Title of Lesson: Classroom Management Using Gandhian and Kingian Principles of Nonviolence

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Guiding Questions:

- How can we create an environment that reduces or prevents instances of discipline in the classroom?
- How can teachers promote the principles of nonviolence amongst students?

Lesson Abstract:

Using the principles of nonviolence set forth by Gandhi and King, teachers can transform the classroom environment into a close community where students and teachers perpetuate understanding, compassions and forgiveness. A nonviolent approach to discipline issues will result in conflict resolution between the two parties that will have lasting positive peace in the classroom.

Lesson Content:

Five out of seven kids who have a parent in jail will go to jail themselves (Lafayette). What implications does this statistic have on the education system? The oppressor of the 21st century is the cycle of violence. As educators, we have the responsibility (or privilege or burden) to bring down these oppressors and give our students a chance.

Using the system of nonviolence, Gandhi and King brought down systems of oppression without mass casualties, without further dehumanizing participants on either side. By using boycotts, marches, sit-ins, and other measures of civil disobedience, these two brought about social changes. More importantly, by using courage, self-restraint, compassion, and forgiveness, they won over their oppressors and secured dignity and self-preservation for everyone who bore witness to their struggle. What made Gandhi so successful was that he never sought to humiliate his oppressors; instead, he sought to win them over (Fischer, 35). According to King, nonviolence “can save the white man as well as the Negro” (Carson). Using nonviolent means to achieve an end empowers all individuals involved in the conflict.

What is Gandhi and King’s message to the teachers of the 21st century? How can we employ their nonviolence tactics in our classrooms to help us achieve the goals for which our society holds us accountable? Without effective classroom management, learning will not happen. An effective classroom management system has two main parts: 1) pre-meditated lesson planning, procedures and meaningful interactions, and 2) the teacher’s attitude, composure and approach when conflicts arise. The nonviolence principles, by which Gandhi and King lived, create a framework within which these two parts of classroom management can
thrive. The nonviolence approach would address the root cause of behavior problems and treat it, as opposed to just treating the symptoms, thus preventing future problems. Using nonviolence principles in the classroom would empower both the teacher and the student to work toward conflict resolution whenever issues arise. By modeling and directly teaching nonviolence, teachers demonstrate to students that there are constructive ways of coping with life and getting what we want. We can turn them back onto the road of education and end the cycle of violence once and for all.

Gandhi’s teaching of nonviolence can be highlighted by eight key principles: courage, compassion, truth, trust, fearlessness, forgiveness, service-selflessness, and self-restraint (Sethia). King followed six principles that were derived from Gandhi’s eight. These included courage, community, attack forces of evil, not people, suffer, without retaliation, for a good cause, avoid internal and external violence, and the universe is on the side of justice (Lafayette). As educators, we must employ these principles in our classroom to create successful learning environments. Five principles that overlap between King and Gandhi, which are also applicable and practicable in the classroom, are courage, compassion, forgiveness, community, and attacking forces of evil. These five principles are most relevant and can be put immediately into effect in our schools through our daily interactions with students.

Educators must have courage. The marchers in the Birmingham campaign demonstrated courage by not backing down from the fire hoses and dogs let loose by Bull Connor (Carson). Teachers need to have courage to practice self-restraint and persistence when in a confrontation with a student. No matter how difficult a student may be, teachers must be calm, assertive and tenacious with regards to steering the student toward the right path, even if the student lashes out. In the heat of the moment, keep in mind what will be most effective in achieving the goal as opposed to making oneself feel better? By modeling courage, teachers are also teaching students how to act in the face of adversity.

Build a close knit, caring community of learners in the classroom. King describes how the community came together to sustain the Montgomery bus boycott by carpooling, volunteering time and cars for over a year until the U.S. Supreme Court declared bus segregation unconstitutional (Carson). Teachers need a strong community in the classroom just as much as the students. What is meant by building a community? Seeing the good in people and bringing people together in this way. Use students’ strengths around the classroom and get them to “buy in” to the classroom. Show the students you care by speaking to them carefully (Lafayette). Community is to rely on and be relied upon. Students want to feel like they belong somewhere and that they have a purpose. Close communities humanize us. Some activities to build community in the classroom include are under Suggested Teaching Activities: #1 and 2. More important than the activities to build community, teachers who model loving kindness in the classroom are showing students how they should interact with one another.

Separate the act from the person, and attack the act, but don’t attack the person. There’s an anecdote of Gandhi walking on the sidewalk of South Africa. When he walked passed a guard, the guard pushed him down into the street, and told him that Indians weren’t allowed on the sidewalk. Gandhi’s friends quickly came to his aid and suggested he take action against the guard. Gandhi declined explaining that the guard was just following orders. Gandhi regarded the act and the policies as evil, but forgave the guard who was just doing his job. Teachers need to remember to address the negative behavior without accusing student of being evil, lazy, stupid, or apathetic. Remember that we are a product of our environment. Students act a certain way to attain something they are missing. Figure out what that something is, and fulfill
that need in a positive way. By focusing on the act, it’s easier to see the action objectively, rather than feeling personally offended by it.

Forgive the student’s actions and allow chances for redemption. In 1914, Gandhi and General Smuts finally came to an agreement on the rights of Indians in South Africa. For many years, Smuts imposed discriminating policies on the Indians, and Gandhi led nonviolent civil disobedience against these policies. After Smuts put into action policies that secured Indian rights in South Africa, Gandhi gave Smuts a pair of leather sandals that Gandhi made in jail (Fischer). This action showed Gandhi’s appreciation for and forgiveness of Smuts. A teacher needs to forgive students and also ask for forgiveness from students. Each new day is a new chance for the students and teacher to learn, improve and grow together. Forgiveness will show the student the teacher cares and that there is still a chance to do better in this class. This will keep the student “in the game”. When a teacher asks for forgiveness and admits to making a mistake, he/she shows students humility and wins credibility. It also shows students how easy it is to forgive, which is something naturally challenging for anyone to do.

The most important principle to practice is compassion. Both King and Gandhi saw their situations from the perspective of their oppressors. King understood why the southern whites were so against desegregation: it meant that they had to share privileges with blacks (Carson). Thus, King took steps using nonviolence to secure rights for the minority and assure the majority their rights would remain in tact. Similarly, Gandhi recognized that the minority whites of South Africa feared the blacks and Indians, who made up the majority; their policies were to suppress the shear strength of the majority (Fischer). By using nonviolence, Gandhi secured the rights of the Indians without making the whites feel vulnerable. Teachers need to show compassion for the students they work with. Each person has experienced an array of events and emotions that shape his/her way of looking at the world. Empathize and understand the student’s background and environment. By doing so, we humanize the student, and we can separate actions from the person. Showing students compassion will improve teacher-student relationships. However, modeling compassion for the students will spark a ripple effect of kindness which will undoubtedly improve the general ambience.

A classroom management plan that is plainly delineated, with expectations and boundaries clearly conveyed to the students can prevent most classroom behavior issues. The rules and expectations should make sense to the students. Suggested Activities for Teaching #3 can be used to help students think about their values and turn them into class rules. Put in place a system of consequences and rewards to discourage negative behaviors and encourage positive behaviors equally. Devise lessons that are engaging and packed with activities so that students stay focused and busy. Teach the students the procedures of the classroom and insist that these procedures are followed on a regular basis. Procedures provide stability and predictability, which in turn will keep the students unruffled on a daily basis. Above all, remember to allow students another chance to do the right thing. Trust that the student will improve with each try.

Even with an amazing classroom management system in place, teachers will experience several conflicts every day. Of course some conflicts are very small and often work themselves out with little effort. Then there are the bigger conflicts which will call into action all the principles at once. Remember that the person is not evil, but the act can be evil. Maintain self-restraint by staying firm but not provocative during the confrontation. Stay in control by focusing on the goal of de-escalating the situation. Relocate yourself into the student’s circumstances, and help the student overcome his/her negative actions. Remember that when
people act ugly, it’s because that’s all they’ve known (Lafayette). So why punish someone who is ugly with more ugliness? Bring the conflict to a quiet, calm end and you’ve achieved conflict resolution. Win the student over with compassion, patience and forgiveness and you’ve achieved reconciliation. Both parties walk away re-humanized and uplifted.

Adopting the principles of nonviolence is a journey of transforming ourselves and our students and we must be patient with both. Gandhi, too, had to transform his violent nature by making “a conscious effort to grow and change and restrain his bad impulses” (Fischer). Some students will refuse to be transformed or touched by this approach, however, there will be many students who will accept, maybe even thirst for this approach. Celebrate the small victories; for those who you have not won over, remember that you have planted the seed.

California State Content Standards:

CSTP: Teachers establish a climate that promotes fairness and respect. Teachers promote social development and responsibility. Teachers establish and maintain standards for student behavior.

CA BTSA Induction:
17.b Examine personal beliefs related to cultures, communities, gender, and sexual orientation and their impact on student learning and to use instructional strategies that maximize academic performance for all students.
17.e Examine personal beliefs, attitudes and expectations related to gender and sexual orientation, creating a gender-fair, bias free environment.
17.f Recognize and attempt to eliminate bias in the classroom and create an equitable learning community.
17 g. Recognize bias in schools and larger educational systems and work to overcome its effects on students.

Materials Needed:

- Bulletin board (or some wall space)
- Slips of paper or post-its
- Pens
- Prizes or other types of rewards
- Survey of values

Suggested Teaching Activities:

1. Nonviolence wall: Explain that the nonviolence wall is a place where students and teacher can post quotes or messages that relate to nonviolence philosophy. The criteria should be: anything that reflects any principle of nonviolence (predetermine which principles you want your students to focus on), anything else that is very positive and nothing that suggests violence acted out in anger, retaliation, or to instigate.

2. Students work in groups of 3 or 4. Every six weeks the students from each group picks the one student from the group that exemplifies hard work and another student who exemplifies nonviolence or a predetermined principle of nonviolence. They should be
two different students.
3. Create norms by first having students complete a survey of their values. Start with the individual student choosing his/her values; have student decide on the top five they select. Next, have the students decide as a group what their top five are. Next, report out to large group and write down the values (by number) for each group. Decide on 3-7 of the top values and write them as norms or commitments that all the students and the teacher will abide by for the rest of the year. Post. Do this for each period.

**Bibliography:**


