



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

## ASSESSING YOUR SCHOOL CLIMATE

*"Nothing has such power to broaden the mind as the ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under thy observation in life."*

—*Marcus Aurelius*

### OVERVIEW

Teachers will identify and reflect on the attitudes and behaviors that members of the school community are exposed to every day at school, potential impacts on these members, and actions they can engage in to mitigate any harm.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To ensure that all members of the school community feel safe and that they belong
- To make your teaching pedagogy and/or your curricula more inclusive
- To support student and staff well-being
- To better understand your students' and staff members' experiences

#### TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes daily/1 week

#### LEVEL

- Adult

#### MATERIALS

- Paper / Journal / [Reflection Worksheet](#)
- Pen/Pencil

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Teachers will:

- Observe the school and classroom environment
- Identify biases and/or stereotypes within these environments
- Reflect on their observations and note where improvements can be made

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Humility
- Empathy
- Compassion

## SEL COMPETENCIES

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

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Before you complete the practice below, pause, take a few deep, conscious breaths, and consider the following questions:
  - Am I committed to unearthing any biases or stereotypes that are present in my school community? Why?
  - If so, how will I navigate feelings of vulnerability if they emerge? If not, how can I become ready to identify which stereotypes and biases are present in my school?
- You might consider making use of these practices before or after your reflection: [Affirming Important Values](#) or [Mindful Self-Compassion for Adults](#)

## INSTRUCTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes and biases can arise in various relationships and arenas within the school community. For example:

- Between teachers and other teachers, non-teaching staff, administrators, students, or students' guardians
- Between non-teaching staff and other non-teaching staff, teachers, administrators, students, or students' guardians
- Between students' guardians and other guardians, non-teaching staff, teachers, administrators, or students
- Between students and other students, students' guardians, non-teaching staff, teachers, or administrators
- Toward certain groups within the curriculum
- Toward certain groups within school policies and administration

This practice can help identify where such stereotypes and bias might arise, how they might impact members of the school community, and what we might do to mitigate against potential harm.

### PROCEDURE

- Over the course of a school week, take some time to observe the school environment. For example, you might consider reading and analyzing school policies/curriculum more closely, observing students during lunch or recess, observing teachers in the teachers' lounge, etc. Through your observations, try to identify where biases and/or stereotypes exist within your school community.
  - Focus your observations on one area of bias (a few examples include: gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity, culture/nationality, language).
- Review [these examples](#), then write your observations using the same framework. (You can use [this Observation and Reflection worksheet](#) to write your responses, or write your responses in a journal or notebook.) Note that you may not fill out every question for each area that you look at.
- Then finish this exercise by completing the reflection questions on the same [worksheet](#) or in your journal/notebook.

### REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Have you made changes to address any of the biases you noticed? If so, have you noticed any impact that those changes have had on members of the school community?
- Do you feel like you can empathize with members of the school community more?
- Have you noticed any changes in your own behavior towards members of the school community?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Across [seven studies](#) (1,504 students from the University of Kansas), researchers found that social norms influenced participants' own expressions of prejudice. For example, when social norms made prejudice towards a particular group seem more acceptable, participants adhered to those norms when expressing prejudice, evaluating scenarios of discrimination, and reacting to hostile jokes. Thus, evaluating norms is essential for ensuring that the norms are supporting the fair treatment of all community members.

Furthermore, [research](#) has found that we are more likely to engage in a behavior when we form a plan ahead of time, i.e., if-then statements. For example, in a [study](#) of 287,228 U.S. citizens, the voters who were encouraged to create a voting plan (versus simply being encouraged to vote and/or asking if they intended to vote) increased voter turnout by 9.1 percent.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Despite educators' best intentions, biases can creep into the school community in many ways. Such biases might signal to students that prejudice is tolerated, creating hostile environments in which traditionally stigmatized students feel unwelcome and/or have to face discriminatory behavior.

In order to address such biases, one has to first notice them and then create a plan for remedying the biases. Reflecting on how such biases might be experienced by students can also help teachers to identify and change their own implicit biases, fostering more empathy for students as well as creating more [positive outcomes](#) for them.

## SOURCE

[Empatico](#): Empatico is a social-emotional learning platform, connecting students with themselves, each other, and the world through interactive and globally collaborative classroom tools.