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 (L1NK) 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. Steele (2010) refers to this as helping students to “develop a narrative about the setting that explains their frustrations” (216).

- 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.

- Do not single out specific students for “extra help” or interventions. Instead, make information about support resources available to all students.

Resources

ReducingStereotypeThreat.org


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