



SPHERE

Fostering Civil Discourse and Diverse Viewpoints for Every Classroom

Bias Bite #8: Belief Perseverance

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Overview

This mini-lesson is designed to help your students recognize and better understand belief perseverance. Although this bias can encourage individuals to stand firm in their beliefs, it can also hinder critical thinking and perpetuate stereotypes and prejudice.

The following activities will guide students in an exploration of the way belief perseverance works, when it happens, and most important, how to recognize it in themselves. By developing this self-awareness, students can become more open to different perspectives and engage in more thoughtful, civil discussions both in and out of the classroom.



Driving Question

Why do we maintain the same beliefs even when we are proven wrong?

Objectives

- Explain the bias.
- Provide examples of the bias in practice.
- Construct strategies for overcoming and dealing with the bias.

Materials Needed

- Data or evidence for the “Activate” Learning Activity (see in lesson)
- Mental Notes graphic organizers for students

Bias Description

Belief perseverance describes our tendency to maintain beliefs despite being confronted with strong contradictory evidence. This bias is often caused by our avoidance of cognitive dissonance or discomfort as well as our desire to protect our long-held beliefs that may be intertwined with our identities.

PROS AND CONS OF THE BIAS

Pros

- Can provide comfort and stability
- Encourages individuals to stand firm in their beliefs, particularly when related to their identities

Cons

- Hinders critical thinking and can perpetuate outdated practices
- Can perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF THE BIAS

- A teacher with decades of experience holds onto traditional instructional practices despite reading studies that suggest new approaches may be more effective.
- Despite learning that a rumor about a classmate is false, some students still believe it because they initially accepted it as true.

Learning Activities

OPEN

Have students write the name of the day's bias and the driving question on their Mental Notes graphic organizer.

ACTIVATE

Label 2 sides of the classroom, "Agree" and "Disagree." Ask participants to stand up and move according to their responses to the following statements. After students have moved each time, present them with evidence that confirms or contradicts the statement. Use the following statements:

- Sugar causes hyperactivity.
- Academic preschool improves academic outcomes.
- Learning styles are effective pedagogical tools.
- Humans use only about 10 percent of their brains.
- Humans are good at multitasking.

Note: Throughout the activity, remind your students that the purpose of this activity is not about the statements themselves but our responses to evidence that is validating or contradictory.

Ask

- What did it feel like to be presented with contradictory information? What did it sound like in your mind? What did it feel like in your body?
- How many of you changed your minds when confronted with the data?
- How did we come to believe some of these ideas?

EXPLAIN

- Describe belief perseverance to students. Consider sharing the following 6 words, "We've always done it that way," a phrase that is often cited as a dangerous idea in organizations. You may also tell students that the word "tradition" comes from the Latin root *tradere*, which by 1 definition means "deliver or betray."
- Explain to students that belief perseverance describes our tendency to maintain beliefs despite being confronted with strong contradictory evidence. This tendency is often caused by our avoidance of cognitive dissonance or discomfort as well as our desire to protect our self-image or long-held beliefs that may be intertwined with our identities.
- Tell students that they can effectively deal with belief perseverance in the following ways:
 - Actively seek disconfirming evidence.
 - Seek feedback from diverse sources.
 - Set aside time to reflect and ask yourself challenging questions.

A background graphic consisting of a network of light gray lines connecting various sized light gray circular nodes. The nodes are distributed across the page, with some larger nodes and some smaller ones, creating a web-like structure.

DISCUSS

Divide students into groups and have them discuss the following questions:

- In what situations can belief perseverance be helpful? Harmful?
- When have you seen this bias in action?
- When are people most susceptible to this bias?
- How can people recognize when they are being affected by this bias?
- What are some ways to overcome and deal with this bias?
- What is the relationship between this bias and humility? In what ways can our awareness of this bias improve our relationships with others?

SYNTHESIZE AND CLOSE

Ask each group to share what they discussed for at least 1 of the questions. Revisit the driving question and make sure students have responded to the driving question in their Mental Notes graphic organizer for the day.