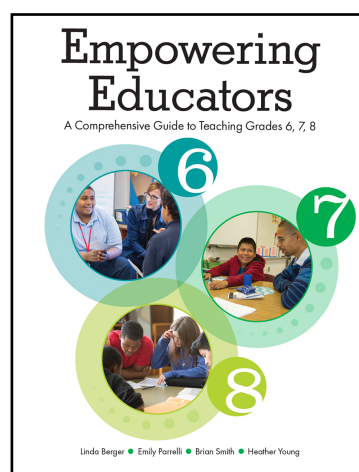
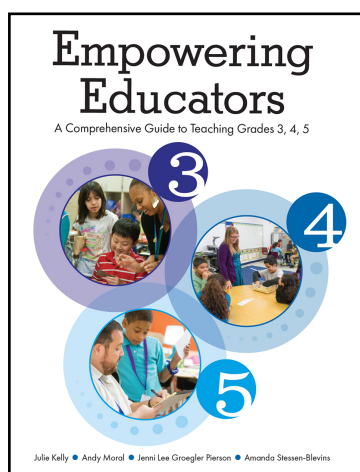
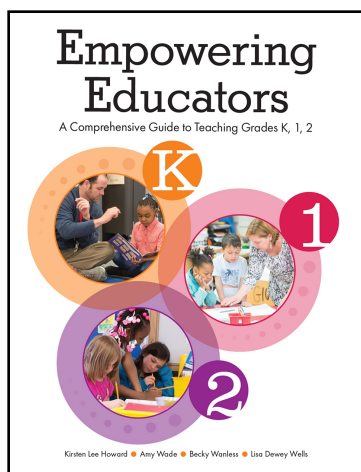


Excerpt from the *Empowering Educators* Series



Power of Teacher Beliefs

Our individual and collective beliefs have a huge impact on our work in schools and our effectiveness as educators. When our beliefs are conscious and healthy, like the collective belief in teacher efficacy described in the overview of this chapter, then the results are often positive and productive ones, such as improved academic outcomes for students and high morale for teachers. But we all have implicit biases, attitudes, or stereotypes we hold outside of our conscious awareness. Those implicit biases can get in the way of our conscious dedication to equity in education and impact our words, emotions, and actions.

Extensive research, particularly in K–12 school settings, has shown that implicit bias has a significant impact on discipline in schools, perceptions of behavior, and even teaching practices and leadership styles (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2018). It's crucial for educators to recognize their individual beliefs and biases, but the work doesn't stop there. The next step is to consciously let go of biases and of the beliefs that do not serve educators or students well, and cultivate or hold on to beliefs that are beneficial.

Identifying Implicit Biases

A first step is bringing awareness to implicit biases by intentionally pausing and asking yourself questions to get below the surface of your actions and words (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2018). Three simple questions, recommended by the National Education Association (n.d.), that you can ask yourself are:

1. What is true for you? Consider what past experiences you've had that you may carry with you.
2. What do you value? Think about what's most important to you and identify what your priorities are.
3. What's your privilege? Bring your awareness to the advantages you have had in your experience that others have not.

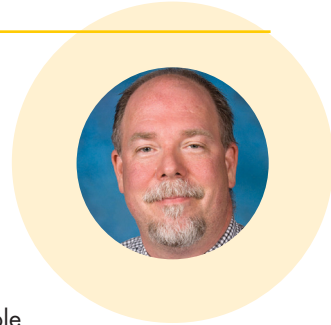
Another step in growing your awareness of implicit or unconscious biases is to explore an implicit association test, or IAT, like the ones developed by psychologists at Harvard University, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington at Project Implicit (Project Implicit 2011). These IATs examine the link between hidden biases and observable behavior. There are several IATs available through Project Implicit that measure implicit associations about a wide range of topics. The IATs are available for free and may be taken easily online. These tests may not provide all of the nuanced data that an individualized, in-person assessment might offer, but they do give useful initial insights into biases you may not have been aware of. As you explore your own beliefs and biases, you can build your awareness and work on changing your beliefs through practices like mindfulness to build empathy for those with different perspectives and building connections with people who are different from you (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity 2018).

As you bring your focus to your implicit beliefs, you can also think about your explicit beliefs and ensure that they serve you and your students well. Some beliefs contribute to our collective efficacy and to students' growing social and emotional learning skills. Those are beliefs we want to embrace, develop, and share with others. Shared teacher beliefs don't develop overnight, but they improve through strong instructional leader-

ship and consistent opportunities for teacher collaboration, like structured professional learning and opportunities to observe colleagues. In turn, these shared beliefs can lead to improved student achievement (Goddard et al. 2015).

Putting Student Behavior Into Perspective

Brian Smith



Often, teachers are the first adults that students see each day besides their family members. Sometimes, they may see their teachers even more than certain family members! Young people will often lash out at the ones closest to them, and so we often find ourselves at the center of a young person's life when they need to vent. This behavior can be hurtful and feel personal, but it's important to remind yourself that student behavior usually has very little to do with your classroom or your teaching. Most of the time, in fact, students are often not even aware of the impact their behavior has on their teachers or others around them.

The sooner we realize that we are not the target of student behavior, even if it appears that way, the sooner we are able to get students the help and support they need. Keep these tips in mind:

- **Stay calm.** We must maintain a professional and kind front no matter how a student behaves.
- **Remind them you care.** When the student is ready, take a quiet moment one-on-one to talk and determine how you can help them.
- **Use your resources.** If you feel overwhelmed by the situation, take the student to another adult who can offer a fresh perspective.
- **Be firm yet kind.** Our students rely on us for a stable and consistent environment. Once a student has calmed down, they should be able to rejoin the class and maintain their sense of belonging in the classroom community.

Teacher Beliefs That Promote Social and Emotional Learning

Teacher beliefs are a set of principles, assumptions, values, and convictions that educators hold true regarding students, the classroom, education and educational concepts, curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline. This belief system guides and informs their thoughts, actions, and classroom behaviors, forms the basis for decision-making, and helps to sort, organize, and prioritize information. Center for Responsive Schools has identified eight teacher belief domains that are critical to teachers' approach to education. These eight domains lie at the heart of social and emotional learning in the classroom and the school.

Conditions for Learning	Belief that students learn best in environments of high expectations that are student centered, developmentally responsive, academically challenging, and safe to make learning mistakes.
Conditions for Effective Teaching	Belief that teaching is most effective when lessons are planned and designed with knowledge of students, including evidence-based practices and strategies, and offer learning goals and instructional activities that are directly related to expectations for what a student should know and be able to do at the end of the instructional chunk.
Goal of Discipline	Belief that the goal of discipline is to teach students to be in control of themselves and to choose socially and morally responsible behavior because it is the right thing to do, not because of fear of punishment or hope of reward. Belief that teaching students self-discipline and self-control develops goal-setting, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills and helps them to become good citizens who exhibit pro-social behaviors and demonstrate respect for self, others, and property.
Goodness of Student Intentions	Belief that educators should hold and communicate positive beliefs and expectations for all students, including those who may have different values than they do; are culturally, racially, or socioeconomically different from them; who appear disengaged and unmotivated; or who struggle and misbehave. Belief that problem behaviors result from unmet needs or lack of skills rather than the student's character, family background, or intention to do harm.

Nature of Learning	Belief that learning is cognitively constructed and relies on social, emotional, and cooperative processes. Belief that learning builds on prior knowledge, is facilitated through choice and through understanding of students' context and interests, and becomes transferrable to a new context when there is an emphasis on process as well as outcome. Belief that changes in the learner happen because of the learning experience.
Purpose of Education	Belief that the purpose of education is to build in students a social consciousness and a strong sense of self, to cultivate the attitudes and dispositions of good citizenship, and to teach students to participate in the democratic process. Belief that education should provide new experiences and open windows for students to see and pursue a bright future for themselves, their families, and their local and global communities. Belief that the purpose of education is to enable students to read, speak, write, and listen well; to work well with numbers and technology; to think, reason, wonder, and be curious; to appreciate and value music, art, culture, movement, and athletics; and to manage themselves and know how to cooperate well with others.
Role of Social and Emotional Skills in Learning	Belief that the social and emotional curriculum has equal weight as the core academic curriculum and that social and emotional learning includes (a) school and classroom environments that support the development of social and emotional learning skills and (b) time and resources given for explicit instruction in social and emotional skill development.
Role of School and Classroom Environment	Belief that the school and classroom are a community in which all students belong, can operate autonomously and responsibly, and feel represented, welcome, and accepted as members of the school and academic community.

Imagine the power of a school community in which all educators consciously share these eight powerful beliefs and strive to ensure that their words and actions align with those beliefs. That kind of community would need to commit to continued exploration, collaboration, and reflection—an ongoing learning cycle that supports these shared beliefs and the teachers who hold them.

Building Shared Beliefs

Collective efficacy doesn't happen overnight. It's something school communities have to work toward and constantly fine-tune. You might find yourself in a school community where you have a different mindset or belief system from those around you. Feeling alone or different from your colleagues can be frustrating and discouraging. How do you create a community of colleagues from the ground up? Start by making a connection with one person from your school. See the next section, "Professional Growth," for ideas that can help build these bonds.

Final Word

Exploring your own implicit biases and beliefs is deeply personal work, and it can have powerful results for you and your students. It's not easy, and it is a particular challenge to address in isolation. Finding colleagues or, even better, a whole school community committed to embracing this work will make it even more engaging and effective. Remember to have empathy for yourself as you go through this reflective process. You will be learning new ways of thinking about the world and your place in it, and there will be moments of discomfort and disquiet. That's an important part of the learning process, and going through it allows us to make stronger, more meaningful connections on the other side. Give yourself the same grace and patience you offer your students. Just like them, you are learning, growing, and changing through this work.