Instructional Technique for Teaching about Prejudice

I am happy to submit my instructional technique on the topic of Prejudice. It is assignment #4 (of six) in the class I teach titled *Psychology of Human Relations* (Psych 120). Because prejudice is such a personal topic I wanted an exercise that could bring a clear message that “we are all in this together.” Over the years some of my students have informed me that when racial or gender prejudice was introduced in one their other classes, it was framed in terms of *oppressor* vs. *oppressed*. This has the potential to alienate White and/or male students. As a result I developed a format that I hoped would minimize this experience while at the same time opening students up to the fact that prejudice comes in a multitude of forms. In addition to summarizing their own experience of discrimination, I required students to interview another person. I wanted students to have a choice during sharing time given that some experiences of discrimination may be too personal to share with fellow students. In addition, to preserve anonymity in all assignments, on the first day of class I ask students to create a four-digit ID# on the front of a 3 by 5 with their name on the back. I keep the cards in a separate file and do not look at them until I have compiled their final grades.

**Here is the handout explaining the written part:**

Assignment # 4—**Prejudice Assignment**

ID#__________

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Prejudice -- This assignment has two parts:

**Part a: Your Own Experience of Discrimination**

1. Write up an example of a time when you were discriminated against because of any one or more of the following reasons:
   - Your race
   - Your body build
   - Your age
   - Your disability
   - Your gender
   - Your looks
   - Your clothing/piercings/tattoo
   - Your sexual orientation
   - Your religion

2. In your write-up explain *each* of the following:
   a. From the above list, which of the following reasons was involved? If it was your race, state your race, if it was your age, state it, if it was your looks, what was about your looks that prompted the discrimination?
   b. Who did the discriminating against you?
   c. Where did it take place? Describe the setting.
   d. From what you remember, what exactly did the person say and/or do?
   e. What emotional reactions did you have to the person’s words or actions?
   f. What did you do in response to the person’s words or actions?
   g. Looking back on the experience, what thoughts about the event do you have now?
   h. Did the discriminating event change your outlook on the world at all? If so, how?
   i. If you have anything else to add, put it at the end.
Part b: Interview Another Person Regarding their Experience of Discrimination

Find a friend, relative or acquaintance who has experienced being discriminated.

1. Write up an example of a time when this person was discriminated against because of any one or more of the reasons listed above from list #1.
2. Ask the person the questions in #2. You may need to take notes.
3. Write-up this person’s answers to 2a-2i.

A week or two after the due date of this assignment, you will be required to participate in group work and share your responses to either part A or part B. If you are absent on the day we do group work on this assignment, you will receive 18 of 35 points on this assignment.

-End of assignment-

A week or so following the submission of the written portion I randomly place students into groups of five or six. Each group is given the directions for their group discussion (see below). They all write their 4-digit ID# on the sheet and, following the group discussion, fill in the blanks.

Group Discussion Sheet:
ID#s for each person: ____________________________

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One person reads these directions for group participation in prejudice assignment:
In this assignment you were to write of an experience in which:
1. You were discriminated
2. Someone you interviewed was discriminated

Today’s goals for Group Discussion:
1. Choose one of the two parts of this assignment (Part A or B) to discuss with your group. Do not choose anything beyond your willingness to self-disclose.
2. As you listen to your group members share their responses, remember that your job is to be a good listener—which means no interrupting or judging.
3. As you listen to your group members’ responses, try to make your comments relevant to following questions:
   a. What am I learning about this person’s responses?
   b. What feelings am I presently having?
   c. Have I had similar experiences?
   d. What input can I offer this person regarding their issues?
      You may ask questions or add your own responses, such as, “That’s similar to my friend who….”

Once everyone has finished, select one person to fill in the blanks below:
1. What has this assignment taught each person? Try to have one sentence for each person:
Group Discussion Sheet (continued)

2. Which parts of the assignment were most meaningful to each person?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

3. What were some meaningful aspects of the group discussion?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

4. What are some beginning suggestions for reducing prejudice?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

5. Any other comments?

_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

Use this handout as a cover page, attach all group members’ paper together with a paperclip, and place in the homework folder as you leave today.

-End of Group Sheet-

I have been giving this assignment for more than ten years. The effect is amazing. Every quarter, as I walk around the room listening to the discussion, I hear the same comments from students, “You’re kidding!” “That’s ridiculous.” “Really?” “What’d you do then?” “I can’t believe it.” The other thing I sometimes hear is laughter. Laughter? Yes, in the middle of an intense discussion on discrimination, students find humor. Believe it or not I’ve saved the ten years worth of filled-in forms. I have hundreds of comments. Below are examples of student comments. I’ve pulled one from each year:

Comment from Fall, 2002 in answer to *What was the most meaningful aspect of the group discussion?*

“We realize that we are not the only ones with these feelings. We all hate ignorance and discrimination; but we realize that we are also like this—hypocrites if you will. We realize that we should start with ourselves.”

Comment from Fall, 2003 in answer to *What has this assignment taught you?*

“I am in disbelief that these situations are still happening today.”

“No matter how long you live in this country, you are still are discriminated against.”
Comment from Fall, 2004 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“Respect differences instead of judging. Everyone has been discriminated against in some way. Everyone agrees on this.”

Comment from Fall, 2005 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“Not just minorities get discriminated.”

Comment from Fall, 2006 in answer to What were some meaningful aspects of group discussion?
“Hearing the hard things people have been through.”

Comment from Fall, 2007 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“Don’t judge people based on class, religion, sexual orientation, race.”

Comment from Fall, 2008 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“Kids can be very cruel.”

Comment from Fall, 2009 in answer to What were some meaningful aspects of the group discussion?
“How we could all related to each other. Being able to listen and have them understand.”

Comment from Fall, 2010 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“It has taught me that people don’t realize what impact they have on others.”

Comment from Fall, 2011 in answer to What has this assignment taught you?
“Discrimination is still around. I shouldn’t discriminate.”

-End of Comments-

I will say the obvious: I love this assignment. I share it with you in hopes of all who choose to use it—or a version of it—will get as much benefit and gratification as I have.

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