

# The “Knowledge Base” of Self: Uncovering Hidden Biases and Unpacking Privilege

## Chapter Five

- I. Paths to Effective Teaching: Exploring Bias and Privilege
- II. Exploring Your Own Bias
- III. “Unpacking” Privilege
- IV. How Exploring Your Biases and Privileges Makes You a Better Teacher
- V. Addressing Your Biases and Privileges in the Classroom
- VI. Conclusion: Getting Started Exploring Your Biases and Unpacking Your Privilege

In your quest to harness the instructional power of diversity-related dynamics in your classroom, one of the most important “knowledge bases” is self-knowledge. Not only must you be keenly aware of your own identities and background (and how they will create dynamics of difference and sameness in the classroom), but you also must be cognizant of your own beliefs and perspectives and how those may be influencing your classroom leadership.

The challenge here is that our beliefs and perspectives are not always obvious, even to ourselves. Indeed, it is the hidden or subconscious presumptions, biases, and prejudices that can sometimes undermine our overt declarations of high expectations for our students.

As we will discuss below, the process of “knowing thyself” serves as a key foundation for becoming an effective teacher in your classroom in at least two ways. First, this process helps a teacher develop empathy and understanding about his or her students’ backgrounds and perspective. Second, looking at your own biases and privileges helps you interact more effectively with people in the school community because you develop a better understanding of your perspectives, their perspectives, and how any differences between them might affect your interactions.

For these reasons, excellent teachers of all backgrounds reflect on their own perspectives, seeking out patterns of thought and hidden assumptions that might be hampering or supporting their role as the instructional leader of their classroom. They also think critically about their own identity characteristics, searching for ways in which those characteristics affect their day-to-day interactions with students and colleagues. Especially for those teachers who happen to share some identity characteristics with the “dominant” culture, taking time to consider what unearned privileges one enjoys because of those identities is an important and revealing process.

In this chapter, you will be asked to think carefully about your own background. Whether or not you share characteristics such as race, socioeconomic status, and background with your students, you can benefit from reflecting on what overt or hidden biases you bring to the classroom, and what you can do to overcome them.

### Additional Readings

Along with this chapter, please read the following selection found on the Institute Info Center within TFANet, and visit the web page below:

- “Unpacking Straight Privilege” by Earlham College Students
- In addition, please spend some time completing Teaching Tolerance’s hidden bias tests online, located at: [http://www.tolerance.org/hidden\\_bias/index.html](http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html)

## The “Knowledge Base” of Self

### I. Paths to Effective Teaching: Exploring Bias and Privilege

#### The Distinction Between Bias and Privilege

Two general parameters shape these potentially personal conversations. First, we separately define and address issues of “bias” and issues of “privilege.”

By “bias,” we mean an individual’s internalized—but often unrealized—preferences for or assumptions about some group. A teacher’s tendency to call on boys more often than girls, or to punish African-American students differently, or to predominantly choose short stories that reflect her own cultural background are all examples of possible manifestations of bias in the classroom.

By “privilege” we mean the ways in which an individual enjoys unearned advantages because of some societal preference for some aspect of his or her identity. Examples include a White teacher’s (perhaps unrecognized) assurance that there will be short stories to choose from that reflect his or her identity characteristics, or a male teacher’s assumed appointment to a budgetary committee.

Both of these concepts—bias and privilege—require careful self-reflection. While in both cases that self-reflection leads us to revelations about how we can be more effective in the classroom, the ways that you can most effectively unearth bias and privilege are different. Thus, we address them separately.

#### Exploring Bias and Privilege as a Means to Academic Achievement, Not an End unto Itself

The second basic parameter for this conversation is that exploring one’s own beliefs, perspectives, and privilege is a means to effective teaching, not an end unto itself. We are embarking on self-analysis not out of any desire to make ourselves feel guilty, or proud, or blamed, or pleased, or angry; rather, we are working to discover internal influences that threaten to lower our expectations of our students.

Maintaining high expectations is the key reason that we ask you to build the “knowledge base” regarding your own biases about your students and communities and the privileges you have enjoyed because of some aspect of your identity.

*I remember it was really hard to prevent making assumptions of why occasionally parents would be late or not show up to parent teacher conferences. It scared me to realize that I would be more generous and “understanding” of those parents from higher income communities. To combat this, I actually used an envisioning exercise where each of my parents were huge company CEOs who were extremely busy with multiple meetings, and thought of how I would react in that same situation in a more affluent environment and what assumptions I would make about those parents in a suburban community. That allowed me to maintain very high expectations of my parents, but at the same time understand that they had multiple things they were juggling—and it didn’t matter if the job was president of Xerox or cleaning the riverboat casinos or working for a local real estate company—but still had the best interests of their students in mind. And it worked--with the right amount of persistence—I had extremely high parent turnout for my conferences. And it didn’t matter if we had to reschedule or if I had to make a home visit or arrive at school early. It’s what any good teacher would do.*

**Maia Heyck-Merlin, S. Louisiana ‘99**  
**Chief Operating Officer, Achievement First**

[A] teacher’s culture, language, social interests, goals, cognitions, and values—especially if different from the students’—could conceivably create a barrier to understanding what is best for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Teachers can break through this barrier by reflecting on their self-knowledge and by learning to acknowledge and respect their students’ language, literacy, literature, and cultural ways of knowing.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> “Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.” North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p. 2.

In order to most effectively lead our students to dramatic academic achievement and thereby give them vastly expanded opportunities in life, we must acknowledge and overcome the often hidden lowered expectations that undermine our students' self-confidence and academic success. We must recognize that it is not only "society," but also *we* that hold those damaging lowered expectations. "When teachers become aware of their own cultural backgrounds and values, they have an opportunity to recognize and address any bias or preconceived notions they may have that would make it difficult for them to accept, understand, and effectively teach their students."<sup>51</sup> So, we discuss bias and privilege because we must insist on, maintain, and prove valid the highest expectations we hold for our students—no matter what our students' race or class or gender or religion or orientation or disability.

### **Is This Discussion Meant for Everyone?**

Yes. All of us—whether we identify as a person of color or as White, as affluent or as poor—can benefit from thinking about the hidden assumptions and prejudices we may have regarding our students, our schools, and our communities. Social psychologists will assure us that no matter what our color of skin and no matter what our background, we are not immune from the many influences in society that lead us to internalize subtle preferences, fears, and stereotypes about various groups of people with whom we are not familiar (and even those with whom we are). A corps member of color or a person of low socioeconomic status may bring a different perspective to this conversation than a White corps member or an affluent corps member. We do believe, however, that all new teachers need to consider these issues.

As discussed in the "Unpacking Privilege" section of this chapter, the process of considering one's unearned privilege is arguably more applicable to White, male, straight, and affluent persons than to African-American or Latino, female, homosexual, or poor persons, simply because the former groups are more likely to have experienced the type of societal preference that we are talking about. On the other hand, an argument might be made that to greater and lesser degrees, all of us, no matter what our primary or many identities, experience identity-based privileges in various contexts—that is, being Black, or Jewish, or female, or gay can and does confer elements of privilege in certain, specific contexts. For example, a Spanish-only speaker who must struggle to work within the dominant language and culture in an English-speaking community, might find that he or she enjoys the "privilege" of language dominance while in a different, Spanish-speaking community—where an English-only speaker might lose his or her privilege. Also, the mere fact that all of us have at least a bachelor's degree puts us in relatively exclusive company that undoubtedly affords us all certain privileges.<sup>52</sup>

## **II. Exploring Your Own Bias**

All of us would like to believe that we are free of biases—that we will enter our new communities and classrooms void of assumptions, misconceptions, and prejudices about those we interact with. And yet most of us, upon careful reflection, come to realize that we do in fact harbor hidden biases about various groups of people. Most pertinent to our discussion here, given our focus on the race- and class-correlated achievement gap, are the hidden biases each of us may have about African-American students, Latino students, and Native American students, and about poor students in low-income communities. Of course, also critically important to our self-reflections about prejudice and privilege are subtle and not-so-subtle ways that we, as teachers, may treat boys and girls differently in the classroom.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Only 24.3% of Americans aged 18 or over hold a Bachelor's Degree or higher, according to the 2002 Current Population Survey on Educational Attainment (found at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

## The “Knowledge Base” of Self

Consider the following experiment: teachers listened to students’ taped responses to questions about television programs. Teachers were shown a picture of either a White or Black student and told that that student had made the statement (even though the pictures were not actually of the speaker). The teachers were asked to rate the responses for personality, quality of the response, current academic abilities, and future academic potential. The results showed a highly significant relationship between the race of the student shown in the picture and teachers’ estimation of the students’ response and academic abilities,<sup>53</sup> laying bare the teachers’ deeply-rooted assumptions about the potential of African American students.

*Initially, I was under the impression that community members, parents, and teachers were not concerned with the academic progress of the community’s children. I quickly learned that despite the conditions they live in, their hopes, dreams, and aspirations were far-reaching, and not limited to the poverty conditions that surrounded them. After inviting parents to a “report card dinner,” I quickly realized that we as a community were all in this together. I thought I was in this all by myself. Little did I know that I had a whole town behind me.*

**Christopher Arnold, Greater New Orleans ‘04  
Instructor, Purdue University**

As explained by Professor Ron Ferguson, who reported on this research, these results do not necessarily indicate that these teachers had a conscious or subconscious dislike of Black students. Rather, the explanation might be that these teachers have been conditioned by previous experience with Black students who underachieve in the classroom (as we know, Black students, statistically speaking, are disproportionately likely to have done). Of course, both possible motivations still result in racially biased behavior that could have very real impacts on a teacher’s instruction and management in the classroom. How would you perform on a similar test? Why do you think so? How can you know?

*Going on the assumption that every student can be high-achieving if we show them how to be, I’ve had to consciously unpack and override my own bias about the background, resources, or personality traits that I’ve traditionally associated with high-achievers.*

**Julia Guez, Houston ‘03  
Graduate Student, Columbia University**

To help begin to answer those questions we strongly encourage you to put yourself through a similar test. Tolerance.org, a web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, has made available on the Internet a series of bias-tests that were created by psychologists at Harvard and the University of Washington. These “implicit association tests” ask you to quickly respond to a series of rapidly changing images and ideas.

Log on to [http://www.tolerance.org/hidden\\_bias/index.html](http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/index.html) to take some of these tests. (The results are kept entirely private.) After taking one or several of these five minute tests, read the attached tutorial to learn more about the tests themselves, about stereotypes and prejudice, and about the societal effects of bias. If you are interested in trying an additional or different bias test, please see the **Diversity, Community, & Achievement Toolkit** (p. 2: “Computer-Based Implicit Association Tests”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet ✖

If you are like most participants in the online exercise, these tests will confirm the idea that even though we may believe we see and treat people as valued equals, hidden biases may still influence our perceptions and actions. The fact is that stereotypes and prejudice linger in most of us, and those biases can and do have impacts on our classrooms. Perhaps we make assumptions about students that “look” a certain way, or we make assumptions about why certain students do not do their homework. Maybe we have stopped making copies of the classroom assignments for Mary in detention because we “know” she

<sup>53</sup> Ferguson, R.F. “Teachers’ perceptions and expectations and the Black-White test score gap.” Printed in C. Jencks and M. Phillips (Eds.). *The Black-White Test Score Gap*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1998, p. 277.

is not going to do the work anyway—even though what Mary actually needs is to know that we do believe she can and will do the work.

After we discuss the related notion of privilege, we will review some concrete suggestions for diminishing the effects of those hidden biases in our classrooms.

### III. “Unpacking” Privilege

Another angle from which we must build the “knowledge base” about ourselves is to consider the ways in which we benefit from societal preference for some aspect of our identity. “Unpacking privilege” is a metaphor used to describe the process of becoming aware of the ways in which our identity-based status in society confers on us invisible advantages in life, thereby shaping our experiences, viewpoints and actions. Such privileges may be conferred on us because we are White, male, affluent, educated, straight, able-bodied, Christian, or speakers of English. The process of “unpacking privilege” involves careful consideration of the societal realities that subtly—and not so subtly—create the “privilege” of additional opportunity, freedom, or comfort for us because of some aspect of our identity.

In your classroom, these privileges could manifest in any number of ways. Do we even contemplate the fact that letters from the school are written in English only? Do we plan a Mother’s Day project on the assumption that everyone has a parent who is a woman? Do we take for granted that religious symbols in a school celebrate Christianity? These questions often do not occur to those of us who are enjoying that so-obvious-as-to-be-invisible privilege.

As mentioned above, “unpacking” one’s privilege is not exclusively—but is probably predominantly—a responsibility of persons with identity characteristics most often associated with the dominant or mainstream majority in our society. It is precisely those individuals who are part of that “dominant” group that may be blind to the privilege that they themselves have experienced. “[D]ominant groups, whether by race or class, often are unaware of their identity because it is in sync with the internal and external images they hold of themselves and reality.”<sup>54</sup> (Nonetheless, we encourage all corps members to take part in this process because it is highly likely that all of us, in some way or another, enjoy some privileges beyond those enjoyed by our students, if for no other reason than by virtue of our level of academic achievement.)

#### McIntosh’s Original, Invisible Knapsack

The phrase “unpacking privilege” was popularized in large part by Peggy McIntosh at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. An excerpt from Professor McIntosh’s work commonly called “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” has become a model for the kind of self-evaluation and awareness that is necessary for one to begin to recognize the many ways that social dynamics of power influence our lives. To further help define the phrase “unpacking privilege,” consider an excerpt of that influential 1988 essay:

Through work to bring materials from women’s studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men’s unwillingness to grant that they are over privileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women’s status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from

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<sup>54</sup> “Critical Issue: Addressing Literacy Needs in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Classrooms.” North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, p. 2-3.

## The “Knowledge Base” of Self

women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there is most likely a phenomenon of White privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a White person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, White privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think Whites are carefully taught not to recognize White privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have White privilege. I have come to see White privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks . . .

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on White privilege.
9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can cut my hair.
10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
12. I can swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
19. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, out numbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.
23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.
26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in flesh color and have them more or less match my skin.

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote it down. For me White privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own. . .<sup>55</sup>

Thus, as McIntosh's essay makes clear, "unpacking privilege" refers to our attempts to pull back the veil of complex dynamics of difference and sameness that impact our lives—especially those dynamics that make us more appreciated, safe, influential, or comfortable in a given situation than we might be if we presented some alternative identity. Several variations of McIntosh's original piece have been written to help people unpack their privilege related to their gender, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. We ask that along with this chapter, you read the "Unpacking Straight Privilege" piece written by students at Earlham College about heterosexual privilege in society.

*Teaching forced me to a new level of questioning and re-evaluating my racial identity. As a white woman, one of the privileges that I had experienced is that I had not often found myself in situations where I was the minority. In my classroom, I was the only white person in a classroom filled with students of color. I had a hard time coming to grips with the fact that even though I was the minority in numbers, I was still in power. My "power" did not come from being a part of a majority; it came from my white privilege.*

**Stephanie Crement, Bay Area '99  
Special Education English/Language Arts Teacher  
Boston Public Schools**

Some people have described the process of unpacking privilege to be like "a fish discovering water." Coming to grips with the ways in which you may have enjoyed unearned benefits because of your identity can be a surprising, disturbing and even painful process. It is a critically important process for teachers to go through, as difficult as it may be.

As some of you have no doubt already experienced, recognizing the unspoken privileges that one's White-ness, or male-ness, or straight-ness, or affluence offer can obviously be an unsettling process. But keep in mind that the difficulty of this process is not, in and of itself, its purpose. The point of this process is not to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed, but is instead to identify those power dynamics that shape our beliefs and perspectives so that we can be more aware of them in the context of our

classroom. Only by recognizing your own biases, and the assumptions you may have developed because of privilege, can you effectively fight the temptation to act on lowered expectations of our students' achievement.

<sup>55</sup> McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." A working paper at Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, 1988.

## The “Knowledge Base” of Self

### IV. How Exploring Your Biases and Privileges Makes You a Better Teacher

Thus, in the teacher-training context, reflecting on your own prejudices and privileges is not an end unto itself, but rather is a means to becoming a better teacher. But what is the connection between this potentially personal and painful process and teaching well?

The answer to that question begins with a recognition of the close relationship between bias and privilege. In a manner of speaking, these two concepts are corollaries of one another. If one carries a bias, he or she has some unfounded assumptions that shape expectations of the targeted group’s behavior or abilities. On the other hand, if one enjoys a “privilege” (in the sense we are using here), one likely has some unfounded assumptions about one’s own contribution to his or her success in the world. That is, “privilege” is closely related to “bias” in that “privilege” involves unquestioned assumptions about *one’s self*. In both cases, the process of “uncovering” or “unpacking” that bias or privilege is a process of replacing those assumptions with a more nuanced and real vision of one’s interactions with others. In the context of teaching, this quest for a more nuanced and realistic view of the world is particularly important and has direct implications for a teacher’s interactions with and leadership of students.

First, this heightened awareness and vision is key to understanding who your students are and how their backgrounds and cultures and experiences shape their view of and approach to your classroom. That is, as a teacher who is trying to assess students’ needs and motivations, you must have an unfiltered view of the students’ abilities and past performance. Exploring your biases and privileges is a way to check yourself for those “filters” that would otherwise inhibit your ability to truly read and help your students. Have you made assumptions about the process and pace of your students’ learning of some concept based on your own experience with that concept, even though you were a native English speaker and your student is not? Or, maybe you find yourself making assumptions about the reasons behind your students’ acting out—assumptions that are entirely based on your experience as a student of that age and that ignore critical differences in the challenges that you faced and those facing your students. Perhaps you are not thinking about the impact that others’ high expectations for you had on your own performance and behavior?

The better knowledge of our students’ perspectives and challenges (that arises from exploring one’s bias and privilege) leads to insights that inform instructional and

*Before I went into the classroom, I automatically thought that I would have a pretty simple time as a teacher in the classroom. After all, not only was I of the same background as the students I taught, but I had also grown up with similar socio-economic and educational inequities. This fact alone built my confidence; I would be able to assimilate into the school and community culture with pure ease. After my first week of school, I was perplexed by how my assumption was completely inaccurate. I had students and colleagues questioning why I was teaching in their neighborhood. I tried to explain my similar circumstance to what they were experiencing; yet, they were hesitant to believe me. They mentioned how the language I spoke was proper, my style of dress was different, and how each and every day I drove home in my car to another neighborhood that I called home. This was very disappointing to me, but it made me realize how important it was for me to recognize the privilege I was bringing to the classroom. Although I was a minority, I had gone to college and had amassed certain experiences that were not common to my students or their families. My perspective had completely changed. I was the same as my students in terms of skin color but our experiences were different based on the academic freedom I had the opportunity to explore. I had to approach the situation differently. I had to approach my school community more humbly, acknowledging my privilege while expressing (through my actions) my purpose for teaching—giving my students the same opportunities I was lucky enough to receive so that they too have choices and a voice for their own life experiences.*

**Susan Asiyambi, New Jersey '01**  
**Senior Vice President – Teacher Preparation, Support, and Development**  
**Teach For America**

managerial decisions in the classroom. As we are able to truly trust our own assessments of students' needs and challenges, we are better able to address them.

Second, looking at your own biases and privileges helps you interact more effectively with people in the school community because you develop a better understanding of your perspectives, their perspectives, and how any differences between them might affect your interactions. A teacher's exploration of his or her bias and privilege may offer insights into how that teacher is perceived by—and how that teacher perceives—others. What do my colleagues see as the privileges that I have enjoyed? How can I know? What of my deep-seated biases have my students picked up on and how does that affect our relationships? What are my biases and default assumptions about the administrators in my school, and how have those assumptions colored my interactions with them? These types of questions—all fruits of the “unpacking” process discussed above—are keys to maintaining the respect and humility necessary to have a meaningful impact on your classroom, school, and community.

In our experience, corps members who look within themselves to consider the ways in which their various identities have advantaged and disadvantaged them are more effective as classroom and community leaders, and are more often successful in their quest to close the achievement gap for their students. In a nutshell, they are better able to maintain the high expectations that they have set for their students.

## V. Addressing Your Biases and Privileges in the Classroom

What is a teacher to do upon realizing that he harbors some potentially damaging prejudices about his students? Or upon realizing that her previous assumptions about what should be “easy” for her students is shaped, in part, by privileges afforded her by her own identity?

There is no easy or blanket answer to this question—as every situation most certainly has unique characteristics that call for unique solutions. We have, however, mapped out a few strategies in other texts that offer guidance here. For example:

*I think I had always associated rural poverty with white folks and urban poverty with people of color. I also believed that urban settings were more dangerous and rural settings were more impoverished. As a white man from a lower SES town in the northeast, in my experience this was an accurate assumption. Working in Garyville, Louisiana, as part of the GNO corps, I realized just how subjective that experience was, and my notions about what poverty looks like were completely challenged.*

**Bill Murphy, Greater New Orleans '00  
Principal, Baltimore City Public Schools**

- **Collect Data.** In a case where you suspect you are preferencing one group of students over another in your interactions in class, you should (a) create a system that monitors your interactions (perhaps a clipboard with students' names on it and put a check by the student's name as he or she shares a response or gets to participate in a demonstration), and (b) create a system that ensures variety in your calling on students (such as the tried-and-true popsicle sticks approach). For more information, see the section on “Engaging, Involving, and Valuing All Students” on page 69 of the *Classroom Management & Culture* book.
- **Bring In Fresh Eyes.** Ask your Program Director or co-worker to observe your classroom and bring a fresh perspective, looking for any manifestations of the bias that you are concerned about exhibiting. Sometimes an observer will see things that you do not. Or, your observer might be able to reassure you that your suspected bias is not actually manifesting in the classroom.

## The “Knowledge Base” of Self

- **Grab Opportunities to Challenge Your Assumptions.** There is no antidote for prejudices like counter-evidence from your own students. If, for example, you are worried that you do not have as much faith in your girls as your boys during math class, pay particular attention to some girls’ math products and, in all likelihood, you will find your assumptions shaken by the very real evidence before you.
- **Watch Yourself.** Using video tape to examine your own practices is an excellent way to watch for bias- and privilege-driven behaviors. Does the privilege you have enjoyed as a White person, or as a Christian, or as a college graduate impact your classroom teaching and interactions with students? By watch your own teaching with those questions in mind, you may discover ways that you can mitigate the impact of bias and privilege.

While these various strategies are all helpful in particular contexts, the bottom line is that there is no solution for your hidden prejudices like openly acknowledging them. Once you identify your propensity to think or feel a certain way about a certain group of students, your awareness of that pattern will be heightened and you will automatically begin to adjust your behavior in response.

## VI. Conclusion: Getting Started Exploring Your Biases and Unpacking Your Privilege

In this chapter, you have been asked to look within. “Knowledge of self” is one of the first and arguably most important diversity-related knowledge bases that you need to develop in order to maximize the learning in your classroom.

While many of you have already begun this process (and you will be encouraged to explore your hidden biases and privileges this summer), we also encourage you to think now—as you read this text—about what basic assumptions, perspectives, biases, prejudices, and privileges you will be bringing to your summer and regional classrooms. When you imagine the students you will be teaching, what and whom do you see? What are your honest, base assumptions about those students and how can you mitigate the effects of those assumptions? Which of your many personal experiences in life will shape—for better and for worse—your perspective of your students, of your classroom, of your school, and of the hard work that will be required of you and your students to succeed?

*There were several times that my students told me that I couldn't understand because I was white. Sometimes they were right – there were things I couldn't understand initially because of my background- but when I asked them to explain the situation to me, the conversations we had were really powerful for all of us. The fact that I was willing to learn from them made a huge difference in the relationship I had with my students.*

**Jessica Murphy, Greater New Orleans '99  
Behavior Specialist, Indianapolis Public Schools**

At this point, please read “Unpacking Straight Privilege” by Earlham College Students, which can be accessed by visiting the Pre-Institute Work page on the Institute Info Center within TFANet. 