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

MAKING VALUES-INFORMED DECISIONS

"When you learn something from people, or from a culture, you accept it as a gift, and it is your lifelong commitment to preserve it and build on it."

–Yo-Yo Ma

OVERVIEW

Staff use reflective questions to assess possibilities, navigate dilemmas, and make the best possible choice to serve the needs of the individual, team, community, and learning environment.

LEVELS

- Adult

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the start of a meeting
- To encourage a richer discussion
- When a challenging dilemma presents itself
- For the development of practices and solutions that recognize the dignity of every member of the community

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 20 minutes

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Staff will:

- Engage with questions that are meant to broaden their perspectives as they engage in addressing school challenges
- Listen to one another
- Identify steps to move forward

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- Making Practices Culturally Responsive
- Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Integrity
- Humility
- Fairness

SEL COMPETENCIES

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

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect on your personal values. Consider how your values influence your decisions.
- How might understanding the values and perspectives of staff members help you make the best possible decisions that serve the needs of the school community?

INSTRUCTIONS

Moral character supports decision-making from multiple perspectives, allowing one to honestly evaluate situations with open-mindedness, integrity, equity, and justice in order to respond in a meaningful and responsible manner.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Look at the meeting topic or agenda to get a sense for what will be discussed. Choose a set of questions from the ones provided below that could serve as a warm-up to jumpstart everyone's thinking, or questions that could help engage new perspectives on a dilemma or challenge your team is facing.

Question Set 1

How does my role affect how and what people share with me?

How might I contribute to providing a safe environment to share ideas, thoughts, concerns, and viewpoints?

Possible use: when addressing issues of trust or belonging in school

Question Set 2

Does this decision conflict with my core values?

How are we ensuring the intrinsic worth of people is being valued in an equitable and just way?

Possible use: when making decisions that impact the school's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion

Question Set 3

Why do we believe this is the right decision?

What other choices do we have in this situation?

Possible use: when making decisions that impact others at the school

Question Set 4

How might others perceive my decision or action?

What ethical concerns or implications exist in this decision?

Possible use: when a serious offense needs to be addressed

Question Set 5

What are my biases?

Do I acknowledge the bias I bring to this situation, or am I taking action to remove that bias?

Possible use: when reviewing school disciplinary policies

Question Set 6

What is my mission or vision?

How am I aligning my choices with my mission or vision?

Possible use: when preparing for the start of the semester

Question Set 7

What qualities are you grateful for when collaborating with others?

How does gratitude impact our decision making?

Possible use: when addressing issues related to a lack of support among teachers

Question Set 8

How are we practicing love and care?

What are the consistent opportunities and practices in place that encourage the development of authentic relationships?

Possible use: when discussing community building strategies

DURING THE MEETING

- Introduce the meeting topic and agenda.
- Read the set of starter questions out loud and let participants know you would like to start the meeting by discussing those two questions. Set a few norms for the discussion (e.g., anything said is confidential; listen actively and with an ear to understanding others' views; argue with ideas, not individuals; commit to learning).
- Ask participants to discuss each question and how it relates to the identified topic/challenge. You may have participants turn in pairs first and then ask a few pairs to share their thoughts. Encourage everyone to provide their input. Ask participants to identify if and how their perspective on the topic or challenge shifted after considering the opening questions.
- Discuss how this conversation informs your steps moving forward.

SOURCE

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REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What sort of insights did participants gain from this discussion?
- Did you notice a difference in how staff engaged in the meeting?
- How might you handle conflicts in opinions?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research suggests that deliberate reflection can strengthen moral character in people, particularly increasing their practice of humility. Deliberate reflection also encourages the practice of self-correction and acknowledgement of biases that may influence behavior. Thus, deliberate reflection lays a foundation for people to engage in more honest and fair behavior.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Schools face moral dilemmas every day. In order to make effective decisions that deliver ethical and equitable learning opportunities for all learners, staff members need time to reflect together on how they view and experience the situation based on their personal values and those of the school.

Reflecting on the sets of questions in this practice engage character as part of the decision-making process, helping staff members design solutions for the dilemmas and challenges they face. In addition, intentional reflection helps to cultivate practical wisdom, the skill that helps us to know and do the good in the right way—a useful tool in the fast-paced environment of a school.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

Greater Good in Education is a free online resource produced by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Visit our website at ggie.berkeley.edu to choose from more than 300 practices that can be incorporated into all aspects of a school community, from academic instruction to staff meetings to engagement with parents.

Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
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