

Addressing Microaggressions in the Classroom

1. Directly correct the stereotype/assumption/language.

Example: A White student turns to a Black student and asks if Black people believe the Black Lives Matter movement is being effective.

Possible response: No one can represent everyone from their racial or other social identity groups. Everyone speaks from their own experience. Let's hear different people's perspectives.

Example: A student uses the term "illegal alien" when discussing immigration issues.

Possible response: I realize you probably didn't intend it this way, but using the term "illegal alien" is considered by many to be an offensive term since people aren't "illegal". Preferred language is "undocumented".

2. Address the comment on a broader level as a common assumption, not focus on the individual. Example: A student makes a comment about a gender non-conforming person just being "confused" about their gender.

Possible response: Many people mistakenly believe that people who are not gender-conforming are just confused. However, people who are gender non-conforming don't identify with the traditional gender categories and are expressing their gender in a way that is consistent with their own sense of identity.

3. Remind students of class guidelines and respectful behavior.

Example: A student says, "That's so ghetto" or "That's so retarded".

Possible response: We agreed that we would be respectful and not use put-downs. That language is not consistent with our guidelines and is unacceptable. (If appropriate, suggest other terminology or ways to express their thoughts.)

4. Note reactions and ask for a response.

Example: A student makes a statement that students visibly react to.

Possible response: "I noticed that several students had a reaction when John said that. Could you help us understand your reactions? Before asking people to share their thoughts and feelings, it may be helpful to remind people of the class guidelines.

5. Ask for further clarification of the statement.

Example: When a student makes a biased comment, ask them to clarify their thinking and assumptions.

Possible response: You're suggesting that low income students are not as academically capable. Could you tell us more about how you came to that assumption?

Follow up with correcting inaccurate assumptions and information.

Consider following up with the person who said the microaggression and/or the person who was the recipient of the microaggression after class.