



What do you believe you believe?

Discussing our beliefs about people whose race, religion, or socioeconomic backgrounds differ from our own can get uncomfortable. For one thing, we may not feel safe saying what we really believe. For another, we may not know how to speak skillfully about such topics in productive ways.

A new study from the Yale Child Study Center exposes another reason it can be difficult to talk about topics like race: Sometimes our biases are implicit rather than explicit (Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016). As the study demonstrated, educators' unconscious biases shape their expectations for and interactions with children. In the study, researchers showed video clips to teachers, asking them to hit a key when they saw challenging behavior. Using eye scan technology, the researchers found that participants' eyes followed the black children — particularly the African-American boys — more than they did the white children.

As Patricia Guerra and Sarah Nelson share on pp. 8-9, educators' beliefs matter. Understanding and addressing those beliefs will be critical to ensuring all students experience excellent teaching. According to

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recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2016), the student population continues to diversify. If educators at all levels are operating in ways that create barriers for entire segments of children, gaps in achievement, access, and opportunity will persist.

Attending to our beliefs is central to continuous improvement. When we talk about adult learning and how educators grow and change, we look at more than knowledge and skills. With thanks to Joellen Killion, Dennis Sparks, Ellie Drago-Severson, Peter Senge, and many others, we know we must also address beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions. If we don't consider the mental models that educators hold, whether about specific students in their classrooms or their own efficacy, it can be difficult to transform practice or sustain the implementation of new learning.

Shifting beliefs and assumptions isn't simply a matter of engaging in a well-facilitated discussion or hoping for a new attitude. A range of influences shapes our beliefs, including our experiences, families, religion, culture, ethnicity, and society in general. Still, as educators undertake the important work of prioritizing equity in schools, they can't ignore an examination of implicit and explicit beliefs.

In this issue of *JSD*, we offer several articles to build readers' understanding of relevant equity concepts and promising models in the field. At the

same time, I invite you to start your own belief and assumptions audit. Enlist your colleagues and seek out skilled facilitators to guide what can be difficult critical conversations. A few questions to consider as you start are:

- What do I learn when I examine my own beliefs and attitudes?
- What tools can I use to help others surface their assumptions and beliefs?
- How can I contribute to a culture that encourages difficult reflection and conversation around a range of equity questions?
- How can I help myself and others shift assumptions and mental models in ways that advance practices and benefit students?

What other practices and questions have helped you to discuss beliefs and assumptions? What are the benefits when you do? Please let us know.

REFERENCES

Gilliam, W.S., Maupin, A.N., Reyes, C.R., Accavitti, M., & Shic, F. (2016, September 28). *Do early educators' implicit biases regarding sex and race relate to behavior expectations and recommendations of preschool expulsions and suspensions?* New Haven, CT: Yale Child Study Center.

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