Why Was This Toolkit Created?

Teachers Are Change-Makers

Teachers are in the unique position to empower students and elevate their learning experiences. Our classrooms equip students with strategies and tools they will use for the rest of their lives. Now more than ever, it is crucial that we provide students with opportunities to learn how to relate to people whose thoughts and opinions differ from their own. Through civil discourse methods, we offer students the tools to use their voices and respectfully communicate in a polarized world. The teaching of civil discourse aims to bridge diverse viewpoints and allow space for discussion, understanding, and reflection.

This toolkit was crafted specifically with middle school teachers in mind. It is designed to help you integrate civil discourse routines and strategies into your classroom with ease, no matter what subject area you teach.

Civil Discourse Boosts Student Achievement

Decades of research shows that civil discourse lessons boost students' overall academic and social–emotional success. Evidence from more than 20 international studies showed that engagement in high-quality classroom discussions improved overall student performance in core subjects, as measured by national and global exams (Alexander, 2012). While all students benefited from this approach, students from multilingual backgrounds appeared to gain an extra boost. Research demonstrated that lessons in civil discourse and oracy—defined as proficiency in oral expression and comprehension—significantly improved the spoken English skills of multilingual students, leading to increased confidence and engagement in all educational areas (Kotler et al., 2001).

Civil Discourse Fits in Any Classroom

Making space within your existing curriculum for civil discourse lessons maximizes student learning with minimal time commitment. Teachers don't need to worry about straying from required content, because the civil discourse framework fits within existing curricula. In

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fact, civil discourse lessons improve student understanding of all educational content, as students are given the chance to think deeply and discuss the material with their peers.

Teacher-led lectures require students to take notes and sit passively. Students in these lessons miss out on opportunities to develop important communication skills, healthy reasoning, and social–emotional learning. By contrast, in civil discourse lessons, all students are actively engaged, so learning takes place on a deeper level.

Level Up Your Lessons with Civil Discourse

Prepare Your Students for Their Future Careers

Employers rank communication as a highly useful skill in every work environment. Civil discourse and direct instruction of oracy teaches students to convey messages clearly and persuasively. Students also gain insight into others' needs while they recognize the importance of responding to feedback. These life lessons will greatly benefit our students as they transition into adulthood, particularly when they find themselves working in collaborative team environments. Employers value individuals who can foster professional relationships, and civil discourse experiences provide opportunities to build these critical skills.

Together, We Can Save the World

Teachers play a pivotal role in helping students find their voices through civil discourse lessons that prioritize active listening and the inclusion of all perspectives. Our classrooms provide the perfect training ground to hone communication skills through civil discourse and oracy lessons. In order to maintain a resilient society, it is crucial for students to learn how to communicate respectfully and effectively. By teaching communication skills and consistently providing opportunities for classroom discussions, we can empower the next generation to communicate effectively while respecting diverse viewpoints. This in turn will contribute to the enhancement of civic culture in America.

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