



When downward Mobility Strikes

Curriculum Unit 20.03.08, published September 2020
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Introduction

As I reflected on the unit that I was going to teach, I thought to myself, how will I make this relatable to my students? The unit that I will create and develop will be based on downward mobility, upward mobility, their causes, effect and the results thereof. The unit will focus on how downward and upward mobility affects social and economic statuses locally as well as around the world. This unit will be used with intermediate and middle school students that reside on the south side of Chicago. Many of these students come from families that experienced both sides of mobility, primarily downward mobility. Students will learn that no matter what happens in life or where they come from, we must continue to persevere, thrive and go forth strongly with the policies that we believe in, even if it means starting over in a place or position that is unfamiliar to us.

In the beginning of the unit, we will read a novel that will serve as one of our anchor texts. Before we begin to read our novel, we will take a look at what upward and downward mobility means, what it looks like and how it can affect us. My students will take a look at both past and present events that have contributed to downward and upward mobility during the time that the story takes place. My students will take a deep look at how downward mobility has evolved overtime in our country, other countries as well as in their own communities. Making this type of connection with them will be key to get them to understand the concepts before we fully dive into our book. They will understand how downward and upward mobility are real movements that can change abruptly due to the workforce, crime, recessions, lack of achievement and poor underachieving schools.

Students will read the novel entitled “Esperanza Rising” by Pam Munoz Ryan. Esperanza is a young girl from Mexico whose family migrates to the United States and experiences both downward and upward mobility. Esperanza’s family has to start over and they are forced to work for lower wages. Esperanza suffered from the loss of her father. As a result of this, the family migrated to the United States. The family did not have the same socio-economic status in the United States that they had back in Mexico. Esperanza could not attend school, yet in Mexico she attended a private school. Esperanza’s mother became ill. She could no longer work on the farm to support her family. The family went from one direction to another. In the unit, we will

take a look at how these situations affected their upward mobility.

In an effort to engage my students in student to student discourse throughout the unit, students will dissect the who, what, where, when and why downward mobility was so prevalent during this time. Students will also take a closer look at the effects of downward mobility. They will research and investigate this. We will take a deep dive into why this is happening more often than not. As a result of our investigation, students will learn empathy.

In this unit, students will be challenged to look at the opposite side of downward mobility, which is upward mobility. It is important that they are exposed to both concepts. In the unit students will learn that after the Mexican Revolutionary War, the United States offered Mexican immigrants the possibility of upward social mobility. Many Mexicans migrated here, never looked back and saw endless possibilities of wealth and so much more. We will take a deeper dive at what that looked like and how coming to the United States contributed to their upward social mobility.

Students will use a wide variety of resources throughout the curriculum units including but not limited to videos, articles, blogs, books and journals. They will also engage and participate in close reads, interactive conversations, student to student discourse, independent activities, and cooperative learning activities and use protocols while engaging in learning activities.

At the end of the unit, as a part of their culminating project, they will have the opportunity to compare at least two different groups of people and explain how downward or upward mobility has affected their lives, families and cultures. They will have to participate in a hands-on project to fully grasp the concept of upward and downward mobility. The hands-on activities in our unit will promote their understanding of both concepts. Because they are developing into young critical thinkers, it will be equally important for them to think about how their family is directly affected by downward and upward mobility. Students will have to provide concrete examples to show that they truly understand.

We will be taking a look at history as it has presented itself in the past. They will understand why what happened yesterday, truly affects us today. It is equally important for them to understand this concept. If students are educated about the policies that have stifled the progress of our country in the past, we will have a way to turn things around immediately. We have to look at the past in order to understand the present and our future. This in return helps us to understand where we are going in life. This unit will give them a new perspective on how they will view themselves, their families and people that they interact with on a daily basis. There are things that directly connect to the downward or upward mobility of different communities. We will look closely at that and how it has affected us on the Southside of Chicago. I think the findings will be eye opening for our students. If we can get them to see what pushes us toward downward mobility, we can teach them the steps to be proactive against it and move in the direction of upward mobility. They need to know how to take the necessary steps needed to move more towards upward mobility status.

As we look at real life situations throughout the unit, investigating various periods of time, such as wartimes that have contributed to the overall mobility of our country, students will continue to develop a greater understanding of downward and upward mobility. After engaging with this unit, students will know that they have a choice. They will learn that they have a choice to change policies that affect them. They will learn that they have a choice about how they want to live their lives. It will be a choice to move forward or backwards. They will be more informed to make better decisions for their life and future.

Rationale

Students will be able to make connections between their lives and upward/downward mobility. It is important for them to understand why public policy is important to us and how the different policies affect them. When we have a better understanding of how policies affect us, I think that we think about them differently. I would love to introduce these concepts to my students in preparation for their futures. This would be learning at a new level for them. It will be amazing to introduce them to a concept that they have no prior knowledge on. To take it even further, they will be able to make connections. This will be a perfect opportunity to get them to think on a different level. As the saying goes, "When we know better, we do better." They need to know the importance of social security and healthcare. It is my mission in this unit to teach them that they can change the policies that are not working. They will know that they can organize peacefully to put pressure on the decision makers. It could be for an organization or a particular group of people, such as African-Americans or minorities of color in general.

Demographics

Westcott Elementary School is located on the Southside of Chicago, in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood. We have 396 students. Ninety-six percent of our students are low-income students which mean the vast majority of them receive free breakfast and lunch daily. Twenty percent of our students have IEPs, one percent English Language Learners, eleven percent are homeless (almost 4 times the states' amount and 5 times the district's amount), thirty percent of them are chronically absent and fifty-six percent are chronically truant from school. The ethnic background of our students is primarily African-American. Ninety six percent of our students are African-American; three percent are Latino and 1 percent other.

The students that I specifically teach are primarily raised by their fathers. They are diverse learners in a cross categorical classroom. This means that there are a wide variety of disabilities. Each one of them comes from a single parent home. They suffer from hurt that stems from many areas of their life including the absence of a parent. My students are also social emotional learners with very high academic needs. Many of them receive social work services at school due to the traumatic experiences they've encountered. Some of them have experienced trauma at a level that most adults have not experienced and probably couldn't handle. We've had to call SASS which is an agency that comes out to evaluate students that may have possible mental illness concerns that we are not able to address at the school level. Sometimes this same student has to become the mom or the dad in the family if they (the parents) are absent in the lives of the children in the family. This unit was designed with all of this in the back of my mind. I have students with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), mild cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, social emotional disabilities and Other Health Impairments. Approximately 12-15 diverse learner students will have access to this curriculum. The majority of them have all of their IEP (Individualized Education Plan) minutes with me.

Content Objectives (more of the background for teaching the unit)

During seminar we discussed many facets of downward and upward mobility as it relates to the unit that I will be teaching. We specifically engaged in robust conversations about healthcare, social security, inequality, the work force, crime, recessions, lack of achievement and schools that underperform. We noticed a trend. Many of the areas that were poverty stricken and had schools that underperformed were primarily in the African-American community. Overtime, many policy changes took place that led to the downward mobility of some and the upward mobility of others. As we engage in our unit, my goal is for my students to see that they have control over their social and economic mobility status. History does not have to repeat itself if we begin to teach our children at a young age about policies that affect them. I believe it will have a profound effect on them when they can understand what we are talking about. As they make direct connections throughout the unit, the goal is to empower them to know that even on the Southside of Chicago, upward mobility is possible. When we teach, we empower. The knowledge I have gained in our seminar will assist me in delivering a topic to our students that affect their everyday lives.

In a 2020 interview about her co-authored book “Deaths of Despair” Anne Case said, “U.S. healthcare in America is primarily employer based.”¹ This means that one must go to work and invest in healthcare in order to have access to it. If one does not hold a job where healthcare is offered, they may be subjected to subpar healthcare. People may also use the emergency room as their primary doctor if they don’t have healthcare when they are ill. This could lead to higher mortality rates as people are not being seen by a healthcare provider due to lack of insurance. According to the Guardian, “A 2009, study conducted by researchers at Harvard Medical School found 45,000 Americans die every year as a direct result of not having any health insurance coverage. In 2018, 27.8 million Americans went without any health insurance for the entire year.”² As we discussed in the seminar, it is important to also take into consideration, how other countries such as Canada and Mexico have managed their healthcare system. Canada has taken healthcare to another level. Canada provides universal healthcare in their country. This means that everyone has access to healthcare. In our unit, students will have the opportunity to compare healthcare systems. Healthcare was equally as important in the novel because once Esperanza’s mom became ill, she had to see whatever doctor was available. She didn’t have healthcare being a newcomer to the United States. Although Esperanza and her family had just arrived in the United States, the campesinos (field workers) that were already in the United States did not have access to healthcare and they too faced the same dilemma of improper healthcare.

Research has shown that downward and upward social mobility are tied to our health. In a Norwegian study, it showed that people with upward mobility tend to have less health problems than those that are experiencing downward mobility. This is a major concern due to the fact that many of these people probably don’t have any type of health insurance which could be another reason why disease and illness rates are up in communities such as the black community. One thought that came to my mind is how will we change this? This is a component that my students and I are really going to deep dive into. We know that policies were meant to be changed. They should be fair for all stakeholders involved. Students will learn that they have a voice when it comes to policies being changed.

Back in May of 2020, our seminar group had a discussion on how recessions have affected our country over time. During the Great Recession between the years of 2007 through 2009, many people lost their jobs. When people lose their jobs, they in essence have to start all over again. They have to buy into a new healthcare program. They will have to start their social security contributions again and realize they have lost some time

contributing towards their retirement. If people don't have jobs they most likely do not have access to the proper healthcare. Recessions produce high levels of unemployment as well as crime. If people don't have their own source of income coming in there is a great possibility of high levels of crime in their neighborhoods. My students will be able to make a great connection to this.

In most recent times, people have lost their jobs due to the looters in Chicago. Stores were forced to permanently close leaving thousands of people unemployed. Some of the families affected were my students' families. They lost their healthcare, dental and vision insurance. It was challenging for many of them to apply for assistance to help them. There is a true recession in the city of Chicago at this time. People are not able to get jobs due to businesses closing. Downward mobility is in full effect. Many don't know where they will seek employment. Many of the businesses were close proximity to where the workers lived and they did not have to travel far. Most of them could walk to work. The dynamics are different at this present moment since the looting took place. It is going to be very interesting to see how my students respond when we take a look at how we sometimes contribute to the downward mobility of our communities. When we loot and take advantage of a time that has a long term negative impact on our community, everyone feels it. Again, it is up to the people in the community to change that. If they want to see an upward swing in mobility, they are going to have to take action.

The workforce in general has shifted. There are many that are still able to hold traditional jobs where manpower is needed. At the same, we discussed in our seminar that many companies are replacing people with machines and robots. Dr. Chike Akua writes in "Honoring Our Ancestral Obligations" that, "Many jobs like the one described above have been outsourced overseas or, due to technology and automation, no longer exist."³ If companies are leaning more towards using machines and robots, there would be no need for employer based benefits such as healthcare. This notion alone poses an immediate threat. People would no longer be paying into Social Security. As we also discussed in our seminar, there is a possibility that Social Security may be non-existent. Social Security was a program started under President Roosevelt. When it comes to Social Security and downward/upward mobility, it is going to depend upon how much one contributes to the fund. If people are not working, they are not able to contribute. On the contrary, if people are working but are working at low wage paying jobs, more than likely they aren't paying a great deal of money into the fund. They have no real level of security when they are ready to retire. There are also those jobs that people take and work for cash. They aren't paying into Social Security which means they aren't paying into their retirement fund. When they are older, they won't have anything to look forward to. This is yet another dilemma that we must ponder.

Another implication for teaching this unit is the inequality that was faced by many groups, but particularly the African American community. In many of our poor and impoverished neighborhoods, the school systems are not the greatest; they underperform and lack overall achievement. For many of their counterparts it is just the opposite. In Chicago where I teach, if the school is in a good neighborhood, they will have all of the resources they need to ensure the success of their students. Children on the Southside of Chicago do not have the same access unless they attend a selective enrollment school or a gifted program. As we investigated and concluded in our seminar group with the Newark Schools, every child deserves a good education. It shouldn't matter if they come from a rich or poor background. If we give our children a solid education, they will be more prepared in life and equipped for opportunities. Unfortunately, Chicago is a very political and racially segregated city. Racial segregation is real. The opportunities for the African-American children on the east, west and Southside of Chicago are not the same as their peers on the north side.

Since the beginning of time, African American people have been restricted from many things including

learning, owning land and having the same freedoms as their Caucasian peers. This has stifled our progress. We have had people come along such as Mark Zuckerberg that gave 100 million dollars to a school system. It was supposed to be in an effort to improve the school system. His plan backfired. He wanted to tie student performance to teacher's pay. In "The Prize" it states, "Zuckerberg wanted a "transformational" teacher's contract. The goal was to apply business-style accountability to teacher pay - abolishing the long standing system of basing salaries on years of service, instead making student performance the measure of a teacher's worth."⁴ Many of these students are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sometimes they are not going to perform at their highest level of capacity. It would be unfair to tie their performance to their teacher's pay. As it relates to education in Chicago, downward mobility has played a tremendous role in the movement of the minority people in the city. Many African Americans in Chicago are not pursuing a higher education. Dr. Chike Akua said in his book, "Honoring Our Ancestral Obligations", "Unfortunately, many schools are way behind in terms of preparing students for the practical realities of today's world."⁵

In my research I found that many white Americans on the flipside area are also currently experiencing downward mobility as it relates to education. They are experiencing almost the same thing that African Americans experienced almost 50 years ago. In one journal article, I read that some of the wealthy parents are worried about their children and their mobility status.⁶ Many millennial young White Americans are not attending college. This poses a threat to their economic and social mobility statuses. This is what actually worries their parents the most. There is a fear that their children will not follow suit of creating their own generational wealth as their ancestors did. This not only poses a threat to their families but to the economy as well. When we work, our economy thrives because we spend money. My students will learn the importance of working hard to be able to fund whatever dream their heart desires. In his book, "Education for Transformation", Dr. Chike Akua states, "Master teachers are able to transcend politics, policies, procedures and paperwork to truly meet the needs of the children."⁷ We have to teach them about concepts such as upward downward mobility so they know the choices they have and the paths that they can take.

In addition to the inequalities in education, we also took a deep dive into the inequalities of the housing market. We found high levels of racial segregation still exist. In areas where racial segregation is prevalent, the housing market is different; the school systems are not on the same playing field and access to resources are limited. In the neighborhood where I teach, many of the people are renters. Their mobility rates are very high. They tend to move from one impoverished neighborhood to another one with their families. Many of them have school aged children which means that they will inherit whatever school system that their neighborhood has to provide. Most of the time, these are not the best situations. These inequalities tend to lead to higher rates of crime and death. People begin to take what they don't have, even if it means taking someone's life. These inequalities have led to many disparities. It is very challenging to teach children that come from backgrounds where they don't have access to basic things that will improve the quality of their lives. The reality is where there are more renters; the neighborhoods tend to be more impoverished in nature. Many are not able to afford to purchase their own home due to low wages and possible low credit scores.

As we discussed in our seminar, this can sometimes lead to subprime mortgages and lending. We learned that between 2007 and 2010 during the Great Recession, our country was in a subprime mortgage crisis. Banks were lending money to people they knew that could not afford the loans over a long period of time. Many begin to lose their homes. During the recession, their household debt to income ratio was higher than usual and disproportionate. This is what ultimately led to people losing their homes. Many of our students have been affected by a current housing crisis here in Chicago.

Chicago's Mayor Lori Lightfoot has developed programs to help people that are struggling to pay their rent due to job loss or as a result in the change of the economy. She offered 2,000 families a \$1,000 rent assistance payment during COVID-19. It is evident that the housing market for many is unstable at the moment. We are talking about a group of people who have been historically behind for decades in many facets. If people are not able to work and obtain the type of employment that can sustain them and their families, we will be faced with this dilemma for a long time. The sad reality is as downward mobility hits communities hard, upward mobility seems even harder to acquire. People will be forced to move and possibly move into worse neighborhoods than the ones they previously resided in. The entire dynamic of how it is truly a domino effect when the economy is affected in any way.

Downward mobility as it relates to the housing market in Chicago is at an all time high. The mayor has put some policies in place to help some of the Chicagoans that need assistance to pay their rent. The mayor is attempting to help the housing market. If renters are able to make their payments, the owners will be able to make their housing payment on time. This policy she put in place directly affected 80 percent of the families that I serve on a daily basis. Policies put in place to help people move in an upward direction are needed in our country all across the board today.

The research has shown me how downward mobility directly affects upward mobility. If people are not working and able to provide for themselves, they will not have the same opportunities as someone with more mobility and capital income. The workforce, healthcare, social security, housing market and education system play integral roles in downward and upward mobility. If any of these areas are affected in any way, it will inherently affect the people with low socioeconomic statuses the most.

Teaching Strategies

Dialectical journaling for reflection - students will use journaling as a way of reflection

Protocols - allows students to engage in some non traditional ways

Close reading - students are able to analyze and interpret what the text is saying

Anchor Charts - serve as daily guides and scaffolds for the diverse learners

Fix it up Fridays - an opportunity for students to fix up anything from the week to earn a higher grade.

Classroom Activities & Teaching Strategies

Anchor Charts will be used daily. We will create them as we go. They will serve as visual reminders for key concepts and ideas that we discuss and are important for our unit. Students will refer to them frequently and often. As we dig deeper into our unit, students will use their dialectical journal each day in response to the chapters that we read. They will have to quote directly from the text and respond to the quote they selected. They will have to remain within whatever chapter we are working on but they have freedom to choose what

they want to respond to. In responding to the text students have to make a connection from the text to self, text to text or text to world. I will provide relevant feedback to each student based on their response.

Students will also engage in using a variety of protocols throughout the unit. One protocol that we will use is the stop light protocol. After reading the directions for an activity or closely reading, students will use their stoplight protocol to let me know if they understand the directions or what they just read from the text.

Another protocol that we will use is something that I call Robinson's Carousel. Students really enjoy this! They have the opportunity to walk around and answer questions that are posted on adhesive chart paper around the classroom. They can also respond to each other on the chart paper. This activity works very well with students who need frequent movement breaks. This allows them to move but with purpose.

Students will also engage in the Think-Pair-Share protocol. This protocol allows students to think on their own, pair up with a partner and share out to the entire group. Think-Pair-Share is one of my favorite protocols to use because students must begin thinking independently before they can partner up with a classmate.

Another strategy that is super important for my students is close reading. Students will read closely to determine the meaning of words and understand what the text is saying. Close reading allows the students to analyze the text in a chunked format. The smaller chunks allow time for them to dissect the information presented to them.

One of my favorite personal strategies that I will implement is something that I call, "Fix It Up Fridays." Students are able to bring any work or their daily dialectical Journals if they want to correct it to our small group when it is their turn on Fridays. They have the opportunity to "fix up" any assignments from the week to earn a higher grade. This has a tremendous impact on their confidence and work ethic.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

My unit will incorporate the following Common Core State Standards. By the end of the unit, students will be able to synthesize and demonstrate their understanding of what they are learning through the standards. Some of the Common Core State Standards will be used daily.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2

Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.5

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 4 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Bibliography/Teacher Resources

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Three Visions for Achieving Equal Rights - Facing History and Ourselves

<https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/memphis-1968/three-visions-achieving-equal-rights>

Why is it more important to understand what government does? Submitted by KRM

<https://www.press.jhu.edu/news/blog/why-it-more-important-ever-understand-what-government-does>

The Americans dying because they can't afford medical care

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/07/americans-healthcare-medical-costs>

Health-related mobility, health inequalities and gradient constraint

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End Notes:

¹ Case, Ann. “Deaths of Despair”. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1D1qIzzn2-o&t=269s>

² The Guardian. “The Americans dying because they can’t afford medical care”, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jan/07/americans-healthcare-medical-costs>

³ Akua, Chike. “Honoring Our Ancestral Obligations”. 2020, pg. 70.

⁴ Russakof, Dale. “The Prize”. 2020, pg. 151

⁵ Akua, Chike. “Honoring Our Ancestral Obligations”. 2020, pg. 70

⁶ Brookins. “Why rich parents are terrified their kids will fall into the middle class?” <https://www.brookings.edu>.

⁷ Akua, Chike. “Honoring Our Ancestral Obligations”. 2020, pg. 70.

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