



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

COMMON BELIEFS SURVEY: TEACHING RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

"People create social conditions and people can change them."

—Tess Onwueme

OVERVIEW

Teachers rate their level of agreement with 13 common beliefs about racially and ethnically diverse students, reflect on their beliefs and their possible consequences, and then outline action steps for better serving their students.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During a staff or grade-level team meeting
- For staff professional development
- For individual reflection

TIME REQUIRED

- < 60 minutes (for individual reflection)
- < 120 minutes (for group in-service or pre-service use)

LEVEL

- Adult

MATERIALS

- Copy of the [Teacher Voices worksheet](#) (PDF) for each participant
- Copy of the [Discussion Prompts](#) (PDF) for individual reflection or group discussion

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Examine commonly held beliefs about racially and ethnically diverse students—the kinds of things we may say in conversations about how to meet the learning needs of all students.

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Before you complete the worksheet below (whether on your own or with a small group), pause, take a few deep, conscious breaths, and consider the following:
- Am I committed to unearthing any beliefs, behaviors, or communication patterns that might be perpetuating racism, power, or privilege? Why?
- If so, am I ready to reflect on my beliefs about racially and ethnically diverse students?
- Am I prepared for the emotional risk of considering my implicit biases (or unexamined prejudices)? How will I navigate feelings of vulnerability if they emerge?

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR INDIVIDUAL USE

- Review the framework for this reflective process:
 - Framework: Teachers want students to learn, and many make an effort to be particularly responsive to racially and ethnically diverse students. Many of the beliefs we hold and lessons we are taught about racially and ethnically diverse students and how best to facilitate their learning have positive effects. Others, however, while seemingly sensible and well intended, can have negative consequences.
- Read each statement on the ["Teacher Voices" worksheet](#) (PDF) and complete the "First Thoughts" section after each statement. Try not to "overthink" the items, answering instead with your "gut response."

- Next, read the entries for each statement on the [Discussion Prompts](#) (PDF). As you read each discussion prompt, reflect on your initial response in "First Thoughts," and write down additional thoughts, along with possible action steps that might help you better serve students.

FOR IN-SERVICE OR PRE-SERVICE USE

Preparing for the Meeting

- Prior to the in-service or pre-service class, introduce the planned "framework" and objective.
 - Framework: Teachers want students to learn, and many make an effort to be particularly responsive to racially and ethnically diverse students. Many of the beliefs we hold and lessons we are taught about racially and ethnically diverse students and how best to facilitate their learning have positive effects. Others, however, while seemingly sensible and well intended, can have negative consequences.
 - Objective: We will examine commonly held beliefs about racially and ethnically diverse students—the kinds of things we may say in conversations about how to meet the learning needs of all students.
- Next, ask participants to complete the "First Thoughts" section of the ["Teacher Voices" worksheet](#) (PDF) and to hand in their completed sheets anonymously.
- Compile "scores" and comments from participants' worksheets, providing a "class score" for each statement, along with representative samples from their comments.

Meeting Together

- Begin the in-service or pre-service class by re-introducing the framework and objective. Next, share the class's composite scores and comments from the "Teacher Voices" worksheet.
- Next, break participants into diverse, small groups of four to six — up to 13 groups in all (i.e., the number of common beliefs listed on the "Teacher Voices" worksheet).
- Assign each small group one or more statements for further reflection. Provide each small group with a copy of their assigned statements, with composite scores and representative comments, as well as the [Discussion Prompts](#) (PDF) for their corresponding questions.
- Allow small groups adequate time for discussion, encouraging them to write down thoughts and comments and to come up with at least one related "action step" that might help them and others better serve racially and ethnically diverse students.
- Ask small groups to report back to the class. Facilitate a whole-group discussion, as needed.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did you and/or your colleagues respond to this reflection process?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What "action steps" can you take to better meet the needs of your racially and ethnically- diverse students?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Scientists are actively exploring evidence-based recommendations for reducing racial bias in [educational](#) settings. Some research has found that, in order to decrease unintentional bias in [adults](#), nurturing non-threatening environments for professional development where participants do not feel shamed is key. The goal is to increase participants' internal motivation to reduce bias while also lessening external pressure.

Ultimately, effective strategies and approaches should provide staff with opportunities to practice new beliefs and skills and improve their ability to build relationships--a critical task for schools due to multiple studies that show [discipline disparities](#) and lower [academic outcomes and behavior evaluations](#) for students of color when compared with white students.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Despite educators' best intentions, they can't always be aware of their assumptions and/or their implicit biases, especially when an intense work day isn't necessarily conducive to pausing and considering one's daily thoughts and behaviors.

In light of this demanding daily pace, it's important for teachers to engage in reflective processes that prompt them to [shift](#) away from some of their default behaviors--and potential biases. Just as teachers keep thoughtful running records of students' learning, they can benefit from tracking their own personal and professional growth.

Teachers' growing awareness of their beliefs can affect the quality of education their students receive—and is a crucial part of building a just and equitable society.

SOURCE

[Teaching Tolerance](#). Willis Hawley, Jacqueline Jordan Irvine and Melissa Landa designed the instruments and framework for this activity.