

HISTORY TEXTBOOKS AND ACTIVE LEARNING HISTORY IN RWANDA

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I hold a Bachelor's degree in Arts with Education and have been teaching History since 2007 to Ordinary Level learners' (Levels 1, 2 and 3). In my view the Rwanda Education Board, the government institution in charge of education is encouraging what we call active learning – which is learner centred learning. Textbooks and teachers' guides are therefore written to support the History curriculum and to help and encourage teachers to provide opportunities for active learning in their classrooms. Some of the History textbooks I use in this regard are:

- New Junior Secondary History Book 1
- New Junior Secondary History Book 2
- New Junior Secondary History Book 3

These books are all written by Dorothy Ntege and Emmanuel Bamusananire.

This is a significant change from the traditional forms of classroom teaching used in Rwanda in the past and requires commitment on the part of the teacher and a supportive environment provided by the school management. Thus, textbooks and teachers' guides and other supplementary learning and teaching materials provided by Rwanda Education Board to our schools are crucially important components in achieving successful learner centred learning. History teachers, therefore, need to shift from the traditional method of instruction so as to rather play the role of a facilitator in order

to value learners' individual needs and expectations. Therefore, as a history teacher, I use textbooks in order to meet the educational policies of active learning as follows:

Annual scheme of work

At the beginning of the academic year, the annual scheme of work is established by me and handed over to the academic leader. I retain a copy on which I mark, on a weekly basis, the progress I make in my teaching. I also make and add some additional comments where necessary. The presentation of all activities to be done is recorded and the reference for each activity is mentioned. The History textbooks are very important in preparing this annual scheme of work: I consult the textbooks for each level in order to divide the content to be taught into topics and sub topics as well as giving the exact reference to be used during the teaching and learning process for each topic and sub-topic. The learners are also given a list of activities to accomplish and various textbooks are given to them as references.

Lesson planning

The scheme of work is underpinned by lesson plans for which I mostly use textbooks. They provide strong support for lesson planning and provide learning experiences with a balance of the different skills, attitudes, values and competencies over time while ensuring progression in terms of the knowledge and understanding, as set out in the syllabuses. Apart from the History textbooks that I use as outlined earlier I also use other History books in my lesson preparation. These include:

- A History of Africa Volume 2 – 1915-1995
- A History of Rwanda – Teachers' Guide for Secondary Schools
- MK European History – The Revolutionary Era 1789-1970

The textbooks (the school textbooks I use as well as the additional books) help me to set objectives at the beginning of each unit. But these textbooks also help me in the following manner in my History class:

Notes elaboration

Textbooks are important sources of content knowledge and are also useful with the elaboration on notes. I use knowledge from the textbooks to edit the lecture notes to be handed to students. At the end of the lesson, notes are given to students as a summary of the lesson. They are written on the chalkboard and students write them down in their notebooks. The textbooks are needed in order to make the summary to be given to the students. I have to choose important content for each topic in the textbooks to be given to the students as notes. Simply put the History textbooks portrayed above help me to summarise the notes.

Group discussions

Group discussions are encouraged in the classroom for some topics to facilitate the process of active learning. I give time to students to read different books in the school library thereafter we have discussions in groups. Each group stands in front of the other learners and tells us what they have discovered during their research. Other students ask them some questions and I give some observations, comments and even more explanations after the presentation of each group. For example, while studying sources of History, learners research how historical information is collected (they can use textbooks). I help them to form discussion groups and how to do a presentation of group discussions results.

Homework

The History textbooks are also useful for homework that is given to students. They use some textbooks as reference works to do their homework. However, they are also directed to the school library and read books from various authors that are similar to the books I use in my lesson preparation. This is very important for learners because while reading, they learn a lot and acquire new knowledge.

Locating some historical sites

Apart from the maps which are found at school, the textbooks are also used while locating some historical sites of importance. For example, I can ask

learners to locate some historical sites. Then, the learners are requested to consult the History textbooks in order to know where those sites are to be found. Sometimes, they are also asked to draw maps in their notebooks based on what is found in different textbooks. This helps the students to know where different historical sites are located.

Revision

At the end of each chapter in the History textbooks I use there are “study activities” that stimulate thinking and learning on the part of students. They also contain several exercises to guide the learner on how to answer questions. Some review questions are also found at the end of each chapter. I mostly use these activities for revision in the classroom for the examinations as outlined in my scheme of work.

Assessment and evaluation

History textbooks also help me in the continuous assessment and evaluation of the learners. At the end of each unit, oral questions are asked to learners before going to the next unit. I do set my own questions from the content of textbooks or use review questions that are set at the end of each chapter in a textbook. This is also done at the end of the lesson where I even use written questions that are answered by students on a piece of paper. This helps them to prepare for exercises, tests and exams.

To me, in the Rwandan context in which I teach, I use History textbooks extensively in the teaching and learning process. Not every child in my classes has a prescribed textbook. I therefore supplement the History textbooks I have with Internet sources, films and videos, visits to historical sites, museum and field studies, photographs, maps, stories and testimonies of survivors of the Genocide in my country.