



Bias Bite #8: Belief Perseverance

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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 belief perseverance, which is our tendency to maintain beliefs despite being confronted with strong, contradictory evidence. While this cognitive pattern can provide comfort and stability by protecting our identities and convictions, it can also hinder critical thinking and result in perpetuating outdated practices and stereotypes. 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 maintain the same beliefs even when we are proven wrong?

Materials Needed

Data or evidence to present to teachers (see Activate)

Mental Notes graphic organizers for students

Bias Description

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 long-held beliefs that may be intertwined with our identities.

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

- Provides comfort and stability. Belief perseverance encourages individuals to stand firm in their beliefs, particularly when related to their identities.
- Hinders critical thinking. Persevering in one's beliefs may interfere with critical thinking and result in continuing to engage in outdated practices and perpetuating stereotypes and prejudices.

Bias in Action: School-Based Examples

- A teacher with decades of experience holds onto traditional instructional practices despite being presented with evidence to the contrary.
- A faculty or department is reluctant to adopt new curricula, technologies, or learning frameworks despite their statistically high rates of efficacy.

Professional Development Protocol for School Leaders

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 participants have moved each time, present them with evidence that confirms or contradicts the statement.
 - 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.
- After educators have had a chance to respond to a statement by moving to their chosen area of the room, share the evidence regarding that statement.
- Following the activity, remind educators that the activity was not about the statements themselves but about our responses to evidence that was validating or contradictory. Then ask the following reflection questions:
 - 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

- Introduce the idea of belief perseverance.
 - 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.
 - Note that the word “tradition” comes from the Latin root tradere, which by 1 definition means “deliver or betray.”
- Explain 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.
- Provide examples.
 - Some examples you might share are phrases you might hear from other teachers or students such as the following:
 - “I’m not a math person.”
 - “That teacher hates me.”
 - “I’m not smart enough for honors classes.”
 - “Technology is nothing more than a distraction.”
 - “Small class sizes automatically mean better learning.”
 - “Hands-on learning opportunities always work best.”
- Share mitigation strategies.
 - Actively seek out disconfirming evidence regarding a belief.
 - Seek feedback from diverse sources that reflect multiple viewpoints.

- Set aside time to reflect and ask yourself challenging questions with intellectual honesty.

DISCUSS

- Divide educators into groups and discuss scenarios using the following guiding questions:
 - What is the relationship between this bias and other biases?
 - How can belief perseverance show up in schools for different stakeholders (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.