

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Inquiry: How do microaggressions present in public secondary schools and how do they affect students of color?

TPEP Standard: Danielson 2a. Creating an environment of respect and rapport



UNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THEIR ROLE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

“Microaggressions” is a term that has recently been applied to the discussion of racial prejudice and specifically refers to the statements or actions that are subtle or indirect examples of a racial prejudice or bias. Microaggressions are seen throughout society in common interactions and communications which are often so normalized that they can appear as acceptable behavior. Students of color are often the victim of microaggressions in school as they are assumed to be lower-achieving or more misbehaved. These microaggressions are exceptionally harmful to people of color and their self-identity. So, when microaggressions are applied at a young age towards children of color, they lose the confidence and self-efficacy that peers their age have. It is especially imperative to recognize microaggressions in public schools and how they can negatively affect and discourage students from achieving at their full potential. Students should not be limited by the expectations and presumptions their teachers make about them based on their intersections and diversities.

Theme/Theme Description	Microaggression Example	Message
Ascription of intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “You are a credit to your race.” “You are so articulate.” Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People of color are generally not as intelligent as whites It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent. All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.
Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A white man or woman clutching a purse or checking a wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes. A store owner following a customer of color around the store. A white person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are a criminal. You are going to steal. You are poor. You do not belong. You are dangerous.
Alien in own land When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Where are you from?” “Where were you born?” “You speak good English.” A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are not American. You are a foreigner.

D. Fox Harrell, “Playing Mimesis: Engendering Understanding Via Experience of Social Discrimination...”

TYPES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are defined by Hammond (2014)¹ as “those small seemingly innocuous brief verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that send hostile, derogatory, denigrating, and hurtful messages to people of color”:

- Microassaults – the misuse of power and privilege against students of color
- Microinsults – to demean a person’s racial and cultural heritage
- Microinvalidations – to exclude a person’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences

Examples of Different Forms of Microaggressions		
Microinsult	<p>A Black male college student at a highly selective university is asked what sport he plays, with the underlying assumption that he did not gain admission based on his academic credentials, but rather his athletic ability.</p> <p>A Latina administrator is described as “spicy,” which culturally and sexually objectifies her while diminishing her effectiveness as a leader.</p>	
Microinvalidation	<p>An Asian American professor is asked where she is from, and when she replies, “Kansas,” her student responds with, “No seriously, what country are you from?” suggesting that she was not born in the U.S.</p>	
Microassault	<p>A Muslim student sits in a class where a professor makes Islamophobic comments during his lecture.</p>	

Higher Education Today: higheredtoday.org

Jennifer	I’m sitting next to a girl and she looked over at me and told me that she’d never been to school with a black person before. For the life of me, I don’t remember what prompted that or why she would even disclose that. I just remember feeling so awkward and thinking, ‘How is that even possible and why would you blurt that out?’ ... After that I felt like I was under a micro-scope for the whole class.	Microinsult perpetrated by a peer
Tiffany	One teacher ...was giving the demographics of the class. He said, ‘We don’t have any African American students in here.’ I was like, ‘What? I’m here.’ I had to speak up and that was kind of awkward. I had to speak up in the middle of the class and everyone was kind of looking at me like, ‘Oh my God, did she just come out in class?’ He apologized the next class, but the damage was kind of done.	Microinvalidation perpetrated by a professor

Thomas, Dinkins, & Hazelwood, “Racial microaggressions: Stories of Black Candidates...”

FIXED AND GROWTH MINDSETS

Fixed and Growth Mindsets are discussed in education as having an important role on student achievement:

- Fixed Mindsets: the comfortability of remaining stagnant¹
- Students of color are more likely to have a fixed mindset because of microaggressions.
- Learned Helplessness is the idea that once someone is repeatedly exposed to a negative stimuli, they develop the mental mindset that they will never be able to escape the negative stimuli.
- Fixed Mindsets in students of color are also heavily affected by academic tracking.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics on Upper and Lower Academic Track High School Courses: Categorical Variables

	Non-academic track	College preparatory track
% Female	46.0	54.0**
% White	48.7	51.3**
% Black	51.9	48.1**
% Hispanic	67.4	32.6**
% Other	50.6	49.4*
% IEP	74.1	25.9**
Dropout	76.0	24.0**

*p < .05, **p < .001

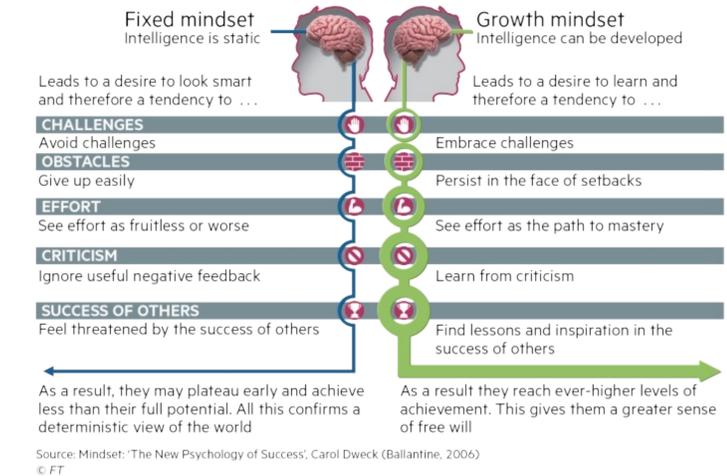
Allen et al., “Racial Microaggressions and African American and Hispanic Students in Urban Schools...”

ACADEMIC TRACKING AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Academic tracking refers to the different pathways through school and are often connected to gifted and special education programs:

- Students of color are more frequently placed on vocational tracts rather than college preparatory courses.³
- There’s a bias in IQ/Aptitude testing that places students of color in special education programs at a higher rate.
 - Testing has also been shown to limit students of color from gifted education, but specifically in public secondary schools, the availability of Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) classes has significantly decreased over the years.
- Students of color often feel uncomfortable in gifted programs because of the environment, and the microaggressions they face within the programs.
 - Students of color feel more pressured to conform to the majority classroom identity and if they refuse to do so, they are more likely to have their culture disrespected through microinsults.

Carol Dweck’s theory of the fixed and growth mindset

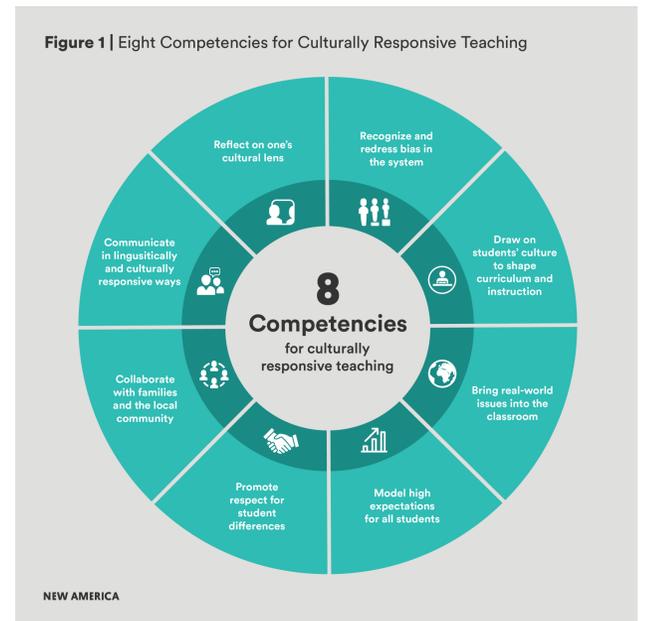


CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) refers to “an engagement strategy designed to motivate racially and culturally diverse students”¹:

- Address Personal Biases and Prejudices
- Get to know students personally.
- Use real life and current event examples within the classroom.
- Promoting respect and embracing student differences
- Recognize bias within the system

CRT helps eliminate the numerous amounts of microaggressions that appear within public secondary schools.



New America: newamerica.org

IMPORTANT NOTES

- Students of color make up around 51% of the US public school population as reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).²
- Public-school teachers are 79% White and Non-Hispanic as reported by NCES.²
- 42% of public-school students attend high poverty city schools as reported by NCES.²
- Most students of color face lower socioeconomic status resulting in⁴:

- Poor Diets
- Substandard Schools
- Increased Suspension and Expulsion Rates
- Lower Test Scores
- Higher Dropout Rates

These statistics are important to understanding microaggressions because they demonstrate the number of intersections that students of color have as opposed to their educators.