

A Handbook for Teachers

It is a strong belief in the organization, that the idea of a "born teacher" is a myth. In consequence, teaching is viewed as an art and a science composed of certain skills and a mastery of these skills can make a good teacher. In keeping with this view, VERS developed a handbook for the teachers, which contains (a) practical tips for imparting a lesson, (b) a basic understanding of the needs and wants of childhood (child psychology) as well as (c) classroom transaction inputs for various subjects. These are seen as that a mode of consistent and comprehensive teacher development.

Some key areas, discussed in the handbook are given below briefly-

1. A Good Classroom

The handbook begins by discussing the idea of a good classroom as opposed to a not-so-good classroom. The former has a democratic teacher, emphasis on context and encouragement to creativity and innovation. The latter in turn has an authoritarian teacher, emphasis on content and encouragement to rote learning. The learning process in these two classrooms is therefore also very different. In the democratic classroom, the process of learning is experiential (it is through the creation of learning situations and actual "doing" that learning takes place), while in the authoritarian classroom the process of learning is textual (the text book content is the only source of information).

2. Introducing a Lesson-

An important part of the classroom pedagogy which is often the most neglected one is the introduction of a lesson. The Handbook lays stress on this part of the classroom transaction, saying that if the lesson is introduced well, there is genuine interest, motivation and curiosity generated in the children, who will listen, follow and participate in the lesson throughout.

If for instance, the lesson for the day is on "volcanoes", a teacher who begins by saying "Today I will teach you about volcanoes. Do you know anything about volcanoes?" loses the class immediately by the opening remark, which builds up resistance in the learner's mind. In alternate, the handbook suggests-

a) Starting the lesson with an interesting analogy or example

- b) Starting with a story (in this case the story of the volcanic eruptions of the Mount Vesuvius could be told)
- c) Starting with a role play or a dramatization of the topic or issue to be studied
- d) Starting with a demonstration
- e) Starting by using an audio visual aid (in this case some real life volcanic eruptions captured on camera as a slide show or a motion picture can be shown)
- f) Starting by using a chart prepared prior to the lesson (a chart with pictures of mountains, both dormant and volcanic can be shown)

3. The Art of Questioning

The handbook also shows how questions play a very significant and critical role in the classroom transaction. Questions can keep a class active and alert. However, questioning is an art and good questions can stimulate children to think and keep them attentive. The questions need to be pertinent, precise, grammatically correct, and unambiguous, to the level of the student and importantly, put across to the whole class. Responses also are important in that it should not be given in a chorus, the responses should be in complete sentences, should be audible and understandable to the whole class. In case of an incorrect response, the child should in no condition be ridiculed or scolded (this will prevent/reduce her chances of responding in future out of fear and hesitation). Further, questioning should not be the prerogative of the teacher alone, and the learners should also be encouraged and free to ask questions. Further, students should be encouraged to ask provocative questions as it promotes original thinking. Questions from the students also give the teacher an insight of the kind of problems faced by the learners.

4. Importance of Speech and Expression

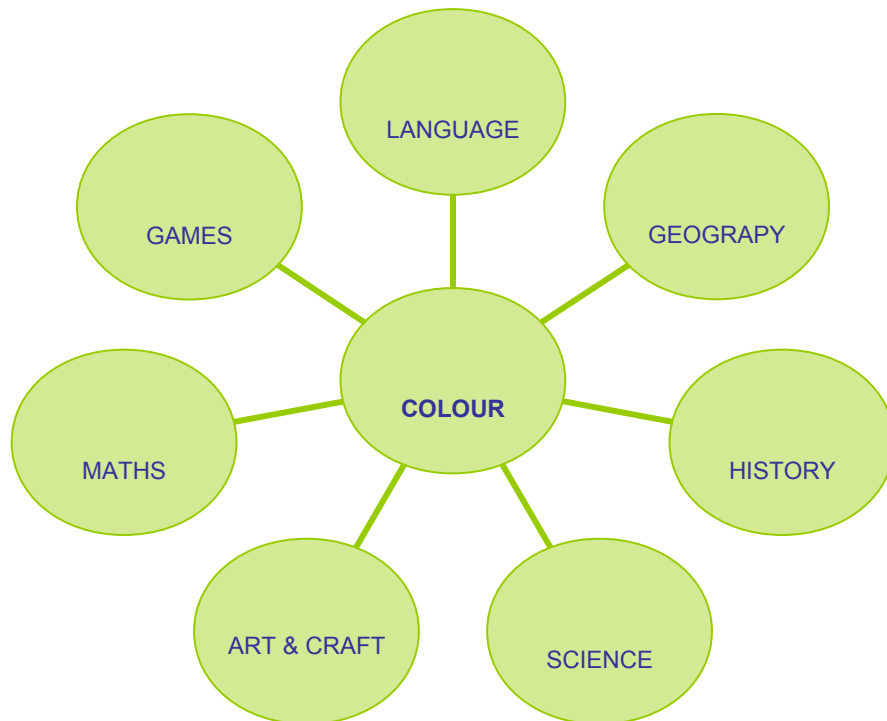
The handbook takes an interesting view on teaching. Teaching is seen as analogous to acting, with the teacher as an actor. The teacher has to hold the attention of the pupils in much the same way as an actor holds the attention of her audience. The actor also seldom turns her back towards the audience, has to speak coherently, audibly with frequent voice modulation, maintains eye contact with the audience and uses a lot of expressions. All this hold true for the teacher too. For instance, how would an audience react if the actor delivers her part in a static manner, seated on a chair, without any voice modulation or expression on her face? Very often teachers do just that- simply read out a chapter

from the textbook in a flat, even tone without any gestures and expressions and expect the children to be attentive and alert.

If this analogy is kept in mind, the performance of the teacher improves instantly as, while teaching a lesson she will keep drawing parallels between herself and an actor and the children and an audience, and thus deliver better.

5. Theme Teaching

Our schools have a certain curriculum and syllabus to follow. It deals with all aspects of our lives in relation to our environment, its history, its politics and its relation to the world and to the universe. This curriculum is divided into subjects and each subject is labeled and made into a water tight compartment. In compartmentalizing the world and the universe, we can no doubt study it in more detail. Yet, these subjects in reality are interlinked to each other naturally. Just like if we partition a room, it is difficult to see what lies on the other side, similarly, by compartmentalizing subjects, we often lose sight of the whole and its interlinkages. Sometimes, thus, it is important to break down these partitions and take an overall view of the whole, which act to open up our minds to newer and more interesting ways of teaching. Theme teaching is one such method of approaching the syllabus, whereby a teacher can freely leap over the fences that divide history, geography, science and literature. For instance, one can choose the theme of "colour". It can be interlinked as represented -



Colour can be linked to the different subjects through the following means, for instance-

Colour and Language- The children could be asked to think of words that describe and bring out certain properties of colours- e.g. electric blue, midnight black, raven black, snowy white, navy blue, baby pink, sky blue, powder blue and so on. The symbolic uses of different colours can also be discussed, e.g. red for danger and stop, white for peace, black for sorrow or mourning

Colour and Geography- The colours of different soil types can be discussed leading to a discussion on the properties of such soil e.g. red soil, black soil, where it is found and what crops they yield, what mineral causes the colour in them etc.

Colour and Science- A discussion can be held on colours in nature- what and why questions can follow- why is the sky blue, what is the colour of the leaf – why is leaf green, what makes clouds grey etc. Here a question on the green colour of the leaf can lead to further discussions on chlorophyll and experiments on photosynthesis.

Colour Games- Colours in daily life can be discussed leading to a fun filled colour exhibition where groups could be formed and given a colour and they would make an exhibition of all things in their daily lives of that particular colour. E.g. white group could exhibit- rice, flour, cotton, milk and so on.

The possibilities of the theme teaching method are endless when rhymes, songs, games, dramas, slide shows, experiment and Excursions are organized. However, this method has a problem. Because the flexibility is so great, it is difficult to use this method in daily teaching, but it does help to give a better picture of the curriculum and interlinkages between the subjects and hence removes boredom

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well as giving both the teacher and the student space to breathe while learning. It is thus, better to avoid elaborate planning and abstract themes. It is more prudent then to choose themes like forests, deserts, water or paper, than concepts such as time or market.

6. Story telling as a Teaching tool-

Stories bring about a change in the usual routine classroom, it can be used to encourage children to think creatively by asking them to complete a half story, it can also be used to enhance, the listening and understanding capabilities of children through story telling sessions- which also improve their vocabulary and orient them towards literature. Stories if used correctly can also be used to teach various curricular topics in subjects of health, history, geography and even science, without being didactic. An example is given below-the subject here is Health (Clean Habits)

Miku's Friends

Miku feels quite grown up now. Naturally! After all, he is ten years and four months old! He doesn't like being treated like a baby anymore. Whoever heard of a ten year four month old baby! So he really dislikes being asked by his Grandmother "Miku, have you brushed your teeth?"

Much worse is when she insists on brushing his hair before he leaves for school. Why doesn't she brush Father's hair when he goes out to work?, he wonders angrily! It's a pity that Miku can't even go to bed in peace. "Son", it's his Father calling this time, "Did you brush your teeth before going to bed?"

"No, of course I didn't", Miku said to himself. Who would? The toothpaste has such a strong spicy taste, it burns his mouth! Terrible! Miku just hates it!

The other thing that Miku absolutely hates is...you've guessed it...taking a bath! The water almost bites his skin, cold, horrid water! He hates the shivering feeling that comes over him when he takes a bath. But nobody understood that, he thought ruefully.

Now, the next day was a Sunday. So, no bathing, no brushing, no combing! Peace at last! Miku could do just as he liked the whole day!

Miku was so excited, that he woke up early in the morning. He was about to step into the washroom when he heard some excited voices inside. He wondered who it could be at this hour and strained his ears to hear.

"Oh, what a dirty creature our Miku is!"

Miku couldn't believe it. It was the voice of the toothpaste!

"You can say that again", now it was his comb talking. "I hate to be pulled and dragged through his dirty, unruly mop of hair! That ragamuffin ...must be rolling on the roads for hours!"

"The boy doesn't even know how to hold me...and I've heard his mother tell him a hundred times to use me before eating his breakfast! But does he listen? He must be deaf! He is so often at the breakfast table without cleaning his teeth. I guess he doesn't know what a toothache feels like. What the cavities must be doing to his teeth. It won't be long before he has one!" That was the opinion of the toothpaste.

Miss Soap was the most forgiving. She added in a gentle voice, "Boys will be boys!"

"You pamper and spoil him!" remarked the cream jar. "The other day only, he filled your case with water for his soap bubbles. See how your thinning! And how he lied to his mother! 'I've been using it to wash my hands often!', - bah! Have you ever seen him using you or even me on his body? Wait till his skin soils and dries up! He'll be using me all the time then."

Miku's throat went dry with fear as he heard his toothpaste, soap, toothbrush and cream jar talk about cracked skin, toothache and smelly breath...

"No one will talk to him then," said the Toothpaste. "Who wants to talk to a boy with bad breath?"

"And who wants to play with a boy who has dirt under his fingernail? I wouldn't!" said Miss Soap.

Miku suddenly had a picture of himself. Dirty, yellow teeth, hair crawling with lice, his skin cracked, and his hands caked with mud...God! How ugly he looked! Nobody wanted to play with him, talk to him, enter his room, and not even fight with him. Nobody was his friend anymore. How fortunate he was to have woken up early today! That's how he learned all these important things. Yet to think what the toothpaste, brush, comb and other thought of him was bad enough.

A much ashamed Miku, tip toed back to his bed and sat there quietly for a long time. Then he went back to the washroom once more. Miku looked at the shelf. The cream and the toothpaste were lying without their covers, the toothbrush had frayed. The sad little soap was lying in one corner. Miku gently arranged them one by one.

If you look at Miku's room now, you will find it absolutely spick-and-span. Miku himself is very clean too- clean teeth, well combed, shiny hair, smooth skin and clean nails. He has just one more thing left to do- wake up very early another morning and listen to the toothpaste, brush, soap and others talk. Surely, they will have good things to say about Miku this time!

7. The Use of Charts in a Classroom-

While there is nothing novel about using chart in a classroom today, a deeper look into the making and utility of charts is given in the handbook, saying that for better learning while, hearing is better than reading, viewing is even better than hearing. The impact of a visual aid thus is the maximum and needs to be used effectively.

A chart facilitates reading writing and hearing all at one time. If a teacher while talking, refers to a chart, then the learner has a triple channel registration as she a) listens to the teacher b) sees the pictures and c) reads the written matter in the chart simultaneously. Hereafter, the chart, as if, speaks to the learner every time she looks at it. A process of revision thus goes on.

An interesting chart based activity, in the handbook is given below-

Chart Based Activity

One can use charts in various ways for exercise and revision. For instance-

On a broad chart, draw a scenery on one half and stick a few pockets on the other. From an assortment of words written on small slips, the learner will select the ones associated with the scenery and keep them in the adjoining pockets. Say for instance, the scenery drawn is of a rainy day. The slips will then need to be having words like raincoat, water logging, umbrella, clouds, lightening, thunder, paper boats and so on, jumbled together with disassociated words like spoon, cable, bag, sweat and so on. The child in the process of selection and matching words to the scene, will get her conception of rainy season cleared on the one hand and will also expand her vocabulary on the other.

The same chart can be used for other activities as well. There can be a counting exercise with number slips instead of word slips. Slips can have sentences instead of words for an extended language activity and so on.

These are, in short, some of the outlined areas of the teacher's handbook. The handbook is a useful tool as it is an area of consistent teacher education. It is something that the teachers find useful in terms of in service development, as it gives them opportunities to innovate and grow.

