

Learning Constitutional Values Through Activities

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In a democracy, the most exacting and challenging job of a citizen is citizenship. This is so because a citizen is responsible for selecting the government and to use this right, the individual must be capable of decision-making. Education plays a pivotal role to develop this competence by helping us develop our ability to think clearly and grasp new ideas.

An ideal and rational public discourse requires the interest of all citizens, the availability of relevant information to all and well-developed critical thinking abilities among them. Education aims at developing these critical thinking abilities in the citizens, where each citizen can make his or her own decisions rationally and can understand intellectual integrity and sift truth from falsehood, facts from propaganda; reject partiality and radicalism. An educated mind has a scientific temperament and faith in outcomes based on data. It has the ability to receive and perceive new ideas.

Activity 1: Situation analysis and the good of all

Based on my understanding of democracy and citizenship, I did an activity in a school I was invited to. After having a discussion with the teachers and students, instead of giving a lecture on constitutional values, I proposed an activity to help students understand the basics of constitutional values. I gave them a few questions, two of which are discussed here. The students had to analyse and answer these.

Situation 1: Let us suppose that there is a public tubewell in an area to provide water to three hundred farmer families of five villages in the vicinity. What arrangements will you make for the planning and distribution of water so that all farmer families can get the benefit of irrigation?

Situation 2: Who would you choose to be the sarpanch of your village?

The students worked in their respective groups and presented their solutions to the larger audience. One of the groups shared their views on the above situations which were as follows:

Answer 1: We will dig wells, lakes and other means of water storage and use the tube-well for storing

the water. The water as a resource will be well distributed among all, rich or poor.

Answer 2: Voting for the sarpanch: Based on the work done by individuals or promise of essential work that needs to be carried out in the village, they would choose the individual for *sarpanch*.

Activity 2: Welfare of all

Democracy is based on the idea of the common good, that is, the common good of all citizens must be ensured. It is possible on the idea level while making any decision, the common good of the people is being ensured. But to ensure that it translates into practice, each citizen must understand his/her rights and duties. We must try to sow the seed of citizenship at a very early age. This was realised by me through an interaction with the children after watching the movie *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. After watching the movie, I asked them a simple question. 'What will you do if you get the power like that of Harry Potter?'

The children's answers were varied. The initial response was to have a lot of money and become rich. This is something quite understandable given their economic circumstances. We always focus on what we do not have and their wish to have a lot of money is an obvious choice as they think that money can solve most of the problems they face in their daily lives. But on further probing, we found that they wanted the money for the welfare of the people around them, their village and not just for themselves. This was quite touching for me. Here are some of the responses:

- Cleaning of the village
- Providing water to all
- Building a palace
- Making money and giving it to the government which will give it to the poor
- Making a magic bus that would let people travel for free

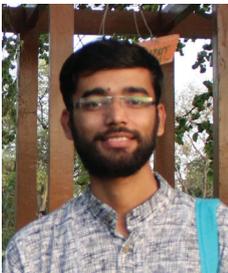
The idea of cooperation amongst the students and the opportunities where this may be translated into practice should be developed at school.

Democratic values cannot be developed overnight. This requires continuous effort and hard work from teachers. A passion for social justice, sensitivity to

social evils and exploitation must be kindled in the heart and mind of our children and the foundations for the change should be laid in school.

References

Deliberative Democracy and Education by Rohit Dhankar
Aims of Secondary Education (Secondary Commission Education 1952-53 Report)



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Children have to deal with situations in their immediate sphere that require them to make choices. Their immediate sphere that influences them the most includes those who may care for them, those who may be indifferent and even those who may want to manipulate or use them. A child needs to understand how to distinguish between these and respond to each appropriately.

Hridaykant Dewan, Ideals of Citizenship, p 11.