

Action Overview: Educator Beliefs

Action: Examine beliefs of educators across the organization

This set of resources is designed to help educators examine their beliefs about student learning and how those beliefs affect their interactions with students.

Introduction

What is the impact of educator beliefs?

The attitudes and beliefs of educators explicitly and implicitly affect their interactions with students, and influence their students' beliefs about themselves and their abilities to learn. We know that "Teachers want students to learn, and many make an effort to be particularly responsive to racially and ethnically diverse students" (Hawley). However, because of the complexity of individual experiences, biases, and perceptions, positive intentions do not ensure positive outcomes for students. Sometimes we are not aware of unintended outcomes or impacts of beliefs that we hold: "Many of the beliefs we hold and lessons we are taught about racially and ethnically diverse students and how best to facilitate their learning have positive effects. Others, however, while seemingly sensible and well intended, can have negative consequences" (Hawley). "without addressing the underlying deficit beliefs influencing educators' behavior, providing "high-quality" or "research-based" professional development does little to change practice..." (Guerra, 2009).

Why is it important to examine educator beliefs?

Educator beliefs should be examined in order to:

- form a school culture in which discussions of culture are accepted and expected
- form a common vision and philosophy for education.
- Understand how educator attitudes and actions toward individual learners and groups of learners and help educators identify whether some learners are advantaged or disadvantaged by instructional practices and policies.
- align curriculum and instruction to ensure that students' education leads to equitable career, college and daily life readiness.
- inform course offerings and development.
- identify needs for professional development to increase educators' knowledge, skills, and efficacy to address the shifts.
- inform teachers' perceptions of their own success and value.
- inform interventions and approaches to differentiated instruction.

How will understanding current educator beliefs benefit the development of a standards-based education system?

The activities in this action will have educators examine their beliefs by responding to a survey in which they provide responses to common education situations and then that information is collected anonymously. By reflecting on the responses, the participants may challenge and possibly change their beliefs in ways that are

more supportive of equitable learning. Also, having a shared understanding of the beliefs of colleagues may enhance the effectiveness of collaborative work in developing a standards-based system. The products of the analysis of the beliefs survey will be utilized in the culminating action of this strategy, the development of a vision for instruction and curriculum

Suggested Activities

How do educators use portal resources to develop shared understanding of current educator belief?

1. If you have not completed the [Danger of a Single Story activity](#) from the Standards-based Education Strategy, participate in that activity
2. [Plan and Conduct an Examination of Educator Beliefs](#)

Related Content

[Examining Instruction Practices Strategy Overview](#)

Standards-based Education Strategy: Role of Standards Action: [Danger of a Single Story Activity](#)

References

Guerra, P.L., & Nelson, S.W. (2009). Changing professional practice requires changing beliefs, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(5), 354-359.

Hawley, W., Jordan Irvine, J., & Landa, M. (n.d.). Common beliefs survey: teaching racially and ethnically diverse students. In *Teaching Tolerance*. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/common-beliefs-survey-teaching-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-students>

Notes:

0. Identify data sources for this exploration
 - Beliefs survey of teachers
 - About what we do in instruction: individuals, teams, system
 - About student learning/capacity etc
 - About culture, school climate, family, policies, etc
 - Suggestion from Mary L, from Teaching Tolerance: [Directions for Common Beliefs Activity](#), [Teaching Tolerance "Common Beliefs Survey"](#), [Teaching Tolerance "Common Beliefs Description"](#)
 - beliefs about learning-- how best to learn in content area
 - [Beliefs and arts \(early learning\)](#)
 - [Beliefs about creativity](#)
 - Assumptions about students' prior learning-- expectations
 - Survey students and families
 - Observations of instruction
 - DuFours' 4 squares activity about beliefs (already done in SBE section,-- if not, utilize it here OR include those prompts in survey)
1. Recording sheet...(personal and collective)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BycwcKgioNwLU0RpVmh2dWI4d1E3bWJNYkIzcVRxa1RyYzMO/view>, Patricia L. Guerra and Sarah W. Nelson, Changing Professional Practice Requires Changing Beliefs, Phi Delta Kappan, Vol. 90, No. 05, January 2009, pp. 354-359.

An abundance of research suggests that teachers' personal beliefs drive professional practice. Unfortunately, the prevalence of deficit thinking, which is the inclination to view certain groups of students as inherently flawed, is well documented in the literature on pre- and inservice teacher education (Valencia 1997). In spite of this, most school improvement efforts continue to focus on changing only the behavior of educators, rather than working on both beliefs and behaviors.

In the domain of education, teachers often have different expectations and standards for their students based on students' race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, which show up when it comes to evaluating student achievement and behavior. When a teacher has lower expectations of an adolescent's achievement based on the adolescent's group identity, this has a harmful influence on actual achievement (Jussim and Harber, 2005). Recent research finds that Black teachers have expectations of their Black students that are 30 to 40 percent higher than the expectations that White teachers have of the same students (Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge, 2016.) The same research shows evidence of intersectional inequality: these differences are larger for Black male students than for Black female students (Gershoshen, Holt, and Papageorge, 2016). These findings are consistent with research, finding that, for elementary-school-age Black children, having a Black teacher in third through fifth grades increased the probability of graduation from high school (Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge, 2017). These findings underscore the considerable cost associated with the continuing shortage of Black teachers in U.S. schools (Madkins, 2011) (For further discussion, see "Creating Culturally Sensitive Learning Environments" in Chapter 7).²⁴

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2019. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25388>.
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Notes for potential inclusion in readings.

"Schools are a major part of society's institutional processes for maintaining a relatively stable system of inequality. They contribute to these results by active acceptance and utilization of a dominant set of values, norms and **beliefs**, which, while appearing to offer opportunities to all, actually support the success of a privileged minority and hinder the efforts and visions of a majority." (CHAPTER 6 of Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice. Changing the Discourse in Schools. Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith. 1997. Pg 1)

"Even when an attempt to identify and discuss substantive issues occurs, there are serious barriers. Existing cultural patterns, ways of thinking and accepted practice tend to conceal significant problems and contradictions. Symptoms often get identified and treated as causes and the problems persist. For example, children do not turn in their homework assignments, which drives many teachers to distraction. The homework problem will get identified as something within the student and/or home conditions. Different policies will then be employed that reward or punish doing or not doing homework. What will seldom be considered is the idea that the relationships and conditions of learning in the school and classroom are major contributors to why children do not do homework. Such things are not considered because teachers and principals are coming to school every day "doing their work" in ways that are acceptable within the culture of schooling. Thus it cannot be anything they are doing." (CHAPTER 6 of Race, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism Policy and Practice. Changing the Discourse in Schools.

Eugene Eubanks, Ralph Parish, and Dianne Smith. 1997. Pg 2)

“Teachers' beliefs appear to reflect longstanding attitudes, “common sense,” and their experiences in education rather than research-based knowledge about learning and motivation. Because teachers' beliefs play a significant role in shaping their instructional behaviors, and thus what students learn, it is important to examine their characteristics, their content, and their expression.” [\(Turner, Christenson, Meyer 2009\)](#)

“Prawat (1992) contended that some strong beliefs about teaching and learning hindered teachers' adoption of constructivist, or learning-focused pedagogy. At least two different types of teacher beliefs support this argument. First, many teachers tend to consider both learners and content as fixed, rather than interactive and malleable. These teachers appear to believe that both development and individual differences, such as intelligence, limit their ability to teach the curriculum, so it must be adapted, by style or pace to “fit” students. A corresponding belief is that teachers may assume that if something is taught (i.e., explained or demonstrated), it should be learned (Nuthall, 2004). If students do not learn, the problem is attributed to the inadequacy of the students' (stable) motivation, ability or persistence, but not to the instruction (Floden, 1996).” [\(Turner, Christenson, Meyer 2009\)](#)