

What Is Said in the Teachers’ Lounge: Bias Filter Worksheet

The teachers’ lounge is not a place—it is a mindset. It is a sacred space that allows educators to vent frustrations, share ideas, and build camaraderie. The “teachers’ lounge” is anywhere educators connect and congregate. While these spaces hold value, they can also hold bias. Now, before you toss this worksheet, just hear me out. This is not an attack on your moral character. Everyone has an unconscious tendency toward bias, called *implicit bias*, that typically runs **counter** to a person’s own belief system.

Your brain is biologically wired for bias. Bias is not a personal flaw but a human adaptation that simplifies information and helps your brain make quick, automatic associations and decisions. The human brain is not inherently neutral, but research has shown that presenting new narratives that run counter to stereotypes can reduce implicit bias (Nosek et al., 2014). This tool can help professionals look out for potential bias, ask filtering questions, consider opposing ideas, and respond with more neutral actions. Think of this worksheet as a fabric softener that helps protect our interactions against the static that comes from implicit bias.

This worksheet provides a space for educators to analyze conversations that are often only heard in the teachers’ lounge. Use it as a self-reflective tool that will help you make these conversations work for you by filtering out potential bias and offering suggestions for neutral discussions and decisions. We all have an ongoing internal monologue. The goal is not for that monologue to **be** neutral—that’s impossible. The goal is to recognize when our internal speech might cause us to make mental shortcuts. Then we can filter this internal speech and respond with neutrality. Use this worksheet to help you step out of your own values and walk in someone else’s shoes.

The page numbers listed are from my book *Push Past It! A Positive Approach to Challenging Classroom Behaviors*. However, you don’t need the book to use this self-reflection form. This form does not have to be read in a linear manner.

References: Nosek, B. A., Bar-Anan, Y., Sriram, N., Axt, J., & Greenwald, A. G. (2014). Understanding and using the brief Implicit Association Test: recommended scoring procedures. *PLoS one*, 9(12), e1110938. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0110938>

Directions:

- 1. In the space below, write down everything you say or hear others say about a student, a family, or coworker in the “teachers’ lounge” with intense challenging behaviors.**

2. Filter potentially biased comments.

Potential bias	Why might this signal potential bias?	Anti-bias actions and neutral decision making
List any statements that label or measure whether a behavior is “right” or “wrong.”	Ethnocentricity involves imposing a value judgement on the actions of others based on the standards of your culture. Whether a behavior is “right” or “wrong” can vary within and between cultures. It does not mean a behavior is never wrong. However, to avoid bias, educators should always engage in meaning making. Interpreting the actions of others without meaning renders those interpretations meaningless. (Pages 26-28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List potential origins of a behavior. • List potential meanings behind a behavior. • List potential functions behind a behavior. <p>*Remember: Actions don’t always match values, and it can be easy to fall into the idea that someone doesn’t care about or value something. Time, capacity, skill level, etc. all impact action</p>
List any statements that include removing, segregating, or limiting student time in a classroom or school.	No matter how well intentioned, removing students from school removes the opportunity for students <i>and</i> educators to learn new skills. When children are pushed out of school, their problems are pushed into the larger community. The same behavior is still occurring, but children now exist with less structural support and fewer services. This can potentially make communities <u>less</u> safe. If every child isn’t successful in an environment, strategies should focus on changing the environment rather than changing the child. (Pages 11–18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List potential strategies and services that can be pushed into the current setting. • List new ways to cope besides wishing for a new place for someone to be or new people to implement a plan.
List any statements that suggest there is only one way to accomplish a goal.	Ethnocentricity involves thinking your way of living is the only correct way. Being on the same page makes for a short book of knowledge. When you think you know everything about something, it puts a ceiling on your knowledge that prevents you from knowing everything there is to know about something. Healthy conversations seek understanding as opposed to agreement. (Pages 58–62)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List a variety of ways to accomplish a goal.
List any statements that assign blame.	Blame shifts thoughts and conversation away from the difficult task of our own self-reflection to reflecting on what we perceive as the shortcomings of others. This could be a mechanism that helps us cope with uncomfortable feelings associated with a challenge. (Page 32-34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List ways you or your team could be contributing to a problem. • List ways you could contribute to a solution.

<p>List any negative statements.</p>	<p>The brain has a natural negativity bias. If you only look at what is wrong, you won't be able to get to what is right. Viewing everything through a deficit lens can stagnate problem solving and productivity. (Pages 48-50)</p>	<p>Use a strengths-based lens and write down all the strengths of the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child • Family • Coworker • School
<p>List any assumptions not verified by the individual and not based on factual evidence.</p>	<p>Since the brain often looks for shortcuts, educators have to constantly question whether they are viewing a person or situation in an overly simplistic way based on limited information and preconceived ideas. Keep in mind, individuals exhibit their culture to varying degrees in their own individual ways. (Pages 31–33)</p>	<p>Intersectionality involves viewing an individual/group through many aspects of their identity: Race Class Gender Language Other: List ideas along with supporting evidence.</p> <p>*Remember: Individuals always self-identify.</p>
<p>List any statements that call into question someone's lived experience.</p>	<p><i>Gaslighting</i> is a term used to describe making another person question their perception or lived experience. People are always the experts on their own lived experiences. (Pages 32–34)</p>	<p>Believe someone's lived experience as they describe it. If you are unclear about someone's perception, before questioning their reality, ask questions to understand that lived experience. Can you describe that experience?</p>
<p>List any statements that make comparisons.</p>	<p>A <i>false equivalency</i> occurs when an individual uses flawed reasoning that assumes two different situations are the same because they share <u>some</u> of the same characteristics while ignoring important differences. (Pages 32-33)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of similarities and differences between situations. • Make sure you know <i>all</i> the differences and similarities. • Also note the degree or magnitude of a difference or similarity and how that may affect the situation.
<p>List any statements that corroborate your views.</p>	<p>An <i>echo chamber</i> is a place where someone only encounters ideas/opinions that correspond with their own existing views. These views are reinforced, and alternative ideas are rebuffed. (Pages 29-34)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List opposing ideas and consider how they might be true. • List common word(s) that link seemingly opposing ideas.