# DOES WORKING IN ACADEMICALLY DIVERSE GROUPS INFLUENCE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS?

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## 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

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