

Resource Guide

Reducing Stereotype Threat in the Classroom

Stereotype threat can be inhibiting for student performance in all educational settings, starting at a very early age. For university educators, there are a number of strategies that can help to reduce the potential activation of stereotype threat and to create what are often referred to as *identity-safe classrooms*. Some of those strategies are described below.

- Be aware of your own implicit biases about different identity groups (e.g., race or gender) and the potential of students in those groups to achieve in your class/field.
- Set high expectations for all students and convey a personal belief that all students are capable of meeting them, regardless of differences in identity groups.
- Give “wise feedback” on student writing (Yaeger et al., 2014), including explicitly rooting that feedback in high expectations, a belief in student success, and targeted feedback with concrete suggestions for ways to approach revision.
- Normalize anxiety in the face of rigorous course expectations.
- Frame (or reframe) tasks so that you are less likely to create an identity threat cue. For example: instead of a task being “diagnostic of students’ abilities,” frame a task as a problem or puzzle to be solved.
- Avoid putting students in a situation where they are the sole member of their social category in an otherwise uniform group.
- Do not single out specific students for “extra help” or interventions. Instead, make information about support resources available to all students.

Resources

Steele, C. M. (2010). Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do. New York: Norton.

Yaeger, D.S. et al. (2014). Breaking the Cycle of Mistrust: Wise Interventions to Provide Critical Feedback across the Racial Divide. Journal of Experimental Psychology: General. Vol. 143, no. 2, pp. 804-824. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033906>

Sekaquaptewa, D. (2018). Solo Status: How Lack of Diversity Affects Members of Underrepresented Groups. In ACS Symposium Series (pp. 141–158). <https://doi.org/10.1021/bk-2018-1277.ch006>

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center at cttl@slu.edu.