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| **What not to say/do** | **Why it is harmful** | **What to say/do instead** |
| **Unresponsiveness to Student Needs** |
| "If I do that for you, I will have to do it for everyone" | Sameness does not equal fairness; different people have different needs. | “How can I help you? I want to make sure you can learn and demonstrate your learning in a way that works best for you.” |
| "If you were paying attention, you would understand." | A student may have valid reasons to not have been paying attention. They may have been paying attention but did not understand or may have an anxiety disorder. This statement also places the teacher as holder/owner of the knowledge—a colonial mentality. | “What questions do you have?” “How can I help you better understand?”“How can I help?” |
| “You were here, you should know what to do.” | Just because a student was present in class, does not mean that they necessarily understand the assignment. | “How can I help you better understand the assignment?”“Is there a particular part of the assignment that is confusing?” |
| Expecting students to self-advocate for their needs, missing assignments, or absences | For a multitude of reasons students struggle with advocating for themselves. Do not assume that they know how to self-advocate or feel comfortable advocating for themselves. Also, students’ differing levels of comfortability with their various teachers may impact their ability to advocate well in all classes. | Model appropriate advocacy behaviors often in class. Make class time to have students check for missing assignments. If a student was absent, check in with them for missing assignments/work when they return. Teachers need to be the ones reaching out to students. |
| “I never accept late work.”  | Our students are post-COVID student are still recovering from lost SEL skills and re-learning how to be students. Having rules without exceptions denies the humanity of our students. Grades should not be used as a punitive measures. | Be flexible. “Was there something that prevented you from being able to complete this assignment on time?” “How can I support you completing this assignment?” |
| Generalizing the poor behavior of a few students to the whole class.“You are all being so terrible.” | Our students are individuals, punishing a whole group for the behavior of a few denies them their individualism. This also can be unmotivating for students who are behaving well. Students may also worry about their grade in the course. | Try having small group conversations with students engaging in disruptive behaviors. |
| **Professing Innocence** |
| "I am colorblind."“I don’t see color.” | Not really possible, with exception of someone with vision limitations. This denies the existence of racialized experiences and identities of students/people, particularly those in BIPOC communities. | “It is important to me to be kind to all people.” (May need follow up depending on why colorblind statement was made, e.g., as defense mechanism) |
| "I cannot be racist. I chose to teach at a diverse school/married a person of color/I grew up in X city." | Being in proximity with BIPOC communities does not ensure anti-racism. Being around, married to, in a family with BIPOC doesn’t mean you cannot be racist or say/do racist things.  | “I value being in a diverse community.” (May need follow up conversation as saying “I cannot be racist because…” can be interpreted as a defense mechanism and/or a form of tokenism.) |
| Student: "Someone said a racist thing to me." Teacher: "I am sure they didn't mean it that way, don't be upset." Or "I understand, but I didn't see it that way. Or “That wasn’t the point/intent.” | This invalidates the student’s experience and/or feelings. As a white educator, saying things like “that wasn’t the point” can be a form of gaslighting and is also a way of claiming superiority. White people cannot understand racism in the same way as BIPOC. | “Tell me more about what happened?”“What was hurtful or harmful to you about what happened?”“What would help you heal or be able to learn or feel better moving forward?”\*See Sentence Stem chart for more |
| **Excusing Ignorance** |
| Repeatedly mispronouncing someone's name and not making an effort to get it right or giving them a nickname.  | This often a form of Eurocentrism, privileging white or European names. | Learn the name. Write it out phonetically or develop a mnemonic device. |
| "What's that thing on your head called again?" | Whether it is a hijab, pagri or Dukus or another type of head covering it can be offensive to ask students/people to explain or justify a non-European style of clothing or dress. | Do not comment on head coverings. Can learn on own. |
| **Putting Burden on Students** |
| "Can you share about this place/history/culture/religion (insert country/place)?” | This is placing the burden of teaching on students. It is the teacher’s job to know about the content. It can also feel targeting for students.  | “Does anyone have anything to share or add about this?” Do not look at certain students when saying this.  |
| Relying a lot on students to translate. | This can make it difficult for students who are translating to focus on content/practice or their own learning. Also this is a large cognitive load to carry. | Use tech and/or translation tools before and during lesson. |
| Asking students “Let me know I do/say something that offends you” (like racist or sexist or homophobic or transphobic or ableist) | It is hard for students to tell their teacher—someone who grades them—if something in the class is offensive. Can also be problematic for white, male, cis, hetero, abled educators to ask this because it is putting the burden on students. | Do not expect this or ask this. Seek out a community of colleagues to help. It is not students’ job. |
| Do nothing. | As Desmond Tutu said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” | Don't stay silent. |
| **Eurocentric Norms** |
| “Don't talk like that." “Use proper English. | Acknowledging academic language rules/norms are from a colonial, European approach. There are many ways of speaking English. English is not the official language of the US.   | Acknowledging the power systems around language and racism.“Another other way of saying this is…” |
| "I know best." (especially from a white teacher) | Reinforces white supremacy as white teacher is the authority figure. Places student as submissive and not empowered. | “In my experience as a (racialize voice e.g., white) person I have found…” |
| Assuming students’ behavior/future--e.g. "You can't do that in a job," "You will need this in college," or "you need to do this for college.” | Being in school is not a realistic analogy to a paid job. Also college experiences are different for different people.  | “This (insert behavior) is important to me because (insert thinking).” |
| Saying something (e.g., a circle) is about student engagement or voice and then talking is really just coming from the educator | This is not equity of student voice. If teacher is proposing to include student voice, students should be talking more than the teacher. | Do not use your voice for student voice. |
| Saying something is a "need to know" but not addressing the system that prioritizes knowledge | Different communities, different cultures, and different people have different needs. In an AP class, “need to know” may be for the exam, but not necessarily for college or life. “Need to know” without putting in context of white supremacy culture can lead to increased invisibility and legacy of white supremacy. | “This is important for this test/class because…” |
| Euro-centric approach to Spanish versus Afro-Latinx or Latinx focus. | A colonial approach to Spanish can be especially impactful from white non-native speaking educators who do not acknowledge a/their position of whiteness. | Acknowledge colonialism and racism involved in racism. |
| **Low Expectations** |
| "Your English is so good." | Saying this to BIPOC can be insulting because it is making an assumption about standards or abilities.  | Do not comment on this. If a student’s English has improved (you know them) you can say “Your English is improving.”  |
| “You have potential, but you don't use it.""You have so much potential." | It's a deficit mindset. Or that you think they're lazy. There are many reasons for the student's work. | "What you did here is great. Keep up the good work.” “You have the skills to go far in this. You might want to consider a career in…” |
| **Assumptions** |
| Talking about family status --e.g., "bring this home to your mom and dad." | Do not assume nuclear family structure is the norm; there are many different types of families.Assuming someone’s housing situation (e.g., lives in a home, lives in one home, has a consistent home). Can be harmful to students because it sets up standards, they may not feel comfortable telling others, including their teacher, about.  | “Bring this to your family or guardian.”“When you are outside of school…” |
| Making assumptions about religion or holidays--Thanksgiving, Day of the Dead, Christmas, Lunar New Year, Ramadan, Rash Hashanah. | Not everyone in a religion or culture celebrates all holidays. We have many different religions here and cannot assume people’s religions.  | “Have a great break”.“How can I help you?” |
| Going outside for a walk or break when it is cold and/or raining. | Assuming everyone has access to a coat. Assuming weather will not impact someone’s hair.  | Don’t go outside or expect students to be able to advocate for themselves in these situations (because if others want to go outside or their grade depends on it, they may have trouble speaking up) |
| "You guys" or "Ladies and gentlemen". | Assuming gender as a binary construct. Can be harmful to trans, non-binary, and many other students. | “Students”“People”“Young minds”“Thinkers”“Mathematicians” “Scientists”“Athletes”“Writers”“Historians”“Linguists” “Artists” |
| Avoid statements about students as a whole (e.g., so-and-so is lazy). | We see a small portion of their day and life. | When I see (insert behavior), I think (insert thinking) because (reasoning). |