Ahimsa Center K-12 Institute Lesson Plan

“To every right, there is a corresponding duty”
Creating a positive classroom environment through the teachings of Gandhi

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Grade Level/Subject Area(s): 6-8th Grade English/Writing/Ethics

Duration of Lesson: 30 minutes, 3-5 days

Common Core Standard:
Common Core Writing 6.1 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Lesson Abstract:
In today’s world of excess, overindulgence, and entitlement; where do we draw the line between that which is “owed” to us and our responsibility to society? Gandhi spoke of duty and service. Today’s youth focuses on personal gain rather than service. Understanding that individual rights are accompanied by duties and responsibilities is key to a positive classroom environment.

Guiding questions:
Do you agree that every right has a corresponding duty? How does the meaning of the quote relate to today’s society? How can we use what Gandhi has taught us about rights and responsibilities to create a positive classroom environment?

Content Essay:

In his most seminal work, Hind Swaraj, Gandhi states:

“To every right, there is a corresponding duty.”

Gandhi simply yet eloquently reminds us that, rights are not just gifts given to us, but that there are duties attached to those rights. Gandhi’s belief that we all have a call to service, led him to work most of his life ensuring the rights of his people. Throughout his life, Gandhi exemplified the correlation between the rights that we all have as citizens and our duty to serve the community from which we demand those rights. Gandhi believed in securing rights through personal suffering known as Satyagraha. Gandhi believed that through self restraint, one could attain personal Swaraj, or personal freedom. By practicing self restraint, we can free ourselves from the proverbial chains that bind us. It is only through hard work and sacrifice that we can secure our own personal freedom which allows us the rights we all so desperately want. We often take for granted rights that we are given and forget that we have a duty to our fellow man. Thinking of our rights without considering the consequences of those rights is a destructive journey we often take without even realizing it. Gandhi believed that rights are to be earned and that there are consequences to taking our rights for granted without thoughtful consideration of the effect the actions we take have on ourselves and others. It is simple to hide behind a given
right to freedom without considering how one person’s freedom to exercise their rights imposes on another person’s rights and freedoms. It is through self sacrifice and consideration for others that true freedom can flourish and everyone in the community can exercise their rights individually.

“Civilization is that mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms.” (Hind Swaraj, 1997,p60)

Gandhi believed that true civilization emerged from one’s duty to others. Only through duty and service can we obtain individual Swaraj, or freedom. The most powerful indicator of a person’s rights is the ability to exercise those rights through personal freedom. Duty to your neighbor, community, and country ensures that all individuals experience the individual freedom that Gandhi so deeply avowed. It can be argued that the terms: rights and freedom are directly related. Without freedom there are no rights, and without rights, you cannot have freedom. Gandhi defined individual Swaraj as “self-rule.” Therein lies the key to Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj; self rule that is rooted in service to the well-being of others which Gandhi refers to as Sarvodaya. As individuals work toward the well-being of others, true freedom and the ability to exercise our basic human rights can be attained.

The concepts of Swaraj and Sarvodaya can be used to provide the means to a positive classroom environment. As students learn that their rights in the classroom are bound to their duty to their classmates, the notion of self rule will take effect. Today’s youth often bemoans the rights that they are owed. Students often feel entitled and lack a sense of responsibility to themselves and, more disturbingly, to others. This pervasive need to behave in a manner that undermines any sense of community and responsibility to others, often leads to a toxic and negative environment for students. It leads to an environment where students continuously and viciously infringe on each others’ rights. Students in today’s classrooms find themselves with the inability to consider how their behavior affects those around them. They are unaware that they have the ability, and that it is in fact their duty, to ensure that other’s around them are able to exercise their own rights and freedom.

Teaching students that their rights are tied to a duty to each other can create an environment that is grounded in good will. Making students responsible for the well-being of their classmates and teaching them to sacrifice for each other can create a classroom community that will empower students to look out for one another and lead others to do the same. Gandhi explains the power of individuals forming an oceanic circle in which the center is the individual surrounded by his or her community and both giving and drawing strength from one another in Hind Swaraj:

“life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready for perish for the circle of villages……never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.” (Hind Swaraj, p182)

Through the concept of the oceanic circle, students can be taught the importance that one person’s behavior has on the whole. There is value in teaching them that they are all one and that together each one has an impact on their environment both in the classroom and outside of
the classroom. Though the understanding that behaving in the interest of others will create a positive environment for everyone, students can put into practice the concept of Swaraj and Sarvodaya.

Learning about self restraint, duty, and the well-being of others via the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi can foster a classroom environment that enhances student learning. Educating children is a duty that we as educators have. Instilling in them a sense of justice and community is part of the education they deserve from us. As educators we must consider that educating the mind, body, and soul is the true meaning of education. A true educator must contemplate what the true lessons of the classroom should be.

“What is the meaning of education? If it simply means a knowledge of letters, it is merely an instrument, and an instrument may well be used or abused” (Hind Swaraj, 1997, p99)

We must concentrate on giving students an instrument that has a purpose. Students should understand the power that a true education can possess. An education that encompasses the everyday academia that they are required to learn in harmony with the humanity that they will require in order to make their classroom community and the community in which they live a better place because they’re in it.

Bibliography:

Teaching Activities:
*Day 1:* Free write on the quote “To every right there is a corresponding duty”. What do you think the quote means? What do you think is meant by right and duty? Small group discussion.
*Day 2:* Assign students groups and give them a large piece of butcher paper. Make a T-chart. Have students create a list of “rights” they want to have in the classroom on one side. On the other side of the chart, have students fill in the corresponding duty that belongs with their right.
*Day 3:* Student web: Have students stand in a circle and hand one of them a ball of yarn. Each student will come up with one positive thing that they can do in the classroom to help others and throw the yarn across to another student, until all students have given one example and a web has been created in the center. Discuss with students.
*Day 4:* Students will begin to brainstorm ideas based on the list of rights they came up with in their groups on day 2. They will choose what they believe to be the 3 most important rights they have in the classroom.
*Day 5:* Students are to make an outline of the responsibilities that go along with each of the rights they have chosen.
*Day 6:* As a homework assignment students will write a 5 paragraph essay outlining the 3 most important rights and corresponding responsibilities in the classroom.
*Day 7:* During a class discussion students will collectively decide on the most important rights and corresponding responsibilities in the classroom. These will be posted in the classroom as a continuous reminder throughout the school year.