

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
WEBINAR

HOW SCHOOLS CAN HELP TO CULTIVATE
INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY IN AMERICA'S STUDENTS

Monday, August 31, 2026

This is an automated transcript that has been minimally reviewed. Please check against the recording for accuracy. If you find any significant errors of substance, please let us know at events@brookings.edu.

WELCOME AND MODERATOR

JON VALANT
Herman and George R. Brown Chair in Education Studies, Senior Fellow, and
Director, Brown Center on Education Policy, Brookings

OPENING CONVERSATION

JONATHAN RAUCH
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, Brookings

PANEL

JASON BAEHR
Professor of Philosophy, Loyola Marymount University
Cofounder, Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach (Middle School)

ERANDA JAYAWICKREME
Harold W. Tribble Professor of Psychology, Wake Forest University

TENELLE PORTER
Assistant Professor of Psychology, Rowan University

* * * * *

VALANT: Welcome. I'm Jon Valant, a senior fellow at Brookings and the director of our Brown Center on Education Policy. We're here today to talk about intellectual humility, and specifically, how we can cultivate intellectual humility in students. And I know that topic isn't always top of mind for those of us in K-12 education.

I think we can sometimes fall into a trap where we start thinking that the purposes of school are narrow, that it's just teaching the kinds of things that show up on state tests. And we can fall into a trap where we think that the capabilities of schools are narrow, too. But the truth is that schools aren't narrow in purpose or in capability, and they are the primary institutions we have for developing the virtues in people that we think are important for a cohesive society, a stable democracy, and a thriving economy. And intellectual humility certainly strikes many of us as one of those virtues.

So what is intellectual humility? We'll get more into that over the next hour, but in the simplest terms, and it's an awareness that, as humans, we're all wrong sometimes. And in fact, that's a wonderful part of being human because it gives us opportunities to learn, especially from one another.

Just this morning, we released a couple of Brookings reports on developing intellectual humility in young people. Those reports focus especially on what schools can do, and they describe results from surveys of nationally representative groups of students, parents, and teachers. You can find those reports on the Brookings website.

Today, we're together for an hour, and we've divided that hour into parts. We'll open with a short conversation with my colleague, Jonathan Rauch, who will motivate the discussion by describing changes in our society's relationship with the truth. We'll then transition to a panel discussion with three experts in intellectual humility who will help us understand how we can cultivate intellectual humility in young people.

We'll save about 10 minutes at the end of the hour for audience questions. If you have a question, you can email it to us at events@brookings.edu. It's events@brookings.edu. And thanks to those of you who have already submitted questions. Thanks also to the John Templeton Foundation for their support of this work and to our events team here at Brookings for making this webinar possible.

Let's get started. So we're gonna start here with Jonathan Rauch, and Jonathan is a senior fellow in the Governance Studies program at Brookings and a contributing writer at The Atlantic. Jon is a prolific writer and leading thinker on a wide variety of issues related to American life and politics.

Of particular relevance to today's discussion, Jon authored a book called *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*, and it describes an epistemic crisis in modern America and discusses how we can build a society that is better able to separate fact from fiction. And I think that book really helps to illuminate the stakes for us when it comes to equipping young people with virtues like intellectual humility.

So Jon, welcome.

RAUCH: Happy to be here.

VALANT: So as you know, topic here today is intellectual humility which I think of as an appreciation that we're human, and no matter how much we might think to the contrary, we're fallible and we get things wrong, and we have a lot that we can learn from other people.

And as I mentioned, in 2021, you published this wonderful book, *The Constitution of Knowledge*, where you write about the need for a liberal society to have systems, institutions, and norms for vetting ideas and establishing truth. And you wrote about how strained and threatened that is in modern America.

So now that we're a few years past the book's release, I'm hoping you can give us a sense of that book's core argument and an appraisal of where we are here in 2026

RAUCH: Happy to. The book's thesis, as you just mentioned, Jon, is that if you want knowledge, which is very difficult and expensive, as opposed to just information which is very cheap and often bad, you need not just a free marketplace of ideas but a lot of social structures that will put those ideas into contention in a systematic way to produce persuasion.

And that those rules look a lot like the United States Constitution, which incentivizes compromise, constitution of knowledge incentivizes persuasion. And a lot can go wrong with the constitution of knowledge. Depends, as you say, on a lot of norms and institutions and informal rules. So where are we today compared to five years ago? There's good news and bad news. Which do you want first?

VALANT: Let's start with the good news.

RAUCH: The good news is that the world of academia over the past five years has become significantly more aware that it has a serious problem with the the capture and sometimes political corruption of certain of its disciplines, certain of its departments.

It's become much more aware that it's lost the trust of the American people. And there is now a burgeoning reform movement both within universities to begin addressing issues like viewpoint diversity and to some extent disciplinary capture. And also an effort that's quite creative, of which I'm generally supportive by state legislatures and other agents, to create intellectual centers, sometimes called schools of civic education within universities that will bring alternative perspectives.

I'm on the board of Heterodox Academy, and that's a group of academics who are doing this work of reform from inside. And there's been a sea change. It began before the Trump administration and has only accelerated since. That's encouraging. The bad news is that when I wrote *The Constitution of Knowledge*, it came out in the late spring of 2021, I wrote that Donald Trump and his MAGA movement are the most sophisticated and effective propaganda operators since certain persons we won't name in the 1930s.

They use very sophisticated techniques of cognitive manipulation like repetition and reversal, like what Steve Bannon calls flooding the zone with shit, and these things work. I thought that with Trump's electoral rejection we would see the retreat of those tactics. Of course, Trump is now back. He's in charge of the government, and we are seeing the repurposing of federal agencies to spread what's not to put too fine a point on it, to spread misinformation, half-truths, exaggerations, and lies.

We see, for example, that when an American citizen is shot in Minneapolis, that word is put out that this person is a terrorist, an out and out lie. So the use of government for purposes of undermining the constitution of knowledge it's not going away. And it's deeply compromised the credibility of the government and then through the scientific agencies, which as you know are under attack. It's also weakened our research agenda, our research program.

VALANT: But can I ask, so those of us who are in K-12 education, we're kind of in the business of trying to figure out what are ... what's the knowledge, what are the skills, what are the virtues that students will need as they enter adulthood in order to be contributing members of our society.

And in the terms that you laid out there, so on the good news side, you know, a lot of our K-12 students are the ones who will s- end up in those institutions of higher education. How do you think of what it is that which, which virtues, which skills, which knowledge are most important for us to be instilling in the K-12 years so that those students are ready to be, to make a contribution once they get to college and career and beyond?

RAUCH: Well, I know a lot more about higher education than K-12, but what professors tell me and tell others, I think helps understand at least one answer to your question, which is they say students are coming to them not understanding how to argue, how to take a side, how to listen to another side. They back away from arguments.

Once they begin to sense an argument is coming, they retreat. It's not a comfortable thing for them. To the point where some professors have mused about maybe we should have a freshman orientation course in how to have an argument. I am not well-placed to tell a K-12 teacher what's going to work in her classroom.

There's so many ways of doing this. I talked to one creative teacher who runs this thing in her social studies class called Prove Me Wrong, and she'll put out a hypothesis like the moon is made of cheese, and then demand that her students prove her wrong, and that's pretty clever. But one method that is tried and true, and I think could use wider adoption, is instructional debate.

This is not competitive debate. You know, you're not winning a prize. But instead of having the solo student stand up and give a book report, you can assign students to debate a topic. You can form them into teams. You can ask them to do research, and what can be especially as important is you can assign to them the sides that they take.

So the side they defend isn't necessarily the side they agree with. Turns out students really like debate because it's so engaged, because it's team-based. They're very shy at first, but if you structure it right and take them by the hand, they really adapt to it. And it also turns out that debate is a great way to get people to understand that there are other viewpoints, and that you have to be able to see those viewpoints to understand your own

VALANT: Thank you. And certainly in K-12, in the K-12 space we do see a lot of energy for debate right now, and it's motivated in, in large part by what you're talking about. So Jonathan, one more question for you and then we'll move to the other panel. But I'm curious about how you think about AI and technology in the context of what you've laid out here.

So how has... how is our information environment changing? What changes might we expect going forward? How do you think about kind of what we need now versus what we needed years ago, given that, like, the, the way that we get information looks so different now from how it used to?

RAUCH: You know, to be honest, Jon, I'm completely at sea understanding the implications of AI. It feels like something so big I can't get my hands around it. The potential pedagogical uses as, for example, a Socratic tool or as a tutor or as something that can be used for students to try out arguments, to have a friendly debater, all of that on the plus side. On the minus side, all the potential for mis- and disinformation created at an industrial scale targeted to individuals, including students, on a deeply personal basis.

I don't know what to think. I can only think and hope that the importance and agency of the human being, the teacher in the classroom that will stay central

VALANT: Well, thank you so much, Jonathan. We will let you go. And while we're transitioning here to our second panel discussion, the other panelists can go ahead and jump on. And I'll introduce them.

So to start, we have Jason Baehr. Jason is a professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University. Jason specializes in the study of intellectual virtues like curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, intellectual courage, and intellectual tenacity. And in addition to his academic work on the subject, Jason is the co-founder of a charter school, the Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach, that brings those ideas to life in middle school classrooms. And Jason, we're excited to hear about that work.

Eranda Jayawickreme is the Harold W. Tribble Professor of Psychology at Wake Forest University, and a senior research fellow in its program for leadership and character. Eranda has done a great deal of research on character development, and his areas of expertise include post-traumatic growth, moral personality, wisdom, and wellbeing.

Welcome, Eranda.

JAYAWICKREME: Thank you.

VALANT: And Tenelle Porter is an assistant professor of psychology at Rowan University. Tenelle specializes in intellectual humility, motivation, and learning. She has expertise in K12 education, and she describes her interests, and I love this line, as being in the psychological processes that make growth possible for imperfect humans navigating imperfect systems.

So Tenelle, welcome. Thank you. And just as a reminder, so we'll chat here for a little bit, and then we'll take questions from the audience. And if you have a question and you send it to events@brookings.edu, that'll get passed along to us. Tenelle, if it's okay, I'm gonna start with you, and I have a, a couple of questions for you here.

So you are a leading scholar in this field. You have largely built your career around intellectual humility, and I'm curious about two things. So first of all, I'm curious what it is. Like, what is intellectual humility? So, so I'm hoping you can define it for us, and maybe let us know how it's different from open-mindedness or curiosity or some of these other virtues

that we may... that may be a little more familiar to us. And then second, why do you think it's so important? You know, why is it at the heart of your work?

PORTER: Well, thanks so much, Jon, and thanks everyone for joining. It's just a privilege to be with you today. So Jon, you've done a great job already of explaining or describing intellectual humility.

I'll define it as recognizing the limits of my knowledge and understanding. So it's about recognizing that what I know is part of all there is to know. So I do know things, but my knowledge is partial, my perspective and my understanding are partial. And therefore, sometimes I get things wrong. As you said we're all human beings.

We're not gods, we're not omniscient. We're fallible. We don't know everything there is to know. And this is, of course, related to open-mindedness and curiosity, but a way that I find this really helpful to think about the relation between all of those things is that intellectual humility comes first. So if we think curiosity is like this, curiosity is about a drive to know and explore, so the recognition that I don't already know and fully understand something can really motivate that drive.

And open-mindedness, it's about listening to lots of different perspectives and standpoints. And again, here, that's really aided if first we recognize that we ourselves do not have all of the answers. So intellectual humility can give rise to curiosity and open-mindedness. That's part of why it's beneficial.

I think speaking to, like, your sort of question, just some of the other benefits of intellectual humility, we have been learning a lot about this. We still have a lot to learn about it, but I'd say there are three areas where intellectual humility is really helpful. And one is in expanding our knowledge.

So in the area of science and progress and knowledge, acknowledging that we don't understand everything can really help us advance and learn more. The second area is in our social relationships with one another. It turns out that when you recognize you don't know a thing that others will know things that you don't, that relationships, it helps ease disagreements, for example, with partners, between parents and children, between romantic partners, all sorts of things.

So it helps with that. It helps socially. And the third area which really connects with Jonathan's intro to this panel is just that intellectual humility helps with our civic life. It helps us talk with people who disagree with us. And I'm just always reminded of Benjamin Franklin, who famously told the delegates at the Constitutional Convention to doubt a little in their own infallibility, and that's really the heart of intellectual humility.

It was with us at the nation's founding, and it, as Jonathan said, allows for this kind of compromise and progress that we need for our democracy to function

VALANT: Thank you. And so am I hearing you right that even if there is an appreciation that we don't know everything, we still can feel like we know something?

So I think Jonathan mentioned an example of students trying to prove to a teacher that the moon isn't actually made of cheese. Like, we can believe those things, right? Like, we don't have to, we don't have to just doubt everything all the time. Is that correct?

PORTER: Yeah. That's absolutely right, and I think we'll hopefully have a chance to talk about this a bit more. But that calibration piece of intellectual humility, of learning what is the right amount of doubt, of learning to distinguish, okay, this is what I know, but this is what I don't yet know, that's really important, and that's a process that we work on a lot in school and through education, and kids get better at that as they get older. So, so yeah, the calibration is really important, and intellectual humility does not mean doubting everything all the time.

VALANT: And one more to bug you with on the definition here. So I think a lot of people who are watching this will be familiar with the growth mindset when thinking about what growth mindset means for classrooms. How does, how do intellectual humility and growth mindset fit, or how are they different or the same?

PORTER: Yes. So these two things are related, and I find it helpful to think of the growth mindset as giving rise to intellectual humility. So if the growth mindset is the belief that we can improve, that we can grow, that we can get smarter, operating with that understanding of intelligence and competence makes it a lot easier for us to admit what we don't know.

Because by contrast, if we're operating in a fixed mindset that says, "Well, everyone either wins the intellectual lottery or they don't. We have smart people and dumb people," well, then everybody starts to become really interested in looking as smart as possible. It becomes really hard to acknowledge and even admit to ourselves or to other people that we don't have it all figured out. So the growth mindset is an understanding of competence that can give rise to intellectual humility

VALANT: Thank you. Eranda, if I can bring you in. So you're a professor of psychology, you specialize in moral and intellectual character and as well as more generally in human growth and development. And I'm curious about how you think about intellectual humility, and in particular, if you could speak to whether you think of it as learnable. Like if I want to go and become more intellectually humble, or if my 12-year-old and 15-year-old want to go and become more intellectually humble, is that something they can do?

And then is it teachable? So is it the kind of thing where whether it's me as a parent or it's my kids' teacher, is it something that, that we can kind of deliberately cultivate, particularly in, in young people?

JAYAWICKREME: Well, yes. So very briefly, my answer to both those questions is yes. But let me give you some, some background. So I'm a personality psychologist, so I study the ways in which people differ from each other and the reasons why they differ, right? So I'm interested in traits, I'm interested in virtues.

And until maybe 20, 25 years ago, many personality psychologists had a very traditional view of what a trait was. You know, traits had to do with the structure of your personality, and the idea was that, you know, traits were fixed or immutable. So to go back to a point that Tenelle made, right, if you were high on extroversion or if you're low on open-mindedness, that's who you were as a person, right? So that was a very traditional view of how people understood traits.

In the last 20 years or so, people adopted more of a process understanding of traits, and by that I mean there's been a greater acceptance of the fact that people change, right? People change from moment to moment, depending on what the situation is like, what their goals in those situations are like. People change across time, right? So we change and develop in part because of, you know, our normative development as we move from childhood to adulthood, in part because of life experiences that we have. So increasingly, there's a recognition that people do change across time. We know that people become more agreeable across time.

We know up to a certain point in time people become more open-minded. So we have strong evidence from multiple longitudinal studies that multiple personality traits, including traits that are relevant to intellectual humility, like open-mindedness, do change, right? So this idea of traits as fixed entities is not supported by the data. So the question now that many personality psychologists are studying has to do with how this change happens, right?

What drives that change, and can we create conditions to foster that change ourselves, right? And this gets to your question. So there's been a lot of research on personality change interventions, including some work that I've done in my lab and research that are in other labs looking at personality change interventions.

And we know that there are real effects from these interventions. So, whether it's intellectual humility, open-mindedness, agreeableness, people do change. I should caution that the effect sizes we see are relatively modest. So I think we do need to be realistic about the amount of change we can expect from these types of interventions.

These are not dramatic transformations. But having students, having young people engage in specific regular activities, so reminding yourself, right, of the importance of intellectual humility. Modeling it, right? So modeling intellectual humility for others. Celebrating instances where you or your friends are able to acknowledge the fact that you might be wrong about something. Staying accountable to the task of questioning your judgments, questioning the basis for your beliefs, right? These are, you know, tasks that you can highlight and promote to make people change their manifestations of intellectual humility.

Now, one point I should make is, you know, you can teach people the skills of engaging intellectual humility. So some of the activities I mentioned, having people construct the best version of their opposing argument, ways in which you can ask probing questions not only of other people's perspectives, but your own perspectives and engaging meaningfully with opposing arguments. So these are things you can teach people, teach students.

I think the challenge is helping people, helping students enact those skills or practice those skills. Because the way in which you change your trait over time is by practicing, right? So it's a bit like going to the gym, right? You can learn, you can be given the skills to engage in intellectual humility, but in order for you to change your trait level, you need to practice repeatedly.

And here is where I think some of the research that Tenelle has done becomes important because the conditions that we create are important, right? So it's not just giving people the skills, but having them practice the skills in an environment that promotes it, right? So having teachers that model intellectual humility, as you know, Tenelle has shown in her work, or creating an environment that promotes it, like Jason has done in his Intellectual Virtues Academy.

So I think part of the way in which we promote intellectual humility is not just give the skills to people so that they can work it themselves, but creating an environment that fosters that, that facilitates the development of these skills.

VALANT: Yeah, that, that's interesting. And so I mentioned at the top that we did these, these reports and we did some surveys of teachers and students and parents. And one of the results that struck me was that teachers are much more inclined to like the idea of getting kind of staff-wide trainings in how do you cultivate intellectual humility rather than kind of focusing it in certain subjects or in certain activities or with certain teachers. It sounds like that might be consistent with what you're saying.

So, so rather than just having a sort of a single initiative, which is your intellectual humility training, that it might be, you might expect more persistent longer term effects if it becomes just sort of part of the culture of the school and it's part of the culture of the classroom. Is that right?

JAYAWICKREME: That's completely correct, and I'm sure Jason will have more to say on this. But, you know, 25 years ago when I was in graduate school, Barry Schwartz would talk about how, you know, it doesn't make any sense to have classes or courses on teaching people how to be, you know, how to have good character, right? And what you need to do, he said you need to find ways to inculcate it in the whole curriculum. And I think that's especially true of intellectual humility and any intellectual virtue, right?

Because, you know, one of the challenges of saying, you know, we really care about intellectual humility, we're gonna focus on this, we're gonna have a module on it, is that, you know, people are then motivated to say, "I'm intellectually humble," and to, to sort of report that they're engaged in it without actually doing the work of, you know, reflecting on like what, what is the basis for the knowledge that I have, right? To what extent am I confident in that knowledge?

So I do agree with you. I think a more system level approach to promoting intellectual humility in schools is the best path forward here .

VALANT: And Jason I'd love to bring you in here. So I mentioned this as I was introducing you, but you have these two, like, fascinating complementary vantage points from which you come at this. So on, on one hand you've written some really good work on intellectual humility and intellectual virtues in books and in articles. And then on the other hand, you have a practitioner side where you're part of founding a school that focuses on intellectual virtues. And so I'd love to hear more about the school, so if you could tell us a little bit more about the school, but also how you think about developing intellectual virtues and intellectual humility in the context of all that we ask of schools, because as you know, we ask a lot of them.

BAEHR: Sure. Thank you, and thanks so much for the opportunity to participate here. Very briefly about the Intellectual Virtues Academy of Long Beach. There are, there's actually a middle school and a high school. The middle school was founded in 2013 and the high school three years after that.

These are schools that are systematically designed around the question of what would it look like to give students frequent opportunities to practice virtues like intellectual humility, curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual courage in the context of academic teaching and

learning. So, so not as a separate curriculum, but what would it look like to support students' growth in these qualities while teaching traditional academic knowledge and skills?

And because both schools were designed from the ground up with that end in mind, they are remarkable places, and they really are sort of illustrations of what's possible when it comes to trying to educate for intellectual virtue and intellectual humility included I appreciate your question about how this might figure into the responsibilities of schools, and I appreciate that you've made the distinction between intellectual virtues in general and intellectual humility in particular.

So if you don't mind, I'll say a quick word about how I think intellectual virtues are related to other intellect... Excuse me, how intellectual humility is related to other intellectual virtues. At a very broad level, we can think of intellectual virtues as the personal qualities or character attributes that we need in order to think and learn and inquire well, to do so competently and responsibly.

And one way to individuate one intellectual virtue from another is in terms of the obstacles to good thinking that each virtue helps us overcome. So one obstacle to good thinking would be a tendency to be overly confident or to be defensive any time someone challenges my beliefs, or to be someone who tends to avoid difficult questions or counter-evidence.

Well, intellectual humility, because it helps us be more comfortable with and attentive to our intellectual limitations and what we don't know, it, it equips us to overcome that obstacle. But there are lots of other obstacles to good thinking and learning as well. We tend to think about things narrowly or in ways that are already familiar, and so we need open-mindedness.

Especially given some of the ways that technology can lead to a kind of passivity in the intellectual life or in, in the context of learning we need curiosity to actively wonder and ask questions if we wanna be good thinkers and learners Some of us are really averse to risk-taking in a learning context. And so we need intellectual courage that will help us face our intellectual fears.

Similarly many of us struggle with giving up when learning gets difficult, so we need perseverance to overcome that obstacle. So if you think about all the different obstacles there might be to good thinking and learning, intellectual virtues are the character attributes that help us, that are sort of custom designed to help us overcome those, those obstacles.

So when thinking about intellectual humility or intellectual virtue more broadly in an educational context, I do think it's important to think about a plurality of virtues, and also to be really thoughtful about who our students are. Because certain groups of students may need to emphasize or work on certain virtues more than others. So, so we should let our, who our students are, what their context is, what their identities and backgrounds are, have some significant influence on how we conceptualize intellectual virtues and which virtues we, we prioritize

You asked the question about kind of the responsibility that schools have for trying to educate for intellectual humility and other virtues. Here's one way to come at that. Most people would agree that schools are responsible not just for transmitting knowledge and skills, but also something that's a little more personal. And often we think about schools as tasked with cultivating lifelong learners or critical thinkers.

And those are some areas, lifelong learning, critical thinking, where I think it can be really helpful to appeal to intellectual virtues. These are thick attributes or, or thick qualities, as philosophers like to describe them. They pick out very concrete characteristics that are attractive and admirable. And that language, the language of intellectual virtues, whether it's humility, open-mindedness, intellectual courage, or intellectual perseverance, that language can be really useful for fleshing out what we mean when we say schools should help students become lifelong learners or critical thinkers.

So I do think there is an element of responsibility to these things. But the last thing I'll say is that my preference when talking about these things in relation to education is to think of them less in terms of obligations or responsibilities or requirements, and more in terms of a kind of worthy epistemic or educational ideal.

Part of why I say that, I think, is that teachers are already so overburdened with responsibilities and requirements, but also because I think a lot of us as educators, whether K12 or post-secondary, got into this business because we thought that education could make a difference to who students are and who they're becoming and what they fundamentally care about in life, and even in the world of ideas and in the domain of knowledge and learning.

And I think once again, this language of intellectual humility, open-mindedness, curiosity is a way of fleshing out or unpacking what that goal or aim or aspiration was that got us into the field in the first place. And so by talking about these qualities as an educational ideal, I think we can really tap into those desires and add a dimension of meaning and purpose to the activities of teaching and learning, which can be inspiring and nourishing for educators that are already overburdened and overworked.

VALANT: And we'll come back to this, but I think that feels particularly important in the context of headwinds from technological change where w- it really does feel like it can threaten us. Jason, if I may, can you say a little bit more about how this gets operationalized at school? Like what, how is the experience different for a kid who's going to Intellectual Virtues Academy versus, you know, the math class, the social studies class, whatever it may be, versus going to a, a school down the street that might have a, a more traditional orientation?

BAEHR: Yeah. I mean, I could talk for an hour about that, that, what it looks like there. So let me do my best to try to be precise. I think it's helpful to begin though at the the wider cultural level at the school, as we've already talked about. I I agree on the one hand that I certainly think and feel strongly about the idea that the primary way to teach for intellectual virtues is not to teach about intellectual virtues, so doing lessons on these qualities. Completely agree with that.

At the same time, it's useful to have the language. And a lot of students -- intellectual humility is still somewhat of a technical term. And so I do think it's helpful to acquaint students with the language and concepts and examples, exemplars of intellectual humility and other virtues.

And that's one of the things... So, so, so the notion of intellectual humility is a familiar idea and term and value at the Intellectual Virtues Academy. But it's also something that's just built into various practices at the school. Even when it-- even down to how the staff at the school interact with vendors out in the world, there's a practice of acknowledging what we don't know, where we need help knowing things.

And then when it comes to the school itself and the sort of internal operations, certainly the school leaders model intellectual humility. If you don't mind I'll quickly share a quote from John Dewey that's quite pointed in this respect. He says, "Everything the teacher does, as well as the manner in which he does it, incites the child to respond in some way or another, and each response tends to set the child's attitude in some way or another. A teacher's best conscious efforts may be more than counteracted by the influence of personal traits which he is unaware of or regards as unimportant."

So both when it comes to school leaders and teachers, and from teachers to students the importance of modeling it is critical. And certainly it's a common practice among the leaders and the teachers at IVA to demonstrate and exemplify intellectual humility. It's just baked into the culture, baked into practices, baked into how people relate to each other.

As far as what it looks like for students, try to be quick here's one example. The school makes frequent use of what are called thinking routines. Harvard's Project Zero has done extensive research that's very practitioner-oriented. For K-12 practitioners that are listening today, check out Thinking Routines Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education. There's a wealth of resources. These are basically little thinking exercises that can be used in a lot of different contexts and disciplines, and they are structured opportunities for students to practice wondering, curiosity, or practice acknowledging the limits of their perspective, intellectual humility, or practice taking intellectual risks, intellectual courage.

So there's a pervasive use of thinking routines at the school, which often involves some kind of step about what don't you know, or what are you left wondering about, or what are the limits of your perspective. So it's just a routine practice for students when they engage with, whether it's math or social science or literature, to be attentive, to be attending to their intellectual limitations. And thinking routines are just kind of a, a really useful tool to do that.

VALANT: Thank you. And Tenelle, to kind of pick this up, so, I'm curious if you have reactions to, to what Jason just said. And then also, so if we... I think we have some educators on the line with us, and if they're wondering, you know, in a really concrete way, what can they do to help their students develop intellectual humility, what would you suggest?

PORTER: I think the first thing I would suggest, and it's been a theme across all of the, several of the speakers today, is experiment with modeling it. So I should model it as well. And I say we have a lot to learn about what educators should do about this. We don't know everything there is to know about it.

But what we do know is that when we ran a series of five studies, when teachers or professors said, "You know what? I know a lot about my subject, but even I don't know everything there is to know about it, and when I make mistakes, I will-- I'm gonna try not to, but when I do, I'm gonna be upfront with you about that, because we're all here to learn and grow together," students picked up on that. They felt like they belonged in that classroom, and they began to feel comfortable expressing intellectual humility themselves. So experiment with that.

And I would say parents as well. We're getting new data from Candice Mills and other researchers, Judith Danovich, that when parents say, "Oh I'm not sure what the answer is, but let's look it up together." You know, a kind of just admission that, "I don't know it, but here's how we can find more information about it," that their kids are picking up on that, too.

So parents and teachers, this is a really powerful tool. Experiment with it. Please let me know how it's going. I mean, I think it will be helpful.

And Eranda and Jason have talked about this importance of creating a learning culture where the most important thing in that classroom is learning and growth. I will speak to a cultural force that we have some data about that, that works to to stifle intellectual humility. And that is a culture of brilliance or genius.

So in a kind of culture, and I don't just mean like respecting each other for their talents and competence, and we're all humans and have a lot of incredible capacity. I mean a context where it's important to look really smart. A context where it's important to not show any weakness or vulnerability.

When our children are in these settings and they pick up on that, and they pick up on this kind of cutthroat competition, "I'm not supposed to not know anything. I'm supposed to have all the answers," that suppresses intellectual humility. Not only does it make children more reluctant to admit it when they don't know something, it also makes them a little more reluctant to even admit to themselves that they don't understand everything.

Even that feels risky. So, instead of these brilliance cultures, to try to cultivate these cultures of learning and growth

VALANT: Thank you. I like that distinction between the learning culture versus brilliance culture. And Eranda, I'm gonna, I'm gonna come to you. So I'm curious too, I saw you nodding in, when Tenelle was talking about brilliance cultures and what they can do. So any, any thoughts you have on that.

And also if you could tell us a bit more about what you see as the, the individual benefits in, of developing intellectual humility or other intellectual virtues. Like I think we heard from Jonathan at the top about some of the collective benefits that I think are sort of implied by development, developing this more effectively in, in students. But could you talk about what it actually does for a kid? You know? So if I'm, like, if I'm a parent and I'm concerned about my kid, why do I want my kid to be intellectually humble?

JAYAWICKREME: Yes. So just to respond to to Tenelle's point. So I think, you know, one of the challenges, one of the biggest challenges of brilliance culture is that it creates an environment that penalizes intellectual humility, right? So if the idea is that I will select for brilliance, everyone here is really smart, then by implication I can't make a mistake. I have to be right, or I have to be seen to be right all the time, right?

And I think in, you know, if we want to create a climate that fosters intellectual humility, you need to create opportunities for people to admit their own ignorance, get things wrong, right? And then learn, right? So that when they actually do go up for testing, right? Because, you know, the reality is that testing's important and, you know, the lives of students depend on how well they do in exams. When it comes to that stage, they have done the work in their classroom, in their learning environment, that such that they, you know, feel more confident in what they know, right?

If the environment itself penalizes the opportunity for us to admit mistakes, make mistakes, that, that learning's not going to happen, right? So, you know, I think Tenelle's completely right that, you know, creating cultures where we value brilliance, where people feel like they,

they are smart, so their intelligence is somehow this fixed quality, that is not conducive to learning.

But you know, to think about the benefits of, Intellectual humility. You know, Tenelle mentioned this, I think, at the top of our discussion, but people high on intellectual humility are better learners. They're more teachable, they're more receptive to feedback. They're more willing to engage with material that challenges their preconceptions, and they're less likely to dismiss evidence that doesn't fit their preexisting beliefs.

Also people high in intellectual humility tend to have better relationships because, you know, if you're willing to acknowledge that you're wrong, you're more likely to listen to your peers or your friends' perspective seriously. Whenever you're talking or discussing with your friends or with your colleagues, you don't feel like you need to win every argument because you're curious about the other person's perspective.

Also, I think in a, in a diverse classroom, right, where people will come in with different perspectives, different viewpoints being open, right, to other people's perspectives, being willing to acknowledge that, okay, you know, maybe I need to update my beliefs, or maybe the evidence for my beliefs is-- could be mistaken. You know, that can be really helpful for engaging across meaningful difference. I think people high in intellectual humility are more likely to engage in better decision-making, right? So when we make decisions about, you know, what healthcare provider to pick or what life, what life goals you want to prioritize in the moment, I think people who are high in intellectual humility are likely to seek out more information, to seek out the strongest evidence for and against a particular perspective they have, more willing to update their beliefs when, you know, new information comes to light. So you can imagine how intellectual humility could be helpful in multiple dimensions of your life, right? When it comes to your career, your relationships.

I also think it's, going back to Jonathan Rauch's book, right, that I think people high in intellectual humility are less likely to be gullible, right, when engaging with information in civic life. So instead of, you know, falling in with whatever information, whatever claim fits with your worldview, I think Intellectual humility helps you evaluate the quality of arguments, even if there are, are, you know, the arguments that you find appealing. If you don't think the evidentiary basis is strong enough, you can reject those arguments. So I do think intellectual humility is a particularly important skill in civic life.

And finally, and again reiterating a point that Tenelle made earlier, people who are high in intellectual humility tend to be happier, tend to have high levels of wellbeing. And I think one of the reasons why is that they have better quality relationships, right? Because they're less defensive when engaging with other people. There's probably less interpersonal conflict as a result. They're probably more oriented to personal growth. So I think for all these reasons, it's worth, what do I call it? Developing your intellectual humility.

I did wanna say though, that I think one potential drawback to focusing on intelle- intellectual humility relates to a point that Jason made earlier, which is that intellectual humility is one of many intellectual virtues that work together that to enable us to be good thinkers and good, you know, good consumers of information, right? So in some of the work that we have done, we have found that intellectual humility is one of many intellectual traits that contribute to good thinking. And you know, these traits in our work fall into five clusters, so: open-mindedness, curiosity, rigor, creativity, and intersperspectiveness. And all those components work together, right? As Jason mentioned earlier, to correct, you know, various deficiencies or limitations we might have when trying to understand the truth.

So I do think the real risk to the extent to which there's a risk of focusing too much on AI, is that we do that to the detriment of other intellectual virtues. And one outcome that can come from this is when you use intellectual humility to question arguments you don't agree with, but you don't engage intellectual humility when you're reflecting on arguments or evidence that reinforces your perspective, right? So in other words, what I would call asymmetric intellectual humility, where you really want other people who disagree with you to focus on the limitations of their argument. But because, you know, you might not have high levels of other intellectual traits like intellectual integrity or intellectual honesty, you focus only on arguments you disagree with. So, that's a long response, so I'll stop there.

VALANT: Can I ask for your response to that? So whether there's a risk of focusing on intellectual humility at the expense of other intellectual virtues?

BAEHR: Sorry, was that, was-

VALANT: Tenelle. Tenelle,

BAEHR: Taneel. Good. Okay.

PORTER: Yeah. I'm like, Jason, please feel free... No. Is there a risk of... Could you say it one more time? Is there a risk of-

VALANT: So, Eranda, tell me if I'm, if I'm misinterpreting this. But as I understood it, that was an argument that if we focus too specifically on developing intellectual humility and maybe developing it in one very particular kind of way, we can actually work against the development of other intellectual virtues. Is that fair, Eranda?

JAYAWICKREME: So, yeah, what I guess what I was trying to say is that to the extent to which there is a drawback to focusing, to fostering intellectual humility, it's when you foster it, yeah, as you said to neglect of other relevant intellectual virtues

VALANT: Yeah.

PORTER: Yeah. I completely agree. And so I think, there's been some written about this concept of excessive intellectual humility as well where that's no longer a virtue. When you become so consumed with what you don't know that it just becomes paralyzing and it's just a bad deal. That's not what we're after.

And, you know, I think a countervailing virtue that some people have written about that we might add into the cornucopia that Jason and Eranda have already mentioned is intellectual pride. Like, there are reasons to be to take pride in things that you know or in things that you've done and accomplishments, and it's virtuous to develop that, and philosophers have written about why that's virtuous.

So we can think about cultivating that alongside intellectual humility to help people calibrate so that they don't become so overcome with their limits. Jason, anything to add there on that?

BAEHR: No, that's great. I'll just reiterate that you've identified sort of two ways we can go wrong when thinking about intellectual humility in this context.

One is to confuse it with sort of its excess. So, so humility, intellectual humility as a virtue does not involve a kind of over-concern with what you don't know or thinking you know less than you actually know. That's not what we're talking about at all. But even once when, even once we conceptualize intellectual humility as a virtue, it still doesn't cover the whole range of things.

And I like the example of proper pride. A closely related virtue that I'll often talk about is intellectual autonomy, where here's the idea: intellectual humility helps us attend to and own our intellectual limitations, whereas intellectual autonomy or proper pride helps us own our intellectual strengths. We need to do both of those things.

And a lot of virtues stand in this kind of complementary or dynamic tension. Think as well about open-mindedness. Sometimes we need to step back, consider alternative points of view. Other times, we need to move forward and have the courage of our convictions. So we need the whole group.

They're in a kind of creative dynamic tension with each other. But they, at the end of the day, they complement each other in important ways, in ways that you're illustrating there.

VALANT: Great. Thank you. So I wanna jump to the audience questions, 'cause we actually have a ton of really good questions.

We had a ton of good ones that came in, and I'm seeing a ton of good ones popping up here on, in my notes. I think one of them really gets to this question of learning cultures versus brilliance cultures, and a, a challenge that, that comes with them. And any of the three of you can take this.

So it's a question from Aaron. And he asks, so he says it, "It feels like conventional education gives kids conflicting messages. On one hand, have a growth mindset, learn from failures, it's okay to be wrong. And then on the other hand, you get these quantified test metrics, your MAP scores, your SAT, your summative assessments that they're really important, like your school's report card, so you need to go get those."

And so for students, it can feel like you're getting these mixed messages about how on one hand, it's, there's a real risk to not being right, and on the other hand, well, no, we want you to go and try to not be right. Like, if you're a, if you're a kid watching this, what do you make of that?

PORTER: I'll jump in and say I think Aaron's absolutely right about that. I think there are true mixed messages being sent to kids through our education system, and I think that it raises questions about how we might structure schools so that they value growth more than regurgitating right answers.

And I think I'd add to that just a point that was such a striking finding from the surveys that we did with parents, teachers, and students that they really valued intellectual humility. They thought it was something that should be cultivated in schools. So this is right up there with other things that are done in schools. Like, there's real interest in this, and people think it's valuable. So, restructuring might, you know, have widespread buy-in.

VALANT: Here, and just to ... I'm gonna try to get to a, a few of these.

So, we just received another question. How can I assess whether our programming effectively-- this is coming from someone who works in a school-- effectively develops intellectual virtues and civic engagement among the students we serve? More specifically, what questions should I be asking about our curriculum programming and student experience, and then outcomes to determine whether we are successfully developing these qualities?

And anyone can jump in.

BAEHR: That's one for one of the social scientists, that's for sure.

PORTER: Oh gosh, I was thinking Jason.

JAYAWICKREME: Yeah, I was thinking Jason would be perfectly positioned to answer this.

PORTER: Yeah. I know, I really was because your work with IVA and the intellectual virtues again- and how they really done assessments with the intellectual virtues in mind.

BAEHR: Yeah. Oh my goodness. Okay. Well, we, maybe we can both contribute. Once again, there's so much that could be said but-- and there were a lot of moving parts in that, in the question. But in terms of assessment, look, there are more and less formal ways to try to assess students' development of, of intellectual virtues. On the more demanding and rigorous way, there are validated measures that my colleagues here can talk about that could be used in a kind of pre-post format over the period of a year or maybe a few years. But there are also lots of informal ways that we can look for this, and frankly, in many ways already do look for it in the work that our students do.

One thing I'll highlight is that every intellectual virtue, intellectual humility included, has a kind of activity or skill dimension. And usually, that figures prominently in the definition of the virtue. So if we think of intellectual virtues as a willingness or ability to admit our intellectual limitations, well, that's the characteristic activity or skill. It's something that we can practice.

So are our... Well, this addresses a couple parts of the question. If you're, If you're taking a step back and looking at your educational program, or you're an individual teacher looking at your own practices, you can ask, am I creating regular well-supported opportunities for my students to admit what they don't know or to pay attention to, and acknowledge and articulate the limitations of their perspective or their evidence or their knowledge? When I think about the things I have my students do in terms of assignments or what we do during class, how often am I creating structured opportunities for them to do that, right? Well, if I'm doing so, then there will be, that will be a natural opportunity to assess for intellectual humility, 'cause I'll be able to say, are they able to consider multiple perspectives? Can they articulate good objections to the, to their viewpoints?

One thing a teacher might do is have students say, you know, "What's one thing that you're uncertain about?" Or, "If we could go over one more idea or or concept here what do you feel least certain about with whatever we're studying?"

And then again, if students can answer that question and they can answer it in a way that's thorough and that's convincing and so on that's a way of assessing whether they are practicing intellectual humility.

Of course, just practicing intellectual humility, having that ability doesn't mean that you'll always have good judgment about when to use it or always be motivated to use it. So, so the measurement of character has always got to be multifaceted and, and more complex. But that's an initial idea.

JAYAWICKREME: And just to, just to add to what Jason said, you know, a few years ago, Angela Duckworth, right, argued that, you know, self-report measures of character are probably not suitable for use in schools because of the pressures around you know, what do I call, performance and the fact that people might, you know, might be motivated to inflate their, their self-assessment on these virtues.

So I just want to, what do I call it, reiterate something that Jason said, which is that I think it's important that there be focused assessment on the environment, right, on, on the school climate. And I think there are many ways in which you could harness existing assessments to get at ways in which you can tailor environments, tailor school climates for intellectual humility.

VALANT: Interesting. So you're talking about assessing whether the, the classroom or the school is showing attributes of intellectual humility rather than going right to the individual student for those assessments. Is that right?

JAYAWICKREME: Yes.

VALANT: Interesting. So we have just a, a couple minutes left here. I, we got a bunch of questions that relate in one way or another to AI, intellectual humility and AI. So just to put names to a couple of these. Jeremy asked, "What are the connections between humility and AI usage?" And then we have one from Brittany, "As AI increasingly shapes how young people learn and eventually work, how should we think about intellectual humility as a future-ready human skill? Does the ability to recognize uncertainty to challenge and answer and revise one's thinking become more important in an AI-enabled world?"

So to any of you, thoughts on how we think about AI in the context, or how we think about intellectual humility in the context of AI?

PORTER: I just came across some fresh research on this showing that when people see the output of an AI chatbot, they become really bad at knowing the limits of their knowledge.

In other words, the AI is so fluent, it's so authoritative that it gives people an illusion of understanding, and they don't even question. Most will not even question what the AI is saying, even though, as we know, these AI bots are fallible. And so we're going to need to develop intellectual humility for students themselves to acknowledge their own knowledge is partial, but to also know that geez, these AI bots, their knowledge is also partial and they're fallible. Finding ways to do that is going to be an important project as we move forward, I think.

And yes, to the second question. I think the advent of AI is really spotlighting and bringing to the fore the importance of our critical thinking abilities. And intellectual humility is at the center of that.

JAYAWICKREME: So I'll just second everything that Tenelle said. You know, I'll also add one potential benefit of AI, which is that, you know, there are already tools been developed that allow people to use AI to come up with the strongest version of opposing arguments, right? So I think one, you know, potential benefit of AI is that we, it could be a teaching tool to help students think about the strongest version of an opposing argument and then engage critically with it.

So I think, I mean, I agree with Tenelle. There are a lot of challenges that AI poses to the development of intellectual character more broadly, but I just want to highlight one potential benefit.

VALANT: Thank you. And Jason, any last thoughts here on AI or the prospects of an intellectually humble AI bot?

BAEHR: Yeah I also agree with everything that's been said. To, to try to tie together a couple of things my inclination when thinking about intellectual character and AI is to go more to some other virtues, the practice of which I think is so often short-circuited given the way many students use AI today. So I think particularly about intellectual autonomy, the ability to think for yourself. Curiosity and also a kind of intellectual tenacity or perseverance.

So one of the questions here is you know, what's at stake? What might be lost with certain ways of using AI? And here I do think the language of things like curiosity, autonomy, perseverance is really helpful for naming something that we care about that might be in jeopardy. But I think the move from this point is not necessarily therefore ban it all. Eranda, as you're suggesting, I think a good principle or question might be what would it look like to use AI in a way that supports students' practice, you know, of thinking for themselves or identifying their intellectual limitations or considering multiple perspectives or wondering well or persevering in the context of struggle?

How can we use AI to support that kind of practice and development versus short-circuit it?

VALANT: Well, I'm I'm afraid we have to cut it there but thank you all for a, a terrific discussion to Jason, to Tenelle, to Eranda, and thank you all for watching at home.

I'll encourage you again, we have a couple of new reports up on the Brookings website, and one of them really points to a lot of the research that is coming out on intellectual humility and points to some resources for educators and to, for others who are interested in bringing some of this into your own lives.

So thank you, and enjoy the rest of your day