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Interrupting Bias

"We need to invite the souls of the young people that we work with, and once they're able to refine—identify their grit, resilience, and character that they've already developed—their academic performance will improve."

- Dr. Victor Rios

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Interrupting Bias | Responding to Deficit Thinking

Remember:

- Speak up, every time, without exception.
- Have a response at the ready. Practice it.
- Be calm and positive. (Even if you feel the opposite).
- Be confident. Remember the goal.
- ECHO: Be the next voice if you aren't the first.

<p>stop</p>	<p>“You must speak up against every biased remark, every time it happens. Letting one go, then speaking up against the next one, sends an inconsistent message: that sometimes bias is ok; other times it isn't. Letting the first instance go without comment also sends the message to anyone within earshot that it's ok to say bigoted things. So interrupt it. Every time. In the moment. Without exception.”¹</p>
<p>Drop In the Moment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That offends me. • I don't find that funny. • That made me uncomfortable. • I'm surprised to hear you say that. • I need a moment to process that. • Let's remember to keep our language asset based. • That's a bold statement, to imply... • “Does that comment come from a place of asset and support, or something else?”
<p>Roll After the Event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you mean by that? • I'm not sure if you intended to offend, but I heard _____ • Did you mean to say something hurtful? • Let's think through the impact of that statement on students. • Tell me more. • How could we rephrase that to better communicate your intent? • “It's been my experience that... Is this something you've experienced?” • “You may not have meant to offend me, but you did. And this happens to people of color all the time. If you do not mean to offend, you will stop doing this.”
<p>(Follow Up)</p>	<p>“I was just joking,” or “You're being too sensitive/PC.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the classroom, this is a way for children to test boundaries, allowing them to back away and avoid ownership over what was said. With intervention, this allows children to realize where social boundaries are. • An adult who uses 'just joking' is no longer testing boundaries but is attempting to escape punishment for crossing them. Not only are they trying to escape blame, but they are also reassigning the blame onto you. • The “just joking” defense also cuts off conversation and dialogue.⁴

“I’m colorblind,” and, “I don’t see race.”

- This is actually another form of oppression of students of color. When these statements are made by those in power, they immediately diminish any student of color, declaring that their full identities and all that shapes them isn’t worth perceiving. ²
- How can we deny in others what they cannot and should not deny in themselves?⁵
- This sends the message to students that there is something wrong with being what they are. Translation: “I don’t think of you as being black. I think of you as being white. I think of you being normal like all the rest of us.” ²
- While this person is trying to demonstrate that they see students as individuals separate from any racial generalizations and stereotypes (and thus, are not biased), this very sentiment, let alone the act, comes from a place of privilege. It denies all that makes students of color full individuals.
- Even if one were to claim that they legitimately “do not see race,” one of our jobs as educators is to prepare students to enter society. A society that is in fact not colorblind and sees race as something to be feared rather than embraced. So even with that claim, one not seeing race would still have to know the perspective of seeing the race of their students to prepare students for a society that will.⁵
- Instead, can we guide people to use their privilege to confront and dismantle such thinking and practices?³

References

- 1 Speak Up at School. Learning for Justice
- 2 How Should You Respond to a Racist Comment? Randy Cohen. *All Things Considered*, NPR
- 3 Specific, Candid, and Helpful Responses to Expressions of Racism and Bias, Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE)
- 4 The Just Joking Defense, Laura Tropp, *Inside Higher Ed*
- 5 Saying “I Don’t See Color” Denies the Racial Identity of Students. Larry Ferlazzo, *EdWeek*

Preparing to Interrupt Deficit Language

What are the most common phrases or phrase types you encounter from adults?

1	2	3
What will you say in the moment? (Interrupt Question Educate)		
How will you follow up? What will you say?		

What are the most common phrases or phrase types you encounter from students?

1	2	3
What will you say in the moment? (Interrupt Question Educate)		
How will you follow up? What will you say?		

“Don't let hate have the last word.” ~ Learning for Justice