

# Identity Safe Classrooms

## Places to Belong and Learn



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# Identity Safe Classrooms

Identity safe classrooms are those in which teachers strive to ensure that students feel that their social identity is an *asset* rather than a barrier to *success* in the classroom, and that they are welcomed, supported, and valued whatever their background.

# Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat happens when people from negatively stereotyped groups worry they may be judged or treated in terms of a stereotype, or might do something that would inadvertently confirm the stereotype.

“Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us” by Claude Steele



# Are We Colorblind?



Michelle Robinson  
(1985)

“My experiences at Princeton have made me far more aware of my ‘Blackness’ than ever before...no matter how liberal and open-minded some of my White professors and classmates try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor on campus; as if I really don’t belong...It often seems as if, to them, I will always be Black first and a student second.”



# Identity Safe Classrooms

## An Antidote to Implicit Bias

What is implicit bias?

- Unconscious attitudes, emotions or feelings
- Person is unaware of the bias
- Can include negative or positive stereotypes about a person or group
- Will result in automatic reactions, without conscious intent

# Identity Safe Classrooms

## An Antidote to Implicit Bias

Researched solutions to implicit bias:

- Positive intergroup relations
- Countering and replacing stereotypes and stereotype threat
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Looking at people as individuals instead of as a group

Devine (2012)

# Identity Safe Classrooms

## An Antidote to Implicit Bias

What is your experience with these solutions?

- Positive intergroup relations
- Countering and replacing stereotypes and stereotype threat
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Looking at people as individuals instead of as a group

# Identity Safe Classrooms

## How do I Know If I Have Implicit Bias?

“Implicit Association Tests” or IATs measure our automatic stereotypes and prejudices.

*Project Implicit.* <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

What is your experience with implicit bias?

# Identity Safe Classrooms

## An Antidote to Implicit Bias

Implicit Bias Solutions	Identity Safety
Refuting and countering negative stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Breaking down stereotypes</li><li>• Refuting stereotypes</li></ul>
Empathy and appreciating diverse perspectives	Valuing and validating student differences <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Non colorblind environment</li></ul>
Positive intergroup relations	Caring relationships in a non-colorblind environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Positive relationships with the teacher</li><li>• Positive relationships among students</li><li>• Attention to prosocial development</li></ul>
Looking at people as individuals	Opportunities for autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High expectations</li><li>• Student voice</li></ul>

# Identity Safety

What questions do you have?

# Identity Safe Classrooms

Identity safe classrooms are those in which teachers strive to ensure that students feel that their social identity is an *asset* rather than a barrier to *success* in the classroom, and that they are welcomed, supported, and valued whatever their background.

# Identity Safe Study Results

## **Students in identity safe classrooms:**

- Earned higher scores on the California mandatory Standardized Tests

## **Students who felt more identity safe (as measured on the Student Questionnaire):**

- Liked school more
- Were interested in challenging work
- Felt a stronger sense of belonging
- Had a sense of autonomy
- Believed that working hard would improve learning
- Felt their teacher and classmates helped them



# Identity Safety

What questions do you have?

# Components of Identity Safety

- Child-Centered Teaching
- Classroom Relationships
- Cultivating Diversity
- Caring Classrooms

“Identity Safe Classrooms” by D. Steele & B. Cohn-Vargas

# Child-Centered Teaching

- Listening for student voices
- Teaching for understanding
- Focus on Cooperation
- Classroom Autonomy

# Listening for Student Voices



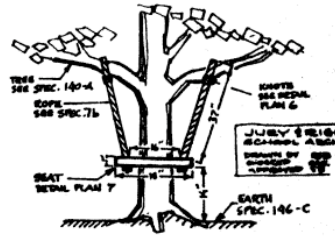
AS TEACHERS REQUESTED IT



AS PRINCIPALS ORDERED IT



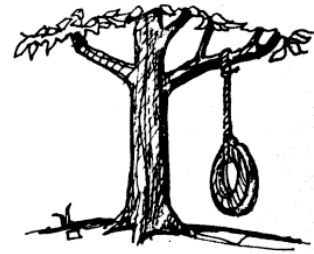
AS CENTRAL OFFICE DESIGNED IT



AS BOARD OF EDUCATION APPROVED IT



AS MAINTENANCE INSTALLED IT



WHAT THE STUDENTS WANTED

# Teaching for Understanding



# Focus on Cooperation



# Classroom Autonomy



# Classroom Relationships

- Teacher Warmth & Availability for Learning
- Positive Student Relationships



“The Bus Kids: Children’s Experiences With Voluntary Desegregation” by I. W. Lit



# Teacher Warmth



What is the matter with you, Jeffrey —  
do you want me to lose my job?

# Teacher Warmth and Availability for Learning



# Positive Student Relationships



# Cultivating Diversity

- Using Diversity as a Resource for Teaching
- High Expectations and Academic Rigor
- Challenging Curriculum for Everyone

“Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds” by S. Nieto

# Using Diversity as a Resource for Learning



# High Expectations and Academic Rigor



# Challenging Curriculum



# Caring Classrooms

- Teacher Skill
- Emotional and Physical Comfort
- Attention to Pro-social Development

“Learning to Trust: Transforming Difficult Elementary Classrooms Through Developmental Discipline” by M. Watson



# Teacher Skill

## Room 3 Class Norms

- \*Take turns
- \*Share
- \*Listen to others
- \*Use our words
- \*Be kind
- \*Play safe

# Emotional and Physical Comfort



# Attention to Prosocial Development



# The Power of Positive Presuppositions

## The Power of Positive Presuppositions

A pre-supposition is an assumption that is hidden in the phrases we use to speak to one another.

*Negative example:*

You better study for the test or you will fail.

*Positive example:*

When you study for the test, what will you work on first?

# Identity Safety

*What are you doing in your classroom to create identity safety?*

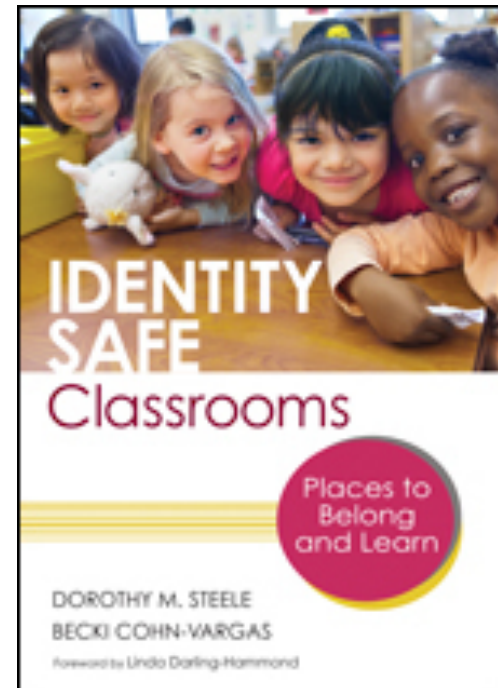


# Identity Safety

What questions do you have?

# You Can Find Out More

- [Identitysafeclassrooms.org](http://Identitysafeclassrooms.org)
- [Notinourschool.org](http://Notinourschool.org)
- [Collaborativeclassroom.org](http://Collaborativeclassroom.org)



# Book and Resource List

1. “Whistling Vivaldi and Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us” by Claude M. Steele
2. “The Nature of Prejudice” by Gordon Allport
3. [reducingstereotypethreat.org](http://reducingstereotypethreat.org)
4. “Identity Safe Classrooms: Places to Belong and Learn” by Dorothy M. Steele and Becki Cohn-Vargas  
[identit safeclassrooms.org](http://identit safeclassrooms.org)
5. “The Bus Kids: Children’s Experiences With Voluntary Desegregation” by Ira W. Lit
6. “Learning to Trust: Transforming Difficult Elementary Classrooms Through Developmental Discipline”  
by Marilyn Watson
7. “Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds” by Sonia Nieto
8. Devine, Patricia G.; Forscher, Patrick S.; Austin, Anthony J.; Cox, William T. L. (2012). "Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention". *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*