

EQUITY-MINDED INQUIRY SERIES

Student Interviews & Focus Groups



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ADDITIONAL TOOLS

For additional inquiry tools, please visit us at <http://cue.usc.edu>.

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PURPOSE: WHY TALK WITH STUDENTS?

Scholars have documented how classrooms are racialized (as well as gendered, classist, and ableist) spaces where white students' sense of belonging, opportunities for learning, and expressions of knowledge are privileged over that of racially minoritized students (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). They have also investigated how culturally relevant and sustaining practices can make classrooms spaces in which racially minoritized students are valued as knowers and learners, can develop positive racial identities and self-concepts, and are empowered to see and address racism. Given these divergent possibilities, it is important for practitioners, specifically instructors, to understand how racially minoritized students experience your classrooms. As Peña (2012) showed, faculty who interviewed racially minoritized students about campus experiences and then debriefed with colleagues about what they learned not only developed a "critical consciousness" about the discrimination, racism, and marginalization students faced, but learned to question their racialized assumptions and to determine how to create more racially inclusive and equitable environments.

In this guide, instructors will learn, in a step-by-step process, how to develop and conduct student interviews and focus groups focused on racial equity, and to use findings to inform changes in practice.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This activity is for a small group of practitioners (minimum 2) who can support each other through this process. This activity is designed for instructors who have taught the course(s) from which students in the sample are selected (e.g., instructors who have all taught pre-calculus). Ideally, the group will be racially and ethnically diverse in its composition, as well as in terms of instructor experience teaching courses with racially and ethnically diverse student makeups.

TIME COMMITMENT

The time commitment for this activity will vary based on whether you proceed with focus groups and/or interviews, how many you conduct, and how many students you will include. Each focus group could run between 60 to 90 minutes, while each interview could be between 30 to 60 minutes. In addition to doing the focus groups and/or interviews, you will need to budget time reviewing and analyzing the transcriptions (if focus groups / interviews are recorded and the recordings are transcribed) and your notes, and to apply what you learn to your classroom practices.

MATERIALS

- Protocol (see below for guidelines to develop)
- Tape recorder (if audio recording is desired and students agree)
- Refreshments for students (if focus group and/or interview is conducted in person)
- Gift cards for students to acknowledge their time and participation

STEP 1: PRE-WORK

WHAT'S YOUR AIM?

While the overall purpose of this activity is stated above, it is important for you to think through **your aims**. To do so, ask yourself the following questions:

- What do you hope to learn from speaking with Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, Pacific Islander, and other racially minoritized students?
- What are you especially curious about and why?
- Have you analyzed your course success data by race/ethnicity and are you puzzled about particular inequities? If yes, what puzzles you?
- How do you anticipate using what you learn to improve your practice?

We suggest each group member engage these questions on your own and then debrief as a group. From this discussion, the group can create a set of shared aims for the activity.

WHAT ARE YOUR TRIGGERS?

Faculty members who conduct these interviews and/or focus groups, might become triggered if they learn that students are dissatisfied with their instructional practices. When triggered, some responses from interviewers could include being defensive and trying to explain a situation from their perspective; asking inappropriate probing questions; not listening to the participant's responses; and even making statements that are not aligned with the purpose of the interview and/or focus groups. An interviewer who is triggered and reacts to a student's comment during the conversation can impact the outcome of the discussion negatively. To address this, we suggest that interviewers answer the following questions in the pre-work stage.

- When I think about my work, what types of comments, actions, or behaviors prompt negative responses from me?
- How do I typically respond to these triggers? Note: Your response may be different for each action, statement, or behavior.
- What could be some root causes of these triggers? What are some practices that I can employ to address my response when I am triggered?

Please remember that there is nothing wrong with being triggered. It only means you are human. We suggest taking time to ask and answer each of these questions with a partner as you can prepare for the interview and/or focus groups.

STEP 2: SET UP

Once you've determined your aims and addressed your triggers, it is time to prepare for the focus groups and/or interviews. There are multiple pieces to this step as our goal is to be as comprehensive as possible about the different aspects you'll want to consider prior to conducting the focus groups and/or interviews (Step 3).

DECIDE WHETHER YOU'LL DO FOCUS GROUPS, INTERVIEWS, OR BOTH

Focus groups and interviews are both popular forms of data gathering in higher education research and each has benefits and potential limitations to consider.

- **Focus groups** can be thought of as a group interview. They are useful when conducting research on college student experiences because they build on what students are already used to doing: exchanging ideas with peers and forming perspectives in dialogue with others (Kelley, 2003). In mimicking group exchanges, focus groups can elicit more candid responses, as well as jog memories that may not surface without prompting by another's comments. Finally, for race-related questions and issues, focus groups can help create a "safer" space for minoritized students to share their experiences. Indeed, focus groups have been used to examine race-related phenomena such as racial microaggressions (Solórzano et al., 2001), racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007), and successful Black students at historically Black and white institutions (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2002). Alongside these benefits are some limitations. Focus groups could promote "group think." Students may self-censor because they do not want peers to know their thinking. And, depending on the number of students and the amount of time allotted, there might not be enough opportunities to get at individual nuances.
- As exchanges that typically take place between a researcher and a participant, **interviews** can address some of the limitations of focus groups. While focus groups alleviate the pressure on individual students to respond to each question, one-on-one interviews give a student the opportunity to share more and potentially, to share

more deeply than they would in a group setting. Also, with interviews, the exchange can more easily move according to what the student shares, and thus you are better able to get a sense of their perspective and story. And an one-on-one interview means you can give your entire attention to one participant, which is not the case with focus groups.

That said, interviews may not elicit the kind of “natural” conversation that can emerge in focus groups, nor the prompting of a memory based on what another focus group participant shares. Some students may not be as forthcoming as others, potentially leading to an interview that feels stilted and disjointed. In such cases, interviewers may need to restate questions, ask questions in a different manner, break up a question into several parts, ask follow-ups, probe for examples, and the like, all in the moment.

Importantly, if after a few attempts to elicit a response to a question a student does not offer much more than they did initially, take it as a cue to move on. Keep in mind that in such cases, a student’s limited or superficial response may be because the question called up negative experiences that they are not ready or inclined to share. As much as it is the job of the interviewer to elicit responses from a participant, this must always be done in a trust-building and respectful manner, which most of the time means listening, hearing, and attending to what a participant is communicating by what they are saying and not saying. It is also beneficial to consider debriefing with students after an interview, particularly if there were questions that seem to trigger / elicit negative experiences. We encourage you to seek out resources to support the debrief ahead of the interview.

Given the benefits and limitations of focus groups and interviews, which will you pick? You can also consider proceeding with both. For example, you can start with focus groups to get a sense of more general patterns and then interview a subset of focus group participants to follow up on and probe comments shared during the focus groups.

Time—your time—is another consideration. Budget 60 to 90 minutes per focus group and 30 to 45 minutes per interview. How much time can you devote to conducting the focus groups and/or interviews?

DECIDE HOW YOU WILL SAMPLE STUDENTS

Sampling is an important dimension of any research project and has consequences for the representativeness of findings and the extent to which they can be extrapolated across situations and conditions. With practitioner inquiry, the focus is on your area of practice, and thus selecting students who have taken your course is a key criterion. From there, since this activity is about the experience of racially minoritized students, you then want to focus on Asian, Black, Latinx, Native American, and Pacific Islander students.

When making decisions about which students to invite to participate, there are some things to keep in mind given the inherent power asymmetry between you as a faculty member and the students.

- Student participation must be voluntary and not tied to any grade or assessment or credit they receive for a course.
- Even if participation is not tied to grades, assessments, or credit, we caution against including students who are currently in your class if you are planning to conduct the focus group or interview, whether as facilitator, interviewer, or notetaker. In this case, it would be best if other practitioners fulfill these active roles.

Another thing to consider is whether you will invite specific students, all students from classes you're currently teaching, or all students from current and past classes.

- In inviting specific students, one benefit is that you can select those who are more willing to share; one limitation is that you may not get a full picture of racialization in your class.
- In inviting all students from classes you're currently teaching, you have a better chance of getting a fuller, more comprehensive

picture, however, that picture will be limited to what is going on in the current semester.

- In inviting all students from current and past classes who are still enrolled at the college, you have a good chance of getting the comprehensive picture over a wider time frame.

There is no right or wrong with sampling. Again, the impact will be on the representativeness, veracity, and applicability of your findings.

Finally, returning to the issue of your time, you can decide to cap participation at a set number, for example, 10 or 15 students. So while your invitation will go out to a broad group, how many you accept for participation will depend on your time and budget for gift cards for students.

DECIDE HOW MUCH YOU WILL GIVE STUDENTS FOR THEIR TIME AND PARTICIPATION

It is customary that research participants, especially students, receive some token for their time. This is not meant to be compensation, but an acknowledgment of their participation. A \$20 gift card or gift certificate is within the ballpark for taking part in one focus group or one interview.

DECIDE WHETHER YOU WILL AUDIO RECORD THE FOCUS GROUP AND/OR INTERVIEW OR TAKE NOTES

Researchers typically audio record focus groups and interviews and then have those recordings transcribed. They do so in order to preserve, with as much fidelity as possible, what participants share. It is important to note, however, that the decision to record is not in your hands but in the hands of the students. If they agree to have the focus group (all students would have to agree) or interview recorded, then you can do so.

If the students do not agree to be recorded, then you will need to take notes. With focus groups, we suggest that the person taking notes not be the same as the person facilitating the conversation. This way, the facilitator can focus 100 percent on what the students are saying, to their affect and body language, and to any other non-verbal cues. You can also consider having a separate notetaker for interviews, again so that the interviewer can focus on the participant.

DECIDE HOW YOU WILL INVITE PARTICIPANTS

You can choose to invite participants to an interview / focus group in several ways: group email communication, one-on-one conversations, or via other participants. There are benefits and challenges with each type of invitation to consider.

- **Group communication.** This method involves identifying the names and contact information (email, phone numbers, etc.) of all who meet the criteria and sending a mass communication. With this type of invitation, you can reach a large group of potential participants with one communication. One challenge is that the method's effectiveness is contingent on recipients reading the communication. As such, it could require sending more than one communication before you have the desired yield for the sample. Researchers typically follow-up with potential participants who have not responded up to three times.
- **One-on-one and small group, in-person conversations.** Speaking with potential participants in small group conversations or one-on-one discussions can be effective for expressing the purpose and value of the project and answering questions about the work in a discussion setting. However, it is important to be mindful of the asymmetrical power dynamic that can exist in these settings. To reduce the chance of the feeling of undue influence, you can invite students to participate, then follow up with them about their interest in the project at an identified date. Specifically for small group conversations, you can distribute interest sheets that students can complete and return to you to express their interest in participating. The interest sheets request potential participants' names and contact information (cell numbers or email addresses).
- **Via other participants (or snowball sampling).** In this case, participants recommend other potential participants who meet the project's criteria. You can pair snowball sampling with the other two methods above.

Regardless of the invitation method you select, your invitation will be effective if you include the following:

- **Purpose:** What is your aim for the project (see Step 1)? Once this is clearly identified, it will be easy to convey this to potential participants.
- **Details about the interview:** Aspects such as the length of time for the discussion, thank you gifts (e.g., gift cards) and the amount, method of interview (online or in-person), and rationale for their selection are important areas for discussion.
- **Use of the findings / results:** Be clear about how you will use the results of the project. Some examples may include improving aspects of your own practice or creating professional development opportunities for other faculty.

PREPARE YOUR FOCUS GROUP AND/OR INTERVIEW GUIDE

It is important to design the overall structure of the focus group / interview, as well as specific questions, ahead of time. This gives you a chance to think through what questions to ask, in what sequence, and how to craft the overall experience for participants and yourself. Please see the Appendix for recommendations on how to build your guide.

DECIDE WHETHER YOU WILL NEED IRB APPROVAL FROM YOUR CAMPUS.

Typically, if research is being used to better understand your practice and to inform practice improvement, then your campus' institutional review board will not need to review your research plan. That said, we strongly suggest that you check in with the IRB administrator or chair and to proceed according to their guidance.

STEP 3: CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP / INTERVIEW

In this step, we offer advice on what to do before and during each focus group or interview session.

BEFORE THE FOCUS GROUP OR INTERVIEW

Prior to the focus group or interview, you will want to review your guide to re-familiarize yourself with the questions and overall direction. While there is no need to memorize the questions, and it is good practice to have a copy of the guide in front of you, it is also beneficial to be clear about the purpose and aims of the focus group or interview.

In addition, make sure to prepare your technology. Does your recorder have enough storage and battery power? Do you have multiple writing instruments in case the ink stops flowing or the point on your pencil breaks, as well as lots of paper to take notes on?

Also, are you familiar with the physical space where the focus group / interview will be held, assuming in person? Do you know where it is located? Is there enough seating for everyone? Does the air conditioning work? Is it quiet enough to minimize outside distractions? Do the lights work? If you have permission to record, are the acoustics appropriate for your recording device, or will you need a microphone or other voice enhancement instrument?

Finally, don't be late. In fact, be early to set up the space and make it welcoming for students.

DURING THE FOCUS GROUP OR INTERVIEW

With both, building authentic rapport and trust with students is key (Kezar, 2002). Remember that one of your aims should be to learn how minoritized students are experiencing the classroom, and likely, for them to open up about this matter, it is important that:

- You meet them with care, compassion, and empathy.
- You are fully present and actively listen to what the students share.
- You recognize that there is an inherent asymmetry.

- You work from the assumption that even if students volunteer to participate, they are under no obligation to tell you anything they do not want to tell you.
- You give students time to share what they want and not feel the need to move on if the response is not immediate.
- Recognize if participants' responses prompt certain triggers for you; handle your feelings and response appropriately.

While you can probe if you don't feel that a question elicited responses you thought they would, if after one or two probes, the response is the same, then you may want to take that as a cue to move on.

When participants speak in generalities or offer short descriptions (e.g., "Instructor A is helpful"), follow up with a probe for specifics and concrete details. For example, you can say, "Tell me more," or ask, "Can you give me an example?" Participants may provide more description if they are prompted to do so by the interviewer, so be sure to probe for a detailed response during the interview / focus group, as needed. Again, keep in mind that participants should not be forced to give answers. Also, it is also a good idea to reflect back what you are hearing from students during the focus group or interview to ensure that you are understanding them in the way they intend. You can do so by saying, "What I hear you saying is [paraphrase what was said] Is that right?"

Finally, make sure to monitor the time and be within eyesight of a time-telling device. Students have agreed to participate for the amount of time you asked and the focus group or interview should be limited to that time.

ON INTERVIEWING RACIALLY MINORITIZED STUDENTS ABOUT RACED / RACIALIZED EXPERIENCES

There are several things to keep in mind when conducting (and analyzing) interviews that seek to understand raced / racialized experiences.

First, not everyone will see and agree that something (e.g., an exchange, a behavior, a text) is raced / racialized. Imagine observing a dialogue between a white instructor and a Black female student who arrives a few minutes after class has started. Although with a laugh and a smile, he subsequently references her "late" arrival several times in the next few minutes. And while the student appears to smile and laugh along with the

instructor, another student watching this exchange may wonder whether he is giving the student a hard time—even if in a joking way—and perhaps doing so because she is Black. This second student wonders this because on another day, when a white male student arrived 30 minutes into the class, the instructor said nothing. Now imagine you are interviewing the two students. Say, in your interview with the Black female student, you ask her to describe her relationship with the white male instructor. She responds saying that they have a “good relationship” and she feels “comfortable” with him. As an example, she describes the exchange above. In your interview with the second student, you ask whether the instructor seems to treat students differently by race and ethnicity, and the student says “yes,” and references what happened with the Black female student and the white male student.

Second, despite the fact that how people experience the world is shaped by race (and gender, class, ability, and other social identities and categories), the dominant norm in the United States remains race-neutrality and in some cases, race-evasiveness. One consequence for interviews is that students may not bring up race unless asked, and even if asked, they may not share. Remember that even if you have been this student’s instructor, your relationship is that of instructor-student, and if previously you have not engaged in a conversation about race with that student, there is no reason for the student to think that you can be trusted to hear and understand their raced, racialized, and racist experiences in class.

All of this is to say that interviewing about race is a complex task and requires preparation, thought, and deep awareness. We suggest reading the following resource, as well as reviewing Appendix B where we provide an interview excerpt about a Black student’s racialized classroom experience.

Resource: “Race, subjectivity, and the interview process” by Christopher Dunbar, Jr., Dalia Rodriguez, and Laurence Parker in *Handbook of Interview Research* (Sage Publications, 2001).
<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588.n18>

STEP 4: ANALYSIS AND DEBRIEF

If the focus groups and/or interviews are recorded, then you'll need to decide whether you will transcribe the audio. There are benefits to transcription, the chief one being that a written record is easier to review and go through. However, transcription is not essential, especially since this research is not going to be used for publication nor presentation purposes. If you choose not to transcribe, you still have the recording to listen to and to take notes from.

As a team, you can choose to “divide and conquer” the recordings and notes, and assign portions to members. This way, all team members will have an opportunity to work with and make sense of the data collected.

Also as a team, you may want to decide on a uniform approach for data analysis. For example, you can decide on a set of questions that you will “ask” of the data, such as:

- What differences/similarities do you notice in participants' responses? If yes, what patterns do you notice, if any? Consider patterns by race/ethnicity and gender.
- If students identify instructors in their responses, are there themes that you notice in the faculty members' practices that are useful to capture in your notes?
- Are participants speaking about experiences that arise with racially minoritized students, or are they speaking about the experiences of students, generally, in the classroom?
- Do participants use more than one-word or short descriptions to describe their experiences? If yes, capture the description. For instance, do participants describe an instructor as 'nice' or 'hard to read,' or do they provide more description? Note: Any additional description that you capture must have been included in the interview /focus group. Be sure not to extrapolate beyond what participants provide during the discussion.

Once you've gone through, set up a time to do a team debrief. The purpose of the debrief is to pool together what you learned from your individual analyses, to see if there are patterns across the data you were assigned to go through, and to address questions that emerged. In addition, you could consider whether there are additional data you want / need to collect (e.g., other outcomes data disaggregated by race/ethnicity). Finally, the team debrief is an opportunity to sketch out next steps.

STEP 5: NEXT STEPS

In this final section, we draw on interviews with racially minoritized students about their experiences with math and in math classrooms. These interviews were done by one of us (Maxine) with another researcher using the questions provided in Appendix A. In reviewing the interviews, we were drawn to the following quotes from four students:

“I want to think he just has a natural gift for like, remembering. In like the first week he already knew everyone's names and, like I said, it's easy going class. So I think it allows for more understanding of the individual students rather than just, that's that guy who sits at that seat.” (Student 1)

“I feel like they, just how I said before that, [name of instructor], he did make an effort to make personal connections with the students. And, I understand it's like, it's hard because there are so many students, but just at least like talking a little bit to them instead of just teaching then going to your computer and just working on your computer and ignore the class, you know?” (Student 2)

“... when I had surgery he actually reached out like every week as I was recovering. And was like, 'Hey, how you doing? Here's the stuff for this week, if you have any questions let me know. Like, how are you doing?' Because it was something where I was just laid up for weeks. So I really felt like, oh, he really cares about how I'm doing, it's not just like, 'Well get this done so I can grade it,' you know.” (Student 3)

“I feel like, okay here we're doing math together and you're here doing math together with me. So I feel like he just makes the relationship with his students very ...(pause) I'm trying to think of the right word. But I wouldn't say casual. Humane makes it sound odd. But he just makes ... Friendly, nice. You can tell he cares about you, not only as his student, but as a person, and that he really, really wants to see everyone succeed.” (Student 4)

What do these quotes evoke for you? What do you see?

For us, these quotes signaled that students value instructors who make them feel cared for and who see them as people, not just as students in a classroom. This was one of the main patterns we detected from the student interviews and one we think can serve as the basis for shifts in practice. For example:

- Based on Student 1's comment, instructors can focus on getting to know students' names early in the semester, say by the end of the second week of class.
- Instructors can also think about asking students to complete a short "getting to know you" survey before the semester starts or on the first day of class. Questions can include things like: What is your major? What are you hoping to learn from this class? What has your experience been learning about [course subject] to date? Is there something you want me to know about you?
- Instructors can reserve a portion of every class--say, 5 minutes at the start--to do a general "check-in" to see how students are doing. There is no obligation for students to share and should be done on a voluntary basis. Such check-in's can signal to students that while the purpose of class is to focus on the subject, it is also a space to talk about things happening in their lives.

APPENDIX A: HOW TO CREATE A FOCUS GROUP / INTERVIEW GUIDE

A focus group / interview guide typically includes two parts: (1) introduction, and (2) the questions. It is in the introduction where you explain the “ground rules” of the focus group / interview, including things such as aims and participants’ rights. The notion of “ground rules” may seem formal, however, we encourage you to take a conversational approach in delivering the introduction. This helps set the tone of the focus group / interview as less of an interrogation or inquisition and more as a dialogue or exchange.

Here, we first provide a sample introduction script with notes explaining the rationale for the text. We then provide advice on developing an overall structure for your questions, along with examples and notes.

INTRODUCTION

Text	Notes
Thank you for taking the time today to be part of this [focus group / interview]. My name is _____. I am a [your role, e.g., instructor] in the ____ department at the [name of college].	Thank students for their participation, introduce yourself
The purpose of this [focus group / interview] is to [explain purpose]. This should last about [XX minutes]. Basically, what will happen is that I will ask a bunch of questions that I’d like to get your thoughts on. The questions will cover [offer a general description of the different buckets, see below].	Explain aims, time commitment, what the interview will cover.
You don’t have to answer all the questions, and in fact, if there is one you don’t want to answer, just let me know. You can say, “I’d like to move on,” and we’ll go to the next question. Also, if you find yourself during the [focus group / interview] feeling like this is not what you signed up for, you can let me know that you’d like to withdraw your participation. Frankly, even if after this is all done and you decide that you no longer want to be part of this, just tell me and I won’t use what you shared. No matter what, you will still receive the gift card.	Explain the voluntary nature of students’ participations and their rights in this process.
With your permission, I’d like to record this [focus group /	Ask for permission to

interview]. The recording helps me capture with accuracy what you share. Do know that you can stop the recording at any time or go “off the record” for a portion of the [focus group / interview].	audio record.
In addition to the recording, my colleague [provide name] will be taking notes. The notes are more like “back up” in case something goes wrong with the recorder, which can happen!	Explain notetaking.
The only folks who will listen to the recording and reading the notes are [name who]. We’ll be discussing what you share, with the hopes of making changes to our teaching and our classes.	Explain who will have access to the recording and notes.
So, that was a lot. Do you have any questions? If a question comes to you later, feel free to ask at that point.	Offer an opportunity for questions before starting.

QUESTIONS

In general, focus groups / interviews will have several buckets of questions. There is no set number, however, in general, two buckets include the opening and closing questions, while the remaining buckets are for substantive questions. It is likely that you won’t get to ask each question. That is OK and hence it is important that you are clear about:

- what you are looking to learn from the focus group / interview as a whole;
- how each bucket contributes to the overall set of aims;
- which questions are priority and which are optional (i.e., good to ask if there is time)

Time, meaning the proposed length of the focus group or interview, is one thing to keep in mind when deciding how many questions to include. Keep in mind, though, that it is possible that in an interview, there will only be time for five questions because the participant has a lot to share in response to those questions. It is equally possible that you can get through 20 questions because the participant does not have much to share, even after some probing.

The interview questions shared below were developed by Dr. Maxine Roberts and Dr. D-L Stewart for a project about the experiences of racially minoritized students in math classes. Consider these questions as

examples that you can incorporate into your own guide as is, or modify to fit your aims better.

Bucket 1: Opening and Rapport Building

These questions offer the opportunity to gather basic information from participants that will help distinguish students in the sample. This section is key for “setting the stage” with participants. Some of the questions may allow for additional probing, and help you introduce your questions later in the interview / focus group. For example, the length of time students have been at your college may shape their experience in different ways; you might explore this later in the discussion.

- What name would you like to be used as your pseudonym?
- How do you identify your race and ethnicity?
- How old are you?
- And how do you identify your gender and what pronouns should we use when referring to you?
- How long have you been a student at [name of institution]?
- Which math class are you in currently?
- What's your major?
- What had you say yes to participating in this study?

Bucket 2: Characterization of Instructors and Experiences in the Classroom

Students' classroom memories—with instructors and activities—are useful for understanding their classroom experiences. Consider the types of responses you may receive and the probing questions you might ask to learn more about their experiences.

- Can you tell me, of all your experiences, who was the best math teacher you ever had?
- Who was the worst math teacher?
- How does your current math instructor compare to those teachers?
- What are five words that you would use to describe your experiences in this math class? For each word selected, please share why you chose that descriptor.
- If you think about the things like the classroom syllabus for the course and the kinds of activities that you did in class, is there a specific activity or an interaction in the classroom that stands out for you? How did that activity make you feel or what did it make

you think?

Bucket 3: Interactions with Instructors and in the Classroom

Students' beliefs about the ways their instructors engage with them and their peers tell them whether or not they are valued as knowers and learners in the classroom and whether they are expected to succeed. These engagements shape how they interact in the classroom. These questions are useful for helping the interviewer learn about the nature of these engagements.

- How well do you think [your instructor] tries to get to know all the students in the class? How is that different from other math instructors?
- How well do you think your instructor tries to get to know you?
- How well do you think your instructor does with giving a variety of students the opportunity to ask questions and answer them?
- Do you feel like you have enough chances to ask and answer questions in class?

Bucket 4: Perceptions and Identity

By inquiring about students' self-perceptions and the perceptions that they believe instructors have of them, interviewers can understand the lens from which learners engage in the classroom. These questions begin by exploring the participant's self-perceptions, then transitions to their beliefs about instructors' perceptions.

- What is your perception of yourself as a math student?
- What perception do you think your instructor has of you as a math student? What makes you think this?
- In what ways do you think your identity affects your experience in this course?

Bucket 5: Advice for Instructors

With these questions, the interviewer positions the participants as the 'experts' and seeks their advice on classroom engagement. This category of questions is valuable because interviewers often use participants' responses to deduce implications for practice. Here, the interviewer provides a different type of engagement by giving students the opportunity to share their insights on this topic rather than inferring what is most helpful for students.

- If you could offer advice to instructors who are teaching math courses about how to support success for students who share your identities, what would you suggest?
- What other advice would you give instructors? What else would instructors need to know?

Bucket 6: Closing

With these questions, interviewers ‘close out’ the discussion by gathering any final information from participants. However, this section is not designed for interviewers to broach any new topics or gather additional information about what was addressed previously in the interview.

- Do you have anything else to add?
- Is there anything that I did not ask you about your instructor or your experiences in our classes that you would like to share?
- Is there a question you wished I asked but didn’t?
- Do you have any questions for me before we close?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW EXCERPT OF RACIALIZED CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE

In an interview with Maxine Roberts, Kendon Joseph (pseudonym), a Black male student, recalls an incident in a math class at a community college he attended. In the following excerpt, Kendon shared about the interaction he had with his math instructor.

As you read the excerpt, pay attention to three things: (1) Kendon's comments about his initial response to the interaction with his instructor; (2) the description of the body language the interviewer observed before deciding to probe further; and (3) how Maxine's use of probing questions reveals information that Kendon did not reveal early in the conversation.

Kendon: One day [the instructor] was going over the square root.

When you have a negative number in a square root, it turns into an imaginary number. I thought that was interesting because it was my first time seeing that. Then during class, he put us in groups to work on assignments and he called me outside--I'm thinking he called me to tell me I'm doing a great job. However, it was opposite. He told me he was gonna suspend me for a couple days. The class was three times a week, then he told me I'm disrupting the class, you know. He was just accusing me of things I wasn't doing. There was students who was being obnoxious, who was being loud and was really disrupting the class, I guess he thought I was being sarcastic, but I took my college classes very seriously. So, when he told me he was gonna suspend me, I was shocked...I've had many classes and the students are disrespectful and very loud and the teacher talk to them over and over and I've never seen a teacher suspend a student. I've never been suspended in life, so it made me very emotional. I was just in shock. I couldn't even tell my family.

[Maxine's notes: In general, Kendon's demeanor during many of our conversations was calm and cheery; however, during this discussion, his voice is louder than normal and he sounded agitated. It was clear that even retelling the details about this situation disturbed him. While he did not

identify the issue as racially-motivated at first, given my discussions with other participants in the study, I asked if he thought there might be a connection. Initially, Kendon seemed reluctant to say the situation has racial undertones, but then shares his honest perspective.]

Maxine: So why do you think he did that?

Kendon: Um, I mean it was a White gentleman. Obviously, I wasn't doing anything wrong. I found it interesting because I liked it, the math that he was explaining. It's not like I blurted it out, I just said it at a pretty low tone. He probably took offense to it or something.

Maxine: You bring up that he was White, do you think it was race-related?

Kendon: Indeed, because there was only a few Black students in the class and a majority was White and Hispanic. He was picking on this other Black kid as well. He suspended him as well.

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