Empirically Validated Strategies to Reduce Stereotype Threat

Below is a brief list of empirically validated strategies to reduce stereotype threat. For reviews of these strategies, see:


1. Remove Cues That Trigger Worries About Stereotypes
   - Reduce prejudice (Logel et al., 2009); remove physical cues that make it seem that a school setting is defined by the majority group (Cheryan et al., 2009); don’t ask people to report a negatively stereotyped group identity immediately before taking a test (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Danaher & Crandall, 2008)

2. Convey That Diversity is Valued
   - For instance, communicate a multicultural ideology that explicitly values diversity (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008)

3. Create a Critical Mass
   - Increase the visibility and representation of people from minority groups in a field (Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008), among test-takers (Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000), and in positions of authority (e.g., among teachers; Carrell et al., 2010; Dee, 2004; Massey & Fischer, 2005)

4. Create Fair Tests, Present Them as Fair and as Serving a Learning Purpose
   - Use gender- and race-fair tests, communicate their fairness, convey that they are being used to facilitate learning, not to measure innate ability or reify stereotypes (Good et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995)

5. Value Students’ Individuality
   - Remind students of aspects of their individual identity (Ambady et al., 2005; Gresky et al., 2005)

6. Improve Cross-Group Interactions
   - Foster better intergroup relations (Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008; Steele, 1997; Walton & Carr, 2012); remind students of similarities among groups (Rosenthal & Crisp, 2006); undo stereotypical associations through cognitive retraining (Forbes & Schmader, 2010); promote cooperative classrooms (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Cohen, 1994)

7. Present and Recruit Positive Role Models from Diverse Groups
   - Expose students to successful role models from their group who refute negative stereotypes (Marx & Goff, 2005; Marx & Roman, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2003)

8. Help Students Manage Feelings of Stress and Threat
   - Teach students about stereotype threat so that they attribute anxiety to stereotype threat rather than to the risk of failure (Johns et al., 2005); teach students to reappraise arousal as a potential facilitator of strong performance rather than barrier to it (Johns et al., 2008)

9. Support Students’ Sense of Belonging
   - Teach students that worries about belonging in school are normal, not unique to them or their group, and are transient rather than fixed (Walton & Cohen, 2007, 2011)

10. Convey High Standards and Assure Students of Their Ability to Meet These Standards
    - Frame critical feedback as reflective of high standards and one’s confidence in students’ ability to meet those standards (Cohen & Steele, 2002; Cohen et al., 1999); more generally, teach students to view critical feedback as reflective of feedback-givers’ high standards and confidence in their ability to meet the standards (Yeager et al., 2011)

11. Promote a Growth Mindset About Intelligence
    - Teach students that intelligence is like a muscle—that it is not fixed, but grows with effort (Aronson et al., 2002; Blackwell et al., 2007). Promote this conception of intelligence or ability as a norm.

12. Value-Affirmations to Reduce Stress and Threat
    - Have students write about, reflect on, and perhaps discuss core personal values (Cohen et al., 2006, 2009; Martens et al., 2006; Miyake et al., 2010)

Want to learn more?

Thank you to Priyanka Carr, Paul Michael David, Pam Grossman, Shawn Nak-kyung Kim, Renee Lizcano, Christine Logel, and Holly Materman