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

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

"Learning to stand in somebody else's shoes, to see through their eyes, that's how peace begins."

—Barack Obama

OVERVIEW

Students demonstrate courage by voluntarily sharing their responses to this prompt: "Most people see me as _____, but I really am _____ . Then, all students participate by reading each other's anonymous answers loud and listening to each other's experiences with empathy and compassion.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage students to practice being vulnerable with one another
- To cultivate greater self-awareness
- Any time of the year

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes (2-3x/week)

LEVEL

- High School

MATERIALS

- Equipment to watch
- Paper
- Pencil/pen
- Video

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify whether there are discrepancies between how others see them and how they see themselves
- Practice courage by sharing aspects of their identities.
  Listen to the experiences of their classmates
- Respond to each other's experiences with empathy and compassion

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGHTS

- Empathy
- Courage
- Compassion

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Complete the prompt, "Most people see me as ___, but really I am ___." Reflect on how this makes you feel. Consider talking to a friend about how you are feeling and taking the time to listen to how your friend is really feeling about his/her own life.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Load the [video](#) before students come into the class and check that the sound is working.
- Make sure all students have a piece of paper and something to write with. Let students know that their responses will be anonymous and will be read aloud to the class.
- You will be prompted to call on any students who would like to share their own writing.
- Next, you will be prompted to collect all students' papers and redistribute them randomly.

- After everyone has read the responses on their paper to the class, you will be asked to call on students to share what it felt like to speak from someone else's perspective.
- Finally, you will be asked to call on any students who would like to respond to any of the statements read aloud.
- Follow along with your students and model active participation.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What was it like for you to hear your student's responses to the prompt? How might you create more opportunities for students to express who they are and feel safe doing so?
- Have you noticed a change in how students engage with each other?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A review of school based interventions suggests that to respond with empathy, students need to have an understanding of emotions and the ability to take other's perspectives. In one study, children ages 6–17 were told they could select as many candies as they wanted, but that the next child would only get to pick from the remaining candy.

In one condition, children were given information about the next child—"I heard that his/her dog ran away and his/her grandma is sick. He/she is so sad!" In the control condition, children were not given information about the next child. Children were then given the opportunity to decide privately whether to share the candy by leaving some in a closed box. Children tended to show more empathy and, in turn, share more candy with the next child when the researchers provided information about the next child's emotional state. This research suggests that we may encourage more empathy and altruism from others when we are willing to share and learn more about each other.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Cultivating empathy in students is important because it can help students cultivate strong relationships with their classmates, encouraging helping behavior, sharing, and a willingness to comfort others. Empathy can also help create safer school environments. Research has found that an increase in empathy can decrease bullying and aggression among children.

Overall, empathy is often credited as the driver of morality, with research supporting the relationship between empathy and altruistic behavior. Thus, empathy is important for helping us to break away from a focus on the self and to respond to the needs of others—creating a better society for all.

SOURCE

Move This World High School SEL Curriculum