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COMMENTARY

Fostering an inclusive classroom environment with evidence-based approaches

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In this commentary, we build on the authors' teaching practice suggestions that focused on diversity and inclusion by offering several examples of practices and activities that we have used successfully in our own classes. Our hope is that these practices and activities will serve as further inspiration for changes that teachers can make to enhance their Industrial and Organizational (I-O) psychology classes. Our first suggestion is for teachers to consider going beyond understanding our biases by implementing structural barriers—specifically through the practice of anonymous grading—that mitigate the negative consequences of biases on students. Second, we emphasize teaching practices (e.g., facilitating randomly assigned small group discussions, establishing inclusive classroom norms, and using case studies) that help students derive the benefits of intergroup contact.

Implementing structural barriers to mitigate the effects of our biases

We agree with the authors that it is important to "*understand how you, yourself, operate in ways that may be biased toward others, especially nonmajority members*" (Kath et al., 2021, p. 13). However, we think that teachers can go beyond understanding our biases to actively mitigating the effects of our biases. We recommend anonymous grading as one step that teachers can take to mitigate the effects that our biases may have on students from diverse backgrounds. I (Lauren) had never considered anonymous grading until a few years ago when, after taking a deeper dive into the literature on implicit biases, two points made me feel compelled to start using this practice. The first point was that unconscious social biases (e.g., favoring White people over Black people) are quite common (Lane et al., 2007). The second point was that we often lack awareness of our own biases—a phenomenon called the bias blind spot (Pronin et al., 2002). Although implicit bias tests and feedback from others can be useful for self-diagnosing our biases, these tools are imperfect at best (Lane et al., 2007) and cannot provide definitive assurance that we are free of bias. Without a reliable method for definitely ruling out that we are exceptions to the norm, it seems wise to assume that we are like most people and need to take steps to mitigate the effects of possible biases, even if we don't feel biased.

After discussing these issues in my Social Psychology graduate seminar, I decided to try putting more structures in places in my undergraduate I-O psychology class to minimize the effects of any implicit biases I have on my students—a practice recommended in the literature (Greenwald et al., 2019). Fortunately, this is very easy to do in Blackboard, and I have been implementing this practice whenever possible since first deciding to try it out. I tell my students in both my graduate and

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undergraduate classes that I do this because I can never be certain that I do not have implicit biases and that I want to do everything I can to make sure any biases I am unaware of do not affect them. I have received very positive reactions from students about this grading practice. Implementing this practice also allows me to model the use of actionable, research-based insights that promote diversity and inclusion.

When I (Lydia) learned about this approach, I was slightly hesitant to implement it, as I was concerned that anonymous grading might limit my ability to give individualized feedback and to take students' unique circumstances (e.g., writing in a second language) into account. After trying it, however, I have realized that this is not the case, as students' names are revealed after all assignments have been graded, at which point any adjustments can be made in light of relevant contextual information. Many of my students have responded positively and have indicated that they wish other instructors would adopt it as well. To us, this policy is an easy way to minimize any unintended harm caused by our own implicit biases. We suggest that others give it a try!

Fostering positive intergroup contact

Beyond implementing structural barriers to minimize the negative consequences of biases, we also think the diversity and inclusion literature points to an additional strategy for enhancing I-O teaching practice—the value of students getting to know each other. Encouraging students to get to know each other in the classroom—particularly when the class is large and diverse—can be challenging. However, if we as teachers can create a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their unique viewpoints, we increase the likelihood that beneficial and potentially transformative forms of intergroup contact will occur. Experiences of intergroup contact help reduce prejudicial attitudes by enhancing knowledge about other groups' experiences, reducing anxiety about intergroup contact, and increasing perspective taking and feelings of empathy toward other groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Facilitating experiences of intergroup contact in our classes can help prepare our students to value and model inclusivity as they enter graduate programs and/or the workforce. In fact, we believe that not using the classroom to facilitate positive intergroup contact may be an important missed opportunity to cultivate positive intergroup attitudes among our students! Over the past few years, we have learned several strategies that help facilitate beneficial intergroup contact.

Using randomly assigned discussion groups

One strategy that I (Lauren) use is to randomly assign students to small groups of three or four students that change for each class. This approach allows students to interact in a small group setting with each of their classmates over the course of the semester. I started using this strategy after noticing that—despite having very diverse classes—students were experiencing very little intergroup interaction, as students tended to gravitate toward similar others.

During class, I provide thought-provoking questions for students to discuss in these randomly assigned small groups prior to facilitating a large class discussion. Depending on the format or the topic, such discussions can take on various forms of intergroup contact (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015) including (a) explicit discussion of issues that are related to gender and race in diverse groups (called "contact meetings"), as would be the case when the discussion prompts ask diverse groups to talk about race and gender issues in selection or leadership, or (b) cooperative learning programs, as would occur when diverse groups work together on a project or set of discussion questions that aren't explicitly about intergroup relations.[1] Meta-analytic evidence suggests that both approaches are effective for improving intergroup relations (e.g., reducing intergroup anxiety, increasing empathy and knowledge for other groups, and improving attitudes toward

[1]This sort of activity is consistent with the focal article's suggestion of having diverse groups work on superordinate goals.

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	Best class you have had	Worst class you have had
What the students did		
What the teacher did		

Figure 1. Best class/worst class grid. (I usually put up a large sticky note or draw this grid on the board and then ask students to place sticky notes in each quadrant.)

out-groups) in naturalistic settings (Lemmer & Wagner, 2015). Of note, discussion groups can be easily replicated in synchronous online classes, as many online platforms (e.g., Blackboard Collaborate Ultra) have easy-to-use breakout group functions.

Establishing norms of inclusivity

We have learned that discussion groups provide beneficial intergroup contact only if we as teachers can establish classroom norms of inclusivity and respect. In smaller, discussion-based classes, I (Lauren) do this by distributing participation guidelines on the first day of class. I discuss these guidelines with my class and solicit input, which often leads to adding some new helpful guidelines. Through these guidelines, I seek to the foster norms of valuing all voices and perspectives, respecting others, and being actively open-minded, which should increase the likelihood that intergroup contact is positive and leads to beneficial outcomes (Ellemers et al., 2013; Mitchell & Boyle, 2015). For instance, the following participation guidelines use goal-setting principles to help facilitate a greater representation of perspectives in the larger group discussions: "If you tend to speak up first or frequently in classes, consider making a specific goal to wait for others to speak before you raise your hand or to limit the amount of time you speak so that everyone can be heard. If you tend to be quiet in classes, consider identifying a specific goal to contribute more frequently so that others can benefit from your insights." Participation guidelines also encourage students to consider acknowledging their peers' particularly insightful points from the small group discussions rather than always sharing their own points—another practice that helps more voices be represented in the larger group discussion. To facilitate respect and open-mindedness, participation guidelines emphasize the importance of (a) not assuming that other students share one's perspective, as such assumptions can make others feel unwelcome and stifle the expression of diverse viewpoints, and (b) striving to take seriously and to engage constructively with perspectives that differ from one's own viewpoint by listening carefully to others and making every attempt to provide substantive reactions—or clarifying questions—rather than disengaging or responding less respectfully.

Another approach I (Lydia) regularly use in undergraduate courses to establish inclusivity norms and rules collaboratively is the best class/worst class grid (see Figure 1). This approach adopts a participative approach to goal-setting, consistent with evidence that goals established collaboratively lead to greater goal acceptance, self-efficacy, and performance (Erez et al., 1985; Latham et al., 1994). In this activity, students are asked to reflect on the best class and worst class that they have had (in high school or college) and identify students' and teachers' behaviors in those classes. Students write their ideas on sticky notes and place them in the relevant box. After doing so, students form small groups to describe their contributions (this often becomes quite lively; students often have a lot to commiserate about from past classes).

Following this discussion, the groups are asked to create two or three rules or principles that will serve as guidelines for the course—many of which focus on promoting inclusivity. Once the groups offer their proposed guidelines, I offer questions to discuss that are intended to clarify the meaning of the rules. For instance, students almost always offer a guideline that is related to

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"respecting others' ideas." This can mean many different things to different students, so I often encourage them to discuss, more concretely, what it looks like in a classroom to show respect for others' ideas, especially those that are challenging or frustrating. I have found that this activity encourages students to feel more ownership over and willingness to follow guidelines and helps me navigate any problem behaviors that may arise because I am able to point to a list that they themselves developed and to which they agreed.

Using case studies to promote perspective taking

In our undergraduate courses, we have used case study assignments that are designed to help students explore course concepts by conducting a series of interviews.[2] At the beginning of the course, students are asked to pick a case study person—often a relative—to interview about their work experiences. As the course proceeds through various topics (e.g., selection, motivation, work attitudes, diversity and inclusion, leadership, work stress), students interview their case person using guiding questions that are focused on that topic (students are also encouraged to develop their own questions during the interviews), and they then write narratives describing and reflecting on what they learned and how it connected with the content that was discussed in class. Talking to important others about these experiences helps students to realize how much that work in general—and the specific topics in our I-O classes—affects people. This experience allows the students to connect more deeply with the material and to see how the science-based practices that we teach influence people's lives.

Because this activity tends to be a deeply meaningful experience for both the student and their case person, with many students indicating that they gain perspective on and respect for their interviewee through the process,[3] the interviews often serve as a very useful starting point for fostering perspective taking among students during in-class discussions. Research on intergroup contact suggests that immersive exposure to an out-group member's experiences through written narratives can cause the listener to simulate the subjective experience of the out-group member, facilitating positive attitudes and reduced stereotyping toward the outgroup member and the associated out-group (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). We have found that devoting class time to small group discussions of themes that emerged during the case studies is a good way to expose students to the lived experiences of out-group members. As the case studies often elicit powerful stories about how the interviewee's work experiences have been affected by race, gender, or some other group status, discussion of these stories provides an experientially rich complement to the class material that not only helps engage students with class material but—consistent with the scientific literature (Kaufman & Libby, 2012)—also serves as a powerful way to facilitate perspective taking with members of the out-group through immersion in their lived work experiences.

[2]I (Lauren) was initially inspired to add this activity to my classes by the textbook *Understanding Careers: The Metaphors of Working Lives* (Inkson et al., 2014).

[3]The following are recent quotes from students about their experiences with the project: (1) "These interviews have not only enabled my interviewee a chance to gain greater understanding of their own life choices and goals but have transformed my initial perception of my case study person from when I first began these interviews. I feel as if for the course of my entire life that I had a very shallow understanding of my case person and the struggles that they went through."; (2) "My perspective on my interviewee has most certainly shifted. Through this interview process I was able to see more aspects of her everyday life, story, and views which greatly increased my respect for her. In sharing pieces of her story, I was able to better understand why she held certain views and why she clung firmly to them. I never knew about her journey through a primarily male dominated field and hearing the stories of how she was discredited gave me a glimpse into the intense courage and fortitude she carries."; (3) "My respect for my mother after the interviews, while already very high, went up much more after the interviews. Getting a better understanding of how much she had to sacrifice, as well as the long and oftentimes arduous road she had taken really showed me the causal forces and events that led her to provide me the advice and pushes she has throughout my life. I'll be honest, for quite a while there had been a level of friction between my mother and I due to disagreements about my career choices and my indecision. After the interviews and the class, I felt like I could better appreciate where my mother was coming from."

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Conclusion

In summary, we agree with Kath et al. (2021) that we, as I-O psychologists, are well suited to identifying and applying evidence-based practices to help accomplish the goal of creating courses that are more inclusive of diverse students. To supplement their suggestions for evidence-based teaching practice, we have offered several additional examples of practices that we have used in our I-O courses to help promote diversity and inclusion. We hope that these practices will be useful for other instructors as they consider how to enhance their teaching practices.

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