

# *Equitable Teaching Practices: Responding to Microaggressions*

Wendy M. Smith

University of South Carolina Lunch & Learn

October 4, 2022



This presentation is based in part on work from the SEMINAL project; SEMINAL is supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (DUE-1624643, 1624610, 1624628, and 1624639). All findings and opinions are those of the authors and not necessarily of the NSF.

***IN OUR GRIT, OUR GLORY™***

Thanks!

**The material in this session were developed collaboratively with a larger group, and tested out with participants from SEMINAL. Thanks to Matt Voigt, Nancy Kress, Rebecca Machen, Antonio Martinez, Adriana Corrales, and all the participants of our SEMINAL and OPEN Math workshops**



**Student belonging** is critical to positive academic & social outcomes in higher ed, especially in STEM fields (Strayhorn, 2018)

Myriad factors can increase or decrease students' feelings of belonging (personal, academic, social, relational, environmental, etc) (Salami et al., 2021)

Experiencing **microaggressions** leads to lower feelings of belonging (Franklin, 2016)



**What are microaggressions?**

**Can you give some examples you've experienced or witnessed?**



### Death by one thousand paper cuts

Sue (2007) and Nadal (2008) define microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional" and includes "acts that reflect superiority, hostility, discrimination, and racially inflicted insults and demeanors to various marginalized groups of people based on such identities as race/ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religion, class, and age"



- **“Where are you even from?”**
- **“You speak English really well”**
- **“Your name is too hard to pronounce, so I’ll just call you \_\_\_\_\_”**
- ***Using incorrect pronouns***
- **“The intro class is next door” *when a BIPOC student walks into an upper level course on day 1***
- ***Can be environmental: being the only BIPOC student in a course***



- **Trivializing:** “It is obvious/clear/trivial that...”
- **Wait time:** Asking “are there any questions” then quickly moving on
- **Prior Knowledge:** “You should have known this from...”
- **Dismissal:** “Come see me after class”
- **Environmental:** representation of BIPOC students in upper level classes; textbooks

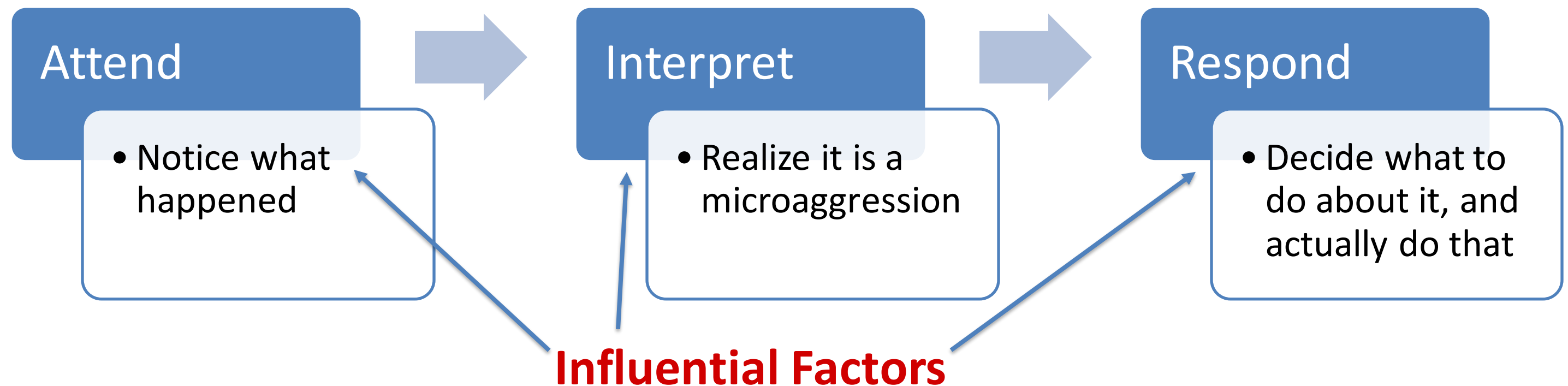


- **Student Engagement in Mathematics through an Institutional Network for Active Learning (SEMINAL)**
- **26 Math depts Involved in improving dept cultures to normalize actively engaging students in first year courses**
- **Year-long learning community to explore ways to center equity in improving teaching & learning**
- **Research team crafted scenarios for interviews & group discussions based on actual events**





## Framework: Teacher Noticing research (e.g., van Es & Sherin, 2021)



- Past experiences & actions
- Personal characteristics
- Professional relationships
- Knowledge/experience related to microaggressions
- Beliefs & values related to equitable teaching practices & student experiences
- Comfort level with confrontations
- Power dynamics
- Norms (classroom, dept)



In Groups (see handout)

**Read through the 4 scenarios.**

**Select one as a group to be the first to discuss.**

- Take a moment to reflect on how you would have individually responded to the scenario.
- Share things that stood out to you with the people at your table.
- What local or personal considerations would impact your response to this scenario?

**As time permits, select another scenario and repeat (reflect then share/discuss).**



Classroom Scenario: Online class (Shawna)	Department Scenario: Dynamics
Classroom Scenario: In person class (Janet)	Department Scenario: Hiring





### Action Taker

Immediate  
Response to  
Condemn Message



### Connector

Relating Through  
Personal or Similar  
Experience



### Confidant

Building  
Relationships with  
Others



### Thinker

Taking Time to  
Reflect Prior to  
Response



### Cautionary

Uncertainty on  
Moving Forward



### Conflicted

Avoid addressing but  
condemn



### Apolitical

Avoid and dismiss  
the situation

Archetypes of potential responses from research  
(public/private)

### **Multiple “right” ways to address microaggressions**

- Considerations of public vs private responses
- References to class norms or ways of interacting
- Following up with aggressor and aggressees
- Education on why something is a microaggression and therefore not okay

**According to students interviewed, the worst response is to do nothing**

*Silence endorses the aggression*



- **Educate yourself to better notice microaggressions**
- **Pre-reflect on possible responses**
- **Engage in ongoing discussions to explore various options**
- **Talk with students & colleagues about microaggressions they experience**
- **Commit to responding to microaggressions**



**Thanks for engaging!**

**I welcome follow up questions &  
inquiries:**

**[wsmith5@unl.edu](mailto:wsmith5@unl.edu)**



## Equity and Culture Take-aways to build a movement:

- **Connect** with campus programs & resources to support students
- **Link** to university priorities & mission statements.
- **Value** teaching and instructional innovation
- **Develop** a community of practice among instructors, focused on improving teaching and learning.

## Transforming Departments:

- [ASCN book](#)
- [SEMINAL book](#)
- [Increasing student success in STEM](#)





- [Accelerating Systemic Change Network](#)
- [COMMIT Network](#)
- [CoMInDS](#)
- [MSRI CIME 2022](#)
- [Teaching for PROWESS](#)
- [OPEN Math](#)
- **MAA CONNECT,  
My.AMATYC**