

GEORGE LUCAS EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

A Look at Implicit Bias and Microaggressions

A primer on the impact of implicit biases in schools and how they can be expressed by students and faculty.

By *Todd Finley*

March 25, 2019



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Like everybody else, I possess unconscious biases about people that are contingent on how they talk and look. Such instant judgments, called *implicit bias*, involve “automatically categorizing people according to cultural stereotypes,” Sandra Graham and Brian Lowery write in “*Priming Unconscious Racial Stereotypes About Adolescent Offenders*” (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/B:LAHU.0000046430.65485.1f>).”

The consequences of implicit bias in schools are both powerful and measurable. A *2017 study* (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0049089X16307098?via%3Dihub>) by Hua-Yu Sebastian Cherng, for example, found that “math teachers perceive their classes to be too difficult for Latino and black students, and English teachers perceive their classes to be too difficult for all non-white students.” In English, these biases lower the affected students’ “expected years of schooling by almost a third of a year.... The effect of being underestimated by math teachers is -0.20 GPA points.”

Implicit bias also leads to inequitable punishments for students of color. A *2012 investigation* (<https://cloudfront.escholarship.org/dist/prd/content/qt3g36n0c3/qt3g36n0c3.pdf>) found that “17 percent, or one out of every six black schoolchildren enrolled in K–12, were suspended at least once,” compared with “one in 20 (5 percent) for whites.” Black girls ages 5 to 14 have been viewed by adults as “less innocent” than white girls of the same age, which may be a factor in the disparity in suspension rates, according to a *2017 report* (<https://www.law.georgetown.edu/poverty-inequality-center/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2017/08/girlhood-interrupted.pdf>) by Georgetown Law’s Center on Poverty and Inequality.

IMPLICIT BIAS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are one outgrowth of implicit bias. Columbia University’s Derald Wing Sue defines this term as “prejudices that leak out in many interpersonal situations and decision points”; they are experienced as “slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages.”





DEFINITION:

Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. Hidden messages may “communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment.”

source: Derald Wing Sue

1 GENDER



Whistling as a woman walks by.

MESSAGE: You are a sex object. That is, women’s appearance is for the enjoyment of men.

source: Derald Wing Sue

2 MICROASSAULT

“Explicit racial derogations” meant to hurt, such as calling

somebody “colored” or
“Oriental.”

source: Visions, Inc.



3 MICROINVALIDATION

Negating the thoughts,
feelings, or experiences of a
person of color.

EXAMPLE:

“Don’t be so sensitive.”

source: Visions, Inc.



4 AVOID SAYING...

A) “Where are you from?”

MESSAGE: You’re not American.

B) “You’re so articulate.”

MESSAGE: Your group isn’t
usually as intelligent as whites.

C) “I’m not racist; I have several
black friends.”

MESSAGE: I’m immune to racism
because I have friends of color

because I have friends of color.

D) Saying to an Asian person:
“Speak up more. You’re so
quiet.”

MESSAGE: Assimilate to the
dominate culture.

source: Wing, et. al., 2007 via U. of Minnesota

5 IMITATING ACCENTS

Mimicking foreign accents
reinforces stereotypes and often
mocks groups for struggling
with English.

6 AScription OF INTELLIGENCE



Assigning smarts based on race
or gender. “How’d YOU get into
that school?”

source: Gwen Miller



In a 2007 article for *American Psychologist*

(<https://world-trust.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/7-Racial-Microaggressions-in-Everyday-Life.pdf>), Sue and six other researchers

identified three categories of racial microaggressions:

- A microassault is a “verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.” Example: Students wear Confederate flag clothing.

- A microinsult is insensitive communication that demeans someone's racial identity, signaling to people of color that "their contributions are unimportant." Example: A teacher corrects the grammar only of Hispanic children.
- A microinvalidation involves negating or ignoring the "psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color." Example: An Asian American student from the U.S. is asked where she was born, which conveys the message that she is not really an American.

Over the years, the concept has been extended beyond race to include similar events and experiences of other marginalized groups, including women, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, etc.

In schools, students report that *experiences like these* (<http://microaggressions.com/>) are fairly common:

- "In high school, boys in my math classes would look over my shoulder and unsolicited point out my errors with their pencils."
- "Sometimes I'm asked, 'Why are you so white?' meaning that people with Arab names and heritage are supposed to be all dark-skinned, and I'm asked to justify my skin color and explain why I don't match their racial stereotypes."
- "I've been told, 'Go back to Mexico!' many times."

Other microaggressions include teachers being surprised by certain students' achievements or holding tests on religious holidays, and peers imitating foreign accents or saying, "That's so gay," or "She's so bipolar."

STARTING IMPORTANT CONVERSATIONS, AND KEEPING THEM GOING

Once during a faculty meeting, I witnessed an educator tell a white male colleague that he'd committed a microaggression. At the time, I didn't know precisely what that meant. Nobody talked for a few uncomfortable

seconds until someone changed the topic. Calling the man out in the moment was justified. After all, it's everybody's job to make diversity-sensitive norms explicit. But that moment was also a dialogue killer. Had there been previous conversations among the entire faculty about microaggressions, perhaps the entire incident could have been avoided.

Thoughtful conversations are also halted by whataboutism ("Why do they get to use racist words and we don't?"), name-calling ("snowflakes," "thought police"), and the unfortunate formula "strategic denial plus conjunction plus racist comment" ("I'm not racist, but...").

How do you have a meaningful classroom dialogue about microaggressions? The trick is to plan a conversation on this topic before microaggressions ignite tensions. Set *discussion ground rules*

(<https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento->

[prod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf](https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf))

, like "commit to learning, not debating," and then show *examples of microaggressions*

(<https://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/racial-microaggressions-you-hear-on-a-daily-basis>) as a prelude to discussing why they're hurtful.

If these types of conversations feel too challenging to you, contact a nearby university's office of diversity and inclusion and invite someone with expertise in sensitive topics to address the class. They'll model how to handle this discussion, so you can take the lead next time.

RESOURCES TO COUNTERACT IMPLICIT BIAS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

There are a number of resources that can help K–12 faculty and adolescent learners counteract implicit bias and avoid the perpetuation of microaggressions.

Videos: Watch and discuss Dr. Yolanda Flores Niemann's "*Microaggressions in the Classroom*

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZahtlxW2CIQ>)" and Ahsante the Artist's "*I, Too, Am Harvard*

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=115&v=uAMTSPGZRil)" during the next faculty meeting.

Checklists: Read "*Microaggressions in the Classroom*

(https://www.messiah.edu/download/downloads/id/921/Microaggressions_in_the_Classroom.pdf)," developed by the University of Denver, as well as Kevin Nadal's list of *microaggressions that harm LGBTQ people*

(<https://psychologybenefits.org/2014/02/07/anti-lgbt-microaggressions/>).

Activities: Sign up for a seven-day bias cleanse that emails daily tasks to reorient your thoughts on race, gender, and anti-LGBTQIA bias. And try Harvard's *Implicit Bias Test* (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>).

Readings: Check out multicultural texts suggested by the *American Library Association*

(<https://libguides.ala.org/c.php?g=488238&p=3530814>).

Norms: Learn about *culturally inclusive classrooms* (<https://teachallreachall.weebly.com/what-is-culturally-inclusive-teaching.html>) and establish classroom ground rules that promote inclusive language and behaviors.

Students and teachers are made of powerful feelings, but these feelings are not fixed and set in stone. Emotions can be identified, excavated, understood, and managed. And when we work through that process together, *implicit bias can be unlearned* (<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>).

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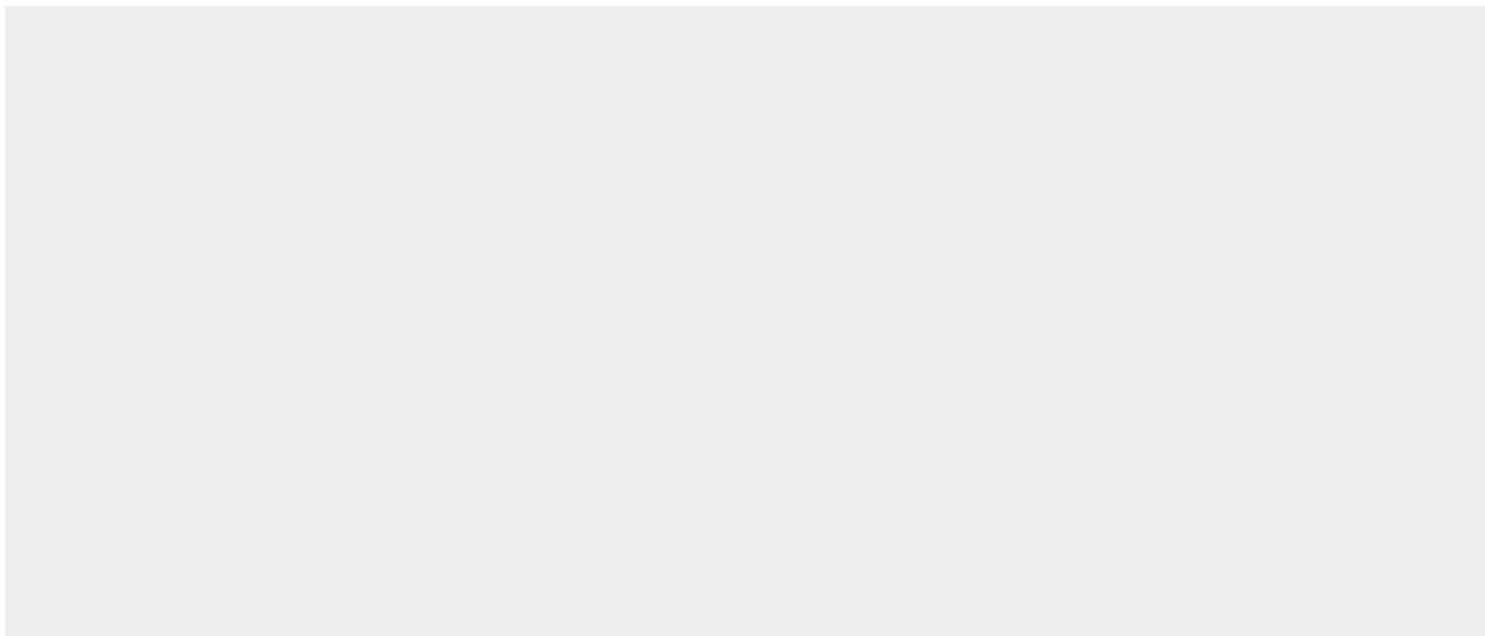
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

How a School Puts Culturally Responsive Teaching Into Practice

Educators at the dual-language Amigos School are creating an authentically immersive, academically challenging school experience.

By Sarah Gonser

October 30, 2020





When Cambridge Public Schools, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, decided three years ago to prioritize culturally responsive teaching, one of its longstanding institutions, the Amigos School, suddenly found itself ahead of the curve.

The small K–8 dual-language immersion public school has practiced culturally responsive teaching for years. It’s a philosophy that informs everything from its pedagogy to the school’s philosophy about Spanish-English immersion. “There are no blank slates walking into the classroom,” says Amigos’s principal, Sarah Bartels-Marrero. “Culturally

responsive teaching is capitalizing on all that students bring with them from their personal lives and their home lives. And it's really knowing that student, knowing where he or she is from, and using that to craft the most meaningful and rigorous learning opportunities.”

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Letting Young People Lead With Their Identity

By providing students with opportunities to let their identities shine, educators get to know them well, says youth advocate Karen Pittman—and that is one of the first steps in culturally responsive teaching.

October 21, 2020

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STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Strategies to Encourage Students to Turn Their Cameras On

Incorporating SEL approaches, playing games, and giving students options can inspire them to show their faces.

By *Liz Byron Loya*

November 9, 2020



While there is a tremendous amount of value to being able to see your students' faces during distance learning, we can't force them to be on camera, just as during in-person teaching, we can't force unengaged students to lift their

heads or remove hats or hoodies that obscure their faces.

With experimentation and persistence, however, you can arrive at strategies that work. Whether they need options, encouragement, or trust in order to turn their cameras on, there's likely a solution that is the right fit for your classroom, circumstances, lessons, and students.

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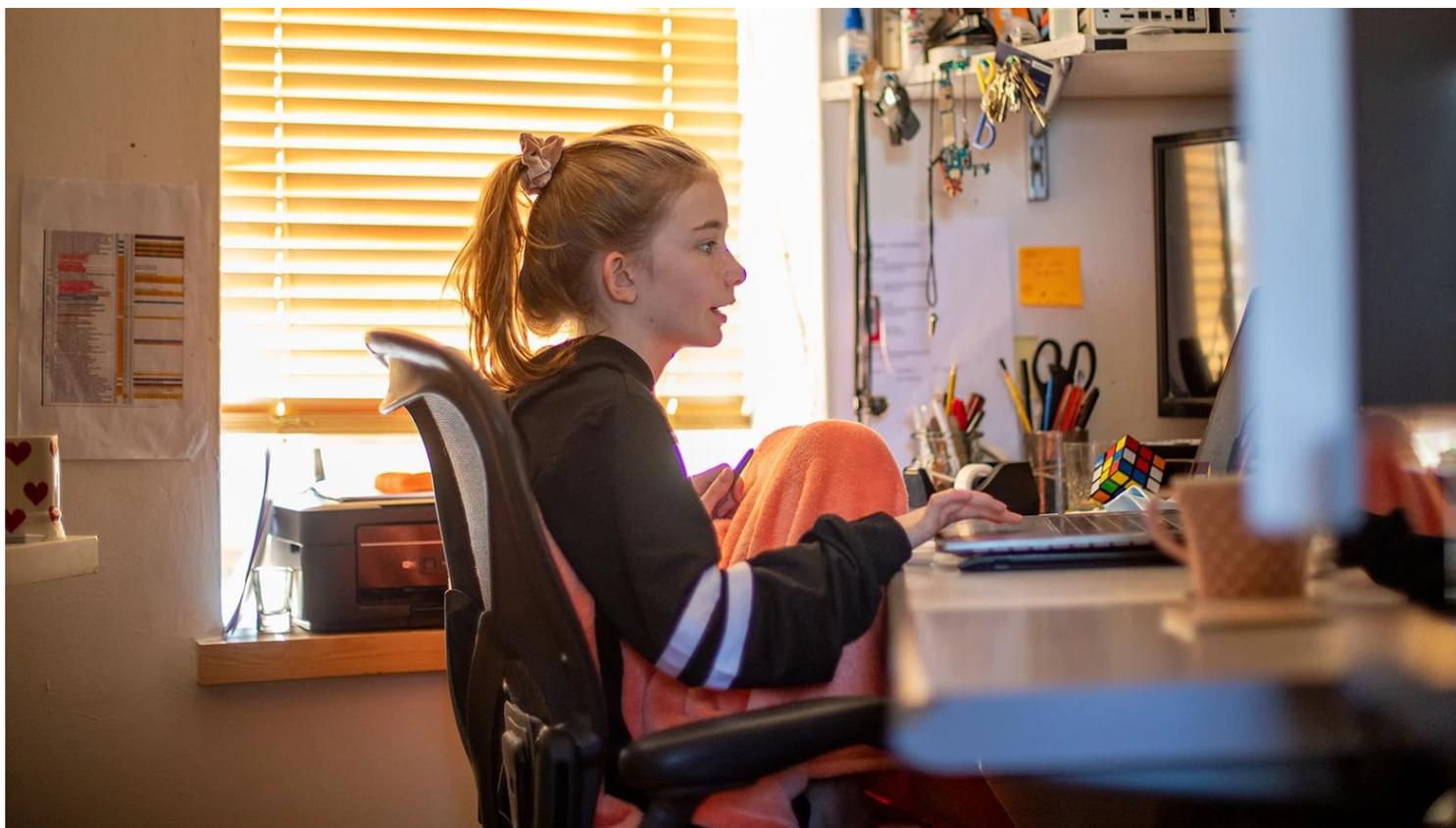
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Adapting an Effective Math Collaboration Activity for Distance Learning

An instructional coach and math teacher who developed a powerful model for student collaboration have tweaked it for the pandemic.

By *Ashley Taplin*

October 26, 2020



Cooperative learning has been highlighted by educational researchers John Hattie and Robert Marzano as a *high-yield strategy* (<https://www.cnyric.org/tfiles/folder1306/8%20Strategies%20Robert%20Marzano%20amp%20John%20Hattie%20Agree%20On.pdf>) that “adds value to whole-class instruction and to individual work” by boosting both engagement and collaboration. Last year, I leveraged Hattie and Marzano’s research to partner with high school math teacher Kathleen Janysek in creating a cooperative learning strategy we called *Try It, Talk It, Color It, Check It* (</article/strategy-boosting-student-engagement-math>).

When we implemented the strategy, we used the three components that Hattie and Marzano indicate are essential to success—structure, small groups, and explicit instruction on how to work effectively in groups—and the results were dramatic in terms of the look, sound, and feel of Kathleen’s Algebra 1 classroom. Silence turned into discussion and debate, and the students’ dependence on their teacher transformed into independence. Ultimately, Kathleen and I created a new approach that replaced traditional whiteboard practice and engaged all students rather than most.

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TEACHER WELLNESS

5 Simple Ways to Manage Stress This Year

Finding ways to process the challenges of this year will be critical for teachers.

By *Lori Desautels*

October 20, 2020

Educators this year are faced with a multitude of decisions and reflexive reactions as schools and communities try to create the safest plans for the return to school, and the chronic unpredictability of this situation wears on our nervous systems.

Why is this? Our brains and bodies are being flooded with millions of bits of sensory information every day, but with an increase of anxiety and worry, these sensations can trigger our stress response systems, causing our bodies and brains to move into a survival state where we find ourselves feeling chronically unsafe, dysregulated, and stressed.

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SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

High School Is Not the Time to Let Up on SEL

The science suggests that teenagers still need lots of social and emotional support—but SEL work tends to focus on the elementary years.

By Sarah Gonser

October 29, 2020

In elementary school, it's common to have social and emotional lessons built into the curriculum, and the research shows that they have a strong, positive impact on student outcomes and school climate. But a 2019 *survey* (https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10064.html) of 15,000 K–12 teachers and 3,500 principals confirms what many probably suspect—that by the time kids reach high school, standalone SEL lessons are rare. The study's authors suggest that “explicit, stand-alone lessons tend to be better suited for, and more likely to be adopted in, elementary schools.” And as kids enter the teenage years, they found, teachers tend to use more informal practices—for example, squeezing in short exercises when busy academic schedules permit.

The relative scarcity of high school SEL lessons, says David S. Yeager, assistant professor of developmental psychology at the University of Texas at Austin, is a question of quality. “Typical SEL programs ... have a very poor track record with middle adolescents, even when they work with [younger] children,” writes Yeager in a 2017 *report* (<https://labs.la.utexas.edu/adrg/files/2013/12/5-Adolescence-Yeager-2.pdf>). “Programs for adolescents are sometimes simply aged-up versions of childhood programs—for instance, they communicate the same message, but now the character doing the talking has a skateboard and a chain wallet.”

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SCHOOL CLIMATE

Extracurriculars Play a Vital Role During the Pandemic

Dedicating time to extracurricular activities during the pandemic provides middle and high school students with a sense of normalcy and social connection amid uncertainty.

By *Emelina Minero*

November 13, 2020

When it comes to school activities, “canceled” has been the recurring refrain during the pandemic.

But now that educators have a semester of emergency remote teaching under their belts—and many are returning in person in some form—schools are increasingly trying to improve opportunities for students to engage in school life amid the new circumstances.

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APPS

3 Tech Tools for Distance Learning and Beyond

These (mostly) free tools make it easier for teachers to connect with remote students and provide plenty of ways to engage them.

By *Stephanie Rothstein*

November 13, 2020

As so many of us try to juggle teaching virtually or in a hybrid format this year, I've decided to focus my energy on technology that will help me no matter the setting. These three tech tools have had a huge impact on me, my staff, and my students.

Pear Deck and Google Slides make the best partnership. I always build my presentations in Google Slides. Then I open Pear Deck and sprinkle in the goodness. Pear Deck allows me to add interactive elements, connect with

students, and understand how to better support them. Pear Deck can be used in so many ways—synchronously or asynchronously.

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CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY

What Matters Most When You're Evaluating Edtech Tools

Look past the marketing and focus instead on the student—and teacher—experience and built-in engagement features.

By *Shveta Miller*

November 12, 2020

Because of pandemic-induced distance learning, planning lessons and remaining connected with students involves an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the benefits and potential problems with edtech resources. As a veteran teacher and instructional coach with years of experience in edtech, I've seen it over and over again: Teachers' inboxes and social media news feeds are inundated with advertised tech products, and it's hard to know what will enhance the learning experience for our students, whether they use the tool in class or remotely.

There are a host of factors that educators need to consider when choosing edtech tools and resources that will support their students and instruction.

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PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

3 Keys to Making Project-Based Learning Work During Distance Learning

This challenging time provides an opportunity for students to work on real-world problems they see every day.

By *Michael McDowell*

November 12, 2020

Amid a pandemic, educators are trying to figure out how to make sure that kids are socially in tune, emotionally intact, and cognitively engaged. Moreover, we're all attempting to figure out how to do this across a plethora of mediums, including computer screens, video cameras streaming into classrooms, and engaging students face-to-face albeit across shields, masks, and plexiglass.

Still, there is an opportunity here to give students a chance to discuss the challenges of their own environment, the barrage of news they face daily, and the core content they need for long-term success. One of the best options to meet these demands is for students to engage in rigorous problem- or project-based learning (PBL)—an approach that ensures students develop high rigor and experience high relevance by solving problems or completing tasks in a remote or face-to-face environment.

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