Inquiry Demonstration Plan

Lesson Title: Moral Dilemmas **Lesson #** TBD **Date:** **July 20, 2020**

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Rationale & Overview

Why does this topic matter to students?
Students of this age are growing into individuals that are increasingly capable of having an impact on the people and world around them. Comparing their ideas of moral "goodness" with others' helps to clarify their beliefs and recognize and embrace the diversity around them

**How does this lesson fit within the larger inquiry project?**
This lesson begins the students on their process of writing a short story that expresses their personal views regarding moral goodness.

How does this project incorporate the inquiry cycle?
The process of writing has many elements of the inquiry cycle: students are tasked with using their writing to respond to the essential questions ("what does it mean to be a good person") and go through a continuous cycle of creating, revising, and reflecting en route to a final product. The essential questions, which will be repeatedly revisited throughout the unit, are meant to be open-ended, with the responses evolving as the inquiry proceeds (Wiggins & McTighe 2013).

Key Questions For Inquiry

Core Question & Supporting Questions for Inquiry Project	Question(s) Addressed in This Lesson
What does it mean to be a good person? Can people be neatly separated into heroes/villains in real life? Why do we root for certain characters/people and villainize others?	What does it mean to be a good person?
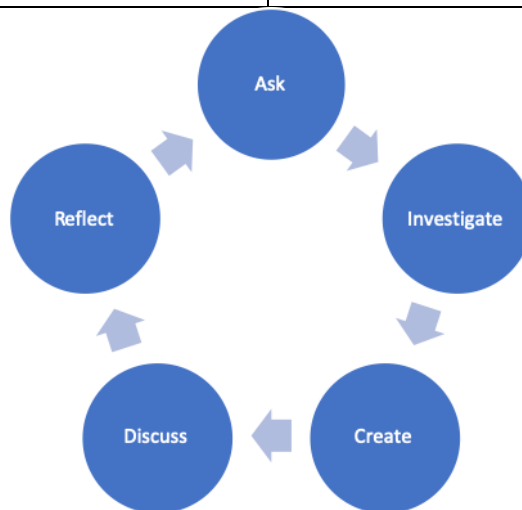
Inquiry Approach and Rationale

This undertaking has many elements of a **discipline-based inquiry.** "Educators advocating for this approach argue that each discipline (e.g., science, mathematics, history) has its own particular ways of generating knowledge, verifying what counts as quality work, and communicating. The job of teachers thus becomes to apprentice young people into these practices" (Friesen 2015). Students are going through the writing process much in the way that an author would: they are clarifying the themes that they want to promote in their literature and making those come alive through the process of planning, organizing, drafting, editing, and crafting a final product. Throughout the process, there will be opportunities for peer and teacher feedback as well as self-reflection.

Core Principles of Effective Teaching (Sharon Friesen) Focus on one or more core principles in the lesson

Core Principle 1: Effective teaching practice begins with the thoughtful and intentional design of learning that engages students intellectually and academically. *What aspects of the inquiry are the most challenging and meaningful for students?	Articulating and clarifying their own personal definition of "goodness" can be challenging, but it can be a very meaningful undertaking. Similarly, contrasting one's values with those of your peers can challenge a student's worldview.
Core Principle 2: The work that students are asked to undertake is worthy of their time and attention, is personally relevant, and deeply connected to the world in which they live. *What makes this inquiry valuable, meaningful, and "alive" for the students and teachers?	Students are asked to connect these concepts of goodness to the people around them, both in their personal life and in the greater world. This gives them a deeper lens to view both world events and events of their own lives, as well as the stories we will read in class.
Core Principle 3: Assessment practices are clearly focused on improving student learning and guiding teaching decisions and actions. *How do I define learning and success in this inquiry? How is learning expressed and articulated in peer, self and teacher assessments?	Learning here is defined by the ability to articulate one's justifications regarding moral dilemmas and connect these responses to moral beliefs they hold. It is emphasized that there are not right or wrong answers, but rather clarity in communication and backing up one's values with reasoning are valued. Additionally, the students will be evaluated based on spelling and grammar.
Core Principle 4: Teachers foster a variety of interdependent relationships in classrooms that promote learning and create a strong culture around learning. *How do I connect students with each other, with experts in the field, with larger communities and nature, and across disciplines?	Students are connected with each other when they are sharing ideas. They connect with the field of English Language Arts when they are engaging in the initial phases of character development. Connections can be made to social studies, as these discussion often relate to historical or contemporary world issues
Core Principle 5: Teachers improve their practice in the company of peers. *How do I reflect on the inquiry together, and/or collaborate with others?	Like with any lesson or unit, it can be valuable to talk to other teachers in the same subject area (and especially those teaching the same grade level as you) to share ideas. Additionally, this could open a great opportunity to collaborate with other grade-level teachers; I could talk to, say, the Socials or Science teachers to see how the principles of moral dilemmas can be applied to the material being covered in their classrooms.

BC Curriculum Core Competencies

Communication	Thinking	Personal & Social
- Students are practicing both written and oral communication, as well as organizing their own thoughts into a coherent and meaningful response - Students are communicating individually (through writing) and in small group and large group discussions	- Students are recognizing the concepts explored in our thought exercises and evaluating them as well as applying them towards new situations - Students are in the beginning stages of character development, a practice we will engage in further throughout the writing	- Students are asked to assert their own opinions into the responses to the moral dilemmas and character formation based on their own backgrounds and contexts - Students are challenged to recognize the factors which may contribute to someone having different values than

	process	their own

BC Curriculum Big Ideas (STUDENTS UNDERSTAND)

"Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens."
   - This activity has students critically examining cultural and personal assumptions of moral goodness

"Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy."
   - This project is the beginning stage of a creative endeavor, a short story which illustrates the student's moral philosophy and gives them a creative outlet

"Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world."
   - Using the construct of a creative short story and a main character as a surrogate for their own viewpoints, students are learning how to use story to illustrate their ideas and share them with others

BC Curriculum Learning Standards
(STUDENTS DO)   (STUDENTS KNOW)

Learning Standards - Curricular Competencies	Learning Standards - Content
"Recognize and appreciate the role of story, narrative, and oral tradition in expressing First Peoples perspectives, values, beliefs, and points of view": Students are in the beginning phases of crafting a story that expresses their personal perspectives "Exchange ideas and viewpoints to build shared understanding and extend thinking": Students are sharing and expressing ideas about moral goodness in order to expand each others' mindsets "Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences": Students are in the beginning phases of crafting a story that expresses their personal perspectives to their peers "Assess and refine texts to improve their clarity, effectiveness, and impact according to purpose, audience, and message": Students will go through the writer's process of planning, drafting, and revising "Use an increasing repertoire of conventions of Canadian spelling, grammar, and punctuation": Students will be instructed and evaluated on spelling, grammar, and punctuation while the importance of these is emphasized "Transform ideas and information to create original texts": Students are beginning the process of transforming their ideas into a short narrative	- forms, functions, and genres of text - language usage and context - elements of style - syntax and sentence fluency - presentation techniques

BC Curriculum Indigenous Connections/ First Peoples Principles of Learning

How will I incorporate Indigenous knowledge and principles of learning?

Overt connections will be made to the following First Peoples Principles of Learning (n.d.): "Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions"; "Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story"; "Learning requires exploration of one's identity"

Respectful Relations

How will I invite students of all backgrounds, interests and skills into the inquiry?

A big emphasis will be placed on the subjectivity on this lesson. There are not wrong answers; students are merely clarifying their own beliefs based on their personal experiences.

Lesson Activities

Context: This will be part of a larger project in which students write a short story that expresses their unique view on what makes a person morally good.

Introduction/Brainstorm: Ask the students: if you had to craft a character for a story you were writing who was the ultimate "good" person, what would that person be like? Spend a few minutes making a list of qualities that this person possesses.

Group Brainstorm: In groups of 4, do the same exercise. Pretend you are writing a character to be the ultimate good person, and make a list of the most important qualities for them to possess. Elect a spokesperson to present the final list to the class addressing the following questions:
What were some of the traits that were on many lists and were easy to agree on?
What were some of the traits that differed between lists and were difficult to agree on?

Full class discussion: Why might people disagree on what makes a good person? What impacts people's views? If our experiences change our views, do you think our views will mostly change or mostly stay the same over time?

Activity 1: Introduce students to the trolley problem, the large man modification, and the surgeon problem. Poll them as to what they would do in either scenario. After each poll, ask a few students to share their thoughts on why they hold the view that they hold. This activity often reveals conflicts in students' stated moral rules, revealing more nuance than they may realize. Additionally, much like the previous exercise, it reveals diversity in thinking among the students. Use this as a jumping-off point to discuss moral dilemmas. Reveal to the students that they will craft a moral dilemma as the primary conflict of their story, and resolve that moral dilemma in a way that expresses their unique values.

Activity 2: Link students to the class site, which gives several moral dilemmas (tysonsmoraldilemmasforinquiryclass.wordpress.com). Ask them to click through them and find one that interests or challenges them the most. Give the following instructions: "Using the voice of what you believe to be a morally good character (think back to your original list), write a paragraph of their inner monologue as they make their decision. Include a resolution to the dilemma (what did they do?)". Show the two given examples to provide a template for how they may approach this.

Materials and Resources

      Paper or other recording device
      Pen or pencil
      The *Inquiry Presentation* Slideshow
      Chromebooks to explore tysonsmoraldilemmasforinquiryclass.wordpress.com

Organizational Strategies

Students will be organized into groups of four to facilitate instruction

Proactive, Positive Classroom Learning Environment Strategies

An environment of openness and inclusion will be cultivated from day 1 of the course, and efforts will be made to ensure that all students have the opportunity to have their voices heard and valued

Extensions

See the upcoming Unit Plan

Reflections (to be completed after the lesson demonstration)

It was very rewarding to see this lesson come to life. The real value here is in the discussions facilitated; for me, the highlight was a fervent discussion between my "students" as to whether knowledge is a desired moral trait. As the students discussed, they revealed differences in their backgrounds that led them to different values while still showing a great amount of respect for each other's viewpoints, and even evolving their own viewpoints to an extent. While I admired the respect for the viewpoints of others, I realized that this may come far easier to MEd students than it may eighth graders, and I need to ensure early in the year that my classroom is a space from respectful and amicable exchanges of diverse ideas.

Trying to integrate more discussions into my classroom has been a growth goal for me for years. I think that I often feel some anxiety about this: what if the discussions don't go anywhere? What if no one wants to speak up? How do I account for time when I am unsure how the discussions will go? There is much more comfort in knowing exactly what the main points are going to be in the class. However, this activity really helped underscore for the great value in these unplanned discussions. It absolutely threw my time off, but so what?! I let this conversation go for long beyond the prescribed time because I recognized its value; it was a moment of spontaneous, live learning, and shutting that down to stay on schedule and hit my points would have been absurd. Taking inspiration from Clifford and Friesen (2003), I wanted to let the student discussion become the content as opposed to having it become an accessory to the content. I think in the past I tried to put opportunities for discussion and debate into what I felt were appropriate spots in my courses, but when these opportunities were given to students in classrooms in which their voices were not usually heard, many shied away and the opinions of the most vocal students were dominant, while other voices were rarely heard from. I had not cultivated an environment which was regularly conducive to these exchanges of ideas. I need to focus on making my classroom an environment where everyone's voice is heard regularly and where discussion and debate are parts of everyday classroom life. This is an exciting challenge for me, and I look forward to exploring strategies to cultivate this environment in September.

Deepanjali brought up a great point regarding the moral dilemmas I brought into the classroom. She questioned whether the thought experiments had themes that were too mature or disturbing for eighth grade students. This is something that had not occurred to me; I have only taught grades 11 and 12 English, and when I brought this thought experiment up to my 11th grade Socials class, it made for a rich discussion and did not seem to upset anybody; I felt it was appropriately challenging. However, this may be an area where my lack of experience teaching students of my grade level is showing. Much of this lesson would work with less grim thought experiments in the place of those that I chose. This may be an area where I do some research and talk to my teaching peers to determine whether my lesson is appropriate. Additionally, I may need to evaluate the needs of my specific students in order to assess the appropriateness of the thought experiment. I could sense Deepanjali's growing discomfort with the moral dilemmas I had presented, and this (along with the aforementioned time constraints) led me to speed through the latter part of this portion of the lesson. While a certain amount of discomfort may be conducive to growth, I need to make sure that I can find the line between challenging and disturbing.

Overall, I felt that this lesson accomplished what I sought out to accomplish. The "students" had the opportunity to express their opinions and have their opinions appropriately challenged. They began

the process of clarifying their own values and becoming exposed to the diverse values of their peers. They also began the process of expressing their viewpoints through storytelling using traditional storytelling techniques and writing processes. For this lesson and unit to work most effectively in my classroom, I must work on cultivating an environment of open, honest, and accepting discussions. I also must ensure that the content is appropriate for students of this age level. Taking these areas for growth into consideration, I would absolutely use this lesson and unit in my classroom.

References

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