Title: Update Your Operating System

Lesson By: Lisa Callaway Pate, Palmer Ridge High School, Monument, Colorado

Grade Level/ Subject Areas: 11th & 12th grade / Psychology

Duration of Lesson: 1 block day (90 minutes) / 2 traditional days (2 forty-five minute classes)

Content Standards (National standards from National Psychological Association):

- Content Standard: The influence of the individual and the environment on perception.
  - 2.3 Explain the role of the environment, motivation, past experiences, culture and expectations on perception.

Lesson Context:

Students will have just finished part two of our third unit, “Sensation and Perception.” The second half of this unit includes information surrounding the influence of perceptual set and context. This lesson will take these concepts to a deeper level in terms of motivation, past experiences and expectations.

Lesson Abstract:

Students will re-examine their perception of the world as an interdependent global community and their place within it. Through private response, introspection and free writing in addition to reading excerpts from both Hind Swaraj and Gandhi’s Talisman, the students will explore the possibility of a complete change in perspective thus, altering the lens through which they view the world: their perception.

Guiding Questions:

1. How do the following influence our perceptions?
   a. environment
   b. past experience
   c. motivation
   d. expectation
   e. culture
2. Would an increased awareness of these factors fostered through the study of excerpts from Hind Swaraj and Gandhi’s Talisman enable us to perceive more accurately?
3. How can perspectives from Gandhi reshape our perceptions of the world and our role in it?

Content Essay:

Is Perception Reality?

According to Ocean Robbins (2001), we look at the world “through a lens that is crafted based on how we have decided to make sense of the world.” These personal world lenses, also referred to as our personal operating systems, tend to be formed early in life based on our own unique set of experiences. Unfortunately, while we are unlikely to update our operating systems, the world is changing incessantly. Therefore, it is very likely that our lens is focused improperly.
The purpose of this lesson is to provide students with an opportunity to refocus or clean their lens, to update their personal operating systems. In most psychology textbooks, this system or lens is known as the “perceptual set.” The perceptual set is defined as an individual’s set of expectations to see or perceive something based on prior experience. In order to refocus this lens and/or update this operational system, it is necessary to become aware of oneself at a deeper level than is normally required. Self-awareness is a pre-requisite for an individual’s perceptual set to be accurate as well.

**Application to a Real World Situation**

This lesson will begin with an excerpt from *Hind Swaraj*. In *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi has created a dialogue between the “reader” and the “editor” whereby the reader poses questions which the editor addresses in such a way as to enable the reader to self-reflect and grow. In chapter IV, the reader asks the editor to explain his or her views on “swaraj” or self-rule. Gandhi wrote *Hind Swaraj* to establish the truth about self-rule (Gandhi, 1997, p.xix); therefore, the editor’s response to this question is crucial in disseminating Gandhi’s view of the correct approach for obtaining India’s sovereignty from the British.

The “editor” answers the “reader’s” question with another question in order to make it clear that the reader’s perception of “swaraj” is not the same as the “editor’s.”

**READER:** I would like to know your views on Swaraj. I fear that our interpretation is not the same.

**EDITOR:** You and I and all Indians are impatient to obtain Swaraj…to drive the English out of India is a thought heard from many mouths, but it does not seem that many have properly considered why it should be so. I must ask you a question. Do you think that it is necessary to drive away the English, if we get all we want?...Why do we want to drive away the English?

**READER:** Because India has become impoverished by their Government. They take away our money from year to year. The most important posts are reserved for themselves. We are kept in a state of slavery. They behave insolently towards us, and disregard our feelings (Gandhi, 1997, pp. 25-27).

In this incomplete excerpt, Gandhi allows the “reader” to state the pervasive attitude towards British rule in India. As their conversation continues, however, the “editor” persists in assisting the “reader” to comprehend that this widespread perception of British rule in India is not completely accurate. Through a series of questions, the “editor” is able to aid the reader in discovering that much of India wants to get rid of the British but not the British way of life.

**EDITOR:** In effect it means that we want English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger’s nature, but not the tiger.

**Adjusting the Lens**

The “editor” then goes on in Chapters v – xiii explaining that British civilization (the tiger’s nature) is not the same as Indian civilization. The editor explains that in order to institute true Swaraj, Indian civilization must be reinstated so that the tiger’s nature does not remain. He further contends that true civilization is the “mode of conduct which points out to man the path of duty (Gandhi, 1997, p.65).”

Concurrently with discussion on the true meaning of civilization, the “editor” assists in the “reader’s” discovery that the British did not *take* India so much as India was *given* to the British. He helps to facilitate the "reader’s" understanding that Indian people gave India to the British by adopting the British civilization. After completely altering the “reader’s” perception of civilization and British occupation, the
“editor” is then prepared to further modify the “reader’s” operating system by asserting that the means to arriving at Swaraj must non-violent.

With absolute certainty, the “editor” contends that any accomplishment obtained via violence will not be an accomplishment at all. Furthermore, according to the “editor,” to truly arrive at Swaraj, their means must be worthy of their goal. Because violence could never be worthy, the only answer is, and always has been, passive resistance to all unjust laws including any that gave the British rule over India.

EDITOR: Passive resistance is an all-sided sword; it can be used anyhow; it blesses him who uses it and him against who it is used. Without drawing a drop of blood, it produces far reaching results. It never rusts, and cannot be stolen. Competition between passive resisters does not exhaust (Gandhi, 1997, p.92).

Through the process of igniting self-refection in the “reader,” her or his perception of “swaraj” or self-rule evolves from simply removing the British to regaining all that India had lost. The process is outlined meticulously starting with individual self-rule and expanding for the greater good to encompass all involved- including the British.

From the World to the Self
Gandhi’s vision of Swaraj lived hand in hand with his concept of “sarvodaya” or well-being for all. He refused to gain independence through violence which would reduce the end by using unfit means. His belief that everyone deserved well-being and that well-being for all was not just a possibility but also a responsibility is alive in each line of Gandhi’s Talisman.

It begins, “I will give you a talisman.” A talisman is an object which averts evil and brings good fortune; therefore, Gandhi is offering a metaphorical object: a rule by which to live well and thoughtfully.

He continues, “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.” Here Gandhi challenges the individual to consider his or her own individual actions. He is encouraging thoughtful living.

Then Gandhi goes further and directs each individual to consider altruistic action leading to Swaraj and Sarvodaya by asking, “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 for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?”

Finally, he asserts his belief in each individual’s capacity to perceive themselves and other’s in a more inclusive and thoughtful manner when he declares, “Then you will find your doubt and yourself melting away (Gandhi, 1948).”

Challenge each student with the power of The Talisman.

Conclusion
Into today’s technologically connected but physically unattached society it is not difficult to disconnect ourselves from others near and far. Even in the high school classroom, it is easy to witness students who are more connected to their devices than to each other. They converse on line, they flirt on line and they can turn away from problems with the touch of a finger. Their view of the world and “others” should be broadened by electrical opportunity; however, if they are not encouraged to contemplate, to consider, to challenge their own perspectives, it is not unlikely that they will fail to do so. By encouraging thoughtful
decision making and consciousness before action, individuals constantly update their personal operational systems, refocusing their lenses thereby changing not only their individual perceptions of the world but actions as well.

**Bibliography:**


**Teaching Activities/ Materials Needed:**

1. First the class will be given 7-8 minutes to free-write a response to the question, “On your eighteenth birthday you decide to go out with friends and purchase LOTTO tickets. Lo and behold, you alone win the fifty-million dollar jackpot! How will you handle the money?” These responses will remain private.
2. Read excerpts from *Hind Swaraj* as well as *Gandhi’s Talisman* in its entirety. Allow the students to explore and consider the possibility of a complete change in perspective.
3. Resubmit the original question and allow students to re-write in free-writing format for about 10 minutes.
4. Students will then compare and contrast their original responses to their final responses.
5. Students will have an opportunity to share insight gained in a small group and then whole class discussion.
6. Finally, students will create a goal for awareness of their own challenges to accurate and thoughtful perception.
7. Conclude with reading from Ocean Robbin’s “The Power of Partnership” about changing his own perception concerning his autistic son.