Student-centered learning in Group Work: Know Self, Understand Others, Collaborate and Reflect on Process

Whether I teach a course I have taught before or a new class, I am always challenged to find ways to get students to connect to the topics of my course. In my Food Politics in LA course, for example, students have at times complained that the readings are dense or uninteresting or more importantly, they are not sure how my class lessons apply to their majors. Thus, my challenge is not only to inspire, but also to help students make connections between my class, their personal lives and their disciplinary focus.

In his *Produce Thinkers, Not Docile Workers*, David Gooblar discusses ways we can become more proactive educators by using our power in the classroom to create a “more open, egalitarian, and more focused on real learning” (Gooblar 2015). He borrows from Cathy Davidson, a professor and scholar of technology and Pedagogy at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, to suggest that we begin by relinquishing control over the classroom in order to create ‘student-centered learning’ (Davidson in Gooblar 2015). In turn, I proposed to use my OARS grant to explore student-centered learning in my Food Politics in LA course. My personal interest was combined with the stipulations of the OARS grant, which are as follows:

Deliverable to include points that other faculty can use in increasing student agency. Of particular interest is the group forming and how students report their learning was affected. Will need to analyze that qualitative data (which Claudia is an expert at).”

- Faculty write the report is a format appropriate for dissemination (publication)
- Report includes evidence of research into the literature of assessment. (Ballard and Mayberry can advise)
- Report includes what the faculty member learned and recommendations for improved teaching for potential adaptability for use at Otis.

Originally, I planned to turn the class over to students for four weeks so they could work in groups to research a food politics topic of their choice, prepare a lecture presentation and engage the class in discussions. However, the call to focus on group formation led me to explore literature on teamwork and collaboration and this undoubtedly influenced me to rethink my original idea and instead to apply the student-centered learning approach specifically to the development of groups.

The student-centered learning approach to group formation I explored involved giving students freedom to choose a topic of their liking to design a

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1 Student-centered learning, also known as learner-centered teaching is a concept that grows from a larger conversation begun by Maryellen Weimer who sought to create applicable means to deconstruct the power laden teacher-student relationship in the classroom in order to develop more meaningful learning experiences for both teacher and student (Weimer 2002).
creative and collaborative response to any issue related to community gardening and/or food politics. However, it also informed the way I set up groups based on common interest. An in-depth exploration of my methodology will follow a discussion of influential pedagogy.

**Student-Centered Learning: Choose Your Elements and then Let Go!**

Student-centered learning arises from the recognition that the college classroom is “extremely instructor-centered and that this situation works against students becoming successful, mature learners” (Brown Wright, 92:2011). From the language we use to write course descriptions to the ways we deliver information in the classroom, what is often communicated is that we are in charge and according to Brown Wright’s *Student-Centered Learning in Higher Education* article, this leads to “anxious and tentative rather than empowered, confident and self-motivated” students (Brown Wright, 92:2011). In turn, the recommendations have been to give up some of the power and share decision-making in the classroom.

So, how do we give up power in the classroom and still ensure that students learn necessary information regarding the course topics? And how can we make the learning enjoyable so that students connect to information in ways that will stick? To begin, one must determine which course ‘elements’ must remain under one’s control so that once this is established, students can be given the power to construct the lesson they want to learn and the methods they want to use in doing so. Methods that encourage and instill student-centered learning therefore include allowing the students to choose the readings, preparing the lecture and/or discussion and working collaboratively to conduct interviews with scholars and sharing the information in a public forum (Davidson 2013). Next, you turn the experience over to students and let them share what they learned and essentially do the teaching.

Given the flexibility in pedagogical methodologies one can employ to deconstruct the traditional instructor-centered experience, I originally outlined a four-week experience that would turn the classroom over to students who would be expected to work in groups to research and prepare a lecture on a food politics topic of their choosing. The elements I planned to control were a) grouping based on common interest, b) determining the research methodologies, c) moderating discussions, d) requiring them to share the information in class and via social media and e) assessment of learning through reflective writing. The elements I planned to leave up to students were the selection of topic, readings and presentation mode. The goal of this exploration was to give students greater agency in determining what they would learn in the hopes that they would choose topics that mattered to them whether on a personal or academic level. However, Rebecca Frost Davis’ “Yes, but How Do You Teach Collaboration?” (2012), prompted me to turn the focus back on myself and to reflect on how I was teaching collaboration (Frost Davis 2012).

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2 Weimer identifies five areas where the teacher-centeredness of the classroom is clearly seen: the balance of power, the function of content, the role of the teacher, the responsibility of learning, and the purpose and processes of evaluation.
Not only did it become apparent that I needed to really think about the skills I wanted to teach, but also how to provide students the opportunity to reflect on the experience in order for them to identify the value of the classroom experience or a given project and perhaps even how they might apply it in other areas of their life.

**Teamwork and Collaboration: Fail, Reflect on Process and Repeat**

While educators across college campuses recognize the value of collaborative learning and in turn, include team projects in their courses, “most,” explains Frost Davis, “don’t know good teamwork” (Frost Davis 2012). Educators appreciate what students can learn from working together, but they do not necessarily know how to teach students skills for working in teams. Frost Davis’ reflection on the current state of teamwork in higher education in turn, impacted my thoughts regarding the importance of failure that many of us have experienced at one point or another, but which we have not always used as a teaching opportunity (Frost Davis 2012). Additionally, Frost Davis also emphasizes iteration and the importance of reflecting on process rather than then end product.

Many of us would agree that when it comes to team projects, different elements help or hinder the team experience as well as the quality of the end product. However, it is not always possible to avoid failure and we should put as much time into group formation as we do in “help[ing] students learn from failure” (Frost Davis 2012). Frost Davis recommends using reflection to engage students in thinking about what they learned from the failed group experience. In the larger scheme of things, “getting a little advance experience on how to handle malfunctioning team dynamics is not necessarily a bad thing” and it actually serves as preview of what teamwork in the workplace will really be like; some group experiences and the end products will be successful and some will fail, but both experiences will always have lessons to teach us (Frost Davis 2012).

Along with using failure as a learning opportunity, Frost Davis recommends that we also practice iteration. In order for a lesson to be gained from a team project, it must be done more than once, however, this poses a couple of challenges for the educator. First, group projects tend to focus on the specific course taught by the instructor and they tend to be done only once and within a short period of time. In turn, Frost Davis explains, “at the very least, [students] are learning only one variety of collaboration” (Frost Davis 2012). Therefore in order for students to gain a clear sense on how to collaborate they have to do it again in other classes. This suggests that if we employ group projects in one course, we should do so in other courses we teach, but it also brings up the question of how we might link lessons across courses taught by different instructors.

Frost Davis’ third point concerns process; she expresses the importance of scaffolding the teamwork experience and then encouraging students to reflect on their experiences working with others. While she does not go into the types of prompts she uses to stimulate students’ reflections on their group experience, she
does recommend the use of the Teamwork VALUE Rubric\(^3\), which is “designed to measure the quality of a process, rather than the quality of an end product” (Frost Davis 2012). While I am not prepared to abandon concern for the end product I do agree that process should be a central focus. The question is, what should we expect students to learn from teamwork across courses and perhaps even institutions. What skills will translate into confidence and adequate ability to work in team structures?

According to Cecilia McInnis-Bowers and E. Byron Chew’s “The True Teamwork Model: Blending the Liberal Arts and International Business Education” (2008), group work should not only enable students develop team skills, but also cultivate an understanding of self and of others. McInnis-Bowers and Chew state,

> It is not uncommon for the elements of teamwork to be developed separately across the student’s curricular and cocurricular experiences. . . . This segmentation in time, teachers, disciplines, and domains jeopardizes the cohesion of learning. It is, therefore, imperative to find better ways of helping students successfully master what are not only constituent elements of teamwork but, arguably, also representative outcomes of a liberal education: deeper, richer understanding of oneself as an individual; perception, knowledge, and understanding of others who are different from oneself; and the ability to engage in meaningful and effective collaboration to solve complex problems.

McInnis and Chew’s solution to the issue of segmentation of learning in turn, blends approaches from different fields to bring the lessons under one room, so to speak. The authors propose The True Teamwork Model which involves a “three-pronged approach: knowing self, understanding others, and collaborating to solve complex problems” (McInnis-Bowers and Chew 2008).

The first part of the True Teamwork Model involves exploration of questions through a self-guided format, to enable students a sense of their personal behavior and/or characteristics. Although the authors do not clearly state whether the self-guided format is provided as an online prompt or a written hand-out, they do list the types of questions students can explore. For example, why do I tend to procrastinate? why can’t I speak up in class? Or why do I always jump to conclusions? (McInnis-Bowers and Chew 2008).

The second part of the True Teamwork Model involves the use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence Model to enable students understanding of personality types and “social forms of intelligence” (McInnis-Bowers and Chew 2008). These models serve to provide frameworks for understanding the ways others think and behave. However, since most of us also have cultural ways of knowing, the authors also emphasize the use of models such as Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Framework to support exploration of cultural

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3 The Teamwork Value Rubric can be accessed for free through the Association of American Colleges & Universities here: https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/teamwork
heritage and to provide students with insight into “key behavioral or attitudinal dimensions that are associated with friction and misunderstanding between people from different cultures” (McInnis-Bowers & Chew 2008).

Once students have explored self and other they are ready to begin the collaborative process. The Teamwork Model draws on Tuckman’s stages of development to give students an understanding of teamwork as process. Teams are formed, students get to know each other, they ideally establish “common understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors” and they perform duties by working together to respond to the group assignment prompt (McInnis and Chew 2008). Tuckman originally identified four stages of development: forming, storming, norming and performing, but later introduced a fifth stage, that of adjourning, because he came to understand that reflection and discussion played a role in the learning process (Brown-Wright 1992:2011).

To apply the Teamwork Model, McInnis and Chew recommend turning the classroom into a lab environment established by the design of a group project and “tasks associated with the specific content of his or her course” (McInnis and Chew 2008). Theoretically, students will not only develop knowledge regarding the specific topic, but they will also learn from the experience of working together. Like Frost Davis, McInnis and Chew also express a value for documenting the process of the experience as a way to determine what is learned. Yet, they take their recommendation one step further by proposing the use of ‘reflection-in-action’ in order to give students opportunities during the work process to take a step back, reflect, put their thoughts to action or to rethink their project contribution and then to reflect again. In other words, the process of reflection should not only take place at the end of a project, but rather also be continuous and this not only “trains their cognitive skills in reflective thinking and bringing those skills to bear in decisive moments” but also determines “accountability to the team process” (McInnis and Chew 2008).

**What I did: Applying Student-Centered Learning to Group Work**

Based on my understanding of the student-centered learning approach and considerations related to teamwork and collaboration I determined a group project that attempted to give students a sense of agency over their learning experience and
which emphasized a “three layered learning outcome: knowledge of self, understanding others and collaborating to solve complex problems” (McInnis-Bowers & Chew 2008). To begin, I established what elements I would give over to students and which ones I would maintain control over.

**Elements I controlled:**
- Assigned research paper –
- Grouped students based on common interest
- Assigned Group Project that includes Assessment & Team Building tools:
  - Communication/Collaboration ‘contract’ (tool used to train in team skills; accountability)
  - Plan of Action for Completion Description
  - Group Goals Statement of Intent
  - Readings that teach collaboration
  - Applied the ‘Animal Game’ (also known as Four Styles of Communication) to a) enable reflection on self, b) encourage understanding of others and c) establish verbal contract to define how each person will operate, communicate and how they will all address conflicts.
  - Required that students engage in Self Assessment & Teamwork Evaluation through the use of:
    - Journal of Process (4 entries minimum; no word count requirement)
    - Individual Participation in Group Reflection
  - Required each person to have a speaking part

**Elements students controlled:**
- Selection of research topic
- Determining group project topic & individual roles
- Presentation styles

While the task of assigning assignments is a traditional practice that places the power in my hands, I assumed the role of guide/mentor or as Margaret Andrews author of *Making Teams Work* calls it, “coach” and I focused more on giving students tools to define their ideas, providing check points and reminding them of the assignment requirements (2016). Giving students choice to design their learning experience required me to shift my mindset and to relinquish notions of self as authority over the class. The requirements for the group\(^4\) are not all my own, I too

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\(^4\) In Fall 2016, CAIL faculty were asked to require students to create group ePortfolios; this was partly introduced as a means for establishing greater individual accountability in group projects. Prior to this requirement, I had students create group ‘sections’ within my course ePortfolio.
have to comply with them to a certain extent, but the idea was to fill in the spaces with information students would need and then to back off and let them work it out. I follow this with a description of how I set up the assignment as well as explanations for my choices.

Week 2
In preparation for writing the Library Research paper, I asked students to research a topic of personal interest. My goal was to get them to think about a topic they cared about and to explore its connections with food politics, if any. This assignment had two purposes, the first was to give students agency over their learning experience and the second was to learn more about their personal likes in order to begin thinking about whom I would group together. I took into account personal interest as well as individual behavioral characteristics (e.g., type A personality, self-driven or shy). Here is the exact prompt I used to guide students in their research:

Reading Question #2 due Week 3
During week 2 you identified a topic of personal interest, which could be anything (e.g., angry cat memes, heirloom seeds, mail-order chicks and ducks, furry fandom, NASCAR, food porn, whatever). For this homework I want you to 1) conduct 'hard research' on your topic and determine how it is connected to an area of food politics (Access to food, food safety, peak oil, nature in the city, global warming and/or environmental or social/cultural sustainability), then 2) pick TWO sources to use as primary sources to develop your research paper and 3) Write annotations for your sources, The Otis Way. Bring a print-out of your annotations so we can discuss them during class.

Week 3
To ensure students’ understanding of how to research, I spent time discussing ways to select appropriate information related to food politics topics such as GMO’s. In addition, I took students to the library where Heather Cleary reiterated some of the points I made in class as well as shed new information regarding databases and ways to refine their search. Below is the class description:

Week 3/Feb 8: Research Methodology I: Establishing authority
There is a lot of information available to us via the Internet regarding GMO’s, organic farming, global warming, industrialized agriculture, peak oil and so on. While this represents an abundance of information that is readily available to us, it also poses a challenge: How do we choose what to read? How do I know which author’s words or research are the most reliable? Or is the question, to determine which author has the most credibility?

DUE: Reading Question #2

3:15 Check-in
* Attendance
* How are we doing with submissions? Assignment comprehension?
* Weeks 1 & 2 = Larger context within which CG’s are situated. The big issues: Climate change associated with industrial farming, growing concern re food
security connected to population growth & peak resources (peak oil, peak water, peak everything!)

*Is it all gloom and doom? Or do we have accomplishments to speak of?*

*Meet Kristy Baltezore, course mentor/artist/activist*

**4PM-5PM**

A. How to conduct library research.
B. How to navigate google in order to find reputable and reliable information
C. How to identify local resources
D. Recognizing your own bias
E. How to get started with your own research
F. BEGIN RESEARCH PAPER

Interestingly, over half of the students in the class did not all welcome the incentive to select a topic of personal interest. Students in this category expressed a lack of confidence in determining connections between their personal likes and food politics. The remaining handful of students accepted the challenge and in turn wrote papers exploring connections between social media, gaming, memes and food. Moreover, these students expressed “liking” the research assignment or that it was “fun”. Below are some of the comments made by students in their papers and/or in the final course reflection, which communicate what they explored and how it connects to their personal interests or how they felt about working on a topic based on their personal interest:

“When I was assigned this research paper to relate one of my personal interests and how that interest is connected to food politics; my first thought went to Internet memes. As a nineteen year old girl who religiously follows and embraces the meme culture I wanted to explore what food memes are the most popular and what effect do they have on people?” (Abdulmajeed, Library Research Paper 2016).

“Overall I really enjoyed the class. I was able to tap into some of my own interests and talents for most of the assignments; this made me want to be involved with the class. Creating motion graphics to include in the work, the t-shirts for the group assignment “go The S’dooof!” It was almost like I was collaborating with the assignments, not just completing them” (Essex, Final Reflection 2016).

“Because of English is my second language, I am not a good writer and I always feel confuse when I write a paper. Honestly, the beginning of my paper was not smoothly. But I overcame my weak spot and tried my best to research information about my topic in all of the websites, databases, and library. The paper was finished slowly because I spend much time on reading and finding the useful articles. I also went to SRC for help, because my grammar is not well. Although the paper might not great, I feel satisfy in the end because the topic is based on my interest and the process makes me feel great because I finally know the right way to push my essay on the right path” (Zhao, Final Reflection 2016).

**Week 4 – Week 5**
Papers were turned in during Week 4, class mentor Kristy Baltezore and I read and discussed them and we created four groups based on student interests. Below is an example of two groups, the first was formed based on their individual focus on social media, gaming and memes and the second was determined on the basis of their interests in culture, advertising and health as it relates to food. I provide student last names along with the title of their papers and a brief note regarding the behavioral characteristics each person displayed in order to provide a basis for understanding my rationale for forming groups. As Frost Davis observes, the more successful teams are those “built on members’ dispositions and skills, such as free discourse, open communication, and conflict resolution” (Frost Davis 2012). Below is a description of my first group:

**Group S’doofs**  
Abdulmajeed – Memes and Dietary Choices  
*One of the more vocal students in class. In addition, she exhibited an emotional connection to topics discussed which include concern over water issues, frustration with food injustices surrounding Latina/os in South Central and uneasiness related to climate change.*

Essex – Digital Media and the Eating Habits of Youth in America  
*Vocal, enthusiastic about the course and his personal topic as well as open to the learning process at every point. He never complained about the workload and he was always chipper and ready to vocalize ideas; other students seemed interested in what he had to say.*

Nur – Food Politics Culture and Social Media  
*Not as vocal during in-class discussions, and seemed on the quieter side. Still, she turned in work on time and showed an understanding of the course topics as well as course requirements.*

Kato – Yelp’s Impact on Social Media and Food  
*Introverted, but not lacking in personal or social confidence; this was evident from his willingness to share views during discussions. He spoke directly to fellow students and/or to me and he did so in an audible tone of voice.*

Again, I gave strong consideration to Frost Davis’ comment regarding the most successful teams which is why I was careful not group students whose characteristics were too alike. These were not the only students who wrote about social media, there were a couple of others, but I felt that the group could become out of balance if I had three vocal and outgoing personalities or three quieter types. Of course, one can only intervene so much, and it is possible that the two vocal types butt heads or that someone fall short on their participation.

The paper titles of my second group do not invoke the central theme that connects their work. I felt that the main concern invoked by each student was health, agency and the individual. Two papers looked closely at the ways advertisement shapes food or make up choice and the other two looked at the role that culture plays in defining how we see and think about food. As with the first group I tried to create balance by placing two outspoken students with two ‘quiet’ people, but I was surprised to learn that the seemingly quiet students were actually confident and vocal. Fortunately, the dynamics between all members worked and they maintained positive communication and working relations. The following describes my second group:
Group 15 lbs later . . .

Sanchez – Food Porn: The Relationship it has to Our Health
*Paid attention to the ways food porn is represented in social media
*Outspoken during class discussions and always in a friendly mood. Had some difficulty understanding assignments and navigating, but did turn in work on time. He seemed more of a team player than self driven.

Roberts – Advertising, Impact & Change
*Made well thought out comments during class. She was vocal, but not outspoken and I originally perceived her as more of a team player than someone who could take charge of a group, but her group mates recognized her as the 'leader' due to her ability to a) organize a plan of action and b) make everyone feel included in the decision-making process.

Jo – Are We Using Green or Black on Our Face?
*Researched organic make-up and gave some attention to the ways make up is advertised
*Outspoken and willing to take up issue with ideas I shared. Turned work in on time and made up late work in a timely manner. She seemed to respect the 'rules' even if she also verbally took up issue with workload or requirements. She and Sanchez were good friends, but I figured that they worked well on their own and therefore did not think that their being together would hinder the group process.

Zhao – Authentic Chinese Cuisine vs. American Chinese Cuisine
This student was very quiet. I later learned that her quiet demeanor was due to her feelings of insecurity over her command of the English language. At first she sat with other International students, but those students talked in class regularly and after I called their attention, she made it a point to separate herself from them to avoid being considered as a disruptive student. This showed me her level of personal engagement, but also her willingness to step out of her comfort zone in order to learn and succeed in the class.

Week 7
Although Kristy and I determined groups by Week 5, I did not announce them until Week 7 when I assigned a team building assignment, the Group Question. For this assignment, I selected four readings from Andrew Shea’s Designing for Social Change: “Give Communities Ownership,” “Design with the Community’s Voice,” “Identify the Community’s Strengths” and “Utilize Local Resources” (2012). Each group member was assigned one chapter and they were to respond to a question regarding the reading on their own. In class, each group was given time to discuss the readings and to share the central lessons of that work with the whole class. Below is the assignment prompt:

Group Question due Week 10
What methods did the artists and designers use to respond to community concerns? Do you think these methods were useful? Or do you find the methods or ideas discussed applicable to a situation in your community or an issue you are thinking about proposing for the group project? Or do you think the solution was problematic and if so, how? Explain.

Even though you are working as a group, each person is responsible for reading this chapter and writing their own response, which must be SUBMITTED for a grade. When we meet in class on Week 8 you will have the chance to gather with
group members to put your responses together and to outline the main points of this reading.

You will present the main points of this reading to the class. **Prepare to present your insight as if you were the instructor imparting information to others that you feel they must understand if they are to embark on the development of a response or solution to a social concern.**

Even though I maintained control of the readings, I gave students power over how they would teach the material. I do recognize that the question leads them to look at the readings in a certain way, but I felt that this too was necessary if they were to learn how to respond to real world problems. After all, collaboration must be taught and these readings do just that. In “Utilize Local Resources” for instance, Shea discusses the ‘problem’ that designers worked to resolve, what they did and why. In addition, some chapters specifically discuss techniques used to determine what the project or action would be. For instance, Shea discusses the use of an “open-sourcing technique” or “rounding up” technique that involves “adopting or adding to another’s idea and growing it to maximum potential” (Valicenti in Shea 100:2012).

In class, students met with fellow group members to share their individual thoughts regarding the reading assigned to them. After 10-15 minutes of discussion and preparation they ‘taught’ the other groups how to, for example, use local resources to empower youth to establish a business based on their local food, the pecans. During these student-led discussions, Kristy wrote notes on the glass board while I ‘moderated’ and asked questions to elicit details regarding the projects they read about.

**Week 9**

During this week, I played the ‘Animal Game’ with my students. I have used this game with students before, however in the past I presented it as an ice breaker meant to get them laughing and engaging with each other to prepare them for working in groups. Additionally, my previous use of this game included a ‘freeze tag’ type of movement exercise that helped me scramble and separate friends in order to create groups based on diversity of major and to ‘force’ them to work with someone new. This time, however, I made a conscious effort to use the game as a team building tool that enabled students to reflect on their personal behavior as well as to think about others.

I began by asking questions that were about themselves: What animal do you think best defines you when you are happy? What animal best defines your overall personality and why? After prompting them to reflect on their personalities I asked questions to get them to draw connections between themselves and their classmates. For example, I asked them to consider the similarities and the differences between the animals and then I told them to stand by the animal that best represents who they are. Once they picked animal identities I had them talk about why they are that animal and what misconceptions about that animal they want to correct.
While the animal game does not enable understanding of personality types or of social intelligence such as Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence Model which McInnis and Chew recommend, it does give students an opportunity to think about their own personality and also to draw connections between themselves and others. Students laugh and joke with each other as they take their place under the same animal or when they realize how different someone sees themselves. However, the animal game is not always appreciated. I have experienced a semester or two during which a class found the game childish or annoying, but this year the majority of students in class seemed to really like it and they got the purpose for doing it. The positive response I received regarding the game could be due to who is in the class; the students in this class were vocal, engaged and most seemed to have a playful sense of humor. However, I also credit the way I prompted the exercise.

Prior to engaging students in the game, I asked if anyone had played it before—one person raised his hand and shared a few comments regarding his prior experience—next, I explained that I learned this game from an artist who learned it during an organizing workshop and that she played it with people prior to beginning any group-based project. I told them that I found the game useful as a tool for exploring self-awareness, awareness of others and awareness of how we communicate. With this, we began the game and we concluded with a discussion of how each person wants to be addressed if s/he ‘slacks off’ or falls behind as well as thoughts on best ways to support a group mate that is having difficulty understanding or keeping up. I also opened up the circle for comments and questions regarding the game and or why I did it. When we concluded, Molly Luria Roberts said, “I see what you did, you made us recognize things about ourselves that we also have in common with others in the class, very clever” (Roberts). Since she got the purpose of the game, I reached out to this student and asked her to share additional thoughts regarding the animal game to which she responded:

The animal game was fun to play and to see everyone laugh and giggle together. It was informative to hear a little bit about each other in a humorous, casual way. I think it helped the class feel more comfortable with each other. I enjoyed the interactive and physical aspect of getting up out of seats and moving around (Roberts).

Another student, Adrian Sanchez, noted in his Individual Participation in Group Project Reflection the effectiveness that the game had in identifying personality types. He writes,

I was very surprised and happy to have the teammates I had, I believe our professor Claudia J Hernandez did an outstanding job at selecting the team members. She and our guest lecturer Kristy Baltezore, had us play a game in which, we had to associate our selves with four different animal behaviors; by doing that, we would show our personalities. Because of this game, both Claudia and Kristy, were able to recognize our qualities, therefore they could match us up based on our similarities (Sanchez).

The connections made by these student show the effectiveness that the animal game has in exploring personality types, however further assessment is needed if I am to gain a fuller sense of the impact it has on students and their self learning.
Following the Animal Game, I introduced the assignment, explained the requirements and gave students class time to begin by discussing amongst each other how they planned to collaborate. I did not excuse the class until they had exchanged information and discussed the Communication/Collaboration Methods they planned to use. The prompt I gave them included a link to an Internet article that reviews different online collaboration tools:

**Communication/Collaboration Methods:** What means of communication will you use? Facebook group? Text, email, etc? Please determine which way will be the most inclusive and accessible to you all. You might find this article useful: [The 20 Best Tools for Online Collaboration](#)

As you will see from the group submissions below, students did not write out a full response, but rather listed the tools they planned to use. Still, this assignment gave students a chance to begin the forming process that Tuckman describes. They began getting to know each other and discussing their individual papers to learn more about their interests that I used to bring them together. In some cases, the first two group work sessions gave students a chance to start getting to know a student they had not met or worked with before.

**Group S’doof**

**Communication Ideas**
- Text
- Google Drive
- Weekly Meet-ups (Tuesdays)

**15 lbs later . . .**
This group did not submit a list of communication/collaboration methods, instead they entered their individual email addresses and cell phone numbers along with the following note:

***EMAIL, PHONE, and FACEBOOK MESSENGER are our best bet for contact!***

**Seedlings**
This group did not submit a list of communication/collaboration method, but one student discussed how they communicated in her journal entry #1. She writes,

Week 1: Our group exchanged contact information at the end of class. We planned a skype meeting at 830 PM on Friday. During our Skype call we talked about our essay topics and what are interests are in terms of food. We came to an agreement that there is a major issue with society’s dependence on industrial agriculture. Our group came up with the idea to make a starter kit for home/urban gardening (Chang).

**Soylent Green**

**Communication Methods**
- Fengji:
- Rachel: Tuesday/Friday good. Sunday maybe
- MiNa:
- Ally:
During Week 10 students worked in class and I made sure to remind them of requirements such as keeping up with their individual journals, but I also required them to draft their Plan of Action for Completion and to determine Group Goals. I used these assignments along with the Communication/Collaboration Method prompt to get students to define roles or delegate tasks as well as to help them ‘buy-in’ to the group building experience; these assignments help create the forming and norming stages of team development because they enable getting to know each other as well as the establishment of rules and social roles necessary for performing their tasks. These three assignments also represent three of fourteen possible elements that can be included in a Team Charter, a collaboration tool that Margaret Andrews recommends (2016). The prompts I used for these assignments are as follows:

**Group goals:** What is your intention as a group?

**Plan of Action for Completion:** The plan of action will list the names of everyone in the group with a brief description of what you will do to advance the group project by Week 9 (in other words, what homework are you and your group mates assigning each other)

In addition to requiring students to enter their team response to the prompts listed above, Kristy and I gave them time to discuss and plan during class. As Andrews notes, elements of a good team assignment include “frequent face-to-face interaction to promote team goals” (Andrews 2016). Despite in-class discussions, the ways each group responded to these prompts in their Team ePortfolios differed. For example, Group S’dooft briefly outlined their goals and they did not revisit these prompts after Week 10. The Seedlings did not do these assignments at all. Group Soylent Green did not include Group Goals, but they did log in their research process in place of a Plan of Action and Group 15 lbs later . . . kept a weekly log of their plan of action which shows the progression of tasks they took as individuals to complete their project as well as supportive language and call for help. Though this group did not list the ePortfolio as a communication tool, they did use it that way. During check-in points I learned that they committed to checking the ePortfolio every Friday to ensure that they maintained on task and also to verify that updates that might have been posted by a fellow member. Below is an excerpt of 15 lbs later . . .’s first, second to last and last entry which provide a glimpse of the group’s collaboration experience:
Plan of Action: 04/04/16
Adrian: research emotional eating (over eating, binging, etc)
Mollie: research comfort foods, nostalgia, why we eat comfort foods
Sherry: positive effects of enjoying comfort foods
Tina: socio-economics + comfort foods > ex: fast food burgers vs artisan/specialty burgers

- find affects of social media on eating habits
- see social media (especially food porn) influences/changes tendencies/behaviors
- find out what is the draw to food porn (social status, etc?)
- is good porn good, bad, indifferent?
- what are the most popular/shared/liked foods in America?
- spread awareness of what our eating habits are

Plan of Action 04/21/16:
Mollie:
- finish essay/presentation + post > "individual essays" tab
- add key points to "presentation" tab > key points
- concept brief
- detailed description
- add video to "presentation" tab
- finish survey draft posters, if time?
Adrian:
- finish essay/presentation + post > "individual essays" tab
- add key points to "presentation" tab > key points
- possibly be an actor in our video again :)
Sherry:
- finish essay/presentation + post for "individual essays" tab
- add key points to "presentation" tab > key points
- drawings*
Tina:
- finish essay/presentation + post for "individual essays“ tab
- drawings*
- add key points to "presentation" tab > key points
- Send Mollie photos for the video

*drawings:
- rabbit eating healthy food
- rabbit eating junk food
- rabbit on scale or measuring belly, etc (show 15 lbs somehow)
  If time:
- header image (at appropriate size)
- background - possibly not tiled?
- rabbit taking a survey
- rabbit meeting goals/looking accomplished

ALSO!
I need help with the video - let’s work on the 'plot', text for the slides, any music or bg noise. We might need more footage - if so let’s plan it and shoot it soon. I’ll do the editing.

Plan of Action 4/25/16:
Wrap up your individual essays, double check your journal entries, add to the video, and be excellent! :) Almost done team, you’re all awesome.
Even though S’doof did not elaborate on their goals and plan of action, they did share in class discussion that they had checkpoints to ensure communication and understanding. Conversely, the other two groups seemed to be together when I checked in with them, but their individual assessments and team evaluations revealed imbalanced working relations.

In spite of the fact that I discussed conflicts and resolutions during the Animal game, and again during Week 11, it would have probably been useful to create an activity to enable thought and reflection regarding the storming phase of the group work experience, which occurs to some extent in every group. Members of group S’doof, for instance got along great during class and they determined a system of communication they all agreed on, yet there was at least one person who was unhappy with the face-to-face arrangements because it meant he would have to drive from his home in the valley to the Otis campus simply for a meeting. In the Seedlings group one member assumed the leadership role, but she felt unsupported by two of her group members who were not always communicative. And Soylent Green had a team member that was largely missing-in-action; they never knew if she was coming to class or whether she was keeping up with the tasks she had committed to doing. Perhaps the only group that did not have a single conflict is 15 lbs later . . . .

**What Students Learned: Self-Assessment & Teamwork Evaluation**

While I implemented assignments and practices to influence reflection-in-action, namely In-class check-in discussions, Journal of Process and the Plan of Action, I chose to focus my attention on ways students reported what they learned in their Individual Participation in Group Reflection. The question prompt I used is the same across all CAIL classes, but I tweaked the title to avoid generating a single group response as opposed to individual answers from each person. The question is:

**Individual Participation in Group Reflection (200 words; 2-3 paragraphs)**

Please discuss your part in the project. You want to make your logic and critical reasoning as clear as possible to the reader. What did you do, how did you do it and why did you make the choices you made? How did you work as a member of this team? How did your paper or research contribute to the project? Was the end result effective or not, why or why not? What would you have changed and why?

My reasons for analyzing student response to this reflection is two-fold: first, I wanted students to have an opportunity to articulate their feelings regarding group work, which does not come easy for everyone during class discussions whereas if they have to write things down they, for the most part take time to think about what they will say. Second, I wondered to what extent our shared reflection reveals a) knowledge of self, b) understanding of others and c) collaboration.

My initial impression was that students would discuss their experience in a way that exhibited knowledge of self and impressions regarding the collaboration process. After all, the questions that make up the prompt asks students to talk about their individual experience. We ask them to: “discuss your part” “What did you do, how did you do it and why did you make the choices you made?” “How did
you work as a member of this team?” And “How did your paper or research contribute to the project?” Because we did not ask students questions that elicited thought concerning the team members and personality types, I did not feel confident that they would articulate understanding of others.

As an ethnographer, I approached the student responses to the question as data that I read and re-read to identify what students took away from the group experience. I looked for patterns in language that showed how students talked about their individual “part” and “reasoning” and highlighted these sentences in orange. I underlined understanding of others using red pen and I used yellow to mark comments regarding teamwork and collaboration. I highlighted comments regarding the end result in blue.

My course consisted of 16 students of which only two did not submit a response to the reflection. One student failed to keep up with class assignments and missed the maximum allowed of classes therefore she dropped the class while the other student simply did not do the assignment. In turn, my analysis is based on review of 14 responses total. I break down discussion of ‘findings’ beginning with a discussion of the ways students express (or not) knowledge of self.

**Knowledge of Self**

Of the fourteen students who responded, only two made clear connections between their personal tendencies and values with the group project. Rachel Bender from the Soylent Green group expressed frustration with the lack of communication that characterized her group, and she also talks about her tendency to take charge, but how she betrayed that tendency this time around and the consequences of that. Below is an excerpt from the response including my notes in bold capital letters within brackets. Again I used the orange highlighter to indicate knowledge of self. She writes,

I really liked this class up until the group project; now I'm just relieved it's going to be over. I made a promise to myself before this project began to resist my

[RECOGNITION OF PERSONAL TENDENCY] leader/control freak tendencies when it comes to working with others. I'm so overloaded in my other classes I couldn't imagine handling the stress of taking on the bulk of the work for a group project.

[EXPRESSION OF VALUES] I had hoped I would be put with people who could be held accountable and be communicative about what they were going to contribute to the project, and that ideally our contributions would be equal. I felt aimless and like I was working on my own. There were only a couple of days my entire group seemed to be present in class (Bender).

Conversely, Mollie Luria Roberts reflected on her behavior and how these communicated a leader role to her teammates. She does not draw attention to personality traits, tendencies or values, but she still looks at herself to draw connections between what her actions communicated about her person or role in the group. She says, “according to my teammates, I was the leader. I can see how that is the case. I spent most of my time checking in on everyone’s progress, including myself and making sure we all knew what our goals were” (Roberts).
While Bender and Roberts were the only students who articulated connections between their personal tendencies or behavior and the group experience, two others submitted responses that hint at explorations of personal tendencies, traits and values. Rebecca Bryant from the Seedlings for instance notes, “I was definitely more of a follower in this group while Sarah was our leader” (Bryant). Sherry Siwen Zao of the 15 lbs later . . ., on the other hand, talks about her shyness, which she attributes to her lack of English speaking skills. She does not explore traits or tendencies that shape how she approaches tasks, but she does explore where she is at in her learning as an International student for whom English is a second language. Sherry explains,

When I saw this project, I was very confused. Honestly, I don’t know what going on at beginning. I think I am the weakness part of my team. [RECOGNITION OF SITUATIONAL PERSONAL QUALITY] My English is not well, so I always feel so shy to express my opinion. But I felt different in this project, the passion of my teammates was infected me a lot. I thought it is will be a very complex project before. But the result is the opposite. I really enjoy and love this project in the end. Thanks for my teammates, they really help me a lot. Because English is my second language, sometimes I don’t understand the process. They are very patient to explain to me. . . . We had good communication and had a lot of fun. I really glad we have a leader in our group, which is Mollie. She seems like a centre in our group. When we came out some ideas or topic, she organized them very well. This is very useful for our project and she makes our job much easier (Zao).

The remaining ten students wrote responses that literally connected to the question prompt. In turn, their writing reflects talk of what they researched or their part, which again was a description of tasks they undertook or information they looked up. Below are a couple of examples:

For my part of the project, I had to research the Internet and Meme culture and how it shapes your opinions and choices in regards to food and diet (Nur).

For the group project I was in charge of researching the meme culture, and how food is viewed within the context of the meme culture. I began the research for the group project by looking at what healthy food memes are out there and comparing it to the food memes in mainstream meme culture where junk food is idealized and glorified. . . . My paper looked at the healthy memes, unhealthy food memes and advertisement. I began to look at my experience with targeted advertisement and started to compare advertisement by companies like McDonald’s and an ad done by a lettuce farm. I began to imagine what it would look like if fruits and vegetable companies were to begin to advertise their in season produce and use that same sensual advertisement techniques that companies like McDonald’s uses to get people to buy the food (Abdulmajeed).

For my part of the group project I am focusing on a topic similar to that of my research paper, which was how digital media devices are being introduced to kids at a young age and how food companies are using digital mediums to market food to adolescents (Essex).

For this project, my role is design the restaurant including logo, Name, Menu design
and some other stuff. I also research about how to run a restaurant to make our project more real (An).

For our group project my role was to do research on food waste in restaurants, and to figure out what restaurants were doing to help prevent future waste. . . . I did a lot of research on different types of food items that could be reused to create a menu that was completely recycled and repurposed like using the grain that was left over from the distilling process when making beer to make home-made bread (Shaeffer).

In this group work, my work was to research about the demographic of what kind of people would benefit from urban farming. I research online and look through the website by comparing the differences website resources and document what kind of people would benefit from urban farming. . . . My job on this project also was designing the packaging with Becca (Lin).

**Understanding of Others**

As I expected, all fourteen students did not discuss understanding of others. Even though I used the animal game to help students identify personality traits they shared in common, I did not include a question to prompt their thoughts of the exercise and/or the personality types they connected to and which their fellow teammates had in common or not. As I mentioned in my discussion of the animal game only two students articulated thoughts about the animal game, one of which identified that the game revealed personality types, but he did not explore this beyond that. If and when students refer to teammates they make reference to the role they played as leader or they characterize the person using adjectives such as not “bossy”, “lovely”, “straight-forward.”

**Collaboration Skills**

Although McInnis-Bowers and Chew provide an in depth discussion of the True Teamwork Model and how to apply they do not provide a clear discussion of how to measure what students have learned. They suggest that reflection-in-action as well as repetition of practice leads to understanding, but this leaves me wondering what they consider good measure of collaboration. What reflective thoughts in class discussions and/or written reflections communicate meaningful understanding? Do students leave the class with a clear sense of skills they gained and how to replicate these in other classes or work situations? If so, what are these skills?

Conversely, the Teamwork VALUE Rubric provides a precise definition of teamwork as “behaviors under the control of individual team members (effort they put into team tasks, their manner of interacting with others on team, and the quantity and quality of contributions they make to team discussions.)” (Rhodes 2010). This definition and rubric informs the reflection I assigned my students and it is in keeping with the ways I engaged students to think about the group work experience. In turn, I read their reflections keeping eye out for statements that describes the five Teamwork VALUE Rubric areas:
a) Contributes to Team Meetings  
b) Facilitates the Contribution of Team Members  
c) Individual Contributions Outside of Team Meetings  
d) Fosters Constructive Team Climate  
e) Responds to Conflict  
(Rhodes 2010)

So, how did students communicate collaboration? In regards to discussions of how they individually contributed to group meetings only two students, Jose Adrian Sanchez and Sarah Chang explicitly discusses meetings and what they did in them. Adrian explained, “After the first meeting, we quickly knew what we wanted to talk about, since our interest were the same. In the beginning, as we began our research, we started to become overwhelmed with the amount of information we gathered. I advised the team to narrow their topic down and stay with it” (Sanchez). Sarah notes, “the first week of our project, I passed around my phonebook and collected everyone’s contact information. I reached out to the group and set up a Skype meeting. During the meeting we discussed what our project idea was going to be (Chang). While both students do not provide fuller detail, the brief description they provide shows their willingness to contribute to the team.

Three other students, coincidentally all from group S’doof mention meetings, but they did not discuss how they contributed to these. Ayan Nur said, “even though we had conflicting schedules we still made time to meet up and get work done or share our information via Google Drive” (Nur). Her fellow team member Damon Essex mentioned having meetings, but he only commented on the challenge that these posed for him since he had to commute one hour to campus each time they gathered while her other teammate Garrett Kato simply noted that they had multiple meetings that he found helpful. He said,

We did have a pretty good amount of group meetings to discuss with amongst each other to help each of us what to work on. There were a few days when we can agree that if we all didn’t have a busy schedule for the last few weeks we could have met but we understood we have things we needed to take care of (Kato).

In terms of reflecting how they each facilitate the contribution of team members, only two students articulate this: Sarah Chang and Mollie Luria Roberts, both of whom speak from their positions as team leaders. Readers should note that these students did not elect themselves as ‘leaders’ but rather assumed this role through their behavior and ways they contributed to the group and it was their teammates who identified them and ‘named’ them leaders. Below are excerpts from their reflections which show how they communicate how they enabled others to contribute to the group.

The first week of our project, I passed around my phonebook and collected everyone’s contact information. I reached out to the group and set up a skype meeting. During the meeting we discussed what our project idea was going to be. I came up with the idea to create a farming package. I typed out our project idea and plan of action. After receiving critique for our project idea and plan of action, I spoke to the group about which aspect of the project they wanted to research. I assigned an area of focus for research to each group member. Becca was absent
that day so I texted her everything she missed and let her know what she needed to research (Chang). . . . After our second critique, I assigned each member of the group an aspect of the package to design. I left the overall package up to Juan and Becca. I sent Yiren a Sofrito recipe and had him add the aesthetic aspects. As for myself, I decided to design the "How To Guide". I wrote our final introduction and group proposal and answered questions my group members had. The best quality my group members had was they had good attitudes about the project, were supportive of each other, and were team players. I especially was able to depend on Becca the most.

According to my teammates, I was the leader. I can see how that is the case. I spent most of my time checking in on everyone’s progress, including myself and making sure we all knew what our goals were. I did my best to set up the blog basics so that everyone could spend their time developing the project and filling in content. Not that I didn’t do my fair share - I think that my teammates’ original ideas were closest to the final project. I followed their input as far as topic and input and spent my energy more on production. I wouldn’t call myself a leader necessarily, but rather the producer or the organizer. . . . As a member of the team, and as far as the entire team was concerned, I felt we all worked well together. I’m not sure what to change because we had really good communication throughout the project, we had fun, and we were all happy with the end result which were goals from the very beginning. I valued everyone’s input and perspective which contributed to our project. From my observations, no one had any difficulty with other team members nor were there any internal struggles. . . . Overall, I really enjoyed this group project and felt inspired by my team’s input, direction and enthusiasm (Roberts).

Sarah’s reflection exhibits the way she took charge of the group experience and this contributed to the success of her team; two of her teammates commented on her leadership role as well as how helpful it was to have her in that role. Rebecca Bryant noted, “Sarah was our leader. However, she wasn’t bossy or anything, she was very straight-forward in asking us what to do once we all had agreed on a group project. Without her, we would have been a little lost in what to do or what to work on. She kept us on track” (Bryant). Juan also commented on Sarah’s leadership by saying, “in this group work, I met some problems and every time I can get the answers from Sara Chang. Sarah is the leader in our group. She is very nice and every time have patient to answer our problem and give us many suggestions. I think she is a very good leader in our group and made our group get a good final project result” (Lin).

The comments made by her teammates also show that Sarah engaged them in a way that supported the third are of the rubric which references contribution to team climate, however, she herself only hints at this a bit and I am left to wonder if she recognized the extent of her contribution. In the reflection excerpt I include above, Sarah talks about text messaging Rebecca what she missed from a meeting she was absent on and she also mentions assigning her teammates tasks for completion, but she does not describe the ways she motivated them through the use of positive language. Mollie, on the other hand, repeats the ways she “followed” and “valued” her teammates “input and perspective[s]” and this was felt by teammates
who expressed appreciation for her role as leader. Tina Jo said of Mollie, ""I would say that Mollie was our leader and without her guide, all of us would have been very lost. However, she was not bossy nor anyone did not follow her instruction so we had a really good teamwork” (Jo).

To facilitate contribution to a team like fostering constructive team climate are not, and should not, only be tasks or responsibilities of leaders, however it seems from these responses that this is generally how students perceive the meaning of facilitating contribution. Where students’ shine is in discussions of their individual contribution to the team, but this is largely product oriented as opposed to concerned with the process of ensuring communication with team members and/or ensuring that he or she is on task.

Finally, in respect to discussion of how they responded to conflict, no one reported disagreements, but there was at least one person who expressed discontent with the lack of communication her team members exhibited. Rachel Bender wrote,

I had hoped I would be put with people who could be held accountable and be communicative about what they were going to contribute to the project, and that ideally our contributions would be equal. I felt aimless and like I was working on my own. There were only a couple of days my entire group seemed to be present in class. I collaborated with the one team member who was actually willing to be communicative, Ally. She was consistently good at staying in touch, and we had a similar vision for the end goal of the project.

I think in the case of the Soylent Green of which Rachel was a part, communication was partly difficult due to a language barrier. Fengjie An was confused and unsure about her connection to her teammates and it was through discussions that she found a way to contribute and be a part of the group. Mi Na Park, on the other hand was largely absent from the team experience; she missed the first meeting, attended the second, but missed subsequent meetings and class therefore she fell behind and her team mates were unsure of her role. This students lack of participation really affected cohesion as well as communication in this group.

Although only one person wrote about an interpersonal conflict, a few others did mention challenges, whether personal or group-based. Garrett, Juan, Fengjie and Sherry for instance all mention feeling concerned or confused at the start of the group project and it was only through meetings and engagement with team members that they were able to determine their role and contribute to their group. It does not go unnoticed that three of the students mentioned are International students whose are still developing their command of the English language. Below are excerpts of their reflections in which these students express their personal challenges:

I think early in the month we had a tough time of what we should be working on and researching on. We were a little unsure about what we wanted to discuss and what our main points were based by our own papers. I can agree I was a bit concerned about how our work was divided but we all came to agreement of what we wanted to discuss and our interest (Kato).
At first, I have to say I really don't like this project because I barely understand what we should do. Our other member are research about food waste, home gardening and something else, I couldn't see anything that related to my first research paper. so I am afraid to start this project at the beginning. But the lucky things is I met the great members, we discussed a lot and trying to figure out what we going to do, we try several ideas but it doesn't work. . . I have to said I like this project. It is really fun and everyone get involved with. We solved lots of problem such as we doesn't have time to meet, we create a group chat that allow us can work individually and share our information anytime. It is a great experience as a group project, I learn a lot (An).

In this group work, I met some problems and every time I can get the answers from Sara Chang. Sarah is the leader in our group. She is very nice and every time have patient to answer our problem and give us many suggestions. I think she is a very good leader in our group and made our group get a good final project result (Lin).

When I saw this project, I was very confused. Honestly, I don't know what going on at beginning. I think I am the weakness part of my team. My English is not well, so I always feel so shy to express my opinion. But I felt different in this project, the passion of my teammates was infected me a lot. I thought it is will be a very complex project before. But the result is the opposite. I really enjoy and love this project in the end. Thanks for my teammates, they really help me a lot. Because English is my second language, sometimes I don't understand the process. They are very patient to explain to me (Zao).

**What I Learned: Discussion & Recommendations**

Although my in-class experience with students revealed a general sense of enjoyment and fulfillment gained from group projects there is still huge room for implementation of a student-centered learning experience. After I wrote down the elements I left up to students it felt like I hardly relinquished power and I am now consider ways to give students more control. Giving up control was especially tricky during this particular exploration because I focused on teaching collaboration and based on readings I felt that this area required me to be more hands on. Indeed, the deep observation and analysis of reflection responses has enabled me to see the gaps on teaching teamwork that I can better address in order to improve student experience in the classroom as well as what they take with them from the group work they engage in during my class.

The first area that became apparent during my research is a need for faculty at Otis to discuss the relationship between teamwork and collaboration. These two terms are used interchangeably in the literature as much as they are in practice. But do they mean the same? As I have come to perceive these terms and the practices that define them, they do not carry the same meaning; collaboration is a both a state of mind—a willingness or openness to participate and engage with others—as much as skills (e.g., active listening, asking for help, joining conversations through the sharing of ideas) that contribute to meaningful communication and working relationships between individuals and it is what leads to teamwork. For me this points to the need to determine specific collaboration methods/techniques I want to teach and ensure that students leave my class with. By collaboration
methods/techniques I mean, for instance, the use of the open sourcing technique/rounding up which not only provides students a way to come up with a project, but it also gives them an opportunity to reflect on how they determine ideas as well as to identify how others in their group think.

My second recommendation would be for faculty to consider using Team Contracts if they are not already. My observation of this semester’s groups allowed me to see that the most successful groups were those whose members really applied themselves to determining communication methods as well as establishing group goals and individual roles that not only served to form the formal basis of the group, but which enabled bonding experiences that made people hold themselves accountable to the group.

My final points pertain to teaching and assessment of collaboration. My review of literature on teamwork, especially the work of McInnin-Bowers and Chew, reveal that for group work to be effective it must include a three pronged approach that enables knowledge of self, understanding of others and collaboration. Prior to this experience I perceived the group project as an opportunity to develop interpersonal skills and even though I use the animal game to prepare students for working together I did not have a precise intention to enable knowledge of self through group work. However, self-questioning and reflection of what one brings to the table should be part of the team development experience because it can help students identify tendencies, values and characteristics that may hinder or help their group experience.

Furthermore, this exploration reveals a gap in my teaching of collaboration. I do not teach understanding of others as fully as I could and despite my use of the animal game to consider individual personality traits along with similarities and differences among students there is room for more in-class exploration of types of thinking including the ways cultural knowledge plays a role in the sharing of ideas, decision making and even response to conflict.

In addition, to recognizing areas in which to improve my pedagogical approach to teaching collaboration in my classroom I identified room for improvement of the Group Project Reflection we currently use for CAIL courses. Originally, I thought the question was useful in engaging students’ thoughts regarding their personal role, but after reading and re-reading all of my students’ responses I realize that they are not making clear connections to the tendencies, values or traits they bring with them to projects. Students respond to the question prompt by stating what they researched and this speaks more to their individual contribution to the group project than it does to knowledge of self.

Our current reflection also does not include a prompt that gives students a chance to discuss what they learned about their teammates, which enables social learning they can carry with them to other classes. To understand others is about recognizing the similarities as well as differences in personalities, but more important the communication styles that correspond to these. In addition, culture can play a role and this includes the role that language can play in determining communication and conveying willingness to be part of a group. This semester my English-as-second language students sat together during class—this is a sociocultural occurrence—and when it came time to take part in groups some ended up
together while others were forced to leave the comfort of friends to join a group. Three students expressed confusion and lack of confidence in their ability to contribute to the group in the beginning, but after a couple of meetings they felt better about their abilities and the experience in general. What worked was willingness among all students to include each other and to determine understanding. Rebecca Bryant and Juan, for instance, had a great experience working together, but they do not discuss it in depth and only use adjectives such as lovely to characterize what it was like to work together. Sherry found great support in her cohorts and especially Molly, the group leader. When Sherry presented her research to the class during Week 11, her group backed her up by affirming the ways her research informed their work and by expressing gratitude for her research. The support Sherry received filled her with a greater sense of buy-in to the group as well as personal confidence and this was evident by Week 14 when her group presented their final project; Sherry was more animated, she spoke more loudly and she used cue cards that she had practiced reading prior to class. In addition, she expressed having had a great learning experience in this group, which I hope will enable her to continue practicing openness to working in groups.

Finally, along with teaching collaboration methods, it will be important to explicitly convey to students that the group project is not simply about learning to synthesize research data together, but about recognizing the steps they go through to get things done. The importance is the process of merging their individual interests and ideas together therefore it might be useful to ask them to write longer reflections in which they discuss their process in as much detail as possible.

This semester my students talked about working as part of a team in a detached type of manner. The talked about the research they did and how that contributed to the whole and this is part of collaboration, but it is not a complete picture. In order for them to really be able to speak to how to collaborate they must be able to clearly discuss what they contributed during meetings—what ideas did they share?—they ways they facilitated contribution of other members to the group. My student’s responses leads me to think that in general, most of them thing that the person in the leadership role is the one who is facilitating anything, but in reality cooperation of others along with staying on task and maintaining communication channels open also add greatly to the group. In class group work parallels team sports in the sense that everyone has or should have a part and all parts are necessary for developing a successful project.

Another area that students do not entertain in their reflections is team climate. Students are brief in their responses and only one student really discussed how she valued and respected the work of her peers. I would like to give students more opportunities to determine ways to encourage and motivate others. To be fair, this is not an area I gave special attention to, but in hindsight, I see how valuable it can be. Molly was one student who shared her respect for her teammates and this was felt by them; they expressed gratitude for her leadership and noted feeling supported by her. I truly believe that the success of this group had a lot to do with Molly’s organizational practice, but also her ability to authentically care for each person she worked with.
Lastly, I think our reflection question can also add a prompt to get students to explore conflict. I am certain that more students in my class experience some type of disagreement during the group experience, but they do not voice it nor do they recognize that the issue and their form of resolution is a learning experience; the problem is dealt with, or not, and it is not written or discussed. Having taught classes that include group work before I have learned that students have difficulty talking about the team experience in person and/or in platforms that their teammates and friends will also see. Yet, conflict arises and it can lead to failure in a group therefore it has become apparent to me that I can improve on how I deal with conflict in my class. I think my use of the animal game allows for opening conversation regarding ways students want to be approach if issues arise, but this is not enough. In the future I will have to include an exercise to establish ways to address issues in constructive ways because talking about conflict and failure is not enough and students seem to respond better—even when they drag their feet or roll their eyes at the idea—to games and in-class exercises.

As we continue to use group assignments in our classes, it will be important to consider how we define and continue to teach teamwork and collaboration in our class and perhaps across the CAIL curriculum. Again my recommendations are based on this semester’s observations of students’ group experiences and their reflections on their individual participation in their group. Although, the majority of students in my Food Politics in LA course commented positively on their experience, their reflections do not represent the fullness of what they learned, which includes the process of becoming and functioning as a team. In turn, I will have to add additional games to provide opportunities for students to deepen knowledge of self, understanding of others and collaboration. Frost Davis has a point in saying, “Whether the common purpose of our collective work is leisure, research, commercial, or civic activity, collaboration underlies our new networked world. We all need to think about how to learn it” (Frost Davis 2012).
Bibliography


