

VA EXCHANGE TEAMS BRING CTE PROFESSIONALS TOGETHER

We are building regional Exchange Teams across Virginia. Exchange Teams enable Coordinators, Teachers, and supporters of CTE to gather and exchange ideas as we work on the common goal of improving career opportunities for Virginia students

We invite you to join us by visiting our home on Currki.org. Our professional development materials are available for you to use, for free.

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Featured Curriki Resources this month:

- *Stereotype Threat - Changing the school environment*
- *Effects of Stereotype Threat on Education*
- *Buried Prejudices*
- *Interpreting Stereotype Threat*

LEARN MORE

Reducing Stereotype Threat
<http://reducingstereotypethreat.org>

Change: Stereotype Threat
www.mentornet.net/News/newsart.aspx?nid=35&sid=1

Stereotype of Mathematical Inferiority Still Plagues Girls:
www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/08/27/01girls_ep.h28.html?tmp=90471732

The Interference of Stereotype Threat
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0341/is_1_57/ai_75140961/pg_1?tag=artBody:col1

The Implicit biases we all have:
<https://implicit.harvard.edu>

VIRGINIA PTA

The Virginia PTA Supports Career & Technical Education

Trailblazers is working with the [Virginia PTA](#) to help educate parents about the value of Career & Technical Education. [See our new brochure for Elementary School Parents](#)

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Helping students overcome internal barriers to success.

We are what we think

Attracting students to CTE courses is not always easy, for many reasons. Yet we know the future of the students – and the workforce in Virginia – depends on our success. An added challenge is attracting students to courses that are “nontraditional” for their gender (such as technology for girls, health sciences for boys) – and attracting minority students to certain CTE courses typically populated mainly by white students. In each of these cases, students benefit when they explore ALL of their options, even nontraditional ones.

Have you ever wondered why it is especially difficult to attract female students to courses in science or technology? Male students to teaching? Minority students to courses in which they would be the first or only minority student enrolled?

It is possible that, in promoting nontraditional courses, you encounter barriers that have nothing to do with you, your marketing strategies, or even the students’ interest in your courses. They may resist taking this step because of internal barriers – beliefs about themselves that come from cultural stereotypes such as: girls can’t do math, or minority students won’t succeed in technology.

For example, in March, 2005, Dr. Lawrence Summers, then President of Harvard University, suggested that innate differences between genders explain the under-representation of women in science and engineering. He later apologized for this “unintended signal of discouragement” which expressed an all-too-common justification for the gender gap in “high wage” career sectors: boys are better in math and science than girls. Research, however, is showing otherwise, suggesting that the steady stream of discouraging messages to girls, boys, and minorities is an important factor keeping them out of nontraditional careers.

Professor Joshua Aronson has devoted his research to understanding gender gaps in education and standardized test performance. He focuses particularly on the psychology of stigma – the way people respond to negative stereotypes about their race or gender. Being the target of well-known cultural stereotypes (“girls can’t do math”) leads some students to feel “threatened” when they are ready to try something new or out of the ordinary, because they’ve come to believe they can’t be successful. Dr. Aronson and C. M. Steele

named this condition “Stereotype Threat” in the first article they wrote on this subject in 1995.

Reminding people that they belong to a group about which others hold negative stereotypes, often causes strong, unconscious psychological and physiological responses. These responses can interfere with performance and motivation. Aronson’s studies have shown how stereotype threat depresses standardized test performance; and they have also shown how changing the testing situation (even subtly) so that students are not reminded of negative stereotypes, can improve test scores. In other words, students may avoid courses you are trying to promote because they believe they won’t succeed in them. Any message that you, or your colleagues convey must be as encouraging as possible – and must reflect images of people (who look like the students you are trying to attract) succeeding in this course or career.

Almost everyone is vulnerable to stereotype threat of one kind or another. Its effects have been shown with: Hispanics in academic settings, African Americans taking standardized tests, women in math, Whites with regard to appearing racist, men compared with women on social sensitivity, Whites compared with Blacks and Hispanics in sports ability, and others. In other words, you don’t have to belong to a minority to experience stereotype threat, but, being a member of such a group means that it happens more often – and often with more extreme consequences.

One interesting and important note: stereotype threat seems particularly troubling for those students who value achievement. For example, racial minority students who most strongly value academics are those most likely to withdraw from school. Therefore, it is important to watch out for stereotype threat even, and sometime most especially, with your most highly motivated students. See the next page for specific steps you can take to support your students.

Read more online at <http://reducingstereotypethreat.org/>
Read the original research on this topic:
Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African-Americans. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 69, 797-811.

Here are some tips on reducing stereotype threat in your classroom from ReducingStereotypeThreat.org

What Should You Do?

Provide role models

Exposure to positive role models can improve performance. Research shows that women tend to perform as well as men on a math test administered by a woman with high competence in math, but they performed more poorly when the test was administered by a man. Other research shows that even reading essays about successful women can improve women's performance. So, in your recruitment efforts, and early in your classes, bring in pictures, stories, or actual testimonials from people nontraditional for this course material...and keep this kind of material coming throughout the semester.

Emphasize high standards; assure students hard work leads to success

Overcoming stereotype threat does not mean lowering standards. In fact the opposite is true. Students feel stereotype threat less when teachers emphasize high standards and assure them that they can succeed if they work hard. This approach increases motivation and makes teachers seem less biased. It signals that students will not be judged stereotypically and that their abilities and "belonging" are assumed rather than questioned. Highlight different approaches to problem solving and applaud students' differing perspective so they know you value diversity.

Encourage self-affirmation

When students have a chance to affirm their self worth, they worry less about negative stereotypes and the consequences of failure. In one study, some seventh graders were asked to indicate values that were important to them and to write a brief essay about why those values were important. Others indicated

their least important values and wrote about why those values might be important to others. African-American students who wrote the self-affirming essay about their most-important values did better during the semester than those who wrote about their least important values. Researchers think that self-affirmation helps students overcome anxiety about stereotypical expectations of poor performance. Consider asking your students to write an essay imagining themselves in this career, or succeeding in this course – telling why and how they think they will contribute in a positive way.

Help students see the external and temporary reasons for difficulties and anxieties

Help students to understand that difficulties occur for many reasons, not only because of race and gender. For example, reassuring students that it's normal to feel anxious when you start middle school and begin unfamiliar subjects like algebra, helps them focus on a challenge that can be overcome (inexperience) rather than on a characteristic that will never change (race or gender). Reinforce success each time you see it – talk to students about their accomplishments. Praise students when they demonstrate the characteristics they need for success, like attentiveness, effort, listening, neatness.

Emphasize an incremental view of intelligence

People have damaging stereotypical beliefs about intelligence as well as about race and gender. Some people think that intelligence is fixed, not changing over time or across contexts. When they face a challenge, people with these beliefs tend to give up very

quickly, assuming that the fact that they find the task difficult is proof that they don't have the capacity to accomplish it.

Other people think of intelligence as a quality that can be developed and improved. When facing a challenge, these people are likely to work harder because they believe that difficult tasks can be mastered with effort.

Encouraging students to view intelligence as malleable, "like a muscle" that can grow with work and effort, helps them to enjoy school more and to earn higher grades. It is tempting to talk about intelligence and "IQ" because those terms are so familiar. It is tempting to praise students by, for example, saying how "smart" they are. But in the long run this is counter-productive. Instead teachers need to emphasize the importance of effort and motivation in performance and de-emphasize inherent "intelligence," "talent" or "genius."

Deemphasize threatened social identities

Another way to reduce stereotype threat is to try not to remind students of stereotyped group memberships. For example, simply moving questions about a test-taker's ethnicity and gender from the front page of a standardized test to the back page resulted in significantly higher performance for women taking the AP calculus test.

It is also helpful to encourage students to think about themselves in terms of their valued and unique characteristics. Emphasizing the importance of each student as a unique and valued individual who shares many complex identities with others seems to reduce the importance of a threatened identity.

Does your School offer a Mentoring Program to your students? Did you know that:

"Children who have...adults in their lives who care about them, are willing and able to nurture their development, and are good role models for them - have the best chance of growing up to become responsible, productive, caring adults themselves. Mentors are soldiers in the armies of compassion, sharing their time to help provide a supportive example for a young person. Mentors help children resist peer pressure, achieve results in school, stay off drugs, and make the right choices. Many people become mentors because of the impact of a mentor in their own lives, creating a chain of compassion over the course of generations."

www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/12/20071219-4.html

January is National Mentoring - will you be ready?

www.mentoring.org/mentors/national_mentoring_month/

"The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitude of mind."

— William James