Critical Thinking About Social Media

Lesson plan for CTSM_2: Solitary and Dialogical Accounts of Cognition. Adapted from

https://www.plato-philosophy.org/teachertoolkit/exploring-existential-angst-self-social-media/

This lesson plan uses activities call**ed** *think-pair-share*, *spiraling conversation*, **and** *for-and-against*. **In a think-pair-share activity, students first spend 1-2 minutes thinking to themselves about a question posed by the instructor. They then spend 1-2 minutes talking about the question with another student. Finally, they share the results of that conversation with the class.**

In a spiraling conversation, intermediate steps are interposed between pairing and sharing. At each step, the students "spiral" outward (either clockwise or counter-clockwise) to pair with other students, before returning to their original pairs.

In a for-and-against activity, the class is divided into two groups, one of which is focused on finding good arguments in support of a position, and the other on finding good arguments against it.

Objective: Students will consider the impact that social media is having on human society and individual well-being. They will also defend positions on whether it is important to be exposed to ideas with which one disagrees. The method of *for-and-against* is introduced.

1. **Lecture (10 minutes): summarize the discussion of 5 stages of technology and self-consciousness from the end of CTSM_2: language, writing, formal education, printing press, and internet.**

2. **Activity (10 minutes): two rounds of think-pair-share and spiraling conversation, on a comparison between the impact of the printing press over the last 600 years, and the impact of the internet right now.**

   Round 1

   - **Think: what would be the biggest loss if the printing press had never been invented? What might a similar loss be if the internet were to disappear?**

   - **Pair and discuss answers.**

- **Spiral conversation.**

- **Share in group discussion**

  Round 2

  - Think: what would be the biggest gain if the printing press had never been invented? What might a similar gain be if the internet were to disappear?

  - Pair and discuss answers.

  - Spiral conversation.

  - Share in group discussion

3. Lecture (10 minutes; *this can be shorter if CTSM_1 Lesson plan was used*): The teacher should introduce the following concepts:

   - To think: a big topic (explicit or implicit, intuitive or reflectively)

   - To judge: to stake a claim about the way things are

   - To infer: to extract information from judgment

   - To reason: to look for good grounds for inferring, and so judging

   - Argument (premises, conclusion): a reasoned sequence of inferences, meant to persuade one to accept a judgment.

   - Solitary Mind vs. Dialogical accounts of reasoning

   - Community of Inquiry

   - Pedagogy of Trust

4. Activity (20 minutes): read the following from John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*:

   "He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion..."

   - Introduce *for-and-against*: the class is divided into two groups, one of which is trying to come up with arguments (reasons) supporting Mill's conclusion, others with arguments (reasons) that rebut it.

   - Think and share: Silently, on their own, students come up with arguments for their respective position. Then, let each side converse as a separate group to try to come to a consensus on the single best reason for or against Mill's position.

   - Finally, as a group discuss the best views on the two positions.

   - If time, another for-and-against can be run on the continuation of that passage:

"Nor is it enough that he should hear the opinions of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them...he must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form."