

Bridging Texts and Experience - Of Mediated Knowledge and Use of Media as a Pedagogic Tool in School Education

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My first memory of a television or ‘titim’ as I would call it as a toddler was that of a wooden box that had to be opened like a sliding wardrobe and stories my mother still regales me with of how I had to be equally weaned off it. Later as my brother and I were growing up, viewing the ‘idiot box’ had to be controlled and regimented by our parents and the manner in which they set good examples by either not watching television or restricting themselves to only particular kinds of ‘good’ programmes had to be followed. Some thirty-five odd years down the road, my mother has taken a complete U-turn from my childhood days and now rather proudly talks of her grandson who learnt to switch on the CPU of a desktop computer much before he could either walk or talk.

What is striking is the expeditious march of media – firstly, in terms of the various technologies from its humble beginnings as the printed word, then the print media to television and radio, the audio-visual media and more recently, the internet and social networking sites. Secondly, in terms of its intrusion and presence in our everyday lives, be it our morning newspaper, hours spent watching television, listening to the FM radio while going to work, the computer being a constant



presence at work or our smart-phones that are almost an extension of ourselves, giving us company for every waking moment of our lives. Finally, there is our acceptance and the change in outlook towards different forms of media.

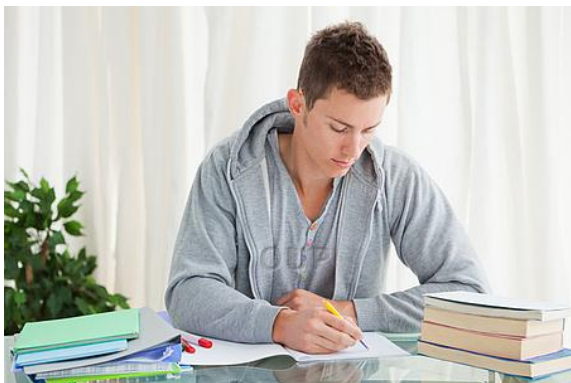
Two very recent advertisements clearly highlight the shift in the manner we view media now and want to use it. On one hand, the *Independence Day* special commercial released by **IDEA cellular** having the *Azaadi* anthem “*Hum nahi banenge ullu aaj se*” speaks of the internet as freeing people from being made ‘idiots’ or fooled easily. On the other hand, the **Tata Sky Active Learning** commercial shows a young boy conducting a scientific experiment that he learnt from watching television. This underlines the point that media and its different forms can be used positively in learning and knowledge creation, moving away from the earlier perceptions of it having a negative impact on young minds. The question remains how and why we need to use media as a tool of teaching, especially in school education.



The answer lies in the wealth of information that media generates on one hand and on the other, the access it creates to this world of information that goes much beyond the limitations of school text books. A young mind is generally curious, having multiple questions and wanting to know more, so media exposure enables them to think, frame questions, explore and look for answers. Many studies conducted in the West, e.g. the *Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2000* bears testimony to the fact that differential access to information, its utilization and receptiveness produces the digital divide. This in turn deepens disparities between affluent and disadvantaged schools making a new class of people, that of digital haves and have-

nots with the latter being disadvantaged in relation to the former. The ***Hole in the Wall*** experiment initiated by *Dr Sugata Mitra*, an educationist and scientist in 1999 in a slum in Kalkaji, New Delhi, is a case in point where computers with internet facilities were installed for slum children. It was observed that the children not only learnt how to operate the computers and use internet, they also accessed information to acquire basic knowledge about subjects like mathematics and science. For more details, see <http://www.hole-in-the-wall.com/>.

Academics and teaching techniques in schools, whether it is social sciences or the humanities, tend to focus on and are limited to the written text. Reading more often than not is considered the '**only**' way of acquiring knowledge. The question that becomes pertinent here - *is reading the sole mode of acquiring knowledge? Aren't there other modes through which we can acquire knowledge?* Often these modes are hierarchized where reading is emphasized over others. The different modes and methods undergo an '*othering*' process which is commonly perceived as oppositional to reading, and at the same time, undermining its supremacy and relevance to acquiring knowledge. But the truth is that the use of different modes and methods of gaining knowledge not only opens up newer arenas of learning, these are also complementary to 'reading' methods as well.



Herein lies the importance of media and media-aided tools of teaching that opens up a student's arena of learning at a very early age. Additionally it brings within its folds new forms of knowledge and literacies in this digital age. Thus, a photograph, a film, a song, a news item, a television serial, a blog page, computer games and diverse forms of popular culture can all be part of the student's learning process beyond the textbooks at school. In other words, using different forms of media enables the student to visualize, relate and understand better.

For example, as a student of Geography, I knew or rather had the textual knowledge of the phenomena of earthquake or a tsunami and that when measurement on the Richter scale was high, it indicated the magnitude of the earthquake and its ability to



destroy and devastate human life and property. I also knew about tremors and aftershocks, the ground deformities, ruptures and fissures on the surface of the earth post an earthquake, but it was only after I saw and experienced the 2001 Bhuj earthquake was I able to better relate and internalize the knowledge that I had already. One cannot have personal experiences of what is being taught in a classroom situation but can definitely experience indirectly or as a third party through media.

Another parallel example would be the 2004 Tsunami that struck the coastal regions bordering the Indian Ocean affecting Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India and was considered one of the deadliest natural disasters in the documented history of mankind. In India it primarily damaged the south-eastern coast and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The photographs in media, the video footages on Youtube, and animated representations of the undersea tectonic movements created vivid imageries of the Tsunami. These visual representations of the actual event made it possible for most of us to see and experience the devastation, albeit indirectly, to understand the phenomena of Tsunami.



Though most of us had rudimentary knowledge of a Tsunami, the experience of seeing the real life images made it possible for us to connect Tsunami with undersea seismic activity, formation of huge waves and the destruction it was capable of making. Interestingly, at this juncture, media reports started pouring in about how the five indigenous tribes of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands— the *Jarawas*, *Onges*, *Shompens*, *Sentinelese* and the *Great Andamanese* had survived the destruction using native warning signals and had moved towards the interior and to higher grounds. These warning signals were developed from oral traditions and simple observations of nature. This further reiterates the fact that acts of seeing and experiencing things help in internalizing and using knowledge. It must be noted here that the information and imageries produced by media can be used across various disciplines, from humanities to social sciences and the sciences. In many ways it also highlights the inter-connectedness of the disciplines and the collective knowledge that they produce, thereby encouraging a holistic, interdisciplinary approach towards the entire learning process.

Introducing media and media-aided tools to students enables them to see and experience beyond the four walls of their classroom and relate to the texts they are reading. Thus media broadens the arena of experience and the knowledge gathered and learnt. It also employs multiple and varied forms of information and knowledge that enables the student to imagine, visualize and subsequently adapt to what is being taught in the textbooks. This makes reading of textbooks more relevant as the students are able to relate this knowledge practically to their experiences. Thus media forms the interface between knowledge acquired through textbooks and that acquired through real world experiences, making the former much

more relevant and applicable in real life situations.



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Lesson Plan on Use of Media as a Pedagogic Tool in School Education

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Aims and Objectives

- To connect and critically analyze classroom learning with real world situations
- To make students aware of newer areas of learning beyond text books
- To incorporate different modes and methods of learning, particularly everyday experiences

I. Using Films

The film *Bee Movie* may be shown to groups of students above the age of 12. They may also be asked to see the film beforehand.

Age of students: 12 years and above

Time allotted: Discussions of about 30 minutes

Learning outcomes: Through discussions of the storyline of the film, students will try to analyze, evaluate and discover relationships between man and nature.

They may also have group discussions and presentations on the following themes:

- Symbiotic relationship between man and nature
- Food chain
- Workers' rights, protests and ethics (this is for students in the age group of 15 years and above)

On similar lines, animated films like *A Bug's Life*, *Open Season*, *Madagascar*, *Ice Age*, *Over the Hedge*, *Finding Nemo*, *Flushed Away*, *Horton Hears a Who!*, etc. can be discussed to understand various themes like relationship between man and environment, climate change and human impact on the environment.



Films can be shown for discussions on a wide range of topics from India's colonial history – *Mangal Pandey* and *Lagaan*, to partition– *Garam Hawa*, *Gadaar: Ek Prem Katha*, *Pinjar*; on city life– *Mahanagar*, *Life in a Metro*, *Shanghai*; depictions of classical literature can also be explored through films like *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, *Haider*, etc.

II. Using Computer Games

The computer game *Settler of Catans* may be played amongst groups of 3-4 students.

Age of students: 10 years and above

Time allotted: 45-60 minutes approximately

Learning outcomes: Through the game, students learn how settlements and cities evolve over time and space.

Specific themes of discussion through this game may be:

- Use of resources
- Trading of these resources and building of infrastructure
- Role of economy in city development

[Alternatively *Settlement Colossus – Epic Game* and *Minecraft* may be used to initiate similar discussions.]



Online educational softwares with a graphical programming interface for 3D games and/or science simulation models like *StarLogo Nova*, interactive online games like *Geology Explorer: Planet Oit Information*, *Virtual Cell* may be used.

III. Using Songs

Age of Students: 14 years and above

Time allotted: 30 minutes

Learning outcomes: The following song from Jharkhand may be used to initiate discussions on understanding gender relations in a tribal society.

Song:

“As long as I lived in your house O father

Like a peacock feather it looked!

As long as I lived in your house O father

Like a peacock feather it looked!

If you let me be married and go away

The house will become empty!

If you let me be married and go away

The house will become empty.”

Specific themes of discussion may be as follows:

- Status of women in tribal societies
- Comparison between the status of women in tribal and non-tribal societies

Source: ***Tribal songs of Jharkhand*** by Bubu Imam, <http://www.vayavya.in/bulu-imam.html>.



Similarly, item songs in Hindi films can be analyzed to understand the wrong depiction of women in our society and relevant gender education topics can be discussed. One can also discuss the lyrics of the song “*Do deewane is sahar mein*” from the film *Gharonda* as it expresses the everyday struggles of living in a city.

IV. Using Advertisements

Students may be asked to gather images of the popular *Amul* advertisements and make presentations on the associated issues or topics.

Age of students: 13 years and above

Time allotted: 30 minutes

Learning outcomes: How advertisements reflect key events in contemporary Indian society and how they are being represented in the public sphere.

Specific themes of discussion may be as follows:

- Identification of key events in our society
- The politics in the identification process
- The politics of public representations

Similarly, the portrayal of gender roles in advertisements focusing on specific products can be discussed and compared. For example, household related products like *washing powder*, *household equipment*, *cosmetics*, etc. are predominantly women-centric, whereas men advertise power props and gadgets like *cars*, *bikes* and *phones*, etc.



V. Using Comic Books

Students may be asked to bring *Amar Chitra Katha* comics covering different themes like mythology, Indian classics, Jataka tales, and historical figures. Then they may be asked to narrate the stories, and work on pair/group projects based on them.

Age of students: 7 years and above

Time allotted: 30 minutes

Students of higher classes may be asked to discuss the following themes – Indian traditions, values and beliefs, different forms of history, starting from oral traditions to formal documented history of present times.



Other themes that may be discussed through comics are: thoughts on European history through *Asterix*; *Archies* and the depiction of urban youth; articulation of moral values and representations of good and evil through *Marvel* comics and their many superhero characters like *Spiderman*, *Iron Man*, *Ghost Rider*, *Captain America*, *Hulk*, etc.

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Words Section



Hypermedia (noun)

Meaning

- The art of knotting string in patterns to make decorative articles. It is an elaborately patterned lacelike webbing made of hand-knotted cord, yarn, or the like, and used for wall decorations, hanging baskets, garments, accessories, etc. (*Oxforddictionaries.com*)

Origin (and additional information) ~ The term's first known use was in mid-19th century: it is a French word, derived from Turkish *makrama* meaning *tablecloth* or *towel*, which in turn was derived from Arabic *miqrama* meaning *bedspread*.

Macramé's primary knots are the square knot and forms of "hitching": *full hitch* and *double half hitches*. **Cavandoli macramé** is a variety of macramé used to form geometric patterns and free-form patterns like weaving. One of the earliest recorded uses of macramé style knots as decoration appeared in the carvings of the **Babylonians** and **Assyrians**. Fringe-like plaiting and braiding adorned the costumes of the time and were captured in their stone statuary. Macramé was a specialty of Genoa, where, in the 19th century, towels decorated with knotted cord were popular. Its roots were in a 16th-century technique of knotting lace known as *punto a groppo*. Macramé traveled from North Africa, with the **Moors** during their conquests, to Spain, and as a result of this conquest it spread, firstly to France, and then throughout Europe. It was introduced into England at the court of **Mary II** in the late 17th century. Queen Mary taught the art of macramé to her ladies-in-waiting.

Sailors made macramé objects in off hours while at sea, and sold or bartered them when they landed, thus spreading the art to places like China and the New World. Nineteenth-century British and American sailors made hammocks, bell fringes and belts from macramé.

Though the craze for macramé faded slowly, it regained popularity during the 1970s as a means to make wall hangings, articles of clothing, bedspreads, small jeans shorts, tablecloths, draperies, plant hangers and other furnishings. By the early 1980s macramé had again begun to fall out of fashion as a decoration trend.

Words Section

Macramé jewellery has become popular among the American neo-hippie and grunge crowd, starting in the early 1970s. Using mainly square knots and granny knots, this jewellery often features handmade glass beads and natural elements such as bone and shell. Necklaces, anklets and bracelets have become popular forms of macramé jewellery, along with leather and fabric belts. Materials used in macramé include cords made of *cotton twine, linen, hemp, jute, leather* or *yarn*.

Usage ~

- i. *The exhibition featured bobbin lace, patchwork and quilting, cross stitch, canvas work embroidery, macramé, and even miniature furniture.*
- ii. *Women in rural areas are well known for their macramé hammocks and bags.*
- iii. *The rustic chair and stools, the country-style ceramic pig cookie-jar on the counter, and the macramé shade over the table— all contribute to a feeling of casual comfort.*