

Strategies for Reducing Implicit Bias in the Classroom

What Is Implicit Bias and How Does It Impact a Learning Environment?

According to the National Institutes of Health (2022), “Implicit bias is a form of bias that occurs automatically and unintentionally, that nevertheless affects judgments, decisions, and behaviors” (para. 2).

The Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.) provides a similar definition: “Implicit bias refers to unconscious attitudes, reactions, stereotypes, and categories that affect behavior and understanding” (para. 1).

As mentioned in these definitions, implicit bias often occurs unconsciously but offends people exposed to it. Many factors are associated with such behavior, including childhood socialization, media exposure, and cultural environment. In a learning environment or classroom, implicit bias can affect a teacher’s perceptions of students and judgment of their performance. If left unchecked, implicit bias in the classroom may contribute to inequities and discrimination, unfair grading, and poor academic relationships between the teacher and the student.

Similarly, students may have implicit biases that affect their perceptions and interactions with peers and instructors. These biases can result in exclusion or the formation of stereotypes within the classroom or impede equitable and collaborative learning experiences. For instance, students may have biases that favor individuals from their own social or cultural groups leading to a lack of inclusion or empathy toward those from different backgrounds. The biases may affect students in local classes and even those who attend a semester abroad to fulfill their academic programs.

Some of the examples of implicit biases in a learning environment were identified as follows:

- A professor calling on certain students most frequently.
- The readings and multimedia materials chosen for any given lesson not representing or reflecting the diversity of the classroom.
- A presumption that international students have expertise or an interest in issues related to their race, ethnicity, or home country.
- A tendency to equate lower proficiency in spoken English with poor writing skills.
- Initiating a discussion on a hot topic, such as racism in the United States, without realizing that international students in the classroom may not understand the historical and cultural circumstances linked to the issue. (NAFSA, 2020, para. 5).

The Yale Center for Teaching and Learning (n.d.) lists similar examples and more.

How Can Instructors Minimize Implicit Bias in Their Classrooms?

According to the Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, teachers can reduce their implicit biases by following these four steps

- Self-Assess Implicit Biases
- Cultivate Inclusivity

- Solicit Feedback from Outside Observers
- Solicit Feedback from Students (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d., para. 3)

In addition, teachers can reduce implicit bias in their classrooms or other learning environments by implementing these inclusive teaching strategies:

1. Expanding content and materials. When planning lessons or preparing for a lecture, make a conscious effort to include a variety of examples of perspectives.
2. Holding all students to high standards. Holding them to high standards that are reachable for them individually and then expressing your faith that they can reach those standards
3. Encouraging mistakes. Creating a shame-free environment helps students develop a growth mindset.
4. Using props when possible. Being accommodating towards different learning styles and language barriers (

References

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