Ahimsa Center K-12 Lesson Plan

Applying a Pedagogy of Peace to the Classroom

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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
Middle School History/Humanities

Duration of Lesson:
Potentially all day, every day

Content Standards:
All of them

Lesson Abstract:
Gandhi and Chavez not only lived lives of nonviolence, but created cultures of peace for others. The information herein will provide classroom teachers information and examples of ways that Orosco’s Peace Pedagogy might be implemented into schools to allow for students to live lives of nonviolence.

Guiding Questions:
- How did Chavez and Gandhi wish to enact educational reform in public schools?
- How could a Peace Pedagogy be applied to the decisions made in a classroom regarding curriculum choice, presentation, classroom management, and classroom organization?

Content Essay
After an undergraduate degree and a credentialing program designed for elementary educators, I had completed six years of teaching before anyone asked me “What is education?” I had never considered what an answer to that question. I would state with confidence that I was rocked all the way to my professional foundation, except in that moment I realized I might not have any professional foundation. Apparently, I had a bit of work to do.

David Orr, an environmental educator, has written a great deal on the purpose of education in the United States. He states that, among other roles, our education should achieve the Greek concept of Paideia, which is that to say “that the goal of education is not mastery of subject matter but mastery of one’s person” (Orr, 1994, p. 13). He also has written that knowledge carries with it the responsibility to see that it is used well in the world. He strongly believes in the power of example over word. Following this line of thinking will direct us to believing, then, that in order to teach our students to be peaceful, we have no choice to but to teach them peacefully. I would argue, as would Gandhi and Chavez, that many educational settings fall short of reaching that goal.
Gandhi and Chavez would argue that teachers should strive to create a culture of peace in school. The United Nations defines “a culture of peace” to be “a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by taking their root causes and solving problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups, and nations (Orosco, 2008, p. 23). Classrooms are an ideal setting for the introduction and practice of actions that advance a nonviolent way of negotiating the world. Jose-Antonio Orosco has outlined five different targets that teachers can use to set goals for both curriculum and classroom organization. His recommendations are reflective of the philosophies Gandhi and Chavez shared on education. His pedagogy can also be read as the blueprint of the way these two men lived out their lives in nonviolent ways.

The examples that follow are a few of the ways that Chavez and Gandhi exemplified Orosco’s Peace Pedagogy.

1. **Build a democratic community.**

   Cesar Chavez was a tireless advocate of democracy. He made great strides working toward the solidification of collaborative and cooperative aspects in his United Farmworker’s Union. Orosco, in fact, writes of Chavez’s desire to move from a situation of “power over” to a situation of “power with” (p. 93). He strove for an emphasis on dialogue, mutual attention, and communal identification within the union, and also with his “opponents”, the landowning farmers. Additionally, he saw the importance of reaching out to the general community, since all parties would eventually benefit from inclusionary interactions.

   Similarly, Gandhi’s pursuit of social justice, both in South Africa and in India, provides a powerful example of a lifelong attempt at the creation of democratic communities. His intentions, when creating his ashrams and the Phoenix and Tolstoy Farms, were to carve out communities where democracy and nonviolence were lived on a daily basis. Gandhi said that, “One is not worthy of rights without fulfilling one’s responsibility” (Sethia, 2012, p. 56). The opportunity to participate in these communities was contingent upon a commitment to participation in the large amount of work that was taking place within the community. Democracy was also explicitly taught, in the form of the lessons Gandhi taught on peaceful violation of unjust laws, nonviolent marches, and welfare for all (p. 56).

2. **Practice the skills of cooperation.**

   The social activism of both Chavez and Gandhi required incredible amounts of cooperation with and among the community. The picketing and boycotting instigated by the UFW were absolutely dependent upon the cooperation of both the farmworkers and the general public. Without clear goals shared by large numbers of mobilized supporters, the intentions of the Chavez and his union would never have been actualized.

   Gandhi’s protests were not only nonviolent, but they were inclusionary. He felt that *swaraj*, India’s freedom from Britain, could not be obtained until the poor and the “worst off” were brought into the field of a national movement (Sethia, 2012, p. 107). In order to nonviolently rebel against British rule, Gandhi counted on the cooperation of millions of Indians. He himself trained thousands of individuals in nonviolence, but he also depended upon practicing *ahimsakas* to share his philosophies and teach the appropriate strategies.
3. Develop a sense of ethical awareness and thinking.
Cesar Chavez demonstrated his emphasis on ethical considerations in his reflections on gender roles and the Mexican cultural tradition of “machismo”. Orosco writes that, “by refusing to be a macho, Chavez also made room for the redefinition of masculinity and the consideration of different styles of leadership that are more in line with feminist notions of decision making and empowerment” (2009, p. 89). Although he was not a prolific writer like Gandhi or Dr. King, he spent a considerable amount of time contemplating the motives behind his actions, as well as the effect his decisions would have on others. Much like Gandhi, he refused to allow for the use of inappropriate means to be used to reach the ends desired by his union. Both leaders placed great emphasis on thoughts and actions being closely aligned with outcomes. They also each had a strong adherence to nonviolence, which speaks volumes of the high standards they had of the members of their movements, as well as the love and respect they had for their opponents. Both gentlemen felt that ethics must be at the center of any movement for positive change.

4. Promote critical thinking.
Education was also at the heart of the movements of both Gandhi and Chavez. In fact, one of the reasons that Chavez chose nonviolent direct action, as opposed to armed struggle, is because of the opportunity for education that it provides (Orosco, 2009, p. 51). He stressed the development of skills in group deliberation, compromise, and collaborative planning (Orosco, 2009, p. 52). Each of these are higher level thinking skills, and require participants to think critically about their actions.

Gandhi had very similar thoughts on education. He said that education “is that which liberates. Education, according to him, meant ‘an all-around drawing out of the best in child and man – body, mind, and spirit’” (Sethia, 2012, p. 175). He spoke of education needing to have a practical value. Practicality, in truth, requires skills of critical thinking in the individual applying the knowledge. He couldn’t be satisfied with a country of factory workers; he hoped for a system of education that promoted independent bodies and minds working together for a common goal of democratic freedom.

5. Instill a sense of self-worth and empowerment.
Empowerment is at the heart of the life’s work of both Chavez and Gandhi. Chavez dedicated his life to the creation, and then continuation, of the United Farmworker’s Union, which includes empowerment as one of its five Core Values (www.ufw.org). Increasing the volume of worker voice, as well as training union members to advocate for themselves, was a crucial piece of his work.

Gandhi strove tirelessly to empower Indians first in South Africa, and then in India. He developed philosophies surrounding the idea that swaraj, or self-rule, in India would only be achieved in individual Indians worked toward a personal swaraj. This request, placed on the shoulders of the Indian people, required them to make a transformation into a citizenry confident and strong in their ability to lead themselves into the future.

Both Gandhi and Chavez recognized that we are in grave need of a cultural revolution of values in the world, and the both identified schools as an ideal setting for that revolution to take place. Orosco’s Peace Pedagogy is an accessible framework with great potential to be used as a tool to
make these changes. The lessons ideas that follow are meant to be examples of steps that can be taken so that perspectives that can be shifted and conversations that can begin.

References


Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:

1. Build a democratic community.
   - **Socratic Circles**
     The incorporation of Socratic Circles into classrooms is a great way to build inclusion into the curriculum. Because the ground rules stipulate that each student must participate, student voices that are often quiet become heard. Every student must be prepared in order to comment, so the importance of intention and planning are also reinforced.
   - **Weekly class meetings**
     Class meetings are necessary if a democratic community is to be established. Students should be counted on to create the agenda, as well as to conduct the meeting. The teacher can certainly respond, but should only do so from the perspective of a member of the class community, not as an authoritarian.

2. Practice the skills of cooperation.
   - **Team building exercises outside of the classroom**
     Leaving the confines of the classroom helps to show students the importance of an activity. Trust-building exercises, games that promote cooperation and support, and even field trips to team-centered activities such as ropes courses can give students an opportunity to connect with each other more easily than in the classroom.
   - **Cooperative Learning built into lessons**
     Much research has documented the positive benefits of cooperative, not competitive, activities in the classroom. Cooperation helps to build community, whereas the competition in traditional classrooms breaks community apart.

3. Develop a sense of ethical awareness and thinking.
   - **Monthly current event writing assignments**
     Knowledge of local, national, and world news brings new perspective into the classroom, and can help in presenting multiple viewpoints and empathy.
   - **Volunteering in primary classrooms**
Service in one’s community should not just be completed out of a desire to get into a good university, nor should it be completed as a punishment. Working with younger students is a great way for teenagers to practice valuable leadership and decision-making skills.

- **Tell the story of moral heroes**
  When biographies are brought into the classroom, they should not be limited to those who were successful in war or politics. The lives of unsung heroes might be better chosen to study with young people. This will allow students to see value in peaceful, everyday decisions that are made by those all around us, and not just value in the decisions made by the ruthless and violent.

- **Social activism as part of the Satyagrahi Training in the classroom**
  Please consider looking at my previous lesson plan for nonviolent activist training in the classroom.

4. **Promote critical thinking.**
   - **Open-ended questioning built into lesson design**
     A consideration of Bloom’s Taxonomy when creating lesson plans will go a long way in creating opportunities for students to creatively solve problems and consider issues.

   - **Present critical issues, such as gender and success**
     There must be opportunities within classrooms to define the concepts that we use to define ourselves. Dominant culture presents very limited viewpoints, but will tirelessly drive them home. Allowing students to consider the meanings of life will inspire and empower.

   - **Student voice included in lesson design and unit/lesson grading**
     If students are given an opportunity to participate in the creation of a unit plan, they will be much more motivated to participate in the activities of that unit. Conversations surrounding state standards, and the different ways to disseminate information, should be held so that all participants can find consensus in the learning.

5. **Instill a sense of self-worth and empowerment.**
   - **Introspective work within Writer’s Workshop**
     Writing activities, such as the *This I Believe* essay contest, give students opportunities to formulate personal perspectives. Both Writer’s Workshop and the essay lessons put out by NPR offer structured ways that young people can use to make sense of their world. They also provide opportunities for students to share beliefs, fears, and goals with others.

   - **Inclusion of student voice in the decisions made in and for the classroom**
     Consideration of student input is an easy way to empower students. Inclusion of the ideas and perspectives of others builds buy-in and helps to make learning meaningful and lasting.