

Enhancing CTE Teaching and Learning: A Blueprint for High-Quality Instruction and Microaggressions Deterrence

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, studies have substantiated the adverse, long-lasting impact of microaggressions in education. Career and technical education (CTE) programs are not immune from the devastating effects of the subtle and covert nature of microaggressions. This study presents a blueprint for boosting the quality of CTE instruction and minimizing instances of microaggressions. Through open coding, selective coding, and axial data coding, this grounded theory study involving 56 students and 12 teachers highlights two critical success factors: (a) psychological safety and student engagement congruence and (b) student empowerment and microaggression deterrence congruence. The main finding is that student empowerment through microaggressions management tactics along with enhanced organizational culture is positively associated with improved efficacy, whereas permissive CTE settings exert negative influence, leading to more devastating effects than initially assumed. A conceptual framework to reduce the interference of microaggressions with the goal of enhancing the quality of CTE instruction is proposed. Implications for research and practice are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

It has emerged from extant research that student participation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields encompassing CTE programs has grown exponentially over the years (Anderson, 2009). With regard to CTE programs specifically, it has been reported that 77% of ninth-grade public school students enrolled in 2009 participated in CTE by their senior year in 2013 (Ashford, 2020). Moreover, almost 98% of U.S. high schools offer some form of CTE programs, including coursework, work-based learning (such as on-the-job training, internships, practicums, clinical experiences, or cooperative education), and career pathways (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 2019). Enrollment in CTE programs has been associated with positive outcomes, including increased graduation rates (Castellano et al., 2014), credits accumulation, and successful college mathematics experience (Neild et al., 2015). In 2018, the CTE concentrator graduation rate in North Carolina CTE programs was 99.2%, according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2023).

Despite their popularity and relative success, however, these programs still face a cohort of challenges, such as low levels of female participation; funding and staff capacity; negative perceptions of CTE; lack of transportation for work-based learning; language barriers; lack of support services; inflexible scheduling; recruitment and retention of qualified, diverse teachers; program screening criteria; limited long-term outcome data; limited information on evidence-based strategies (Government Accountability Office, 2022); and stereotype threat (Heilman, 2001).

In addition to these challenges, the prevalence of discipline-related incidents spurred by prejudice or bias in U.S. schools is on the rise. It was reported that more than one out of five students experience bullying, and one out of five students is chronically absent, with 7 million students missing 15 or more days of school in 2015–2016 (USDE, 2019). A study reported 7,103 single-bias incidents involving 8,552 victims, of which 57.6% were motivated by race, ethnicity, ancestry, or bias; 20.1% by religion; 2.7% by gender identity; 2.0% by disability; 16.7% by sexual orientation; and 0.9% by gender (U.S. Department of Justice, 2019). Moreover, the COVID-19 Pandemic had a significant impact on the education sector.

In the post-COVID Pandemic era, several incidents of discipline problems and altercations have been reported in schools. According to the 2021 *Report on Indicators of School Crime and Safety*, public schools reported 1.4 million incidents of crime during the 2019–2020 school year, an increase in cyberbullying compared to 2009–2010 (16% vs. 8%), an increase in student verbal abuse of teachers (10% vs. 5%), an increase in student acts of disrespect for teachers (15% vs. 9%), and widespread disorder in the classroom (4% vs. 3%; Irwin et al., 2021). Another report, the 2023 *Report on the Condition of Education*, noted that in April 2022, roughly 70% of public schools saw an increase in the number of students seeking mental health services since the breakout of the Coronavirus Pandemic (Irwin et al., 2023). Research has shown that victims of bullying are susceptible to experiencing depression and anxiety, truancy, dropout, and health problems (Hornor, 2018; Swearer & Hymel, 2015). It is worth noting that dropout rates in American high schools remain high, especially for certain minority groups (American Indian, Hispanic, and Black).

A large and growing body of research has ascertained the pervasiveness of microaggressions and their adverse effects in educational environments (Berk, 2017a; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Williams, 2020). Extant literature has amply shown that microaggressions provide a backdrop for hostility, tension, and conflict (Williams, 2020). They can cause such severe effects as depression, anxiety, impostor syndrome, and burnout (Nadal, 2018; Nadal et al., 2021), negatively impacting productivity and self-efficiency (Cohen et al., 2009). Furthermore, they can engender self-doubt, stress, and tension. These emotions are known to be “silent killers of student engagement” (Brookfield, 2015, p. 76). Such an environment is known to contribute to psychologically unsafe working conditions (Edmondson, 2018). Left unaddressed or incorrectly approached, microaggressions can create hostile learning environments, adversely impacting the quality of instruction and creating learning barriers (Smith et al., 2007; Williams, 2020). Low retention, for example, can be linked to microaggressions (Williams, 2020).

In educational environments where microaggressions have free rein, the potential for interference in teaching-learning practices looms large. Microaggressions may adversely impact the ability of students to take risks, be candid, volunteer, participate in learning activities, support peers, and make mistakes. R. Brown (1990) noted that behaviors such as asking for help, admitting errors, and seeking feedback exemplify threats. Research has shown that the potential for threat, embarrassment, or public humiliation inhibits learning (Argyris, 1982).

Conversely, psychological safety appears to facilitate learning (Hirak et al., 2012), performance, and team efficacy (Edmondson, 1999). Research has established a positive congruence between psychological safety and success, innovation, and learning. Essentially, student engagement is a critical enabling driver of academic achievement, retention, and well-being (Thomas & Nair, 2023). Student engagement drives educational outcomes (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

This qualitative research examines common microaggressions that interfere with the quality of CTE instruction and suggests a framework for creating a psychologically safe CTE environment that is conducive to high-quality, inclusive, and equitable CTE instruction. The purpose is to encourage humanistic practices that minimize microaggressions, improve teaching and learning, promote student engagement, and enhance the quality of CTE instruction. This research addresses the question, What critical factors can reduce the interference of microaggressions in CTE classes and influence the quality of CTE instruction? To answer this question, a qualitative study focused on grounded theory was employed to uncover those factors using open and axial coding techniques (Charmaz, 2006).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Burgeoning scholarship supports the argument that microaggressions negatively affect educational practices (Berk, 2017c; J. Y. Kim & Meister, 2023; Williams, 2020). While they are micro, these aggressions have a macro impact that can silently snowball into major problems in educational settings. Microaggressions can impair student engagement, undermine teaching effectiveness, and impede learning and problem-solving, leading to underperformance, absenteeism, disengagement from learning, and mental or emotional withdrawal. In a nutshell, microaggressions can adversely affect mental health, create physical health problems, perpetuate stereotypes, increase stress and negative feelings, lower productivity, and generate a hostile climate (Okazaki, 2009; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2019).

The hostile and invalidating climate can lead to anger, depression, stress, anxiety, loss of self-esteem, and even rage (Sue, 2010a). These effects can subsequently have long-lasting consequences on victims (O'Keefe & Wingate, 2013) because they are constant, cumulative, and energy-depleting, unlike regular daily incivilities (Sue et al., 2019). In essence, microaggressions have been linked to disengagement, disidentification, burnout, turnover (J. Y. Kim & Meister, 2023; Meister et al., 2017), and psychological trauma (Auguste et al., 2021; Capodilupo et al., 2010; Dodge, 2019; Henfield, 2011; Moody & Lewis, 2019; Murray, 2020; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007). Empirical evidence establishes a significant correlation between teacher stress and burnout with poor student outcomes (Herman et al., 2018).

Furthermore, numerous studies have underscored the strategic importance of a positive school climate in influencing learning outcomes. Specifically, research has substantially shown that a positive school climate that fosters a nurturing, safe, and supportive educational environment can enhance class attendance, academic achievement, and retention and graduation rates (Cohen et al., 2009). Subsequently, a positive classroom atmosphere is conducive to quality instruction and effective student learning. Conversely, microaggressions have negative bearings on student

learning and classroom climate. Where they have free rein, students tend to underachieve and teachers tend to undermine their own teaching practices.

It has been argued that students who claim to be victims of microaggressions play the victim card and are just too weak to handle hurtful words (Barbash, 2015). Yet, as noted earlier, there is a considerable body of research on the harmful effects of microaggressions (Berk, 2017b; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007). Given their harmful effects and the toxic climate they engender, microaggressions can negatively and significantly affect different functional aspects of student performance (Keith, 2016). They can lead to underachievement, absenteeism or truancy, dropout, assault, and bullying (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001). These can be attributable to a congruence of other factors, including (but not limited to) negative school climate, insufficient instructional support, socioeconomic conditions, lack of parental involvement, and personal responsibility. Thus, minimizing causal factors of student disengagement in the classroom by creating a positive and supportive learning environment can play a significant role in the prevention and reduction of student dropout rates, absenteeism cases, and classroom tensions.

Research suggests that an educational component is the centerpiece for reducing bullying and microaggressions. A study by McCallion and Feder (2013) found that school-based bullying prevention programs produced positive results by reducing bullying and cyberbullying by up to 25%. Williams et al. (2020) reported that the Racial Harmony Workshop, an initiative based on functional analytic psychotherapy and acceptance and commitment therapy aimed at reducing racial bias and microaggressions, resulted in improved mood and increased positive feelings toward a marginalized group.

Learning is an exploratory and dynamic process that encompasses social interaction, decision-making, hypothesis-making and testing, and affective and emotional investment. Essentially, learning is the *raison d'être* of all teaching. Teaching is undertaken for learning to occur. The success of any teaching can, therefore, best be judged in terms of the learning that results from it. Thus, an educational environment devoid of microaggressions is best suited for full engagement, active learning, and academic success.

Student performance may suffer in a classroom environment fraught with mistrust, tension, and hostility. It is hard for students to thrive academically if their ideas, cultural values, experiences, aspirations, and actions are dismissed, ridiculed, or demeaned. Anxiety, fear of ridicule or public humiliation, and self-doubt can set in, leading to what Brookfield (2006) termed “pedagogical hypertension” (p. 76). Ultimately, this may result in disengagement from learning or blockage of learning. Externally, students may appear to be serene while experiencing learning-threatening emotions internally. Heightened tension in the classroom can only undermine the student’s ability to learn freely and actively and the teacher’s ability to teach effectively and efficiently.

Furthermore, the notion of confrontation is inherently ubiquitous in the argument culture and in the fabric of a classroom where sarcasm, personal attacks, criticisms, insults, arguments, and invalidations occur on a regular basis. Tannen (1998) proffered that the argument culture can contribute to “alienating, separating, and disconnecting people” (p. 25). Fundamentally, such an adversarial environment can be an ideal ground for culture confrontation, race confrontation,

prejudice confrontation, social status confrontation, social affiliation confrontation, gender confrontation, sexual orientation confrontation, and religious affiliation confrontation. Unless there is adequate psychological and pedagogical preparation of educators and students, a classroom where microaggressions predominate can easily turn into unmanageable chaos, which will ultimately and negatively affect the learning process.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Over 5 decades ago, Dr. Chester M. Pierce (1970), a Harvard University psychiatrist who was then-chairman of Black Psychiatrists of America, coined the term *microaggression* to encapsulate a myriad of “offensive mechanisms” (p. 472) used against Black people in the United States to psychologically coerce them into accepting the disenfranchised state they were in. Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, and Bucceri (2007) described those racial microaggressions as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (p. 273). The term *microaggression* has since expanded to include various marginalized groups such as specific racial/ethnic, gender, nationality, religious, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation groups (Berk, 2017c). Microaggressions stem from a host of internal and external factors, such as prejudicial beliefs and attitudes, implicit bias (Sue et al., 2019), learned behaviors, and aversive racism (Williams, 2020). Due to their subtle or covert nature, microaggressions can be hard to detect yet can have psychologically devastating effects on victims. They are capable of destroying peace and group harmony as well as the morale of the individual and team (Desai et al., 2023).

Conceptually, the term *microaggression* has also evolved from subtle “putdowns” (Pierce et al., 1977, p. 66) of Blacks to hostile behaviors and indignities directed toward different marginalized or targeted groups (Nadal et al., 2014; Sue, 2010a). Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, and Bucceri’s (2007) definition provides a more practical, semantic delineation of the contours of this term as it is used today: “Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights, invalidations, and insults to an individual or group because of their marginalized status in society” (p. 271). Williams (2020) postulated that microaggressions are “learned behaviors, taught through observational learning and other social mechanisms from an early age” (p. 35).

Examples of microaggressions abound. They include presumed incompetence, abrupt and rude interruptions, explaining for others (aka “mansplaining” or “womansplaining”), insensitive remarks, devaluing others’ contributions (Berk, 2017b, 2017c), ascription of intelligence, assumption of criminal status, myth of meritocracy, pathologizing of cultural values, second-class citizen treatment, invisibility due to race, environmental omissions, being labelled as low achieving, and being alien in one’s own land (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007). Regarding the classifications of microaggressions, Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, and Bucceri (2007) identified three broad categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults are verbal or nonverbal discriminatory actions or attacks that convey a hurtful message. Microinsults are intentional or unintentional, verbal or nonverbal, conscious or unconscious, subtle or covert snubs, putdowns, or sarcastic remarks intended to demean the victim (Berk, 2017a). Microinvalidations are described as communications that “exclude, negate, or

nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the victim” (Berk, 2017c, p. 67).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a grounded theory approach to attempt to uncover and understand the elusive social phenomenon being investigated. Strauss and Corbin’s (1990, 1998) systematic procedures were selected for the elucidation of microaggressions; the collection of reliable data from educators and learners; and an in-depth interpretation of events, happenings, and instances of microaggressions. Generally, this approach allows researchers to transcend and supersede their own theoretical ideas, beliefs, feelings, and perceptions in order for new insights to emerge (Creswell, 2007).

Throughout the years, several instruments have been utilized to attempt to uncover patterns, perceptions, and experiences of microaggressions as well as personal motives that drive them. Some of the commonly utilized instruments include the Positive and Negative Affectivity Schedule (Watson et al., 1988), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Discrimination (Molero et al., 2013), Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998), LGBT People of Color Microaggressions Scale (Balsam et al., 2011), Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (Nadal, 2011), Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (Huynh, 2012), Racial Microaggressions Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012), Homonegative Microaggressions Scale (Wright & Wegner, 2012), Gendered Microaggression Inventory (Yang & Carroll, 2016), Student Microaggression Inventory (Berk, 2017a), Cultural Cognitions and Actions Scale (Michaels et al., 2018), Overt-Covert Aggression Inventory (Miyazaki et al., 2003), and Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Asian American Women (Keum et al., 2018). The list is not exhaustive.

In addition to quantitative instruments, numerous qualitative studies based on common qualitative approaches—case study, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and narrative—have amply heightened understandings of microaggressions experienced by marginalized groups with varying degrees of interpretive infallibility (Berk, 2017c; Gonzales *et al.*, 2015; Hill et al., 1997; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Yosso et al., 2009). Several extant qualitative studies rely on self-reports (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012), recall (Wong et al., 2014), thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and consensual qualitative research (Hill et al., 1997), with a multitude of data sources encompassing documents, observations, interviews, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2007).

The adopted grounded theory approach aims to explore the occurrences of microaggressions, causal conditions, context, actions taken in response, intervening conditions, and consequences in a CTE classroom environment. An electronic survey with a series of open-ended questions was sent to the study participants. Observation field notes, survey responses, and discussion notes were triangulated to construct a conceptual framework for CTE instruction quality enhancement.

Sample and Data Collection

The target population for this grounded theory study was full-time CTE teachers and students enrolled in CTE courses from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS). Using theoretical sampling methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a sample of 56 students and 12 teachers was drawn from this population. It was stratified into two sets of contributors—students and teachers—to gain a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The sample was drawn from three of 34 high schools.

CMS offers over 20 CTE career pathways for high schools, including advanced manufacturing and engineering, architecture and engineering, automotive, biomedical science, business management, carpentry, cosmetology, culinary arts and hospitality, customer relationship management, digital marketing, energy and power, financial planning, game art design, graphic and digital design, interior design, nursing fundamentals, public safety, public safety—emergency management, public safety—firefighter technology, public safety—law enforcement and protection, software development, and sports and event marketing. A few faculty members from school districts outside of CMS were interested in the study. However, it was deemed necessary to limit the sample to CTE students and teachers within CMS with a diversity of attributes and characteristics to ensure the validity and transferability of the findings.

Research participants were asked to explain their perceptions of the nature of microaggressions they experienced or witnessed, the responses to microaggressions, the consequences of those microaggressions, the context of the microaggressions, the intervening conditions, and the interventions. Overall, this grounded theory study focused on the interpretation of the apparent connection between a microaggressive classroom environment and the subsequent quality (or lack thereof) of CTE instruction. Questions were designed to allow study participants to genuinely share their experiences. Academic discussions about the topic with several students and teachers over the past 5 years have provided an impetus and a foundation to pursue this research.

Following theoretical sampling and the generation of grounded theory by Strauss and Corbin (1998), three coding systems—open coding, axial coding, and selective coding—were used to allow me to find recurring themes that were important to respondents. The survey questions and academic discussions were designed to be comprehensive in scope. The results of the survey would elucidate my understanding of microaggressions in an attempt to help improve the learning and teaching processes by minimizing their interference in CTE. During the discussion phase, several students reported knowing about microaggressions but not knowing the phraseology to describe the phenomenon. Some indicated being surprised that the topic of microaggressions had received inadequate attention in schools despite their widely recognized and increasing impact on students' mental health and performance.

Study 1: Students

The primary goal of Study 1 was to develop an understanding of microaggressions faced by students and how they impacted their learning. It was designed for students to share their insights into their perceptions of microaggression realities in the classroom. For Study 1, data were

obtained from 56 students who completed a survey electronically. This was followed by face-to-face academic discussions to elicit students' written responses. Questions were organized into four sections: perception of personal ability, perception of personal contribution, race and gender stereotyping, and cultural values.

Students were predominantly African American (23, or 41.1%), Hispanic (20, or 35.7%), Asian (8, or 14.3%), White (3, or 5.4%), and Other (2, or 3.6%). Their ages were 14 (10.9%), 15 (34.5%), 16 (25.5%), 17 (18.2%), and 18 or older (10.9%). They were all enrolled as full-time students at different grade levels in four CMS schools: 9th grade (44.6%), 10th grade (28.6%), 11th grade (16.1%), and 12th grade (10.7%). More than half (58.2%) were males, 38.2% were female, and 3.6% chose not to reveal their gender. The majority of students took one CTE course (46.3%), 25.9% took two CTE courses, 13% took three CTE courses, 11.1% took four CTE courses, and 5% did not specify the number of CTE courses they took. Students were selected if they met the following requirements: (a) enrolled as a full-time student in CMS, (b) taking at least one CTE course, (c) experienced or observed instances of microaggressions, and (d) ability to communicate in English.

A 31-item, anonymous survey was administered to CTE students in a 2-week time frame in May 2023 to solicit their views on microaggressions they may have experienced or witnessed. The questions were designed to cover four aspects of microaggressions: perception of personal ability, perception of personal contribution, race and gender stereotyping, and cultural values and communication styles. With respect to student survey questions, six were designed to capture perceptions of personal abilities, six for perceptions of personal contribution, five for perceptions of race and gender stereotyping, and six for cultural values and communication styles. Overall, 23 questions made up the student survey, in addition to eight questions about demographic data.

The diversity of the student population allowed me to address the survey questions and collect a wide range of responses from students of different backgrounds. To get students to participate willingly in the study, I promised that their responses would remain confidential and that there would be no attempt to identify any individual participant. Overall, 56 students completed the survey. All of these students were enrolled in CTE courses. Their demographic diversity was representative of the target population, as can be seen in Table 1, which summarizes the students' demographic characteristics.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Demographics

Demographic Category	Number	Percentage
Age		
14	6	10.9
15	19	34.5
16	14	25.5
17	10	18.2
18 or older	6	10.9
Grade Level	25	44.6
9th grade		
10th grade	16	28.6
11th grade	9	16.1
12th grade	6	10.7
Gender	32	58.2
Male		
Female	21	38.2
Prefer not to say	2	3.6
Ethnicity		
Asian	8	14.3
African American	23	41.1
Hispanic	20	35.7
White	3	5.4
Native American	0	0.0
Other	2	3.6
Years Taking CTE Courses		
1	30	56.6
2	10	18.9
3	7	13.2
4	4	7.5
5 or more	2	3.8
CTE Course Taken		
Agricultural Education	1	1.8
Business, Finance, and Information Technology Education	14	25.5
Technology Engineering and Design Education	11	20.0
Trade and Industrial Education	4	7.3
Other	25	45.5
Number of CTE Courses Taken		
1	25	46.3
2	14	25.9
3	7	13.0
4	6	11.1
5 or more	2	3.7

Study 2: Teachers

Study 1 was complemented by Study 2, which was designed to gain insights into teachers' perceptions of this social phenomenon within the CTE environment. Both studies were conducted almost concurrently. For Study 2, teachers' questions addressed four areas: perception of expertise or competence, perception of performance, race and cultural stereotyping, and cultural values and communication styles. Teachers were randomly selected based on the following criteria: (a) employed as a full-time teacher in the CTE department in a CMS school, (b) teaching at least one CTE course, and (c) experienced or observed instances of microaggressions.

All of the teachers were employed full-time. Teachers were predominantly African American (7, or 58.3%), White (2, or 16.7%), Asian (1, or 8.3%), and Other (2, or 16.7%). Teachers' ages ranged from 20–29 (8.3%), 30–39 (16.7%), 40–49 (33.3%), and 50 and up (41.7%). With regard to their education levels, the majority (83.3%) had master's degrees, 8.3% had undergraduate degrees, and 8.3% had doctorate degrees or had taken postgraduate courses. Two-thirds (66.7%) taught business, finance, and information technology courses; 16.7% taught technology engineering and design education courses; and 16.7% taught other courses. There were more females (75%) than males (25%). With regard to the number of students taught, 16.7% taught 1–19 students, 8.3% taught 20–39 students, 16.7% taught 40–59 students, 16.7% taught 60–79 students, and 41.7% taught 80 or more students. These teachers had several years of experience teaching CTE courses: 33.3% had 0–5 years, 41.7% had 6–11 years, 8.3% had 12–17 years, and 16.7% had 18–23 years of experience in CMS.

A 36-item, anonymous survey was administered to CTE teachers to solicit their views on microaggressions, perceived or real, in CTE classes. Teachers' questions addressed four areas: perception of expertise or competence, perception of performance, race and cultural stereotyping, and cultural values and communication styles. With respect to teachers' survey questions, five were meant to gauge perceptions of their expertise or competence, seven for perceptions of their performance, six for perceptions of race and gender stereotyping, and four for cultural values and communication styles. Overall, 22 questions made up the teacher survey, in addition to 14 questions about demographic data.

CTE teachers who participated in the study were willing participants. They were distributed over three CMS schools. The survey was sent to over 30 CTE teachers. Overall, 12 teachers completed the survey electronically. Most of them also shared additional thoughts through further face-to-face discussions. Their contributions were paramount to uncover additional insights into microaggressions in CTE classes from their perspective. Table 2 summarizes the teachers' demographic characteristics.

Table 2. Summary of Teachers' Demographics

Demographic Category	Number	Percentage
Age		
20–29	1	8.3
30–39	2	16.7
40–49	4	33.3
50 or older	5	41.7
Education		
Associate's	0	0.0
Undergraduate	1	8.3
Graduate	10	83.3
Doctorate/postgraduate	1	8.3
Gender		
Male	3	25
Female	9	75
Prefer not to say	0	0.0
Employment Status		
Full-time	12	100.0
Part-time	0	0.0
Ethnicity		
Asian	1	8.3
African American	7	58.3
Hispanic	0	0.0
White	2	16.7
Native American	0	0.0
Other	2	16.7
Years Teaching CTE Courses		
0–5	4	33.3
6–11	5	41.7
12–17	1	8.3
18–23	2	16.7
24–29	0	0.0
30 or more	0	0.0
Number of Students		
1–19	2	16.7
20–39	1	8.3
40–59	2	16.7
60–79	2	16.7
80 or more	5	41.7
CTE Courses Taught		
Business, Finance, and Information Technology Education	8	66.7
Technology Engineering and Design Education	2	16.7
Trade and Industrial Education	0	0.0
Agricultural Education	0	0.0
Other	2	16.7

Data Analysis

While open coding and selective coding allowed for the naming, identification, and categorization of microaggressions, axial coding allowed me to connect the categories and sort out relationships between them. The triangulation of observation field notes, survey responses, and discussion notes aided in minimizing and suspending subjective, preconceived ideas or biases and optimizing accuracy in data collection and inferences (Johnson et al., 2020). It also helped ensure methodological rigor. Chapter Two presents the results of this grounded theory analysis and suggests a framework for managing microaggressions.

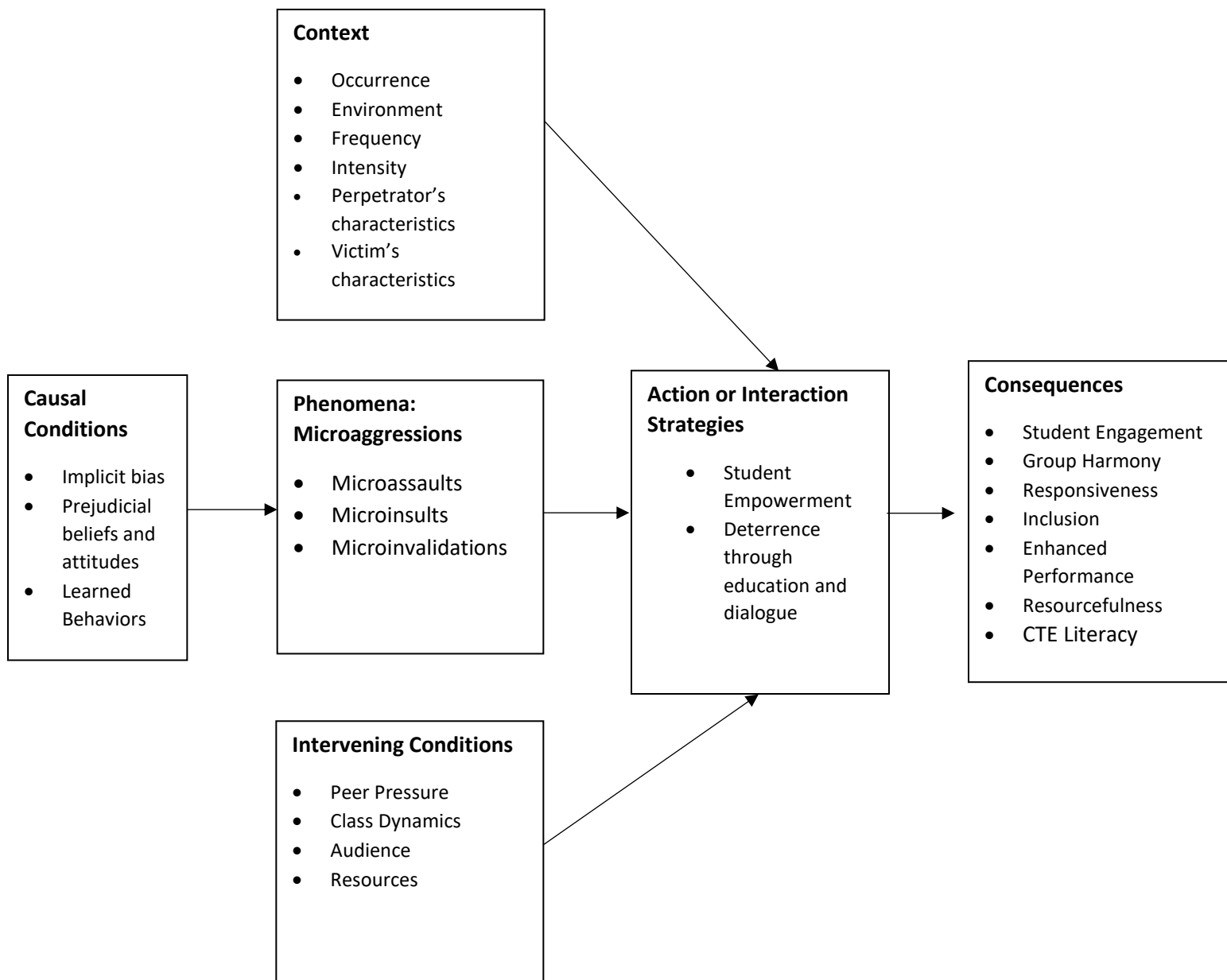
RESULTS

A Conceptual Model for Microaggressions Management

This grounded theory investigation proposes a theoretical model for coping with microaggressions and improving learning and teaching experiences, presented in Figure 1. It schematizes links between causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, management strategies, and consequences of microaggressions.

Figure 1. Model of Microaggression Management Strategy

Figure 1. A Model of Microaggression Management Strategy



Causal Conditions

Three distinct types of causal conditions of microaggressions emerged from the data: (a) implicit bias, (b) prejudicial beliefs and attitudes (Sue et al., 2019), and (c) learned behaviors (Williams,

2020). Berk (2017c) defined *microaggressions* as “*explicit* expressions of bias and attitudes and blatant acts of prejudice” (p. 99). It is worth noting that implicit bias or unconscious bias, which can occur without recognition (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), differs from deliberate prejudices (or explicit bias). The following statements from some study participants reflect social stereotypes based on intentional or unintentional slants. They are highly loaded with metamessages.

Students’ quotes:

One student was quoted as telling another student, “This book is not for you. Africans can’t read. You don’t even have libraries in Africa.”

As he was leaving his seat, a student was warned, “Don’t leave your schoolbag here. You know he is from Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans will steal anything.”

Student to another student: “You have slave feet! I am sure you can run fast.”

A White student started a response to his Black teacher this way: “Listen, boy.”

Similarly, teachers also must examine their own biases, such as halo effect, gender bias, racial/ethnic bias, sexual orientation bias, and incompetence bias. Students reported cases of some teachers who underestimated their students’ cognitive abilities; teachers whose impressions of students affected their rapport with those students (halo effect); teachers who questioned their students’ intelligence; and teachers who judged their students based on race, religion, or sexual orientation. The following biased statements from teachers tend to undercut and, indeed, undermine teacher effectiveness.

Teachers’ quotes:

One teacher described his students in this manner: “These students are thugs, man. They like to fight.”

Teacher: “My students can’t read. I wonder how they [administration] have been promoting them [students]. How do they expect me to teach them?”

Teacher: “When children have children, this is the result. Students don’t know how to act, and parents can’t help.”

This is what one teacher thought of her students’ names: “Many of my students have ghetto names; you know they are coming from the ‘hood.’”

Teacher: “Our students can read but don’t read.”

Teacher: “No incorrect grammar is allowed in my classroom.”

It is hard to pinpoint the underlying motives behind the natural inclinations that led to these statements. These feelings may have stemmed from bigotry, prejudice, bias, or discrimination. They could have been motivated by preferences associated with gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, or other group-defining characteristics. They could also have been mere

expressions of internalized behaviors resulting from socialization practices or prevailing cultural norms. Williams (2020) argued that racism is another factor besides the three causal factors cited earlier. *Aversive racism*, as she referred to it, is different from blatant, old-fashioned racism in that “aversive racists outwardly endorse fair and just treatment of all groups yet harbor feelings of discomfort toward people of color that may be unconscious” (Williams, 2020, p. 38).

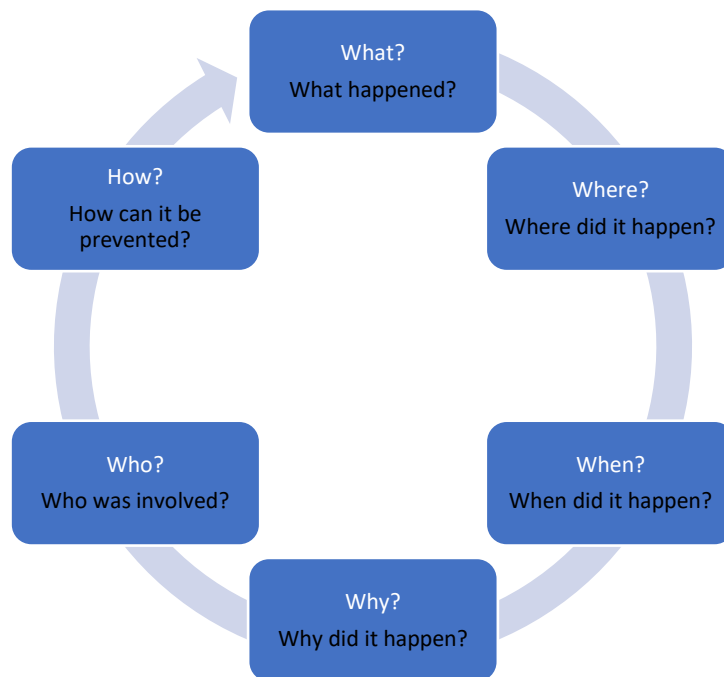
Teachers must be adequately equipped and prepared to explore their own biases and blind spots. They must be trained to gain self-awareness and to challenge their own stereotypes and prejudices. Students and teachers must be armed with a toolbox of skills to manage stress, anxiety, and microaggressions. Teachers must adopt asset-based approaches, not deficit-based approaches, to teaching. It is their pedagogical duty to lead students to reexamine and challenge their preconceptions, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and biases. Many teachers are reluctant to talk about their own biases. The debate is not settled because of the fear of tackling and addressing one’s conscious or unconscious internal biases. Silence is not the solution. Teachers must be brave enough to confront this topic because microaggressions can have harmful, long-term effects on students.

To succeed in achieving the intent of Perkins IV, the main support of CTE programs is “to improve the achievement of CTE students in relation to state academic standards and to ease their transition to postsecondary education” (Castellano et al., 2014, p. xv), it is important to minimize the influence of these causal conditions in CTE settings. Considering the countless and deleterious consequences of microaggressions—such as student disengagement, teachers’ underperformance, students’ underachievement, absenteeism, teacher turnover, and student dropout—in CTE programs, heightening teachers’ and students’ informed awareness of their own biases and prejudices can be an effective self-management tactic.

Context in Which Microaggressions Occur

Microaggressions do not occur in a vacuum, context matters. Understanding what, when, where, who, why, and how is crucial for students and teachers to develop educated awareness of the manifestation, causal conditions, intervening conditions, interaction patterns, classroom dynamics (if it occurs in a classroom), impact on victims, audience, responses, and consequences of microaggressions. These contextual factors are paramount. The following questions should be addressed: What happened? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen? Who was involved? How can it be prevented in the future? The teacher should allow an open dialogue around these questions with an attitude of neutrality. Figure 2 provides a schematic of a dialogue framework.

Figure 2. Microaggression Context Model



Microaggressions experienced in CTE environments vary in terms of frequency and intensity of the attacks. They also vary in terms of interaction patterns: student-to-student, student-to-teacher, teacher-to-student, and teacher-to-teacher. Learning about the occurrence, the environment where it occurs, the frequency of such incidents, the perpetrator's characteristics, the victim's characteristics, and the emotional states of individuals involved can provide insights into the underlying causes and proper coping strategies. It is important that learners take ownership of the learning and the learning environment. Teachers must set clear limits on what behavior is permissible in the classroom. Once norms, boundaries, and expectations are set, expectations are that fewer occurrences will take place, and optimal instruction can proceed with minimal disruptions.

It is worth noting that victims and perpetrators varied. The perpetrators were regular students and teachers who seemed to feel entitled to their behaviors. Some were unaware of the impact of their actions, which ranged from simple unintentional smears to extreme putdowns. The victims on the receiving end of microaggressions were a mixed group of individuals based on their learning disabilities, race/ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. For them, the classroom does not provide much-needed safety, support, and protection, which creates various psychological effects. They can lose their self-confidence and self-esteem. Avoidance can be a response to a stressful situation (Woolfolk, 2004). Victims of classroom-related harassment are known to avoid the environment altogether.

Intervening Conditions Influencing Microaggressions

Several intervening conditions influence the what and the how of microaggressions. Notable among them are peer pressure, audience, classroom dynamics, and resources, which played a powerful role in occurrences and the responses to microaggressions. Peer pressure, particularly negative peer pressure, was uniquely influential because it promoted and encouraged conformity to unspoken group norms. Here are a few direct quotes by students that illustrate peer pressure:

“You’re going to let him talk to you like that?”

“Don’t let him get away with that!”

“If that was me, man, we would be scrapping right now!”

These statements could instigate aggressive responses, and students often succumb to this type of peer pressure, forcing them to act or respond aggressively.

Having an audience affected students’ responses to microaggressions. In some cases, it exacerbated peer pressure. Students’ responses to microaggressions differed when there was an audience around. Fear of being ridiculed, reprimanded, or ostracized affected their responses. Some students tried hard not to appear weak, soft, helpless, or powerless around their peers. Some students appeared to be emotionally withdrawn, avoiding confrontation. It is essential that all students have a shared understanding of the expected classroom culture.

Classroom dynamics was another intervening condition that added another layer of complexity and sophistication to this phenomenon. Taken holistically, the dynamics of the classroom environment concerned classroom actors (students, teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators present in the classroom), their emotional states, behaviors, interactions, and learning and teaching processes. When students were immersed in learning, their productivity soared and incidents of microaggressions decreased. It is incumbent upon teachers to create a classroom culture that empowers students to work together.

Resources are fundamentally important assets for student success. If present, disparities and inequalities must be addressed promptly. Some students reported that they had a slow internet connection at home, lacked Wi-Fi at home, lost their Chromebooks, or did not have the required software. The lack of availability of resources affects students’ behaviors. Lack of access to the same resources reinforces the notion of a “digital divide.” This tends to push students to display disruptive behaviors. Equitable resources allow for the inclusion of all students. Given the diversity of CTE student populations, particularly in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, abilities, and learning disability status, it is imperative that all students have access to the same

type of resources (hardware and software) and experience equitable and inclusive CTE instruction. School leadership must ensure that resources are accessible, relevant, and reflective of all students' identities, backgrounds, differences, and perspectives in CTE learning environments. This implies equitable allocation of resources and funding of programs. Students and teachers should be asked to contribute their input. Their input can guide the selection, adoption, and allocation of resources.

Microaggressions Typology

Through open and selective coding systems, 22 broad categories of microaggressions were chronicled:

1. Alien in one's own land,
2. Color-blindness,
3. Myth of meritocracy,
4. Ascription of intelligence,
5. Devaluation of technical competence,
6. Devaluation of physical presence,
7. Identity threat,
8. Pathologizing young woman's personal character,
9. Denial or ignorance of one's reality,
10. Exclusion,
11. Assumption of incompetence,
12. Name-calling,
13. Denial of individual racism,
14. Pathologizing of cultural values,
15. Assumption of criminal status,
16. Assumption of intellectual inferiority,
17. Offensive signs or pictures,
18. Sexist/heterosexist language,
19. Traditional gender-role prejudicing and stereotyping,
20. Degrading a racial or ethnic group,
21. Discomfort/disapproval of experience, and
22. Endorsing stereotypes.

Table 3 provides a thematic synthesis of microaggressions in CTE classrooms. Themes were adapted from Sue (2010b), Nadal et al. (2014), Berk (2017c), Barber et al. (2020), and J. Y. Kim and Meister (2023).

Table 3. Thematic Synthesis of Microaggressions in CTE Classrooms

Theme	Context	Microaggression Quote
Alien in one's own land	A student's response to the question, "Has anyone (a teacher or a classmate) ever devalued, invalidated, or diminished your contribution in a class activity?"	"A classmate once said that my opinions didn't matter in a group activity and called me a racial slur to back up the reason why my opinions didn't matter."
Color-blindness	A teacher reassigns a Hispanic student to a new seat because of disruptive behavior.	The student reacts angrily and says to another student: "This nigger keeps moving me, man! I swear to God! I am about to blank!" Shocked, the teacher asks, "Are you calling me the N-word?" Student: "You are a nigger, aren't you?" Then, quickly and unapologetically adds, "I call everybody nigger!" The teacher advises the student to refrain from using the N-word.
Devaluation of technical competence	Three quotes from three CTE teachers responding to the question, "Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your technical capabilities, your intelligence, or your competence?"	"Yes, someone once underestimated my technical abilities before. I just proved them wrong." (Teacher 1) "Yes. A colleague of mine, but she does not know that I know. I did not worry about it because karma is a gangster." (Teacher 2) "Yes. Sometimes people of other races automatically underestimate the value that a Black person may bring to the table." (Teacher 3)
Myth of meritocracy	A student expresses self-doubt. A teacher confides to another teacher.	"Sometimes I may know what they are talking about, but I always let someone else respond because there are times when I doubt myself." "My students can't read. I wonder how they [administration] have been promoting them [students]. How do they expect me to teach them?"

Theme	Context	Microaggression Quote
Ascription of intelligence	An African American student's response to the question, "Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your personal capabilities, your intelligence, or your competence? Please explain."	"YES!!!!!! I'm both overestimated in strength and underestimated in intelligence."
	An Asian student's response to the question, "Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your personal capabilities, your intelligence, or your competence?"	"They have overestimated my intelligence for years."
	A response to the question, "Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your personal contribution in a CTE class?"	"Yeah. Many people have overestimated my ability to understand and program a piece of code quickly."
	A Hispanic student's response to the question, "Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your personal capabilities, your intelligence, or your competence?"	"Yes, a lot of people think I'm dumb, mostly because I'm pretty quiet and because I'm a Latina. They also assume that I can't speak English."
	An African-American teacher's response to the question, "Has anyone (a teacher or a classmate) ever devalued, invalidated, dismissed, or diminished your performance in a class activity because of your race or your gender?"	"Yes. Sometimes people of other races automatically underestimate the value that a Black person may bring to the table."

Theme	Context	Microaggression Quote
Ascription of intelligence (<i>cont'd.</i>)	A teacher recalled torture from a former teacher when he was a student	“Yes, when I was in grade school. I had White teachers do this. I even had my second-grade teacher fired because of how she treated myself and other Black students. She basically tortured us. She was South African and this was in the early 80s.”
Devaluation of physical presence	The presence of a student or teacher can be completely ignored. Students or teachers can also be constantly interrupted in formal discussions (Berk, 2017c; J. Y. Kim & Meister, 2023). Two students reported.	“The class was having a group discussion one day. Just before I spoke, the teacher said, ‘You can say “pass” if you don’t know.’ He hurt my feelings by assuming that I did not know.”
Exclusion	Student excludes self from class participation.	“Yes. Sometimes people of other races automatically underestimate the value that a Black person may bring to the table.”
Identity threat	Two students talking about their CTE teachers.	“I have a hard time speaking up, and really just stick to doing my work without verbally participating in class as much as I can.” “No one cares about anything he has to say.”
Denial or ignorance of one’s reality	Regarding a Hispanic student who was born in the United States, one student says to another student:	“When I first saw him, I thought he was stupid.” “Can you ask him if he speaks English?”
Pathologizing dress code	A teacher was upset about a student’s attire.	The teacher told the student, “I bet you be giving it up” (meaning she thinks the student is sexually active). The student concluded that the teacher called her a prostitute. She said, “This teacher basically called me a whore! I could not believe it!”
Assumption of incompetence	A student’s response to the question, “Has anyone ever underestimated or overestimated your personal capabilities, your intelligence, or your competence?”	“Yes. A few days ago, we had a test in a CTE class. I was the first to finish, and almost everyone thought I cheated.”

Theme	Context	Microaggression Quote
Name-calling	A teacher’s response to the question, “Has anyone ever made implicitly or explicitly biased statements about you in CTE class based on your race, your ethnicity, or your gender? Please explain.”	“Yes, I have been called the N-word in a student group chat at another school that was mostly White.”
Denial of individual racism	A White student to a Black teacher.	Student: “Listen to me, boy!” Teacher: “Who are you calling ‘boy’?”

Pathologizing cultural values

Assumption of criminality

Assumption of intellectual inferiority

Offensive signs or pictures

An African-American student stunned his teacher with this strange inquiry
A student asks another student (who is half Arab, half Hispanic).
Staff member to teacher.

Student-to-student microaggression.

Teacher-to-student microaggression.

A student believes that a teacher treats students differently.

A Hispanic student uses masking techniques to edit a picture of a monkey and replace the head of the monkey with a famous African-American movie star. The class is appalled when he asks.

Student: "You. I call everybody 'boy.' I call my dad 'boy.'"

"I heard that Africans eat monkeys and have sex with them; that's how they catch Ebola. I saw it in a documentary. Is that true?"

"Is your father Osama bin Laden? Are you a terrorist, too?"

"These students are thugs, man. They like to fight."

"Don't leave your schoolbag here. You know he is from Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans will steal anything."

"One time, one of my teachers told the whole class (including me) that we were gonna fail. But we all passed."

"I know a teacher who asks difficult questions to students of other races first before asking African American students. In that class, students of other races get more attention than African American students in some classes."

"How do you like my design?"

Theme	Context	Microaggression Quote
Degrading a racial/ ethnic group	A teacher asks students about their most memorable moment at school as they are about to graduate. Before one Hispanic student has a chance to answer the question, another student interjects abruptly. A student jokingly tells a group of Hispanic students	“The day he turned legal in the United States.” The class bursts into laughter. “If Donald Trump is reelected, he is going to deport you, you, you, you, and you [pointing at individual students]. You’re gonna be deported. There are too many illegal immigrants at this school.”
Discomfort/disapproval of experience	A White student uses a confederate flag as a course profile picture and as a background for each slide presentation.	“Nothing you will say will stop me from using this flag. I grew up loving it. You can’t understand.”
Denial of individual racism	A Hispanic male student is having a conversation with a female student close to the classroom door after the last bell, which signals the beginning of the class. The teacher comes out and asks the young man to enter the classroom.	Student complains, “This nigger is always in my shadow.” Teacher asks, “Am I a nigger to you?” Student responds, “The word <i>nigger</i> means nothing to my generation. Your generation takes it too seriously.”
Endorsing stereotypes	A student tells his classmate, a tall, athletic African-American student. A male student advises an African-American female student to drop a class A teacher asked students what they wanted to do after high school. One student answered for a Hispanic student. A White teacher told an African-American female student:	“Why do you want to major in computer science? You are so big and tall; you should be a football player.” “Why are you taking Game Art and Design? Drop that class; it is for boys.” “I know what you are going to do after you graduate! You are going to work in a construction job. That’s what Mexicans do!” “You act like you grew up in a house.”

The table encapsulates a sample of microaggressions that take place in CTE classrooms and on school grounds. There is not one form that is harmless. Communicated verbally and nonverbally, all these microaggressions can be powerful destroyers of student involvement, engagement,

confidence, trust, and self-esteem, particularly for marginalized groups. They can, and indeed do, disincentivize course enrollment, involvement, and participation. In STEM, where gender parity with regard to student enrollment is a major challenge, microaggressions such as assumption of inferiority or incompetence, devaluation of technical ability, degrading of physical presence, degrading of a racial or ethnic group, and pathologizing women's personal character only help reinforce the exclusion of female students from the programs, however appealing the programs can be.

Moreover, such microaggressions as stereotypical assumptions, invalidations of racial/cultural issues, overemphasis on weaknesses, and culturally insensitive remarks (Constantine & Sue, 2007) can lead to conflict, public humiliation, demoralization, shame, and embarrassment. There is experimental support for the notion that these interactions tend to be tense, raising anxiety levels, particularly for those with little or no prior exposure (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Students who are constantly exposed to these stereotypical situations can feel nervous about the environment, which can inhibit their performance. The public shame, embarrassment, and humiliation microaggressions engender reinforce the feeling of impostorship (Brookfield, 2015). Hollingsworth et al. (2017) uncovered a correlation between some forms of racial microaggressions (namely, invisibility, low achievement or undesirable culture, and environmental invalidations) and suicidal ideation. The authors established the mediating role that depressive symptoms play between suicidal ideation and microaggressions. Standing at the door of a CTE classroom, a new teacher who visited a veteran teacher in another school, said to the veteran teacher as a tardy student walked in the classroom: "You have another stray coming!" The Caucasian teacher looked at the African-American student with a smile on his face as he uttered these words. This bright student who passed three industry certification exams—Certiport, PCEP, and PCAP—in Python Programming was furious: "He called me a stray! I can't believe it. He doesn't even know me." He wanted to confront the teacher. His teacher stopped him.

Teachers also reported cases of devaluation of technical competence or physical presence, denial of one's reality, disapproval of experience, ascription of intelligence, and assumption of intellectual inferiority. A CTE teacher whose students produced exemplary programming work was asked in a virtual session: "Did you really teach them (students) that, or did they (students) learn on their own?" Stressing the importance of a good Grade Point Average (GPA), a teacher encouraged his students to maintain decent GPAs. One student asked the teacher: "What was your GPA?" The teacher responded: "4.0." The student's reaction was: "You must have cheated." Research has established an association between underestimation of personal ability and greater stress levels (Torres et al., 2010). As indicated earlier, these microaggressions can negatively affect teachers' efficiency and effectiveness, leading to burnout, retention problems, and attendance problems.

Consequences of Microaggressions

In essence, microaggressions can lead to withdrawal, disengagement, self-doubt, frustration, and anger. Insubordination, instructional unresponsiveness, and reduced motivation to participate in learning activities can, therefore, be by-products of these emotions. Students may demonstrate

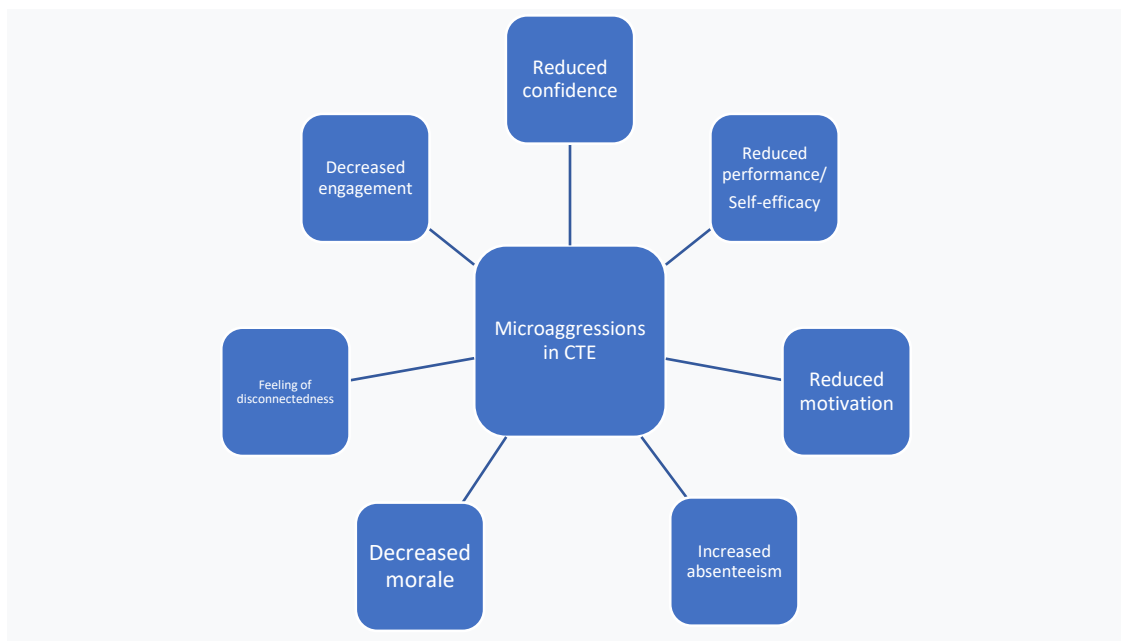
unpreparedness or unwillingness to learn or to participate in class activities. This can result in either resistance or blockage and cessation of learning. Students may disengage from the learning process, ostracize themselves, and become unresponsive or reactive. Their defensive and offensive impulses may be triggered. Their emotional states may affect their motivation and involvement in class activities. Their “socio-affective filter” (Stevick, 1976, p. 48) can be lowered or raised depending on negative affect or positive affect, leading to a set of challenges. There is extensive research on comprehensive input and socio-affective filter (Dulay et al., 1982; Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Wherever microaggressions are ubiquitous, teachers encounter discipline problems such as student insubordination, emotional detachment, mental withdrawal, unresponsiveness, seclusion, defeatism, disengagement, disidentification, animosity, and harassment. Williams (2020) summarized the harmful impact of microaggressions on victims’ mental health. Those consequences include stress, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, suicide, anxiety, somatization, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

One of the primary responsibilities of a teacher is to furnish a positive effect. This aids in driving high levels of student engagement for them to achieve academic success. It is quite unlikely that this goal can be achieved in a hostile educational environment where microaggressions are prevalent. Students can be unwilling to participate in class activities such as volunteering, taking risks, joining teams, asking questions, giving oral presentations, speaking up, expressing a viewpoint, and helping others. They may show some resistance toward proposed learning activities, agendas, teaching styles, communication styles, tests, and more. This resistance may affect their adherence to classroom activities. The consequences of microaggressions are severe if unaddressed, as can be seen in Figure 3.

When students are constantly subjected to microaggressions, they may struggle to complete learning activities effectively, attend classes consistently, or thrive in the classroom, resulting in reduced confidence. In addition to reduced confidence, microaggressions can also lead to reduced performance or self-efficacy, reduced motivation, decreased engagement, increased absenteeism, decreased morale, feeling of disconnectedness/decreased group harmony, and reduced satisfaction, as presented in Figure 3. It is worth pointing out that the impact of microaggressions is not always immediate or short-term. It can be mid-term or long-term.

Figure 3. Summary of Consequences of Microaggressions in CTE



Teachers and school administrators should set the tone for positive academic communication. The way they communicate with and around students is enormously important. They should model the “what to” and “how to” of positive interactions. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to see teachers employ microaggressive tactics in their academic interactions with students. This deviancy only reinforces microaggressions among students. In fact, teachers’ actions, behaviors, demeanors, and temperaments play a significant role in determining how students behave in the classroom. Bailie (2015) argued that communication, engagement, presence, timeliness, responsiveness, and modeling positively affect online student satisfaction. These practices also apply to onsite student satisfaction. The content and form of teachers’ communication have direct and indirect effects on students.

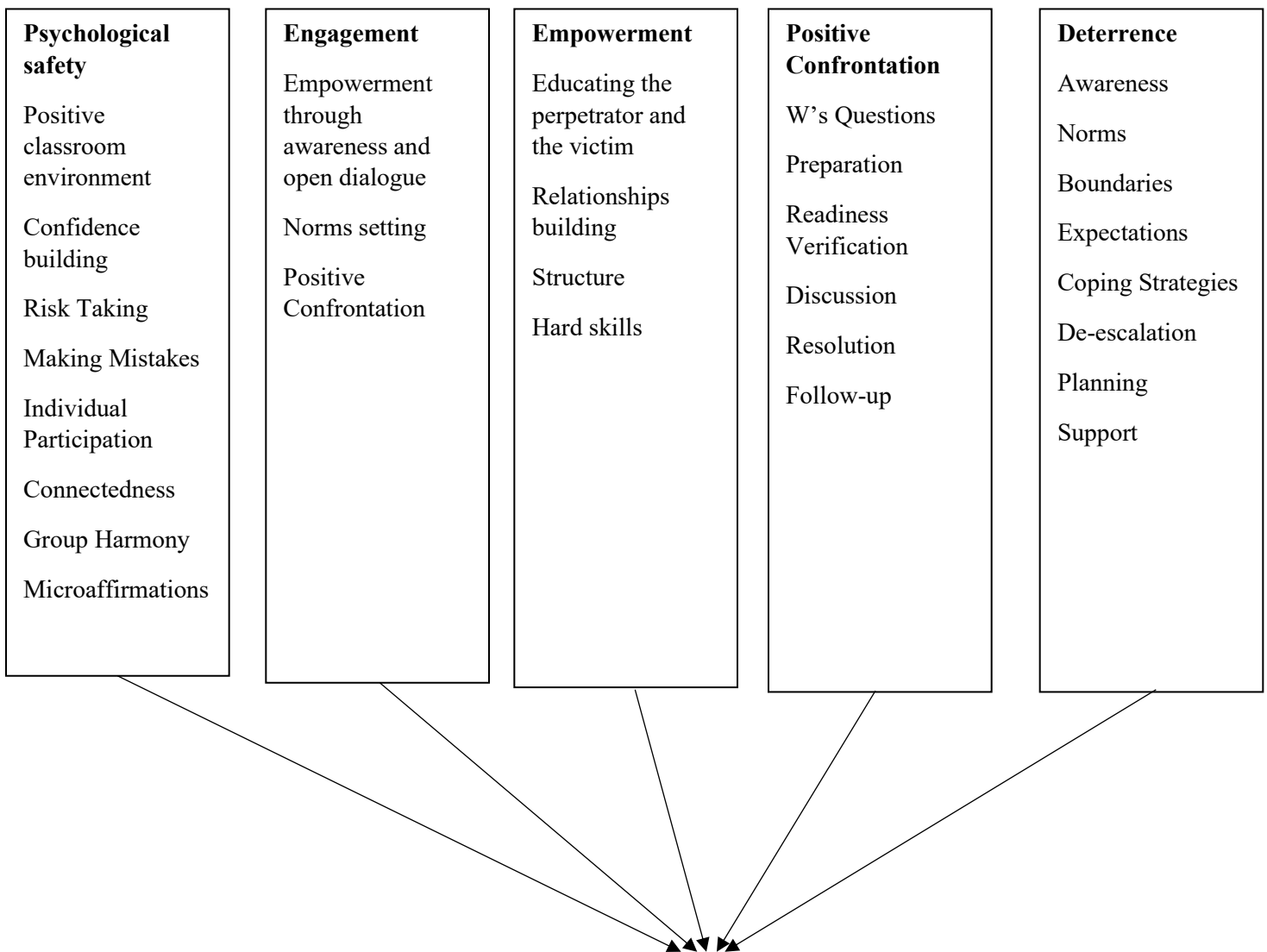
It is worth noting that students value being respected, trusted, accepted, listened to, and educationally empowered. Thus, teachers should tap into socio-affective factors that contribute to students’ positive affect, such as joy, excitement, enjoyment, interest, and enthusiasm. Ultimately, praise, sense of humor, correction without rejection, encouragement, relationships, and social presence provide stimuli that can scaffold student engagement, creativity, resiliency, critical thinking skills, group harmony, instructional responsiveness, performance, resourcefulness, and CTE literacy. The essence of CTE teaching lies in this accomplishment. To be able to cope with microaggressions, student empowerment through education and dialogue is vital. Conversely, discourtesy, threats, overcorrection, harassment, sarcasm, and condescension can only lead to adversity and hostility.

DISCUSSION

Axial coding produced two critical success congruences in CTE environments: (a) psychological safety and student engagement congruence and (b) empowerment and microaggression deterrence congruence. In other terms, a psychologically safe environment is positively associated with student engagement, higher efficiency, confidence building, and enhanced performance.

Microaggression deterrence through empowerment can lead to higher-quality CTE instruction. Finally, equity and inclusion can be intertwined to advance CTE learning. Figure 4 summarizes the relationships between the categories.

Table 4. A Conceptual framework of CTE Instruction Success



Positive Outcome

- Career and College Readiness
- Sense of Belonging/Connectedness
- Self-Confidence Building
- Student Empowerment
- Enhanced Personal Contribution
- Enhanced Performance
- Higher Engagement
- Higher Motivation
- Group Harmony

Microaggressions deterrence through empowerment can lead to higher quality CTE instruction. Finally, equity and inclusion can be intertwined to advance CTE learning. Table 4 summarizes the relationships between the categories. The following lines will address the three types of relationships.

Psychological Safety and Engagement Congruence

It is widely recognized that disengagement is pervasive in schools (Corso et al., 2013). Psychological safety helps create conditions that positively affect student engagement and productivity. Desai et al. (2023) defined *psychological safety* as “a condition in which one feels safe to learn, contribute, and challenge the status quo without fear of being reprimanded, marginalized, or punished directly or indirectly” (p. 173). In essence, psychological safety enhances student engagement. Extant research lists motivation, relationships, structure, relevance of content, and teacher’s expertise as contributing factors to student engagement and enhanced achievement in the classroom (Corso et al., 2013). Engagement can be achieved through setting clear norms and expectations, awareness and accountability, positive confrontation, microaffirmations, positive affect, and empowerment.

In short, psychological safety affects the quality of student engagement, learning outcomes, and teaching practices. This study establishes a congruence between psychological safety and student engagement. It establishes that a psychologically safe classroom environment helps students engage actively and holistically in learning endeavors and build confidence, as can be evidenced by these student quotes:

Sense of empowerment:

“Yes, I can accomplish anything when I feel trusted and respected” (Student 5).

“Yes, I would perform as best as I could; whether that is up to someone’s standards is no concern of mine” (Student 15).

Responses to microaggressions differ. Not all students are impacted in the same manner. Responding to a question about how a microaggression incident affected students, some students indicated it never affected them, while others noted it affected them to some extent. One had mixed feelings:

Ambivalence regarding the impact of microaggressions:

“Yes and no. It made me believe that I did absolutely suck at that course. But also no, because I know I am bad at that course. So it did not really affect me much” (Student 7).

Accused of cheating on a CTE test by peers for being the first to finish, one student claimed the accusation did not affect him. Here is his response to whether the accusation affected his confidence:

Impact on self-confidence:

“Yes. A few days ago, we had a test in a CTE class. I was the first to finish and almost everyone thought I cheated. No, not really, because I knew that I didn’t cheat” (Student 8).

While some thick-skinned students claimed to be unbothered by microaggressions, several argued that microaggressions impacted them negatively. In the following two examples, one thought she was not smart after experiencing a microinsult. Another noted that he stopped believing in himself.

Impact on self-confidence:

“It affected my confidence because I assumed that I was dumb for not meeting expectations” (Student 4)/

“It caused me to lack confidence in myself and I stopped believing in myself” (Student 11).

Conversely, some students are resilient and may not feel the immediate impact of microaggressions, as can be seen from the following statements:

Not impacted:

“No, because I am not letting someone else ruin my confidence” (Student 54).

“It didn’t affect my confidence because I know I am capable of completing anything assigned to me, if explained well” (Student 52).

Ironically, not many students indicated that microaggressions affected them adversely. The following quotes illustrate that microaggressions can serve as confidence boosters for some students. These students felt rather incentivized by microaggression incidents.

Confidence boosting:

“It honestly didn’t affect my confidence since I’ve learned to ignore those types of people. In fact, it increased my confidence in showing off my work” (Student 51).

“Yes, it made me more confident” (Student 55).

Student engagement is a powerful driver of student success (Bovill, 2020). Student engagement means CTE students are on task, engaged with instructional materials and activities focused on standards-based, integrated academics along with career-readiness skills (Castellano et al., 2014). Engaging learning is relevant, participatory, collaborative, and challenging. Students should be active participants in the learning process, interacting with the teacher, other students, and the content. Engaged CTE students should be actively involved in cooperative learning, problem-solving, creation and co-creation, design and decomposition, processing and meaning-making, investigating and creating, replicating and modifying, engineering and reverse engineering, designing and testing, analyzing and synthesizing, discussing and evaluating, interacting and hypothesizing, and sharing and reflecting. All these activities should require attention to detail, risk-taking, active listening, confidence building, mistake-making, meaningful social interaction, affective investment, critical learning skills, peer support, positive affect, microaffirmations, and tactful pedagogical facilitation. A psychologically safe environment is best suited for such endeavors. It is associated with student engagement, higher efficiency, and enhanced performance. It allows students to perform optimally.

Yet, empirical and anecdotal evidence reveals that one of the reasons students are not always fully engaged is ineffective instruction, leading to disturbances (Scott et al., 2014). It can be inferred that students' academic achievement, as well as teachers' performance, may suffer in an educational environment where adversity, hostility, toxicity, animosity, and mistrust are perpetually ubiquitous. The subsequent toxic climate may ultimately lead to conflict, verbal and physical confrontation, and inefficient learning outcomes. In CTE environments, a negative climate can amplify and exacerbate the effects of technostress, digital divide, inequity disparities, achievement gaps, and learning disabilities. Realistically, a classroom environment with microaggressions is not an ideal setting for active CTE learning or effective CTE teaching.

Without a classroom climate, optimal student engagement cannot be expected. It has emerged from data that a microaggressive environment can erode self-confidence; sow self-doubt; and negatively impact the ability of a student to participate in learning activities, volunteer to ask questions, take risks, make mistakes, speak up, propose new ideas, and share opinions without any fear of ridicule. Similarly, microaggressions can undercut a teacher's performance, mood, attitude, sense of self-worth, and self-efficiency. In other words, microaggressions can engender an environment that is not conducive to effective learning.

Student Empowerment and Microaggression Deterrence Congruence

Implicit bias develops at an early age, and microaggressions are the products of implicit bias, which may be hard to undo. The role of the teacher is crucial to help students unlearn microaggressive behaviors. As diverse groups of students come together, physically or virtually, they must learn to accept each other and treat each other with utmost respect. Hope and Timmel (1984) posited, "Unless there is this spirit of respect and acceptance, people will not be free to learn, to rethink their old opinions, to change and grow, or to share fully their thoughts and feelings" (p. 6). The feeling among students that their needs are recognized may be an important step toward activating a sense of ownership of the learning process. Because schools are

quintessentially a microcosm of the real world, this sense of respect for self and others will carry over in every aspect of their lives beyond the classroom.

To minimize the occurrences of microaggressions and counter their negative effects, it is important to have preventive and responsive mechanisms in place through student empowerment. Student empowerment can be an effective means of equipping students with the appropriate skill set to become cocreators of learning and teaching. As partners of learning and teaching (Dunne, 2016; Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), students take greater initiative in the co-creation of a learning culture that fosters active participation, equity-mindedness, student engagement, shared decision-making, and personal responsibility. This implies meaningful collaboration between students and teachers (Bovill et al., 2016). As learning shifts from teacher-centered models to student-centered models, students should be empowered to take personal responsibility for the success of their own learning.

The skills required to deal with microaggressions are teachable and learnable (Dodge, 2019). Student empowerment entails adherence to a social contract outlining behavioral expectations in the classroom, as suggested by the Capturing Kids' Hearts program. It also entails students acquiring effective learning skills, which include academic skills, personal skills, and group interaction skills. Adapted from Howard High School of Technology's Quest for Quality Student Performance Guide (Bottoms & Sharpe, 1996), Table 4 summarizes these skills. Some skills have been modified, and new skills have been added. These skills help promote student engagement and a positive learning environment.

Table 4. Quest for Quality Student Performance Guide

Academic Skills	Learning Skills for CTE Students	
	Personal Skills	Group Skills
Reading with understanding	Note-taking	Participating actively in groups
Understanding mathematics	Demonstrating self-control	Being sensitive to group members
Analyzing data	Demonstrating self-care	Compromising to reach goals
Problem-solving	Attending to details	Knowing group norms and standards
Self-expression	Following instructions	Listening to/observing group members
Addressing societal impacts of technology	Attending classes regularly	Knowing group members' names
Using, managing, and evaluating technology	Managing projects effectively	Expressing ideas to group members
Using research and library skills	Knowing personal strengths and weaknesses	Disagreeing without being disagreeable
Writing effectively	Uncovering one's biases and microaggressions	Working in changing environments
Speaking effectively	Responding to microaggressions with poise	Working with different demographics
Thinking creatively and critically	Verbalizing thoughts	Respecting others' ideas

Investigating and analyzing	Working independently	Leading or following to reach a goal
Drawing connections	Confronting a microaggression perpetrator	Collaborating with peers
Planning and designing	Demonstrating integrity, honesty, and respect	Providing feedback
Replicating, modifying, and creating	Developing career plans	Involving disinterested students
Using tools and equipment	Learning new skills	Assigning team roles

Academic Skills	Personal Skills	Group Skills
Providing feedback	Displaying creativity and imagination	Responding to questions
Deconstructing an object	Displaying loyalty	Time management
Encoding an object	Giving attention to quality	Accurately expressing one's ideas
Communicating/presenting persuasively	Meeting school and work deadlines	Understanding an audience
Listening actively	Being properly groomed	Taking turns
Developing digital literacy	Dealing effectively with peers and microaggression perpetrators	Conflict management
Demonstrating leadership	Using judgment	Conflict resolution
Using resources productively	Goal setting	Effective negotiation
Innovating thinking	Demonstrating adaptability and flexibility	Solution-based strategic thinking
Technical writing	Demonstrating emotional intelligence	Building rapport and sharing
Programming	Receiving feedback	Decision making
Code review	Being detail-oriented	Accountability
Synthesizing and reflecting	Prioritizing tasks	Participating in group discussions

Dodge (2019) suggested a framework for handling difficult and uncomfortable conversations without being disagreeable. Students must be taught the virtues of positive confrontation, conflict resolution, social interaction, personal initiative, respect for self and others, active listening, and socialization. These traditional values contribute to making students effective communicators and sociable human beings, which affects the way they are perceived in society. If students learn to debate and convince persuasively with words, they are likely to engage in difficult conversations without being disagreeable, resolve conflict, and function appropriately in an academic setting. Hence, the primary goal is to create a learning environment that allows students to develop social interaction skills, intrapersonal skills, and interpersonal skills to solve authentic problems.

Positive Confrontation and Educational Empowerment

Open dialogue is vital to empower students to develop awareness of the context, content, and consequences of microaggressions. By allowing students to address instances of microaggressions through positive confrontation, teachers resolve to educationally empower students. Conversation is the cornerstone of a positive confrontation. A positive confrontation begins with an open, straightforward dialogue between a perpetrator who violates classroom norms and a victim who is subjected to microaggressions. The two parties should agree to discuss their genuine feelings and intentions in a respectful manner. They should agree to disagree and respect each other's point of view. They should not avoid talking about their biases and prejudices. However, they should focus on the positive aspects of the confrontation, which are mutual understanding, active listening, and compromise. They should agree on the purpose of the conversation: what to discuss, how to

discuss, why to discuss, where to discuss, and who to involve. As Du Bois and Hutson (1997) observed, "Dialogue as an act of co-creation, therefore, is a matter of serious talk" (p. 43). Neither party should talk over the other, and both should decide if mediation is necessary. Once a resolution has been implemented, it should be evaluated and reevaluated to assess its effectiveness. Boundaries, norms, and expectations must be clearly defined. Any violation must be addressed.

If students run away from slights or microaggressions or passively confront them with silence or inaction, they are predisposing themselves to social dysfunction or inefficacy. Soft skills such as problem-solving, positive attitude, cross-cultural communication, active listening, goal-centric thinking, critical thinking, and compromising contribute to making students effective communicators, which can affect the way they are treated and perceived in society. Students must learn to verbalize specific thoughts or feelings, debate different viewpoints, articulate opinions, express frustrations, de-escalate conflict situations, and persuade with words or arguments. These skills can serve students positively when confronting microaggressions or other life challenges without resorting to verbal or physical violence. They can allow students to acknowledge personal biases, accept responsibility, empathize with victims, admit wrongdoing, and make amends. Thus, schools must help students learn to verbalize their thoughts, communicate specific feelings, and resolve conflicts peacefully.

A positive confrontation implies active listening, communication dexterity, and knowledge of the context. It is important to identify the place and time of the incident, the nature of microaggression, the audience, and the sociocultural background of the aggressor and the victim. This knowledge can help prevent or predict future occurrences. It is important that the two interlocutors address some critical points: perception of the incident, motivation and intent, reactions and feelings, and resolutions for the future.

A positive confrontation contributes to open communication and peaceful resolution of a conflict. Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, et al. (2007) proposed a five-phase model for deconstructing the microaggression process: (a) experience the incident; (b) attribute the aggressor's intent; (c) provide immediate cognitive, behavioral, and emotive reaction to the incident; (d) interpret and process the incident and reaction; and (e) proffer consequences of and consideration in coping with the microaggression.

As Lewis et al. (2013) pointed out, students' coping strategies are contingent upon the situation and contextual factors. Thus, individual personalities, personal relationships with the offender, and personal insecurities or vulnerabilities also influence the nature of the response. Therefore, a five-step approach to cope with microaggressions is adopted here: (a) identify a microaggression, (b) verify readiness to discuss, (c) have a positive confrontation, (d) have a resolution, and (e) evaluate the resolution.

The key to changing mindsets is the ability to identify microaggression. By nature, microaggressions are multifaceted and hard to deconstruct. As indicated earlier, they initially applied to only one racial group (Pierce et al., 1977). Their field has expanded to include religion, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, nationality, sexual identity, and cultural background. They characteristically stem from a host of internal and external factors, namely, internalized

prejudices, implicit biases, social stratification, standards of living, differential treatment, and lifestyle. The identification process is not an easy undertaking. Different conversational styles and cultural differences may lead to miscommunication that can be misconstrued as microaggressions.

Therefore, training is fundamental to the identification of microaggressive language and behaviors. Students and faculty must be trained in the characterization of microaggressions. Salient characteristics of microaggressions include the invisibility of bias; (un)awareness of the insult; trivialization of others' feelings, views, and contributions; and the offensive nature of the language or behavior. Here are a few guiding questions: Did a microaggression happen? What type of microaggression was it? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Why did it happen? Who was involved? How did it happen?

Another way to identify microaggressions is to administer a scale constructed to uncover microaggressions. Some of the commonly used instruments are the Student Microaggression Inventory (Berk, 2017a), Racial Microaggressions Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012), Gendered Microaggression Inventory (Yang & Carroll, 2016), Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998), Homonegative Microaggressions Scale (Wright & Wegner, 2012), and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Discrimination (Molero et al., 2013). Students should learn to identify patterns of microaggression and the underlying implicit bias that triggers them. They should be encouraged to document and report salient cases of microaggressions to teachers, school counselors, and school leaders. Once an identification is determined, the next step is to decide how to respond to a microaggression.

Ultimately, a positive confrontation does not need to occur on the same day as the incident because it can require some mental preparation. Preparation is key to the success of a positive confrontation. The victim and the aggressor must be ready to discuss in a good frame of mind, as presented in Figure 5. Given the confrontational nature of the encounter, a positive confrontation must be well thought out and well planned because it can turn into a chaotic verbal or physical altercation if it is not handled appropriately. An aggressive attitude may escalate the situation. To approach a perpetrator, the victim must be thoughtful and open to the eventuality of an agreement or a disagreement. By agreeing to disagree, an escalation can be prevented. It is important to remember that reasonable people can have reasonable differences. A good dose of humor can help defuse or de-escalate the situation. It may turn out that the aggressor had no intent to offend the victim. To curtail misunderstandings or miscommunications, instances of microaggressions must be approached and confronted strategically, pedagogically, and equitably.

Figure 5. Model of Microaggression Resolution



An effective resolution resulting from a positive confrontation is an agreement by both parties about the way forward. A resolution should begin with a review of the incident. The questions addressed earlier should be relevant here: What happened? Why did it happen? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Who was involved? What lessons can be learned from the incident? The offender must take the victim's feelings into account and make a commitment not to re-offend. This requires an introspective self-examination—looking deep into one's mind. Both parties, the aggressor and victim, must reexamine and challenge their implicit biases and their internalized prejudices. While it is practically impossible to be completely bias-depleted or prejudice-depleted, we can unlearn some of our biases and prejudices through self-knowledge.

Positive confrontation skills have known benefits that CTE classes need for operational effectiveness. They can help students and teachers restore relationships impacted by microaggressions. A few recommendations for restorative resources encompass Flippen's EXCEL Model from *Capturing Kids' Hearts*, Yale's RULER, and Restorative Practices (Costello et al., 2010, 2019; C. G. Vincent et al., 2016). The strength of positive confrontation rests on the following skills: assertiveness, attentive listening, persuasive speaking, spontaneity, receptiveness, and conflict resolution. These soft skills can increase self-confidence and decrease uncertainty, insecurity, and stress levels. Stevick (1990) postulated that humanistic education conditions can effectively amplify learning and provide an environment that facilitates the achievement of the full potential of the student. It is important that students, faculty, and school administrators frequently assess and reassess the way they communicate with peers and students.

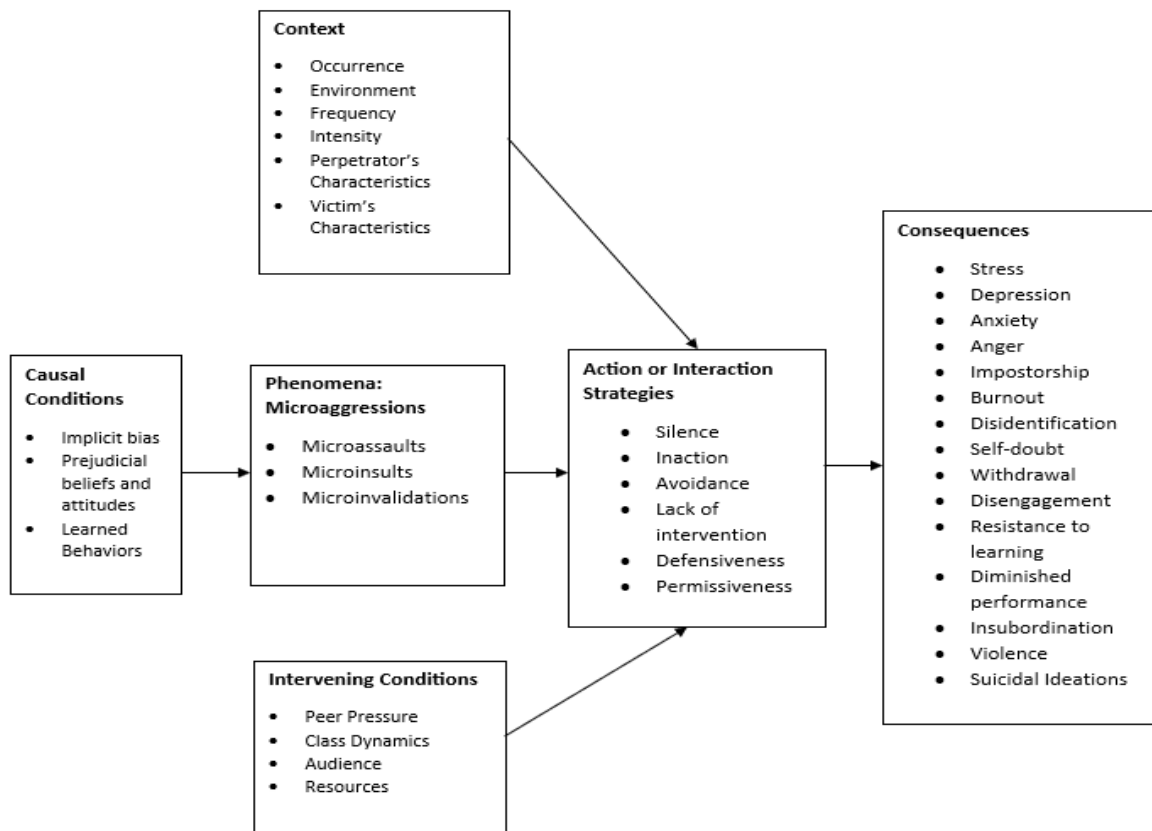
Education as Deterrence Tactic

By default, conflict is embedded in the fabric of a diverse educational environment. The potential for conflict looms even larger in a classroom where microaggressions are prevalent. It is critically important that schools have management strategies in place to cope with microaggressions effectively. Failure to address microaggressions appropriately can adversely affect the psychological safety of all involved in the teaching and learning processes.

Deterrence alone is not enough. Having a coping mechanism to respond to microaggression occurrences through education and open dialogue empowers students and strengthens class cohesion, equity, inclusion, and student engagement. An educational component should be the centerpiece of any strategy to equip students with the appropriate skill set to respond to microaggressions calmly and assertively. Student empowerment has the potential to improve the classroom atmosphere and the learning culture. Students must also learn to be cognizant of their own biases and address them effectively. Dodge (2019) argued that eliminating microaggressions is a daunting challenge. However, students can use occurrences as opportunities for learning and change. Educating the offender, the victim, and the audience is a positive step toward student empowerment and toward deterrence. When students are equipped with soft skills to cope with microaggressions, they become more prepared and grow from the experience. All high-performing CTE classes have a certain level of conflict. What matters is knowing that students and teachers treat one another with respect, with dignity, with empathy, with fairness, and with honesty. They should be open-minded enough to acknowledge each other's feelings. The ultimate goal of a positive confrontation should be mutual understanding.

Knowing how to address microaggression incidents is important. Students respond to microaggressions in a variety of ways. Emotional responses may encompass nervousness, self-doubt, anxiety, stress, and tension. Some responses have been silence, inaction, violence (verbal or physical), confrontation, and compromise. When anxiety sets in, motivation sets out. Students must be taught how to regulate and manage emotions under certain stressful situations. Humor is a good coping strategy (Berk, 2015). Furthermore, silence, inaction, and passivity are ineffective responses to microaggressions. Sue (2015) contended, "The most ineffective strategies are [a] do nothing, [b] allow the discussion to be deflected away from the issue at hand, [c] shut down the discussion, and [d] exhibit defensive behaviors" (p. 231). These responses sow confusion and may promote biased behaviors and legitimize microaggressions (Berk, 2017a; Sue et al., 2011). Ignoring a blatant instance of microaggression in the classroom to avoid a confrontation, exhibiting defensiveness, and changing the subject are not healthy strategies. A microaggression-permissive environment gives rise to several challenges, indicated earlier and as illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Model of Microaggression in a Permissive Classroom Environment



As noted earlier, students with social anxiety, stress, and low self-esteem may endure learning challenges because of microaggressive interactions. Some students may retaliate verbally or physically. A few may remain unaffected or may avoid confrontation by ignoring the incident or by changing the topic. Nathanson's (1992, 1997) Compass of Shame highlights four responses to inappropriate behavior: withdrawal, attack self, avoidance, or attack other. *Withdrawal* means isolating oneself and running and hiding. *Attack self* means self put-down and masochism. *Avoidance* includes denial, abusing drugs and alcohol, and distraction through thrill-seeking. *Attack other* involves turning the table, blaming the victim, and lashing out verbally or physically. Hynes (2008) indicated that individuals could resort to five possible conflict management strategies: avoiding, accommodating, compromising, problem-solving, and forcing. While students are encouraged to report incidents of microaggressions, it is important that they learn to manage them, to resolve them, and to confront them. Sue et al. (2019) suggested a micro-intervention framework for disarming microaggressions that comprises four strategic goals: (a) make the invisible visible, (b) educate the perpetrator, (c) disarm the microaggression, and (d) seek outside support and help.

Education, not sanctions, should be considered as a deterrent. It can be inferred that deterrence tactics minimize or counter the interference of microaggressions in CTE classrooms, thereby improving the quality of instruction and learning experiences. Therefore, a strategic plan to deter microaggressions preemptively must encompass an education component, an awareness protocol, a boundaries delineation protocol, a conflict management and resolution protocol, a de-escalation protocol, and coping mechanisms. A permissive environment is fertile ground for the adverse effects addressed earlier. Table 5 presents a theorized model of the harmful impact of microaggressions on students in a permissive classroom environment.

Theoretical Elements in Student Empowerment

Authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B,” but rather by “A” with “B,” mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views and opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes, or hopelessness, imply significant themes or the basis on which the program content of education can be built (Freire, 1968/1972, p. 82).

Several studies have highlighted theoretical frameworks that can influence student empowerment and affect dynamic interactions between teacher and learner in an educational environment. Social-emotional learning theory (Jones & Doolittle, 2017), social learning theory, social impact theory (Latané, 1981), and cognitive-affective-social theory of learning in digital environments (Schneider et al., 2022) are four relevant examples. Elements of each theory can illuminate the student educational empowerment process. Student empowerment is about capacity building. Student empowerment entails positive confrontation, soft skills, de-escalation, education, restorative practices, conflict resolution, and acknowledging feelings. In short, it means building relational capacity (releasing the “power within” and giving the “power to” and the “power with” students to self-manage).

Naturally, a student’s educational empowerment is contingent upon the pedagogical and psychological actions of a variety of sources (or social actors). To optimize the effectiveness of the teaching process—and consequently improve the CTE quality of learning—and to exert an influence on the dyadic teacher-learner relationship, the impact should be subject to credibility, mutual trust, open-mindedness, receptiveness, and respect. On the one hand, a teacher’s expertise, experience, pedagogical skills, instructional leadership, and responsiveness are deemed to be critical predictors of student success. On the other hand, a student’s intrinsic motivation, goal setting, academic resilience, and discipline are important enablers of academic achievement. The combination of these factors is likely to result in a more efficient give-and-take interplay. In fact, it is not the number of people that students interact with at school that affects them the most, it is the quality of stakeholders: a caring school counselor, a charismatic school leader, an effective teacher, a supportive parent, and so forth.

Clearly, the power of the educator as an influencer or behavior modeler does not necessarily derive from their level of education attainment, age, race, or gender. However, demonstrated empathy, proven expertise, and experience may partially account for the influence teachers can exert on students. The immediacy of the source is the closeness in time and space between the influencer and the learner. This closeness can be physical, virtual, or psychological. An impactful teacher's influence does not end in the confines of the classroom's physical space. It goes beyond the bounds of the classroom walls and the school campus. A student may remember a teacher's motivational thought, a study skill learned in class, a joke, an expectation, a coping strategy, and so forth. The people (teacher, teacher assistant, academic facilitator, counselor, assistant principal, and principal) in the educational environment of the learner may account for the magnitude of the impact. The influencing source can affect the student's perception and reception of course content or target performance skills. Although the number of sources does not matter, it appears that the more sources of influence there are, the greater the chances of an impact. The more role models there are in the life of a learner, the more likely the impact will be positive. Students are often more receptive and open to knowledge shared by credible, trustworthy, and knowledgeable educators or school administrators. The process can result in strengthened and enhanced student performance. Therefore, a student's satisfaction with an educator can be linked to individual academic achievement.

However, student dissatisfaction is often linked to a stressful learning environment and experience. Research shows that underperforming students may regard a stressful educational setting and the learning process as a source of anxiety (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020), which can be conducive to decreased self-efficacy, decreased engagement, decreased motivation, and decreased connectedness. Students' social-emotional health must be an integral part of CTE curricula. Disregarding this aspect can have adverse repercussions on students. Also, attracting, recruiting, and retaining effective teachers must be a critical leadership goal.

Implications for Practice

The results of this investigation provide some insightful, introspective opportunities for teachers. First, it has been established that teachers can diminish or limit their own effectiveness by allowing microaggressions to interfere with their teaching. Teachers must be cognizant of the negative consequences of microaggressions on their own performance as well as on their students' cognitive, affective, emotional, and mental health. Results of inaction, avoidance, silence, inattention, and passivity on their part encompass, among other consequences, withdrawal, disengagement, instructional unresponsiveness, insubordination, phobia, self-doubt, verbal and physical confrontation, inefficient and ineffective performance, resistance to learning, tuning out, frustration, and anger. Subsequently, these effects can ultimately lead to public humiliation, lack of participation, sleep disorder, and suicidal ideations.

Second, teachers can undermine their own effectiveness by creating an unwelcoming learning environment in which microaggressions have free rein. The classroom atmosphere that results from confrontational social interactions can have profound negative consequences. Deborah

Tannen (1998), a well-known sociolinguist who has published a great deal of research on cross-cultural communication, noted that the argument culture creates “an adversarial frame of mind” (p. 3) that rests on opposition. In an adversarial classroom environment, there is little or no trust between teachers and students. Thus, students will not fully bring themselves into a classroom where they can be ridiculed, demoralized, or dehumanized or where they are compelled to follow a teacher-prescribed agenda. Teacher performance will ultimately suffer in this context.

To unlock students’ true academic potential, teachers must acknowledge their values, aspirations, needs, views, fears, dreams, doubts, preferences, experiences, memories, goals, hobbies, and personal and academic interests. They should avoid subjugating students into submission with condescending attitudes and negativity in their daily discourse and behaviors because coercive compliance can only lead to a microaggressive classroom environment. Such an environment plants seeds of a dysfunctional classroom. In other words, a teacher’s sarcasm, moodiness, and microaggressions negatively affect the classroom atmosphere. Teachers must watch their body language, the tone of their voice, and the words they use. To check one’s inner biases, a teacher must work on reducing and eliminating instances of microaggressions in their classroom. They should be encouraged to foster an active learning environment based on core educational values, namely, mutual respect, can-do mindset, communication, collaboration, risk-taking, and active participation. Such an environment values diversity, resiliency, and high performance. It is incumbent upon teachers to facilitate the learning process by creating conditions that nurture the emotional, mental, cognitive, and intellectual development of students.

Teachers’ attitudes usually shape and influence the dynamic of classroom interactions. For students who have been historically exposed to various types of indignities due to their race or socioeconomic status, it is unwise to exacerbate their negative feelings in the classroom. Some students face a host of challenges, including homelessness, extreme poverty, absence of a parent or parents, residential mobility, or learning disabilities. It is the teacher’s primary responsibility to create an instructionally supportive and safe environment for every student.

Additionally, the impact of classroom microaggressions on teacher performance can be significant. Microaggressive teachers may limit their own effectiveness. Their power to facilitate the learning process can be called into question, negated, rejected, or discredited. In fact, teachers’ underperformance can be partly attributable to classroom climate, among other factors. To encourage students to become active learners and productive cocreators of knowledge, teachers must create an open, respectful atmosphere that is conducive to effective learning. Microaggressions from students, colleagues, and administrators can contribute to raising teachers’ stress levels.

Job satisfaction is known to be a key pillar of teacher retention. The more satisfied teachers are, the more likely they are to remain in their jobs. Ambiguity, bureaucracy, and work overload can heighten teacher stress, leading some teachers to quit. Teachers reported that teacher pay, students’ behaviors, job dissatisfaction, and lack of instructional support are the four main reasons why they needed another line of work.

Finally, the link between microaggressions and productivity suggests that microaggressions can create stress, anxiety, and pedagogical hypertension. In other words, microaggressions can engender an environment that is not conducive to effective and affective learning. By implementing microaggression management strategies, teachers can reduce conflicts, negative verbal altercations, and physical altercations.

Conclusion

Clearly, the pervasiveness of microaggressions in a CTE environment articulates a malaise. The resulting paralyzing dysfunction can significantly hamper student achievement and teacher effectiveness. As a facilitator of the learning process, the teacher's pedagogical responsibility is to create conditions that ultimately lead to active learning and not impede the learning process, by allowing a culture of microaggressions in the classroom. In effect, emphasis should be placed on an educated understanding of the benefits of inclusion, equity, surface-level or demographic diversity (age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical ability, and cultural background), and deep-level diversity (cultural values, communication styles, preferences, attitudes, and personalities) in a CTE environment. Diversity should be acknowledged, celebrated, and exploited strategically. Limited English proficiency, for example, should not be viewed as ignorance, nor should one be judged based on skin color, zip code, state or country of origin, religion, or gender. Physical presence, personal qualities, class attendance, and CTE literacy must be valued and celebrated.

It is important that teachers and students develop informed awareness of appropriate management strategies to reduce or manage incidents of microaggressions in the classroom or on school grounds. It can be surmised from the study findings that consistently educating the perpetrator and the victim, setting boundaries, using humor, providing and encouraging students to seek support, using positive affect, having an array of microaggression management protocols in place, and engaging students in open dialogue are effective tactics that can have positive consequences. Those consequences include (but are not limited to) a positive classroom atmosphere, course participation, instructional responsiveness, compliance with rules, trust building, positive confrontation, effective performance, active learning, leadership emergence and consolidation, soft-skills empowerment, and hard-skills development and consolidation.

CTE teachers should ensure that students harness employability skills and college readiness skills and are prepared to face real-world, societal challenges. Student educational empowerment is paramount to student engagement. There should be open discussions about the need to reduce or eliminate instances of microaggressions. Biases of all kinds must be acknowledged, addressed, and handled accordingly. The failure to address the pervasiveness of microaggressions and their harmful impact on student achievement and teacher performance can only perpetuate a culture of prejudice. The ability of students, instructors, and school administrators to treat one another with respect increases the potential for educational success.

The grounded theory study focused on two types of congruence that can enhance the quality of CTE instruction: (a) psychological safety and engagement congruence and (b) student

empowerment and microaggression deterrence congruence. Based on the results of data analysis, it was surmised that a psychologically safe environment is positively associated with enhanced efficacy and student success. Deterrence through educational empowerment and positive confrontation aids in minimizing the interference of microaggressions in CTE classrooms. The suggested student empowerment framework calls for additional research for empirical validation. Further exploration of the framework with different methodological approaches and target populations can help confirm the study findings.

To conclude, this section explored the multifaceted nature of microaggressions in CTE classrooms from the points of view of teachers and students. It established that microaggressions create a hostile learning environment that can adversely affect the psychological safety of all involved in the teaching and learning processes. Such an environment can amplify and exacerbate the effects of technostress, academic underachievement, ineffective performance, digital divide, and inequity. Microaggressions should not be normalized because they constitute barriers to student learning, academic achievement, group harmony, equity, and inclusion. Eliminating microaggressions altogether is a nearly impossible task. However, minimizing their interference in classroom dynamics is possible. Empowerment through education and dialogue is key to curbing the frequency, intensity, and occurrence of microaggressions. Proper management tactics help reduce stress and anxiety. Fundamentally, it is crucial for schools to review and rethink some of their policies in order to ensure effective instruction and learning for all students.

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