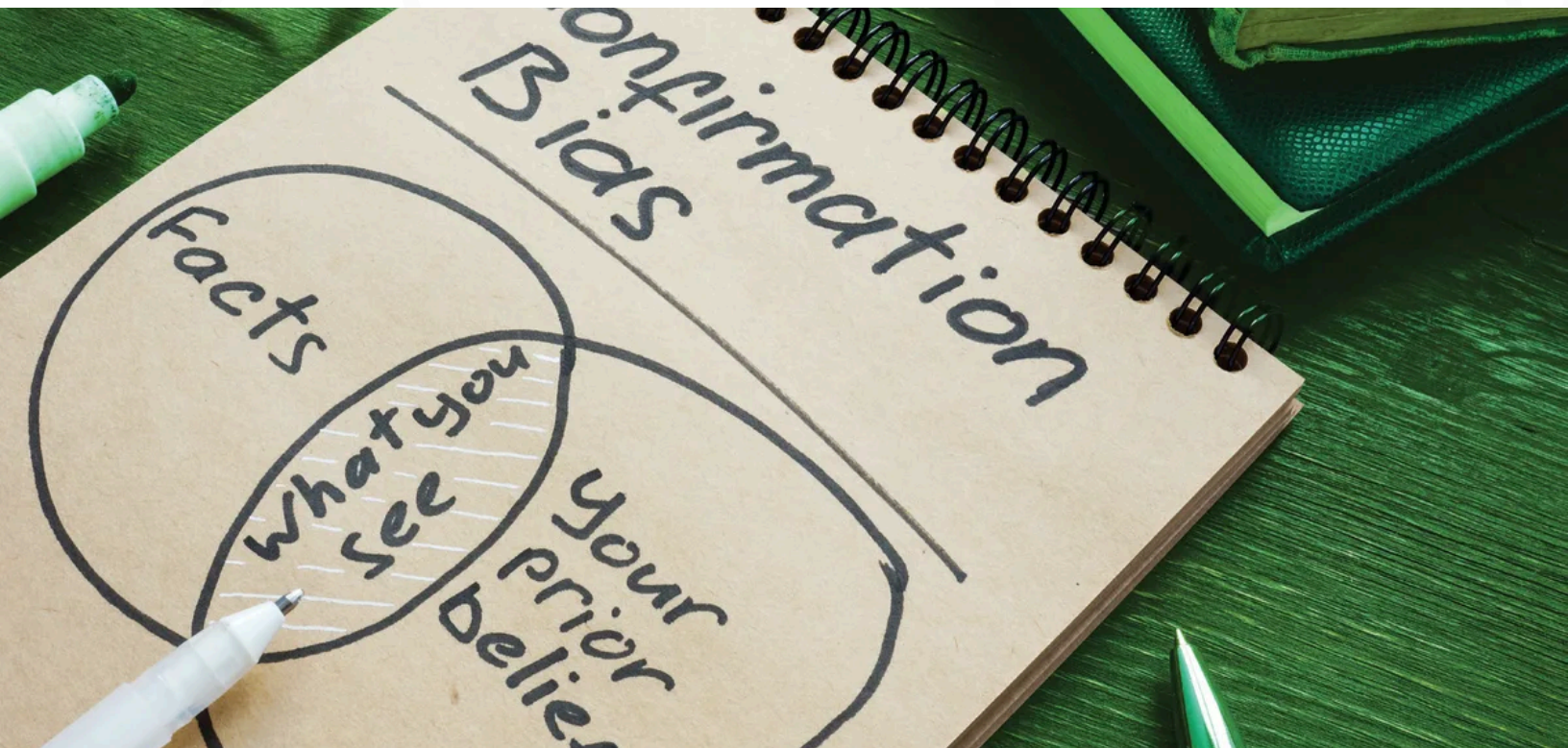




Bias Bite #1: Confirmation Bias

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Bias Bites are written for administrators to help teachers explore their cognitive limitations through suggested protocols that can be implemented in school-wide meetings and other professional development opportunities. The following activities guide teachers to explore confirmation bias, which is our tendency to seek and interpret information in ways that favor our existing beliefs while avoiding contradictory evidence. While this cognitive pattern can provide positive feelings of confidence and social cohesion, it can also lead to poor decision-making, worsen social tensions, and support other biased thinking. The structured learning experiences in this Bias Bite provide educators with a more thorough understanding of this bias. They also help educators develop greater humility and awareness of their cognitive limitations, fostering more spaces for civil discourse in their schools.



Driving Question

Why do we seek and interpret information in ways that favor our existing beliefs?

Materials Needed

- “The Most Common Cognitive Bias” video
- Mental Notes graphic organizers for students

Bias Description

Confirmation bias is a phenomenon in which people seek or interpret information in ways that are favorable to their preexisting beliefs. Conversely, they discount or avoid information that is contradictory. This thinking pattern may be conscious or subconscious and may result in hypothesis myopia.

Every bias has its pros and cons. The pros and cons of confirmation bias are as follows:

- Positive feelings. Confirmation bias can elicit feelings of confidence and intelligence.
- Poor decisions. This bias can lead to poor decision-making by deprioritizing or not acknowledging information that does not confirm one's beliefs.
- Heightened tensions. Confirmation bias can reinforce us-versus-them thinking and in-group bias, which can worsen social tensions and exclusion.
- Support of other biases. This bias can support other biased thinking such as groupthink and the bandwagon effect.

Bias in Action: School-Based Examples

- A school administrator creates an echo chamber by being surrounded with leaders who agree only with the administrator.
- A teacher believes a student is gifted and seeks evidence that confirms this belief, such as the student's participation in extracurricular activities or a strong vocabulary. However, the teacher overlooks other data such as the student's performance in classes or standardized test scores.
- A teacher's preconceived notions about students from particular backgrounds leads to referring them undeservedly to special education, downplaying evidence of similar behaviors of students from groups they perceive more favorably.

Professional Development Protocol for School Leaders

ACTIVATE

- Play Stop the video partway through and ask educators if they can guess the rule. Ask a few volunteers to explain their thinking and then play the video until the end. "The Most Common Cognitive Bias."
- Ask educators to reflect on the following questions:
 - What did you notice about the number sets that the volunteers presented when watching the video?
 - What strategies did you or the volunteers use to determine the rule?
 - What was preventing you and the participants in the video from figuring out the rule sooner?

EXPLAIN

- Share the definition of confirmation bias.
- Explain why confirmation bias occurs.
 - Confirmation bias occurs because our brain uses cognitive shortcuts that make the decision-making process more efficient and help us avoid cognitive dissonance. In other words, we've adapted to taking the path of least resistance.
 - Because it feels good to be right and bad to be wrong, we often engage in confirmation bias.
 - Confirmatory thinking can produce groupthink and feelings of social cohesion.
 - We engage in confirmation bias because past information affects how we think.
- Share mitigation strategies.
 - Actively seek diverse or neutral sources of information.
 - Seek out disconfirming evidence, such as listening to or reading about people who differ from you in their opinions.
 - Engage in discussions with those who disagree with you and can ask challenging questions.
- Ask educators to generate examples of confirmation bias that are school based and non-school based. Have a few volunteers share with the whole group.

DISCUSS

- Engage in a whole-group discussion about the following questions.
 - What is the relationship between this bias and the others you're learning about?
 - How can confirmation bias show up for different stakeholders in schools (e.g., students, teachers, administrators, families)?

- Under what conditions or in what situations are we most susceptible to this bias?
- How could one recognize when this bias is affecting them?
- What are some strategies to overcome this bias?
- What is the relationship between this bias and humility? In what ways can our awareness of this bias improve civil discourse?

SYNTHESIZE

- Revisit the driving question and have participants respond.