

PEDAGOGY

Call Me by My Name: The Impact of Instructor Knowing Student Names on Inclusion

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Abstract

Being able to call on students during class increases the likelihood of instructor immediacy. As a result, due to a decrease of distance between students and the instructor which may increase the likelihood of creating an inclusive environment. An inclusive pedagogical strategy that has been shown to be effective in knowing student names is the use of name tents. The results of this study revealed that through the use of name tents, students felt vested and valued by other students and the instructors, which are critical in building relationships in an inclusive atmosphere. Furthermore, the results indicated that recognizing the different social identities listed on the name tents was effective in creating an inclusive environment in as well as outside of the classroom.

Introduction

The lyrics of a popular television show in the 1980s related that people wanted to go to where everybody knew their name. While the lyrics could apply to a college classroom setting, instructors may

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find it challenging to remember and correctly pronounce students' names when there are 50 or more in the class (Jiang et al., 2020). In addition to being a good teaching strategy, knowing and pronouncing students' names correctly is a significant way to provide an inclusive environment in the classroom setting (Cooper, 2017; Marrun, 2018). Conversely, should instructors make little attempt to know student names or be able to pronounce the names correctly, they create an environment that is not inclusive (Bagar-Fraley, 2020; Marrun, 2018).

A theory that faculty may use to promote classroom inclusivity is instructor immediacy (Faulkner et al., 2021). Mehrabian (1967) first developed the theory of instructor immediacy as an affective expression of emotional attachment, feelings of liking, and being close to another person. The theory of instructor immediacy relates that when instructors approach students with teacher immediacy signals, students sense that the instructor is conveying an affinity or liking towards them (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012). Calling on student names in class is part of instructor immediacy because it decreases the distance between students and the instructor (Tanner, 2013).

A traditionally successful strategy to create a positive and inclusive relationship is for instructors to know their students' names (Glenz, 2014). Strategies to learn student names may include seating charts, name games, or mnemonic devices. However, another strategy that has been shown to be effectively used to establish instructor immediacy by learning student names is using name tents (Cooper et al., 2020a; Cooper et al., 2017; Killpack & Melon, 2020; Tanner, 2011). While it is a simple pedagogical concept, using name tents has been shown to be an effective method for providing an "inclusive and equitable classroom is a manifestation of that respect and care" (Bagar-Fraley, 2020, para. 2).

To clarify the purposes of this study, while diversity describes the differences between individuals, inclusion explains how individuals can relate to each other across those differences (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023). Although diversity and equity are important components, this study focused on student inclusion to determine whether students believed they were valued and welcome, among other items, due to the instructor's knowledge of their names using name tents in an active learning environment.

Research into the use of name tents has been conducted to determine class inclusion in a variety of areas, including large biology (Cooper et al., 2017), as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes (Cooper et al., 2018). Furthermore, the use of name tents has been identified by the Association College and University Educators (ACUE; 2023) as an outstanding way to increase inclusion by learning and pronouncing student names properly. Despite support from such sources, name tents have not been employed to determine if they impact inclusion in undergraduate sport management classes. Thus, the purpose was to determine if using name tents effectively increased inclusion in large undergraduate sport management classes (i.e., 50 or more students).

Review of Literature

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

The terms diversity, equity, and inclusion are often used interchangeably. However, each term may be defined differently. For example, diversity may connote the variety of students' experiences, identities, backgrounds, and perspectives in a classroom setting (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023). Equity indicates the fair treatment of students by addressing perceived disparities and biases that may be present in a classroom (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023). Inclusion represents the establishment of a classroom environment in which the students feel their participation in class is welcomed, supported, respected, and valued (Faulkner et al., 2021). Inclusion also offers students who are considered to be historically marginalized (i.e., first-generation or gender) the opportunity to feel comfortable in participating in class discussions (Tavares, 2017).

In part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increases in diversity, college students are different today than they were five years ago. Classrooms have been referred to as being a microcosm of greater society (Fuentes et al., 2021). As such, it is important for educators to adopt pedagogies and techniques that allow the inclusion of "culturally diverse and underrepresented students" (Atay & Trebing, 2017, p. 3) to feel comfortable in the classroom setting.

Inclusive Pedagogy

Florian (2012) stated, “The increasing cultural, linguistic, and developmental diversity of today’s classrooms demands more inclusive approaches to schooling” (p. 275). Inclusive pedagogy considers learner diversity to prevent the relegation of some students as community classroom members (Spratt & Florian, 2015). Rather than denying differences between students, an inclusive pedagogical approach seeks supportive ways of accommodating diversity (Florian, 2010).

An inclusive pedagogical approach occurs when classroom practices promote teamwork between students in active learning opportunities to generate a perceived inclusive community to learn together (Spratt & Florian, 2015). Developing a connection with students is a basic component of inclusive teaching as the instructor becomes better informed about the student’s experiences and future goals (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023). As a result, inclusion may leverage the diversity of students and faculty to enhance the learning experiences of everyone (Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, 2023)

Instructor Immediacy

Previous studies have indicated that instructor immediacy can lead to positive student results (Hussain et al., 2021; Ledbetter & Finn, 2018; Sheybani, 2019). Instructor immediacy was perceived as the nonverbal actions of the instructor that either add or subtract the extent of psychological closeness between teacher and students (Andersen, 1979). Andersen (1979) defined non-verbal immediacy as “communication behaviors that reduce physical and/or psychological distance between teachers and students” (p. 543). Non-verbal immediacy behavior would include making eye contact and smiling (Hsu, 2010), which may produce more effective interactions (Zheng, 2021).

Instructor immediacy was later expanded to include teacher verbal behaviors (Gorham, 1988). Verbal immediacy by an instructor relates to such communication behaviors as referring to the students by their names or referring generically as “we” or “us” (Seifu & Gebru, 2012). Furthermore, the instructor’s verbal immediacy may increase students’ interaction with each other and the instructor outside the

class (Liu, 2021). Liu (2021) revealed that instructors who employed both nonverbal and verbal immediacy behaviors were more likely to motivate students than instructors who chose not to use immediacy actions. These findings support the idea that learning students' names may increase student motivation and trust due to instructor verbal immediacy. Baker (2010) reported that students believed that instructor immediacy was a significant motivational factor when the instructor knew their names in an instructional-learning environment. By knowing their names, students in large classes may view the instructor and other students as caring about their success, which may lead to building a trusting relationship.

Active Learning

In contrast to traditional lectures, students in active-learning classrooms are expected to interact frequently with one another and the instructor (Cooper & Brownell, 2020b; Eddy et al., 2015; Seidel et al., 2015). While lectures have been shown to communicate information efficiently between instructor and student (Struyven et al., 2008), active learning is a teaching strategy in which students actively participate in understanding facts, ideas, and skills by completing assignments, often in class. Generally, active learning may employ class discussion, writing, problem-solving, and practicing skills. However, the consistent aspect of active learning is that students participate cognitively and interpersonally (Bredow et al., 2021).

Types of Active Learning Strategies

Bligh (2000) states that active learning occurs in the classroom when students are doing anything other than listening passively to a lecture. Furthermore, active learning may challenge the students to think critically or creatively and address others in a group or class setting. However, caution should be taken when using the same active strategy throughout the semester. While there are various types of active learning strategies that an instructor may employ, the instructors in this study used think-pair-share, brainstorming, or round-robin activities.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-pair-share is an active learning strategy that is intended to provide students time to reflect (think) about a question posed

by the instructor (Lyman, 1981). The students then are paired into groups by the instructor, in which they discuss their perceptions of the question. Lastly, the instructor calls on students to share their perceptions with the entire class.

Traditional Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an active learning strategy in which students are asked to recall what they know about a subject by generating related terms and ideas. Students are instructed to begin with what they know to be true and systematically work toward formulating relationships they had not considered before. Brainstorming at the beginning of a lecture to gain students' attention and prepare them to receive the day's material, or it can be used at the end of a lecture to summarize and help students formulate connections between what they have just learned and the world outside the classroom.

Round Robin

Round robin is a type of brainstorming activity in which students are provided opportunities to express their opinions on an assigned topic (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Round-robin brainstorming is unique as it strongly encourages students to participate equally in the discussion (Namken & Rapp, 1997). Furthermore, the instructor assigns the groups to be as inclusive as possible.

Purpose of the Study

During these uncertain times in which enrollments fluctuate, issues regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion are receiving substantial attention at universities and colleges in the United States (Fuentes et al., 2021). Although student equity and diversity are crucial elements, this study focused on inclusion to determine if students felt included in an active learning environment by the instructor knowing their names from using name tents. While a number of previous studies have related active learning to inclusion, this study is unique to sports management as no previous studies have associated active learning and knowing student names in large-enrollment (i.e., 50 or more students) courses to inclusion. Using name tents has increased interactions with instructors and peers, increasing student sense of inclusion (Cooper et al., 2017; Tanner, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study was to determine if using name tents had an

impact on student inclusion in large undergraduate sports management classes.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Participants were undergraduate sport management students who were recruited from two upper-level classes at a research-intensive university in the southern part of the United States. The class sizes of these undergraduate sport management classes were considered large with more than 50 students enrolled in the courses (Flaherty, 2020). The overall number of students enrolled in the two undergraduate sport management classes was 108, with an average of 54 students per class.

After receiving approval from the university's IRB, a questionnaire was distributed to the students online over four weeks using Qualtrics. The respondents were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary, and no extra credit would be supplied (primarily to maintain student anonymity). Furthermore, the respondents were informed they could not complete the questionnaire more than once. Nowhere on the questionnaire did the respondents need to either identify themselves or the class in which they were enrolled. As a result, there were no incentives for students to respond to the questionnaire.

All responses were kept completely confidential, as they were anonymously entered into database software. Of the 108 students who were asked to participate in the study, 42 fully completed it, for an acceptable return rate of 39% (Baruch, 1999).

Course Description

The courses were taught by two instructors with more than 30 years of experience teaching at the university level. Additionally, both instructors were committed to using a student-centered, active learning approach to instruction. Before the start of the semester, the instructors of the courses agreed to use a think-pair-share, brainstorming, or round-robin designed to be student-centered instruction at least once per week throughout the semester. The classes met three times per week for 50 minutes each over a 16-week semester.

On the first day of class, the students were given name tents with only their names on the front and back of the cardstock. After instructor introductions, the instructor randomly assigned the students to groups of no more than three. This procedure was done to minimize the likelihood that the students knew each other.

Since names are primary components of a person's identity, the students were asked, but not required, to write their social identities, such as hobbies, gender, or sexual orientation, at the bottom of their name tents if they felt comfortable doing so. This option provided an occasion for student members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersexual, or asexual (LGBTQIA) community to offer their pronouns should they desire (Cooper et al., 2020). The prompt identified the term "pronouns" as a replacement for "preferred gender pronouns." This was done to recognize that pronouns are "not a preference but a personal truth and to acknowledge that some students do not identify with any gender" (Killpack & Melón, 2020, p. 3). Additionally, offering name tents to the class could substantially increase instructor verbal and nonverbal immediacy (Cooper et al., 2020). Finally, the instructors also identified aspects of their own background on the name tent to share with students.

It should be noted that the instructors considered other ways to know the names of the students, however, the name tent strategy was employed for two reasons. First, using seating charts would require the students to sit in the same seat for the entire semester, which was perceived as restrictive. Additionally, when students participate in in-class groups activities, they may not know the others prior to the assignment. Secondly, a mnemonic strategy could be used, however, with more than 50 students in each class, it was agreed that using such a strategy could be an onerous impediment on the instructor's memory.

Instrument

A 25-item questionnaire using a 1-5 Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) was used for this study. The statements were guided by a combination of existing literature on classroom practices that create a positive and active classroom atmosphere (Cooper et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2020; Eddy et al., 2015; Seidel, 2015; Sheybani, 2019). Nine of the questions related to the respondents' perceptions of using name tents. Eight statements were

associated with building relationships with other students. Nine statements dealt with building relationships with the instructor. The Likert scale statements were randomly placed to prevent group answers.

A pilot test was conducted to establish question sensitivity, understanding, and appropriateness (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The input from the pilot study was gleaned from four graduate students and four faculty members with experience in survey analysis. All items were measured, revealing good internal consistency and reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, which was deemed acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were employed to analyze the data.

Results

Perceptions of Using Name Tents

Of the 42 responses, 40 (95%, $M=4.69$, $SD=.56$) of the respondents perceived it was important for the instructor to know their name. Only seven ($M=1.83$, $SD=.377$) of the students indicated that they had used name tents in previous classes at the university. Sixteen respondents (36%, $M=2.98$, $SD=1.09$) revealed that they felt comfortable revealing their pronouns on the name tent. Twenty-eight (66%, $M=3.86$, $SD=1.05$) revealed that they were comfortable identifying their social hobbies such as favorite teams, food, or high school attended, etc.... Thirty-seven (88%, $M=4.26$, $SD=.56$) believed that using name tents was an effective approach to learn the instructor. Furthermore, 39 (92%, $M=4.31$, $SD=.66$) reported that the name tents were an effective way to know the names of their classmate's names. Additionally, 33 (93%, $M=4.29$, $SD=.81$) would like future classes to use name tents or a similar strategy.

Building Relationships with Other Students

Of the 42 respondents, 29 (69%, $M=.169$, $SD=.47$) did not know the names of the majority of students in class prior to the semester. Additionally, 37 (88%, $M=4.56$, $SD=.86$) perceived that knowing the names of other students increased the likelihood of creating an inclusive environment. Furthermore, 38 (90%, $M=4.29$, $SD=.80$)

Table 1
Name Tent Usage Perceptions

Statement	Mean	SD
I have had previous classes that used name tents at the university	1.83	.38
I felt comfortable identifying my pronoun on the name tent	2.98	1.09
I felt comfortable identifying my social identity such as favorite teams, food, music, hometown, high school etc... on the name tent	3.86	1.05
I would like future classes to use name tents or similar strategy	4.21	1.12
Using name tents is an effective way to learn about my instructor	4.26	.56
I would like name tents or similar strategy to be used in future classes	4.29	.81
Using name tents is an effective way to learn about my classmates	4.31	.66
It is important to me that the instructor knows my name	4.69	.56

related that using name tents was an effective way to build relationships with other students beyond the classroom.

Thirty-seven (88%, $M=4.33$, $SD=.81$) of the respondents indicated that using name tents helped them recognize the different social identities, such as beliefs, pronouns, and affiliations. Moreover, 36 (86%, $M=4.30$, $SD=.77$) of the students felt that knowing the social identities of other students helped generate positive in-class discussions. Additionally, 39 (91%, $M=4.24$, $SD=.73$) reported that being able to have class-related discussions outside of class increased. Thirty-six (86%, $M=4.14$, $SD=.85$) answered that they were more likely to attend class because other students knew their names. Finally, 37 (88%, $M=4.31$, $SD=.75$) felt valued, while 36 (86%, $M=4.17$, $SD=.78$) felt vested in the class because other students knew their names.

Building Relationships with Instructor

Among the most important reasons for advancing the ability of the instructor and student to form a trusting relationship was knowing names, thereby increasing the likelihood of an inclusive environment. Of the 42 respondents, 35 (83%; $M=1.83$, $SD=.38$) indicated that they had not had the instructor in any previous classes. Moreover, 39 (93%, $M=4.45$, $SD=.06$) of the respondents believed

Table 2
Building Relationships with Other Students

Statement	Mean	SD
I knew the names of most of the other students in this class previously	1.69	.47
I am more likely to attend class because other students knew my name	4.15	.85
I felt vested in the class because other students knew my name	4.17	.78
Knowing the names and social identities of other students helped generate positive out-of-class discussions.	4.24	.73
The in-class active learning activities helped me get to know other students beyond the classroom	4.29	.80
Knowing the names and social identities of other students helped generate positive in-class discussions.	4.30	.77
I felt valued in the class because other students knew my name	4.31	.75
Using strategies like name tents helped me recognize the different social identities such as beliefs, pronouns, and affiliations	4.33	.81
Knowing the names of students assisted in building an inclusive classroom community	4.56	.86

that the instructors cared about them because they were familiar with their names. Furthermore, 37 (88%, $M=4.32$, $SD=.72$) perceived that they felt more vested in the class as a result of the instructor knowing their names. Finally, 36 (86%, $M=4.30$, $SD=.87$) felt valued because the instructor knew their names, and 28 (67%, $M=4.00$, $SD=1.03$) reported that knowing the student's names helped build an inclusive classroom community.

Thirty-three (78%, $M=4.10$, $SD=.73$) indicated that the instructor was more approachable due to knowing their names. The results of this study also indicated that 31 (73%, $M=4.27$, $SD=.47$) of the respondents felt that name tents assisted in building positive student-instructor relationships. Furthermore, 32 ($M=3.98$, $SD=.87$) were comfortable seeking advice from the instructor on class and other academic issues. Finally, 28 (67%, $M=3.81$, $SD=.97$) of the respondents revealed that because the instructor knew their names, they were more likely to attend class.

Table 3
Building Relationships with Instructor

Statement	Mean	SD
I have taken classes from the present instructor.	1.83	.38
I am more likely to attend class because the instructor knew my name	3.81	.97
Using name tents helped me feel comfortable asking advice from the instructor about class and other academic issues	3.98	.87
The instructor knowing our names helped create an inclusive environment	4.00	1.03
The instructor was more approachable because he/she knew our names	4.10	.73
Using name tents helped to create positive student-instructor relationships	4.27	.47
I feel valued in this class because the instructor knew my name	4.30	.87
I feel more vested in this class because the instructor knew my name	4.32	.72
The instructor cared about me because he knew my name	4.45	.06

Discussion

Einstein (2011) once stated that “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler” (p. 385). While it is a simple pedagogical strategy, using name tents has been shown to be an effective method for learning a student’s name (Cooper et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2017; Tanner, 2011). Furthermore, Stoffi et al. (2022) perceived Occam’s Razor to claim that if everything is equal, the more straightforward approach is preferred to a more convoluted one. Thus, while using name tents may be considered a relatively simple and low-tech strategy for knowing student names, it has been shown to be effective when used to establish instructor immediacy (Cooper et al., 2018; Cooper, 2020).

This study was not meant to offer a universal set of strategies that may be implemented to provide an inclusive environment. Rather, the study focused on how a relatively simple method could develop relationships between students and instructors for an inclusive environment. As such, the descriptive analysis of this study indicated that the students felt the use of name tents was important to developing an inclusive atmosphere in the class.

The results also revealed that active learning was important in creating an inclusive atmosphere. Bonwell and Eison (1991) referred to active learning as one that “involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing” (p. 2). As it applied to this study, active learning strategies (e.g., think-pair-share, barnstorming, and round robin) were used to enhance communication with others in their groups and the entire class. Additionally, active learning opportunities can help students generate friendships and increase peer support to establish connections to various social university communities (Braxton et al., 2000).

Cooper et al. (2017) suggested that for inclusion to occur, students’ personal interactions should be evident with their peers as well as with their instructors. The students in the courses in this study may possess a range of identities, gender expressions/presentations, and related pronouns. Using their pronouns (e.g., he, she, ze, they) provides the students with levels of understanding, respect, and validation (Armstrong, 2023). Furthermore, possible misgendering by the instructor or other students may create an environment of disrespect and unwelcomeness (Killpack & Melón, 2020). The results of this study indicated that the students were unsure about sharing their pronouns on the name tent. However, they believed that using name tents allowed them to understand and respect the different identities of other students. This finding supports Faulkner et al. (2021) contention that making “students feel welcome is about creating an environment of inclusion with instructor-student relationships as the foundation, taking into consideration age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, and socioeconomic status” (p. 108). Previous research has indicated that students tend to trust their teachers, which relates to immediacy, which is the closeness and trust a student feels with their instructor. As such, a key to developing peer relationships is the ability of the students to communicate and trust each other.

Using students’ names is part of instructor immediacy because it can decrease the sense of distance between students and the instructor (Tanner, 2013). Additionally, knowing the names of other students by hearing the instructor refer to them during class may stimulate communication with their peers (Cooper et al., 2020; Cooper et al., 2017). Ballester (2013) indicated that interactions

with other students increase the “willingness to engage students in communication, among others” (p.11). Furthermore, students tend to feel valued and trusted when their peers address them by their names (Cooper et al., 2020). Thus, the results of this study indicated that building relationships with other students and instructors, feeling valued and vested, may be applied to instructor immediacy and the use of name tents.

Limitations and Future Research

This research was limited in design by using only upper-level sport management classes. Additionally, the present sample did not include a wide array of various classifications or majors from multiple universities. Therefore, attention must be observed concerning the generalizability of the research findings. Moreover, the use of active learning strategies is often easier in classes that have smaller enrollments. As a result, another limitation concerned the design of the classroom as larger, lecture-style classes which may make it difficult for the instructor to answer questions.

Future research could expand on this study by quantitatively examining how knowing student names using a strategy such as name tents would increase inclusion as well as diversity and equity at other universities. Moreover, several studies have indicated that when students know the names of other students, friendships may develop, which could have broader implications for student retention in college (Sandstrom & Rawn, 2015; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, 1997). Additionally, a qualitative analysis (i.e., interviewing class students) could be incorporated to examine further explanations of their answers. This type of analysis would allow researchers and university administration to gain a more thorough understanding of what students’ gauge on using name tents. Finally, inclusive teaching practices have been shown to be beneficial for marginalized populations. As such a study could analyze the perceptions of marginalized populations such as international, first-generation minority or nonbinary students.

Conclusion

College classrooms have become increasingly diverse. As such, it is essential for instructors to use students’ preferred names and pronounce student names correctly to create an inclusive environ-

ment. While student inclusion has become a hot topic at universities in the United States, the use of name tents in class has been shown to increase interactions between faculty and students (Cooper et al., 2018; Cooper et al. 2020). Tinto (1997) suggested that for inclusion to occur, it must start in the classroom. When instructors do not engage with students through verbal or non-verbal immediacy, students are less likely to remain at the university (Ai & Giang, 2018; Solis & Turner, 2017). Cooper et al. (2017) reported that for inclusion to take place on a consistent basis, instructor immediacy and name tents may be used to develop an understanding and trust between the students and instructor.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, there has been a steady and recent decline in university enrollment nationally. Such a decline has further heightened the importance of university retention measures by instructors with consistent student interactions. This present research study showed the positive perception of students of faculty using name tents to facilitate learning. This “extra touch” by faculty reiterated previous studies before COVID-19 and added reinforcement of using name tents to promote a trusting relationship between faculty and students.

While other strategies may be used, the use of name tents offers an uncomplicated yet powerful pedagogical strategy that encourages student exchanges and in and out-of-class connections. Furthermore, the use of teaching strategies such as name tents offers instructor immediacy that may increase student retention (DellAntonio, 2017). By reemphasizing Occum’s Razor principle that the simplest solutions are more effective, employing name tents sends direct and indirect messages to the class that the instructor cares enough about the students to learn and use their names. These factors greatly contribute to the overall success of university retention in terms of the number of students and financial funding for the university.

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