

Our world, our society – Social Sciences grade 8
(Vivlia, South Africa, 2006, ISBN: 978-1-77006-444-7)
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Introduction

Textbooks are frequently considered to be important informers of content knowledge to be explored in lessons. Textbooks provide a certain structure which often forms the basis of teachers' pedagogical practices and learners' academic development in particular Learning Areas or school subjects. *Our World, Our Society* would be no exception. This Social Sciences (SS)² textbook for grade 8 learners contains the necessary information from which content knowledge of Social Sciences can be derived and explored. However, as most textbooks have their fair bit of inaccuracies, so too does *Our World, Our Society*. For the purpose of a structured critique, three main categories have been devised: the scope (which considers content, reliability and accuracy); readability (including style); and activities included in the textbook.

Scope

This textbook religiously follows topics mentioned in the *National Curriculum Statement for Social Sciences* (DoE, 2002). The content topics in the textbook are structured according to the NCS Grade 8 framework (DoE, 2002, pp.91-92). This may be useful to teachers as it provides a point of departure for their Social Sciences lessons which are in keeping with the SS policy document they use when planning lessons and assessments.

In terms of content accuracy, several flaws can be identified. The authors have included two meanings of "Revolution". Although it is necessary for learners to understand that often there are no definite meanings to words, it may

² Presently Social Sciences has become separate Learning Areas within the Continuous Assessment and Policy Statement implemented in South African schools by the Department of Basic Education in January 2012.

at the same time result in a sense of conceptual confusion. *Our World, Our Society* introduces the idea of race by identifying the “white” race; however the authors refer to the native people of Africa as Zulus. This is politically incorrect as African native people consisted of several other tribal ethnicities besides the Zulus. The authors go on to state: “African people living in South Africa”, which – to learners – may not make sense because South Africans are inevitably Africans (people native to the African continent).

Additionally not all indentured labour entailed 5 year long contracts. Instead this could be replaced with “for a specific period of time”. The title of the map on page 60 of the textbook reads: “Map shows *modern day* South Africa in the *1860s*” (own italics). This title is highly ambiguous and could foster a sense of confusion in learners understanding. Therefore it is suggested that the map reads: “Map showing independent kingdoms of South Africa in 1860 before it was colonised”. Furthermore, lobola as mentioned in the section on Industrialisation in South Africa is not explained well enough and may appear to be unclear to learners as it does not make mention of the fact that lobola was a practice among native people and not among all inhabitants of South Africa. In essence it should be made clear to learners that Mahatma Gandhi fought for the rights of racially-marginalised people in South Africa, and not for Indian people only as stated in the textbook.

Despite the excellent coverage of topics in this textbook, *Our World, Our Society* lacks in the reliability of the information it provides to learners and teachers. Ambiguity and inaccuracy of information have to be addressed for the textbook to achieve the success in learners’ conceptual and pedagogical growth.

Readability

Our World, Our Society has a substantial amount of written information as compared to other textbooks. Additionally, the written text is accompanied by the considerable use and variety of visual aids such as graphs, maps, tables and pictorial sources. This has a two-fold advantage. Firstly, it captures learners’ interest as learners are presently more visually receptive than they were in the past. Secondly, it helps learners become accustomed to data-handling skills which are greatly needed in our globalised world where problem-solving is a necessity.

Units within each module are inter-linked to each other through the introductory topic sentences at the beginning of the unit. These are beneficial to learners as it helps them reflect on the content they have covered in previous lessons and make correlations with the current topic under discussion.

There are several guidelines which serve as cognitive support to learners. Firstly, textboxes can be found on several pages throughout the textbook which provide a simplistic explanation of what is considered of importance for learners to know. Uniform Resource Locators (URLs)³ and summaries have also been included at the end of each unit. Learners are also urged to seek information concerning topics in the Grade 8 textbook from the library, the internet or by speaking to elders. Additionally assessment rubrics for activities engaged with during the unit are incorporated for learners to assess themselves.

Despite the above positive remarks on the textbook, in some instances images used in the textbook appeared unclear and blurred due to the green fill. I would assume that if learners had difficulty in identifying particulars in the images, then they are certain to find it difficult to interpret and subsequently complete the activity which required use of the sources.

The style of the textbook was generally suited to the academic level of grade 8 classes. The additional assistance provided in the book catered for learners who had enquiring minds and who were more academically-inclined than others.

Activities

Unlike other textbooks, *Our World, Our Society* does not place more emphasis on activities and resources used to engage in Social Sciences topics. Yet the activities which are included, catered for the different cognitive levels of learners. Several activities which appear in the textbook allow for integration, not only of History and Geography, but also of the languages, Life Orientation and Mathematics. Hence resulting in a holistic interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and assessment.

Moreover, additional assistance to teachers is provided in the form of a Teachers' Guide. This contains possible answers and marking rubrics to activities in the learners' book, an introduction of the Social Sciences Learning

3 Internet addresses which identify and locate files in the World Wide Web.

Area as well as work schedules and assessment rubrics which Social Sciences teachers could derive their lessons from and plan their lessons around.

Recommendations

Despite the generous use of pictorial sources, it is recommended that reference to places where an event/s occurred, be accompanied with a map. This could physically contextualise the event being discussed. Also, authors should include the sources from which images have been extracted so that should learners or teachers wish to conduct further research on that particular image, they will find it easy to locate.

Conclusion

Our World, Our Society exhibits an unbiased approach in the composition of the contents. The layout of textbook allows for ease of reading and a flow of information. The pictorial images which accompany the typed text add variation in reading and create a meaningful yet comprehensive guide for learners and teachers. There are, however, areas which need rethinking and revising. Overall, this textbook offers a reasonable point of departure in terms of the content knowledge and skills which serve as the basis for Social Sciences.