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# Explicit Attitudes Towards Race: The Impact of Active Learning in Teaching Diversity

Adele Quigley-McBride

*Iowa State University*, [adeleqmb@iastate.edu](mailto:adeleqmb@iastate.edu)

Kimberly Rae More

*Iowa State University*, [krmore@iastate.edu](mailto:krmore@iastate.edu)

Curt More

*Iowa State University*, [curtmore@iastate.edu](mailto:curtmore@iastate.edu)

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# Explicit Attitudes Towards Race: The Impact of Active Learning in Teaching Diversity

## **Abstract**

The majority of colleges and universities in the United States require students to take at least one diversity-related course to graduate. Considering the current political climate, this is a step in the right direction as it should encourage students to be more accepting and help facilitate an inclusive campus environment. However, these courses typically are not tailored towards addressing current diversity issues impacting Americans (e.g., New Zealand Film counts as a cultural diversity credit at Oberlin College in Ohio). In addition, very little empirical research has been conducted looking at the effectiveness of these courses or at which teaching methods are most beneficial for promoting inclusivity and attitude change. Therefore, we conducted an empirical study looking at the benefits of open discussion and active learning for starting the process of attitude change and to promote understanding of diverse groups and cultures. Results revealed that students were slightly more motivated to control their prejudice and that color-blind racial attitudes decreased. Contrary to expectations, results revealed that students were slightly more discriminatory after engaging with the course content.

## **Disciplines**

Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research | Educational Methods

# **EXPLICIT ATTITUDES TOWARDS RACE: THE IMPACT OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN TEACHING DIVERSITY**

Quigley-McBride, A., More, K. R., & More, C.

## **ABSTRACT**

The majority of colleges and universities in the United States require students to take at least one diversity-related course to graduate. Considering the current political climate, this is a step in the right direction as it should encourage students to be more accepting and help facilitate an inclusive campus environment. However, these courses typically are not tailored towards addressing current diversity issues impacting Americans (e.g., New Zealand Film counts as a cultural diversity credit at Oberlin College in Ohio). In addition, very little empirical research has been conducted looking at the effectiveness of these courses or at which teaching methods are most beneficial for promoting inclusivity and attitude change. Therefore, we conducted an empirical study looking at the benefits of open discussion and active learning for starting the process of attitude change and to promote understanding of diverse groups and cultures. Results revealed that students were slightly more motivated to control their prejudice and that color-blind racial attitudes decreased. Contrary to expectations, results revealed that students were slightly more discriminatory after engaging with the course content.

## **BACKGROUND**

Active learning is a student-focused teaching technique that immerses students in the teaching experience using techniques such as in-class discussions and activities, which has been found to lead to increased student performance in fields such as science, mathematics, and engineering (Freeman et al., 2014). Active learning may be particularly beneficial in diversity-related courses where the goal is to improve students' understanding of the history that has shaped attitudes and behaviors towards minority and marginalized groups in the United States. This may be especially useful considering that mental representations or group specific attitudes is a determinant of behavior (Fazio, 1986). To the best of our knowledge active learning has not been assessed as a teaching method in diversity-related courses to date. Thus, the purpose of the present study was to examine the benefits of a diversity course which implements active learning as the primary teaching technique at Iowa State University in terms of explicit attitudes towards race.

## **METHODS**

The course that was assessed was Dialogues on Diversity (Human Science 150). This course is a discussion-based class designed to help students explore aspects of diversity that are relevant to the Iowa State community. The general objective of Dialogues on Diversity is to create a welcoming environment to reflect upon and learn about different group identities and develop skills to use differences, disagreements, and conflicts as opportunities for deeper understanding and create the potential for attitude change. For the purpose of the present report, students enrolled in course during the Spring 2019 semester were eligible to participate. After students provided informed consent to participate they reported on their age and sex as well as explicit racial attitudes using the Quick Discrimination Index (30 items), the Colorblind Racial Attitudes

Scale (COBRAS; 20 items), and Motivation to Control Prejudice scale (17 items). Participants reported on their explicit racial attitudes during the first week of class and before the end of the semester. Active learning was objectively assessed for each section ( $N = 5$ ) by coding the number of minutes each section participated in active learning for the span of the course. Two trained undergraduate research assistants were assigned per section and completed the coding for each class.

## RESULTS

We pre-registered our full sampling and data analysis plan on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/wb86q>). Our final sample of participants who completed both the pre-test survey and the post-test survey included 44 individuals, 28 of which identified as Caucasian and 16 who identified as a racial minority. The mean age was 20 years old ( $SD = 2.49$ ), and the sections of this course spent an average of 68.44 minutes on active learning per class ( $SD = 11.24$  minutes). An average of 25.41 minutes was spent per class on traditional learning methods such as lecturing ( $SD = 8.05$  minutes). Three measures were used to measure explicit racial attitudes prior to the course beginning and then again after the course was complete (Time 1 and Time 2, respectively). There were no significant differences found in this sample, yet when regressions were run (using  $\alpha < 0.05$ ) some trends were noted. Unfortunately, the Quick Discrimination Index scores slightly decreased in general over time, indicating slightly more discriminatory attitudes ( $M_{difference} = -1.39$ ,  $d = -0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.51, 0.34]). The COBRAS indicated that people reported fewer colorblind racial attitudes after the class though ( $M_{difference} = -0.8409$ ,  $d = -0.04$ , 95% CI [-0.47, 0.38]). Finally, participants indicated that they were more motivated to control their prejudices after taking the class, as indicated by the Motivation to Control Prejudice scale ( $M_{difference} = 1.38$ ,  $d = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.31, 0.53]).

## DISCUSSION

This research project has the potential to positively impact Iowa State inclusivity and enhance the positivity of the learning environment for a wide range of students who come from various backgrounds including those who have experienced diversity-related issues and those who have not. Moreover, these results could have a wider impact on future students in Dialogues on Diversity and in other courses at universities across America that implement these types of diversity teaching interventions. Although our results are underpowered, they are the first empirical test of active learning used in a diversity course. Future studies should include larger sample sizes and examine the impact of longer interventions such as full semester courses.

## REFERENCES

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