

TEACHERS VOICE / HANDS-ON ARTICLES

Navigating and adapting the History curriculum as an official policy to realities on the ground in Eswatini, Waterford Kamhlaba United World College

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History is one of the most valuable subjects in the school curriculum. History plays a vital role in facilitating the political, social and economic development of Eswatini through the improvement of life skills such as empathy, tolerance, critical thinking, communication and proper decision-making. It is the responsibility of teachers to navigate the History curriculum and adapt it as an official policy to realities on the ground, thus yielding responsible citizens. This article outlines various strategies that teachers can implement to fulfil this responsibility.

According to Park (2020), there exists a profound gap between the pedagogical expectations embedded in the written curriculum and the actual intended local standards. It is my role as a teacher to bridge the gap, so as to ensure that the instructional strategies used are constructive and align with the local education policies for developing the learners. In the learning of History, there are some sensitive topics that directly contradict the reality on the ground. These include topics about the governing of people, for example, the Russian revolution. As a History teacher in Eswatini, which is a kingdom with a highly discontent population, I teach topics regarding the issue of discontent using sources from contrasting perspectives. The local education policy advocates for the use of the History subject to develop patriotic citizens; therefore, I handle such topics vigilantly. Using sources from contrasting perspectives helps develop critical thinking and empathy among the learners, thus enabling them to consider the issues from a wider perspective.

The use of pedagogies that foster Education for Sustainable Development in the curriculum and align it with the local norms and values is key in the learning of History. These are mainly pedagogies that encourage learners to become tolerant, critical thinkers

and improve their communication skills (Laurie et al: 2016). These may include the use of debates and discussions, among other techniques that enable learners to analyse issues critically. Since I am currently teaching in an international school, which happens to have a great diversity of learners (in terms of culture and race, to name a few), debates help to foster those skills among my learners. However, I always prepare my debates well in advance to ensure that the diversities in my class are considered and prepare their reading material to make the debates educational. I consider it worth mentioning that these debates always bring unity among my learners as they work as a team, despite their differences. I always ensure that my debates are based on contemporary issues, which adds value in terms of the learners' social development. This further provides a platform where learners can critique and analyse issues in the global context while at the same time protecting the local values. That, on its own, enables learners to align the content to local realities and develop an interest in the subject. In one of the lessons on nation-building strategies, I used a debate. My learners were debating the notion that "the reed dance ceremony is no longer significant in the life of the girl child in our current societies". This enabled the learners to explain the importance of the ceremony while at the same time outlining some of the loopholes. The lesson was beneficial even to the learners who had never attended the ceremony; it fostered a love for their own cultural practices and aligned the subject to the realities on the ground.

In adapting the History curriculum as an official policy in line with the local realities, I further navigate the curriculum through the incorporation of technology in the classroom, such as the use of video clips and documentaries. This helps stimulate enthusiasm and love for the subject as our learners are highly interested in technology. The use of technology can help enable the learners to lead their own learning and aligns it with international as well as local standards through the guidance of the teacher. When teaching topics such as the peace settlement, I usually share a website link of a documentary for learners to watch. It can then be aligned to the local realities by making direct comparisons. In the documentary, they learn about international heroes such as Woodrow Wilson (and about his 14 points). A lot can be applied to local realities, mainly regarding issues around peace. Some of Woodrow Wilson's points can be adopted into the classroom policy regarding peace-keeping, and in that way, learners can learn to apply those peace principles in their communities.

Furthermore, the curriculum can be navigated through the use of interactive strategies such as discussions, especially when dealing with contemporary issues. This calls for proper preparation, especially if the issues are sensitive enough to raise an argument among the learners. This is mainly because the subject History plays a significant role in developing an appreciation for the local political system and stimulates interest in participating in

politics. Consequently, preparing in advance helps put controls in place, thus catering to any issues that might threaten the local moral values and aligning the subject with the local realities. This further helps learners to develop a sense of social justice and self-efficacy as community members.

Huxham et al. (2015) mention that it is very important that the teacher interprets the instructional resources (such as worksheets) in a manner that ensures proper coverage of the learners' diverse needs. This further enables me to cater for the learning needs of my learners while meeting the curriculum standards and aligning them with the local realities through the application of local examples, which are, in turn, aligned with the lesson objectives. Worth noting is the fact that successful curriculum design and interpretation is marked by a process of dynamic interaction between teachers and their learners in order to meet the local standards as indicated by the education policy. For instance, when teaching about the local history, the teacher takes learners on an excursion to the national museum where they can find out about their own local history.

In a nutshell, History teachers play a crucial role in nation-building by navigating the curriculum and adapting it as an official policy to realities on the ground through the use of local examples. This could also be achieved through manipulation of the pedagogies so that they are aligned with the standards while meeting the needs of the learners.

References

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