

Unit Plan Reflection: The Great Depression

Megan Zimpelman

Reflection

My goals for this unit included teaching students the necessary content material regarding the Great Depression, but I also wanted students to develop higher level cognitive skills, such as analysis, application, and creation. As I planned this unit, I included activities where I thought students could both build this content knowledge and develop these cognitive skills.

This unit was my first foray into student teaching, and overall, I think it went well. Students enjoyed comparing and analyzing photographs from the 1920s versus the Great Depression, and especially enjoyed listening to speeches from President Hoover and President Roosevelt and then comparing their economic policies. Additionally, I felt one of the most successful lessons was the Inquiry Lesson that focused on the causes of the Great Depression. On their final unit test, an overwhelming majority of students answered questions that aligned with this learning objective correctly. Students also remarked that they enjoyed working with technology, which they were able to do in two iPad lessons and three laptop lessons over the course of the unit. Finally, students expressed that they liked the Build Your New Deal Project, which allowed them to express their creativity yet also served as a way to assess their content knowledge and cognitive evaluative skills.

There were a few things that I needed to adjust for the unit's implementation that differed from my initial unit plan. Originally, I hoped to have students research and learn about New Deal programs using laptops, but decided to have them research using only the class set of textbooks instead. This adjustment was partly due to time constraints - I found that while laptops were a useful tool in the classroom, I did not fully account for the amount of time it took for students to each receive a laptop, turn the laptop on, log in, etc. After discussing this with my cooperating teacher, I decided instead to have students research the programs simply using their textbooks, which provided detailed information regarding each program.

Additionally, I decided to use another economic activity that I did not initially include in my unit plan that I borrowed from another teacher at my practicum school. In this activity, students used an online resource to research economic statistics, such as federal spending, unemployment rate, and consumer price index over a ten-year period from 1926 to 1936. Through this activity, students were able to compare these statistics, and understand the economic changes that took place over this ten-year period in the United States. Students were also able to see how certain statistics, such as federal spending, changed as a new president took office. This activity served as an excellent transition into the next day's lesson, where students used iPads to listen to speeches from Hoover and FDR, and then compare the two presidents' respective economic policies.

Though I think that this unit went well, there are still some things I would revise for future use. Logistically speaking, if I were to teach this unit plan again, I would put all documents - all worksheets, notes, vocabulary, etc. - into a larger packet for student use. I printed out each worksheet or set of worksheets for each individual lesson, and had students pick up each of these documents on the day of each lesson.

Though I did not think this would be an issue beforehand, I quickly realized that this influx of paper created unnecessary confusion and difficulty for my seventh grade students. Additionally, many students had trouble keeping track of all the different worksheets, and I often had to provide students with additional copies. I took this into consideration when I taught my next unit, and made a large packet to hand out from the beginning, which worked significantly better than passing out individual worksheets daily. Though creating a packet of worksheets may seem like a simple adjustment, it made a world of difference in terms of classroom management and student learning. I did not need to spend class time passing documents or having students to pick up worksheets, and students knew exactly where to find the class notes or document needed for that day's lesson.

Additionally, if I were to teach this lesson again, I would revise the Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) lesson format. This was my students' first exposure to this type of lesson, and they struggled with following the SAC format. While some students excelled at explaining arguments to their fellow classmates, others clearly felt uncomfortable and only contributed minimally throughout the lesson. Therefore, when I held a SAC lesson again while teaching, I restructured the activity so that students discussed the arguments in a larger group than just four students first, and then brought the class together for a larger discussion. This approach actually garnered a higher level of student participation, and I felt students understood and grasped the material better as a result.

I created my lessons with the six PASS Standards in mind. While teaching, I was excited to see my students engage in these different standards. My students ethically valued the role they thought the government should play in lives of Americans, particularly the poor. I saw my students practice higher order thinking regarding economic policy, and explore deeper knowledge when it came to researching the true purpose of the programs of the New Deal. Students engaged in a substantive comparison of conservative, liberal, and radical economic policies, and debated which approach was best for the United States, using historical evidence to support their claims. Throughout this unit, I provided time and encouraged substantive conversation among my students as a way to build deeper knowledge and develop cognitive skills.

Though I initially hoped to connect the Great Depression to the recent economic recession, I found my students struggled to make these connections on their own. A few students asked if the 1929 stock market crash was similar to the housing bubble collapse of 2008, and we discussed this historical parallel as a class. Additionally, students recognized certain New Deal programs, such as Social Security and Medicare, that are still active in American society today. I felt this unit integrated the disciplines of both history, politics, and economics, and compared how economic events affected the politics and history of our nation.

Overall, I think my students grasped the content material of this unit and continued their development of cognitive skills. The average for the unit test was a 79% on the multiple-choice section, and a 8.5 out of 10 on the short answer essay. My cooperating teacher informed me that this is consistent with his students' performance on assessments. Additionally, my students demonstrated their ability to evaluate in their New Deal projects, and submitted excellent work. Though some students definitely grasped the evaluative component better than others, this project served as an overall success in both assessing my students'

knowledge and comprehension of New Deal programs, and a way to introduce higher-order cognitive thinking into the classroom.

Overall, I think this unit went well. Though I would definitely adjust some components, such as the unit packet and the Structured Academic Controversy, I think that this lesson successfully taught both core concepts and helped students develop important cognitive skills essential to their education.