# ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS

## In the Classroom

### Definition:
Microaggressions are commonplace and brief verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or otherwise negative messages to a specific group based on identity (such as race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, nationality, citizenship, ability, etc).

### Students face:
- Cognitive - questioning whether or not to respond.
- Emotional - exhaustion, anger, sadness, and anxiety.
- Behavioral - diminished attention, careful attention to word choice, tone, and body movement.

### Common Classroom Microaggression Types

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ascription of intelligence</td>
<td>Assuming one is unintelligent or smarter than average based on appearance</td>
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<td>2. Denial of racial reality</td>
<td>E.g. dismissing claims that race was relevant to understanding a student's experience</td>
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<td>3. Denial or devaluing of experience or culture</td>
<td>Ignoring the existence, histories, and systemic injustices against cultures or groups of people</td>
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<td>4. Making assumptions based on appearance</td>
<td>Assuming people speak or don't speak a certain language because of their appearance; questioning someone's membership status such as “you don’t look disabled”.</td>
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<td>5. Assumption of immorality</td>
<td>E.g. assuming that poor people, undereducated people, LGBTQ people, or people of color are more likely to be devious, untrustworthy, or unethical</td>
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### What To Do When Microaggressions Occur

1. **Be calm.** A part of unpacking our biases is making mistakes. Approach the conversation from an intent versus impact standpoint. Good intentions can have a harmful impact, and this can be a valuable teaching moment for students.
2. **Acknowledge** the moment and take the lead in guiding the conversation (slow down or stop the previous conversation).
3. **Inquire:** Give students the benefit of doubt. Ask for clarification, then hold students accountable as necessary.
   - Example: “Could you please say more about that?” or “It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Could you please tell me why?”
4. **Reframe:** Create a different way or perspective from which to view the situation.
   - Example: “Let’s reframe this to explore other perspectives/interpretations. Consider for a moment that... What if...?”
5. **Identify:** Explain why a certain statement is problematic. Support critical thinking. Avoid villainizing and speak from “I” statements where possible. Reference previously established discussion guidelines if needed.
   - Example: “Saying __ often comes up in popular culture. Some might find it problematic because of __.”
6. **Acknowledge** visible and invisible emotions in the room. Ask students if they'd like to stay or take a break/end class for the day and return to the conversation later.
7. **Validate** the students who have been impacted.
8. **Follow up** as needed. See individuals after class, briefly check in at the start of the next class. Identify if more resources are needed.

### What NOT To Do When Microaggressions Occur

- Ignore the situation.
- Respond with hostility.
- Be passive and let students guide.
- Focusing on right or wrong.

### Sources:
- University of Washington, "Addressing microaggressions in the classroom"
- Carnegie Mellon University, "If you notice a microaggression, mention it!"