Ahimsa Center K-12 Teacher Institute Lesson

Title: Walking With Gandhi and Active Activism

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Grade Level/ Subject Areas:
9-12th grade Physical Education & Health

Duration of Lesson:
45min. twice a week for 4-6 weeks.

Content Standards:
High School Course 1:
3.2 Act independently of negative peer pressure during physical activity.
3.3 Identify and evaluate personal psychological responses to physical activity.
3.9 Recognize and evaluate the role of cooperation and positive interactions with others when participating in physical activity.

Lesson Abstract:
This lesson uses the act of walking as the practical application of Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj at the individual level in order to provide students with the opportunity to use walking as a form of self-reflection and meditation. Multifaceted in nature, the act of walking is also a form of non-violent social change as advocated and exemplified by Gandhi. The contributory activities and cumulative project of organizing a walk help to create a better overall understanding of walking as tool for individual accountability and social service.

Guiding Questions:
• What is Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj?
• How can Gandhi’s vision of individual Swaraj be supported through walking meditation?
• In what ways was Gandhi instrumental in introducing walking as a form nonviolent social resistance?

Content Essay:

Gandhi’s Swaraj
The word Swaraj comes from the language of Gujarati and was interpreted by Mohandas K. Gandhi, the “father of non-violence resistance” in India during the 1920’s-30’s as meaning “self-rule, self-government, freedom” (Sethia 64). To most of us, this meaning of Swaraj sounds meaningful and enticing.

Teacher Prompt: In what context was Gandhi using this term?

To answer this question we must take a deeper look into Gandhi’s interpretation of Swaraj and discover what was behind his view of individual freedom and “self-government”. In the 1920’s, Gandhi was encouraging the people of India to reclaim their freedoms from the British, who had
taken over control of the nation. Through modern industrial civilization the British were steadily diminishing Indian culture and society. “Despite its material progress, according to Gandhi, modern civilization was a hindrance to the needs of the human spirit and the yearning for a good life (Sethia 59).

The people of India were losing themselves, getting swept up in having more and more material goods and setting aside their simpler way of life. Fascination with modern civilization had facilitated British rule of the Indian subcontinent (Sethia 61). Gandhi said that the people of India could only reclaim their way of life, their culture, by achieving Swaraj. Indians could work toward Swaraj by turning inward and working on their moral self to ultimately be able to become reliant on our own strength of our body, mind, and soul (Gandhi, in Parel, 2009, p. 21). Individual transformation could only take place through selfless service to the community and decision-making based on uninhibited choices that were not driven by material goods. Once the people of India were able to make decisions that aligned with their cultural spirituality they would be able to work within Swaraj and therefore not be controlled by the temptation of “things” introduced by the British through modern civilization.

**Applicable Swaraj for the Individual**

Applying Gandhi’s call for individual Swaraj into our own lives presents a strong reminder that we have control over our material possessions. They do not have control over us unless we let them! In order for each of us to take control of our lives and our happiness we must first look inward as Gandhi suggests.

**Teacher Prompt: How can each of us use Gandhi’s Swaraj to help us regain control over our decisions in order to lead happier lives?**

A great way to become a more reflective individual is to practice meditation. In its true context, by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, meditation means, “to engage in contemplation or reflection” (2013). Meditation comes in a variety of forms and does not have to be concentrated around a religious practice. It can be concentrated around a thought, an idea, or a problem. In Physical Education we have the unique opportunity of experimenting with “walking meditation”, using the activity of walking to reflect on self.

In a letter written not long before he died, titled “The Talisman”, Gandhi wrote:

> “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….”

(Gandhi, in Sethia p.72).

To achieve Swaraj we must first dispel our doubts and recall the hardships and struggles we have been through in our lives. Many of us have been victims of horrible events, but these events are behind us. In the present we can each choose to reclaim our lives and not remain prisoners to our pasts. The “poorest and the weakest” that Gandhi spoke about can many times be us. Through use of meditation while walking we can remember our struggles and use them as strength builders to regain control of our thoughts and actions. Walking also provides us with the physical act of moving forward. We each have the power to make any negative thought a positive one and
ultimately change the course of our lives through use of Gandhi’s Swaraj. When talking about India’s future freedom Gandhi stated:

…Live for this true picture, thought never realizable in its completeness (our vision of perfection for our lives). We must have a proper picture of what we want, before we can have something approaching it”. (Gandhi, in Parel, 2009, p.182)

Teacher Prompt: What does your life vision look like and what steps will you take to achieve this goal?

Walking as a Tool for Non-Violent Resistance

Walking is unique in that as a physical act it can mean many different things. We have already seen how walking can create a sense of freedom for self and now let’s look at walking as a form of nonviolent resistance or activism. The Merriam-Webster dictionary outlines the word activism as meaning, to “promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental change or status” (2013). Gandhi used walking as a form of nonviolent social resistance in 1930 when he organized the “Salt March”.

Gandhi’s most well-known act of non-violent resistance was instigated by the high taxing on salt. The poor people of India, who used salt as their one cooking spice, could not afford to buy salt once it was taxed. Gandhi addressed the issue of salt tax in an article featured in his newspaper Young India on February 27, 1930, “next to air and water, salt is perhaps the greatest necessity of life. It is the only condiment of the poor… There is no article like salt outside water by taxing which the state can reach even the starving millions, the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. The tax constitutes therefore the most inhuman poll tax that ingenuity of man can devise (Gandhi, in Sethia 2012, p.111).

Gandhi, appalled by this act of government, organized the Salt March in order to promote the disregard of the government for the wellbeing of the poor. Gandhi sent a letter to the government informing them of his plan to break the salt laws in an attempt to come to an understanding before he completed his act of disobedience as a form of nonviolent resistance. The government declined to meet with Gandhi and so, on March 12, along with seventy eight others, began the 241 mile walk to the ocean on the coast of Dandi (Sethia 113). Upon arrival almost a month later, Gandhi intentionally broke the salt laws by picking up a lump of salt and sand.

In this act, Gandhi used walking as a form of nonviolent resistance to draw attention to his cause. We have all heard the quote “actions speak louder than words” and it’s true. Activism is powerful and progression as physical act is a strong method of nonviolent resistance that draws awareness to unjust social issues.

Teacher Prompt: How can we use walking as platform for non-violent activism?

Upon completion of this lesson students will be able to understand Swaraj and its application to walking meditation. Furthermore, students will be exposed to the power of walking as a form of nonviolent resistance and Gandhi’s role in nonviolent activism. The goal of this lesson is to prompt students to ask the question: “How can I use walking to promote Swaraj for myself and nonviolent social activism relevant to the needs of today's world.
Bibliography:


Teaching Activities

1. Free Write:
   After completion of the “Gandhi’s Swaraj” section of the lesson students will take out journals and free write for 10-15min. about three things that they feel personally imprisoned by. This can be a past experience, a thought or idea inside their head, and even feelings and emotions such as stress and anxiety (remind the students this is for their eyes only).

2. Paraphrase:
   Once students have completed the free write ask them to paraphrase Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj. Write the concepts or phrases on the board as students generate ideas. Encourage the class to challenge others responses and ask: WHY? Once the class has agreed on wording ask students to write the concept in their journal next to the first writing exercise.

3. Go for a Walk:
   After completing the “Applicable Swaraj” section of the lesson ask students to re-read their original free-write work and pick one of their three visions of personal imprisonment. Then go for a silent 5-10 minute walk (this can be on or off campus). Students should meditate and reflect on the vision of their choice throughout the duration of the walk. End your walk in back in the classroom and have students write in their journals and discuss in small groups about what they thought and felt during the walk.
   • Were they able to concentrate?
   • Were they distracted? If so, why?
   • What might they try next time to help them concentrate?

4. Student Structured Walks:
   Create student groups of 3 and ask students to organize a structured walk for the class. For example:
   • Silent walk with a partner
   • Music walk in singles
• Walking and picking up trash
• Walk with brief pauses for note taking
Once students have created types of walks have each group lead on separate days and have students continue journaling about their thoughts and experiences.

5. **Physical Representation of Life Goal(s):**
   After discussing internal change’s relationship with external outcomes, ask students to create a physical or written representation of something they would like to get out of life. A goal they want to reach or a challenge or fear they want to overcome. Participate in this activity with the students and be the first to share your goal or challenge with the class. Students can choose to share with the class or just with you.

6. **Pair and Share:**
   After discussing how Gandhi uses walking to add drama to his cause, ask students to pair up and generate 3 reasons why walking is used in today’s society to advocate social issues. Students in pairs then share their thoughts with the class.

7. **Organizing a Walk:**
   In this cumulating project students will work together, in conjunction with the teacher, to organize an after or before school walk to advocate for a cause of their choice. Students will need to answer the following questions in their “Advocating Plan” to have a successful walk:
   - **Advocating Plan:**
     o What cause will we support?
     o Who do we want to inform about this issue and why?
     o What is our goal upon completion of the walk?
     o How Far will we walk?
     o Do we need funds?
     o How will we get funds?
     o Who will the funds go to?
     o How do we promote our walk?
     o How will this walk have a positive effect on others?

**Materials Needed**
- Journals
- Writing materials
- Construction paper and recycled items: milk containers, egg cartons, etc.
- Large Chart paper
- Access to internet