



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

MINDSHIFTS: AN INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY REFLECTION TOOL

"Change is the only constant thing in life."

— Heraclitus

OVERVIEW

Students recognize the value of changing their minds and embracing intellectual humility. By reflecting on a time when they shifted their perspective, they practice open-mindedness and develop a deeper appreciation for intellectual growth and learning.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During classroom meetings or advisory periods
- To develop students' self-awareness
- At the start of a new topic, unit, or school year to encourage open-mindedness
- After debates or discussions to reflect on shifting perspectives
- To foster a culture of intellectual humility and openness to learning
- After learning challenging concepts to process an evolving understanding
- As a reflection after receiving feedback

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- Writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students, teachers, or school staff will:

- Recognize the importance of being open to changing their minds when presented with new information or perspectives
- Reflect on their own thought processes and identify how and why their views have evolved over time
- Engage in thoughtful analysis of their previous beliefs and consider the factors that led to their change in perspective
- Cultivate the ability to approach new ideas and viewpoints with curiosity and the willingness to reconsider previously held assumptions

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Curiosity
- Humility
- Growth Mindset

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Focused Attention

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Try the practice yourself. Then, reflect on the following:
 - What mindshifts did you recall?
 - What did you learn from them? How did those moments change you?

INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Begin by introducing the concept of intellectual humility. Explain that *intellectual humility* is "the degree to which people recognize that their beliefs might be wrong." *Intellectual humility* means...

- *Being open to new ideas.*
- *Being willing to reconsider your beliefs when presented with new information or perspectives.*
- *Recognizing that you might not always have all the answers.*
- *Acknowledging that your knowledge and understanding can have limitations.*
- *Challenging your assumptions, biases, and level of certainty about something or someone.*

Also explain the [benefits](#) of being intellectually humble, as opposed to being highly certain. *People with greater intellectual humility ...*

- *Tend to be more curious and open-minded, and are generally better liked as leaders.*
- *Are more likely to value and care about the well-being of others.*
- *Are more motivated to learn and more knowledgeable about general facts.*
- *Invest more effort in learning challenging material, are more open to feedback on assignments, and achieve higher grades.*
- *Are more likely to make well-informed, thoughtful decisions.*
- *Are more open to collaborating with those who hold different viewpoints (e.g., religion, politics).*
- *Tend to forgive those who have hurt them.*
- *Are more willing to question their own views and consider opposing perspectives.*
- *Display less "my-side bias," that is, favoring your own side of an argument, even when there is good evidence for the other side.*
- *Are more open to befriending outgroup members on social media.*
- *Are more likely to experience higher levels of life satisfaction and less negative emotions.*

Share the following prompt:

- *"Think about a time when you changed your mind about something important to you. It could be a belief, an opinion, or even a simple preference.*

REFLECTION

Invite students or colleagues to quietly reflect on their own experiences. Ask them to recall a situation when they:

- Realized they were wrong about something
- Gained new information or a new perspective that made them rethink their stance
- Changed their mind about an issue, idea, or belief they previously held strongly

Examples: favorite hobbies, fashion trends, friendships, school rules or policies, or more complex ideas such as gender equality, social norms, climate change, wars, democracy, capitalism, polarization, family structures, and relationships.

WRITING PROMPT

- *"Write about a time you changed your mind. What was the belief or idea you held before? Why did you believe it? What caused you to change your mind? How did you feel afterward?"*

Encourage students or colleagues to be honest and thoughtful in their reflections.

SHARING AND DISCUSSION

Invite students or colleagues to share their experiences with a partner or small group. They can talk about the following:

- *What they learned from changing their minds*
- *How it felt to admit they were wrong or to shift their perspective*
- *Why intellectual humility is important in learning and growing*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What made it difficult or easy to change your mind?*
- *How did your new perspective impact the way you think now?*
- *What does this experience teach you about the importance of staying open to new ideas?*
- *How do you view mind shifts or changing your mind? When is it a sign of weakness, and when is it a sign of growth?*

CLOSURE

Bring the group back together and reflect on what they learned from the exercise:

- *How can practicing intellectual humility help us in our everyday lives?*
- *In what ways can we continue to stay open to new perspectives and ideas?*

End by emphasizing that when we encounter new information, changing our minds is generally a strength, not a weakness, and that it is an important part of growing as learners and thinkers.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION

- Encourage participants to set a goal to actively listen to different perspectives in the future and remain open to changing their minds when presented with new evidence or insights.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do participants recognize the importance of being open to changing their minds when presented with new information or perspectives?
- Do participants reflect on their thought processes and identify how and why their views have evolved?
- Do participants engage in thoughtful analysis of their previous beliefs and consider the factors that led to their change in perspective?
- Are there ways I, as a teacher and colleague, can integrate intellectual humility into future lessons, class meetings, staff meetings, or other contexts at school?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Classrooms that view mistakes as a normal part of learning help foster intellectual humility. In this [study](#), researchers surveyed ethnically and racially diverse middle school students in California and New York (55% Hispanic or Latino, 16% Asian, 15% Black, 10% White, and 5% another ethnicity) on intellectual humility and how important learning was in their classrooms, asking about effort, understanding, and the acceptability of mistakes. About two-thirds of students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. Observers found that in classrooms with mastery-oriented teaching, which emphasized growth mindset and participation, students became more focused on learning and showed greater intellectual humility over time.

In yet another [study](#) conducted with ethnically and racially diverse high school students and undergraduates in the United States, researchers found that classroom environments that emphasize intellectual ability stifle intellectual humility. For example, when students perceived a university as focusing on intellectual ability, they viewed the environment as more competitive and were less likely to express intellectual humility by admitting when they did not know something or made a mistake. Therefore, fostering a classroom environment that encourages learning from mistakes can promote intellectual humility.

Additionally, reading or learning about the benefits of intellectual humility, as described in this practice, can increase intellectual humility. In this [study](#), American adults (mean age 36 years) were randomly assigned to read an article encouraging either intellectual humility or intellectual certainty. Participants who read the intellectual humility article reported significantly higher intellectual humility than those who read about intellectual certainty.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Intellectual humility, or recognizing the limitations of our knowledge, has several benefits for students. Intellectual humility is associated with many [prosocial outcomes](#) including higher levels of empathy, gratitude, altruism, and lower levels of power-seeking. Thus, by supporting our students' growth in intellectual humility, we might be helping them become more helpful toward others.

Intellectual humility is also a strong predictor of [open-minded thinking and tolerance toward diverse people and ideas](#) as well as [reflective thinking and curiosity](#). Therefore, cultivating intellectual humility can help our students counter the challenges of narrow, group-based thinking and societal polarization and can help them bridge differences with people they do not necessarily agree with. On a related note, fostering intellectual humility in students can prepare them to counteract [misinformation, fake news, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscience-based beliefs](#).

TERMS OF USE

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