

## Examples of Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions: everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. - Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

Microaggressions may be based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identify, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. These insults or insensitivities may be exhibited by students or adults within the school community – keep that in mind when considering each example.

The following are examples of microaggressions in the school setting:

- Failing to learn to pronounce or continuing to mispronounce the names of students after they have corrected you.
- Scheduling tests and project due dates on religious or cultural holidays.
- Disregarding religious traditions or their details. (Ex. Impacts of fasting)
- Setting low expectations for students from particular groups or neighborhoods.
- Calling on, engaging and validating one gender, class, or race of students while ignoring other students during class.
- Assigning student tasks or roles that reinforce particular gender roles or don't allow all students flexibility across roles and responses.
- Anticipating students' emotional responses based on gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.
- Using inappropriate humor in class that degrades students from different groups.
- Expressing racially charged political opinions in class assuming that the targets of those opinions do not exist in class.
- Using the term "illegals" to reference undocumented students.
- Hosting debates in class that place students from groups who may represent a minority opinion in class in a difficult position.
- Singling students out in class because of their backgrounds.
- Expecting students of any particular group to 'represent' the perspectives of others of their race, gender, etc. in class discussions or debates.
- Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility and validity of their stories.
- Assigning class projects or creating classroom or school procedures that are heterosexist, sexist, racist, or promote other oppressions, even inadvertently.
- Using sexist language.
- Using heteronormative metaphors or examples in class.
- Assuming the gender of any student.
- Continuing to misuse pronouns even after a student, transgender or not, indicates their preferred gender pronoun.
- Assigning projects that ignore differences in socioeconomic class status and inadvertently penalize students with fewer financial resources.
- Excluding students from accessing student activities due to high financial costs.
- Assuming all students have access to and are proficient in the use of computers and applications for communications about school activities and academic work.
- Assuming students of particular ethnicities must speak another language or must not speak English.
- Complimenting non-white students on their use of "good English."
- Discouraging students from working on projects that explore their own social identities.
- Asking people with hidden disabilities to identify themselves in class.
- Ignoring student-to-student microaggressions, even when the interaction is not course-related.
- Making assumptions about students and their backgrounds.

- Featuring pictures of students of only one ethnicity or gender on the school website.
- Having students engage in required reading where the protagonists are always white.

### **Practice Addressing Microaggressions**

Scenarios:

You are walking in the hallway and hear a student use the “n” word in passing in the hallway. None of the people who heard the student use this language say anything. What do you do?

One of your fellow teachers repeatedly mispronounces the names of one of their students. You have heard this many times and you know it must bother their student. How do you address this situation with your colleague?

There is a transgender student at your school and teachers/counselors continually use gendered pronouns. You know the student has requested ‘they, them, their’ pronouns. How do you address this issue?

A group of students in the cafeteria continually makes jokes about “illegals.” You work with several undocumented students and they have told you that these remarks discourage them participate in the afterschool program that meets in the cafeteria. How do you address this situation?

Last year, some students wore inappropriate costumes that offended other students. Most of the problem costumes generically adopted culture as costume (e.g., Native American princess, Mexican bandito, geisha). While you are all for Halloween costumes and a bit of fun, you are worried about a repeat of the inappropriate costumes from last year at your site. What should you do?

A student you are teaching says you have lower expectations for them than you do of the white student you teach. They indicate that they think you have these lower expectations because they are a person of color. How do you respond?

You teach a Latinx student and assume they speak Spanish. You are shocked when they tell you that they do not know Spanish. One of your colleagues challenges you because you reacted in a shocked way. They are upset that you would perpetrate such a microaggression with one of the students. How do you respond?

You teach a student who identifies as Muslim. They are fasting during Ramadan, but they have several tests during this time. They are feeling very stressed because of their religious obligations and their academic obligations. You are concerned about them. How do you help them?

Additional examples found in [Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation](#), by Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.