

Citizenship Through Creativity Workshops

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A three-day creativity workshop where children could have fun and enjoy themselves while learning a few things and being creative was planned in the Surpur district. It was a major challenge for us. We planned three major things to do with the children in the workshop. The first was to make them more responsible, the second was to use the community/public property sensitively, and the third was to use dialogue as the main process of communication and problem-solving. However, to do this, we had first to make them feel *equal*.

Feeling equal

We felt that the most important thing for children was for them to feel equal, to feel that they are heard and listened to, that there is no discrimination among them. To do this, we started by making them sit in a circle on the floor, which makes everyone visible and helps children to see that everyone is equal. The facilitator also sits in the circle with them. Nobody is a backbencher. Nobody is a leader. Everybody is in the front. The person who speaks leads and everyone gets a chance to speak.

Then, we had other rules: when someone is speaking, the rest must listen and speak only when the person has finished speaking. When somebody is speaking, others must look at the person. If there are many people wanting to speak, they should raise their hands, and the facilitator will allow each one to speak by turns.

Listening to others was the main advantage of this seating arrangement. When anyone had anything to say or announce, it was done in the circle. Slowly, interruptions became fewer and fewer. The main point repeated was – *let the person finish*. When the group felt somebody had not spoken, the members pointed out to that person for their views. In this way, everyone had a chance to speak and the feeling that others were listening attentively to them, was the most important feeling.

Being responsible

Initially, there was chaos in the workshop. Children would use things and leave them behind everywhere and go away. They would come and throw their bags anywhere. We could not scold them and telling them in a nice way did not help.

We then brought this issue into circle time. The discussion was on what happens if they throw things around, why a place should be well-maintained and how others can be inconvenienced because of this behaviour and how we should be responsible. We should feel and do things on our own, not because somebody else has asked us to.

Children understood this and started being mindful of the items they used. They kept their chappals in a line outside the classrooms, cleaned the paint brushes after using them, wiped the blackboard, came on time and finished work on time. Slowly, one after the other, their attitude started changing. Initially, there were a lot of complaints about each other. But as children started being responsible, complaints became fewer. They would manage each other effectively.

Protecting community resources

We found that, by and large, children were careless about public resources. They would drink water and not keep the glass in its place, use sports equipment and not keep those back and not leave the washrooms clean. We had a long discussion on how we must take care of the public property. Leaving a place tidier for use by others was the main thing that children seemed to understand. Every time, we would ask the question: are we leaving the place in a way that others can use it? This took a lot of effort. Children would not understand, or they would just not remember. Gradually, they started doing it. The most effective progress was when children started pointing out what needed to be done to each other. Children learned to take care of public spaces and community amenities.

Resolving issues through dialogue

Fights among the children were common. They

would fight over the simplest things. Sometimes there would be big fights over small matters. Occasionally, children would fight with teachers too. We wanted to do something about it because when we requested them to not fight, they would agree but immediately after that there would be some provocation and they would fight.

Then, we started a process of talking about everything in the circle. Children would listen and whatever was decided in the circle, would be strictly followed. Each one's opinion was listened to and then, a decision was taken with everyone's consent. This would have to be adhered to by all. Any conflict, issue or problem brought to the circle, was discussed and resolved. The emphasis was on *dialogue*.

This was the most difficult thing for the children to follow. When a conflict arose, they would immediately fight and resolve it. But with our consistent insistence on dialogue, children reluctantly started speaking to each other instead of starting a fight. After some time, children slowly started using dialogue as a method of problem-solving. What happened later was that whenever two children forgetting to talk it out started to fight, the other children would intervene and make them resolve their problem through discussion. Though not wholly successful, we were able to get children to agree for dialogue to some extent.

We ran these creativity workshops for many years. We cannot say that we were completely successful in all the schools. In schools where we did the creativity workshops for a short time, the method did not work, but in schools where we went back and conducted the sessions consistently, the process was successful, though not wholly so.

Outcomes

In the schools where these processes did work, we saw that children followed some norms that lead to being *responsible citizens*. Feeling equal was the simplest of all these and children followed it very well once they were convinced. The circle concept worked as the children liked to sit in a circle and everyone in the circle started to speak. In this process, the most important thing here was listening to others' opinion. This, we feel, was the most successful thing that we achieved with the children.

Being *responsible* and *protecting community resources* was something children understood only slowly and were able to follow to some extent. Here, the main driving force was other children pointing out when someone forgot. Those who were reminded would do it without resentment. The most difficult part of the workshops was getting the children to engage in dialogue. Children, somehow, did not see the importance of the process at all. We too struggled a lot in this process. Thus, the least effective was the dialogue. We are yet to get a hold on this.

This experience of creativity workshops and citizenship education was a great source of learning for us. Citizenship education cannot be delivered in the short-term. It has to be done consistently and repeatedly over time. In different groups, different ideas/ concepts work. There is no pattern of what will work and what will not. The facilitators are the main source of motivation. If the facilitator does not follow something that he/she is advocating, it will not work. Hence, being with the children consistently, over time, following and reminding them of these notions of democratic living and demonstrating them is the only way that they will internalise it.



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