



Exploring Power Dynamics in Post-Secondary Institutions

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Japan adaptation of Eric Sagenes's *Exploring Power Dynamics in Post-Secondary Institutions* (Campus Manitoba), based on Kristen A. Hardy's original work.

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Navigating this resource

In this brief overview, we'll explore the user-friendly features and intuitive interface of this digital publishing platform, designed to streamline your content creation experience. Whether you're a seasoned visitor or new to digital textbooks, this guide will walk you through the essentials of navigating your digital book with ease.

Instructions: Below is a collapsible accordion with 5 sections. Select each section below to reveal additional information on navigating this resource effectively.



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SCREEN READERS

For the smoothest **accessible experience** with this resource, **we recommend using NVDA or JAWS screen readers with [keyboard navigation](#)**. Use the **Tab** key to move between items, and **Enter** or **Spacebar** to activate them.

Important: To support keyboard navigation, each expanded H5P accordion section includes a focus link at the bottom of the section's content. These links don't open new content – they help shift focus to center the expanded section on the screen, making it easier to read and navigate.

Accessibility statement

The authors stand by the belief that education should be accessible to all. This commitment drives us to create free, open, and easily accessible educational resources. We are dedicated to enhancing the accessibility and user-friendliness of the textbooks we develop.

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A text-only, accessible PDF version of this module is available for download.

This format supports offline reading and printing, and is especially useful for individuals using screen reading software.

Download an accessible PDF this module on the front page.

Unless otherwise stated, the guidelines in this section are adapted from the **Accessibility Toolkit – 2nd Edition by BCcampus**, written by Amanda Coolidge; Sue Doner; Tara Robertson; and Josie Gray, and is used under the terms of a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#). You can freely download and access the original material at [the BCcampus Accessibility Toolkit – 2nd Edition](#).

Acknowledgements



Figure 0.1. The Tone River below Mt. Tanigawa, UNESCO Eco Park, Minakami, Gunma Prefecture

ABOUT THE ORIGINAL WORK

This resource is an adaptation of *Exploring Power Dynamics in Post-Secondary Institutions*, authored by Eric Sagenes as an adaptation of Kristen A. Hardy's *Understanding Social Identities Among Faculty and Students*, and developed by Campus Manitoba and The Manitoba Flexible Learning Hub. Additional contributions came from community reviewers, instructional designers, and an advisory board drawn from post-secondary institutions across the province of Manitoba, Canada. We are grateful to the original authors and development team, whose thoughtful, openly licensed work made this Japan-focused edition possible. Full contributor credits are available in the [original edition](#).

Campus Manitoba closed permanently on June 26, 2026, after more than 35 years of supporting open education across the province. This adaptation preserves and carries forward a copy of the original resource made openly available under its Creative Commons license prior to that closure.

The original resource opens with a land acknowledgement, a practice common in Canadian institutions of formally recognizing the Indigenous Peoples on whose traditional territories an organization operates. The original edition acknowledges Treaty 1 and Treaty 2 territories, the traditional lands of the Dakota Oyate and Anishinaabeg Peoples, and the National Homeland of the Métis Nation. That acknowledgement belongs to its place and its authors, and we honour rather than reproduce it here. We encourage readers to [learn why land acknowledgements matter](#).

Japan, too, has its own histories of Indigenous peoples and marginalization that deserve reflection. In that spirit, we carry the original team's invitation forward: to examine the histories of the places where we live and work, and to challenge racism, inequality, and colonialism in our own institutions.

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This 1st H5P Japan edition is adapted and published by the Japan Open Textbook Publishing Consortium on the Open Studio publishing platform (openstudio.pub). This edition adds additional interactive H5P learning activities, new chapters on psychological safety, and contextual adaptations for readers in Japanese higher education.

ADAPTATION AND PUBLISHING

Doug Strable, Founder and Director, Japan Open Textbook Publishing Consortium

Open Studio.pub is built on open-source publishing software. Thanks to the developers and contributors whose work makes open publishing possible.

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MODIFICATIONS IN THIS EDITION

This edition has been adapted for readers and educators in Japan's higher education sector. Changes from the original include:

- Three new chapters on psychological safety (Chapters 20, 21 and 22)
- Contextual adaptations and examples for the Japan post-secondary environment
- Revised front matter, including new acknowledgements and course introduction
- Removal of Manitoba-specific series information and platform-specific terminology
- New cover design

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START HERE: Welcome and learning objectives



Figure 0.2. A participant looking at a laptop during a workshop session.

Who is this for? This self-paced resource is designed for post-secondary faculty, staff and students. Its purpose is to enhance understanding of power, privilege and oppression in the post-secondary context, and to provide strategies and teaching techniques for **advancing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in teaching and learning**.

The module moves from developing an understanding to taking action. After examining how power operates in post-secondary classrooms, you will explore psychological safety: the condition that determines whether every student, not just the most confident, can take the risks that genuine participation requires.

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

- **Estimated time:** 35 minutes
- **Format:** Asynchronous, self-paced
- **Interactivity:** Includes optional reflection prompts and linked resources. While these embedded

links are not essential to engaging effectively with the module, they have been included to allow learners to explore additional relevant resources if they wish.

- **Support:** This resource is not instructor-led, but your institution may offer additional programming.

IMPORTANT NOTE

At points throughout the module, you will be asked to reflect on your own past experiences. If you find any of these reflection prompts to be emotionally challenging, feel free to skip them or to use the text boxes to explore other ideas or feelings that you find relevant to the material.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this module, learners should be able to:

1. **Examine** the concept of power and how institutional practices and policies can marginalize members of equity-deserving groups.
2. **Analyze** how systemic oppression is rooted in relationships of unequal power among social groups and how these dynamics are sustained.
3. **Evaluate** the role of privilege in shaping teaching and learning experiences in post-secondary education.
4. **Implement** teaching strategies and learning activities that address power, oppression, and privilege, and promote equity, diversity, and inclusion in the classroom.



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=26>

Download '[Eric's Welcome Video](#)' Transcript (PDF)

For accessibility or reference, download the written transcript of the video.

Pre-assessment: Thinking about our own experiences

Throughout this self-paced resource, you will encounter a series of reflective questions, such as the one seen below.

These are designed to assist you in thinking about your own experiences, practices, future plans and possibilities.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Imagine yourself as a learner and think back about your own learning experience in post-secondary level. Take a moment and think about the following question: **are classrooms neutral spaces?**

Record your reflections in the H5P form below. we'll revisit your response to this question in the final section of the module.



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=27#h5p-6>

In the next step, you will explore the topic of oppression in post-secondary education.

PART I

MAIN BODY

CHAPTER 1

Power and Privilege in Japan

Privilege can look different depending on the cultural and social context. The following video explores how majority privilege operates in Japan.

Video: Making Majority Privilege Visible [17 min]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=449>

Attribution: Making Majority Privilege Visible, presented by Dr. Makiko Deguchi, Professor, Department of English Studies, Sophia University. Developed as part of the Diversity Survey and Analysis Project at Sophia University. Embedded with permission from the Office for the Promotion of Diversity & Sustainability, Sophia University. The Japanese language version available on this link:

https://youtu.be/Cw4hhY9OmQg?si=cNCT_h8AxbDSOF2h

In this video, Dr. Makiko Deguchi, Professor in the Department of English Studies at Sophia University, introduces the concept of **majority privilege**: the advantages associated with belonging to a dominant or majority identity group, which may go unnoticed by those who hold them. She explains how privilege can operate structurally, introduces the concept of intersectionality, and suggests concrete steps people in positions of power can take once they recognize their own advantages.

Although the video was originally developed for university administrators, faculty, and staff, the ideas apply directly to the classroom dynamics we have been exploring throughout this module.

PART II

OPPRESSION

CHAPTER 2

Oppression

In this section we will examine the concept of oppression, the unequal power between groups and discuss how oppression is systemic.

Historical black and white photo of a person drinking from a 'COLORED' water fountain.

Figure 1.1. A young boy at a segregated drinking fountain at the Halifax County Courthouse, Halifax, North Carolina, USA, 1938.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Take a few moments to reflect on experiences where you felt you had power to change or influence a desired outcome. Note some experiences where you felt like you had **no** power to change or influence a desired outcome.

WHAT'S OPPRESSION?

"The prejudice and discrimination of one social group against another, backed by institutional power. Oppression occurs when one group is able to enforce its prejudice and discrimination throughout society because it controls the institutions. Oppression occurs at the group or macro level and goes well beyond individuals. Sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism are specific forms of oppression."
Sensoy & D'Angelo, 2017, p. 61

Post secondary institutions are places where people from different backgrounds, experiences, identities and socioeconomic status come together. Thus, when people interact, they bring with them elements from these areas and that can shape the way they work with other people.

For example, the professor is the person who has set up the learning and expectations of student behaviour, such as the assignments students must do or how they mark these assignments, and students must learn to take the cue from the professors about what is acceptable.

CHAPTER 3

Reflection on oppression

READY TO CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING?

Instructions: This quick quiz includes 5 multiple-choice questions (1 point each) to help you reflect on key concepts related to oppression. Select the most appropriate answer for each question. Scoring is intended solely for your own understanding and does not form part of any formal evaluation.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=30#h5p-4>

PART III

THE CULTURE OF POWER IN CLASSROOMS AND INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER 4

Power and classroom

It is important to understand three ideas that add feed into the concept of the culture of power – hegemony, ideology and power. **Hegemony** is when one group's ideology is imposed on to everyone in society. **Ideology** “refers to the stories myths, explanations, definitions and rationalizations that are used to justify inequality between the dominant and the minoritized groups.” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 73) Then that means that power is **when people have the ability to impose their “ideas and interests on everyone.”** (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 73)

When professors teach, the information they share can at times come from a narrow scope with one point of view that is being transmitted as the ultimate truth.



Figure 3.1. A tall modern university building surrounded by greenery, Japan.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Please think from your own experience, what does power look like between teacher and student?

CHAPTER 5

Reflection on identities

Educationist and researcher Delpit (1988) questions the effectiveness of some progressive approaches to pedagogy regarding power. She discusses the difficulties students face who are not part of the “culture of power”. Delpit proposed five aspects of power as follows:

1. **Issues of power are enacted in classrooms.** These issues include: the power of the teacher over the students; the power of the publishers of textbooks and of the developers of the curriculum to determine the view of the world presented; the power of the state in enforcing compulsory schooling; and the power of an individual or group to determine another’s intelligence or “normalcy.” Finally, if schooling prepares people for jobs, and the kind of job a person has determines her or his economic status and, therefore, power, then schooling is intimately related to that power.
2. **There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a “culture of power”.** The codes or rules I’m speaking of relate to linguistic forms, communicative strategies and presentation of self (i.e., ways of talking, ways of writing, ways of dressing and ways of interacting).
3. **The rules of the culture of power reflect the rules of the culture of those who have power.** This means that success in institutions – schools, workplaces, and so on – is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those from non-middle-class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes – of those in power. The upper and middle classes send their children to school with all the accoutrements of the culture of power whereas children from other kinds of families operate within perfectly wonderful and viable cultures, but not cultures that carry the codes or rules of power.
4. **If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier.** In my work within and between diverse cultures, I have come to conclude that members of any culture transmit information implicitly to co-members. However, when implicit codes are attempted across cultures, communication frequently breaks down. Each cultural group is left saying, “Why don’t those people say what they mean?” as well as, “What’s wrong with them, why don’t they understand?”
5. **Those with power are frequently least aware of – or least willing to acknowledge – its existence.** Those with less power are often most aware of its existence. For many who consider themselves members of liberal or radical camps, acknowledging personal power and admitting participation in the culture of power is distinctly uncomfortable. On the other hand, those who are less powerful in any situation are most likely to recognize the power variable most acutely.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

While reading Delpit's **Five Aspects of Power**, please take note of the following:

- Three key ideas that captured your attention.
- Two questions that arose during this reading.
- One phrase that encapsulates the main idea of it.

You can read the full article from [Lisa Delpit on Power and Pedagogy](#).

CHAPTER 6

*Reflection on power***WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

Take a few moments to explore through reflective writing:

- How have you seen the Five Aspects of Power play out in your role as instructor and in the institutions where you work?



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=34#h5p-6>

Next, we'll delve into the topic of social stratification.

CHAPTER 7

Power and Privledge in Japan

PART IV

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

CHAPTER 8

Social stratification

A group of professionals engaged in a discussion near a large window in a well-lit room with rows of empty chairs.

Figure 6.1. Professionals engaging in a casual networking session during a business conference.

Social stratification is when different groups in society are given different values. Depending on the privilege we have, we tend to have an understanding and are usually assigned more value in society. For example, cis-gendered, able-bodied men have high value in society, than a LGBTQ+ person. When you look around the post-secondary campus, people are socially stratified based on many different aspects of their society. In this section, we will examine what identity markers can socially stratify groups.

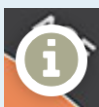
PAUSE AND REFLECT

The Power and Privilege Wheel Activity

This wheel shows how different aspects of identity can relate to power and privilege in society. Categories closer to the centre generally represent greater social power or privilege, while those toward the outer edge represent greater marginalization.

Most people do not fit entirely into one ring. We may experience privilege in some parts of our lives and marginalization in others.

Explore the wheel



Click the **i** icons on the wheel to learn more about each category.

As you explore, think about where you might place yourself on different sections of the wheel. You do not need to share any personal information that you are uncomfortable discussing.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=36#h5p-8>

[Interactive Wheel of Privilege](#) from *Communication Strategies: Effective Practices for Natural Resource Profession-*

als by Dr. Aubrey Neil Leveridge (2024), BCcampus. The activity is based on Greta Bauer's (2021) *Wheel of Power/Privilege*, itself adapted from Sylvia Duckworth's original model. H5P licensed CC BY 4.0.

CHAPTER 9

Power and Privilege in Japan

Privilege can look different depending on the cultural and social context. The following video explores how majority privilege operates in Japan.

Video: Making Majority Privilege Visible [17 min]



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=484>

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The Japanese language version available on this link:

https://youtu.be/Cw4hhY9OmQg?si=cNCt_h8AxbDSOF2h

In this video, Dr. Makiko Deguchi, Professor in the Department of English Studies at Sophia University, introduces the concept of **majority privilege**: the advantages associated with belonging to a dominant or majority identity group, which may go unnoticed by those who hold them. She explains how privilege can operate structurally, introduces the concept of intersectionality, and suggests concrete steps people in positions of power can take once they recognize their own advantages.

Although the video was originally developed for university administrators, faculty, and staff, the ideas apply directly to the classroom dynamics we have been exploring throughout this module.

CHAPTER 10

Reflection on social stratification

LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

Explore instances in which individuals with marginalized identities encounter challenges. Think from participants' lenses.

- What are the potential resources or opportunities that may be compromised or restricted under these circumstances?

Scenario 1



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Accessible Link Text:

[View the full transcript for Scenario 1.](https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=37)

Scenario 2



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Scenario 3



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Accessible Link Text:

[View the full transcript for Scenario 3.](#)

In the upcoming section, we'll investigate internalized dominance as it relates to teaching.

PART V

INTERNALIZED DOMINANCE

CHAPTER 11

Internalized dominance

Take a moment and reflect from your experience. Based on the social groups you belong to, what are some privileges that you take for granted?

Author and researcher Sensoy and D'Angelo (2017) explored the concept of **internalized dominance**. This refers to the process of unconsciously absorbing and acting upon the pervasive cultural messages that suggest one's own group is superior to a minoritized group, thereby justifying a higher societal position. This internalized sense of superiority can manifest in various ways within the context of post-secondary education:

- **Overconfidence in abilities:** A student might enroll in an advanced course for which they lack pre-requisites, believing they can grasp the content despite a lack of foundational knowledge. Similarly, a faculty member might apply for a leadership role within the institution with little administrative experience yet believes that they can learn on the job.
- **Misconception of equality:** There may be a belief that all students have equal access to resources and opportunities, disregarding systemic biases and inequalities that may exist within the educational system.
- **Assumption of rational superiority:** A student or faculty member might feel entitled to voice their opinion in academic discussions, under the assumption that their logic is superior to others' emotional responses.

These examples illustrate how internalized dominance can subtly influence behaviors and attitudes within the higher education environment, often without the individual being consciously aware of it.

CHAPTER 12

Reflection on internalized dominance

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Pause a moment and reflect,

- What are some examples of internalized dominance that you observed in the videos and in your post-secondary or work experiences?



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=40#h5p-6>

Our focus in the next step will be to examine the cultural deficit theory as it relates to post-secondary education.

PART VI

CULTURAL DEFICIT THEORY

CHAPTER 13

Cultural deficit theory

Here we explore how internalized dominance affects people with privilege view others from equity-deserving groups.

Have you ever noticed that some people succeed, while others have a harder time? How would you define the achievement gap between certain students? Why do you believe the achievement gap exists between students?

Sensoy & D'Angelo (2017) discuss the common misconception that minoritized groups are less active in society due to a lack of appropriate cultural values, such as a perceived lack of value for education, or due to some other cultural deficiency (p. 82). This perspective is particularly prevalent in post-secondary level, where diverse cultural backgrounds are often misunderstood or overlooked.

Pinto and Cresnik (2014) offer a critique of the cultural deficit theory, which posits that academic underachievement is a result of deficiencies in the culture, values and behaviors of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This theory is often applied in higher education settings, leading to a deficit-oriented view of students from diverse backgrounds. Pinto and Cresnik argue that this perspective perpetuates deficit thinking and classism, as it fails to consider the systemic disadvantages faced by these students in the educational system.

They advocate for a shift in perspective in post-secondary education: Instead of focusing on perceived cultural deficiencies, **educators should recognize and value the unique strengths and resources that students from diverse backgrounds bring to the academic environment.** This includes acknowledging the resilience of these students, their diverse perspectives, and the richness of their cultural experiences, all of which can greatly enhance the learning environment.

FOR FURTHER READING:

Explore [Mythology, moral Panic, and the Ruby Payne Bandwagon](#) by Laura E. Pinto and Lucyna Cresnik.

CHAPTER 14

Reflection on cultural deficit theory

REFLECTING FROM EXPERIENCE

Thinking about the cultural deficit theory in your teaching and learning, reflect on the following:

- What practices and policies have you observed, been subjected to and/or participated in that perpetuate cultural deficit theory?
- How have assessment practices upheld cultural deficit theory?
- What beliefs exist that continue to uphold cultural deficit theory?

In the next step, we will explore microaggressions in your teaching.

PART VII

MICROAGGRESSIONS

CHAPTER 15

Microaggressions

Now, we would like to delve in how internal dominances plays out in social interactions and how they impact people who are on the receiving end of microaggressions.

Microaggressions are slights made either intentionally or unintentionally to other people but have a real impact on the people who have received the slights. When you assume that a person of colour was born elsewhere, or you question someone's ability to understand a task if they have a disability, you are displaying forms of microaggressions.

Another way to look at microaggressions are as subtle actions of exclusion. A term used by Jana and Baran (2023) explain that microaggressions are actions that are done subtly but their impact excludes a person based on an intersection of their identity.

A teenage girl walks away from a group of classmates, reflecting themes of isolation and bullying.

Figure 11.1. A student walks apart from a group of classmates.

CHAPTER 16

Types of microaggressions

Play the video below to learn more about the topic. A transcript is available for accessibility.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=46>

Accessible Link Text:

[View the full transcript for the video.](https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=46)

Take a moment and think, in what situations have you seen an example like the one in the video?

There are various types of microaggressions that people may experience based on race and/or ethnicity, age, seniority, gender, class, language, nationality, immigration status, accent, surname and culture. They may be based on multiple characteristics and positionalities that define the identities and experiences of people.

In the Japanese post-secondary context, age and seniority function as a central dimension of social hierarchy, paralleling the role that race plays in the North American source material this resource is adapted from. Entry order into a group, such as year of admission or year of hiring, often determines whose voice carries weight, regardless of skill or knowledge. The examples below therefore include both the original categories and new categories reflecting age- and seniority-based microaggressions common in Japanese institutions.

Microaggressions can take many forms and can be experienced in a variety of ways. What they share is that each act is subtle and easy to deny, which makes them difficult for the person targeted to name or challenge (Williams, 2020). In hierarchical settings, this deniability often takes the form of 'that is just how things are done here.' Here are some examples:

Perceived intellectual ability: This refers to assumptions made about a person's intelligence based on their

race, ethnicity or age. For example, assuming an international student cannot follow a lecture, or expressing surprise that a first-year student has a sophisticated idea.

Perceived adaptability: This refers to assumptions that older students, staff, or faculty cannot learn new technologies or methods. Expressing surprise that an older person uses a learning management system, can program and use a GenAI tool competently (“Sugoi desu ne, at your age!”) is a compliment-framed microaggression.

Effort-based moral judgment: This refers to the assumption that poor performance reflects insufficient effort or weak character rather than circumstances, workload, or teaching quality. Rooted in the *konjo* (fighting spirit) and *gaman* (endurance) ethos of school club activities (*bukatsu*), it appears in comments such as “students today just need to try harder” and treats requests for support as a moral failure.

Seniority-based silencing: This refers to the assumption that a junior person's ideas carry less weight simply because of their age or when they entered the group. In classrooms and committees, *kohai* (juniors) may be expected to stay quiet or defer to *senpai* (seniors), even when they have relevant knowledge or better ideas.

Generational labelling: This involves blanket characterizations of an entire age cohort, such as calling younger people “*yutori seda*” (the relaxed-education generation) to imply they are lazy or fragile, or dismissing a young colleague’s concern with “*yutori dakara*” (well, that’s the *yutori* generation for you).

Prescriptive age roles: These are expectations that people behave according to their life stage. Examples include asking a mature student why they are studying “at their age,” telling older colleagues to “make way for the young,” or assuming a young instructor cannot lead a committee.

Nativist microaggressions: These are underlined by assumptions about who truly belongs, such as telling someone to “go back to your country,” repeatedly asking “Where are you really from?”, or complimenting a long-term resident’s Japanese (“Nihongo jouzu desu ne”) in a way that marks them as a permanent outsider.

Stereotype-based joke-telling: This involves making jokes that rely on stereotypes about a person's race, nationality, age, or gender, then framing any objection as an inability to take a joke.

Layered, subtle and cumulative: Microaggressions are often complex, not immediately obvious, and can build up over time. A single comment may seem trivial, but repeated daily experiences accumulate into significant harm.

Visual and nonverbal representations: These include stereotyped images, gestures, and depictions conveyed without words, such as advertising that portrays foreigners as comic figures or older adults as helpless.

Various mediums: Microaggressions can appear in textbooks, children's books, advertisements, photos, film and television, manga and anime, social media, and public signage.

Intersectional microaggressions: These target people at the intersection of multiple identities, such as older women facing compounded age and gender bias, or working mothers assumed to be less committed to their studies or careers.

Reinforcement of institutional hierarchy: Microaggressions can perpetuate ideologies that justify the subordination of certain groups, whether based on race, nationality, age, or seniority, by making unequal treatment feel normal and unremarkable.

FURTHER READING (OPTIONAL)

For readers who want to explore these ideas in more depth, the following sources informed this chapter.

FOUNDATIONS OF MICROAGGRESSION RESEARCH

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Wiley. The foundational text that established the modern framework and taxonomy used in this chapter. A second edition (Sue & Spanierman, 2020) is also available.

[illegible]

CHAPTER 17

Impact of microaggressions

In their seminal work, Solorzano & Huber (2020) explored the **profound impact of microaggressions on individuals**. They found that these subtle forms of discrimination can lead to negative psychological and physiological effects. These effects are not isolated incidents; rather, they can be cumulative, leading to heightened levels of stress and anxiety.

Survivors of microaggressions often experience a range of emotions, including anger, frustration and self-doubt. This emotional toll can manifest in various ways, such as mundane extreme environmental stress, racial battle fatigue and racial trauma. Physiological responses, such as elevated blood pressure, are also common. In an academic context, these experiences can lead to academic self-doubt, further hindering a student's ability to succeed.

Interestingly, when confronted about their behavior, perpetrators of microaggressions often downplay their actions. Common responses include: "That's not what I meant," "It was just a joke," "You're taking this too seriously," "You're being too sensitive," "Don't act like a victim," and "But I meant it as a compliment." These dismissive reactions further invalidate the experiences of the victims, adding to their emotional burden.

CHAPTER 18

Reflection on microaggressions

LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

Explore the following two scenarios on microaggressions.

Scenario 1



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=48>

Accessible Link Text:

[View the full transcript for Scenario 1.](https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=48)

Scenario 2



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=48>

Accessible Link Text:

[View the full transcript for Scenario 2.](https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=48)

At this point, please pause for a moment and in reflective writing, identify the microaggression from these scenarios and answer the following questions:

- What message does the microaggression send?
- What is the potential impact for the person receiving the microaggression?

In the next step, you will explore internalized oppression in teaching.

PART VIII

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

CHAPTER 19

Internalized oppression

In this chapter, we explore the impact of constant messages of dominance for people from equity deserving groups.

What is a message you constantly receive or an idea you think about that makes you second guess yourself? Is this tied to a facet of your identity? What impact do these messages have on you?

Sensoy & D'Angelo (2017) define internalized oppression as the process of unconsciously absorbing and acting upon the pervasive societal messages that suggest one's own group is inferior to the dominant group, thereby justifying a lower societal position (p. 72). This concept is particularly relevant in the context of post-secondary education, where students from minoritized groups may face unique challenges.

Examples of internalized oppression within post-secondary setting might include:

- **Reluctance to share ideas:** A student might hesitate to share their ideas in class, feeling that they lack the authority or that their ideas must be validated by an "expert". This can limit their participation and engagement in the learning process.
- **Self-doubt in abilities:** A faculty member from a minoritized group might feel that they need more experience and are not qualified for a higher position, and therefore, might not apply for promotions or leadership roles within the institution.
- **Pressure to conform:** Students and faculty from minoritized groups might feel the need to constantly please others and remain calm, suppressing their emotions to avoid being labeled as "angry" or "emotional." This can create additional stress and impact their mental health.

These examples illustrate how internalized oppression can subtly influence behaviors and attitudes within the post-secondary environment, often without the individual being consciously aware of it.

CHAPTER 20

Reflecting on internalized oppression

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

Pause for a moment and reflect.

- How does internalized oppression affect students or people from equity deserving groups?



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=51#h5p-6>

In the next step, you will delve into teaching for social justice in post-secondary environment.

PART IX

TEACHING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

CHAPTER 21

Teaching for social justice

Figure 20. A crowd of protesters holding signs in an urban street.

In this chapter, we are going to explore teaching and learning strategies and activities that address power, oppression, and privilege context in post-secondary and promote equity, diversity and inclusion.

Earlier you were asked the question if learning spaces are neutral spaces. As you have gone through the module, examples have shown why and how learning spaces are **not** neutral spaces. However, there are ways instructors can mitigate the imbalances of power.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

What are some strategies you have done to **mediate the inequities** in your courses and/or institutions?

Educational scientist Dr. Kumashiro (2020) unearthed the social justice education through four approaches that we will delve into. While you are discerning this discussion, jot down one thing with which you agree, one thing with which you might argue and one thing to which you aspire.



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=53#oembed-1>

Considering the context of post-secondary institutions , the following four approaches can be implemented:

- **Education for the other:** Faculty members can conduct an equity audit of their practices to identify which students are thriving and which are struggling. They can then determine what barriers might be preventing certain students from succeeding. This could involve examining policies, assignments and teaching approaches.
- **Education about the other:** Faculty members should critically reflect on the course content. They should consider whether the information being shared is predominantly Eurocentric and seek opportunities to incorporate diverse perspectives.
- **Education critical of othering and privileging:** Faculty members can educate themselves about culturally sustaining pedagogies. This approach can help shape and deepen student learning and engagement. It also provides an opportunity to introduce counternarratives into the classroom.
- **Education that transforms students and society:** Many post-secondary institutions have Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committees. Familiarizing oneself with their work, policies and programs can provide valuable support for both faculty and students. Consider implementing small changes based on their work or contributing your own ideas to their initiatives.

You can download and print out the [teaching for social justice strategies checklist](#) while developing and designing a course.

CHAPTER 22

*Reflection on teaching social justice***PAUSE AND REFLECT**

Take a moment to consider: How might these four approaches be applied in your course or institution?



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PART X

BUILDING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

CHAPTER 23

Building psychological safety

Figure 22. Students talking in a lecture hall during class

In this chapter, we are going to explore **what needs to be present in a classroom** for students to take the risk of participating, and what instructors can do to make that risk feel possible. The chapters before this one have shown how power moves through a classroom, often invisibly, shaping whose knowledge counts, whose voice is heard, and whose mistakes are forgiven. This chapter turns from understanding to action.

The answer we will explore is **psychological safety**: a condition, not a technique. It determines whether participatory teaching practices work as intended, or whether they become performances that only the confident students feel safe joining.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Think of a specific moment in a classroom, at any point in your education, when you chose not to say something you were thinking. What made that moment feel unsafe?



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<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=162#h5p-6>

A CONDITION, NOT A METHOD

It is easy to confuse psychological safety with active learning, so it is important to examine this difference. They are not the same thing.

Active learning is a **method**. It refers to structural approaches to teaching, such as group discussion, problem-based learning, debate, and peer instruction, that ask students to do something rather than passively receive a lecture (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). In Japan, this shift was formally endorsed in a 2012 report by the Central Council for Education of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which called for university education to move away from one-directional knowledge transmission (MEXT, 2012).

Psychological safety is a **condition** (Edmondson, 1999). It refers to whether the people inside a given structure actually feel safe enough to take the risks that participation requires: offering an answer that might be wrong, admitting confusion in front of peers, proposing a half-formed idea, or disagreeing with an instructor.

A classroom can be fully “active” by method and still be psychologically unsafe. Students can sit in discussion circles, receive open-ended prompts, and be asked to co-create material, and still say almost nothing that reflects what they actually think. The underlying fear of being seen as unprepared, incorrect, or disruptive to group harmony has never been addressed. Method without condition produces the appearance of participation without its substance (Ito & Takeuchi, 2021).

A well-known Japanese analysis of **failed active learning initiatives** found that many implementations collapsed not because the method was wrong, but because institutions rolled it out at scale without attending to what instructors and students needed underneath it: enough structure to feel guided, but not so much control that genuine attempt and error became impossible (Kamekura, 2016). Good intentions and a good method are not enough on their own.

TWO TRADITIONS, ARRIVING AT THE SAME PLACE

Psychological safety is often introduced as an American concept, associated with Harvard Business School researcher Amy Edmondson. She defined it in 1999 as a shared belief among team members that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999). The concept gained wide attention after Google’s internal research, known as Project Aristotle, identified it as the strongest predictor of team performance across the organization. Edmondson’s book *The Fearless Organization* was translated into Japanese in 2021, where it won a [Japan HR Award](#).

It would be a mistake, however, to treat this as a Western idea recently imported into Japanese classrooms. Japan has its own, older tradition addressing the same underlying problem.

In 2000, engineering professor Yotaro Hatamura published *Shippaigaku no Susume* (失敗学のすすめ, “An Introduction to Failure Studies”), founding **failure studies** (失敗学) as a field in its own right. Hatamura’s central claim, developed through decades of engineering disaster analysis, was that failure is not something to be hidden, punished, or treated purely as shame. **Handled well, failure is the raw material of creativity and improvement.** He argued that failure information naturally hides, decays, and becomes distorted the longer it goes unspoken, and that organizations that build systems for surfacing failure openly avoid the catastrophic failures that come from repeating small, hidden ones (Hatamura, 2000). He went on to found the Failure Studies Society (失敗学会) in 2002.

Hatamura’s framework maps closely onto a distinction now common in Japanese workplace and classroom language: **deduction-based evaluation** (減点主義), which scores people down for every visible error, and **addition-based evaluation** (加点主義), which scores people up for having attempted something, regardless of outcome. Japanese organizational writing increasingly identifies deduction-based evaluation, a legacy of postwar zero-defect manufacturing culture, as a direct obstacle to open inquiry. You cannot simultaneously demand mistake-avoidance and demand curiosity, because curiosity requires the freedom to be wrong.

The classroom-facing version of this idea now circulates in Japanese education discourse as **classroom psychological safety** (授業心理的安全性): a state in which students can safely express their own thoughts and feelings, understood as a precondition for student agency, creativity, and genuine learning.

The point of tracing this lineage is not to argue over which tradition came first. It is to show that Japanese and Western scholarship reached compatible conclusions from different starting points, one from engineering disaster analysis and one from organizational psychology. A Japanese classroom drawing on psychological safety research is not borrowing a foreign concept. It is joining a conversation it has already been part of.

CHAPTER 24

Psychological Safety Is Reciprocal



Figure 24. Teacher sitting at a desk looking concerned.

Discussions of psychological safety in education often focus on whether learners feel safe to speak, ask questions, make mistakes, disagree, or contribute ideas. These conditions are essential, but psychological safety is relational. Instructors are also participants in the social and emotional environment of the classroom, and their own sense of uncertainty, belonging, and safety can influence the learning community (Hopkins & Dovchin, 2024).

Recent research on emotions in foreign-language classrooms supports this reciprocal perspective. Jiang et al. (2026), for example, found that students' perceptions of teacher enjoyment and anxiety were associated with students' corresponding emotions. This does not mean that teacher anxiety directly causes student anxiety, but it does suggest that the emotional experiences of instructors and learners are interconnected.



Figure 24.1 A group of university students sitting in a lecture hall

CONSIDER THIS SITUATION

An instructor who speaks limited Japanese asks students to work together in a co-creation project in English. During the activity, several students begin speaking rapidly in Japanese. One student looks towards the instructor and the group laughs.

The students may simply be clarifying the task, helping one another, or sharing a joke. Using Japanese may also be an important resource that helps them understand the activity and participate more confidently. However, the instructor cannot understand the conversation and may be uncertain about what is happening. Are the students confused? Are they discussing the activity? Are they disengaged? Are they laughing about something unrelated, or about the instructor?

Nothing intentionally harmful needs to have happened for uncertainty to emerge.

This situation also illustrates how power can shift within a classroom. Formally, the instructor holds considerable institutional power. They design activities, manage the classroom, assess learning, and occupy the role of sensei. Linguistically, however, the relationship can temporarily change. Students may share access to a language and social interaction that the instructor cannot understand (Fiset & Bhavé, 2026).

Related research uses the term **linguistic ostracism** to describe the experience of feeling excluded when others communicate in a language a person cannot understand (Fiset & Bhavé, 2026). Although much of this research has been conducted in workplace rather than classroom settings, it provides a useful lens for thinking about multilingual learning environments. Importantly, exclusion does not have to be intentional for someone to experience uncertainty or feel outside an interaction.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY, NOT LANGUAGE CONTROL

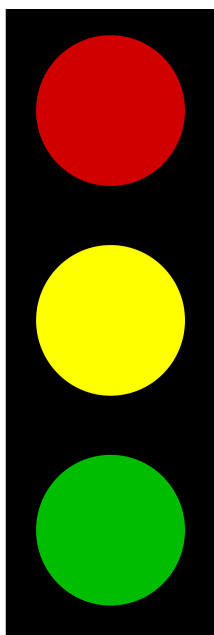


Figure 24.2. A red, yellow, and green traffic light

A response to this situation should not simply be to require students to use English at all times. An English-only rule places linguistic decision-making back in the hands of the instructor and can restrict learner agency. It can also overlook the many ways learners use their first language to think, clarify ideas, help peers, negotiate meaning, and participate in learning. From a co-creation perspective, the more useful question is not, **Which language should students be allowed to use?** but, **How can everyone use the languages available to them while keeping others included in the learning community?**

Instructors and learners can negotiate expectations together. For example, an instructor might explain that Japanese is welcome when it helps students think, understand, or support one another, while also asking students to help bring the instructor or other classmates back into conversations that concern the wider group.

The same principle applies in the other direction. Instructors can unintentionally exclude learners through complex English, academic terminology, cultural references, or conversations that only highly proficient students can follow. Responsibility for communicative inclusion therefore belongs to the whole learning community rather than to one group.

Reciprocal psychological safety is not about controlling which language people use. It is about creating shared responsibility for noticing when someone has been left outside an interaction and finding ways to bring them back in.

This perspective connects psychological safety with **Power Sharing and Voice** and **Building the Learning Community**. Psychological safety is not something an instructor simply provides for learners. It is something instructors and learners continually create together.

Reflection

Who can understand what is happening in your classroom? When might language, status, proficiency, or group membership leave either a learner or an instructor outside the interaction?

CHAPTER 25

Psychological safety in practice

The previous chapter established what psychological safety is and where the idea comes from. This chapter asks two follow-up questions: who carries the most risk when a classroom lacks it, and what can instructors actually do to build it?

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR EQUITY

Psychological safety is sometimes discussed as though it benefits everyone equally. It does not.

Consider what earlier chapters have already established. Students carrying marginalized identities, whether through race, gender, disability, immigration status, socioeconomic background, or the accumulated weight of internalized oppression, already enter the classroom bearing a disproportionate share of the risk that comes with speaking up. A wrong answer from a student already fighting stereotype-driven assumptions about their competence does not land the same way as a wrong answer from a student whose competence has never been in question.

This is the direct link between this chapter and the Power and Privilege Activity discussed earlier in this book, and its Japan-adapted counterpart. Power does not only operate through overt exclusion. It operates through who feels safe enough to be imperfect out loud. A classroom that fails to build psychological safety does not distribute that failure evenly. It reproduces the same power gradient the rest of this book has asked you to notice.

Building psychological safety is therefore not a separate, softer add-on to teaching for social justice. It is one of the practical mechanisms through which teaching for social justice either succeeds or fails in lived classroom experience.

PAUSE AND REFLECT

Where do you sit on the Power and Privilege Activity? How might your position affect how much risk you carry every time you are asked to speak in class?



— An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary/?p=170#h5p-6>

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

The following practices are drawn from both the international psychological safety literature and the Japanese failure studies tradition. None of them requires abandoning academic principles. All of them require deliberate, sustained instructor behaviour, not a single opening day announcement that “this is a safe space.”

- **Model the vulnerability first.** Before asking students to risk being wrong, instructors can visibly share their own mistakes, uncertainties, or early drafts. This is not a performance of humility. It is evidence that the room actually tolerates imperfection, offered before students are asked to test that claim themselves.
- **Shift evaluation toward addition, not deduction.** Wherever possible, build assessment structures that credit genuine attempt and revision, not only correct final output. A draft that took a wrong turn and was revised in response to feedback demonstrates the exact competency a co-creation classroom is trying to teach.
- **Separate disagreement from punishment.** A psychologically safe classroom is not a conflict-free classroom. It is one where challenge and critique carry no hidden penalty. Naming this distinction explicitly helps students who have learned elsewhere that disagreement is dangerous.
- **Normalize naming the fear.** Students often hesitate because they fear being seen as unprepared, incompetent, negative, or disruptive to group harmony. Naming these specific fears directly, rather than offering only a general instruction to “participate,” gives students language for what is holding them back, and permission to set it aside.
- **Build blameless reflection into the routine.** Borrowing from Hata-mura’s failure studies tradition, structure regular moments after a group project or presentation where the class reflects on what did not work without assigning individual blame. The goal is to make surfacing failure a routine, low-stakes act rather than a rare and risky confession.

For further reading, [Psychological Safety Checklist for Post-Secondary Classroom](#)

CHAPTER 26

Reflection on psychological safety

Take time to reflect honestly on the following questions. You are not required to share your answers. Any writing you make here remain entirely confidential and visible only to you. You can export the questions and answers later if you wish to keep a record, otherwise the information is not saved.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openstudio.pub/power-dynamics-postsecondary?p=174#h5p-7>

TEXT VERSION OF THE QUESTIONS IN THE H5P ACTIVITY FOR ACCESSIBILITY.

1. Think of a specific moment when you did take the risk of contributing something imperfect, incomplete, or possibly wrong. What was present in that room that made it feel possible?
2. Reread the Wheel of Power and Privilege, or its Japan-adapted counterpart, from earlier in this module. Where do you sit on it? How might your position affect the psychological risk you carry when asked to speak in class?
3. This chapter distinguishes between a classroom that uses active learning methods and a classroom that has psychological safety. Can you recall a classroom that had one without the other? What was the effect?
4. What is one specific, concrete practice from this chapter that you would want a future instructor of yours to adopt?

PART XI

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 27

Module summary

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS MODULE

In this module, we have considered how power and policies can marginalize members from equity-deserving groups, how oppression is based on relationships of unequal power among social groups, the impact of privilege on teaching and learning, and ideas that can address power, oppression and privilege in a post-secondary context.

Thank you for taking the time to reflect on your own practices and experiences. As you move forward with your learning, it is always good to reflect on what you have learned and how these ideas/concepts play out in your daily realities. Think about what you have learned, be conscious of power, privilege and oppression, and think about the impact it has on you and others around you.

If you are completing this module as part of a group at your institution, also give some thought to what you wish to take away from it to bring into discussions with your colleagues.

- What concepts or ideas would you like to explore further together?
- How can you apply some of the teaching for social justice ideas into your teaching?

Thanks so much for being a part of this learning journey!

Resources for learning more

The subsequent content presents a curated list of resources related to the various subjects in this module, intended for those interested in deeper exploration of these concepts.

TEACHING TO DIVERSITY

DiAngelo, R., & Sensoy, O. (2010). [“Ok, I get it! Now tell me how to do it!”: Why we can’t just tell you how to do critical multicultural education](#). *Multicultural Perspectives*, 12(2), 97-102.

Nadal, K. L., King, R., Sissoko, D. G., Floyd, N., & Hines, D. (2021). [The legacies of systemic and internalized oppression: Experiences of microaggressions, imposter phenomenon, and stereotype threat on historically marginalized groups](#). *New Ideas in Psychology*, 63, 1-9.

St. Denis, V., & Schick, C. (2003). [What makes anti-racist pedagogy in teacher education difficult? Three popular ideological assumptions](#). *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 49(1), 55-69.

REFLECTING ON PRACTICE

Delgado, A., & McGill, C. M. (2023). [Graduate Students’ Perceptions of Instructor Power in the U.S. Higher Education Classroom](#)([this link opens in a new window/tab](#)). *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 35(4), 186-198.

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Ko, M. E. (2021, July), [Revolutionizing Grading: Implications on Power, Agency, and Equity](#)([this link opens in a new window/tab](#)) Paper presented at 2021 ASEE Virtual Annual Conference Content Access.

[majority privilege visible: Implications for teaching a college course on positionality in Japan..](#) [Sophia Journal of Asian, African, and Middle Eastern Studies], 41, 41–56.

Goodman, D. J. (2017). [Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups](#) (Original work published 2011) Sophia University Press. (Original work published 2011)

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Williams, M. T. (2025). [Psychological support and microaggressions](#) Nippon Hyoron Sha.

ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP ON POWER AND IDENTITY IN JAPANESE EDUCATION

Houghton, S. A., & Rivers, D. J. (Eds.). (2013). [Native-speakerism in Japan: Intergroup dynamics in foreign language education](#). Multilingual Matters.

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Rudolph, N. (2022). ["White" and "Japanese" privilege \(?\): An interview with Makiko Deguchi](#). *The Language Teacher*, 46(5), 41.

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Versioning history

We are always seeking to improve our open textbooks. This page lists major changes to this book with major changes marked with a 1.0 increase in the version number and minor changes marked with a 0.1 increase.

Version	Date
1.0	July, 2026

Image Attributions

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