

DOES WORKING IN ACADEMICALLY DIVERSE GROUPS INFLUENCE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS?

Montana Samantzis, Kay Colthorpe, Louise Ainscough, Judit Kibedi

Presenting Author: Kay Colthorpe (k.colthorpe@uq.edu.au)
School of Biomedical Sciences, University of Queensland, St Lucia Qld 4072, Australia

KEYWORDS: group work, student perspectives, student outcomes

BACKGROUND

Group work is a vital part of university education as it fosters collaboration and teamwork skills, which prepares students for the workforce (Gatfield, 1999). Students learning in small groups have higher achievement and more positive views about group work than students working individually (Almond, 2009). However, perceptions and outcomes of students working in groups of similar (homogeneous) or mixed (heterogeneous) academic ability may differ (Donovan, Connell & Grunspan, 2018).

METHODS

In this study, undergraduate science students (n=153) completing group tasks in self-selected, academically homogeneous or heterogeneous groups were asked if their perceptions of group work changed over the semester, and to identify beneficial and non-beneficial aspects of group work.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Most students (80%) reported their perceptions of group work improved over the semester. Beneficial aspects included valuing different perspectives and developing understanding, but aspects were reported similarly by both group types. More students in homogeneous (98%) than heterogeneous groups (85%, $p < 0.05$) reported non-beneficial aspects. Both reported lack of contributions by group members as the major issue, while more students in heterogeneous groups identified differing opinions as a problem. Surprisingly, students in both group types performed similarly. Together, these findings suggest experiences of group work are more impactful than academic groupings.

REFERENCES

- Almond, R.J. (2009) Group assessment: comparing group and individual undergraduate module marks, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(2); 141-148,
Donovan, AD, Connell, GL., & Grunspan, DZ. (2018) 'Student learning outcomes and attitudes using three methods of group formation in a nonmajors biology class', *CBE Life Sciences Education*, 17(4); 1-16.
Gatfield, T. (1999) 'Examining student satisfaction with group projects and peer assessment', *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 24(4); 365-377.

Proceedings of the Australian Conference on Science and Mathematics Education, The University of Sydney and University of Technology Sydney, 2 - 4 October 2019, page 94, ISBN Number 978-0-9871834-8-4