

TLM – The What, the Why and the How!

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As teachers who have been in classrooms for a close to two decades, this term Teaching Learning Materials did sound alien at the beginning. It did lead to very fundamental questions. What is a TLM? Should we use it? Do we use it at all in our teaching without actually knowing that we are using it? Is that possible? How do we use it if we are given one? Are we resistant to the idea of being handed a material which we do not know how to use or do not want to use? There could be a lot more such questions and what we will be doing here is to present our understanding of such materials in Science and Social Science - some that we have used and some that we have watched others do so effectively

What would constitute a TLM for a teacher who teaches mostly higher secondary classes and maybe a couple of secondary classes? It would be anything that would help to put across a concept in Science/Social Science such that the students are able to comprehend it, analyse it, draw inferences, apply it and also hopefully draw connects with other related concepts. Would it be too ambitious to expect that the material nudges the student to think beyond what is being discussed and probably provide a path to further exploration? Probably not, is what we would like to say. So, it would be a material that would support us in achieving the objectives designed while teaching a certain concept. We deliberately use the word 'support' as that is what it is to us as teachers. It would help to illustrate the concept being discussed and also to reinforce any idea being presented. Our classrooms have children with varying capacities of comprehension – some are visual learners and other could be auditory ones. So the material used should aid the pedagogy that is used by the teacher in her classroom and also to nurture the student's understanding of the concept. Another very important aspect in the use of the materials should be about the learning experiences that it provides to the learner which in turn would reflect in the learning outcomes of the class as a whole.

Let us now consider a novice teacher and her preparation for classes – what does she have with her as a starting material – one would think the unanimous answer would be: the textbook. This takes us back to a discussion with a dear colleague and co-teacher and the role that a textbook had to play in her classroom. She would say :

- a) it is a major part of the teacher's 'armoury' with which she enters a classroom - meaning it provides her with a certain level of confidence – it's a tool that she relies on
- b) it is also the one 'common connect' that she has with her students
- c) with its presence she can be on the 'same page' as her student
- d) it is a great leveller
- e) it provides a framework for the prospective pedagogy to be used in the classroom

To be very honest, the textbook was the very first TLM that was provided in the early teaching years and it did provide a direction towards the syllabus of the subject as that was not a document that had an easy access. So is a textbook 'the TLM' or is it a part of the many materials that are available to be used?

Let us see what the National Curriculum Framework 2005, Position Paper National Focus Group on Curriculum, Syllabus and Textbooks has to say about TLM:

'What is needed is not a single textbook but a package of teaching learning material that could be used to engage the child in active learning. The textbook thus becomes a part of this package and not the only teaching learning material'.

Having spoken a little bit about *what* could be a TLM, let us see why one would need it. Earlier we have stated its role in the classroom teaching learning process. Is it necessary at all to use a material in the classroom? What would categorise as a material? Does it need to be a readymade packaged item or can it be as simple and yet very effective as board and chalk? As a teacher who

taught Chemistry for a decade and half, without a textbook, the preparation for the class was based on the detailed syllabus available as reference. So the very primary material, the textbook was not available. This led to creating a very basic kind of material which were detailed notes and even more detailed unit plans. Some other materials which made their way in were flash cards and worksheets (on numbers, balancing equations, filling in steps of processes etc). In this case the materials created were based on their requirement to fulfil a certain kind learning objective and also the pedagogy used (as mentioned earlier).

As to how a material finds its way into the classroom, there could be different views. For a motivated and committed teacher a material is not a showpiece but something that adds to her already existing planned pedagogy. It is something that makes her classroom teaching effective, keeps her students engaged and supports learning. Hence it is extremely important to define the purpose of the material being used for the process of teaching and learning. Let us consider an example. The Modern Periodic Table is a very important part of school Chemistry. Most textbooks and many classrooms have a model of this. This could be a resource that can be used throughout the year whenever elements are referred to and not just when the topic of classification of elements is being taught. It is about discovering an element in the table, its position, its properties and the implications of the position of the element. Another example would be the use of the science lab – a non-existent entity in many schools – a lab with basic materials would be a wholesome teaching learning material for many concepts. Hence, the purposeful use of a material is in the hands of the teacher, her vision of choosing the appropriate material and its use in her classroom.

Animating textbooks in the Social Science classroom

Going back to our social science classes among the other things which comes to our mind is the textbooks where the teacher would ask the students to read paragraph by paragraph and complete the chapter, underline the text, mark the answers and during the examination reproduce in the same way. On the other hand remembering my English teacher who could use the textbook to the maximum. At the end of the term our books would have pencil marks, annotations, summarising, paraphrasing and identifying simile, metaphor, a

pun, sonnet and so on. It was just like traversing the whole textbook with joy, excitement and cognitive enrichment. So till now I was mentioning the textbooks which were designed 30- 40 years back. A teacher had the capacity to make that textbook lively and interactive even then. A textbook which would speak to us, interact with us and talk to us. But why then the textbooks are considered to be boring or even for that matter not considered to be a useful TLM.

Therefore the larger question is how a textbook does becomes a useful TLM. The experience of teaching Social Science post 2005 is a significantly different experience for the teachers. Taking an example from the History textbook from the theme Everyday Life, Culture and Politics introduces us to the chapter – history and sports. In this chapter several primary and the secondary sources have been used. Through the textbook the teacher helps to bring multiple perspectives in the class and also the students are introduced to the original writing. It also helps to develop the skills among the students to interpret and synthesise various sources.

Box 1 Source A

Caste and cricket Palwankar Baloo was born in Poona in 1875. Born at a time when Indians weren't allowed to play Test cricket, he was the greatest Indian slow bowler of his time. He played for the Hindus in the Quadrangular, the major cricket tournament of the colonial period. Despite being their greatest player he was never made captain of the Hindus because he was born a Dalit and upper-caste selectors discriminated against him. But his younger brother, Vithal, a batsman did become captain of the Hindus in 1923 and led the team to a famous victory against the Europeans. Writing to a newspaper a cricket fan made a connection between the Hindus' victory and Gandhiji's war on 'untouch-ability': 'The Hindus' appointing Mr Vithal, brother of Mr Baloo – premier bowler of India – who is a member of the Untouchable Class to captain the Hindu team. The moral that can be safely drawn from the Hindus' magnificent victory is that removal of Untouchability would lead to swaraj – which is the prophecy of the Mahatma.' A Corner of a Foreign Field by Ramchandra Guha

Audio-visuals

With the advancement in technology the latest in the line of TLM is the audio-visual. The usage of this TLM should be meaningful and relevant, otherwise it can just become a tool for entertainment. In order to run a movie, documentary and audio there should be specific purpose in mind of the teacher. It should be age appropriate and pertinent to the theme. Some kind of preparedness is required both at the end of the teacher as well as the students before the use of the audio- visuals. This preparedness includes what they will be watching and hearing and its connection to the chapter. A graphic organiser with the list of questions to be answered by the students is one way to make them active rather than a passive viewer.

But a word of caution - overuse of audio – visuals will turn the students into passive watchers who will look for leisure time in the classroom. Let us share an instance .The teacher has just completed a chapter on ‘Hitler and the rise of Nazism’ and she has promised to show them a movie *The Pianist*. After watching the movie the students go back to their classes and the next day the teacher starts a new lesson. So in this particular scenario the teacher has used the audio –visual as the TLM. Was the students’ learning experience enhanced by it? Maybe yes or maybe no. At times the pressure on the teacher by the Management and peers in high end schools forces the teacher to use technology just for the sake of making her class appear more trendy and to enhance the prestige of the class.

Today’s News, Tomorrow’s History: Newsprint and the Cartoon



The incorporation of a wide range and variety of cartoons in social science books has made the text powerful and rich. The nature of the political cartoons are such that it speaks of something which is contemporary. So now, do we look it only as a sketch with funny features to make us laugh and smile or it conveys much more than that? As quoted in the Social and political life textbook one should not merely **see** the images and turn the pages but one is expected to **read** the images as very often politics is carried out not through words but images. It can be also used to hone the skills of observing, interpreting, analysing and reflecting visuals.

News clippings as teaching-learning material

A very interesting way to generate interest among the students is bringing newspapers to the classroom. It is also in one way to initiate the students into reading newspapers. It can be used for knowing something from the past to something which is contemporary. It brings in a lot of rich and varied discussion in the classroom and helps to build a connection with the classroom and the outer world and make meaning to the topic which is taught. The catch here can be that we need to look at two or three newspapers together so that we can see that how one news can be presented in different ways.

To conclude it is not the inherent **quality of a material** which makes a TLM, **rather the use of the material** for teaching and learning in the classroom makes it a TLM. So considering the textbooks as something which has not earned well reputation can become an effective teaching -learning material and something like models, charts, video clippings may refuse to ignite any meaningful learning in the classroom.

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