

The importance of good social skills

It perhaps seems a little odd to include social skills as something that you still need to work on by the time you have reached Diploma level. Surely by now you should have already learned the necessary social skills? - see "All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten" by Robert Fulghum on my page on the [Learner Profile](#). However there is plenty of evidence that students who do not possess good social skills do not learn well. Social skills involve the interactions between students and their teacher and between students and other students. They do not only take place during formal contact time but also involve the use of social media and the internet. There are various obvious ways in which you can further develop your social skills, such as using plenty of eye contact, listening to other students, encouraging them to contribute by sharing their ideas and never 'putting them down'. It is also important to not to be scared to fail at something (in a safe environment) as one of the best ways of learning is to learn from your own mistakes.



Collaborative learning

One approach to collaborative learning that your teacher may use and is recommended by the IB Approaches to Teaching and Learning document is to try the 'spider web'. Spider is an acronym and 'web' exemplifies the strength and importance of all parts working together to provide an outcome much stronger than an individual as well as providing a physical map of the process.

Spider web

Synergetic—a collaborative, group effort with a single group grade

Process—a process that must be practised and honed

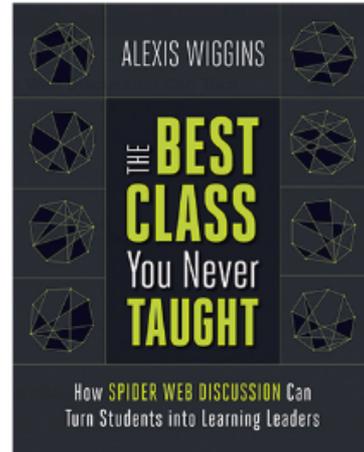
Independent—students work independently; teacher observes and gives feedback

Developed—a developed, sustained discussion that aims to “get somewhere”

Exploration—an exploration of ideas, texts or questions through discussion with a ...

Rubric—a clear, specific rubric against which the students can self-assess

This is an approach taken by Alexis Wiggins who has written a [book on the subject](#) (see image above). It follows a sequence involving all the students in the class with the aim of getting them to arrive at key points through their own discussions, rather than just being lectured to by the teacher. One well tried way is known as the 1-2-4 method. In this exercise students are asked to make bullet points on important aspects of a discussion, argument or topic without talking to anyone else. After a few minutes they are then asked to highlight what they think are the two most important points. They are then paired up with another student. The pair should then discuss what each has come up with explaining why they think their points are the most important and then they must agree between them just the two most important points. Finally two pairs of students are put together and the exercise repeated. One spokesperson from each group of four then gives their two points and a list can be made on a flipchart of all the two points that each foursome comes up with. The point about this is that everyone has to be fully involved. You can't just be sitting in the class daydreaming of the night before or whatever... Each student has to be selective and be able to listen and to negotiate. Finally no one is made to appear stupid and yet everyone has had to contribute. One of the



interesting outcomes is that usually between the whole of your class you will actually cover all the salient points. At the end a good teacher will review the points arrived at and add anything that they think the class has missed.

It can work well in subjects like TOK and literature (Wiggins is an English teacher). In chemistry it is probably less useful when topics are being introduced but may well be of value when it comes to problem solving. Essentially it provides a way of training and encouraging you to work together collaboratively when problem solving by following specific processes such as modelling, peer grading and feedback sessions.

Cultural differences



Many IB schools will have students from different cultures and backgrounds. If you find yourself in such an environment you will need to be culturally aware. What is socially acceptable (possibly the social norm) in one country may well be socially unacceptable and may even cause offense in another culture. When I first started working at Atlantic College, where we have students from over 70 different countries, I quickly realised this. For example, students from one particular part of the world were invariably polite and socially adroit but they used to cause offense in some of the local shops as it is not their custom to say “please” when asking to buy something. The local shopkeepers often remarked on how rude these students were, whereas in fact

they were nothing of the sort, they just appeared to be rude to someone from a different culture. It can be worth having an open discussion with your student friends if they are from diverse backgrounds as no-one wishes to unintentionally cause offense. You may have been brought up to think that it is quite normal to challenge a teacher in class and ask questions when you are unsure, whereas in some cultures it is considered rude to question the teacher and only speak when asked to do so.