Ahimsa Center- K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson Plan

Title of Lesson: Classroom Ethics/Means & Ends
Lesson By: Patrick O’Connell

Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
High School – Government
(or any class)

Class Size:
any

Time/ Duration of Lesson:
45 minutes

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
- Students will understand different views of means and ends, and how these views impact ethical choices they make in their lives.
- Students and teacher will use means and ends to create an ethical guide for their classroom for the year, which may include how they will interact, how power will be used and how they will deal with violations of the classroom ethic.
- Students will write personal reflections on how means and ends work in their lives (for themselves, their families, their interactions with their friends and in school) at the start of the year and then at the end of the year to assess how the experience in the classroom has affected other areas of their lives.

Lesson Abstract:
We will use a conversation about “means and ends” to help students develop their own ethical philosophy, and possibly one for our classroom. We will use two quotes from Gandhi and discuss if Gandhi’s perspective makes sense, both in our own lives and in the interactions of nations.

Lesson Content:
The focus of this lesson will be “means & ends.” I plan to use this lesson as a way of creating an agreement with my students of the ethics we will try to uphold in my class throughout the year. (This lesson can also work for a discussion of ethics in general, with a more personal focus.) I believe that framing this discussion with the use of means and ends will both help us develop an ethical way of interacting throughout the year and will also help them develop an ethical framework for their lives beyond school. While the goal of creating classroom rules or agreements for how we will all interact throughout the year is to both empower and provide some ownership for how the classroom works for students, I think this method goes beyond this goal. It provides a framework that can be used by students to assess their own ethical decision-making process, as well as that used by the society around them. Very often, we expect people be “ethical” without ever teaching them this basic lesson.

When I was first introduced to Gandhi in college, I remember discussing means and ends. I think we read a quote from one of his most important works, *Hind Swaraj*. Here is an excerpt:

> Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed great crimes…The means may be likened to the seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree… We reap exactly what we sow… Fair means alone can reap fair results.\(^1\)
This quote gives you a good feel for Gandhi’s argument. I think you could read this quote and have students reflect on its meaning, both to society, your classroom and to themselves. (To help with your background knowledge, it might help to read the whole chapter, which Gandhi titled, “Brute Force” chapter XVI at http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajya/coverpage.htm). He makes this point clear when discussing why this was important to his independence movement:

… They say that “means after all are [just] means.” I would say “means are after all everything.” As the means, so the end. Violent means will only give violent Swaraj [Home Rule]… There is no wall of separation between means and end…I have been endeavoring to keep the country to means that are purely peaceful and legitimate.2

This quote will allow you to take the personal discussion of means and ends into the realm of society/politics. It could lead to some discussion of war and of how choices people make when they are setting out to try to change society – they are all interconnected.

If you want to be respected, treat others with respect. Peace is a more tricky issue, on both the personal level and the world level. This could be a good focus for a good part of the discussion. So often, it appears that “might makes right,” on both the community level and the international level. In some neighborhoods, it may seem that those with the guns are making the rules, that they are the ones who are the safest. The same internationally, where the US has the biggest and most advanced military the world has ever known and usually gets to do whatever it wants. But are the violent gang members/drug dealers/etc. safe? Do they really have security? Peace? Do the people of the US feel safe? Secure? And as an classroom experiment, you can see what happens if everyone who wants respect treats others with respect, that everyone who wants to feel safe allows others to feel safe, etc. Does what Gandhi is saying in these quotes make sense? Or are “means just means”?

I am not sure if this will help, but it helped me understand how important Gandhi was in the development of ethics: I read a very interesting discussion of means and ends in Professor Gene Sharp’s Gandhi as a Political Strategist. In this chapter (“Ethics and Responsibility in Politics”), Sharp reviews the ethical framework for political decision-making presented by Max Weber in “Politics as Vocation” (1918). Sharp discusses how Weber presented two options:

1. the ethic of ultimate ends – you stay true to your principles and don’t care if you ever achieve particular goals.
2. the ethic of responsibility – you take action in which your focus is on the foreseeable results of your actions

Basically, Weber believed that the only way to be “responsible” was to forsake good intentions and do whatever it took to achieve your goal. He did not believe there was an ethical way to achieve ethical goals. If you cared about goals (your ultimate end), you were forced to sacrifice your ethical means of achieving them, because ethical means were not effective. In essence, you could not be both ethical and politically responsible at the same time.

One cannot claim responsibility in politics without willingness to influence political events. Politics operates not only with power, but specifically with violence. Thus, he who would influence political events must be willing to use violence.3

Weber’s basic assumptions:

1) responsibility is determined by willingness to use violence for political ends;
2) exclusively nonviolent behavior cannot be politically effective and hence politically responsible.

Sharp points out that Gandhi has changed all of this:

The developments in the field of nonviolent action have opened up the possibility of bringing loyalty to ultimate ends and political responsibility under one roof and making them not opposites but two sides of the same coin. 4

So, prior to Gandhi, those who wanted to remain ethical did not need to worry about actually achieving good, they just needed to worry about being good. After Gandhi, those who wanted to be ethical now had a way of being responsible as well, and this was nonviolent action.

Consequently, Gandhi shifted the equation – to be ethical meant to take action to achieve the ends you desired. Just having a moral outlook was no longer enough. This shifted the responsibility of actually achieving the world they desired onto those who believed themselves to be ethical. Nonviolent action provided them with the means they had previously lacked. In essence, they could no longer hide behind being ethical as an excuse for not getting their hands dirty with struggling to achieve the world they envisioned.

The developments in the field of nonviolent action have opened up the possibility of bringing loyalty to ultimate ends and political responsibility under one roof and making them, not opposites, but two sides of the same coin. 5

Sharp revised Weber’s two ethical choices (being ethical or responsible) into five “ideal types” of ethical systems determined on the basis of their view of means and ends:

1. **Ethic of loyalty to ultimate ends and unconcern with results.** They are committed to being true to their convictions, believing that the results will follow from pursuing right actions and remaining true to basic principles.

2. **Ethic of deliberate consistency in means and ends.** Adherents of this ethic have deliberately chosen to work towards worldly goals only by means which are consistent with their ultimate ends, that is, by nonviolent means. They will refuse to use violent methods both on the grounds that such means violate their principles and on the ground that they would thereby reduce their chances of achieving desirable social and political results.

3. **Ethic of willingness to use the “necessary” and “most suitable” means.** Will use violence or nonviolence, depending which would work better according to circumstances.

4. **Ethic of “the necessary evil of violence.”** Believe that the only effective power of political relevance is that which is directly or indirectly associated with violence, although they may say that judged by some ideal system, this violence is regrettable.

5. **Ethic of loyalty to violence as means and ends.** They hold that the ultimate power in the world is based on violence and that the use or threat of violence is necessary to achieve any given goal, but with them violence becomes a “positive” goal itself. 6

I would suggest that, if this is not too much, that you might want to provide a list of these 5 choices and discuss them with your class. After a brief discussion, you can then brainstorm the
ways these different choices affect the way someone would end up living their lives after they made such choices.

The last step, after a good discussion, is to ask the class to experiment, in the fashion of Gandhi (he called his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*) and create a classroom culture where we all try to act in ways where our actions (means) match kind of ideal classroom we all want to work in (ends). Start by writing down and then brainstorming components of the ideal classroom (both interpersonal and academic). Go through the list and find the ones that everyone can agree are important. Then write down and brainstorm the kinds of behaviors it will take to create the ideal classroom. Write up the agreed to means and ends for the classroom and create a process for how you will hold each other accountable to these ideals.

**Endnotes**
4. Ibid., p. 242.
5. Ibid., p. 245.
6. Ibid., pp. 247-48

**California State Content Standards for Social Studies, Grade 12, Government:**
12.2 Students evaluate and take and defend positions on the scope and limits of rights and obligations as democratic citizens, the relationships among them, and how they are secured.
5. Describe the reciprocity between rights and obligations; one’s rights entails respect for the rights of others.

**Guiding Questions:**
- What kind of ethical people do we want to be/become?
- What kinds of actions do we need to take to be that kind of person?
- How can we treat each other ethically to create the kind of learning environment that works for every student in our class?

**Materials Needed:**
- Butcher paper for recording brainstorms
- Lined paper for individual student reflections

**Lesson Context:**
There are many places where a discussion of personal ethics makes sense, especially when you are teaching government! Just about any current event has some ethical nature to it. There may be a time when something very unethical has happened and you can use this lesson to try to frame how someone could make the choices they have.

I am envisioning using this lesson at the start of the school year, to define how we will all relate
to each other throughout the year. Once the exercise is done, you can refer to your discussion and to students’ reflections throughout the year to remind them of what they were thinking during this discussion.

### Teaching Activities:

1. Begin with a brief lecture/discussion on means and ends and how people adopt different ethics to govern their lives.
   - **ethics**: moral principles that govern a person's or group's behavior.
   - **moral**: concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness and badness of human character.

2. Discuss the meaning of “means” and “ends”
   - discuss “ends” (the things or results people want in their lives)
   - discuss “means” (the things you do to get what you want)
   - brainstorm different ways for achieving different goals (getting an expensive pair of sneakers when you have no money, dealing with a bully, dealing with an oppressive new school policy)

3. Read or write on the board the two quotes from Gandhi (appendix A). Here are some questions that might be helpful:
   - Does what Gandhi is saying make sense? Why or why not?
   - Is the only way to achieve fairness is to be fair? To gain respect? To have safety (for us to feel safe, we have to be sure that everyone feels safe)? To achieve peace?
   - What examples can you think of that prove these to be true or false?

3. (optional) Create classroom ethical guidelines for the class for the coming year
   - start with “ends” – what is the ideal classroom culture? What are the components? (e.g. respectful, peaceful, safe)
   - discuss “means” for achieving each component: how do we have to treat each other in order to create each “end” we want?
     (I type up this statement of classroom means and ends and post it in a very central location, and we refer to the poster when issues arise.)

5. **Homework:** students write their own assessment of how they deal with means and ends in their lives: with family and friends, at school, etc. How ethical are they? Do their ends match their means?

6. **End of Year Reflection:** Ask students to write a similar reflection. How have they changed? How have they stayed the same?

### Assessment/ Evaluation: (how students will be evaluated or show mastery)

1. Participation in discussions on means and ends.
2. Initial reflection on how they use means and ends in their daily lives
3. Ongoing interactions, how do they deal with class agreement
4. Final reflection at the end of the year on how their classroom experience has impacted their personal ethical life.
Extension Activities/ Enrichment
Other possible activities you can have them do throughout the year are:
- writing down how they see others in their families dealing with means and ends
- taking notes while watching their favorite TV shows about how the characters deal with means and ends
- taking notes on how the characters in their favorite movies deal with means and ends

Bibliography:


Appendix A

Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered religious have committed great crimes...The means may be likened to the seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree... We reap exactly what we sow... Fair means alone can reap fair results.


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