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Joseph Castillo
California State University, Monterey Bay

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Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom: Integrating Morality, Ethics, and

Values into Curriculum

Joseph Castillo

California State University Monterey Bay

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Miguel Lopez

Abstract

In this capstone project, I argue for the importance of incorporating the teaching of morals and ethics within the classroom. I ground this argument in a critical analysis of William Ayers' *Teaching Toward Freedom* and a curriculum that links Ayers' thesis with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Birmingham Letter*. The review of *Teaching Toward Freedom* is designed to elicit *why* this is a critical book for the field of teacher education. In particular, the analysis focuses on Ayers' development of a philosophical argument about the need for public school educators to commit to "moral" and "ethical action" within the curriculum. In developing his argument, Ayers grounds his thesis in the beauty of the arts, especially literature as the tool for "seeing" and "enacting" moral and ethical education. Then, borrowing from Ayers, I present a curriculum based upon Dr. King's seminal work. I detail how this curriculum should be implemented and argue, in turn, how it will facilitate students' efforts to combat social injustices in their community.

Introduction

William Ayers's book, *Teaching Toward Freedom*, is a book that I believe is vital to teachers being better prepared to work with the many different students and families they will encounter. It is noted that through "imaginative literature" we can see moral and ethical standpoints. This deeper, underlying message that is seen in the work, can be the way in which your students could become more engaged in the lesson. This being that the work you read has to somehow relate to the students in your classroom. The main point however, is that this book, aside from teaching teachers how to be able to stand by their students and support them, it shows us how to facilitate students own self growth. Working in a school is never a neutral job. There is always someone's underlying hope that after the students go through the motions, they will walk out with a specific point of view. This can be very good, in the sense that if we show students ways to better their lives, communities, and strengthen relationships with the people in their lives we could have them walk out with a better ability to navigate the complexities that are human interactions. More often than not however, teachers attempt to instill their ideas into students, and many of these teachers repeat the same patterns they remember from when they were students. From a personal perspective, I recall much of my own education being extremely focused on what we should know, and not what we wanted to know. We never had time to talk about difficult topics in the community and the adults were quick to write off the students due to their lack of acquired experience. I think that it is an integral part of a student's education to all them to take their interest and apply them to lessons as often as it allows.

Understandably, as much as I would want someone to take my word for it, I have yet to become an established authority on the matter at hand. I have looked up and found reviews on

the book that express why this book is vital for a future educator to read. The first review is from *Booklist*, an established book reviewing group under the American Library Association.

Ayers' book *Teaching toward Freedom [is]*, "Powerful, thought-provoking, and a must-read for everyone concerned with the state of education." That review elaborated, "Ayers, an activist for progressive teaching methods, has written and co-authored numerous books on innovative schools and the societal issues faced by teachers. Here he calls on teachers to commit themselves to helping students reach 'the full measure of their humanity,' embrace their differences, and realize they have the power to change their own lives. Seminars on classroom management, discipline, and lesson planning completely ignore his method, what he calls 'teaching toward freedom,' and the teaching of ethical action, which requires dialogue between teachers and students as each learns from the other and from the world around them. Teachers need to be 'works in progress,' encouraging their students to be the same. Bolstering his argument with frequent quotes from authors as diverse as Langston Hughes, Toni Morrison, and Pablo Neruda, Ayers argues convincingly against centralized testing and zero-tolerance policies, which turn classrooms into 'sterile and one-dimensional places devoid of teachable moments.'"

Much of what they say in this review is echoes my opinion on the importance the book and they point out the same values that I have pointed out. They call attention to the use of literature in his and the fact that schools strip students of their individuality. Also, they point out the way that Ayers calls attention to the dialogue that requires teachers to become students of their students to be able to grow together. Another review by Beacon Press states,

"In *Teaching toward Freedom*, William Ayers illuminates the hope as well as the conflict that characterizes the craft of education: how it can be used in authoritarian ways at the service of the state, the church, or a restrictive existing social order-or, as he envisions it, as a way for students to become more fully human, more engaged, more participatory, more free. Using examples from his own classroom experiences as well as from popular culture, film, and novels, Ayers redraws the lines concerning how we teach, why we teach, and the surprising things we uncover when we allow students to become visible, vocal authors of their own lives and stories. This lucid and inspiring book will help teachers at every level to realize that ideal."

Again, I see the commonalities in their review and my own, as well as the one prior. They point out the diversity in the literature he uses in the book. It is made clear at the end of their review that this book is helpful for teachers when it comes to how we approach teaching. Another part of this review that I thought was important was how they bring up the point he

makes about schools being authoritarian which relates to the other review when they discuss zero-tolerance policies

Along with the reviews that are on the book and online, William Ayers has written countless pieces of work in his career and has worked with many other experts in the field of education. He has worked with Gloria Ladson-Billings, a highly regarded woman in the field of education, who acquired her PhD. in Education in 1984, is the Chair of the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and has done extensive research and had written many books and articles on pedagogical theories and practices. Another regarded person that he has worked with is Associate Professor of Art History and Director of the Museum and Exhibition Studies Program at the University of Illinois at Chicago Therese Quinn, who obtained their PhD. in Curriculum Studies in 2001. These two are just a few examples of the high caliber educators, professors, and researchers he has had the chance to work with. With this, I proceed into the critical analysis of his book and the comparison of the book with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Birmingham Letter* to show the similarities of their values in their writing.

Literature Review/Critical Analysis

Introduction

“Teaching, at its best, is an enterprise that helps human beings reach the full measure of their humanity” (p. 1). At the same time, “schooling can be the practice of dehumanization, ‘unfreedom’” (p. 3). We often look at the world as “black and white”, one or the other, never giving a chance to the discussion of the in between of every topic. We often go by the simple “right or wrong”, “good and bad”, “fair or unfair”, leading to a cut and dry answer. I can prove this too you too. A student comes to you with a troubled look on their face. They tell you that

they need you to hold onto their backpack for the day. When you ask why the student needs this from you, you open the backpack to find a pellet gun with ammunition in the backpack. Stop here and think. What do you do in this situation? I would bet that many would say that a student bringing this into school know of the consequences and now has to suffer them. However, why would the student be planning to use the weapon at school, then have brought it to the teacher asking them to hold it? Would you have stopped and listen to the student? Let us go on. The student tells you that they went to visit a family member who lives in the countryside and they were doing target practice, when they arrived home they forgot to take it out of their backpack. They do not want to get in trouble with the school, so they confide in you. What is your reaction to the situation? Do you abide by the rules and potentially get the student suspended, expelled, or involved with the authorities? Or, do you help the student, knowing that you now are involved in the situation and risk yourself too? This is one of the multitude of stories that William Ayers, a distinguished professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, uses to get people thinking about their sense of morality and ethics. Along with stories from colleagues, personal anecdotes, discussion of historical events revolving around laws and race from the analysis of social justice activist and teachers, teachings of moral figures, and most importantly through pieces of literature and film, Ayers takes us on a journey to discover one's own values. Where they stand in the realm of ethics and morality: “‘moral’ implies the personal, the question of reason and thought, reflection and commitment; ‘ethical’ gestures toward action within some explicit community” (p. 14). He shows us ways that we can think differently and critically of the world around us, outside of the “black or white” conclusions many choose to jump to.

Ayers masterfully compiles five chapters filled with a variety of literature and film that helps one navigate the complexities of “moral commitment and ethical action” broken down and

explored via the questions (and title of chapters): *What is teaching for? Who in the world am I? Where is my place in the World? What are my choices?* In these chapters, he provides example after He concludes with the last chapter, *Teaching toward freedom*. I believe that this book is a must read for future teachers because it shows that:

Students bring new and unique thought to any given situation. Teachers and students alike must become their own moral authority and learn healthy dialog with others to expand ideas on morality and ethics. There is no direct path in teaching, and people must learn to question and analyze what is put before them. There is a value in every story that an individual brings with them, and we must give our students the platform to tell their story. Bettering ourselves is a never-ending battle and we must accept imperfection in ourselves and the world around us as we strive to “teach for freedom”.

Chapter 1: Between Heaven and Earth

In this section, we address the question, “*What is teaching for?*”. The first thing that comes to mind is passing down knowledge to the next generation. Making sure that the children growing up will know enough to survive in the world. People tend to not realize that teaching can be a destructive force when people allow it to be. Ayers provides example after example of how people used teaching to strip people of their humanity. From the Indian boarding schools that oppressed them from being able to speak their languages and follow their own customs, to the schools in Chicago that have an absurd list of rules that tell students what they cannot do or say or wear along with the punishments that follow. Through analysis of movies like *The Magdalene Sisters* and *Rabbit-Proof Fence* Ayers shows us how teaching can become “subjugation in one of its seemingly endless forms...” (p. 14).

This country has an outdated school system, one that much resembles an assembly line. We put kids on and teach them what they “should know” and then spit them out the other end, not caring about what they want to know. The teacher is the authority of the class and students must follow blindly. We never stop to think, what are the students really capable of? When the “norm” is threatened, those in power use many different outlets to suppress change, education being one of them. Here, we can also see an overlap in King’s work, where he speaks about how people in power are not quick to surrender it for the sake of others. I believe that this plays into the dominance of the teacher over the student as the adult in the room. This reflects Ayers’s idea that teachers do not often immediately stand with their students and support them in sacrificing some of their power. If we can recognize this, then we must stop and think about what teaching can hold, the potential it had to empower students and not suppress them. “For teaching, at its most fundamental, profound, and primitive core, is indeed ethical work. Whether they know it or not, teachers are moral actors, and teaching always demands moral commitment and ethical action” (p. 14).

Ayers supports his idea of framing the moral landscape of teaching through a quote on page twenty from philosopher Hannah Arendt, she argues that:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.

Where down the road is this idea lost? If teaching requires this “moral commitment and ethical action” then why are we not teaching, it to future teachers? We overemphasize that students learn skills over anything else. This mentality follows students through their entire school career. “The linear, the instrumental, the serviceable are emphasized without question. The moral and the ethical are ignored, obscured, and obfuscated, also without much thought” (p. 17). Ayers continues to make the point that this teacher education programs also follow this thinking. They are tied up in methods, the proven ways to teach to students. They fail to raise the point that students are never the same. That there is no one magic teaching method or set of them. Since each student is an individual, they all will learn in their own particular way. They will have their own interest and desire to learn. This is where we can take some of Ayers suggestions for teacher education programs: “turning toward the student as a fellow creature; building a republic of many voices and a community with and for students; feeling the weight of the world through your own lifting arms” (p. 18). Again, it can be noted that in King’s letter similarities in the messages. Specifically, with King, he brings to light the point that we are all suffering from injustice if just one person is. He further believes that we must physically endure the struggles that others face to better understand that though some people are privileged and to not daily suffer injustice, they need to be willing to feel what one who is oppressed feels to know that these acts are unacceptable. Here, both Ayers and King call the reader to be there both physically, mentally, and emotionally for those who are forced to deal with acts of oppression.

When we start to move away from the typical ways of education, there becomes a potential for learning with depth. It can go beyond that notion of, you learn this because you have to. After all, teaching should make students wonder, question, and show them their own potential. “School is both mirror and window-it shows us what we value and what we ignore,

what is precious and what is venal” (p. 8). If this is true, then we clearly do not find importance in allowing the individual to speak their mind, and conformity to be one of the higher priorities. The same inequalities we see in our schools, are on some level the same that we see in our society and the world around us. King makes an argument similar to Ayers’s, though King’s argument is on a national scale. He discusses what he sees in society, where Ayers discusses the schools. If we make an attempt to make changes in the school system, then we could potentially see the change come with the coming generations. At the same time, we need to make the changes in our society to show the students that what we are showing them is valuable and meaningful. There has to be connections to the student’s immediate world or it will not have as much value. We should as teachers like both Ayers and King point out, give up the power we have and learn what the students find to be important. Let them teach us what they want to see changed and begin to work with them from there. Toward the end of this chapter, Ayers lays out all the values that could be instilled in society, and in turn, the classroom. He talks about some basic fundamentals, things you were probably told at some point down the road but never seen practiced. The idea that every human life is equal. We clearly do not see this in our world. He argues that we should be “embracing our students, taking their side as fellow human beings” (p. 28).

Chapter 2: Turning toward the Student

What is the teacher’s role in the classroom? What is the students? Often, we look at it in the regard that the teacher is the head of the classroom, the teacher had the power and the final say. They are the adult, educated and wise, there to guide the student towards their goals. The student is there to sit obediently and listen, taking in all of this so that they will be ready for the next step. They are just there, receiving, doing their work and “progressing”. When it is put this

way, students just become numbers, objects, there to absorb information. Nothing about this sounds any bit engaging. “It is immoral to reduce a human being to an object” (p. 40), but this dehumanization of students seems to be a common occurrence in most classrooms. We need to see the individuality in our students.

“At the deepest, most profound level education is an enterprise dedicated to truth and enlightenment, liberation and freedom, or, conversely, bent inexorably toward dehumanization in one of its many forms, from conformity and oppression” (p. 31). King plays with the idea of conformity in the context that one will not want to break from the group and become the “other”, especially when someone in the group that is in power considers going against their ideals. Aside from the issues of conformity, Ayers touches on a few more ideas that King only implies. In the context of schools, we often see the students forced into their respective boxes and told what they are capable of. Not often are students empowered to step outside of their role. They should be taught to be able to freely question what they are receiving from the school they attend. This also takes to the teacher being able to step out of their comfort zone and really discuss with their students the importance of being able to seek out what they want to know. With this in mind, think back on your education and wonder if you received the education that empowered you, or the one that resented your individuality. As a future teacher, I see all the ways as a former student that I was told to conform to the school standards, not given too much room to speak out and question. I believe that it is our job as teachers to give students the platform to speak their minds and question the things they are learning. Why not let the students have more say in what they want to learn? After all are they not capable of making decisions? They are human beings like the rest of us, but often people tend to categorize students, not willing to make the effort to understand anything that is different about them. In the poem by

Wisława Szymborska, she arbitrarily attaches numbers to random descriptors of people. Ayers makes the assertion through this poem that “the human condition [is] blessed and cursed, strange, messy, wild and weird” (p. 57). All the more reason to stand with and support our students, and those around us, for we never know what they are experiencing. We must understand that “each student is a whole person, the narrator of his or her own life; each must be treated as a person of value and consequence and worth. Incomplete, imperfect, and valuable nonetheless” (p. 57).

When we understand that we too at one point were imperfect students, it is a reminder that we cannot be too hard on students for being at different stages in their lives. We also must remember that no matter how far we have come, we are never going to become anything more than imperfect ourselves. A poem Ayers includes on page fifty-seven by W.H. Auden is a short and beautiful poem that shows us “perfection eludes us...” and we must love our “crooked neighbor[s] with our crooked heart”.

The story that a person brings with them is full of wealth. The world is built on the backs of the individual bringing their views to the table and collaborating with others to take every valuable aspect and build on them, weaving them together for a whole new experience. On page fifty-five, Ayers makes a good point that there is a hypocrisy between students and teachers. The teacher will make comments on the student, they are lazy, not hard working, and so on. When the students say anything in this regard back to the teacher, true or not, they are “sent to the office and charged with disrespect”. Even further, when a student complains about one teacher to another teacher, they are not quick to take the side of the student and say that the teacher is also terrible when that is the case. It is our commitment as teachers to stand by our students and, “a commitment to the visibility of students as persons requires a radical reversal: teacher, whatever else they do, must become students of their students” (p. 42).

When we allow students to become teachers, we can together send ideas around and progress the level of learning in the classroom because the students are active in the learning process. Ayers says that it is “our first commitment... to recognize and call out the humanity in each of our students” (p. 66) and we need to allow them to do the same for us. “Young people, in particular, need steady, reasonable grown-ups to talk to, to think with, to bounce back off of” (p. 61).

Chapter 3: Building a Republic of Many Voices

Through dialogue, we shape the way we see the world. Discussion is how we come to agreements on topics and issues around us. There is no way we can do this otherwise. Humans are given the unique ability to be extremely specific with what we are conveying to one another, and we can pass it down from generation to generation. Dialogue, like teaching, is a two-way street. If we are to become students of our students, then we must talk with them, not at them. Ayers states that a commitment we have that is tied to taking the side of our students, is to “create a space where a republic of many voices might come to life, the ‘uniculture’ opposed, and the suffocating sameness of the domineering voice resisted. The freedom teacher vows to build an environment where human beings can face one another without mask, a place of invitation, fascination, interest, and promise” (p. 69).

Through allowing a comfortable place for people to generate dialogue, people will begin to be able to see other points of view and learn to understand them. Schools, particularly teachers, should allow students to “make meaning for themselves” (p. 82) on the topics that interest them. Using the classroom as a forum for these discussion, students can discuss anything about the society or the lesson of the day. Since schools are “mirrors and windows” into the immediate community and ultimately the society, they will be able to take what they learn on

having healthy discussion into public forums. It will never be perfect, being that we are all imperfect beings filled with emotion and our own views. With this in mind, remember that “the process of education, of discovery, of freedom, is not so much neat, logical, smooth, and obvious in advance; it is more often messy, rough, unpredictable, and inconsistent” (p. 81). The poem written by Margaret Atwood, iterates the learning process. She starts the poem with “you begin this way:/ this is your hand” (p. 73). The hand is the instrument in which we engage in the learning process. We learn through experience, through trial and error, we begin to experiment and generate thought. Often the thought process is rough and messy, but in the end through discussion we are able to shape something together.

Seeing the classroom as a “location of possibility” (p. 93) sets up students for a chance to take things into their own hands. Nothing is off limits, and through discussion we can discover the limitless possibilities that there are for people to behold. Realizing this, students can “name the world, and they name themselves” (p. 91). An internal dialogue is important to have as well. Discussing with yourself can lead to just as complex thought, after all, “there is nothing more refreshing-or more dangerous-than a mind in argument with itself” (p. 92). There has to be the initial drive of oneself to question and think before they can have truly engaging discussion within themselves and then with others. Ayers pulls a part of the freedom school curriculum that emphasizes the need for discussion. Paul Lauter and Florence Howe, volunteers for the freedom school, wrote “the hidden assumption behind a reliance on discussion are, first, that talk-saying the words-is a necessary step for discovery of self and social identity” (p. 84). The point here is that students need to be given the space to have the open dialogue on self and their place in society. “Both education and freedom require self-activity, each requires the complex interplay of individual choice and assertion combined with collective action and interaction” (p. 79).

There is no one way to look at a particular topic, and it is up to society to set some sort of standard to a situation. Morals and ethics are something that is never black and white, and it is in the infinite shades of grey that the dialogue comes out. We want to be comfortable in our assertion that certain actions are bad, and some are good. Who is the authority on this? Well if there is anything that I have learned from this book it is that you become your own authority and use the viewpoints of others to help shape your moral compass. These discussions are never ending, and constantly evolving the concepts and ideas that come up in the world. Opening up the classroom to allow for students to make this progress is the first step in their progression, “there is no imagined ‘right’ place or time to begin a dialogue the young-with students of any age. There is only right here, right now” (p. 75). The argument that Ayers makes is similar to King’s, they both are tired of people making excuses to delay the advancement of progress. For King, the rights and treatment of people of color. For Ayers, the way that we look at roles in the classroom. Both are right that we must act quickly and convince those who say to wait and remind them that they do not need to wait for injustice to end in their lives, but many others do.

Chapter 4: Lifting the Weight of the World

Via the prior commitments that Ayres argues are necessary for moral and ethical teaching, his last commitment he states is that we must “open our eyes to the world, to the possible and hopeful” (p. 136). The old cliché that we have to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes. It is more so making the effort to understand where someone comes from, and what they stand for rather than ignoring what makes them unique. We have to understand that the world we live in is full of inequalities. When we see inequalities, it is our moral duty to complain and talk about them. If we do not understand the issue, “we can, at the very least, acknowledge, look, and listen” (p. 108). We become activist via actions of acknowledging these inequalities, “and

education and activism are connected” (p. 111). We can teach students about the injustices of the past and how people are still affected by them today. Like King mentions, we all suffer from any injustice onto any one person. We should discuss with our students, what makes laws just and unjust. In the case of King, he is talking about Jim Crow. These laws clearly were built to keep people of color below everyone else. We must educate our future activist, because actions of people in the past, with critiques and discussion, can help students formulate ideas of how they can achieve the equality that has been delayed by the lack of social justice education in schools.

There is value in understanding that no matter the background a person comes from, being able to stand with them and support, assist, or at the least listen to them can show them that not all is lost. We would want the support if we were in a situation where we needed it. Feel the weight of the world, Ayers points out that if we allow ourselves to do so, then we will have an easier time being able to stand alongside anyone. There are many atrocities that we do not witness first hand, but “... once you see it, you can’t unsee it. And once you’ve seen it, saying nothing becomes as political an act as speaking out. Either way, you’re accountable” (p. 124). You become a part of the problem or solution at this point. Knowing this, it is important to let students have a place to navigate the messy world around them. Allow them to be the creators of hypothetical fixes to real world problems for, “without new visions, we don’t know what to build, only what to knock down” (p. 127). We have to remember that we are all held accountable when it comes to dealing with injustices. This is something that as a teacher one has to acknowledge, and then be able to teach on to their students as well.

It is easy for someone to write off problems that do not immediately affect them. If they are not involved, they would remain comfortable on the outside of the problem. This is especially true for people in positions of privilege, as King notes. Individually, somebody with

these privileges would better understand their role in helping fight inequality. Going back to an earlier point, the group of these people would be more difficult to change for there are more ideas and social context at play. To some degree, not everyone can help with every single issue. There is no point in spreading yourself thin. This is where the community and society come into play. If we all take time to at least recognize the issues around the world at hand, new thoughts and solutions could be generated and help potentially solve problems. “The challenge for today, then, is not unfamiliar, but it is unique in time and place-the American story must be rewritten again, right now, by this generation” (p. 135). King makes an excellent point when he states that the time is “always ripe to do right”. Every person is a unique story, and we are always writing and rewriting these stories. They are forever intertwined by the simple fact that we are all living and working together to create the world we are in. These stories are never complete, and everyone is accountable to help edit their own story, and the story of the world around them.

Chapter 5: Teaching toward Freedom (Conclusion)

“Teaching toward freedom is never settled, never finished, but rather, a stance and commitment to the world” (p. 139). As one may have picked up at this point, we are never going to be finished and complete in our quest of teaching morals and ethics. The battle is never over. Via the commitments that Ayers has laid out for us, we can stop and think about what it means strive for a more complete world. We can place other people in front of ourselves and allow us to feel what they feel. We can have discussions with them that expand our understanding of the world and have the potential to create the most wonderful solutions to problems that have plagued people for a long time. One thing that I feel people have a hard time doing is feeling comfortable talking about these difficult situations. There is never a wrong time to speak up about the inequalities that exist around us. The more we allow ourselves to be free speakers, the

more that it will become the norm. “We need to learn to ask questions of ourselves and of others, to ask the risky questions and baffling questions, dynamic questions, and then to live within them, within the contingent answers and the tentative conclusions and the deeper, more disturbing questions that lie just beneath” (p. 140). If we allow people to never have to question what is around them, then they will all remain stagnant in thought, never wondering what the alternative is. Ayres is right when he says that we need to stand with our students, support them and give them the platform to expand thought and question their world. Let them develop healthy methods of coping with the challenging problems they will face. Make them feel the weight of the world and understand that they too are affected by problems that might not seem to do so. Work to change within yourself, and within the community. “We transform ourselves; we change the world. And, just like that, we are teaching toward freedom” (p. 161).

Analysis of Literature from *Teaching Toward Freedom*

Ayers takes two stanzas, 13 and 14, from W.H. Auden's poem "As I Walked Out One Evening" that he uses to argue the point that "perfection eludes us, but we do what we can-the effort continues, the struggle for life must go on.

His argument that he makes through the analysis of these stanzas is short but full of meaning.

Students stress themselves to strive for the "A" grade, the hundred percent. It is common for teachers to emphasize the importance of achieving these standards. Though it is not inherently a bad thing to strive for, this stress creates a need for students to achieve this in any way possible.

They dream to achieve perfection. What is overlooked is the idea that we cannot be perfect beings. To tell our students to shoot for the hundred percent, the A+, is not an awful thing to do.

However, it created the idea that can create unnecessary stress on students and the idea that they have to be perfect or become the "average" individual. We must come to terms with putting in our best effort, and building upon that indefinitely.

As I walked out one evening,
Walking down Bristol Street,
The crowds upon the pavement
Were fields of harvest wheat.

And down by the brimming river
I heard a lover sing
Under an arch of the railway:
'Love has no ending.

'I'll love you, dear, I'll love you
Till China and Africa meet,
And the river jumps over the mountain
And the salmon sing in the street,

'I'll love you till the ocean
Is folded and hung up to dry

And the seven stars go squawking
Like geese about the sky.

'The years shall run like rabbits,
For in my arms I hold
The Flower of the Ages,
And the first love of the world.'

But all the clocks in the city
Began to whirr and chime:
'O let not Time deceive you,
You cannot conquer Time.

'In the burrows of the Nightmare
Where Justice naked is,
Time watches from the shadow
And coughs when you would kiss.

'In headaches and in worry
Vaguely life leaks away,
And Time will have his fancy
To-morrow or to-day.

'Into many a green valley
Drifts the appalling snow;
Time breaks the threaded dances
And the diver's brilliant bow.

'O plunge your hands in water,
Plunge them in up to the wrist;
Stare, stare in the basin
And wonder what you've missed.

'The glacier knocks in the cupboard,
The desert sighs in the bed,
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

'Where the beggars raffle the banknotes
And the Giant is enchanting to Jack,
And the Lily-white Boy is a Roarer,
And Jill goes down on her back.

'O look, look in the mirror,
O look in your distress:
Life remains a blessing

Although you cannot bless.

'O stand, stand at the window
As the tears scald and start;
You shall love your crooked neighbour
With your crooked heart.'

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming,
And the deep river ran on.

Looking at the same two stanzas that Ayers analyzes, I see a similar idea. The first two lines "O look, look in the mirror, / O look in your distress:" lead me to think about one who is uncomfortable in their progress. They are unsatisfied with their lack of perfection and it is running them into the ground.

"Life remains a blessing/ Although you cannot bless". Within these lines, I see that the person looking in the mirror has all the chance to achieve their best, but the quest for perfection that eludes them continues to cloud their ability to understand their potential. They are not able to see that the person in the mirror is "blessed" with the ability to achieve so much, but because it is never going to be perfect, they do not see their work or progress as enough.

The line "O stand at the window" is the metaphorical window that one looks out to see alternative points of view. Just outside this window, one sees the other people who are full of their strengths, but more importantly the flaws. Coupled with the line "As the tears scald and start" the person in the window realizes that they too like these imperfect people. It infuriates and frustrates them. However, in this case, they have a revelation in the following lines. "You shall love your crooked neighbor." All one can do is love someone for the person they are. The people outside the window, as "crooked" as they may be, still may feel the same way. For they will

learn to love their fellow imperfect beings with their own “crooked heart” as the stanza concludes. The entire poem paints a beautiful picture of life, how one looks at it and the feeling one has about themselves. It allows one to walk with the author down the street and witness life as they learn to grow. From the simplicities of two lovers sinning their affections, to the dark moments where justice is not there to help those in need. The spectrum of emotion allows for one to read, and experience it for themselves, giving room for them to reflect upon their growth of being.

I believe that my analysis, and my understanding of Ayers’s analysis, confirms the point made in this part pulled from the poem. I would use this piece of work to have students derive meaning from it as well. I would have them start by reading the poem, and then because I would be would be using specifically the two stanzas that Ayers analyzed, go back, and look at those two as the more important pieces. Before the analysis of those specific two stanzas, I would give students a chance to look at the rest and pick their favorite stanza or two and use the two I wanted to go over as an example of what they could take from their desired part to analyze. I think that this could be used with any students that I may encounter. However, I would make sure to take the lesson plan and make it more specific to the students in the class based on the community, or the background of the students as individuals.

In another piece, Ayers makes the argument around this piece that addresses how we attach categories based on one's, or a group's background. The attachment of statistics to the categories in the poem shows how arbitrary it is to do this to an individual or group. You can make any assumption about a person, but you’ll never end up knowing if they are the “x” out of however

many people you are assessing. Categorizing can dehumanize people, tell them that they are to be a specific way due to where or what they come from.

The importance of his argument is to point out the messiness of the development of human personality and understanding our imperfections as the vehicle that allows us to have growth of being. It also points out how people may have tendencies to act certain ways, but the descriptors are interchangeable, and people are always changing for better or worse.

Out of a hundred people

those who always know better
-- fifty-two

doubting every step
-- nearly all the rest,

glad to lend a hand
if it doesn't take too long
-- as high as forty-nine,

always good
because they can't be otherwise
-- four, well maybe five,

able to admire without envy
-- eighteen,

suffering illusions
induced by fleeting youth
-- sixty, give or take a few,

not to be taken lightly
-- forty and four,

living in constant fear
of someone or something
-- seventy-seven,

capable of happiness
-- twenty-something tops,

harmless singly, savage in crowds
-- half at least,

cruel
when forced by circumstances
-- better not to know
even ballpark figures,

wise after the fact
-- just a couple more
than wise before it,

taking only things from life
-- thirty
(I wish I were wrong),

hunched in pain,
no flashlight in the dark
-- eighty-three
sooner or later,

righteous
-- thirty-five, which is a lot,

righteous
and understanding
-- three,

worthy of compassion
-- ninety-nine,

mortal
-- a hundred out of a hundred.
Thus far this figure still remains unchanged.

What I take from this piece is the idea that we often make up statistics from our biases that have no factual basis. We are quick to take preconceived ideas about people or groups of people from past experiences and apply them to anyone we believe to be this way. This sort of stereotyping is something that people need to be aware of and remember that there is no need to do so. Though the author of this poem could have picked any descriptor, but I believe that it shows all aspects

of an individual that are possible to arise. The beauty in this, is that this poem is something like a fill-in-the-blank. What I mean by that is all the descriptors are interchangeable, because we can never look and assume someone will fall into any specific category. This is all up to what one considers to be good and bad, and the arbitrary statistics are what someone would hope people would fall into. That makes this poem such a versatile learning tool. It has room for one to be imaginative, make points about society, and remind people that you can apply things to someone or a group of people, but you'll only know what the person is actually like once you get to know them.

I would use this piece of work to allow students to see these points and create their own poems of what they have seen in the world around them. It holds the potential to create so much growth in students and the teacher who chooses to use it as well. For the poem will always be able to shift and what one values today could be changed from their past perceptions and will change again tomorrow, and so on. If taught right, I truly believe that this will open student's eyes to the pointlessness of categorizing people based on certain experiences, and to an extent be more willing to hear someone out before they write them off.

Methods: Curriculum/Lesson Plan Framework

Curricular Frame (vision, mission): Showing students injustices of today via injustices of the past through analysis of values, morality, and ethics using Dr. King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail to identify morals, the values he holds, and his calls to ethical action.

What is the curricular idea/theme? Enduring understandings: The curricular theme of this set of lessons is based in teaching students to be their own moral authority and learn ethical action.

Lessons in school lack the why in what students are learning and how they can use what they are taught in their lives right away. Many lessons do not relate to the students and lack critical thinking components. This curriculum will leave an enduring understanding of critical thinking in regard to morals and ethics in the students specifically using examples of social injustices from the past and modern social injustices. Students will have to wrestle with the questions: How can we identify injustice, what defines one? How can we critique injustice in ourselves and society, and how can we create changes? These are questions that I believe will generate the critical thinking for students to have an enduring understanding of the curriculum.

What are the critical/essential questions/issues: The critical issues and essential questions students will be addressing will cause them to think within themselves and of others as well. Students will talk about people who are "moral authorities" and how they impact society. They will also have to address what and who defines morality, along with ways to identify and critique ways to be "morally sound".

What are the social justice and/or multicultural issues/frames that shape the curriculum: The social justice frames shaping the curriculum will revolve around how, historically, people of color face the most injustice via stereotyping and institutionalized racism stemming from slavery

and white supremacy, specifically white people in positions of power who do not act to support the people fighting for freedom. (i.e. King's examples from the letter)

What is the rationale for the Curricular Frame: The rationale for the curricular frame is that students learn about moments in history, but never often go in depth about how these injustices of the past continue in similar ways today. The goal is to cover moments in history, in this curriculum in particular through Dr. King's work, and point out the injustices that King fought to end. In addition to this, students will acquire skills that will allow them to navigate their morality and ethics using the values that King brings to light in his work. Ultimately, students will be better equipped to find their stance on social justice issues, discuss and formulate potential solutions, and have the tools to be able to enact something in their community.

What are the "global" outcomes/" products"/dispositions that are envisioned the "end" of the curriculum: The global outcomes for students after this curriculum is completed is to have students be more willing to stand up for and stand with people who suffer injustices. Students will know that it is always the right time to help fight against people who continue to perpetuate social injustices and call out these people/injustices. Using Dr. King's work, students will compare and critique it looking at modern-day activist. The potential products students will be able to produce could be a persuasive essay or debate skills. These products will be able to give students a way to articulate their stance on topics so that they are better heard by the people they are trying to reach.

Hypothetical lead in lesson

Lesson Plan(s): Introduction to morals and ethics

Rationale for the Lesson Plan(s) (“The Big Picture”): Students address the questions: How do you want people to view you? How do you view yourself? What do I think/believe and how does this affect my actions?

Details: let students openly discuss what they would do in the stories of situations where morals and ethics come into question.

Grade/Class: 5th grade

Student population: students in Monterey county

Content Standards:

- 5.L.5.a Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.
- 5.L.4.b Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., photograph, photosynthesis).
- 5.RF.4.a Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.

Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Goals: students walk away with a grasp of the concepts “moral authority and ethical action” along with “values”. Also, this could have students pulling out words that they do not understand and use them to break them down and learn the meaning of the word and the parts that make it up.

Pedagogical Reasoning/Conceptual Frame:

Concepts: identifying personal stance on issues happening in the world around them

Content: analysis of morals, values, and ethics in current events

Skills: being able to take this analysis and apply it to their community

Dispositions/Persona: students take the stance that supporting their classmates, family, community, and side of those dealing with social injustices is always the right action.

Background Knowledge: Students should have some understanding of basic values (i.e. the golden rule, respect for fellow classmates and community members, knowing that mistreatment of others is never the right action to take)

Connections between/among curricular areas (interdisciplinary connections): History

Social Justice/Multiculturalism: This points out injustices in the world around the students that they should be aware of.

Pedagogical Action:

Beginning (introduction, lead-in, preparation, links to prior experiences): have examples ready to present to the class and working definitions of morality and ethics.

Middle (the lesson): lead an open discussion on the words (moral, ethical, value) and the stories used that day

End (wrap-up, closure): have students leave with the question: what kind of world do we live in, and what world do they want to live in?

Extension (what still needs to occur): get students to plan for collectively defining morals and ethics via individual stance, group stance, and class stance

Daily Planning: Every day for one week after lunch for 45 min.-1 hours

Differentiation, Strategies, Practices: you could also use recently written books, and other current forms of media to analyze as well

Resources: news articles

Activities: having students look up articles that they want to discuss

Assessment is to see progress along the way and Evaluation is at the end of the assignment

Assessment: Checking in with students at during discussion to see what they are learning and what they are not understanding to further guide what I need to work on with them

Evaluation: Students use knowledge at the end to write responses to the questions that they are left to ponder and receive credit for completing the assignment. I will also make comments on their responses to further question or reaffirm their ideas and opinions.

Hypothetical lead in lesson

Lesson Plan(s): Have the class collectively define Morality and Ethics

Rationale for the Lesson Plan(s) (“The Big Picture”): This will show students that we can have different opinions on what we define words and actions by. This will show students that the ideas of right/wrong, good/bad, fair/unfair, just/unjust can differ from person to person.

Details: students will write out their own definitions of the words, then discuss in small groups, then as a class

Grade/Class: same as above

Student population: same as above

Content Standards:

- 1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
 - A. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
 - D. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.
- 2a Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Goals: students take their opinions and beliefs, and organize them into an essay that is based on the personal, group, and class ideals

Pedagogical Reasoning/Conceptual Frame:

Concepts: to show students that we together define Morality and Ethics but that they also have their own set of beliefs that could be different from everyone else, and having the understanding that different is not an inherently bad thing and that they need to be understanding of personal decisions

Content: having students wrestle with the gray area that is morality and coming to an understanding that every situation warrants a different and unique approach.

Skills: acquiring an understanding of how to approach a topic knowing how to be aware of the background of the people they engage in conversation with.

Dispositions/Persona: students will understand that though there are going to encounter other points of view, those people who choose to believe it is acceptable to be oppressive and discriminate based on “isms” and other characteristics that are based off stereotypes are not helping create an equal and just society.

Background Knowledge: using the work that students used from the last lesson, they will already have an idea of what these concepts are

Connections between/among curricular areas (interdisciplinary connections): this could be anything that we choose to use as the vehicle that we analyze morals and ethics surrounding the topic we choose.

Social Justice/Multiculturalism: pointing out the beliefs that people have and how they are oppressive or not, and how the oppressive acts hurt others and in turn them as well

Pedagogical Action:

Beginning (introduction, lead-in, preparation, links to prior experiences): have students recall last discussions on morals and ethics, have them use this to help in their defining of the words

Middle (the lesson): have students define words and then discuss within groups

End (wrap-up, closure): come together as a class and write up the different definitions and discussing why no one answer is completely right or wrong. Students take away ability to see that Morality and Ethics are defined by the individual and somewhat agreed upon by community and society.

Extension (what still needs to occur): have students go out and discuss these topics with friends and family to see what other people's opinions are and be able to compare and contrast them.

Daily Planning: one to two days where students can have open discussion and write about their ideas for 40 min.-1 hours

Differentiation, Strategies, Practices:

Resources: articles where respected moral authorities have defined these and look at potentially more news articles.

Activities: have students discuss and use their own opinions before looking up articles on moral authorities.

Assessment is to see progress along the way and Evaluation is at the end of the assignment:

Assessment: talk with students as the form their ideas and opinions to see where the need more guidance

Evaluation: take what the students have written and give them credit for completing the assignments, then write comments to keep them thinking.

Part of the main lesson

Lesson Plan(s): Focusing on history as the lesson, introducing students to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as a “moral authority”.

Rationale for the Lesson Plan(s) (“The Big Picture”): this is to show students that though they are responsible for their own ideas, opinions, and actions, there are still people that who can be looked at as some sort of model/authority that can help shape their moral compass. To point out actions that are taken by people that oppress individuals and calls to end this.

Details: Using letter from Birmingham Jail, have students read this and analyze by sections pulling out values, themes, and assertions made by King

Grade/Class: same as above

Student population: same as above

Content Standards:

- RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.
- RL.5.1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Goals:

Pedagogical Reasoning/Conceptual Frame:

Concepts: Looking at literature in depth to find values, morals, and calls to ethical action and building upon them so students can get an idea of how to approach social injustices

Content: giving students the means to be able to critically analyze and critique literature

Skills: Showing students how to look at literature in a way that shows them the values the are explicit and implicit in someone’s writing and how writing of anytime period (in this case the 1960’s) could relate to the present

Dispositions/Persona: students will see that the actions taken by the people who are against King are people who stand for inequality, injustice, and continued racism.

Background Knowledge: students will learn about Dr. King and have the background knowledge of morality and ethics discussed prior to be able to realize these points on their own

Connections between/among curricular areas (interdisciplinary connections): Historical connections (1950’s-70’s) covering events in the civil rights movement

Social Justice/Multiculturalism: discussion of the civil rights movement and the ways that it relates to what people are fighting for now. Students will learn about the oppression of people in the recent past and how there is still similar injustices occurring today

Pedagogical Action:

Beginning (introduction, lead-in, preparation, links to prior experiences): introduce King to the students: who was he? What did he believe in? What did he fight for? How he fought for it?

Middle (the lesson): show students the Birmingham Letter and give an overview of the historical context.

End (wrap-up, closure): begin reading portions of the letter with the students and having them pull what they consider to be the important parts out of the paragraph they read and record their thought in their journals for this assignment

Extension (what still needs to occur): this is the intro to the unit on MLK and will continue onward for the remainder of the lesson

Daily Planning: for about the span of a month for 45 min.-1 hour every day

Differentiation, Strategies, Practices: you can cover more or less of the article in a day depending on the grade of students you have

Resources: students will be provided a notebook/journal to keep track of their thoughts as they read and reflect. Students will each get copies of the Birmingham letter to annotate

Activities: a daily reading and discussion, followed by a reflection on what they read

Assessment is to see progress along the way and Evaluation is at the end of the assignment:

Assessment: will be daily at the end of the discussion with the students on what they have taken from the reading that day, along with a journal they will be keeping documenting their learning

Evaluation: students will turn in their journals at the end of the assignment and write one smaller essay on what they took from reading the article and how they can relate it to something going on today.

Part of the main lesson

Lesson Plan(s): show students modern day inequities, inequalities, and injustices and how they impact the individual, community, society, and nation (potentially the global scale)

Rationale for the Lesson Plan(s) (“The Big Picture”): to have students be able to become more cognizant of the social justice issues going on around them. The students should be using the prior lessons to analyze the current events.

Details: students will use the prior lessons to research social justice activist of any era

Grade/Class: same as above

Student population: same as above

Content Standards:

- 7. Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- 8. Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.
- 9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Goals: to give students the drive to want to continue research on their own outside of class. They will see the importance of studying social justice figures and what they can learn from them.

Pedagogical Reasoning/Conceptual Frame:

Concepts: students will learn about social justice activist and the ways they went about fighting injustices, then critique or alter the methods they learned about into their own plans of action

Content: will focus around what they research

Skills: learning how to conduct research on specific topics and compile a research paper

Dispositions/Persona: students will understand the importance that the person they researched and stand on their side as someone who will fight injustice

Background Knowledge: the prior knowledge from the previous lessons

Connections between/among curricular areas (interdisciplinary connections): this lesson will focus mostly on people in history. It also will be a research paper and students will work on the structure and organization of their work

Social Justice/Multiculturalism: this gives students the chance to investigate someone who is important to them and their community

Pedagogical Action:

Beginning (introduction, lead-in, preparation, links to prior experiences): brief students on the project: students will be researching a social justice advocate of their choice and writing a small research paper on them and their lives

Middle (the lesson): students will conduct research in class and can work with each other to find sources and build on ideas

End (wrap-up, closure): let students finish their last few notes and transition into the next activity

Extension (what still needs to occur): this will happen for the length of time given to the student to complete the paper. Students will also be expected to take some of the work home if they do not finish in class

Daily Planning: students will have an hour every day after their mid-day break to conduct research on their person

Differentiation, Strategies, Practices: the amount of work will change for the grade you are working with

Resources: students will need access to books, and if possible computers for internet access

Activities: research will be conducted daily for students, so they can work together and check in

Assessment/Evaluation:

Assessment: students will have time in class to meet with the teacher and get the feedback they need to progress the paper

Evaluation: students will turn in the paper and receive a grade for the assignment. The assignment grade will depend on: how they respond to the feedback, meeting the required topics; who they researched, the person's life, what they fought for, and how they achieved their goals.

Results

The difficult part of this project is that I was dealing with philosophical content and did not have any statistical data to provide. My “data” in this project is more so based in the credibility of the people who I am using as my moral authorities. I wanted to cover this topic because many of the themes that Ayers has in his book were ideas that I have had and always had a difficult time articulating the way he so beautifully did. Throughout the capstone, the themes pulled from the book are the common place for the other pieces of work that were used. The use of King’s work was to prove that there have been people talking about similar messages that Ayers highlights, and that the injustices of the past still manifest themselves today. It was also used to as my piece of literature that echoed the framework of Ayers’s book. It was difficult to narrow my focus down to what ended up happening because this book could have led me in any direction. I would say that there is still much more that could have been included in this paper. I think that interviews with teachers on how they would go about inserting discussions of politically charged in their classrooms, along with where they see themselves as moral authorities or how they would incorporate morals and ethics into their own classrooms would have been very useful.

Ultimately, the use of literature that Ayers had in his book was the most important and central point of this capstone. I thought that this approach to teaching and discussing these points was one that allowed for more meaningful analysis than cold hard statistics. The use of literature leaves room for so many interpretations and imaginative thought, it also is what Ayers at one-point paraphrases as a window into the eyes of a person or group. His use of literature and other media beautifully shows what one can do when it comes to showing what is reflected in the society, culture, or emotions of the writer and what the reader can talk away through critical

analysis of the piece of work. One point he is making in my opinion is that we need to start working through the tough discussions and make them more common place. People are filled with bias and emotion, and we need to have space to support people and let them speak. The other point I believe he is making is that we need to take the disposition that we must refuse any view or idea that oppresses any individual or group of people. This was something that I already agreed with, and now I realize that though people are entitled to opinion, there is no room to allow people to spread the opinions that keep injustice and inequality alive.

I believe that this project is a great starting point for someone who is planning on working in the field of education on any level. I think that the inclusion of these ideals in one's teaching will allow for the students to take away more from the lessons you teach them. It is true, that discussing issues in schools that attempt to maintain political neutrality could potentially lead to a difficult time maintaining a job, but the work needs to be done. We should not sit and wait for change to happen just because there are already some people who are trying to fix the problem. If you choose to do nothing you become part of the problem. We all must act, we all are accountable. All of our lives are interconnected, and I consider you to critically think about your position in any situation. Ayers made this book for someone going into the field of education, but I believe that the messages extend further into our society. We all have to remember to hold each other accountable, but most importantly we must do this for ourselves first so that we may give sound help. I urge anyone who reads this to read *Teaching Toward Freedom*, especially if you are going into education. It allows for one to see new ways to approach education and gives you a chance to critically reflect on your own education. Become a critical thinker and instill the same in your students, for they will need this to have a chance to make a positive change in our world.

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