



Conformity Bias

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What is Conformity Bias?

Conformity bias is the tendency for individuals to align their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours with those of a group. In education, this can lead to groupthink, where the desire for harmony and agreement results in a lack of critical thinking and resistance to necessary change.

How Does Conformity Bias Manifest in Education?

Classroom Discussions: Students may hesitate to express different opinions for fear of standing out or challenging their peers.

Teaching Approaches: Teachers may stick to traditional methods rather than exploring new, research-based strategies, even if they could improve learning outcomes.

Staff Meetings: School staff may agree with the majority opinion rather than voicing concerns or alternative ideas.

Curriculum Choices: Schools may continue using outdated resources because they align with long-standing practices, rather than considering diverse perspectives and new evidence.

School Culture: Schools may resist adopting new policies on inclusion or wellbeing due to a preference for maintaining the status quo.

Recognising Conformity Bias in Education

Uniform Opinions: A lack of diverse viewpoints in discussions, with most people agreeing without debate.

Suppressed Dissent: Students or staff feeling reluctant to challenge ideas or suggest alternatives.

Echo Chambers: Repeating the same educational practices and perspectives without seeking external insight.

Avoidance of Conflict: Prioritising agreement over open discussion and critical analysis.

Strategies to Combat Conformity Bias

Encourage Open Dialogue: Create classroom and staff environments where different viewpoints are welcomed and debated constructively.

Seek External Input: Engage with experts, research, and voices outside the school community to introduce fresh perspectives.

Rotate Leadership Roles: Give different students or staff members opportunities to lead discussions to prevent a single dominant viewpoint.

Use Anonymous Feedback Methods: Allow students and staff to provide anonymous feedback to ensure honesty and reduce pressure to conform.

Promote Critical Thinking: Teach and model critical thinking skills so that students and staff feel empowered to question, challenge, and think independently.

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Reflective Questions

To better understand how conformity bias may appear in your school, consider the following questions:

Decision-Making:

How often do staff members feel comfortable expressing differing opinions in meetings and discussions?

What strategies can help ensure that all voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes?

Innovation in Teaching & Learning:

How do you respond to teaching approaches or curriculum ideas that challenge existing norms?

What steps can you take to create an environment where staff and students feel encouraged to experiment with new ideas?

Recruitment & Staff Development:

How does the existing school culture influence decisions about who is hired or promoted?

In what ways can you ensure that diverse perspectives and experiences are actively sought and valued in your recruitment process?

Risk Management & Critical Thinking:

How do you encourage staff and students to critically evaluate decisions rather than simply following the majority?

What approaches can help foster constructive debate and analysis of potential risks and challenges?

School Culture & Traditions:

How do you determine whether long-standing practices and traditions are still effective and inclusive?

What processes can help ensure that your school culture evolves to meet the needs of all students and staff?

