

# Reducing Implicit Bias and Explicit Bias



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*Before delving into the chapter's contents, take a few minutes to work through the following reflection questions. There is space provided below for your responses. We revisit variations of these reflection questions at the end of the chapter.*

- How do I define the difference between implicit bias and explicit bias?
- What influences my perception of my student's ability and capacity to learn?
- What strategies can I employ to address my implicit bias?
- What strategies can I employ to address my explicit bias?
- What do I hope to learn from this chapter?

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## IT STARTS WITH YOU

Surveys show that teachers enter the profession because they want to make a difference in the lives of children, and contribute to the greater good of society (Menzies et al., 2015; Ni & Rorrer, 2018). Despite these good intentions, the reality is that our implicit biases are at work. Staats (2015) insists:

In education, the real-life implications of implicit biases can create invisible barriers to opportunity and achievement for some students—a stark contrast to the values and intentions of educators and administrators who dedicate their professional lives to their students' success. Thus, it is critical for educators to identify any discrepancies that may exist between their conscious ideals and unconscious associations so that they can mitigate the effects of those implicit biases, thereby improving student outcomes and allowing students to reach their full potential. (p. 33)

Acknowledging and owning our biases may be uncomfortable, but it is necessary if we are to reduce the impact of implicit and explicit biases to provide equitable access and opportunities to minoritized and marginalized students. In this chapter, we provide you with strategies, resources, and examples. You can use these tools to reduce implicit bias and explicit bias as you build your culturally responsive teaching skills within Dynamic Equitable Learning Environments (DELE) by:

- Describing the differences between implicit bias and explicit bias
- Understanding and having awareness of any implicit biases we may currently hold
- Exploring strategies for reducing implicit bias in teaching and learning settings
- Discussing ways to block explicit bias from entering in-person and online classrooms

As you read through the chapter, we hope that you not only come to a greater understanding of how implicit bias and explicit bias can impact different groups of students in your in-person and online classrooms, but also that you feel confident in having the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to address it.

## DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN IMPLICIT BIAS AND EXPLICIT BIAS

As mentioned in Chapter 1, unconscious bias is what is considered an implicit bias. There is also explicit bias. A simple way to remember the difference between the two is that implicit bias is invisible to the person who

has the bias whereas explicit bias is exposed and open. More formal and detailed definitions are presented in Table 2.1, to provide you with context to successfully differentiate between implicit bias and explicit bias.

Table 2.1 • Definitions of Implicit Bias and Explicit Bias

IMPLICIT BIAS	EXPLICIT BIAS
<p>The Racial Equity Tools (2021) website describes implicit bias by stating: “Implicit bias, also known as hidden bias, refers to the numerous ways in which we organize patterns ‘thus creating real-world implications.’ Exposure to structural and cultural racism has enabled stereotypes and biases to penetrate deep into our psyches. Implicit bias is one part of the system of inequity that serves to justify racist policies, practices and behaviors that persist in the mainstream culture and narratives” (para. 1).</p>	<p>The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University (2021) describes explicit bias by stating: “In the case of explicit or conscious [bias], the person is very clear about his or her feelings and attitudes, and related behaviors are conducted with intent. This type of bias is processed neurologically at a conscious level as declarative, semantic memory, and in words” (para. 1).</p>

You now have a shorter description and a more detailed definition of both implicit bias and explicit bias. Sometimes it is helpful to hear examples, too. Scan the QR code to watch and listen to this short video titled “Implicit Bias vs Explicit Bias: What’s the Difference?” that effectively, yet succinctly explains the differences between implicit bias and explicit bias.



Scan this QR code to watch a short video titled “Implicit Bias vs. Explicit Bias: What’s the Difference?”

## STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING IMPLICIT BIAS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

In the previous chapter, we learned about implicit bias, what it looks like across learning contexts, and its impact on teaching and learning. Here, we learn about five strategies to reduce implicit bias in teaching and learning: (1) take an implicit bias test, (2) become a reflective practitioner through journaling, (3) develop empathy, (4) collect data of teaching practices, and (5) use grading rubrics. While not exhaustive, these strategies will help make you more aware of your implicit biases and provide you with tools to minimize the impact on student learning.

### #1: Take an Implicit Bias Test

To reduce your implicit bias, you need to first acknowledge and understand it. This can be accomplished by taking an implicit bias test. Project Implicit (2011) offers the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which:

measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., Black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or

stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). The main idea is that making a response is easier when closely related items share the same response key. (para. 1)

See Anti-Bias Exercise 2.1 to take the test and reflect on what you learned about your implicit biases.

## ANTI-BIAS EXERCISE 2.1

After reviewing the instructions and disclosures, take the following implicit bias test from Harvard University and Project Implicit by scanning the QR code.



What did you learn about your implicit biases?

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### #2: Become a Reflective Practitioner by Keeping a Journal

Engaging in critical self-reflection by keeping a journal can help raise your self-awareness about how your implicit biases are influencing teaching and learning in both in-person and online classes. There are a number of different ways that you can prompt your regular self-reflection, for example:

- **Reflect on a specific exchange or encounter in class.** Describe what happened. What could you have done differently? What can you do to prepare for the next time a similar encounter occurs?
- **Reflect on a specific student in the class.** What are your perceptions of the student? What are your expectations for the student's success? What are the sources of your perceptions and expectations?

- **Consider your students' perspectives.** If your students were to describe you, what would they say? Would the students of color in your class agree? Would the female students in your class concur? Why do you think these would be their perspectives on you and your teaching? What can you do to learn and grow?

These are just a few examples of prompts that you can use to initiate your self-reflection. Such reflection activities are important to promote greater self-awareness. See Anti-Bias Exercise 2.2 for additional insight on how you can recognize and address your implicit bias.

## ANTI-BIAS EXERCISE 2.2

Scan the QR code to watch this TedTalk by Jennefer Witter, "How Prejudiced Are You? Recognizing and Combating Unconscious Bias."

Record your initial responses to the TEDTalk and consider the implications for your first impressions of your students.




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### #3: Develop Empathy

Implicit bias is rooted in limited experience with and understanding of people who you perceive to be different; they do not read as part of your in-group. Empathy—the ability to understand another's perspective and emotions; in other words, to walk in someone else's shoes—has been shown to reduce implicit bias and its impact on teaching and learning (Okonofua et al., 2016; Whitford & Emerson, 2019). Suttie (2016) recommends that teachers develop empathy for their students by learning about students' lives. Empathy should be enduring and inform how you relate to your students. See Anti-bias Exercise 2.3 to work through potential approaches that can be leveraged to develop empathy for your students.

## ANTI-BIAS EXERCISE 2.3



Choose one of these five approaches to develop empathy for your students by learning more about them:

1. Ask students to complete a picture or diagram of their family, friends, and other people who are important in their lives (depending on age level).
2. Have lunch with one of your students.
3. Interview one of your student's parents/caregivers.
4. Conduct a home visit, in person or virtually.
5. Conduct a community walk or a virtual tour of a community agency.

After you complete one (or more) of these activities, record your experience and reflections here.

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### #4: Collect Data on Your Everyday Teaching Practices

*Is it possible that you are calling on your students who come from a higher socioeconomic background more than your students who come from a lower socioeconomic background?*

*Is it possible that you are grading the girls differently than you grade the boys?*

*Is it possible that you are more likely to identify when a student of color is misbehaving than you are when a White student is misbehaving?*

While we may want to believe that we do not engage in such teaching practices, without data, it is difficult to be sure. To identify and address your implicit biases, you are encouraged to collect data on your teaching practices. Staats (2015) elaborates, "gathering meaningful data can bring to light trends and patterns in disparate treatment of individuals and

throughout an institution that may otherwise go unnoticed” (p. 33). Staats continues, “doing so, of course, is easier said than done, given that educators are constantly pressed for time, face myriad challenges, and need crucial support from administrators to effectively manage student behavior” (p. 33).

To assist with data collection, Shah et al. (2021) developed a tool called EQUIP (Equity Quantified in Participation). EQUIP is “a customizable observation tool for tracking patterns in student participation” (para. 1), and can be used in real-time observations or with video recordings. EQUIP generates analytics of the number of times a student participates and the number of opportunities that an instructor makes available for students to engage. Such data is an integral part of teacher reflection and can help to shape teaching practices in Dynamic Equitable Learning Environments.



Scan this QR code to visit the EQUIP website.

Teachers can also request student data for careful analysis of the influence of implicit bias. For example, student discipline data might be revealing and could bring about shifts in thinking and behavior. Similarly, careful consideration of differences in students’ academic achievement might also inspire deeper reflection on the influence of implicit biases and how such biases can be addressed and adjusted. By taking greater responsibility for the roles we play as teachers, we can unveil and unpack how our implicit biases may be influencing student learning. See Anti-bias Exercise 2.4 for guidance on how to more closely examine explicit bias in your teaching practice.

## ANTI-BIAS EXERCISE 2.4



Choose an area of your teaching that you would like to more closely examine for the influence of implicit bias, for example, participation or discipline. For one week, keep a daily tally of which students participate in class, how often, and who does not. Or keep a daily tally of which students are disciplined, the nature of the infraction, the severity of the punishment, and who is not disciplined. At the end of the week, carefully analyze the data to identify patterns and omissions. Reflect on which implicit biases that you might see at work in the data, and consider how you might go about addressing this.

### #5: Use Grading Rubrics

Assessment is also a place where the influence of implicit bias is evident. Quinn (2020) conducted a study to examine the influence of implicit racial bias on a third-grade writing sample that was essentially the same except the students’ names were different. He found teachers were likely to grade the student with a name that signaled White more leniently

than a student with a name that signaled Black. Quinn (2020) conducted the same experiment using a rubric and determined that the teacher's implicit bias decreased when grading the writing assignment. To address the impact of implicit bias on grading, consider removing the students' names and using a discrete rubric with a few direct criteria to assess student learning.

## IDENTIFYING EXPLICIT BIAS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Thus far in Chapter 2, we have focused on strategies to reduce the impact of implicit bias in teaching and learning across contexts. Now, we turn our attention to explicit bias. Explicit bias is the traditional form of bias, when people are fully conscious and aware of their attitudes and beliefs about a person or group. Annamma and Morrison (2018) caution that the current trend toward implicit bias should not overlook teachers who subscribe to overtly racist beliefs that create hostile learning environments. In Table 2.2, we provide examples of explicit bias in in-person and online learning contexts.

Table 2.2 • Examples of Explicit Bias in In-Person and Online Learning Environments

EXPLICIT BIAS	IN-PERSON LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS	ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
<b>Interaction with students</b>	A teacher compliments a Latinx student, telling him that he is different from his classmates and that she sees him doing great things in his life.	A teacher insists that the English Language Learners write in the chat in English, thereby limiting the students' learning and participation in class.
<b>Lesson plan development</b>	A teacher creates word problems for a math test based on slavery and the Underground Railroad, for example, how many miles could eight slaves travel in 1 hour?	When a student posts a complaint in the online "water cooler" area that the history class does not cover women's contributions, the teacher counters with a typed response to the class that women did not win wars.
<b>Student discipline</b>	In an outburst, a teacher tells a student who regularly causes disruptions in her class that he will never amount to anything more than the men in front of the liquor store that she passes every day on her way to school.	A teacher removes a student by placing them in a virtual "waiting room" during a live online class session, as an equivalent of sitting in the hallway after they make a disruptive comment for the second time.



EXPLICIT BIAS	IN-PERSON LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS	ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
<b>Grading assignments</b>	A teacher lowers her expectations of an Indigenous student's performance on an exam because they believe this is the best that the student can do.	A teacher tells a colleague, "I match the student's learning management system's online profile picture with their 'ethnic' name, and I already know they are going to struggle in my class."
<b>Interacting with the families</b>	A teacher asks a colleague to attend a parent-teacher conference with her because she is afraid a Black mother is going to be very aggressive and she wants a witness in her defense.	Frustrated by a student's weak internet connection, a teacher questions parents' priorities when they see a large flat-screen television in the background of the student's Zoom meetings instead of paying for a more expensive internet service that would provide the student with a higher bandwidth and faster connection.

## BLOCKING EXPLICIT BIAS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Here, we focus on four strategies to block explicit bias in teaching and learning: (1) making yourself uncomfortable; (2) educating yourself on history and sociopolitical context; (3) understanding the sociopolitical consequences of racism; and (4) moving beyond reflection to raise critical consciousness. While not exhaustive, these strategies will help you mitigate the influence of explicit biases in your teaching and learning.

***Make Yourself Uncomfortable:*** To challenge and disrupt our explicit biases, we must make ourselves uncomfortable. This entails placing ourselves in unfamiliar settings where we are in the minority. This might include visiting a new place of worship or attending an event in a new neighborhood. Such cross-cultural experiences challenge our assumptions, disrupt our biases, and offer counternarratives to the stories we tell ourselves about people who are different from us.

***Educate Yourself on History and Influences on the Sociopolitical Context in Which Your Students Live:*** Our explicit biases are often

rooted in a lack of knowledge and understanding about history. The omitted stories of minoritized and marginalized communities contribute to the stereotypes about their populations. By understanding history from their perspectives, new interpretations and understandings of the groups and of ourselves can emerge. Such education can take place by reading history books written by scholars of color and watching documentaries that tell a more complete and complex story of human history.

***Understand the Sociopolitical Consequences of Racism and Discrimination on Students:*** With an evolved understanding of history, we can develop an understanding of the sociopolitical forces shaping our current context, particularly the context shaping our students' lived experiences. Such an understanding is key to culturally responsive pedagogy. For example, Ladson-Billings (2014) emphasized the importance of teachers' acknowledgment of the sociopolitical ramifications of race and culture, as well as their recognition of how racism and discrimination impact students. With a keen understanding of the sociopolitical context, explicit biases about the deficits of the marginalized status of certain communities will be challenged and dismantled.

***Move Beyond Reflection to Raise Your Critical Consciousness:*** Reflection is a place for educators to start but not to end their efforts to address their biases. To eliminate explicit biases, it is important to understand how such biases are connected to and reinforced by structural inequities in schools. Advancing reflection to raise critical consciousness will call into question explicit biases and interrogate the underlying assumptions. Annamma and Morrison (2018) assert:

We extend this critical consciousness raising to explicitly address racism; this conscious raising must explicitly consider racism's intersections with other marginalizing oppressions, both in the classroom and society. For educators to engage in a radical critique, they must understand how societal inequities are (re)produced . . . and how shifts in their own consciousness and understanding of learning can disrupt intersectional injustices. (p. 123)

Developing critical consciousness will not only enable a teacher to disrupt their own explicit biases, but also to develop a needed critique of intersecting inequities and injustices taking place in schools and society.

## ANTI-BIAS EXERCISE 2.5



To address your explicit bias, educate yourself by engaging with critical essays, podcasts, and other programming. For example, watch the *13th* by Ava DuVernay or read Chris Collins' essay, "What Is White Privilege, Really?" There are ample equity and social justice educational resources available. Choose one such resource, and use the space below to reflect on how what you learned challenged your thinking and understanding.

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### WHAT'S NEXT?

We hope that you feel more confident in your understanding of implicit bias and explicit bias and how they impact in-person and online teaching and learning environments. Regardless of the prevalence of implicit bias and explicit bias, as culturally responsive teachers, we can reduce bias in our classrooms and strengthen the DELE that we are crafting with our students. Before you go on to Chapter 3, which is focused on eliminating microaggressions, revisit the reflection questions below to see how your thinking around implicit bias and explicit bias has changed. Also, complete this chapter's culturally sustaining checklist and action plan.



### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

*You have worked through Chapter 2 and explored the importance of reducing both implicit and explicit bias in in-person and online teaching and learning environments. Take a few minutes to read through and reflect on the questions below. They may seem familiar because they are variations of the ones you completed prior to reading this chapter. Once you have recorded your responses, go back to the beginning of the chapter to see how your knowledge, awareness, and skills surrounding implicit and explicit bias have expanded.*

*(Continued)*



## Appendix 2.1

### Culturally Sustaining Checklist: Addressing Unconscious Bias

On a scale of 1–4, please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly Agree

ON A SCALE OF 1–4, INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF AWARENESS.	AWARENESS	NOTES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:
	I am aware that teachers' bias can be either implicit or explicit.	
	I am aware that implicit bias is unintentional.	
	I am aware that explicit bias is intentional.	
ON A SCALE OF 1–4, INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE.	KNOWLEDGE	NOTES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:
	I know the difference between implicit and explicit bias.	
	I know that implicit bias can be hurtful to students and families.	
	I know that explicit bias contributes to racism.	
ON A SCALE OF 1–4, INDICATE YOUR LEVEL OF SKILL.	SKILLS	NOTES FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT:
	I can identify instances of implicit bias.	
	I can identify instances of explicit bias.	
	I can conduct self-awareness techniques to reduce instances of implicit and explicit bias.	

## Appendix 2.2

Action Plan: How will I work toward reducing implicit and explicit biases?

What are three actions you can take to use what you have learned in this chapter to reduce implicit bias and/or explicit bias within in-person and online teaching and learning environments?

1.

2.

3.

What supports or information do you need to successfully complete the three actions you listed above?

1.

2.

3.

What challenges and barriers do you expect to be faced with in carrying out the three actions you listed above, and what ideas do you have for addressing them?

CHALLENGES/BARRIERS	IDEAS TO ADDRESS THEM
1.	
2.	
3.	

How do you expect your students to benefit from you taking the three actions listed above?

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## Appendix 2.3 Responsive Resources

Scan the QR codes below to access the following resources as you continue to learn about reducing implicit bias and explicit bias.

RESOURCE TYPE	TITLE	URL
Article	“Teacher Bias: The Elephant in the Classroom” ( <i>The Graide Network</i> )	
Book	<i>Implicit Bias in Schools: A Practitioner's Guide</i> by Gina Laura Gullo, Kelly Capatosto, and Cheryl Staats (Routledge)	
Podcast	“Implicit Bias with Mahzarin Banaji” (Opinion Science)	
Video	“When Implicit Bias Becomes Explicit   Megan Fuciarelli” (TEDx Talks)	

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