

Unconscious Bias in the Classroom

A Reflective Poster for Educators

Our unconscious mind compiles beliefs, values, and experiences that shape how we see the world — and our students. These six biases can influence our judgements without us realising. Recognising them is the first step to creating a more inclusive, equitable classroom for every student.

Confirmation Bias	Conformity Bias	Affinity Bias
DEFINITION <i>The tendency to search for and interpret information that confirms existing beliefs, filtering out contradicting evidence.</i>	DEFINITION <i>Our need to belong causes us to adapt thinking or behaviour to match the group — even when it doesn't reflect our own genuine view.</i>	DEFINITION <i>The tendency to favour people who share similar interests, backgrounds, and experiences — we feel more comfortable around people like us.</i>
IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Do you dismiss information that contradicts your preconceptions about a student? - Do you label students who challenge your thinking as 'difficult'? - Do you unconsciously share your own biases with students as fact? - What makes something 'right' or 'wrong' in your room — and how do you model this?	IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Have you formed opinions about a student based on what colleagues told you before meeting them? - Do you agree with the loudest voice in staff discussions rather than your own judgement? - Do students change behaviour depending on who they are with? - Are there unspoken school norms you follow without questioning?	IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Are there students you connect with more readily? What do you have in common? - How do you react to students whose values or lifestyle are unfamiliar to you? - Do you gravitate toward certain colleagues and limit your professional perspective? - Can you truly see your classroom from your least-similar student's perspective?
WHAT YOU CAN DO - Actively seek perspectives that challenge your assumptions. - Build in reflection time to check judgements are evidence-based. - Model intellectual humility and openness to being wrong.	WHAT YOU CAN DO - Create space for dissenting voices in team discussions. - Form your own student observations before reading others' files. - Nurture authentic thinking in students rather than group conformity.	WHAT YOU CAN DO - Intentionally build relationships with students least like you. - Seek peer feedback on patterns of attention and opportunity. - Audit classroom resources to represent a broader range of students.

Halo & Horns Effect	Anchoring Bias	Fluency Heuristic Bias
DEFINITION <i>The halo effect: one positive trait creates an overall favourable impression. The horns effect: one negative trait creates a lasting negative view.</i>	DEFINITION <i>We rely too heavily on the first piece of information we receive about a person. That initial anchor shapes all subsequent judgements.</i>	DEFINITION <i>We equate linguistic fluency with intellectual ability. Research shows assessors consistently rate identical content higher when delivered in fluent, accent-free English — operating constantly and largely invisibly in multilingual classrooms.</i>
IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Is your positive impression of a student based on a single trait (e.g. neatness, politeness)? - Does one difficult incident colour your whole view of a student? - Are personal impressions leaking into how you assess student work? - Have you been surprised when a 'top' student struggled, or a 'difficult' one shone?	IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Did a strong first impression of a student persist longer than it should? - Do you reference a student's early performance when making current decisions? - How does information received before you meet a student set your expectations? - Is there a student you're under- or over-estimating based on outdated information?	IN YOUR CLASSROOM - Do you rate a student's ideas as less sophisticated when expressed in accented or non-standard English? - Are participation marks inadvertently rewarding fluency over intellectual contribution? - Do multilingual students get fewer opportunities to contribute in class discussion? - Are your assessment criteria separating language proficiency from conceptual understanding?
WHAT YOU CAN DO - Use clear rubrics to reduce subjective impressions in assessment. - Try anonymous or peer marking for more equitable outcomes. - Regularly 'reset' your view of each student with fresh eyes.	WHAT YOU CAN DO - Deliberately 'start fresh' with students each new term. - Minimise anchoring information before forming your own observations. - Build regular review points to reassess assumptions based on current evidence.	WHAT YOU CAN DO - Separate language proficiency from content knowledge in assessment rubrics. - Offer multiple modes of demonstration: written, visual, oral, or multimodal. - Ask yourself: 'What is this student actually showing they understand?'