How Ubuntu, Teamwork, Perseverance and Problem-Solving Empowered Students To Change the World: The Soweto Uprising

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Abstract

COVID 19 distance learning took an emotional and academic toll on students in the K-12 setting. In addition to academic stagnation, many students suffered from academic loss and feelings of helplessness. After universal screenings for mental health determined that our students are in fact suffering, our school decided it to implement Social Emotional Learning into the curriculum. At home, critical thinking to complete assignments wasn't necessary as there was no way to check for academic integrity. In school there is.

This lesson was developed to address student needs during the first week of school, empower them to take control of and become active participants in the education through problem solving and critical thinking, establish classroom norms and arouse a curiosity about African culture in South African and the larger diaspora.

How Ubuntu, Teamwork, Perseverance and Problem-Solving Empowered Students To Change the World: The Soweto Uprising

DAY 1

1. Introduction: (Identify Grade Level K12 Academic Content Standard(s), rationale, focus learner, create bridges from past learning, behavior expectations)

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Grades 9-12 1. CCSS, Mathematical Standard Practice: 1) **Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them**; 3) **Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others**. 2. CA College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard: Speaking and Listening- **Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.** 3. Ethnic Studies Thematic Unit- Marginalized peoples throughout the world.	**Rationale:** Working together to find a common solution to societal issues with the goal of developing a skill that can be in all subjects in and out of the classroom. Utilizing a strategy of tapping into prior knowledge to get the students thinking about how they can advocate for change through determination, perseverance and discipline. This strategy will build confidence in using problem solving skills, teamwork and critical thinking skills as math requires the same skill set to learn and retain mathematical concepts.

Students will bridge personal scenarios of collaboration to solve problems that affected them and their peers where any change/solution was initiated or made for the benefit of all.	

2. Learner Outcome(s)/Objective(s): (What will students learn from this lesson? How will you measure mastery of the outcome?)

Lesson 1- "Let your next move be your best move!" Students will be given a scenario where collaboration and perseverance in problem solving are paramount to finding a solution. While working together, students will construct possible viable solutions to the scenario (even critiquing group members' strategy when necessary) all while keeping a united front. Students are put together in groups of 4 with a dry erase place mat, 4 markers and an eraser. This scenario assignment will be used to gather informal baseline data (Are the students able to work together? Do they have the confidence to approach a seemingly insurmountable problem? If so, will they work through all the ups and downs of problem solving?). Upon completion of this unit, mastery will be measured throughout the school year through various real world mathematical verbal equations, state testing and overall performance in their math classes.	**<u>Rationale:</u>** Students will learn and/or refine skills vital to becoming critical thinkers in mathematics as well as other subjects. Students will assist peers in learning through collaborative work. Students will learn problem solving strategies for math that do not require one to be fluent in math facts. Students will learn how planning, teamwork, perseverance led to changing the world.

	Students will build confidence to approach independent learning after working through and finding solutions as a team.

3. Pre-assessment Activity: (Determine students' abilities to achieve the Learner Outcome and prescribe instruction accordingly. Consider: linguistic background, academic language abilities, content knowledge, cultural and health considerations, interests and aspirations, physical development, social development, emotional development.)

Warm-up: You and your classmates believe your school isn't providing you with the classes you need to go straight to college or a vocational school. To make matters worse, all subjects are taught using Shakespearean English! You're not even allowed to speak your comfort language at all during the school day. If you don't really understand this Shakespearean English, TOO BAD! You've better figure it out. You've brought up your concerns to the school counselors and teachers. You even decide to attend a school board meeting to bring up your concerns to the board members and the public.Your concerns fall on deaf ears. *What's your next move?* 7 to 10 minutes	**<u>Rationale:</u>** To determine where students are in teamwork, talking out problems and solutions, perseverance and tenacity in the face of difficulty no matter how large or small.

Accommodations: students who struggle with writing/spelling can also draw out or use images to describe what they would do.	

4. Differentiation, Adaptation & Accommodation Strategies: (Based on the pre-assessments, modify Learning Activities based on learner characteristics to meet the needs of ELL & special needs students, highly achieving students and low achieving students)

Students will have various ways to participate. 1. Discussion with peers on what they would do. 2. Pictorial method- students draw images that relate to or tell what they would do (mid/ELL). 3. Writing everything out on their section of the dry erase mat, Chromebook or tablet (non-verbal students or extremely shy). 4. Students who grasp these concepts easily would be assigned as "strategists" for their groups (and reassigned to a different group if necessary to create balance). 5. Struggling students would be paired with a strategist.	**Rationale:** By providing students various ways to participate, I am meeting the needs of the various learning styles in my class. By pairing struggling students with more advanced students, I am creating a climate of "each one, teach one". Critical thinkers learn to teach themselves.

5. Resources: **(Identify materials needed for this lesson accounting for varying degrees of skill level)**

Dry erase markers, dry erase mats, dry erasers, Chromebook, paper and colored pencils/erasers.	**Rationale:** Students have various ways to demonstrate understanding based on skill level.

6. Learning Activities: Explicit Teacher Instruction - (Explain, Model, Demonstrate, Check for Understanding)

Explain:	**Rationale:**
"The scenario I gave you is based on real life events that occurred June 16, 1976. Who has ever heard of Apartheid? From 1948 to 1994, the country of South Africa had a structural system of racial segregation where those of British and Dutch descent were able exploit natural and human resources with the purpose of obtaining and maintaining political and economic power. This is apartheid. Under this system, all black students were required to receive instruction in a language called Afrikaans which is heavily influenced by Dutch. This law was enacted 2 years prior to the uprising because the indigenous people were not speaking this language of their oppressors. Because of this forced change, students now had to focus on learning a language instead of learning	By walking around while students are working, the teacher can observe which students have a grasp on the concept and which students are still struggling. By providing guiding questions, the teacher is providing the blue print for critical thinking. By calling on students to discuss finding a viable solution or how this made them feel, the teacher is getting the students to participate and demonstrate their understanding and assist in confidence building as there is no

the subjects. How many of you have struggled through all of our "teacher speak" because you might speak differently or speak another language at home? These students weren't having it! In April of 1976, the students decided to go on strike. They believed that if white students were being taught in their native languages, they should be as well. These middle and high schoolers-estimates say it was 10,000 to 20,000 students- organized and staged a protest on June 16, 1976. These kids were met with the full force of the police and the army. One of the first casualties was a 12-year-old freedom fighter named Hector Peterson. Here he is being carried by his friend and his sister walking with him  This photo went "viral" and put the wheels in motion to end this oppressive system. The regime's lowest estimate of those killed was 176 although some	wrong answer as long as the student makes the effort to contribute to their group.

say this number is more like 700. This commitment to problem solving, strategic planning, teamwork and never giving up even when you're faced with some major challenges (in this case, the death of a friend) changed the world. We're going to watch a quick video about the uprising https://youtu.be/comKTWEOF1c After the video, you and your group mates are going to discuss whatever resonated with you. **Check for Understanding:** ● Teacher will walk around the room to observe students working. ● Teacher will ask leading questions such as: "Do you feel like your learning needs aren't being met at school?", "What problems have you encountered in accessing your education?", "Do you think you could keep going even if there was a major roadblock or traumatic situation?", "Can you relate to the struggles of these students? If so, how?" ● Teacher will call on students to share the ideas generated as a team. 15 to 20 minutes	

7. Learning Activities: Guided Practice/ Collaborative Practice (Check for understanding and provide feedback and re-teaching)

Check for Understanding:	**Rationale:**
Essential Questions- What happens when you don't work through tough situations? These situations can be factoring equations, interpreting word problems or speaking up when you're in need of assistance? For example, what happens in class when you don't ask questions or ask for help in a way that you understand? Please share any examples you might have. *Possible Answers*- 1) You feel like you've let yourself down; 2) You might feel like you're not capable of learning because it is hard; 3) You never get anything accomplished because you fear failing or being successful; 4) You're never able to get into a good place because you doubt yourself. **Allow students to ask each other questions! Don't stop the momentum if the students are still conversing. 15 minutes	By bringing this back to something all the students can relate to, I am promoting inclusivity as even those who are struggling will be able to participate in this closing discussion. All students will understand that to get to a solution, whether it be in life, sport or math, one must have a plan, work through the hard parts and consult with others for the benefit of all.

8. Independent Practice/closing activity: (Provide practice that supports the learning outcome. *Note: Independent activities are assigned assuming that students understand the concept well enough to work on their own.)*

Check for Understanding:	**Rationale:**
Students complete an exit ticket answering three questions using complete sentences: 1. Is it empowering to know that you persevered through hardship? 2. Does teamwork really make the dream work? 3. What is the approximate percentage of those killed in the uprising? You must show your work! *Extension Activity*- Read The June 16 Soweto Youth Uprising | South African History Online (sahistory.org.za) 10 to 15 minutes	Students demonstrate understanding of this concept to work on their own. Students will use prior knowledge to calculate a percentage. Because there is no exact number of protestors or dead, the answers will vary. The purpose is to get them to work through these equations to find a feasible (not necessarily accurate) answer.

DAY 2

1. Introduction: (Identify Grade Level K12 Academic Content Standard(s), rationale, focus learner, create bridges from past learnings)

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Grades 9-12 1. CCSS, Mathematical Standard Practice: 1) **Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them**; 3) **Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others**. 2. Ethnic Studies Thematic Unit- Marginalized peoples throughout the world 3. Ubuntu Philosophy- Learning takes place only through nurturing interactions with others. 4. CASEL competencies- **Social Awareness, Relationship skills and responsible decision making.** Students will be introduced to factual student led movements in South Africa that happened through collaboration and perseverance and how these skills transfer into the classroom.	**Rationale:** To build confidence in using problem solving skills, teamwork and critical thinking skills as math requires the same skill set to learn and retain mathematical concepts. Building on the previous day's discussion, students will become active participants in the learning process by collaborating to create classroom rules, norms and procedures.

2. Learner Outcome(s)/Objective(s): (What will students learn from this lesson? How will you measure mastery of the outcome?)

Lesson 2- "Ubuntu- working together to move forward" Students will learn the meaning of the word ubuntu and how it is put into practice in families, friend groups, sporting teams, social movements and in the classroom. As a team, students will develop classroom rules and norms to facilitate an environment of respect. (Day 3 activity) ***This is an ongoing process. Mastery cannot be determined until the end of the semester which will be measured by the building of effective partnerships, self-advocacy, lack discipline entries and group projects.***	**<u>Rationale:</u>** Students will learn and/or refine skills vital to becoming critical thinkers in mathematics as well as other subjects. Students will assist peers in learning through collaborative work. Students will learn problem solving strategies for math that do not require one to be fluent in math facts. Students will learn how planning, teamwork, perseverance led to changing the world. Students will build confidence to approach independent learning after working through and finding solutions as a team.

3. Pre-assessment Activity: (Determine students' abilities to achieve the Learner Outcome and prescribe instruction accordingly. Consider: linguistic background, academic language abilities, content knowledge, cultural and health considerations, interests and aspirations, physical development, social development, emotional development.)

Warm-up: Yesterday we talked a lot about teamwork and how together, we can go far. In 10 minutes of nonstop writing until the timer goes off, I want you to describe how the Soweto Uprising can be used as a tool to motivate and or inspire young people today. 7 to 10 minutes Accommodations: A word bank will be provided on one of the classroom boards with key words and concepts related to the student movement for students who struggle with writing/spelling. A starter sentence will also be provided upon request.	**Rationale:** To provide students with a safe space to advocate for their learning needs and get them to be active participants by taking ownership in establishing the classroom environment.

4. Differentiation, Adaptation & Accommodation Strategies: (Based on the pre-assessments, modify Learning Activities based on learner characteristics to meet the needs of ELL & special needs students, highly achieving students and low achieving students)

Students will have various ways to participate. 1. Students will have a word bank provided for those struggling with finding the words. 2. All students will have an example sentence on the board to get started. Should students	**Rationale:** By providing students various ways to participate, I am meeting the needs of the various learning styles in my class.

require more, assistance with starter sentences will be provided upon requests.	By providing a word bank, I am providing supports to students who struggle with reading and writing fluency as well as comprehension.

5. Resources: **(Identify materials needed for this lesson accounting for varying degrees of skill level)**

Chromebooks, a timer, paper, pens, pencils, colored pencils, erasers and a worksheet.	**Rationale:** Students have various ways to demonstrate understanding based on skill level.

6. Learning Activities: Explicit Teacher Instruction - (Explain, Model, Demonstrate, Check for Understanding)

Explain: We are going to complete a KWL Chart. Today, we are talking about the concept of "Ubuntu" which is a philosophy of interconnectedness. In the Zulu language, it essentially means "I am because you are". We grow and progress because we work together. Zulu is the native language of the Soweto	**Rationale:** By walking around while students are working, the teacher can observe which students have a grasp on the concept and which students are still struggling.

youth. Now that you have an idea of what this means, write 4 things you **k**now about Ubuntu, what you **w**ant to know and we will close with what you've **l**earned. As long as you're writing, please consult with your group mates… practice ubuntu! **Check for Understanding:** ● Teacher will walk around the room to observe students working. ● What does ubuntu look like to you? ● Do you think ubuntu is what gave kids the confidence to fight for their rights? ● Teacher will call on students to share the ideas generated as a team. 10- 15 minutes	By encouraging peer assistance, the teacher is promoting the very essence of ubuntu.

7. Learning Activities: Guided Practice/ Collaborative Practice (Check for understanding and provide feedback and re-teaching)

Check for Understanding:	**<u>Rationale:</u>**
1. On the board, there will be a class KWL chart. Ask students to volunteer to fill out the columns of K and W. Struggling or shy students can get the assistance of a group mate. After the board activity has been	By working together and looking to each other for help, the students are practicing ubuntu.

completed, ask students to elaborate on what they want to know and to give examples (in discussion) of how ubuntu was at the center of the Soweto uprising. 2. In the discussion, explain that through ubuntu the teacher creates an environment that encourages and establishes student self-control through a process of promoting achievement and positive reinforcement for all students. Essentially, if one wins we all win. If the students are doing well, the teacher is doing well. 3. Q and A: students will ask clarifying questions to complete their independent work. 15-20 minutes	

8. Independent Practice/closing activity: (Provide practice that supports the learning outcome. ***Note: Independent activities are assigned assuming that students understand the concept well enough to work on their own.)***

Check for Understanding:	**Rationale:**
Students complete the L column independently. Struggling students will have the word bank on the board to guide them.	Students demonstrate understanding of this concept to work on their own.
Exit ticket: South African activist, Stephen Biko once said, "The African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school. So negative is the image of African society presented to him that he tends to find solace only in close identification with white society. Part of the approach in bringing about "black consciousness" has to be directed to the past, to seek to rewrite the history of the black man and to produce in it the heroes who form the core of the African background." (Biko, 1987) Based on what you know about the Soweto Uprising, ubuntu and this quote, do you think school would be better if you, your culture and your ideas were part of the establishment of school rules and policies? Do you think learning about all contributors to literature, math and science should be taught? Why or why not?	Students will use prior knowledge to calculate a percentage. Because there is no exact number of protestors or dead, the answers will vary. The purpose is to get them to work through these equations.

Extension Activity- The Soweto Uprising was a catalyst to the eventual ending of Apartheid in 1994. Since then, there have been other student led protests. Most recently the #feesmustfall movement in 2015 calling for the end of university tuition fees and the decolonization of education. Do a google search to see if this movement was successful and, in your own words, write a statement on what a decolonized education looks like.	

11. Lesson Motivation: **(Why did you develop this lesson? What activities will you add, change, modify in the future? What can be done to follow up on the learning from this lesson?)**

Upon returning to in-person instruction, after the COVID 19 pandemic, we noticed a difference in our students in their behavior, effort and motivation. Many of our students were struggling with content but even more concerning was the obvious emotional struggles they were experiencing. As recommended by the American Psychological Association, our school district conducted universal screenings via online questionnaires called Panorama Surveys. "An established method to identify students who may have difficulties with anxiety or depression is through systematic screening of the school population. For elementary school students, screening involves teachers and students

completing brief questionnaires regarding students' emotions and classroom behaviors. At the middle and high school levels, screening primarily relies on student questionnaires regarding the frequency or severity of any emotional concerns" (APA, 2020).

One survey was conducted at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the end of the 2020-2021 school year and the 2021-2022. The first survey showed that while students were disappointed at being home, they were still interested in learning. The second survey findings were far more dismal; the kids were not OK. Many students indicated feelings of helplessness, worthlessness and feeling insignificant. They had checked out of the learning process. Not to mention, most students, nationwide, were struggling with math. As a math teacher, I understand how intimidating math can be but what we were seeing was beyond the average math anxiety. By the end of the 2021-2022, the Panorama survey results were discussed at the end of the year staff collaboration and while there was a slight improvement in the social-emotional health of the students, they were still struggling academically. Our state test results were very disappointing. Especially in math. After consulting with several colleagues, site administration and input from our recent WASC visit, the school site staff decided to implement Social Emotional Learning as part of our curriculum.

As a math teacher and special educator, I see things from a very pragmatic perspective. Students were struggling with Science, analyzing literature, composing essays that required a small degree of research. In short, they were no longer able to tackle complex tasks because they were no longer using any problem solving skills. They were not thinking critically. During distance learning, there was no way to check to see who was using an app or program to generate answers. Further, it was highly suggested by our superiors that "no one fail". Students who had no problem solving skills were being promoted with inflated grades that didn't reflect what they knew or didn't know. Not to mention, students returned to school during a polarizing political climate where they don't see themselves in the curriculum and where many of their parents are still feeling the effects of unemployment due to COVID 19. Some of our students no longer buy into the promise of education. Especially when they see tuition costs rising and educated,

skilled family members still struggling financially. They lost confidence in their abilities because they feel alone.

So, with all of this in mind, I decided to create an SEL unit on empowerment and the philosophy of ubuntu as a way to climb out of this struggle together. This unit can be extended to a 3rd day to actually develop, as a team, the classroom procedures and norms. To empower the students, I will be sharing some information on the Soweto Uprising. Those freedom fighters ignited a spark that could not be contained and they did that through team work, effort, problem solving, desire and tenacity. They planned and worked to solve a problem- the exact same thing you must do when attempting to solve a complex math equation. They helped each other despite the odds against them. In the case of 12 year old Hector Peiterson, his friend (who was only 14 or 15 himself) Mbuyisa Makhubu carried him while still protesting, was the breathing embodiment of ubuntu.

My goal is that the students will become more interested in learning about South African history and its parallels to United States, more inspired to learn about their own history, the histories of marginalized people who built the United States and more importantly to learn and believe that they are important, they have what it takes to be successful and that with each other, with their tribe, with their teammates, they are unstoppable.

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