Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan


Title:
Gandhi’s Talisman and Decision Making

Lesson By:
Jolene R. Lockwood, Laramie County School District #1, Central High School, Cheyenne, WY

Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
Any

Duration of Lesson:
An hour and beyond...

Content Standards:
Lincoln County School District - Instructional Coach Performance Evaluation Standards
2d: Establishing and maintaining norms of behavior for professional interactions
Instructional Coach has established clear norms of mutual respect for professional interaction. Teachers ensure that their colleagues adhere to these standards of conduct.
4d: Participating in a professional community
Instructional Coach makes a substantial contribution to school and district events and projects and assumes a leadership role with colleagues.

Lesson Abstract:
Anyone in a leadership position is invited to think about the ways they might use Gandhi’s Talisman as the last filter to check for the impacts that important decisions might have on their learning community.

Guiding Questions: In what ways might Gandhi’s Talisman support individuals and collaborative teams as they make decisions?

Content Essay:

Gandhi’s Talisman and Decision Making


Guiding Question: In what ways might Gandhi’s Talisman support individuals and collaborative teams as they make decisions?
Professional Learning Communities, Collaborative Teams, Decision Making Teams, Building Leadership Teams, groups of people come together for many reasons, to dialog for understanding, to make important decisions, to create, innovate, and solve problems. Whatever the reason a group comes together for collaboration, there are ways to work together that are grounded in the principles of nonviolence, acceptance, and productive work for the good of the community. Gandhi’s wrote about the notion of collaboration and cooperation:

We must appeal to the good in human beings and expect response. It is not conducive to the well-being of society that every member uses all his talents, only not for personal aggrandizement but for the good of all? We do not want to produce a dead equality where every person becomes or is rendered incapable of using his ability to the utmost possible extent.

He encourages the idea that as members of a group, it is essential that we ‘appeal to the good in human beings’ meaning that a key ingredient of effective group work is coming to the table with positive presuppositions about the other team members and their abilities. This connects directly to the Adaptive School model for collaboration:

The Adaptive School addresses the deeper meaning of collaborative work. According to Suzanne Riley who works with Robert Garmston, "Collaborative work must include respect for one another, a sense of mission, and clarity about the work people are doing together.

Whenever people come together to collaborate and make decisions, there are tensions that arise based on differing opinions, points of view and experiences. This can create a state of positive or negative disequilibrium. When groups use norms as those agreements of how they might collaborate; to get ideas on the table, give everyone a voice, and at times agree to disagree, the group productivity and efficacy is raised. The work of the Adaptive Schools Foundation, now integrated with the Cognitive Coaching Foundation, known as the Thinking Collaborative, is grounded on the research of Costa, Garmston and Wellman. They have designed a framework for groups to work more collaboratively and effectively together when making those difficult decisions.

The first piece of collaboration that the Adaptive Schools suggests is to have structure that guide groups such as the norms of collaboration. They have identified seven norms that groups might attend to, to set both individual and group intentions. “The seven norms of collaboration are essential capacities and skills for high-performing groups. They operate within several practical frameworks that help groups to develop shared meaning and gracefully reach decisions.”

The seven norms of collaboration are: pausing, paraphrasing, posing questions, putting ideas on the table, providing data, paying attention to self and others and presuming positive intentions. The norms of collaboration assist teams in setting intentions and matching congruent behaviors. Through the decision making process, they are the agreements that allow us to dialog with others and listen with empathy and understanding to solve problems. As collaborative teams come to the point of making a decision, once consensus has been determined, a final check prior to implementation would be to use the talisman as the last filter to ensure the decision is one that will be most beneficial to all.
When Decision Making Gets Tough

When we have to make important decisions for ourselves, our classrooms and our learning communities, how might the talisman serve as a final check before making a decision? Gandhi cultivated and nurtured his values of nonviolence, and towards the end of this journey he synthesized these notions in such a way that they are clear and applicable to any decision making process. To put this profound words into context, Professor A. Moss explains, “In August, 1947, a few months before his assassination, Mahatma Gandhi wrote a brief text that has since come to be known as “Gandhi’s Talisman.” Here, in its entirety, is the text:

Gandhi’s Talisman

I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj the hungry and spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.

Dr. Moss expands this “first encounter with the talisman, we see that Gandhi frames it as a reflective activity, as a kind of thought experiment: “applying the following test…” which invite us to consider the ways that this talisman “check” might help collaborative teams be assured that when they are faced with making important decisions, whether as to what they will be putting in front of their students for instruction, or when they have to make decisions for the larger system, they know that these decisions benefit the “the hungry and spiritually starving millions.”

If individuals and teams used Gandhi’s talisman as that final filter check before making decisions, what might happen for students with special needs, students that come to school hungry and deprived of basic needs, students that come from affluent homes, yet are depressed and feel alone, “the hungry and spiritually starved millions.”? So, when individuals and teams are faced with making difficult decisions, they have completed the ‘dialog process’ and have brainstormed and put all their ideas on the table, and are finally ready for making a decision: Might there be a way that we can make these decisions with a greater degree of humanity, compassion, empathy and understanding? And in what ways might we thus build student’s capacities for self-directedness, compassion and empathy and in turn they empower others to have the same? Then “you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.”

Bibliography


Lesson:

CHS PLC (Professional Learning Community) Collaborative Teams
9/2013


Facilitator: Jo Lockwood

Guiding Question: In what ways might Gandhi’s Talisman support individuals and collaborative teams as they make decisions?

Learning Targets:
✓ We can build our background knowledge on Gandhi’s Talisman and make connections to the norms of collaboration.
✓ We can consider ways Gandhi’s Talisman might be used as a final filter for reflection before making important decisions for ourselves and our community.

Agenda:

Opening: The What, Why, How

Grounding: Read the quote from Gandhi on collaboration: “I offer you peace. I offer you love. I offer you friendship. I see your beauty. I hear your need. I feel your feelings. My wisdom flows from the Highest Source. I salute that Source in you. Let us work together for unity and love.” –M.K. Gandhi

Explain and Explore:

Agenda: “Are there any questions or suggestions for the agenda today?”

Norms of Collaboration—Setting our Intentions:
Question: “What might be one norm that you will be paying attention to in yourself and what norm might the group pay attention to as we collaborate today?”

Composing:

Gandhi’s Talisman: A Guide for Living, Dr. Andrew Moss

WHAT: Build background knowledge and a deeper understanding of the importance of Gandhi’s Talisman and how these ideas might connect to the norms for collaboration.
WHY: When we understand the intentions and purpose of Gandhi’s Talisman we can apply these notions of nonviolence and collaboration into the work we do individually and as collaborative team members.

HOW: Read Gandhi’s Talisman, carefully and thoughtfully, annotate and paraphrase, then dialog to deepen understanding using the ‘Save the Last Word’ Protocol with your table group of 3.

Directions for ‘Save the Last Word’ protocol
http://www.nsrfharmony.org/protocol/doc/save_last_word.pdf

Reflection: (Individually and Collaboratively)
Take 3 minutes to write about what new thinking you have as a result of this dialog. Be prepared to share with the whole group, one thing that you are taking with you.

Dialog and Discovery:
How might we make our intentions transparent so that we can take our next steps? What new connections are we making as a result of this learning?

Next PLC Meeting: Applying Background Knowledge to New Situations:

✓ We can successfully apply the Adaptive School’s “Structures for Successful Meetings” protocols to dialog and understand the questions presented. We can use Gandhi’s Talisman as a pause for reflection before making important decisions for ourselves and our community.

Structures for Successful Meetings

- One process at a time
- One topic at a time
- Balance participation
- Understand and agree on roles
- Engage cognitive conflict

Norms of Collaboration

1. Pausing
2. Paraphrasing
3. Posing Questions
4. Putting Ideas on the Table
5. Providing Data
6. Paying Attention to Self and Others
7. Presuming Positive Intentions

Initial PLC Collaboration/Training before dialog and discussion
Direct Instruction: Gandhi’s Talisman, historical context, purpose. Modified from Dr. Andrew Moss’s Workshops from August, Ahimsa Fellowship, 2013