Smithsonian
Science Education Center

Good Thinking! The Science of Teaching Science

Professional Development Discussion Guide

About *Good Thinking!*

Good Thinking! is an original animated series developed by the Smithsonian Science Education Center (SSEC) and FableVision Studios as a professional development resource for K-12 science educators. The series brings viewers into the classroom of science educator Isabella Reyes as she explores "the science of teaching science." Drawing from peer-reviewed research in science, cognition, and pedagogy, *Good Thinking!* distills valuable findings from hard-to-access journal articles to reveal common student misconceptions and promote effective classroom practices.

How to use this guide:

This format was designed to flexibly fit into PLC meetings, PD workshops, or any time that you and your colleagues can meet to absorb some new ideas and discuss your experiences as educators.

The students in the *Good Thinking!* classroom were designed as 5th graders, but research has shown that student ideas about major topics in science are remarkably similar across K-12 grade levels, mainly due to common misconceptions being inadequately addressed or unintentionally reinforced during formal education. While the content of the series is relevant to all levels of instruction, teachers working at the oldest and youngest ends of the K-12 range may need to include additional discussion during the post-viewing conversation that addresses the implications of the videos for their specific grade level.

Requirements:

- Access to a strong internet connection for streaming video
- A screen large enough for group viewing
- Copies of this guide for each participant

Discussion objectives: *Good Thinking! – How "Right-Brained" is Wrong … Brained*

- Gain an in-depth understanding of the origins and implications of 'hemispheric dominance' theories, which are common in popular culture
- Explore the ways in which students are commonly 'lumped' into groups throughout their education and how this practice can affect learning outcomes
- Learn about how scientific practices engage a combination of skills and traits that are often categorized as either 'right-' or 'left-brained' strengths

Procedure

1. Establish ground rules to create an environment conducive to professional development:
    a. Introduce yourself to any participants you may not know. In a large group it may be helpful to select one individual to serve as the facilitator for the session.
    b. Agree upon a brief outline of session length, goals and structure. This module is designed to promote exchanges of knowledge between a group of peers, so it may be helpful to divide participants into smaller subgroups by similar academic levels or content area.
    c. Establish guidelines for productive participation and distribute writing materials to each participant.

2. **Before Viewing** – Each participant should take some time to respond to the questions below on their paper. The amount of time needed to answer these questions may vary, but thorough responses are encouraged, as they will be helpful to the discussion later in the session:

    - Have you ever been described as a 'left-brained' or 'right-brained' person? Do you think of yourself in that way?
    - Do you think certain personality traits make people more adept in science?
    - Have you taught any students who identified as 'right-brained' or 'left-brained'? If yes, did you differentiate your instruction to accommodate them?

3. **Watch the Episode**: *Good Thinking! – How "Right-Brained" is Wrong... Brained*
    Streaming video links available via:
    a. YouTube
    b. Smithsonian Science Education Center
    c. PBS LearningMedia

4. **After Viewing** – Once you have finished watching the episode, begin a discussion using the following questions as a framework. For larger groups, it may be helpful to have the PD facilitator read the prompts aloud and actively manage the time and flow of the conversation:

- While many academic programs make an effort to link certain content areas (e.g. math with science; ELA with social studies), other combinations (e.g. science with ELA) are less common. Do you see any opportunities to foster greater overlap between subject areas? How might an interdisciplinary approach be helpful to your students?
- **Option**: Return to the video and re-watch section: **4:17-5:08**. Have you experienced any instances of the sort of broad categorization of students described in the clip? If so, how do you think this may have influenced student learning?
- **Option**: Return to the video and re-watch section: **5:22-6:10**. In the clip, Gummerson and Ms. Reyes explain that scientific thinking requires a blend of logic and creativity. What strategies can be used to help all students engage with and succeed in science? Can you share any examples that have been successful from your teaching experience?

5. **After the Discussion** – Once your group has finished discussing the prompts and exchanging experiences, give a brief recap of the major takeaways from the conversation. For larger groups, it may be useful for the facilitator to collect one or two salient points from each subgroup's discussion to share on a large sheet of paper. Conclude the session by highlighting any suggestions for effective practices that were shared by the group.

Thanks for tuning in to Good Thinking! We hope you found this session to be informative, and appreciate the contribution of your experience, time, and ideas.

References:

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Suggested Resources:

STEMVISIONS Blog: *Am I Left or Right Brained?* — https://ssec.si.edu/stemvisions-blog/am-i-left-or-right-brained