

Step 1

Developing Perspectives Across the Curriculum

In this lesson a teacher connects the work of surfacing a perspective to ideas his class was focusing on. The teacher, Patrick Breshears, from Wayne (NC) Early Middle College High School, deftly links the wisdom of Aristotle and other ancient philosophers—topics he and students were focusing on in another class-- to the challenges of self-definition that are inherent in personal perspectives. He nicely incorporates deep reflections on existential questions that students may just be starting to ponder as they forge ways to define themselves as individuals who play a role in a greater whole.

Truth and Reality

- *What does truth mean?*
- *How is it connected to reality?*
- *What control does the individual have over truth and reality?*
- *How does truth and reality impact our environment or community?*

For thousands of years, philosophers, politicians, and scholars have debated the nature of truth and reality in order to apply it to the natural world, the individual, and society. People speak of truth as a concrete concept that creates a singular reality. Science and religion attempt to explain the world around and inside of us in predictable and orderly ways. Maybe the physical, psychological, and social constructs are much more fluid than absolution of truth and reality can explain.

According to Aristotle, truth is relative yet perceivable when constructed by a community of minds rather than then summation of the individual. In Metaphysics, Aristotle argues:

“The investigation of the truth is in one way hard, in another easy. An indication of this is found in the fact that no one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but everyone says something true about the nature of all things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed.”

If the individual takes their truth to the community, then a more complete picture of reality is created. Think about the nature of scientific discovery: an individual or small group of individuals work through research and experiments in order to elicit some explanation of a process or phenomenon. This knowledge is then added to a broader community of information and applied to novel situations and explored further by future generations.

- *How can you develop your truth and use it to improve your community's reality?*

First you must understand and develop a perspective. This perspective could be passive in which you think but do not act thoughtfully to promote progress or it could be engaged and proactive in which you use your truth to create change. This change could be within yourself or amongst your friends and not necessarily within your broader community. What if your perspective could lend its truth to improve your community? Would you, do it?

Let's further investigate the passive perspective:

1. *People that let life happen to them.*
2. *People who find excuses to not act.*
3. *People to focus on the problem rather than work toward a solution.*
4. *People that let their truth lie.*

An engaged perspective seeks truth not to simply know but to manipulate or create reality. The engaged perspective does not live within a bubble but collaborates with other perspectives to imagine a better world.

Let's look at two examples and the different approaches:

1. *Your girlfriend/boyfriend dumps you:*

Passive: Only stay at home watch bad TV, eat lots of ice cream for months

Engaged: Stay at home watch bad TV eat lots of ice cream FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS;

Then: try to understand how and why this happened: a) What did I do or not do that made this happen; b) What do others who know me and/or both of us say was the issue; c) are there patterns in my life? Then I go and hit on every pretty/ handsome boy/girl to change my reality.

2. *You notice another student getting bullied regularly by a group of students:*

Passive: You only watch from afar. You comment to your other friends.

Active: You approach the student and offer your friendship. You report it to staff. You stand up for the student as it happens.

*"The price good men pay for indifference to public affairs is to be ruled by evil men."
— Plato*

I. Developing a Perspective

Where does a perspective come from and how is it developed? Perspectives come from three areas:

- a. *Your **circumstances**-these are things you do not control-your race, your income, where you were born, number of people in your family, religion-but that still shape you.*

- b. Your **experiences**-things you have done—many of which you have chosen but some that were chosen for you-that have shaped you. Anything you have done such as clubs, trips, and experiences with friends, etc.
- c. Your **knowledge**-things you know and know how to do that make you who you are...Could be school related BUT DON'T LIMIT IT TO THAT. Good in math, but also good with people, good with children. Know a lot about the Bible. Know how to cook, etc.

Now, we want to get some practice developing our own perspectives.

- 1) Most people do not want to stand out or appear different then the crowd.
- 2) While you are participating in the project this semester you don't want to be the same as everyone else. You want to be different, be yourself and have your own story-we will need it.
- 3) We need your unique perspective to effect change in our community. The best solutions to community problems and challenges are developed when people come at the problem from different backgrounds.
- 4) A perspective is like a pair of glasses
 - a. It's unique to each person. Just like each person has their own eye glass prescription based on their makeup, each person has their own perspective based on who they are.
 - b. Perspectives utilize your past in order to influence your future.
 - i. What shaped me? What made me who I am? What is behind the things I say to myself as I sit in class and how does my inner dialogue show I am engaged and alive?

How do my circumstances influence my decision making? Can my experiences help me influence others? How can my knowledge be used to increase understanding? How do all three combine to create a unique perspective that allows for more complete solutions?