

USING HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN A WELL-RESOURCED SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL

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I teach History from Grade eight to twelve thus I am privileged to see the whole high school syllabus (Curriculum and Assessment Policy - CAPS) played out in my classroom. I have an Honours degree in History and I have been teaching for nine years. I have a data projector in my classroom with a computer and internet access. I am able to not only utilise textbooks as a pedagogical tool but the internet and YouTube. This is really amazing when we have to show learners cartoons and teach visual literacy skills. You tube clips such as History with “Hip Hughes” and others like him make History interesting and fun for learners.

I would like to ask publishers to produce digital versions of their textbooks so that learners can see the pages on the screen and then have the book itself as a hard copy to take home and study from. This will increase the textbook's value for the publisher and the learner. As not all learners are auditory learners seeing the text or the image can benefit them tremendously.

The primary teaching textbook I use is Oxford *In Search of History* Grade 10, 11, 12. For grade eight and nine I use Oxford *Successful Social Sciences*. I am passionate about History and History teaching and I personally love the Oxford History books but utilise as many textbooks as I can to afford to buy on my limited budget to provide me with a broad analysis of the curriculum.

The learners have a History textbook and I explain the words in the text and we analyse the cartoons and any other images in the textbook to increase visual

literacy skills. Then the relevant activities are done and then we go through the answers that are in the teachers' guide and we have a discussion about any learner answers that may be different but not incorrect to the textbook's teachers guide answers. The questions and the answers are explained to learners so that they can learn to recognise the different types of questions that are asked about the sources.

Textbooks can be very helpful to give teachers an overview of the curriculum. Each section can be read from various textbooks to get an overview of the theme or the content. Educators have a vast quantity of knowledge to ingest and by reading through the various textbooks I gain insight into the CAPS curriculum. Learners can then receive worksheets that use the best questions from all the textbooks.

Ultimately I would like to have my own set of composite notes for each section of the syllabus, made up from many textbooks and many different other resources, such as academic books or websites. These notes could be placed on the school intranet and contain hyperlinks that then let learners access the History notes and other web pages and websites to enhance their learning experience.

The learners are allocated a textbook and it becomes their responsibility for the year. This gives them a sense of ownership and helps them to take care of something that is not their property as subsequent learners must use it. It can also help them to feel secure knowing that they can read ahead or go over things that have been done already or even complete the exemplar papers as revision for exams at the back of the textbooks. Textbooks must be handled by the learners physically and they need to bring them to school every day which can be quite onerous for a learner who has many subjects and walks to school. The general layout can be explained to learners. Contents page, various chapters and sections can be highlighted for them to familiarise themselves with the book and that term's curriculum requirements. This might seem pedantic or an exercise in futility however it will be helpful to learners who are not used to handling books. It is a similar exercise to teach English learners dictionary skills. I call this "textbook skills" especially for the screen generation who are used to handling nano electronic devices and not paper books the size of an A4 page.

Hand-outs of extra notes can be given to learners which, is also helpful so that they do not write in the textbooks or highlight words and write in the text books that have to be used for at least six or seven financial years due to

the financial constraints placed upon schools.

In a typical lesson the textbook will be used as the primary resource and the educator will explain the concepts in the textbook and make a summary of the contents of the page for learners to see, either in the form of a mind map or set of notes on the whiteboard.

The activities that are in the textbook are based on historical skills learners need so then they will do the activities and the educator will emphasise the skills required and teach those skills before they do the activity in the textbook. Thus textbooks serve two functions as they contain the information required for learners in the form of the actual text, photos, graphs, cartoons, drawings, paintings, posters and other visual images and they also have activities to keep learners busy and working on their historical skills. History is simply practising these historical skills and the textbook needs to have many different types of questions so they can practise these skills and interpret, critically analyse and engage with the textbooks and the content that is in them.

Other sources that are used in a classroom are worksheets and movies. Worksheets and films go together as film studies are always great for learners to visualise the scenery and historical places. Excursions can also be used to enhance the teaching of History and the Holocaust museum in Durban is an excellent place for Grade 11 learners to critically engage with the past.

Textbooks can be very helpful to educators for assessments. The sources can be provided by the textbooks which must then be referenced correctly and then utilised as actual assessment questions or examination questions. Sometimes the rewording of some of the questions can be made or new questions created. The teacher can use similar questions to the textbook or think of new ones that are at the correct level. Bloom's taxonomy can be a useful tool for this purpose. Some textbooks are better than others and no one textbook has it all, so for History teachers to be able to do their jobs well, they must have a variety of textbooks so learners can be learning from a variety of sources (that they can then interrogate and analyse critically) using their historical skills.

Different textbooks can be used for different sections of the curriculum.

I use the textbook that has the most variety of sources and questions for learners to be able to think critically and so that there is enough content in the text itself to be able to write an essay on that particular topic.

History textbooks can never be a "one size fits all category" and so each teacher must make the best use of the resources that their school can afford,

however not all schools can afford books so this is an issue that many schools have. Perhaps textbook publishers can donate one free copy of their textbooks to all the municipal libraries, providing that municipalities and schools have libraries that are utilised by the public and learners.

Every learner has a textbook in my school. I love books, so in my classroom textbooks are a wonderful option and I use them regularly and follow the CAPS curriculum. I try my very best to provide the learners of History with critical historical skills (I am very passionate about visual literacy) so that they can become informed citizens ready to take their place in a democratic South Africa.