

**Navigating
Educational
Opportunity
The Case of Christopher Jencks**
TEACHING GUIDE

USING THIS TEACHING GUIDE

The Center for Ethics & Education created this curriculum plan to give faculty and students the tools to bridge philosophy and education.

This teaching guide is intended for use in undergraduate and graduate education classes. The curriculum includes a teaching guide for one week.

We assume two 75-minute class meetings in one week, but you can combine activities in whatever way works best for your class.

AUDIO

In September 2021, Avra Reddy interviewed Jaime Ahlberg (University of Florida) about how we can use moral principles to understand theories of justice in Jenck's paper.

LISTEN

<http://ethicsandeducation.wceruw.org/curriculum.html>

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About the Center for Ethics & Education

OVERVIEW

Topic: Thinking about the values tied to theories of equal opportunity

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to articulate the relevant differences between Jencks's five principles of justice.
- Students will be able to understand the supporting arguments to the five principles of justice.
- Students will be able to evaluate cases critically in light of the five principles of justice.

Readings & Audio:

Jencks, Christopher. "Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to Be Equal?" *Ethics*, vol. 98, no. 3, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 518-33,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2380965>.

"Navigating Educational Opportunity: The Case of Christopher Jencks" episode, *Ethics & Education* podcast, November 16, 2021.

<https://ethicsandeducation.wceruw.org/podcast/navigating-educational-opportunity-the-case-of-christopher-jencks/>

Suggested Lesson Plan Overview

I. Intro Activity on online discussion board

II. In Class Activities

- A. Discussion
- B. Charting the Five Theories of Educational Justice
- C. Discussion: Moral Principle Arguments
- D. Cases

INTRO ACTIVITIES

I. Discussion Board

Topic: Thinking about the values tied to theories of equal opportunity

Before Class: Online Discussion Board

Students respond to the following prompts in a discussion post:

- What is one thing you disliked and one thing you liked about the Jencks paper? Why?
- How do you define equity?

Then, respond to another student's post.

During Class: Small Group Discussion

In small groups, students discuss the posts they contributed to the online discussion board. n

II. Charting the Five Theories of Educational Justice

Topic: Distinguishing between Jenck's five theories of justice

During class: Small Groups

This is a supplemental activity that will take 10 minutes. It's a good activity for distinguishing the five theories of justice Jencks outlines in the paper.

Instructions

Down the left side are ways that Ms. Higgins can distribute her time and attention. Across the top are reasons for her to do so.

Place the five kinds of theories governing equality of opportunity discussed by Jencks into the grid (*see next page*). If you can, note the page number in the text of a passage that justifies that placement.

The five theories are:

Democratic equality (DE), Meritocratic justice (MJ), Weak Humane Justice (WH), Strong Humane Justice (SH), Utilitarianism (U)

ACTIVITY

MORAL PRINCIPLES

III. Discussion of Moral Principle Arguments

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to better understand competing moral principles of distributive justice
- Students will be able to critique and defend various moral principles of distributive justice
- Students will be able to identify ethical trade-offs when pursuing specific principles

In some cases, students may not have a comprehensive understanding of each moral principle, or they may have issues with how to refute an argument they dislike. They may also stray from the topic by addressing issues that are not relevant to the argument. Here, we want to provide a specific framework for thinking about each moral principle as formal arguments. We want students to take issue with specific premises in each argument or if the conclusion doesn't follow, rather than a broad discussion of what they liked and disliked.

In this activity, the various moral principles are laid out in paragraph and then argument form. Group students into groups of four. Distribute the activity on p. 7. In small groups, students discuss each premise and talk about whether they agree or disagree with it, as well as whether the conclusion follows from the premises.

MORAL PRINCIPLES

Instructions: In small groups, discuss each premise. Talk about whether you agree or disagree with the premise, as well as whether the conclusion follows from the premises.

Moralistic Justice: We should reward virtue and punish vice. Teacher-student relationships can implicitly be thought of as a “I’ll do my best if you do yours.” Students who make an effort are then entitled to more educational resources than those who do not. Educational resources should be distributed in response to effort, not achievement.

1. Society should reward virtue and punish vice.
2. Students who behave virtuously in the classroom should be rewarded and receive more educational resources.
3. Having good intentions and putting in effort in the classroom constitutes virtue.
4. Students who do not behave virtuously in the classroom should not be rewarded and not receive more educational resources.
5. So students who display good intentions and put in more effort should receive more educational resources.

Weak Humane Justice: We should compensate students who have been disadvantaged with respect to their past educational opportunities by providing them more educational resources than their peers in order to have an equal chance to meet whatever requirements society sets.

1. Society must offer all children an equal chance of meeting whatever requirements it sets.
2. Children are not responsible for their previous educational disadvantages.
3. Society is responsible for correcting only the disadvantages caused by the environment.
4. Society should provide whatever educational resources children need to compensate for environmental disadvantages.

Strong Humane Justice: We should compensate students who have been less naturally or socially advantaged, by providing them with whatever educational resources they need, so they can have an equal chance of meeting whatever requirements society sets.

1. Society must offer all children an equal chance of meeting whatever requirements it sets.
2. Children are not responsible for their level of natural or environmental advantages.
3. Society is responsible for correcting both natural and environmentally caused disadvantages.
4. Society should provide whatever educational resources children need to compensate for both natural and environmental disadvantages.

ACTIVITY CASES

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to apply the five theories of justice in Jencks's essay to Ms. Higgins' classroom.
- Students will be able to understand the moral tradeoffs that are necessary for decision making.
- Students will be able to understand the difference between theorizing about both ideal and non-ideal situations.
- Students will be able to critique the principles they might typically gravitate towards.

In small groups of 3, each student is assigned:

1. Moralistic justice
2. Weak humane justice
3. Strong humane

Argue on behalf of your assigned moral principle. (10 minutes)

In defending the moral principle, consider the following questions.

- Who does your principle help?
- Who does it hurt?
- Why would you choose that principle over any other one?

How would Ms. Higgins practice each of the moral principles? (5 Minutes)

Case studies (25 minutes)

Evaluate the following case studies (p. 9) from the framework of the respective moral principle. If Ms. Higgins approached the situation using the principle listed, who would it benefit? Who would it harm? Do you agree with the way the principle approaches the situation? (Adapted from Jencks, 1988)

CASES

Evaluate the following case studies from the framework of the respective moral principle. If Ms. Higgins approached the situation using the principle listed, who would it benefit? Who would it harm? Do you agree with the way the principle approaches the situation? (Adapted from Jencks, 1988)

1. Weak Humane Justice: Compare Alison, a financially disadvantaged student who is struggling and putting in no effort, with Jane, an affluent student who is struggling but staying after school every day to receive help.

2. Weak Humane Justice: Compare Marc, a student whose deafness is a result of a heritable condition, with Pedro, a student who became deaf as a result of an early childhood disease

3. Weak Humane Justice: Jane is a hard-working girl with a heritable condition which causes a learning disability that requires her to reread something many times before being able to fully learn. Compare her with Linda, who also has great difficulty reading because she comes from a disorganized and abusive home, is always angry at her teachers and fellow students, and cannot concentrate on any task long enough to learn much.

4. Moralistic Justice: Steven has had extremely poor schooling in the past and is now in a class where he is behind other students in terms of ability. As a result, his self-esteem has begun to suffer and he has started to believe that no matter how much he works, he won't be able to catch up. He begins to put less and less effort into the class.

5. Moralistic Justice: Serena is a financially disadvantaged student struggling in class and does not have any transportation other than the school bus, so she cannot stay after school for help because she needs to catch the bus. Compare with Gina, an affluent student who is performing marginally worse than Serena but is staying after class for help.

6. Strong Humane Justice: Johanna has a hearing impairment from birth and is falling behind in course material because she misses some instructions that the teacher gives. Five of her classmates with no impairments are also falling behind in the course.

7. Strong Humane Justice: Selina, a student with a hearing impairment from birth, is falling behind in course material because she misses some instructions that the teacher gives. In order for her to catch up, the instructor would have to stop teaching the rest of the class and give them free time for a week. Should the teacher give the class free time while they catch Selina up?

THE CENTER FOR ETHICS & EDUCATION

We at the Center are committed to encouraging philosophical reflection on contemporary issues in education. This curriculum was developed for use in undergraduate and graduate education, philosophy, and sociology classes. It is available for free.

The Center for Ethics & Education is housed in the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) in the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The Center supports the field of philosophy of education by supporting scholars, graduate students, practitioners, and policymakers in thinking analytically about ethical issues in education.

How did it go using this teaching guide with your class?
We'd love to hear from you!

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The creation of this curriculum was supported by a grant from the Spencer Foundation.

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