THOUGHTSTRETCHERS EDUCATION · WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

# Teaching or activism?
# What to think, or how to think?

Restoring Enlightenment Civics is professional development for K–12 educators. It builds the knowledge, habits of mind and classroom practice that let students take on contested questions without being told what to conclude.

| FORMAT | DELIVERY | FOR | CORE FRAMEWORK |
|---|---|---|---|
| Customized workshops and consulting | On-site, online or hybrid | Teachers, coaches, school and district leaders | 2 rules and 10 commitments |

WHY THIS WORK

## Necessary, but not sufficient

Most civics efforts focus on civil discourse, or on how government works: the three branches, the three levels and so on. Both matter. Neither is enough. Polarization, tribalism and illiberal habits keep growing, and many schools avoid hard civic questions altogether.

This workshop goes deeper, to the Enlightenment principles that sustain democratic life: open inquiry, evidence, pluralism, intellectual humility and the value of dissent. Knowing those foundations, and practicing the habits that go with them, helps educators recognize and push back on illiberalism from the left and the right.

THE CRUCIAL DISTINCTION

## Teaching, not activism

The educator's job is to teach students how to think, not what to think.

**Teaching**
focuses on the process: inquiry, evidence and intellectual humility.

**Activism**
focuses on a predetermined outcome or political orthodoxy.

Participants leave able to build **cultures of conversation**, where pluralism is the goal and dissent is a vital part of learning.

PARTICIPANTS WILL EXPLORE

- Enlightenment principles and habits of mind
- Intellectual humility and epistemic responsibility
- Pluralism and productive disagreement
- Understanding the political spectrum, and the problem of illiberalism at its extremes
- The role of dissent in democratic inquiry
- Teaching contentious topics without prescribing political conclusions
- Objective Pluralism as a practical approach to contested questions
- Creating classroom cultures of conversation

WHO IT'S FOR

**K–12 teachers**
Practical approaches for facilitating contentious topics, examining evidence and running productive classroom conversations.

**Instructional coaches**
Shared frameworks for supporting teachers in civic inquiry, discussion and intellectual habits.

**School leaders**
A common understanding of the school's role in preparing students for democratic participation.

**District and curriculum leaders**
Coherent civic education that connects curriculum, professional learning and instructional priorities.

THE CORE FRAMEWORK

## Two rules and ten commitments of a reality-based community

Adapted from Jonathan Rauch's *The Constitution of Knowledge*, these describe how a community decides what counts as knowledge, and how its members treat each other while they disagree. They anchor every part of the workshop.

RULE 1

### The fallibilist rule

*No one gets the final say.*

A claim counts as knowledge only if it could be shown wrong and has survived attempts to do so.

RULE 2

### The empirical rule

*No one has personal authority.*

A claim counts as established only if checking it gives the same result no matter who checks or who made the claim.

1. **Fallibilism.** Anyone might be wrong, so ideas stay open to criticism.
2. **Pluralism.** Value a diversity of viewpoints and seek them out.
3. **Objectivity.** Truth does not depend on feelings, identity or lived experience.
4. **Civility.** Keep criticism impersonal. No personal attacks.
5. **Exclusivity.** We commit to an objective reality.
6. **Professionalism.** Value the credentials and reputations of the reality-based community.
7. **Disconfirmation.** Every idea and viewpoint is open to challenge.
8. **Institutionalism.** Value and rely on established norms and codes of conduct.
9. **Accountability.** Offer ideas for good-faith critique, and admit when you are wrong.
10. **No B.S.** Seek the truth sincerely instead of obscuring it.

INTO THE CLASSROOM

## Objective Pluralism

Objective about what counts as knowledge, pluralistic about the perspectives students encounter. Teachers teach what is known and say honestly how strong the consensus is, while presenting the range of views people bring to a question, because consensus is always provisional. It is not both-sidesism: some claims are far better supported than others, and Objective Pluralism says so.

INTENTIONAL · BY PLAN

### Lesson design

Build complexity, nuance and multiple perspectives into a unit from the start, such as mapping what is established, what is reasonably disputed and what is a matter of values.

INTUITIVE · BY PERCEPTION

### Lesson delivery

Use teachable moments to acknowledge and leverage different perspectives, and to model the two rules in the moment.

ALSO IN THE WORKSHOP

The three challenges to free thought (fundamentalist, egalitarian and humanitarian), and the three "great untruths" Haidt and Lukianoff describe, with ways to help students reject them:

UNTRUTH 1

*What doesn't kill you makes you weaker.*

UNTRUTH 2

*Always trust your feelings.*

UNTRUTH 3

*Life is a battle between good people and evil people.*

BUILT AROUND YOUR SCHOOL

## Three pathways

Every engagement is customized. Most combine elements of these pathways, sized to a single school team or a whole district.

### Teacher Foundations

Professional learning on Enlightenment thinking and teaching: rights, rule of law, pluralism and intellectual habits of mind.

### Classroom Practice

Modeling knowledge-rich inquiry, projects and discussions, using debate, dialogue and dialectic.

### Leadership and Systems

Aligning purpose, curriculum, systems and practices, with clear vision, messaging and policy.

WHAT CHANGES

### Students

Stronger civic understanding and "civic hygiene," with less tribal thinking.

### Teachers

Confidence teaching civics and contested topics, and pedagogical clarity.

### Systems

A shared vision and messaging, and policy that protects open inquiry.

FROM FIRST CONVERSATION TO LASTING CHANGE

1. **Clarify** — We listen and learn your needs.
2. **Customize** — We design for your team and context.
3. **Deliver** — Engaging, research-based, practical workshops.
4. **Support** — Coaching, reflection, resources and follow-up.
5. **Sustain** — Build capacity for durable impact.

WHAT EDUCATORS SAY

> "This is a must-attend workshop. It really changed my perspective on what exactly I should be teaching through my content."
>
> Philip Ellis, high school science teacher

> "I found this to be more informative and useful than any other PD I've participated in."
>
> Deborah Shirley, elementary teacher

> "Thank you so much for giving us (the teachers) the tools to make real education happen! Finally!"
>
> Amy Guier, middle school English teacher

> "The content is excellent and the presenter was highly effective."
>
> Jim Whitaker, high school social studies teacher

## Bring this to your school or district

Led by Drew Perkins, President and Director of ThoughtStretchers Education and host of the ThoughtStretchers Podcast. Length, format and cost are planned around your goals, group size and calendar. After a first conversation, proposals usually arrive within hours.

**Book a planning call**
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**Email**
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**Call**
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