The Weight of Choice

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
Advanced Placement Psychology, Standard Psychology Grades 9-12

Keywords: Choice, Morality, Development, Philosophy

Teaching Standards: See Appendix 1 for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Making a choice is hard; understanding why we make the choice is harder. This curriculum unit explores the relationship between thought and behavior. Additionally, there are also explorations of moral reasoning and development. Where do our morals come from? Why do we do what we do? This unit breaks down various aspects of human agency for the 21st century student.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 150 students in AP Psychology grades 9-12.

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Morgan A. Andrews

Introduction/Rationale

Sometimes I think. I think sometimes I don't think enough. I think I am *doing* something when I think…but I'm not – at least, not in the traditional behavioral sense of "doing." The ability to think about thinking is awesome, and a skill that is uniquely human (to our knowledge). I seriously doubt my dogs sit around and think about thinking – or really, think about anything. Sometimes I wish I could just be, without being wrapped up in my own mind. However, in thinking, I sometimes stumble on an interesting idea or resolution about a previous encounter with another person; perhaps, in thinking…in reflecting, I begin to look at the situation through a different perspective. Alternative perspectives can often lead to a better understanding of the other person or situation. And this better understanding will allow me to then *act* differently, better even, towards that other person or situation. What we think matters. What we think *about* matters. In my opinion, what and how we think lead us to make choices and ultimately allow us to take actions. I think the sum of all my experiences coalesces to form me. This makes sense. We rarely reflect on the thoughts that begot those experiences. I also think that there were pivotal moments of choice that, literally, determined what and how my life would turn out. I also know that there were thoughts and actions in my life that affected others. But what really trips me out, is when I start thinking about choices other people make, which are based on thoughts they had which were based on a life different from my own. Pay attention, here's where it gets tricky…When a stranger makes one of those life-altering choices – is it at that moment that I too am destined to be affected by this choice? For example, my husband received a full scholarship to study art at College A. His then girlfriend was going to College B. He had a decision, one which would set him on a particular path. When he chose College B, was it inevitable that he would walk into my Astronomy class and sit next to me? Was it written in the stars (couldn't resist)? I know, there are a million other choices – both conscious and unconscious – that led to us meeting, but are there not life-shaping choices? See, thoughts, they're nothing but problems and Philosophy is all about pontificating about problems (*queue Aria Grande).

My point here, ladies and gentlemen, is that when we start thinking, we become active – active in our own humanity. What separates us from the other animals on the planet is our frontal cortex, where complex thought and planning take place. When we choose to think we become active agents of humanity. I think we are often motivated by certain thoughts that lead us to make particular decisions that inevitably lead to actions. As I said before, being able to reflect is a human skill. The choices and actions we decide to make are not set in stone. We can even change our minds mid-action. Consider motivations, we can observe them retroactively. During the execution of our thoughts we can realize that

our original motivations have morphed into something else. I obviously decided to become a teacher. If I am honest my first decision to teach was in the third grade. I thought it was fun to grade papers (if I only knew!). As a junior in high school, I had a history teacher that inspired me and my motivations to teach were based on the effect he had on his students' empowerment, and I aspired to be like him. Now as I reflect, in my ninth year of teaching, I realize that I want my students to leave my class as better versions of themselves. Of course, I want them to learn about psychology but that is not all I want to teach. What I teach is merely a tool for why I teach. My original thoughts led me to teach, but my motivations changed as I grew older. Making any choice is easy…it's acting on that choice that is hard.

Through this seminar, I think I have found a tangible way to make them successful human agents. I will teach them the weight of choice. I sincerely believe that many people, not just my students, make choices without thinking about them. This is ok to do, to an extent…I mean, if you put your hand on the hot stove you don't need to think about whether or not it would be a good idea to remove your hand. Not every choice has to be hard and we shouldn't scrutinize the details of every decision. It is not my intention to scare my students into a paralyzed state where they become scared to make a choice. What I would like is for them to consider the possibilities, the consequences of their conscious choices. I want them to understand that their lives are defined by choices and whatever choices they make they should truly own.

Context

Prior to this year the way I perceived Philosophy was akin to how a Chemist might view Psychology: just a bunch of people making observations about people. When I thought of Philosophy I imagined Socrates, Plato and Aristotle lounging about in their white robes and bare feet getting stoned and just pondering out loud, "Duuuuuude, what if when you die, you like, separate yourself from yourself….duuuuude". Ignorance can sometimes be funny – but rarely is it accurate. When I read the description of the "Human Agency" seminar, I decided it was due time to gain an understanding and appreciation for Philosophy. The ever-patient, provoker of thought, Meghan Griffith as well as the extremely talented and thoughtful members of my seminar group, granted me this opportunity to learn about Philosophy. I would even go as far as to say that *how* I think has changed, for the better. I boast to my students that I will teach them how to think in AP Psychology, now I realize that thinking is much more complicated than speculation and I might have lied to many students in the past. I've learned that Philosophy is about understanding ideas and concepts in their entirety – or rather, the many perspectives of any idea or concept and in turn our own beliefs about those ideas. I've also learned that when my brain gets tired of thinking, it doesn't necessarily mean I should stop thinking about a particular issue but that I am, in fact, on my way to discovering my own beliefs. What I've come to realize is that often, I take experiences at

face-value, rarely questioning *why* I am having the experience or *how* the experience can be both product and catalyst within my life.

I had no idea what the concept, agency, meant. Reading Griffith's description of the seminar I thought that perhaps agency referred to the generic "human experience" or what it means to be human. I quickly learned that defining agency would be difficult and reading about it…even more so. Reading Aristotle is maddening. My first ever philosophical text, *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle, had me talking with countless others to get their opinions…I wasn't sure that I was reading it right. Why would Aristotle contradict himself – or worse – blatantly disagree with himself? I was feverishly taking down my frenzied thoughts/questions along the edges of the paper, sure that I had signed up for the wrong seminar. Then I realized later, as I was listening to Griffith calmly answer my questions that Aristotle wasn't disagreeing with himself, but rather, he was inspecting the various angles of an argument, to better understand the ideas he presented. I also began to realize that human agency *is* confusing because each individual lives a different experience thereby making agency something humans can intuit easier than define.

I've learned that while considering the "big ideas" or even the small ones, it is important to try to find clarity within arguments while maintaining an open mind to confusion. The ability to see the fluidity in arguments allows for better understanding of the argument and consequently our own beliefs. In Psychology there are many theories, perspectives and viewpoints…they can be argued and tested. In Philosophy, many ideas are not able to be tested per se, only considered in logically-based arguments and perspectives. Take for example the "problem" of free will – whether or not we actually have the power of choice. There is no test or experiment that could determine the "solution" to free will. As I found, there are different perspectives. If one were to argue that desires/decisions are born from necessity, similar to the aforementioned example of my husband and me meeting in college, then they must surely argue that there are a chain of events that could only eventually lead to one outcome. This is called determinism and it seems to rule out free will. But if our thoughts and decisions are not determined by previous causes then it seems that these thoughts and decisions are arbitrary…they would be considered random and without choice. Thus, the power to choose would not be possible.[1]

For me, thinking about free will almost always leads to thinking about morality – our sense of right and wrong. If we are without free will then we cannot be held accountable for our actions. If, conversely, we do have free will, then we are subject to the consequences of our decisions. In our society, we punish those who do wrong, implying that we do, in fact have free will. But where does our morality come from? In my Psychology class I lecture about Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development. The idea is that our moral understanding is learned and is developed through three stages: preconventional morality, conventional morality, postconventional morality. The first

stage is that we "do right" to avoid punishment, the second, that we "do right" to gain acceptance and lastly, that we "do right" because of our internalized understanding of right and wrong. Kohlberg believed his stages to be fluid – that they do not necessarily follow an order – but our ability to reason is ultimately learned. In this seminar, I learned that some philosophers disagree with Kohlberg and believe morality to be innate[2]. I had never considered this. To me, babies are predisposed to morality – meaning they are hard wired to learn from their environment. Babies are sponges who absorb their surroundings. This belief that morality is innate is hard to wrap my head around. Don't infants need to be able to ascertain right from wrong? Don't they need to be intellectually capable? In this regard, I agree mostly with Jean Piaget's ideas of cognitive development. According to Piaget, children's cognitive abilities are developed over time. Initially they are just sensory receptors who develop into egocentric bodies. In Piaget's second stage of development they do understand right from wrong, but only in the preconventional context. Children don't develop a theory of mind, the ability to understand and infer others' mental states, until they reach the age of three or four. How can a child without this theory of mind empathize with others? How could they be prepared for morals? In *The Philosophical Baby*, Gopnik points out that babies can and do pick up on how others feel. This makes sense. They are hardwired to be empathetic which would increase their ability to learn from others – but morality? Gopnik even says that babies are born with the knowledge of emotions in relation to facial expressions – that they know that smiling is a sign of happiness. I can agree, however, that babies do more than just imitate our actions.

Babies learn what is good and what feels good through the responses of their caregivers. This allows them to connect with their caregiver, empathetically. Before this seminar I taught about Tronick's still-face experiment to demonstrate that babies learn from feedback. It did not occur to me that babies could be further developing their morality[3]. This interaction between babies and caregivers can increase empathy and secure attachment resulting in a healthy development. Mary Ainsworth's studies on attachment show that democratic or responsive parents yield children who are securely attached. These children feel safe to explore their environment and in doing so, successfully learn the boundaries (right and wrong) of their immediate world. Children who can trust their environment learn moral responsibility. Insecure attachments between child and caregiver result in distrustful children who fear the unknown. Usually, children with insecure attachments are seemingly swallowed by their world. They have difficulty understanding boundaries. However, despite whether children have secure or insecure attachments, they continue to develop their schema. How they think and feel about their environment directly affects the choices and subsequent actions they make. All children continue to learn through the consequences of those actions, but well-adjusted children are quick in their life learning.

Moral responsibility is an on-going development and (as I stated before) largely in tune with the development of cognitive abilities. In our early development and education of

right and wrong we are learning ways to respond to various situations. As our mental capabilities expand, those early lessons in moral responsibility are reflected in the choices we make. During adolescence the way we think goes through relatively drastic changes. As young adolescents fine-tune their inductive and deductive reasoning, adolescents begin to really see what is possible – no longer are they stuck to reality. Young children's cognitive patterns make them vulnerable to what is happening around them. They have less control over the decisions they make or realizing why they make particular decisions. Given their new "sight," young teens can think about the outcome of their decisions and what is more, they are capable of metacognition, or thinking about thinking. This is not to say that young children are incapable of thinking about their thoughts – nay often young children are able to say why they took candy from their younger sibling. The difference between child and adolescent metacognition is the adolescents' application and explanation of their thinking. An adolescent uses these cognitive developments to aide their problem-solving skills, especially in the moral arena. Additionally, an interesting development of this abstract thought is introspection. Self-awareness coupled with hypothetical thought allows the adolescent to assess and reassess decisions. Furthermore, with the onset of hypothetical thought, teenagers begin to think in multidimensional patterns – they begin to see the interrelationship of several issues or decisions and begin to see that one outcome isn't necessarily the end of the decision making process.[4] All in all these adolescent cognitive advances provide opportunities for teens to internalize those early lessons in moral responsibility. For instance, let's say that Sally the teenager, begins hanging out with a new group of friends who, unbeknownst to her, frequently shoplift from the local drugstore. Sally was taught as a young girl that stealing was wrong and when she realizes the nature of her new friend group she is faced with a dilemma. Does Sally forego her early lessons in morality or lose her new found friends? First, Sally can assess how she perceives the situation and decide which outcome is more important to her. A younger child might say that she liked her new friends, so she decided to keep them. Sally, an adolescent, can explain that though she knows stealing is wrong and she will personally abstain, her new friends only steal relatively inexpensive items and so she will decide to keep her friends. Who knows, perhaps in one of her possible outcomes she actually positively influences her new friends not to steal. Obviously, in Sally's situation, her early morality lessons did not cause her to behave in a particular way, but rather, influenced her decisions and actions.

As we progress and age, it is important to note that patterns of behavior are established in late adolescence and early adulthood. In essence, we receive a framework for navigating choices and actions when we are young children. During adolescence we explore and begin to internalize and personalize our framework. As adults we tend to respond in seemingly programmed and predictable patterns. In Sally's case, her experiences in adolescence may solidify her mode of thinking about stealing. However, she is human; therefore she has the ability to think in the abstract, and so theoretically it is possible for her to change her patterns of behavior. I believe that adults have the ability to reason and choose which ways to behave, especially if those adults are products of

"normal" development. Additionally, those normal adults generally want to choose the "right" way to behave.

But, what happens when adults know the right way but choose the wrong way? My students are always intrigued by psychopaths – people who lack empathy. It would be easy to say that all psychopaths are products of horrible abuse and neglect, but this is not true. Psychopaths' understanding of moral reasoning is flawed. They have difficulty understanding emotions of others – their theory of mind is nonexistent. They can understand emotions they feel themselves but cannot recognize those same feelings in others. The difference is neurologically based. The amygdala, the part of the brain that registers intense emotions like fear and aggression, is nonresponsive to images of sadness and fear.[5] If the choices of psychopaths are based in a biological ineptitude, then can they be held morally responsible for their actions? Do psychopaths actually have the ability to reason and choose their behavior? Their biological deficiency manifests in truly selfish behavior. Psychopaths do whatever they need to in order to get what they want. For most people there is a difference in breaking a rule and causing harm. Most people can accept breaking a rule that serves a higher function, like stealing bread to feed your family. But most people cannot abide harming someone to feed a family. For a psychopath, if killing a man was the byproduct of an action it would be no different than stealing a loaf of bread. What I have deduced from my readings is that psychopaths who commit grievous acts are doing so voluntarily. Additionally, their voluntary actions are based in their inability to empathize with others. They lack moral reasoning and thusly should lack moral responsibility. However, they are capable of understanding rules of society. More accurately, they know that rules govern a society. They may not understand that killing a man is morally wrong – just like a normal person can't understand why we sometimes can't turn right on red – but they understand these rules nonetheless. This means psychopaths should be held accountable for their actions, but it would be pointless to try to explain why certain behaviors are wrong. They could choose to follow the rules simply because they understand that rules govern behavior.

We begin to learn the concept of rules at a young age – even psychopaths do. We learn that rule-following leads to acceptance (which often times gives psychopaths the ammunition needed to manipulate others). Rules offer guidelines on how to behave and allow us to predict how others will behave. Sometimes I am relieved in following the rules. It is far easier to say no because of school policy than to be the one to blame for my students' unease. I choose to follow rules that lead to desired outcomes. If I'm following rules, then it makes my choices easier. But what happens when there are no rules to govern my choices? When I go out to eat with my husband, I inadvertently cause him much frustration. There are no rules in choosing my dinner entrée. But, I so badly want to make the "right" decision. If we live our lives on the premise that we should do the right thing, then it makes sense that we experience anxiety when making choices. One night before seminar, I was feeling particularly stressed. I felt that my life was merely a byproduct of the situations I put myself in. I felt out of control – like my external

environment was dictating my life choices. Often I think we find ourselves feeling stressed when we become spectators – when we let life happen to us. I decided that I didn't want to be in control because control isn't the answer (as all teachers know to be true in the classroom). I didn't know what I needed, but I found it in our seminar that night. Our topic of discussion was about making hard choices. For me, many decisions I make are made out of the fear of the unknown and the fear of being wrong. When I think about going back to school, I become paralyzed with the weight of that decision. What if I get pregnant, lose my job, become successful or what if the world ends? Do the pros outweigh the cons? This habit we get into doing "the right thing" can't always apply – especially when choosing between alternatives that can't be ranked as 'better than' or 'worse than' because they reflect such different values.[6] When making these types of choices it can't be about right or wrong – it needs to be about my understanding of myself and who I want to be. I need to get behind myself and support my own choice.

One of the things I've encountered as a teacher is a common thread of insecurity my students share when faced with decisions. They face immense difficulty in standing up and supporting themselves. This is most evident in their test taking behavior. I understand the pressure and competitive nature of maintaining high academic standing (I teach AP!), but my students lack confidence in themselves. If I ask a student why s/he thought the answer choice B was correct, said student immediately (without thought) erases the answer and asks me, "why? Is it wrong?" This is heartbreaking to me. Erik Erickson theorized that humans' social development is a product of a series of tasks, or crises. For the adolescent the crisis is identity vs role confusion. They are supposed to make mistakes, redefine themselves and eventually become ok with whom they are. Today, this is particularly important as children have to contend with more than just the school yard pressure. There are three popular cell phone apps that children obsess over, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. All three are based on constant divulgence of personal thoughts, and what's more is that they want everyone to "follow" their thoughts. Who knew that popularity would eventually be based on what one thinks? The only problem with this is that, if a kid's thoughts aren't liked, aren't followed and aren't reciprocated, then that kid's thoughts are devalued. The result? Expressive inhibitions.[7]

This idea of expressive inhibition is brought on by fears, most commonly fear of rejection, inadequacy, failure, (social) role-violation and embarrassment. Adolescents today are afraid to make choices. They can't seem to get behind them. Usually during this awkward time of life, adolescents begin to separate themselves from their family and put more clout in their relationships with their peers. Their thoughts and actions become aligned with their friends. However, with the invasive role of social media, today's teens are experiencing feelings of isolation.[8] They aren't guarded by the pack, rather they – their thoughts – are judged by their "friends and followers." For some teens, overuse of social networking sites can reduce their feelings of self-worth. Technology is neither good nor bad, but it's relevance to personal identity is tied tightly with how a person utilizes this tool. Some teens have learned that social media is an outlet for their voices to

be heard – they feel good when they can technologically connect with others.[9] However, when my students make choices about my class, I want them to feel as though someone famous retweeted their thoughts. The world is changing and technology is a major part of this change. Adolescents should be using social media to encourage self-discovery. Thinking about how they're thinking, analog and digital, should allow students the freedom to be proud expressive exhibitioners.

In summary, this seminar on human agency along with my curriculum unit allowed me the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the human condition. It was important for me to understand philosophy – how to read it and think about it – so that I could gain a better understanding of the nature of philosophical ideas. For me, grasping the idea that philosophy is about the journey of thought and possibilities of thought rather than gaining answers proved to be exceptionally challenging. As I was contemplating my curriculum unit I began to focus on choice and although the problem of free will is a popular philosophical debate – which led me to the central idea of my unit – free will began to sit on the sidelines. I began to concentrate on the weight of choice. I wanted to explore the relationship between moral responsibility and choice. I was curious to know if the decisions we make, regardless of how small, were rooted in how we identified right and wrong. For most people I think there *is* an intimate relationship between the two. I think it is interesting that there are people in the world, psychopaths, that cannot or do not honor this idea of moral responsibility. While developing this unit, I kept thinking about how my students view their choices – or rather, what they say about their lives. I tried to relate my own teenage years to my students, but there are so many technological advancements that it is difficult to compare. This led me to look at how my students and teens in the twenty-first century make choices. This seminar has done wonders for the ways in which I think and what I think about. I believe the only drawback to developing a curriculum unit that relates to Philosophy (or any subject really) is choosing which materials and concepts would be most beneficial to the students. The scope of ideas presented in this philosophical seminar on human agency dwarfs those concepts presented here in my curriculum unit. I encourage you, the reader, to substitute or add concepts, aside from those I've mentioned that you think would work best for your particular brand of students.

Objectives

I think adolescents frequently make choices without really understanding the choices they are making or more importantly, the consequences of those choices. I also think, as I mentioned before, adolescents lack confidence in their choices. Moreover, I think that adolescents will ask for the freedom of choice and (gasp!) complain when they have it. Ultimately, my goal for this curriculum unit will be for students to understand the weight of choice as well as to initiate students' understanding of human agency.

Students will need to access their higher order thinking skills to successfully explore these philosophical ideas. In this unit, students will become familiar with philosophical

thought; in other words, they will need to forget about having the answer and focus more on developing thought. I think it would be best to introduce students to this idea of thought exploration by reading texts from some historical philosophers including but not limited to Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Descartes and Locke. Students will need to focus on deciphering the meaning of these texts and in doing so will develop their skills in identifying and applying logically-based arguments. This stepping stone in students' philosophical education will be a reference point throughout the unit.

This unit will provide students with the opportunity to become truly acquainted with active thought – thought that is conscious and directed. Students will examine the relationship triangle of thought, choice and behavior/action. Students will be able to logically explain how their thoughts affect their choices and the subsequent actions that follow. How much thought goes into a particular choice? Why was the choice made? Which behavior/action was chosen? How is the action a reflection of choice? By focusing on future decisions, students will discern active thought and rationale from reasons which may appear post-behavior – thus avoiding the hindsight bias. Students will exercise their ability to reason by assessing their personal choices throughout their development and future decisions.

I want to extend the topic of choice through studies of psychopaths. I want students to be able to draw comparisons between the moral development of themselves and psychopaths. How is breaking a rule that is seemingly arbitrary different from a psychopath causing harm? By drawing comparisons between psychopaths and themselves, students will build assessments based on arguments derived from logical exploration. As a byproduct, students will perhaps gain insight into the nature of psychopathic choice and action.

This curriculum unit will necessitate an identification and understanding of social rules which govern personal and social behavior. Students will use introspection to ascertain the effect these social rules and norms have on personal choice and action. Students will assess how they think about choices and in what capacity. For this unit, it is imperative that students identify the role they have in their own life decisions and the weight of the choices they make – regardless of how big or small the decision is. This unit is designed to teach students how to make choices based on personal values rather than outcomes…similar to thinking without obtaining final answers. Students will (hopefully) learn the value of self-exploration and self-awareness in making choices. I want them to at least begin to feel the empowerment of being a self-supporter. I would like for them to understand what it means to be active agents.

Demographic Background

I have designed this CU for students in my Advanced Placement class which meets every other day for ninety minutes. Additionally it will be easy to make minor adjustments to this Unit to make it more appropriate for a standard level Psychology class. Our school,

William A. Hough High School is located in the suburban town of Cornelius on the outskirts of Charlotte, NC. Hough opened in 2010 with state of the art facilities. In fact, our school is on the forefront of the technological movement in education. At Hough we embrace the use of technology as a teaching and learning aide. I foresee our school going completely paperless by the year 2020. We currently are working towards becoming a green school and have embarked via the 1:1 initiative (a computer for every student) – already we have successfully outfitted the freshman class. I mention our technology position because I plan to fully integrate it into the curriculum unit.

There are over 2200 students at Hough, of which 185 will take 395 AP exams in May. We have a 98% graduation rate and on average 90% of our graduating seniors attend colleges or universities. The competition for class rank and notoriety is fierce. My average class size is forty-plus students. I have over 150 AP Psychology students, grades 9-12, who are grotesquely lacking in sleep, constantly overbooked, and in general, overly stressed by the choices they've made. This is one of the many reasons I am looking forward to this curriculum unit. When I tell them that it's their life – that they chose this (to take this academic elective), they emphatically inform me of my inaccuracy and that they had "no choice". Ironically, if I give them assigned seats, they complain I am taking away their freedom. Of course… I am. These contradicting attitudes are present in all of my students, ages 14-18. I will admit that, luckily, the freshmen and sophomores I teach are more mature than most of their peers.

Unfortunately, age may be one of the possible challenges of this particular curriculum unit. I think most teens are still heavily influenced by their parents and are generally shielded from the real responsibilities of the outside world, this being especially true for my 9th and 10th graders. I believe they are capable of hypothetical thought, but may struggle more than their older counterparts with discussions surrounding conscious choice and moral development. Can they (with their internalized parent's sense of morality) logically look at an argument without condemning a person with an opposing viewpoint? Even adults struggle with this. I think it will be imperative to the success of the curriculum unit to stress and implement mutual respect. I believe that I can offset possible "hot" spots in the class by establishing norms for discussions early in the curriculum unit. I think I would also invoke the power of the "cupcakes and unicorns" (a stuffed glitterful animal that elicits good feelings) which would signify a cease and desist order for hot parties involved.

I do believe age will be the bane of this curriculum unit. For a mixed class, upperclassmen demonstrate and initiate attitudes and behaviors that catch like wildfire. The presentation of the curriculum unit at the end of the school year *after* the AP exam, presents two problems. One, upperclassmen, especially seniors, will most likely be suffering from the awful disease, senioritis. Two, this disease is contagious…and the younger kids will begin to act apathetically as well. To offset this possibility I am

designing the curriculum unit to pique interests by centering the lessons/activities on the students by combining introspection, choice and psychopaths.

Strategies/Activities

As a psychology teacher I often find myself teaching novel concepts. However, though the concepts may be new, the ideas are applicable in daily life so it is relatively easy to find ways to present and connect the information to my students. Additionally, psychology is interdisciplinary in nature so students can align many new concepts with areas of study previously learned. As I began to consider implementing this curriculum unit into my classroom I became concerned – how am I supposed to introduce *philosophical* ideals to teenagers? Moreover, how can I help my students meet the objectives I've laid out? The nature of my curriculum unit relies on students' self-exploration and discovery. In order for them to be successful I have to get them acquainted with the pursuit of knowledge…or rather, philosophical thought. I had no idea how to begin. Fortunately for me (and you!) our seminar leader provided my seminar group with a book that offers insight into teaching philosophy. The book, *Big Ideas for Little Kids* is technically written for teachers of young children. Do not let this deter you! Introducing people, at any age, to philosophical ideals is challenging and Wartenberg's book offers strategies and modes of thinking that make teaching this subject more accessible. The entire book is beneficial but I strongly encourage reading chapters three and four. Essentially, in order to have successful discussions about "big ideas" which promote thinking, the teacher must be a successful facilitator of philosophical discussion – which does not necessarily mean that the teacher must be an expert in philosophy.

Before getting into the meat of the curriculum I think it will behoove students and teacher to establish guidelines for thinking and philosophical discussion. I've decided to seek guidance from Wartenberg for two reasons – first, my inexperience will be offset by the thought provocations provided in his examples and secondly, the lessons he offers are great introductions to thinking about thinking. I plan to follow the lesson he provides in chapter twelve (*The Wizard of Oz:* Teaching the Philosophy of Mind) and thirteen (*The Giving Tree:* Teaching Environmental Philosophy) as I feel they align best with my personal objectives. These lessons provide a story matrix as well as possible questions for discussion. During our discussions I will follow the rules for facilitation provided by Wartenberg in chapter four.

The basis of a philosophical discussion is that there is a statement of an opinion and a rebuttal of that opinion. In a class of forty-some teenagers I don't think I will be focusing on just two individuals. The rules allow for successful dialogue between students. My role is not to teach…again, my main objective for this unit focuses on students' self-discovery. The first rule is to make the ideas tangible. The two stories I plan to use provide a common ground for my students – the stories are in their knowledge bank and they will be able to apply the philosophical concepts quite easily (such as happiness, altruism and personal identity). The second rule of the philosophical discussion game is

for players to state their positions. This is not just a yay or nay response. Students should be encouraged to assess their own point of view, to actually take the *time* to think about how they feel about a particular position. As teachers we constantly are beating the clock and pushing kids to make deadlines…we must not do this. We must slow it down and respect the process…we must be patient. The third rule of the game is that players must support their reasons. The why should be the focus…not whether someone feels they are right or wrong. This is crucial. As the facilitator we MUST not allow students to look at right or wrong but whether what they said is backed by logic and reason. The fourth rule is for the players to make a decision…do they agree or disagree with what has been said. Here, points of view should be clarified and restated if needed. This rule is important for philosophical discussions because of the consideration and thought that is involved in making a choice. The fifth rule of the game is that counterexamples must be presented. Is a claim or point of view a universal idea or is it only sometimes applicable? The sixth and final rule of the game is that players should be encouraged to revise their original claims post scrutiny. I love this idea. To me, we rarely offer students a chance to fill in the gaps or strengthen their view (there is so little time). Students/players should consider the counterarguments to their own claims that might have "poked holes" in their logical reasoning then revise their original thought so that their point of view addresses those holes. These six rules can provide a platform for a great discussion that is based solely on student interest. While we, the facilitators, observe and encourage we should also be mindful that the discussion is both engaging and progressing and that the players' claims and comments are relevant to the whole.[10]

Our first discussion will be as a whole class. Unfortunately the number of students and desks often prevent effective discussions where everyone can participate. To promote participation and engagement, I plan to utilize the school campus and hold our discussion in an environment that provides enough space to set up a discussion circle. I think increasing students' visibility of one another will encourage class dialogue. Currently if I ask students to vote on a particular class assignment, I have them put their heads down so they aren't influenced or coerced into decisions they disagree with. Students may benefit from a self-evaluation of theoretical ideas prior to our discussion. For this I plan on administering a pre-topic questionnaire that will give students the opportunity to assess their own thoughts as well as form logical explanations prior to the discussion. I think it will be interesting to see how students will identify with their peers when they have time to reflect on an idea. You can see the example of my questionnaire below. It is designed to reflect some of the rules of the game mentioned above – in doing so students will be encouraged to inspect their way of thinking. Additionally I can use this type of questioning to introduce other topics within the curriculum.

Though the questionnaire will work as an aide in stimulating participation, I still think that the sheer number of students will remain an intimidating factor for the quiet types. To offset this, I often have students turn to their neighbor and discuss a particular topic thereby eliciting participation. Obviously, the issue with this method is that I cannot be

everywhere at once to be the facilitator. Many of my quiet students are typically underclassmen. As the year progresses I am able to get to know my students on an individual level – and my underclassmen aren't really quiet at all – they are just not as loud as my upperclassmen. They aren't afraid to answer content based questions but they very rarely offer their opinions. As I mentioned before, my school is rich in technology and many of my students have access to smartphones, tablets and laptops. I plan on using this to my (and the students') advantage. To give my students who lack volume a voice I plan on using an online tool to create an in-class discussion board. I think I will use a mix of technology with the traditional class discussion model. I believe this will keep the class engaged and motivated to participate. I am excited to see in real-time, what my quiet students are thinking. In addition to these in-class discussions, I would like students to read Aristotle, so they can gain an appreciation for the language used and the presentation of thought in early logical writings. Students will be required to choose two sentences to bring to class and give a brief oral interpretation of their selected texts. I believe this will get students to think about what they read and also, give them a chance to be heard.

In my class, I typically lecture for 20 minutes about any given topic, and then offer a 10-20 minutes break of some sort to reinforce an idea. Doing it this way allows for a preview, presentation and review of the material. There is not too much information and students can stay actively engaged during a lecture for 20 min. However, we teach block scheduling…and let's face it, thinking about human agency and other philosophical arguments can get heavy. I believe students would be open for my typical classroom setup for one day of this unit, but I feel they would get disenchanted with just thinking. Coming up with new ways to present material led me to a strategy called, Problem-Based Learning. I feel like using this method of "teaching" would initiate and excite student participation. They become actively engaged in solving a problem and by doing so, they become their own teachers and learners. I think this would be a truly effective method of teaching philosophical concepts. I've mentioned before that the study of philosophy is less about the answer and more about the arguments. Problem based strategies will give students first-hand experience in understanding the role of reasoning.

The advanced placement exam in May marks the end of new content for my class. Every year students request an end of the year project that deals with some sort of psychopathy. This year, I plan to give that to them using the problem based learning method. In this method of learning, students start with a problem, then they identify what they don't know, which allows them to do the necessary exploring to find the answer.[11] Again, the teacher's role is to act as facilitator only. I have developed a list of objectives that I wish students to achieve during this problem session. It is important that I not share these objectives with the students prior to the lesson as it will interfere with their ability to question and reason. Instead, I will use the objectives as a guideline to direct students' investigation and questioning. Students will receive this problem: You are a lawyer representing a client who is accused of being a psychopath and a murderer. There is

conflicting data surrounding the nature of the psychopath and whether psychopathy is genetically or environmentally produced. The defense is arguing that your client should be held morally responsible for his actions. Independently, students will identify possible issues in these questions and subsequently develop their own objectives for the problem. Students will form their own groups of four to execute the investigation of the problem. Students will use resources available to them to become their own teachers. As a group, students will work to find their solutions to their problems via discussion and research. The teacher's role will be to monitor the classroom and assist in directing students towards the right kind of questions. If students can successfully develop questions then they will build solid solutions to the problem. It is important to note here that solutions should not be considered answers but rather, logically based arguments which state a claim. Apparently, this strategy for learning can be stressful for many students who seem to be fixated on the traditional model of learning. Stay strong. Don't give them the answer. Instead, ask them what resources they need to find the answer, or mitigate their unease by asking them questions that evoke a different set of possible questions.

The next strategy surrounds the relationship between thought, choice and action. For this segment I think it would be best for students to create a product which would enable them to apply logic to their own life decisions. First they will do a reflection via a video journal that will require them to reflect on previous life decisions. This will give students insight into their own patterns of behavior. Furthermore, I believe that an honest reflection of their choices thus far will allow them to understand the weight of their choices and how those choices and behavior have impacted their lives. For the second part, I will require students to keep a thought journal; I've decided that they should be able to elect to do this electronically. Students are constantly in sync with their phones, so giving them this option would make this portion of the project easier for them. I think it prudent to warn them of the possible interferences/disruptions in thought that may occur if they elect to do this via phone (social media alerts, texts, email, etc). This will be a difficult task for them as they will be asked to record their thoughts, no matter how small, throughout the day. I believe this exercise will allow them to reflect on how they think. I also think that students will see patterns of thought emerge and these realizations of these patterns will give students a tool for the final step – the digital comic strip. The comic strip will give students the opportunity to tackle a difficult exercise with a light-hearted approach. I want students to hypothesize about their possible futures. They will do this for four different time intervals – 5, 10, 20 and 30 years from now. Each comic strip will be a representation of a possible issue they could see themselves encountering. Within the comic they should present the problem, their possible thoughts (consistent with patterns of thinking discovered in journaling) and their subsequent behavior.

The last piece will be a personal advertisement. This ad should reflect what they've learned about who they've been, who they are and who they may become. These ads can take shape via video, image (poster) or live action. Each ad should be no more than two minutes in length and should use a minimalistic style. Each student must be visible in

their ad and should be the main focus. Hopefully this last piece will be a lasting lesson about what they think and how they decide – in essence, the weight of choice.

Appendix 1: Implementing District Standards

This unit is designed to meet the North Carolina Essential Standards for Social Studies for the academic elective course of Psychology in the following ways.

12.LC.1 Understand how conditioning, learning, and cognition affect behavior. Throughout the implementation of the unit students will apply the principles of learning to assess their own methods of cognition. Students will look at how the manner in which we are conditioned influences how we behave.

12.DE.1.3 Analyze moral development throughout the lifespan. Students will reflect on their personal development of right and wrong while executing the video journal. Students will be able to identify the types of moral thinking as well as the process of how morals are learned.

12.DE.1.4 Use knowledge gained from an analysis of human development to understand personal challenges at different stages of life. Students will be able to use their reflections of past developmental issues to gain foresight into the types of issues they may encounter during later stages of life through the use of the comic strip activity.

In addition to the aforementioned essential standards this unit will also meet the Common Core English Language Arts Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, Language and Speaking and Listening. Students will be exposed to high-quality, diverse and informative documents which they must interpret, analyze, evaluate and critique. Students will also demonstrate their understanding of the material through personal written and spoken expression where they must effectively communicate and support their interpretations of ideas.

This unit also meets objectives set forth by the College Board advanced placement program. Students will meet the following objectives during the problem based learning strategy. Students will discuss the interaction of nature and nurture (including cultural variations) in the determination of behavior as they investigate the behaviors of a psychopath. Students will also discuss the intersection between psychology and the legal system (confidentiality, insanity defense) as they attempt to solve the lawyer's problem during this activity.

Classroom Materials

Pre-Questionnaire for Wizard of Oz Discussion

1. Are behaviors derived from biological predispositions or are behaviors learned throughout the life span? Support your answer.

2. How do young children and adolescents differ in terms of morality? How and why are these differences present?

3. Do you agree that it is better to make decisions based on pure logic? Why or why not?

4. What is identity? How do you define your own identity? Can identity change? Support your answers.

5. How relevant is happiness to success in life? Support your answer.

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