

- What practical tips do you have when dividing a large intercultural group into smaller groups to promote understanding between group members?
- If you had to provide examples of “diversity”, what categories (i.e. gender/nationality/difference in social/economic status etc...) come to mind?
- How do you go about forming the groups? What characteristics or other criteria do you consider? or do you have any other preferred way of operating?
- What do you think is the difference between forming groups in an intercultural and non-intercultural context?
- What challenges can arise within an intercultural group setting?
- What lessons can be learned as a result of cultural incidents?
- If, on a first meeting with students in a culturally diverse classroom, you were to assign small groups yourself (as instructor), how would you instruct the formation of the groups (i.e. based on ability; gender mix; other...)?
- If you reflect on challenges that might affect intercultural group work, what would be your top issue (i.e. conflicting norms for decision-making; trouble with language fluency; differences in expectations on what constitutes group work; other...)?

References

Carroll, J. (2015). *Tools for Teaching in an Educationally Mobile World*. Internationalization in Higher Education Series. Routledge.

Leask, B. (2015). *Internationalizing the Curriculum*. Internationalization in Higher Education Series. Routledge.

Additional References

UNESCO have produced a resource relating to intercultural dialogue which can be found at the following link: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/intercultural-dialogue>

Cruickshank, K., Chen, H. & Warren, S. (2012). Increasing international and domestic student interaction through group work: A case study from the humanities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 31(6), 797-810.



Gregersen-Hermans, J. (2017). *Intercultural competence development in higher education. In Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: International Approaches, Assessment and Application* (pp. 91-106). Routledge.

Kelly, P. (2008). MULTICULTURAL GROUP-WORK: THE GROUP ALLOCATION PROCESS. In *Higher Education Association Conference* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/phil_kelly.pdf

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