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

YES-NO-MAYBE CURRENT EVENT DISCUSSION

“Tolerance isn't about not having beliefs. It's about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you.”

–Timothy Keller

OVERVIEW

Students take a stance on a current event, explain their stance, respectfully listen to other students’ opinions, and engage in dialogue.

LEVELS

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage students to consider different points of view
- To encourage respectful discussion among students
- To give all students a chance to move and actively participate in discussion

TIME REQUIRED

- 12-20 minutes

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencils/pens
- Signs that indicate “Yes”, “No”, and “Maybe” corners of the room

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Decide where they stand on a controversial statement

- Discuss and summarize their position with others who share it
- Respectfully hear arguments from students with a differing position

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- Making Practices Culturally Responsive
- Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs
- Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- What is one current topic that is controversial? Reflect on your stance on the topic and then consider why others have a differing opinion.

INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCE YES-NO-MAYBE (2-3 MIN)

- Tell students: *Today, we are going to start learning some skills that you will need, now and as you get older, to be effective and involved citizens of your classrooms, your school, your community, and the wider world. It involves thinking about our own opinion on issues and considering others' opinions as well.*
- Designate 3 separate spaces/areas in the room, one for "Yes", "No", and "Maybe."
- Tell students: *I am going to read a sentence and when I am done, you will move to the Yes, No, or Maybe spot of the room depending on whether you agree or not (Yes=agree, No=disagree, Maybe=not sure). If you agree and move to "Yes," you have to share one reason why you agree. If you move to "No," you have to say why you do not agree. If you pick "Maybe," you have to share both something you agree with and something you disagree with about the statement.*
- Establish norms/guidelines with students that set the tone for a respectful discussion. You may consider asking students some of the following questions:
    - How can you show respect to one another during the debate?
    - How might you show your classmates you are listening?
    - How might you handle challenging emotions?
    - How could you show empathy to students who are experiencing strong emotions?

CARRY OUT YES-NO-MAYBE (8-10 MIN)

- Generate and read neutral statements that do not have a clear right or wrong answer. Ethical and values-based questions that are related to your course content often lead to fruitful discussions, but you may want to practice with more neutral statements first. After you read the statement, ask students to move to the appropriate part of the room (or in other ways form a group of those saying Yes, No, or Maybe).
- For practice purposes, you may want to begin with some general statements not connected with specific content you are teaching. Some examples include:
    - Students in school should always stand for the pledge of allegiance.
    - The Constitution states that no person shall be "deprived of life, liberty, or property without the process of law." Is this present in today's society?
    - The statement "We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" is within the Declaration of Independence. Is it still necessary to guard the rights of all who inhabit the United States?
    - Since Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was put into place by executive action without congressional approval it is unconstitutional and should not continue to be upheld in the United States.
    - Citizens should help when they see someone in trouble or in need of assistance.
- Tell students: *If you are in the agree ("Yes") group, join with three or four other students and share one reason why you agree. If you said "No," share one reason why you disagree and how you would make the situation better. If you picked "Maybe," share both something you agree with and something you disagree with about the statement.*
- Tell students: *After you share within your group, pick one or two students to summarize your group's ideas and share them when I call on you.*
- Repeat for other statements as time/curriculum goals allow.

REFLECT ON SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES (2-6 MIN)

- Remind students: *Remember that the point of Yes-No-Maybe is to encourage peer opinion sharing and respectful listening. You are not being asked to create a consensus or resolution or find the "best" or "right" answer.*
- After each statement you complete, as time allows, review the responses of the groups, giving them a chance to add/correct your summary if they wish. This helps ensure that everyone's views were heard and reflected adequately in the summaries.
    - Ask students: *Was there anything that surprised you during the activity?*
    - Tell students: *Notice how you had many different thoughts, and there was not a single right answer.*

SOURCE

This practice was developed by Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development (SECD) Lab as part of their Students Taking Action Together (STAT) project.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were students surprised by the differences in opinions that were present in the classroom? Have you noticed students engage in greater dialogue with each other regarding their opinions on various topics?
- What worked or didn't work for you in leading this practice? Would you change anything for next time?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research shows that SEL interventions that teach skills such as empathy, conflict resolution, and listening have a positive impact on youth development, resulting in better social-emotional skills, attitudes, and indicators of well-being.

Active learning techniques, in which students actively discuss and reflect on ideas rather than passively absorbing them, boost students' engagement and learning. Debate-type activities, in particular, in which students must consider other points of view and clarify their own, have been shown to improve students' critical thinking, perspective-taking, and communication skills.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who are more engaged at school overall tend to do better in academics and in life. More specifically, activities like Yes-No-Maybe Current Event Discussion promote the kind of critical thinking and communication skills that students will be able to apply across contexts, and that will thus serve them well in their future educational and career trajectories.

What's more, the ability and willingness to listen to, understand, and respond respectfully to different perspectives is critical in today's globalized world. To make truly ethical and responsible decisions, students must be able to engage in dialogue with others while developing their own ideas.

TERMS OF USE

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With gratitude,
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