

“Rules You Have to Know”: International and Domestic Student Encounters With Institutional Habitus Through Group Work

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ABSTRACT

As more universities internationalize, interest in engagement between international and domestic students has increased. University initiatives to bring students together often adopt a deficit approach dependent on international students' adjustment to the host culture, overlooking the need for engagement to be a two-way exchange and the role of the institution in this process. Focusing on academic group work as a salient site of cross-national interaction, this study draws on analysis of focus group data to explore how institutional habitus or unwritten rules are enacted at a large U.S. university. Findings indicated that domestic students were better socialized to understand the habitus of the institution and tended to take charge in group work. In contrast, international students were seen as linguistically and academically deficient and were relegated to passive roles in a group. Important implications for practitioners and scholars of U.S. higher education are discussed.

Keywords: cross-national interactions, group work, institutional habitus, internationalization, U.S. higher education

The internationalization of higher education has become a dominant trend among universities in the United States and worldwide over the last few decades. A significant internationalization strategy of higher education institutions (HEIs) is the recruitment of international students (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007), who are

purported to bring an intercultural and international dimension to campus life. This supports the strategy of internationalization at home (IaH) (Knight, 2012), which is built on the presumption that international students can expose domestic students to the world through everyday contacts and special events (Crowther et al., 2001).

IaH is both a strategy and an outcome among a variety of institutional initiatives designed to improve intercultural contact among students from across the globe. The classroom provides one of the most salient contexts of cross-national interaction at U.S. HEIs, and interaction is often facilitated by group work. Though group work is a pervasive practice in U.S. university classrooms today, little research has examined international and domestic students' perceptions of the group work experience. The aim of this study was to understand how international and domestic students experience and perceive group work interactions.

This study draws upon the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) to examine the collective or institutional habitus (Cornbleth, 2010; Reay et al., 2001) of the university in relation to everyday classroom practices. According to Cornbleth (2010), institutional habitus refers to "an intermediary construct through which individuals encounter school structures" (p. 281), conveyed through messages communicated by members of the school community. Institutional habitus represents the unwritten and taken-for-granted expectations governing behavior at an institution as perceived by students, faculty, and staff.

The research questions guiding this study focused on perceptions of group work among international and domestic students in focus groups conducted at a large public research university in the Midwest: (1) How do international and domestic students perceive cross-national interactions in the context of group work? and (2) How do international and domestic students understand the expectations for group work in their U.S. university classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Group work as a sound educational strategy has been given considerable attention in the education literature in recent decades (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Group work benefits students in a number of ways, including through the enhancement of the learning experience (Chang, 2006; Denson & Zhang, 2010), exposure to new ideas and values (Levin, 2005), development of key graduate employability skills (Denson & Zhang, 2010), facilitation of international students' academic and social adjustments (Wang, 2012), and diversification of social networks within large classrooms (Rienties, Heliot, et al., 2013; Rienties et al., 2014).

Educational research has also documented the challenges of group work interactions. Scholars have observed students' negative experiences and attitudes toward group work (Fozdar & Volet, 2012), in addition to the social tensions that arise among group members (Takahashi & Saito, 2013). Other possible difficulties of group work include student resistance (Isaac, 2012), groups' differential levels of collaboration and productivity (Summers & Volet, 2010),

and freeloading group members who avoid active participation in the group (El Massah, 2018).

As increasing numbers of international students study in the United States (Verbik & Lasanowski, 2007), cross-national group experiences have become a common phenomenon. Many internationalization proponents see group work as an opportunity for global engagement among students (Croese, 2011; Kimmel & Volet, 2010). Montgomery (2009), for example, found that international and home students in the United Kingdom saw group work as an opportunity for learning and self-development. Kimmel and Volet (2010) concluded that students' subjective experiences of culturally diverse group work varied according to the organizational and instructional patterns of the learning context. Understanding student perceptions of group work provides a window into international and domestic student experiences of internationalization, as many of their day-to-day interactions occur in a group work context.

Intercultural Interaction in the University Classroom

Although research has shown that intercultural learning occurs when students engage with one another (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Crowther et al. 2001), some literature has recognized that simply bringing international and domestic students together on campus does not necessarily result in meaningful interaction between them (Leask, 2009). For example, domestic and international students may feel negatively toward working with one another (Moore & Hampton, 2015) and choose to self-segregate by cultural background or nationality (Rienties, Hernandez Nanclares, et al., 2013). International students may prefer interacting with co-nationals or other international students over their domestic peers (Bittencourt et al., 2021; Chen & Ross, 2015; Lee, 2010). Horne et al. (2018) found that international students struggled to feel a sense of belonging through academic engagement, suggesting the need for modeling of social integration and mutual respect in academic settings.

In an effort to pinpoint what prevents meaningful interaction, universities and international education scholars may rely on deficit thinking by emphasizing the individual characteristics of international students as the root of the problem (Freeman & Li, 2019). However, a programmatic emphasis on international students' inadequacies and deficits allows institutions to dodge critical reflection on systemic adaptability toward diversity and inclusion (Bittencourt et al., 2021). Few studies consider how institutions and individual students, faculty, or staff may marginalize international students (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Lee, 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007).

This study aimed to understand how the host culture of the institution, or institutional habitus, was perceived by university students in the context of cross-national group work. Through qualitative analysis of students' words on navigating cross-national group work, this study describes how institutional habitus was encountered in interactions between domestic and international students.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study draws on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These concepts help to explain the dynamics of internationalized higher education (Marginson, 2008) due to their focus on "the social world and the dispositions that shape behavior, thoughts, and feelings in social contexts" (MacArthur et al., 2017, p. 32). In the context of a U.S. university in which domestic and international students meet, Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) concepts link structure and agency as they are negotiated in the space of higher education. The university setting represents a structure defined in part by an institutional habitus influencing possibilities for engagement, but students also exert agency by resisting and reinterpreting this set of norms and dispositions. This paper applies these concepts to explore how domestic and international students' experiences of cross-national group work both shape and are shaped by the institutional habitus of the university.

Habitus refers to "an orientation or network of predispositions toward the social world and one's place in it, including a sense of one's resources and how they might be used" (Cornbleth, 2010, p. 281). In other words, habitus is directly linked to an individual's social situatedness, beginning with their early socialization within family, community, and school; all of which impact their actions and decision-making. According to Bourdieu (1990):

The habitus tends to generate all the 'reasonable', 'common sense', behaviors (and only these) which are possible within the limits of these regularities, and which are likely to be positively sanctioned because they are objectively adjusted to the logic of a particular field. (pp. 55–56)

For the purposes of this study, we define the term institutional habitus at universities as the unwritten expectations, rules, and behaviors that everyone seems to know. These unwritten expectations are often implicit, but they guide the ways in which individuals act toward and evaluate each other, and thus indirectly influence their "ability and performance in the formal curriculum" (Smith, 2013, p. 22). Individuals also possess various forms of capital, "the skills, knowledge, and qualifications of a person, group, or workforce considered as economic assets" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) or "power resources" (Swartz, 2016) influencing their understanding of the institutional habitus.

Students who have been socialized in the habitus of the institution are likely to have an easier time navigating the social and educational requirements of group work (Lin, 2014), a dominant pedagogical strategy of Western HEIs. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) described what happens when an individual's habitus aligns with that of their social world:

[S]ocial reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in

water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted. (p. 127)

Bourdieu's (1986) work has been used across a variety of settings, but many applications of his theory of cultural capital omit the voices of communities of color and overlook the forms of capital that marginalized groups possess (Yosso, 2005). In response to these inadequacies of traditional cultural capital theory, Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth puts forth six forms of capital nurtured in marginalized communities. Under the umbrella of cultural capital or community cultural wealth, social, navigational, and linguistic capital have the most explanatory power for our exploration of cross-national group work.

Cultural capital in the context of group work represents both students' educational backgrounds and their socialization within the shared habitus of the U.S. education system. Social capital refers to the networks of people and links to community resources students draw on (Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital represents skills of maneuvering through institutions and fields, often those which are unfamiliar or represent sites of inequality (Yosso, 2005). Linguistic capital refers not only to international students' multilingual backgrounds but also their skills and experiences communicating in more than one style (Yosso, 2005).

To identify the forms of capital which have currency in cross-national classroom encounters, and the ways in which institutional habitus informs group norms, we take classroom group work as our unit of analysis. Thus, we can better understand the underlying logics of the field of group work by exploring how domestic and international students make meaning of the group work experience during focus group discussions.

The amount of power an individual has within a field depends on their position within it and the amount of capital they possess. Groups or agents occupying a position of power have the advantage of determining what counts as authentic capital (Webb et al., 2002). For example, in Lin's (2014) work examining the written assignment in higher education as a field, the instructor legitimized international students' capital through comments, suggestions, and grades.

In our study, students' mastery of the rules of group work are granted legitimacy in part by their instructor, but legitimation must also come from the other members of the project group. In groups, students display different forms of capital and influence. In the case of cross-national group work, domestic students often wield greater power in the field. Institutional habitus thus predicts that domestic students possess the unwritten procedural and behavioral knowledge to have the upper hand in group work settings. Without instructor or classmate legitimation of the "capital portfolio" (Lin, 2014), or the forms of capital each international student presents, international students may find themselves excluded or ignored within groups, their contributions overlooked. In this study, we analyzed students' observations about their experiences to identify the role of habitus and capital within the field of group work.

METHODS

This study employed focus group methods; a qualitative approach designed to elicit individual experiences in a conversational format among individuals with similar experiences. The focus group data used for this study were originally collected as part of a larger university project examining cross-national interaction and educational contributions of international students to the broader institution. Data were collected in multiple group sessions ranging from two to nine members. In total, nine focus groups were conducted with 131 students at one university. Focus group interviews were chosen for data collection to engage as many students as possible and to examine common themes among participants. Focus group participants included the following: 50 undergraduate domestic students, 30 undergraduate international students, 21 graduate domestic students, and 20 graduate international students. Students were defined as domestic if they did not need a visa to enroll in the university. All international students held student visas.

The use of focus groups assumed that students who identified as either international or domestic had shared experiences that could be identified through guided conversation. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), focus groups elicit consensus or shared meaning-making when participants with common experiences are consulted on phenomena that they encounter.

The original framing of the university project was meant to disrupt conceptualizations of international students on campus as merely economic resources, as they have increasingly been framed over the past two decades (Stein & de Andreotti, 2016). The initial review of focus group data identified the cultural and/or academic contributions students make at the university. Researchers originally employed inductive, interpretive coding to identify how cross-national interactions engaged all students academically and cross-culturally (for a full description see Johnstone et al., 2018).

In the present study, our analysis identified group work as a prevailing mode of instruction and site of cross-national interaction, bringing up questions about the functioning of power and capital in this field. We analyzed focus group data through qualitative content analysis and found that our inductive coding aligned with a Bourdieusian framework of habitus. Thus, Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) concepts were applied to understand the phenomena present through a critical lens and to identify structures of power and legitimacy. However, we found that the dynamics of group work could not be fully understood without also incorporating Yosso's (2005) concept of community cultural wealth, a complement to Bourdieu's work. Through this critical lens, we identified how relevant forms of capital functioned in the field of group work based on the perceptions of domestic and international students.

FINDINGS

Findings indicated that institutional habitus was present in group activities. While domestic students described having a shared understanding of how to proceed and the roles students should play in group work, international students who lacked

experience with the learning strategy of group work faced unique difficulties. The following exchange between domestic and international student participants in a focus group encapsulates the themes of habitus and cultural capital that emerged from the data. Participants A and B, who were domestic students, and Participant C, an international student, spoke to the unwritten rules of group work, who has power, and which forms of capital are valued.

Referring to group work as an educational strategy in classrooms, Participant A explained, “Yeah, but it’s more innate for us, compared to an international student.” Participant B concurred, adding, “It’s more in place.”

Participant A continued:

This is what we’ve grown up with generally, even though at the university level it might be different, but we’ve been taught these same things, the same skill set from elementary on where that’s just carried on. And international students maybe haven’t been taught that same skill set that we have.

Participant C replied, pointing out that that group work is not universal:

Group work is not a norm in every culture or in every educational system across the world, as far as I know, for the four countries that I have lived in [I]t was so difficult for me to get used to the group work dynamic in United States. And there’s an assumption that when you start working everyone has the same power and intellectuality, but then later, ... you understand what kind of different skills people are bringing and you try to adjust that to the group work ... So it was so interesting for me to learn how to navigate that division of labor, division of responsibility. Who’s going to lead? Why they should lead but not the others?

In this discussion, we see that the domestic students felt that they were already equipped with the cultural capital to comfortably navigate group work assignments. They described their understandings of how group work functions as innate or ingrained through previous educational experiences in the United States. Participant C explains that as an international student they had not been socialized within the habitus of group work and had to “learn how to navigate” group work assignments.

Institutional Habitus and Capital in Group Work

Our analysis further suggests that the forms of capital students displayed influenced the roles and behaviors they assumed in group work. The field of group work had its own valued currency of capital. Cultural capital was essential to the roles and behaviors of domestic and international students engaged in group work. As Participant D, an international student, explained:

I think one thing is you’re here to learn how to navigate the U.S. academic system, you want to get successful, right? And so there are rules you have to know, otherwise you obey it or you fight against it ...

And [working] with American peers, you get to know some things that you don't know but they do, and that will bring out something that is not explicit in the brochure, in the workshops for international students.

This student implied that international students needed to develop particular capital portfolios to be successful at the university. International students needed to learn the “rules” to have their capital recognized and legitimated by their peers within the group. These rules are “not explicit in the brochure” and have to be learned by students on the go.

Linguistic Capital

Our findings further suggest that linguistic capital, in this case the ability to perform with a high level of academic English, was critical to how student roles played out in group work. Language, whether written or spoken, was a key concern of domestic students when it came to completing projects with their international peers. Some focus group participants adopted a deficit approach toward international students' linguistic capital by emphasizing the challenges international students faced in effectively demonstrating the English language skills that domestic students perceived as valuable. A successful display of linguistic capital became a key gatekeeping measure monitored by domestic students in relation to international students' abilities to navigate group work, as demonstrated in Participant E's comments:

I could tell they were international students [because] obviously their writing wasn't great so I figured that they aren't fluent in English. So that was pretty challenging. And then having to rewrite a lot of sentences and stuff to fix the basic grammatical errors. I feel like they do kind of put in more effort, because they have to prove themselves, that they can compete on our level, even if it's a second language to them.

This domestic student saw international student partners as a potential liability because of the extra work needed to edit their peers' writing. International students failed to demonstrate possession of a narrow, yet valued, form of linguistic capital. This student's reactions did not reflect the broader narratives outlined in IaH around the benefits of international learning, but instead suggested a narrow understanding of the goals of education and the skillsets that are most valued in classrooms.

In another reference to the currency of linguistic capital in group work, international student writing was mentioned repeatedly by domestic students in the focus group interviews. Domestic students felt that they needed to closely monitor international student writing in group projects when a grade was on the line. According to Participant B:

I think one of the biggest problems we ran into was we would have to overcompensate on our parts, 'cause the writing level wasn't there. So that was a more frustrating experience, because I would be reading stuff

sometimes and I'm like ... we can't submit this portion of the paper, 'cause it won't cut it.

International students expressed awareness that their language skills were a primary concern for domestic peers in cross-national interactions and used as a rationale for exclusionary behavior by domestic students. As Participant F, an international student, stated, "And also for Caucasian friends, they [are] not one hundred percent waiting to talk to international students, [be]cause they know there's a language barrier and a cultur[al] barrier between them."

Deficit Perspective Toward International Student Capital Portfolios

Although some domestic students highlighted the benefits of working with international students for learning about different cultures, many did not perceive international students as equal contributors to group work. Instead, they perceived international students as in need of domestic student guidance to navigate the system. As Participant E, a domestic student, explained:

A lot of international students that I meet tend to be more quiet and reserved, and so they don't seem to really speak up ... that's why the American students take over, because they're not speaking up so they just take charge of it, but I feel like if they would they could bring some really good different viewpoints to the table.

A view of international students as lacking skills and needing additional help seemed to be a default assumption among U.S. students. This reflected the positionality of domestic students with experiential knowledge of how things work in U.S. HEIs.

The focus group excerpts above demonstrate that both domestic and international students adopted a deficit view toward international students, emphasizing their weaknesses in group work. Moreover, both domestic and international students acknowledged an institutional habitus and the position of power domestic students occupied. Domestic students' individual habitus aligned with habitus of the institution and they possessed more valued forms of capital for group work. Students also acknowledged that domestic students could "fix" (Participant E) the contributions of international students by serving as cultural interpreters, but such help inevitably led to unequal power dynamics.

Domestic Students in Cross-National Group Work

As a result of previous educational experiences, many domestic students are pre-equipped with a set of skills and expectations around studying, seeking resources, and assignments at U.S. HEIs. This institutional habitus prioritizing the needs and prior experiences of domestic students goes largely unquestioned, despite an increase in internationalization activity on campuses (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Crose, 2011; Knight, 2012). Domestic students are thus more likely to embark upon projects with preconceived notions of how a student group best functions. Consequently, domestic students self-ascribe credibility and often

appoint themselves as guides for international students in group work, as described by Participants A and B. Participant A stated,

They [international students] might learn how to navigate the American education system better by working with people who know what's going on, even though a lot of times we don't even know what's going on. But we know a little bit better than international students, so they might learn ... how to approach a professor, or the type of writing style that professors are generally looking for, or even things like how to navigate some of the school systems here at the university.

Participant B added, "So, basically, everything that we as domestic students have to learn at some point."

The above interaction between domestic students shows that their implicit understanding of institutional habitus lent them the authority to dictate how the group work encounter unfolded. International students found themselves on the margins because their capital portfolios had less perceived value in this field. Specifically, they lacked cultural capital in the form of knowledge of the implicit rules governing group work. Domestic student participants observed that American students tend to take the lead in group work encounters. Participant G shared,

Well in my experience, if I was being stereotypical, usually it's the American students that take charge first and... I mean it's not like they don't want input from the other people, but I think a lot of times people assume that the international students would rather not take charge, or are shyer, or they have a language barrier.... [O]ne of my friends is from Korea. He speaks English very well, but sometimes he [uses] the tenses wrong or speak[s] really slowly, and so they would almost cut him off, and finish his sentence ... because they wanted to do their presentation well.

Participant H added,

With my experience, it was the complete opposite. He was the only international student in our group, and he completely took charge ... I just found it refreshing to see, 'cause it rarely ever happens ... I see that they do get cut off a lot, and it's almost like we don't trust them enough to get things done.

From Participant G's perspective, domestic students approach group work with the assumption that international students who fail to display the valued forms of linguistic capital need domestic students to take a leadership role in the group. When international students demonstrated linguistic capital by taking charge in group work, as in Participant H's example, this was understood as an exception to the rule.

International Students in Cross-National Group Work

In contrast with deficit perspective toward international students adopted by domestic peers, interviews with international students revealed several examples of international student agency in group work. Their agency was revealed by the navigational and social capital they employed to succeed in cross-national group interactions.

Navigational Capital

Some international students developed strategies to avoid the stigmatizing beliefs that domestic students held about their language capabilities. These students navigated around the requirements of group work, finding ways to remain under the radar by completing behind-the-scenes tasks rather than confronting stereotypes about their language skills. In the following exchange, international students described coping strategies for avoiding uncomfortable conversations with domestic groupmates. As Participant I explained:

I heard a lot of students say that they know if they need to work on a project, a lot of international students will choose to do some work, maybe prepare for PowerPoint or something... [so] that they will not have to speak publicly.

Participant D agreed, adding:

You know, I have seen group work, like a group presentation. American peers take the lead in the group presentation and their English is like perfect, so they do the talking. And some international students will just click the PowerPoint, or do some preparation work. But not really the talking.

Avoiding group work with domestic students altogether was an additional navigational strategy among international students. Some students felt more comfortable connecting with other international students rather than facing the judgment and assumptions of their domestic peers. International students described how they felt “closer to other international students” and “naturally work[ed] together” because they “share[d] similar struggles” (Participant D).

These examples demonstrate various ways international students navigate systems not built for them. Rather than challenge the system head-on, students instead relied on navigational capital to avoid discriminatory, racist, or xenophobic conversations with domestic students. Social capital built through solidarity networks with other international students aided in this navigation.

Social Capital

Networks of international students who supported one another in group work and classroom encounters represented a form of social capital. International students drew on their broader social networks to better navigate group work. In

the following focus group excerpt, Participant J, an international student, emphasized their comfort working with other international students:

... I think international students might approach more international students than American students. Some of my concerns might be, I'll be thinking, oh, if this question is stupid, or I might be twisting this word, if domestic students whose English is good, maybe the professor already addressed this issue so many times, but I just can't get the language. And you have these sort of concerns that you share more with international students, they will understand if this question is stupid.

In addition to creating diverse networks of peer support to help them maneuver successfully in the classroom, international students also sought out peer mentors outside of the classroom. Some international students were better positioned to navigate the institutional habitus because of their years of experience studying in the United States. International students who had lived in the United States longer were able to help guide their newly arrived peers. As international student Participant C explained:

When it comes to international students my interaction with them, as you said, depending on how much you know about the US, then there's some sort of a power differential between, you know, international students. Someone might have been there longer than the other person, or might speak the language better than the other person, so it's kind of like "Okay, you're kind of like my mentor right now, you need to help me to get acclimated to the culture and the rest of it," so I had so many other international, you know, friends of mine coming to me and asking me questions if they came later to the United States, and I did the same thing to the other international students who were here before.

International students who were in the US longer developed a better understanding of the institutional habitus and could serve as mentors to other international students in learning the unwritten rules. This social capital, or network of international peers supporting each other, provided a mechanism for navigating and succeeding in the institution.

DISCUSSION

This study used focus group interviews to understand international and domestic student perceptions of cross-national interactions in group work. Our analysis sought to describe the unwritten expectations of group work by applying the concepts of institutional habitus and community cultural wealth. The findings of this study support the use of institutional habitus (Cornbleth 2010; Reay et al., 2001) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as productive frameworks which complement Bourdieu's original habitus framing (1986, 1990) to examine cross-national interactions in higher education.

A key contribution of our findings is that focus group participants made sense of cross-national group work interactions by centering the forms of capital with currency in the field. Group work involved a delineation of roles among domestic and international students, with domestic students holding great power over what forms of participation were valued. Thus, domestic students often took charge of proceedings while international students were relegated to more passive positions. These positions within groups were reinforced by domestic students' perceptions of how international students could contribute or lead. When international students exhibited successful displays of capital in the group, this was seen as an exception to the rule. However, in these cases, international students were in fact developing their own strategies and capital resources to contribute to group projects.

As in Lin's (2014) study on international students and writing assignments, a successful display of linguistic capital held great value in group work, especially to the domestic students who were the dominant gatekeepers. Domestic students frequently referenced concerns about speaking, writing, and performing academic English in the university classroom, and many expressed a lack of confidence in international students' academic English abilities when a grade was "on the line." In turn, international students worried about making errors, avoided speaking during presentations, and often complied with their assigned roles.

The participants in this study strictly observed the conventions of presenting group work, a pressure that they put on themselves and their classmates as part of the group work process. In an increasingly multicultural and multilingual university space, it is perplexing that linguistic abilities carry so much weight in comparison with the content or quality of student work and learning outcomes. The monolingual mindset of the university (Liddicoat & Crichton, 2008) is one of the most entrenched and prominent principles of institutional habitus in majority English-speaking contexts, one that appears to be present at this study's research site. Further, after decades of internationalization research and strategy, including IaH, there appears to be little cultural shift in how teaching and learning are done in the United States. Institutional habitus seems to advantage domestic students over international students and reinforce narratives of U.S. superiority.

Institutional habitus as a theoretical lens reflected university students' understandings of the unwritten rules and standards operating at HEIs. Students can absorb rigid understandings of how to behave in the university learning environment, perpetuating the idea that international students are not prepared to be equal contributors. The results of this study indicate that both domestic and international students are aware of domestic students' privilege but are not necessarily aware of the root institutional assumptions that promote and reinforce such privileges. Our data suggest that the culture of the institution (and U.S. higher education, in general) influences cross-national interactions on campus and reinforces narrowly nationalistic stereotypes of expertise.

Though domestic students appreciated the perspectives of their international student peers, the wealth of linguistic, navigational and social capital international students brought to groups often went unrecognized. However, analyzing focus group data through the lens of navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) revealed the ways that international students draw on their rich capital portfolios to

successfully navigate group work despite their unfamiliarity with institutional habitus and its narrow and stereotypic assumptions about international student roles in groups.

LIMITATIONS

A key limitation of this study was the lack of demographic data available to the researchers as part of our qualitative data set of focus group interviews, which had been previously conducted by a separate research team. Information on demographic characteristics of focus group participants, including their race, gender, nationality, field of study, and level of study was not available to the researchers. This information is needed because neither domestic nor international student groups can be treated as homogenous, as both represent diverse student populations. Though this study shines a light on the dynamics of group work among international and domestic students at one university, it provides limited insight into the perceptions of international students toward the unwritten rules they encounter at their universities—perhaps because it takes time to recognize such unwritten rules exist. The concept of institutional habitus from the perspective of internationalization should be further explored beyond group work to examine broader university functions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings of this study suggest that universities are not impartial spaces designed primarily to serve the needs of a diverse student body, nor has internationalization created a comprehensive space for rethinking how education is done in U.S. institutions. Diversity and internationalization seem to have become buzzwords for institutions which readily employ the terms without fully considering the structural barriers in place for diverse students.

One way to address these shortcomings is to revise how institutions and practitioners understand student participation. To shift the mindset from a deficit perspective toward international students, universities should recognize international students as competent contributors to the academic community in their approach to internationalization. Faculty should prioritize an awareness of the diverse learning preferences and communication styles of students when designing group work assignments and question the ways unstructured group assignments may reproduce inequalities in the classroom. For example, Kim et al. (2016) provided a number of suggestions for designing group work to incorporate different types of engagement, including by setting up rotating discussion leaders, creating groups which remain the same throughout the course, and allowing students to nominate a spokesperson.

While radically shifting the ingrained institutional habitus of a university cannot happen overnight, it might productively begin with expanding norms to include most comprehensible expressions of academic language. There are moments when correcting every non-standard grammatical and stylistic error might be productive, but a deeper focus on the content and overall quality of the

work may disentangle the process of cross-national work from the internal language policing that domestic students currently perform in groups. Additionally, curriculum should be flexible enough to welcome a range of modes of participation to fit the diverse strengths and needs of today's college students. Not every goal needs to be accomplished in groups—especially if these groups introduce stereotypes and power differentials into the learning process.

Moreover, given the barriers to meaningful interaction between international and domestic student peers, more work needs to be done to promote organic, low-stakes connection between them. It is critical to consider the institutional habitus and the messages university programming sends about international students in designing programs for bringing these two groups together. Programming might center on what Thomas et al. (2018) described as “common grounds” of experience, such as cultural celebrations, faith, and shared challenges, to promote meaningful interactions among all students. At the same time, such programming runs the risk of superficially celebrating diversity without addressing structural teaching and learning practices that advantage some students over others.

Future research should investigate which configurations of group work in the university classroom are most inclusive, and which programming is most effective for cultivating inclusive social and academic environments for university students. This study has begun to pull back the curtain on the hidden habitus of higher education institutions and its potential to marginalize international students, in particular, but more work needs to be done to inform which alternative strategies best support students. Faculty and staff who utilize group work activities should engage directly with students to form expectations for cooperation and leadership roles in group work within a classroom community. Group assignments should be carefully designed and considered rather than assumed as a gold standard of university teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

In all cases, internationalization is a process that benefits from careful critique. The intended or unintended assumptions, prejudices, and power imbalances that emerge from everyday practices in HEIs, including the teaching strategy of group work, are rife with opportunity for research and scrutiny. Institutional habitus and cultural capital as a framework can indicate why particular actors engage with each other in the way they do within particular institutions. This qualitative study indicated that classroom-based group work is a useful unit of analysis for understanding how habitus is reproduced in institutions as part of internationalization practice.

The notion that international students alone are responsible for adapting to the U.S. university setting, and learning its habitus is evident in the findings of this study on the dynamics of group work. This approach sets a tone for group work interaction that overlooks the strengths and capabilities international students bring with them to their studies and elides the important role that domestic students and the habitus of the institution play in the integration of international students. Moving away from deficit thinking, higher education

institutions and the students, faculty, and staff who comprise them should approach group work activities with intentionality to build cooperation skills and inclusivity rather than reinforce social hierarchy and division.

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