Using an Interactive Theater Sketch to Improve Students’ Ability to Function on Diverse Teams
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Abstract
The ability to work effectively on a diverse team is important, and simply working together can enhance this ability, but... we hypothesized that it can be improved by having students:
- Individually reflect on personal experience with teams
- Observe ineffective and effective team interactions
- “Get into the minds” of the members of the team
- Debrief the issues in pairs and as a class
- Generate effective teamwork strategies as a class

What is the impact of the sketch on students’ self-reported ability to work effectively in teams?

Logistics of the Performance
- The sketch is performed during a regular ENGR100 class, w/ instructor present, so content can be integrated into course
- A facilitator introduces the sketch and prompts students to reflect individually on previous team experiences
- The performance is followed by a discussion which includes Q+A between actors (in character) and students
- Pair sharing and large group discussion
- Generation of strategies for improving the situation
- A re-enactment incorporates student-generated strategies

Results (*p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001)
- Students who saw the sketch showed significant gains in their ability to address some specific teamwork issues as well as their overall capacity to address common dilemmas
- Students in the control group did not achieve the same gains

Content of the Sketch
- Team of four undergraduates
  - Dan: Male student who doesn’t do his share of the work
  - Joe: Male student who doesn’t finish assigned tasks
  - Beth: Shy female student
  - Rob: Dominating, overachieving male student
- Unclear assignment and ill-defined project specifications
- Common team dilemmas
  - Gender dynamics
  - Poor communication
  - Lack of follow-through
  - Frustration about unsatisfactory group dynamics

Discussion and Implications
- Interactive theater is one useful tool for increasing students’ ability to work effectively in teams
- Probable key elements of the process:
  - Individually reflecting on personal experiences on teams
  - Observing ineffective and effective team interactions
  - Pair sharing and whole class discussion about team dilemmas
  - Using students’ collective expertise to generate strategies

Ways to Achieve Similar Goals
- Be honest with students about challenges of working on diverse teams and about how to resolve these challenges
- Create simple scripts depicting common team dilemmas and invite students to role-play for the class
- As a class assignment, ask teams to reflect on characteristics of successful teams, discuss challenges they have encountered, and list strategies for resolving conflict
- Engage the class in conversation about possible ways to address common dilemmas
- Schedule the sketch in your own course

# sections surveyed # beginning of term surveys # end of term surveys
Control group 5 373 245
Sketch group 9 634 536

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