

Responding to Microaggressions in the Classroom

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Take a moment to review and compare the below three communication resources.

1. Open The Front Door Framework (O.T.F.D)..... p.2
2. A.C.T.I.O.N. Frameworkp.3
3. Helpful Languagep.4

Message Sent By Microaggression

Examples of Microaggression	Theme	Message
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. While walking through the halls of the Chemistry building, a professor approaches a post-doctoral student of color to ask if she/he is lost, making the assumption that the person is not in the right place.2. A store owner following a customer of color around the store.3. Raising your voice or speaking slowly when addressing a blind student.4. "When I look at you, I don't see color."5. Continuing to mispronounce the names of students after students have corrected the person time and time again. Not willing to listen closely and learn the pronunciation of a non-English based name.6. Someone crosses to the other side of the street to avoid a person of color.7. "There is only one race, the human race."		

Open The Front Door Framework

Open The Front Door to Communication (OTFD) Adapted from Learning Forum (2016)

- Observe: Concrete, factual, and observable (not evaluative)
Think: Thoughts based on observation (yours and/or theirs)
Feel: Emotions- "I feel (emotion)."
Desire: Specific request or inquiries about desired outcome

Below write out your O.T.F.D response to the following statement from a student.

"Women are just not as good at math and science as men are, that's why none of us can think of an example of a famous woman in math or science."

O:

T:

F:

D:

A.C.T.I.O.N. Framework

Take A.C.T.I.O.N.: To speak up when microaggressions occur, the steps below provide a guide on how to take **A.C.T.I.O.N.** rather than feeling frozen (Souza, 2018; Chueng, Ganote, & Souza, 2016).

Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.

"I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that...?"

Come from curiosity not judgment.

- Listen actively and openly to their response.
- If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you could end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to "cover their tracks," you may consider making a statement about the initial comment to encourage learning.

"I'm glad to hear I misunderstood you, because, as you know, such comments can be..."

- If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment.

"Can you tell me what you were you hoping to communicate with that comment?"

"Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?"

Tell what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.

"I noticed that . . ."

Impact exploration: ask for, and/or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others.

"What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?"

"As you know, everything speaks. What message do you think such a comment sends?"

"What impact do you think that comment could have on ..."

Own your own thoughts and feelings around the impact.

"When I hear your comment, I think/feel..."

"Many people might take that comment to mean..."

"In my experience, that comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about... I would like to think that is not your intent."

Next steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

"Our class is a learning community, and such comments make it difficult for us to focus on learning because people feel offended. So I am going to ask you to refrain from stating your thoughts in that manner in the future. Can you do that please?"

"I encourage you to revisit your view on X as we discuss these issues more in class."

"I'd appreciate it if you'd consider using a different term because it is inconsistent with our course agreement regarding X..."

Helpful Language

These ideas come from conversations with U-M faculty about responding to student comments in class that might exclude, devalue, or marginalize other students or perspectives. Depending on what you're responding to, as well as how much time you want to spend, steps could include:

- *Clarify*: "I heard you say/suggest _____. Did I understand that correctly?"
- *Validate the useful elements of a contribution*: "Thank you for raising a common perspective..." "I can hear you're really grappling with this complex idea..." "You've raised an idea that's important for all of us to consider, and we'll do that — but first I briefly want to ..."
- *Give the benefit of the doubt* where appropriate: "I doubt this is what you intended, but..." "You may not realize how this sounded..." "I hear that you're primarily making a joke, and yet..."
- *Explain potential impacts of specific language choices*: "The word X is a label that's often objected to by those it's used to describe because ..." "I could easily imagine that your use of that metaphor would feel like an insult to people who ..." "When I hear the phrase/word 'X,' it distracts me from the other points you're trying to make..."
- *Acknowledge a range of possible perspectives and experiences in the room*: "Let's remember we may be talking about classmates when we say ..." "Not all of you will share this response, but there are good reasons that some people find it hard to keep listening after a classmate uses language like..." "I worry about the impact of those words on students who have an experience of ..."
- *Refer to the class discussion guidelines*: "This is a good occasion to remind everyone to be careful how we use the word 'we.'" "Remember we talked in our guidelines discussion about taking care when generalizing about groups of people."
- *Engage classmates*: Use discussion ("Does anyone have a different way of explaining this?" "What questions or concerns do others want to share?") or writing ("I want to understand better the range of perspectives about this in the class; please take out a page and write a couple of sentences about ...").
- *Create a path forward*: "As we continue on this topic, let's all remember not to generalize only from our particular experience..." "I want to pause from our plan for 5 minutes to think a bit about the other issues that have been raised." "Keeping those commitments in mind, let's get back to the main topic at hand here."

Developed by the U-M Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT)

Found here: <http://crlt.umich.edu/resources-1>.

Role Play

Read the below example and apply the O.T.F.D. Framework to this interaction. This example has come from a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Vasquez, 2020).

As the semester unfolded in a Sexuality Across the Lifespan course, an **instructor** and **student** continue to fall into power struggles during class discussions. The student often shares a conservative viewpoint and engages in disruptive behaviors such as laughing when other students share. For example, tensions in class spiked during the Senate Judiciary Committee's hearings on Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court nomination. A discussion of sexual assault led Anderson (student), who strongly supported Kavanaugh, to proclaim that the threat of false accusations [of sexual assault] also placed men at risk. Several classmates immediately responded by sharing their own experiences of being sexually assaulted. Some were in tears as they spoke.

Now take the below interaction between the instructor and student to apply either the O.T.F.D. or the A.C.T.I.O.N. framework as you role play with a partner about the below classroom interaction.

On another day, the topic was about transgender people and public bathroom legislation. It was deciding if transgender people should be allowed to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity. The classroom debate became heated.

Instructor: It is crazy to assume that a transgender person would molest a child or do anything illegal in a bathroom, and the claims are wrong.

Student: raises her hand and says, I wouldn't say that it is crazy to assume this when there have been cases regarding transgender people molesting children in bathrooms. I don't believe that every transgender person is a child molester. The fact that you just stated about it not happening is wrong. When indeed, there have been cases.

Instructor:

Sources & Resources

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