

TEACHING HISTORY IN SWAZILAND

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Textbooks are very important or useful in the teaching of history. Besides being a student companion, a textbook is utilised by the teacher starting with the teacher preparation to assessing the learners' attainment of learning objectives and goals of a certain topic in history. Beginning from planning for the lesson, textbooks play a pivotal role since they contain important aids for some lessons. For example, they contain sketches of very important specific historical areas that cannot be clearly found on a simple map. This is where I utilise the textbook as a teaching aid in the planning stage. Sketches are clearly drawn in the textbook and such have been designed to extend learner understanding, so they make the teacher's job easier in explaining specific historical facts since he keeps on making reference to his map in the textbooks.

I am a teacher who is very fortunate to have the necessary textbooks required for my learners as many schools in the country do not have textbooks, which makes the teaching of history very difficult. In as much as the textbooks are important, I also utilise other reading material like the newspaper for source analysis. I ensure that I have them in the planning and preparation stage.

All the learners have textbooks since they all utilise the prescribed textbooks which they receive from the school at the beginning of every school year. Since they all have textbooks in their possession it becomes easy for my learners to make their notes during and after the lesson. As the learners make their own notes they get to understand the content better. These textbooks have been carefully chosen since they cover most of the content in the syllabus.

To achieve the above it becomes very important to conduct a thorough research on my class which helps me to know my learners very well. This is because learners' understanding comes in different shapes and sizes, for example some learners get along very well with historical facts presented in a pictorial form, so such teaching aids provide clarity to most learners who could have found the topic in question difficult. So a teacher who has conducted research on his learners is going to have minimal problems with his history class since he knows how to present his subject matter to his different learners.

I use the history textbooks to promote learner involvement during lessons. Learners who do not have textbooks cannot participate effectively in class, so I make sure that all learners have textbooks in their possession. I promote participation by assigning the learners exercises that require them to read on the next topic. I do this because learners have a tendency to not read on their own, so such exercises compel them to read at home. If the learners have read at home, they become fully involved in the lesson which makes the lesson very lively, enjoyable and more learner-centred. So the textbook is used as a means to promote learner involvement and also raise interest and curiosity among history learners. As the learners read before coming to class they encounter problems and they cannot wait for the history period to come so that they can raise such problems and see how their colleagues and teacher are going to tackle such problems. The strategy of letting the learners read ahead acts as a motivating factor amongst the history learners, however this approach works well when all learners have the prescribed textbook so that they might not be left behind or else be demotivated.

Furthermore, I use a text book to inculcate critical thinking in my learners. For example, through reading aloud in class, though it is not frequently used, I make some pauses for thought provoking commentaries and questions that challenge the learner to test the elasticity of his or her thinking skills. This is one of the best ways to involve the learners during the lessons and to instil sympathy and empathy among the history learners as it is very fundamental for history teachers to teach content at the same time equip their learners with these abilities. These skills make history distinct from other subjects and make a history learner different from other learners in the school in the way he thinks and does things. During the reading from the textbook process therefore, when we encounter an interesting situation faced by a historical character, I ask my learners questions that would require them to put themselves in the shoes of the particular character. An example of these questions is: *If it were*

you how would you feel, what would you do? I have seen these questions are very helpful in inculcating empathy in the history learners. This therefore makes the textbook very important in the effective teaching of history.

I also use my history textbooks to inculcate tolerance amongst my learners. Tolerance is one of the very fundamental skills needed not only by the history learners but it is also needed in the community where these learners live. So I use the textbook therefore to prepare my learners for community living. The textbooks have many group work activities which require working together and listening to other people's point of view. They require working together and a lot of cooperation which also encourages good human relations. The activities bring the learners together to discuss important historical issues while covering the syllabus at the same time. It is very important to note that working in groups does not guarantee good relations. This makes it very important for me to take the initiative to ensure that all my groups are positively working together to ensure progress. It is also essential for me to ensure that each group has enough relevant textbooks. As a history teacher I find it very important to know the learners very well because that helps me in ensuring that I have formed groups that are capable of working together.

I also use the textbook to prepare for my daily lessons. The textbooks are very helpful because they have been prepared for the current syllabus, and cover most of the content that is found in the syllabus. However, that does not mean that textbooks are the only tools used for reference purposes. They are supplemented by a variety of other books since history is a subject which demands extensive reading from both the teacher and his learners. It is for such reasons therefore that the teacher has to show that he has read extensively on a particular subject. The teacher can show this by displaying mastery of his subject matter. This is achieved with the efficient use of the textbook supplemented with other historical sources. Before going to class I go through the textbook on my own and carefully utilise the content to prepare or plan how I can effectively involve my learners on that topic. I also prepare thought-provoking questions during that time. Such questions aim to develop learners' historical knowledge without being told by the teacher in black and white. It is very important for the learners to create their own knowledge, which is what is being encouraged by the current history syllabus.

Reading in class is also one of the methods I utilise however it is not frequently used. On rare occasions, I assign one of the learners to lead the class in reading on a certain historical topic. This is mostly done if I realise that my class have

not done enough reading on the assigned reading. In such cases therefore it becomes the easiest way to go through the prepared lesson. Mostly in the lower grades like Form one and two, the learners have a tendency of not paying attention to assigned work. It is during such lessons that I pause to make important emphases and clarifications. Such clarifications are usually accompanied by assessing questions to check if learners are following. This is very important to do rather than waiting for summative evaluation at the end of the lesson when much damage has already been done.

On another note, I use the textbook for evaluating purposes. The textbooks contain a lot of exercises that help me check if my objectives for the lesson have been met. This is made possible by the fact that most of the textbooks cover the objectives of the syllabus. This makes it simpler for me to build on those activities to see if my objectives for the day have been met. However it is very important as a teacher that I do not rely on those activities because sometimes they do not contain other aspects of the lesson which I want to test. This is where it becomes very important to prepare my own questions to check for understanding and test if my objectives have been met. This demands that I pay attention to the textbook exercises during the planning phase so that I ensure that they cover or meet the lesson objectives or I prepare other questions if they do not.

The most important textbooks I use to teach History are:

- Swaziland in Focus
- History Awake 1 and 2
- South Africa 1948-2000