

Impact of Implicit Bias on Students

Implicit bias refers to the unconscious attitudes and assumptions that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions (De Houwer, 2019). These biases develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages (De Houwer, 2019).

Research has shown that before we even begin to engage with students, we often have formulated opinions based on the student's name, race, appearance, and other factors. Whether these biases are positive or negative, they can have an impact on our expectations, and these expectations can impact how we teach. Studies show that teacher expectations are closely linked to student achievement and success (Garcia, 2018).

Research has shown that repetitive microaggressions have a negative impact on an individual's self-esteem (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions can also negatively impact a person's sense of self-efficacy. Originating from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to engage in behaviors that support their success (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. Self-efficacy motivates us and can help us deal with setbacks and challenges (Bandura, 2009). A lack of self-efficacy can result in low academic performance.

Examples of Implicit Bias

- assuming that students who speak with an accent will have poor writing skills
- thinking that students who are affiliated with a particular identity group may be treated as experts on issues related to that group
- assuming that students from lower socioeconomic groups will have lower academic ambitions
- assuming that students with substandard writing abilities lack intellectual ability
- expectations that students of certain groups may have particular participation styles (e.g., quiet, demure, argumentative, forceful; Boysen & Vogel, 2009).

Mitigating the Impact of Implicit Bias on Students

- **Avoid asking any one student to speak for a group.** It is impossible to know what students' group identities mean to them or how that identity has affected their lives or points of view; therefore, avoid asking students to speak for a culture or group with which they may or may not identify. Instead, without calling on or pointing out specific students, ask for input from varied perspectives. For example, you might ask, "How does hospital privatization impact people in rural environments?" or, "What challenges could this design idea present to a person with physical disabilities?" Students are then able to choose if they want to share experiences of their own or of someone close to them.
- **Pay attention to pronouns.** When giving examples that refer to people, consider using a gender pronoun that runs counter to the stereotype. For example, if you are using an example about an airline pilot, you might use the pronoun "she" to refer to the pilot.
- **Identify people using identity characteristics only when relevant.** In some cases, race is relevant, such as "Dr. Samuel P. Massie Jr. was the first African American organic chemist to teach at the U.S. Naval Academy." However, in many cases, race is not relevant; for example, consider whether it is important to refer to a person's race in this sentence: "Dr. Gerald is an African American organic chemist who helps develop solar cell mixtures." If Dr. Gerald were White, his race would not be mentioned. By mentioning his race, it makes it seem as if it is notable that an African American man is an organic chemist.
- **Use visuals to broaden ideas about people.** When choosing pictures or videos of people, try to avoid images that reinforce stereotypes, and instead look for images that broaden students' ideas about other people or places.

References

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