

TOOL: IMPLICIT BIAS

Office of Equity and Inclusive Communities and Teaching & Learning Commons

Overview

This reflection-based activity guides instructors in understanding and exploring methods, to reduce their implicit biases. The purpose of this activity is to promote anti-racist teaching practices, support instructors in educating themselves further, and guide them in examining the impact that implicit biases can have in their classrooms. As instructors complete the activity, they will be empowered with area-leading, science-based tools that help to identify and manage the unconscious biases which are revealed. See this [video](#) resource to learn more.

Reflective Pause

Reflect on your current experiences as it relates to this topic.

Consider what you are looking forward to learning more of, or hope to be able to do more of, as you work towards developing anti-racist practices.

Goals

1. Understand implicit bias and how awareness of it can empower instructors to create inclusive classrooms, curriculum, and pedagogy.
2. Reflect on individual unconscious bias.

How-to-Guide

What is Bias?

Bias is “a leaning, inclination, bent or predisposition towards one side or another or a particular result” (Office of the Ombudsperson Province of British Columbia, 2024, p. 1).

Conscious (or Explicit Bias) is bias expressed directly and openly in such a way that it cannot be interpreted or understood differently.

Unconscious (or Implicit) “are biases that we are not aware of. They are your tendencies to prefer a thing, a person, or point of view at an unconscious level, and they are likely affecting your everyday decisions and attitudes”. (Office of the Ombudsperson Province of British Columbia, 2024, p. 3).

Why is this awareness important to us as instructors?

It is human nature to have implicit bias. Malcolm Gladwell (2006), in his book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, explores this subject matter deeply and comprehensively. All people will have implicit biases. Occasionally we develop these biases as survival mechanisms, enabling our brains to efficiently process large quantities of information. Our implicit biases control our perceptions of people and circumstances, as well as how we respond to both.

It is crucial therefore to regularly self-reflect on what our implicit biases are. There are tools that can assist us in self-identifying and further reflecting on our implicit biases.

Tools and Strategies

Self-reflective and mindful practice, which we explore in the activity section below, can help us establish situational awareness of the mental models that drive our behaviours (Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, n.d.) If educators make this kind of self-reflection an ongoing practice, implicit biases may be reduced. Instructors should consider a variety of strategies and positive classroom outcomes that come with discovering and addressing implicit bias, in themselves, and in their curriculum and pedagogy. The activity section of this document will guide instructors through an exercise to identify what mental models they may have and address what is revealed. As well there is an Instructor Resource section that provides further materials to help instructors explore the area of implicit bias and the activity which they complete below.

Over decades, social scientists have been working on instruments to assess unconscious bias. As Inclusive Teaching at University of Michigan reports, many of these started out as self-survey tools. Of the various tools available today, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) has risen as one of the most studied and well-used. Project Implicit, an ongoing study on implicit bias which remains on Harvard servers, uses the Implicit Association Test (IAT), a tool developed by Anthony Greenwald, Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington, and Mahzarin Banaji, Professor of Social Ethics at Harvard, to study prejudice in social settings.

Activity

An instructor can implement this activity at any point throughout the year. Consider beginning the term with a reflection activity as it can set the stage for offering an inclusive classroom experience for your students. It is advisable to keep revisiting this activity, and as well become curious and continually reflect on your teaching practice and how implicit bias can affect it.

Continual reflection helps to ensure instructors recognize that being anti-racist is not a state of being at any given moment or attributed to one activity. Instead, it is an intentional evaluation and adjustment of actions, thoughts, and behaviours (LSA Inclusive Teaching University of Michigan n.d.).

1. Setup:

- a) Arrange a desktop or laptop computer in a room without distraction.

2. Self-Assessment:

- a) Visit [Project Implicit](#)
- b) Select the Racial Bias test and any other bias test that you feel is relevant* to your classroom participant demographics

(Each test takes about 5-10 minutes).

* According to the founders of Project Implicit, The Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., Black people, homosexual people) and evaluations or stereotypes (e.g., good/bad, or athletic/clumsy).

3. Self-Reflective Practice:

After taking the RACE IAT (or any of the IAT relevant to the classrooms you have), we would suggest you reflect on your results. You may wish to use the following prompts in your reflection:

- How do you feel about your results? Are your feelings towards this activity negative or positive?
- How would you interpret these results? Are there any experiences or attitudes, from your past (upbringing, career etc.) that could help you to understand the results?
- Did you feel defensive or dismissive when you read your outcome? If you did, why do you think you felt this way?
- If you showed no implicit bias, do you feel your work as an instructor is done?
- After learning more about Implicit Bias and understanding the results, why do you think it is important to continue to reflect on unconscious biases?

4. Implicit Bias Management Methods:

Where biases have surfaced, you can work to counteract and minimize them, by gaining exposure and understanding. Some examples of activities that can be undertaken are:

1. Consciously expanding your network and developing new friendships or connections with those from that group, to help diversify and broaden your perspective.
2. Making a concerted effort to read literature and watch media that informs a better understanding of the uncovered population.
3. Locating a community group that works with this specific population (this could be hosted by the targeted population or others) and seeking out volunteer opportunities that assist in developing a better appreciation for the people from that group.

This is a sample list of methods to gain understanding and exposure. Instructors may use these practices regularly to help improve how they accommodate or host all learners in their classroom. Overall, the intentionality and genuineness of your efforts is critical to evaluating and reducing your bias.

Reflective Action Point

Reflect on your learning as you approach the end of this tool.

- What changes to your practice do you hope to implement?
- How can this tool support your anti-racist practice?

Instructor Resources

Instructors can use the resources below to expand on their learning on Implicit Bias after completing the activity outlined above.

TOOL: [Resources on Campus](#) – This tool includes resources available on campus for students and staff who may need mental health or cultural supports, as well as advice on reporting or addressing acts of racism. You should have these resources on hand when implementing this implicit bias activity.

Website: [OEIC Resources](#) – This website includes a list of resources by the Office of Equity &

Inclusive Communities department at KPU. Included is the Taskforce on Anti-Racism Final Report and Recommendations. Check back often for new content and resources.

Article: [Your Brain on Bias: 5 Steps to Keep Implicit Bias in Check](#) – points out the Deloitte study which states that “inclusive leaders are mindful of personal and organizational blind spots and self-regulate to help ensure ‘fair play.’” It also features the “A Mile in My Shoes” app listed under #2 of this resource section. (Implicit Bias Beginner friendly)

Virtual Reality App: [A Mile in My Shoes](#) – developed by Michigan State University can help all individuals recognize unconscious bias through different real-world situations. Instructors may find this VR tool helpful to use as an exercise for themselves or in the classroom.

Video and Toolkit: [UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach and Clinical and Translational Science Institute](#) – this website full of resources to educate individuals on implicit bias. It provides a thorough overview of the current state of the science on unconscious bias. There is also a summary of strategies to further assess and address unconscious bias along with a list of resources and references for those interested in learning more. (Implicit Bias Beginner friendly)

Website: [Equity & Inclusive Communities LibGuide](#) – This webpage was created by the KPU Library in conjunction with the Office of Equity & Inclusive Communities and includes a variety of resources (including film and web-based). There is also a link to the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), which KPU employees have access to free tools, workshops, and webinars.

Video: – [What is implicit bias?](#) – NYT/POV’s Saleem Reshamwala unscrews the lid on the unfair effects of our subconscious. (Implicit Bias Beginner friendly)

Article: [Measuring Implicit Bias in Schools](#) – this article probes the connection between bias and outcomes and explores how implicit bias can affect student outcomes. (Implicit Bias Beginner Friendly)

Article: [A Leader’s Guide to Talking about Bias](#) – This article suggests a path that educational leaders can take to adopt a mindset that can work through discomfort and help guide open and authentic conversations about bias in their educational institution. (Implicit Bias Beginner Friendly)

Article: [Responding to Bias at School](#) – Though prepared for K-12 educators, this resource can aid all educators with vetted resources to help instructors prepare for unsettling incidents. (Implicit Bias Beginner Friendly)

Book: [Unconscious Bias in Schools](#) – two seasoned educators describe the phenomenon of unconscious racial bias and how it negatively affects the work of educators and students in schools. “Regardless of the amount of effort, time, and resources education leaders put into improving the academic achievement of students of color[sic],” the authors write, “if unconscious racial bias is overlooked, improvement efforts may never achieve their highest potential.” (Implicit Bias Beginner Friendly)

Article: [Examining Racial Bias in Education: A New Approach](#) – This article covers areas of research on implicit racial associations in education, calling for collaboration between scholars of racial inequality in education and scholars of implicit racial associations. The research provides a new perspective for understanding for when school instructors and personnel engage in behaviours that reproduce racial inequality, often despite best intentions and commitments to racial equity. (Implicit Bias Advanced Level)

Article: [Implicit Bias Awareness: Resources and Activities](#) – This website provides a rich set of resources which instructors can explore and employ to learn more about implicit bias and apply the tools provided within their classrooms. (Implicit Bias Advanced Level)

Book: [Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking](#) – This book is a helpful read for instructors

who want to dive more deeply into the psychology of implicit bias. It introduces and explores the concepts of mental models and blind spots, and how decisions made quickly can be as important as ones made over an extended period. It explains how our instincts can betray us sometimes. Finally, it provides insights into how our first impressions and snap judgements can be educated and controlled. (Implicit Bias Advanced Level)

Module Series: [Implicit Bias](#) – The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race & Ethnicity (Ohio State University) has created a series of asynchronous, self-paced modules on Implicit Bias.

Website: [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#) – this website provides further information and resources about Implicit Bias, as well as connections to other areas such as microaggressions and intersectionality.

Guidance: [Sheridan College’s Inclusive Language Guide “Tip Sheet”](#) on Indigenous peoples, provides a wealth of guidance and information on appropriate and inclusive language and terminology related to Indigenous peoples.

Guidance: [Sheridan College’s Inclusive Language Guide “Tip Sheet”](#) on gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation and sex characteristics, provides a wealth of guidance and information on appropriate and inclusive language and terminology related to gender and sexual identity.

Guidance: [Sheridan College’s Inclusive Language Guide “Tip Sheet”](#) on persons with disabilities, provides a wealth of guidance and information on appropriate and inclusive language and terminology related to disabilities.

Guidance: [Sheridan College’s Inclusive Language Guide “Tip Sheet”](#) on race and ethnicity, provides a wealth of guidance and information on appropriate and inclusive language and terminology related to race and ethnicity.

References

- Equitable Teaching (2024). [Racial Bias Test](https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/racial-bias-test/). University of Michigan. <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/racial-bias-test/>
- Dhaliwal, T. K., Chin, M. J., Lovison, V. S., & Quinn, D. M. (2020, July 20). [Educator bias is associated with racial disparities in student achievement and discipline](#). Brown
- [Center on Education Policy](#).
- Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning. (2021). [Reflective Teaching](#). Yale
- UCSF Office of Diversity and Outreach (2024). [Unconscious Bias Training](#). University of California, San Francisco Office of Diversity and Outreach. <https://diversity.ucsf.edu/programs-resources/training/unconscious-bias-training>
- Office of the Ombudsperson Province of British Columbia. (2024). [Quick tips – Reducing bias in decision making](#). Ombudsperson British Columbia. <https://bcombudsperson.ca/assets/media/Quick-Tips-Bias.pdf>

Author Information

Written By: Reva George (Instructor, Business at NorQuest College)

Reviewed and Edited By: Rotem Lavy (Faculty Developer at NorQuest College) & Branka Turnbull (Instructor, Business at NorQuest College)

Adapted for the KPU context by: Daniel Benzmira (Education Strategist, Teaching & Learning Commons) and Dr. Nishan Perera (Director, Learning Technologies and Educational Development)

OEIC Reviewed by: Dr. Asma Sayed (Vice President, Equity and Inclusive Communities, Office of Equity & Inclusive Communities)

About the authors

Office of Equity and Inclusive Communities

Teaching & Learning Commons