

Demonstrating Awareness of Biases Avoiding Unconscious Assumptions

(Blue text is for our reference only)

Title: Avoiding Unconscious Assumptions

Description:

We all make assumptions. Let's explore how to check our assumptions so we can empower our students. This lesson will help you gain awareness of common unconscious assumptions made by tutors so you can support your student's success.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

- Identify unconscious assumptions.
- Apply strategies to prevent making unconscious assumptions while tutoring.

How would you describe your tutoring experience and skills?

1- beginning tutor

5- expert tutor

Scenario 1:

You are working with a student named Shelby. After a few sessions of tutoring Shelby in math, you notice she takes a longer time to solve the problems than her peers. On one particular day, you are working with a small group of students on an assignment. Everyone in the group has completed the assignment, except for Shelby. She is slowly working through the problems and taking her time.



[\[photo image\]](#)

[\[Open-Decide/predict\]](#)

1. What exactly would you say or how would you respond to Shelby to help her with learning?

[\[Predict/Decide - MCQ\]](#)

2. Which of the following statements to Shelby would best support her in her learning?

- A. "Shelby, you don't have to complete the last two problems on the assignment. As I want to make sure that you stay on track with the other students, and we will be going over the assignment soon."
- B. "It seems this assignment may be too hard for you. Shelby, tell me which problems you are struggling with solving so I can help you. Your success is my success. I really want you to learn how to solve these math problems."
- C. **"Shelby, I like how you are taking your time and working through the problems. Please explain to me how you are solving the problems on the assignment."**
- D. "Shelby, I noticed you are always the last one done. I am going to give you extra time on assignments so you are not rushed and can complete your work at your own pace."

[Explain- Open]

3. Why do you think the approach you selected in the previous question will best support Shelby in her learning?

[Explain- MCQ]

4. Which of the following statements aligns with the rationale you chose and explained in the previous two questions.

- A. Assigning problems that are too hard for a student can harm a student's self esteem. Tutors need to ensure they are giving students problems that they are able to complete in a reasonable amount of time.
- B. **By praising a student for being on task, you are providing positive reinforcement and increasing her motivation. Prompting the student to explain how they are solving the problem assists the tutor in determining the student's understanding.**
- C. It is important that students all understand the material and problems together when tutors are working with a small group of students. When students learn at the same pace it makes tutoring more efficient.
- D. By telling Shelby to work faster you are ensuring that all students are learning the same concepts and at the same time. This also ensures the student does not miss the next activity or future instruction.

Research Recommendations

The correct answer for Question 2 is Option C, as the response praises the students for being on task and makes no assumptions about their learning.

"Shelby, I like how you are taking your time and working through the problems. Please explain to me how you are solving the problems on the assignment."

Tutors should avoid making assumptions such as assuming the student does not know how to answer the problem or is lacking understanding because it is taking them a long time to complete the assignment. This is an *unconscious assumption*, or bias, made by the tutor. In the other answer options, the tutor made an unconscious assumption that the student did not know how to complete the problems or was struggling. This unconscious assumption caused the tutor to lower their expectations for the student by giving them extra time or removing some of the problems they had to complete.

Research shows that students perform better and learn more when held to high expectations. Sometimes, tutors may lower their expectations or make an assignment easier for a student because they assume they cannot learn the content or because they feel empathetic towards them. You can lessen the impact of making unconscious assumptions by first discovering your blind spots and then actively working to remove any stereotypes or attitudes that may affect your interactions with students. One powerful strategy to prevent making unconscious assumptions while tutoring is to ask yourself questions self-checking for bias. Some questions to ask yourself, include:

What makes me think that?

What evidence leads me to that conclusion?

Would this decision be different if the student was of a different race or background?

How would I make this decision if this were someone close to me, like a close friend or family member?

When people are aware that unconscious bias exists, they are more likely to try to correct it. Increasing awareness of your own unconscious biases takes time. By asking yourself questions prompting self-reflection of your own thoughts and assumptions, you are making progress in limiting the impact of making unconscious assumptions.

(Fiarman, 2016)

[Predict - Open Response]

5. In your own words, please explain why it is important to avoid making assumptions about student learning?

6. How much do you agree or disagree with the expert belief of using strategies to prevent making unconscious assumptions or displaying bias?

Strongly disagree-1

Somewhat disagree-2

No opinion-3

Somewhat agree-4

Strongly agree-5

7. Explain why you agree or disagree.

8. [Explain- Multiple Choice]

One student is working with a tutor on writing a five paragraph essay. When the tutor messages the student with guidance on how to structure the essay, the student always replies with, “K”, a shortened form of “okay.”

Which of the tutor’s responses shows the tutor making an unconscious assumption?

- A. **“If you want to get done quicker, I can finish the rest of the essay. This way you will complete your essay.”**
 - B. “Can you reply to me with more than “K”? I cannot tell if you understand what I am saying.”
 - C. “Please explain how you want to structure the rest of your essay? This will help you in drafting the rest of your essay.”
 - D. “When you type merely “K,” I cannot determine if you understand what I am trying to say. If you don’t understand, please tell me so I can help you.”
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Research Recommendation

Studies show that tutors should avoid making assumptions about students' learning. While three of the tutor responses in Question 8 do not make assumptions about the student’s learning, the following does:

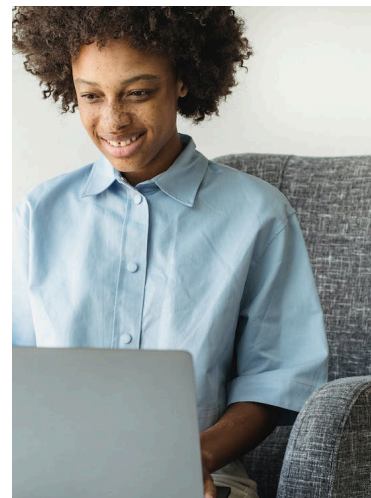
“If you want to get done quicker, I can finish the rest of the essay. This way you will complete your essay.”

In this response, the tutor lowered the expectations of the student by completing the student’s work for them. Although the tutor had good intentions as they wanted the student to complete their essay, lowering expectations hinders students ability to learn.

Scenario 2

You are working remotely with a 7th grade student, Quinn, on their math homework. You and Quinn are discussing a math problem by using the chat feature. Quinn keeps using multiple punctuation marks when asking a question or making a statement. Some examples of Quinn’s messages are shown below:

“What do I do now???”
“Ok!!!!”



"Is this correct???"

[\[photo image\]](#)

[\[Open response\]](#)

9. What exactly would you say or how would you respond to Quinn to help them with learning?

[\[MCQ\]](#)

10. Which of the tutor's responses to Quinn would best support his learning?

- A. "I like that you are very eager to finish the problem. Let me show you the correct way to solve it so we can finish up."
- B. "It is not grammatically correct to use several punctuation marks. As your tutor, it is my job to teach you proper grammar."
- C. "I can tell you are in a hurry. Show me the problem you are having the most trouble with so I can quickly help you. It is important to me that you learn and understand math."
- D. **"I like how you are asking questions and seeking help. Let's answer some of your questions and work through this together."**

11. [\[Explain- Open\]](#)

Why do you think the approach you selected in the previous question will best support Quinn in his learning?

[\[Predict/Decide - MCQ\]](#)

12. Which of the following statements aligns with the rationale you chose and explained in the previous two questions.

- A. It is crucial that tutors are aware of time and are efficient in finding where students are having the most difficulty. Showing a student the correct way to tackle a problem, particularly when students are impatient is important.
- B. Praising a student for being excited to work on their school work is important. In addition, tutors should show students the correct ways to solve problems so they can get the problems correct.
- C. **Telling a student that you like them asking questions and seeking help encourages them to stay engaged. Working problems together keeps students motivated and allows for ownership of their learning.**
- D. Although tutors should focus on math assignments and lessons with students, it is important that tutors educate the whole child and don't assume that they understand correct grammar and other subjects.

Research Recommendations

Research says tutors should avoid making assumptions without any evidence to support their thoughts. Option B, is the correct answer as it is the only tutor response that does not demonstrate a tutor making an assumption about a student's actions or learning.

"I like how you are asking questions and seeking help. Let's answer some of your questions and work through this together."

In the other answer options, the tutor made an unconscious assumption that the student did not know how to complete the problems, was in a hurry, or did not know proper grammar. In some options, these unconscious assumptions caused the tutor to lower their expectations of the student by giving them the correct answer. Tutors can prevent making unconscious assumptions by asking themselves reflective questions prompting them to search for evidence that makes them come to certain conclusions. For example, tutors can ask themselves, "What makes me think that?" or "What evidence leads me to that conclusion?" as a strategy to avoid making unconscious assumptions.

Feedback

Indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

This module was valuable.

Strongly disagree-1
Somewhat disagree-2
No opinion-3
Somewhat agree-4
Strongly agree-5

I can apply what I have learned from this module to my tutoring.

Strongly disagree-1
Somewhat disagree-2
No opinion-3
Somewhat agree-4
Strongly agree-5

Please provide any additional comments or feedback related to this training module.

Further Information

For more information regarding how to demonstrate awareness of bias, check out the resources below:

[Unbiasing by Google](#)

[Unconscious Bias: When Good Intentions Aren't Enough](#)
[Project Implicit](#)

References:

Fiarman, S. E. (2016). Unconscious bias: When good intentions aren't enough. *Educational Leadership*, 74(3), 10-15.

https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Unconscious-Bias_Ed-Leadership.pdf

Ruhl, C. (July 2020). Implicit or Unconscious Bias.

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/implicit-bias.html>