

# SCHOOLS AS ‘PUBLIC SPHERES’: AN EXPERIMENT ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

TIRTHANKAR  
CHAKRAVORTY

## **Abstract**

*The NCF 2005, among some of the major curricular documents across the world, proposes one of the main goals of Social Studies Education to develop the ability to think and act independently in students. The “Social and Political Life” textbooks by NCERT also motivate teachers to posit the school as a microcosm of the society, therefore demanding similar kinds of dialogic spaces in them. However, this aspect of keeping classroom discussion relevant to the socio-political context of the students gets left behind in the contemporary technocratic school environment.*

*Therefore, this study is an experiment to attempt a pedagogy that can potentially lead to the emancipation of thought in students. The approach is to teach in a conventional secondary school using only the pre-existing pedagogical infrastructure to explore whether a conventional Social Studies teacher can live through a pedagogy that can re-imagine schools as democratic public spheres.*

*The study illustrates the findings in the form of certain key pedagogical moments that occurred during the field experience. The key reflection from the entire exercise is that since the school is a site for differences and contradictions of opinions by it being more than a mere site of the transaction of knowledge, a pedagogy that intends to achieve reflective goals in students can potentially lead to generating discursive practices among students.*

## **Introduction**

Citizenship Education is defined as “any educational experience that promotes the growth of individuals in regard to their civic capacities.” (Abowitz, 2009, p. 129) Now while different nations may have different models of citizenship depending upon their democratic structure, they all recognize the importance of education in developing civic virtues in the students. India is no exception to this, for the first educational aim, as per National Curriculum Framework is “... a commitment to democracy and values of equality, justice, freedom, concern for others’ well-being, secularism, respect for human dignity and

*Tirthankar is a doctoral candidate at the School of Social Sciences, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. He has been associated with the education sector for about six years, having worked as a teacher, researcher, program designer and curriculum developer. He holds a Master’s in Education from Azim Premji University, Bengaluru and experiences with organizations like Teach for India, LEAD Schools and more.*

rights.” (NCERT, 2005, p. 10) The NCF further elaborates upon the role of Social Science education to achieve the above-mentioned goals, when it claims that “... social science teaching should aim at investing in children a critical moral and mental energy to make them alert to the social forces that threaten these values .” (NCERT, 2005, p. 2)

While on the one hand, major curricular documents throughout the world consider a commitment to democratic values as a fundamental aim of education, on the other hand, many major sociologists of education posit the school as a site for the reproduction of social hierarchy. For example, Gramsci identifies “work” as the central educational principle that dominates the school structure, for it is through work that the powers of the State and social order get hegemonized into the students’ minds as “rights and duties” (Gramsci, 2000, p. 312) Bowles and Gintis in their work *Schooling in Capitalist America* (2011) talk about “correspondence principle”, according to which the very infrastructure and processes of a school are replicated to those of a factory or a workplace so that the students have a smooth transition towards a particular kind of economic life and are deprived of imagining a different life path for themselves. Further, Bernstein (1971), while talking about the existing curricular structure in modern schooling, defines the term "classification" in terms of the level of insulation between the forms of disciplinary knowledge in a given educational system. By this, he claims that forms of knowledge in education have been divided into disciplinary lines, making education a fragmented experience for students.

The authors of the “Social and Political Life” textbooks try to negotiate between these seemingly opposite narratives presented by the above-mentioned theories, where the proposed aim is to bring experiences to the classrooms that are “... grounded in the lives of students” (NCERT, 2006) The textbook also emphasizes on the need for students to realize that “...’ democracy’ is not limited to the functioning of government institutions but depends primarily on the role played by ordinary persons” (NCERT, 2006, p. vii) Therefore, the key challenge for educators that lies ahead is to develop a pedagogy that corresponds to such content which, therefore, becomes the fundamental objective of this study.

### **Objective:**

This study intends to explore the question of “What are the possibilities to develop a dialogic space for unconstrained socio-political discussions in a classroom for reflective goals through Social Studies education?” in a conventional school setting. This could be broken down further into the following questions:

## **Research Questions:**

### **Broad Research Question:**

What are the possibilities to develop a dialogic space for unconstrained socio-political discussions in a classroom for reflective goals through Social Studies education?"

### **Specific Research Questions:**

1. What pedagogical contributions could the notion "Public Sphere" make towards citizenship education in the Indian context?
2. What are the pedagogical situations that can aid in achieving active student engagement towards socio-political discussions through teaching Social Studies in a classroom?

### **Literature Review:**

1. What pedagogical contributions could the notion "Public Sphere" make towards citizenship education in the Indian context?

This question is explored through a literature review on the discourse on critical theories in sociology and different schools of thought within the sociology of education. There would be access to case studies and narratives on interventions where similar initiatives have been successful.

### **Key Findings from Review of Literature:**

#### **What is a "Public Sphere"?**

The term 'public sphere' was first coined by Habermas in his work "Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" which the Encyclopaedia of Social Theory defines as "... the arena of political participation in which ideas, alternatives, opinions, and other forms of discourse take shape." (Guidry, 2005) The underlying concept of the public sphere could be understood as a space where individuals have an opportunity to express their thoughts independently to contribute towards a dialogue.

Based on the arguments by Arendt, Fraser, and Benhabib (Bowles & Gintis, 2011) (Bernstein, 1971) (Van Manen, 1991), one

1. Growth of multiple public spheres to be imperative for progressive democratic societies, where there should be an open choice for an individual to enter/exit from any public sphere she wishes to participate in.

2. Nopredetermined agenda should be associated with a public sphere, i.e., there should be no restrictions as to what should come under the purview of discussion in a public sphere.

There should be no other criteria for “selection” of an agenda for debate but the consensus among the members. (Benhabib, 1992)

3. Every individual that gets affected by any change in social/political norms must have participatory access to the public sphere, where they have the power to not only critique the existing norms in order but eliminate discriminations if there are any within or outside of the public sphere. (Fraser, 1992)

Where could one find the educational implications to the concept of the “public sphere”?

As mentioned previously, Habermas was one of the front-runners of Critical Theory. Post Habermas, as literature points out, “Habermas’ theory of knowledge ... were taken up by Henry Giroux, Thomas Popkewitz and Maxine Greene, among others, and applied to the educational system in powerful ways.” (Kohli, 1996) This study would focus on the works of Henry Giroux, for he seems to be the closest to the idea of a public sphere, where he advocates for “... a redefinition of schools as public spheres where engagement and democracy can be cultivated in a struggle for a ‘radical democratic society.’” (Morrison, 2004)

### **Giroux and Critical Pedagogy:**

Some of the key themes that can be drawn from Giroux’s work are as follows:

Emancipatory authority: Giroux not only demands systematic changes in the education system but also asks teachers to question and reject “... those authorial approaches which reinforce divisions of labour in society and dis-empower teachers and students.” (Scott, 2008, p. 112) Kumar draws this point further home when he illustrates Giroux’s unique position concerning reconstruction theorists on critical pedagogy. Kumar claims, "For Giroux, the teacher assumes a role of a progressive public intellectual." (Kumar, 2018, p. 146) This can be achieved when critical thinking could be resonated with an appropriate course of action, which indicates what Zevin (2000) identifies as “affective goals” in social studies pedagogy.

Curriculum text as a social construct: Giroux claims that since the curriculum is formulated within the society and state mechanism it is used in, it is essentially a part of the existing corpus of social constructs, therefore the texts are malleable to the extent the society is through critical action. Kumar interprets Giroux in this context when he says that, "The fact that history is a social construct to the extent that it is a collective effort of human society and therefore amenable, invokes transitivity in the students during the educational discourse." (Kumar, 2018, p. 142) Giroux demands teachers for "... providing the learning opportunities for students to become media-literate in a world of changing representations." (Giroux H. , 1992, p. 108) This indicates ICT implementation in classrooms, not merely for technical awareness, but also for giving students independent access to knowledge.

Importance of student experience in schools: Giroux finds it imperative for teachers to not only value students' experiences, but make an essential part of the pedagogy itself. A school could manifest to be a public sphere when the student's worldview is acknowledged and applied in classroom pedagogy and emphasis is to be given on the factors that shape that worldview. He says, "... as a mode of critique, the discourses of the world should interrogate how people create stories, memories, and narratives that posit a sense of determination and agency." (Giroux H. , 1997, p. 140) When the pedagogical narrative stands as a contradiction to the societal one, it is that moment when students begin to think critically and understand "... how their experience is mediated through public and state-sponsored discourses." (Scott, 2008, p. 114)

### **Giroux's Pedagogical Recommendations:**

#### **1. Reconstructing schools as democratic public spaces:**

Giroux argues that schools must be re-imagined as democratic public spaces, for changes in educational practices are bound to eventually bring about changes in society, and by changes, he doesn't seem to refer to conservative, reformative shifts in societal norms but challenging upheavals of extremist notions. He demands teachers to empower the students with "... the convictions and compassion necessary for exercising civic courage, taking risks, and furthering the habits, customs and social relations that are essential to democratic public forms." (Giroux H. , 1992, p. 74)

2. Schools to celebrate differences, but being cognizant of the political implications of the same:

Giroux provides caution to teachers to challenge students' notions of identity that it has to be done tactfully to avoid conflicts. Scott interprets this by saying, "Student identities and subjectivities need to be understood as multiple and embedded constructs" and "... need to be surfaced for and by students in the act of creating new more satisfying, and more socially just forms of identity." (Scott, 2008, p. 104) This is pertinent for aspiring practitioners of critical pedagogy, for then not only do the stakeholders have to be aware of the possible implications of this pedagogy on the students' minds, but they need to be prepared to handle any sort of disintegration in students' minds when talked about identity notions as well.

3. Implications for Social Science Education:

Giroux appeals to the teachers to depart from presenting traditional dominant narratives about History and society at large, and adopt "... a practice that is capable of revealing the historical and ideological parameters that frame its discourse and implications for the self, society, culture and the other." (Giroux H. , 1992, p. 79) Kumar in Giroux's texts see the potential for the development of critical pedagogy in this context when he claims that "No form of domination could ever be sacrosanct and invincible, and this invincibility opens avenues for critical pedagogy in educational discourse." (Kumar, 2018, p. 146)

This might imply that Giroux asks to move away from portraying the textbooks as sacrosanct content and value students' lived experiences that they bring into the classrooms. He gives an overall pedagogical philosophy for teachers, where Giroux, as per Scott, says that a teacher's role is to "... raise the level of consciousness of their students so that they understand how their narratives are also embedded in wider social and political narratives." (Scott, 2008, p. 105)

**What is the relevance of the "public sphere" to Social Science education in India?**

National Curriculum Framework:

The National Curriculum Framework might not have a direct mention of the term "public sphere", but the aims of education mentioned in the document resonate with the spirit of the public sphere that has been

discussed so far. With these values at the background, the NCF addresses students' role in the society, where they state it as an educational aim that the institution must develop in the student "... ability to contribute to society in various ways. This is why education must develop the ability to work, participate in economic processes and social change." (NCERT, 2005, p. 10)

The NCF also recognizes the value and role of the civil society at large towards systematic change in education, when it credits the civil society for having "... helped to give education a visible public space and facilitated the emergence of a discourse on the child's right to education." (NCERT, 2005, p. 121) It identifies schools as "public spaces" to the extent that people from all sections of the society, so long as they are stakeholders to a particular school, have access to the same.

Though it urges civil society to collaborate with the educational institutions for "... critical feedback on different aspects of the curriculum, as well as nurturing of an environment of commitment to the right to education of children" (NCERT, 2005, p. 121), it doesn't push towards re-imagining schools to be public spheres themselves, therefore recognizing the civil society as an external factor.

#### Social Science Education:

The NCF Position Paper on Social Science Education finds it imperative that the Social Science curriculum, among other scholastic subjects, should focus on the contemporary issues that concern the students' lives. The framework lays out specific objectives for educators with respect to "Emphasis (that) needs to be given to issues like poverty, illiteracy, child and bonded labour, class, caste, gender and environment." (NCERT, 2006, p. vii) Further, it says that "... social science teaching should aim at investing in children a critical moral and mental energy to make them alert to the social forces that threaten these values." (NCERT, 2006, p. 2) The above-mentioned objectives are not far from those mentioned previously, for Kumar in his analysis of Giroux's works, notes that "Moral enlightenment is a prerequisite for critical inquiry." (Kumar, 2018, p. 142)

#### Social and Political Life:

To achieve the aims of education being highlighted by the NCF, NCERT decided to develop a new subject titled "Social and Political Life", which would depart from the conventional subject of Civics that couldn't do justice to the diverse community of Indian students. The 8th Grade textbook of the same, which happens to be the culminating part of the three-textbook series

from Grade 6th, identifies the goals for social sciences, that is “... to provide a lens through which to analyze the world around us.” (NCERT, 2006, p. vii)

Therefore, the key objective of this particular textbook is “... to understand contemporary social and political concerns” (NCERT, 2008, p. vii) ; while at the same time “... not develop a cynicism when confronted with stark realities of social and political life in India.” (NCERT, 2008, p. viii) Again, this is synchronous with Giroux, for Kumar claims that “Constructive rationality lies at the core of critical pedagogy practices.” (Kumar, 2018, p. 141)

With this conceptual framework in the context, the study can now delve deep into the curricular and pedagogical planning that would help the above-mentioned abstract ideas into classroom realities.

### **Research Methodology**

2. What are the pedagogical situations that can aid in achieving active student engagement towards socio-political discussions through teaching Social Studies in a classroom?

This question was explored through the formation of a unit plan for roughly five weeks, which was formed in light of the literature reviewed as well as looking at similar studies/interventions of similar kinds. Further, the one unit, based on the textbook “Social and Political Life” in an 8th Grade classroom, was taught in a medium/high-income private school in Bangalore. The exercise culminated in a showcase where students attempted towards having unconstrained discussions on social issues through performance arts. The results have been attempted to be validated through data on student engagement through their feedback, teaching transcripts, and teachers’ reflections.

The rationale for selection of participants:

**SITE:** A secondary classroom medium/high-income school with preferably the CBSE board in any city. The assumption behind selecting a medium/high-income school was that the students would be comfortable writing and converse in English, thus making the documentation easier.

**STUDENTS:** 8th Grade was the most preferred one, for the “Social and Political Life” series culminates in the same.

**Curricular Material:** Since the parallel curricular objectives have been established between the ones aimed for in NCERT textbooks and the same being done in this study, “Social and Political Life” was the preferred textbook for this study.



Objective	Pedagogical Strategy	Essential Questions
Introduction to Marginalization	Theatrical monologue on personal narrative	Why should I care if some people are treated unfairly?
Storyboard on the plight of Adivasis – open discussion	Documentary short film	How is the injustice happening to the Adivasis connected to my life?
Understanding the marginalization of women – open discussion	Unconstrained debating space	Why is it that I feel shy/ignore any type of religion/gender-based biases in class?
Understanding the marginalization of Minorities – data analysis	Compare and contrast data sources	Why should we speak up against marginalization?
Assessment: Performance Task	Role-play, case study	What would it take to confront marginalization?

### **Findings/outcomes:**

The study takes a phenomenological approach to present the findings, which draws from the work of Van Manen (1991). The study would illustrate the findings in the form of certain key pedagogical moments that occurred during the field experience. In each situation, firstly there is an explanation of the pedagogical act in question, be it a particular teaching practice, selection of teaching aid, or any other classroom interaction in terms of the intent behind the act. The intent behind the said acts has generally been based on literature and observations while being mindful of the school context. Secondly, there is documentation of the dialogue/responses that followed the act. The rationale behind the said responses is mentioned in places where the participants were asked for it. In other cases, a possible explanation is provided through background observations. Finally, a claim or reflection that hints towards a praxis of pedagogy is churned out of the entire discussion of the pedagogical situations. Throughout the experience, there were many moments where there was no reconciliation possible between the discourse that the researcher was intending to and one that pre-existed among the students. For such moments, there shall be a reflection towards what could have been done to move the discussion forward.

## **Background Facts for the Analysis:**

### **Demographic:**

The school is owned by an educational trust started by one of the business houses of Karnataka, located in an affluent location in Bangalore. The school was founded in the 1930s primarily as a girl's school, but since the last few years, it has become a co-educational institution. Since the school is run by the trust, the fee structure is rather affordable compared to the facilities and legacy the school holds, which ensures that the students range from middle class to upper-middle-class backgrounds, with a possibility for some lower-middle-class students as well. The classrooms had an approximately equal number of male and female students with more than 70% of the students under the sample size being Muslims, reflecting a rather different kind of diversity in the demographics. Also, the students were majorly hailed from business-class communities. Data related to the caste dynamic was not available for this school, for, unlike government schools where the breakup of general, SC/ST, OBC, and minority students is mentioned in the school office, this school did not disclose such data.

### **Classroom processes:**

The school follows the CBSE board and had very recently started to use NCERT books after having referred to textbooks from private publications. Though the middle and high school classes use a private publication "workbook", which comes with its "key book" as well, so in a way the school officially endorses a guide to "solve" the NCERT exercises, sucking the life of the questions, reducing them to mere didactic factual ones. But the school has partnered with a third-party organization for its Teacher Professional Development, which has impacted the teachers being more self-aware of their teaching practices. As a result, one could observe efforts being made towards student engagement, like student tags to randomize the tasks/questions being asked, a "behavior tracker" chart, mapping student behavior over time. This could be attributed to student participation in classes, with students getting an about 25% of the instructional time on average to speak during a class period.

### **Teacher Identity and presence:**

The fact that the researcher would be working temporarily, having no stakes otherwise in the staff was communicated to the students by the administration. Also, every session taken by the researcher was under the surveillance of CCTV and the subject teacher, often having the coordinators

and Vice Principal as well. While this could have been the standard operating procedure for the school, it did have implications for the pedagogic process.

**Analysis:**

Teaching “Judiciary”:

**Pedagogical Act:** During the beginning of the first chapter, the questions being asked were mostly didactic.

**Intent:** Not only the chapter was one of the more didactic ones of the Social and Political Life textbook (personal curricular reflections), but the intent was to break the ice through cultivating confidence in students, with the assumption that students might be in a better position to respond to factual-recall questions, given the reliance of workbooks in the school.

**Student Action:** Not only there was high engagement among students, having around 50% of students answering the right options, but around 75% of the students attempting as well. It is worth noting here that during the daily quiz, around 25% of the class wrote almost identical responses, having quite heavy terms like “jurisdiction” that they couldn’t have picked from the textbook. This was also verified when the students were precisely asked the meaning of the term, for they did not know the same.

**Rationale:** While asked about such responses to the subject teacher, it was found that the content of student responses was copied from the “key book” of the private-published workbook that the students had.

**Follow-up Act:** It was realized that any questions framed for future lessons have to be created from scratch, having no matches to the questions in textbooks or workbooks. Therefore, some different kinds of comprehension and judgment-type questions were set for the weekly chapter test.

**Corresponding Student Action:** While there was a significant drop in the identity of the terms, there was a visible change in the overall coherence of the responses. Now, students found the questions to be much more challenging, which largely left them with no option but to write authentic responses. This exercise did come with its consequences, with students showing discomfort about the nature of the questions during and after the test as well.

Critical Reflection: While it is important to provide an “epistemic ascent” (Winch, 2013) to the students to understand and apply the content knowledge to their lives, it has to be ensured that the kinds of questions being asked to demand some kind of authenticity from the students. This is not to say that one must not use textbook questions in class, but so long as the scope of the question wouldn’t need any kind of higher-order thinking, students are less likely to find any motivation to engage with the content other than to pass the exams.

Teaching “Judiciary”:

Pedagogical Act: Extensive and precise feedback was given alongside each of the responses was provided to the students. Further, there was a discussion in the classroom where there was an attempt on motivating the rigour of thoughts in the students, for mere copying answers from reference books might not be the best use of the classroom time.

Intent: This act was conducted with the same intent as the previous one.

Student Action: Students previously topping their class tests suddenly found themselves off their mark. This potentially threatened the classroom environment in terms of students openly showing dissent to the researcher.

Rationale: As mentioned previously, this weekly test was a new experience for the students; therefore, the erstwhile “toppers” of the class could no longer score high marks because their previous scoring strategies were not working. Naturally, the power structure of the class was at stake, as now there were new contenders to claim the top spot in academics.

Follow-up Act: The researcher sat down with each student, explaining why marks were deducted for each of their answers. It was explained to the students that to make judgments about not just legal situations, but also life scenarios, students need to consider multiple possibilities related to it. One is likely to think critically when one can make connections between different subject areas/topics.

Corresponding Student Action: There was the first instance of students’ “critically analysing their current realities in light of their societal context” when during class discussion, a student argued that the open court system also aids towards abolishing caste prejudice, as now the constitution gives the backward classes a right to participate in the judiciary which otherwise might not have been possible.

Critical Reflection: If a teacher expects the students to bring the discourse of

their daily lives to the classroom, s/he has to lead by example by moving away from the discourse that is "... mediated through public and state-sponsored discourses." (Scott, 2008, p. 114) If a teacher is successful in conveying an honest point of view to students, they would find the necessary trust to surpass the authoritarian elements present in the school, thereby making a step towards "emancipatory authority".

Moment of "standstill" in the classroom:

**Pedagogical Act:** While taking a substitute class for the subject teacher on Geography, the researcher reasoned that the current state of the Judiciary in rural India perpetuates the injustice our farmers face in life, on the grounds of inequality in getting legal advice against exploitation related to agriculture and the like.

**Intent:** The intent was to explain to the students that the Social and Economic phenomena don't manifest in isolation as they might appear in form of separate books, but are causally related.

**Student Action:** A strong disagreement came from a couple of students, who requested the researcher to not "complicate the topics anymore", for it was already very difficult for them to memorize one subject at a time.

**Rationale:** When asked about their reason for such reaction, the students said they were already very "irritated" at the researcher talking about the Criminal Justice System and the constitutional rights along with it. Though they were reluctant to share the reason for such irritation, one student claimed that he didn't have to care much about the Indian Judiciary system, as their community had its ways of settling disputes.

**Follow-up Act:** The researcher, perplexed by such actions, asked the teachers for suggestions. Then the teachers explained that the community has many outlaws who make decisions within the internal disputes within members of a particular area. Therefore, the students do not see people overtly showing genuine faith in the Judiciary. Unfortunately, the researcher ended up this logical dead end as a pedagogical failure, resulting in a total standstill in classroom interactions due to a lack of confidence.

What went wrong here?

The fact that the dysfunctionality of our Judiciary often results in communities referring to various kinds of influential elements to solve their disputes got the researcher a bit nihilist about the content of the textbook itself. Further, the fact that the class privilege of these students could potentially help them

bypass the socio-political challenges of the country, like settling abroad or manipulating the system to their benefit, but the researcher in some sort of mistaken hypothetical class conflict with the students.

What could have been done better?

This cannot possibly be a pedagogical failure, for the fact that students are trying to compare their knowledge from the books to their own lives, drives them closer to understand “how their narratives are also embedded in wider social and political narratives.” (Scott, 2008, p. 105) However, a pedagogical flaw could be that one did not do due diligence in presenting case studies of court cases from the communities’ that students came from, instead of talking about some isolated cases from around the country. This loss of focus on the part of the researcher would have implications in the further pedagogical plan as well.

Critical reflection: A moment where the teacher’s stance conflicts with that of students should not be looked like a failure. On the contrary, it could be looked like a success to the extent that the pedagogy compelled the students to come out of their passivity and stand up for their beliefs, without caring for consequences. Such moments could be steps towards unconstrained socio-political discussions.

“Turning tables”: Understanding Marginalization:

Pedagogical Act: The opening of the final chapter of the project, “Understanding Marginalization” was presented in the form of a theatrical monologue, where the researcher shared a personal anecdote of a student losing her parents as a result of marginalization. This was followed up by showing a documentary on the Niyamgiri Kondh community from Odisha.

Intent: Though the primary intent might have been to show lived experiences of the urban poor as a marginalized group and connect it to the case study in the NCERT textbook, the researcher might as well be accused of cherry-picking narratives of some of the marginalized communities of the country to morally shame the students.

Student Action: Since the administration was aware of the pedagogical plan, the class hosted the middle school coordinator as well as the vice-principal in the audience of the performance. While this got the researcher a bit anxious, it caused a pin-drop silence in students, almost making the researcher believe that they were moved! However, once the leadership moved out of class mid-session for their work, the class suddenly burst into laughter, leaving the researcher in utter disarray.

Rationale: Since the pedagogical intent behind this whole exercise was in question, the performance barely managed to impact the students. They said that they simply couldn't connect with the story of either urban Delhi or tribal Odisha, and understandably so.

Follow-up Act: The next day presented a pedagogical opportunity, for the boys in the class were sent to attend some sessions. This caused the girls of the classroom to voluntarily engage in a gender-based debate, where they demanded equal rights for women by them being "no less from boys in any way, but rather being better than boys." Being the only male in the room, the researcher played the devil's advocate, asking when the girls have actively stood for their fellow students.

Corresponding Student Action: This presented another significant moment when a girl opened up about her feeling neglected by the other girls due to her being new to a co-educational school and her "different food habits, being vegetarian." The fact that this was the first time she spoke of her discomfort in her two years in this school made the moment very intense.

Critical reflection: Even though theories on critical pedagogy call teachers to be "public intellectual" by "positing the societal discourse as amenable to public efforts", it becomes very difficult for a teacher to escape the false consciousness bestowed upon her by her social location. Therefore, there have to be systematic spaces, (like libraries, online resources, robust peer support system, etc.) for teachers to refer back to theories and realign their pedagogical focus, for the absence of such structures might lead the teacher to form fixed and often toxic mindsets about the school and the community.

"The Final Act:" End of Project Showcase:

Pedagogical Act: Taking a cue from the previous pedagogical moment, the next class had been planned to talk about the kind of marginalization that was directly related to the students, i.e., religion and gender. Students were asked about the kinds of livelihoods they see these communities go for, the kinds of societal expectations from the said groups and how is it connected to their marginalization. This analysis was connected to the data showing the lack of opportunities for Muslims and women that was provided in the textbook.

Intent: As the project was coming to its closing, the intent was to explore whether the students can have unconstrained discussions around their social groups, thereby moving towards pluralistic thought.

Student Action: Again, the ‘top brass’ was scrutinizing the classroom discussions, which this time got the students intimidated as well. However, when asked about how the societal expectations of women are connected to their marginalization, the girls strongly argued that since society mainly expects women to take care of children, they hardly see more women in jobs other than places like school.

Rationale: The previous day’s discussions possibly boosted the girls’ confidence. Also, during the intense moment, the group collectively found that although the girls thought themselves to be a united force, they were caught unaware of the impact their actions were causing on others. This led them to strengthen their social bonds, and one could see that the girl previously neglected by the group was greeted with much more compassion.

Follow-up Act: As a final assessment/ performance task, the students were given a legal situation loosely based on the true story of Dashrath Manjhi. Students were divided into groups while each of them selected a role for themselves (Judge, lawyers, police, etc.) to play in a real-time enactment to be held the next day. Students were also provided with a detailed case brief along with a “mock charge sheet” that would help them reflect on their roles.

Corresponding Student Action: This was another opportunity for the class, as the “toppers” had been taken away for some inter-school tech competition. This allowed students who hardly get to lead teams otherwise. Therefore, this enactment was, in a way, “for the marginalized of the marginalized and by the marginalized”! Though it had some pedagogical flaws as well, as neither the reflection sheets nor the actual dialogues mentioned anything outside the brief document already given to them, the fact that those students got a chance to engage in a high-rigour activity was a very heartening exercise for them.

Praxis: While the curricular documents hint towards maintaining an overall unbiased approach while addressing issues of caste, class, religion, gender, etc., they do emphasize the need for teachers to develop the ability to identify potential threats to democratic values in the students’ minds as well. But in settings where an educational institution consciously works towards “normalizing” (in Foucauldian terms) meritocratic positivism as an essential truth, one could argue that a radical pluralistic stance taken by the teacher could provide greater social awareness amongst students rather than a secular or communitarian one.



### **Discussions:**

Through the systematic analysis of the teaching experiment, one could arrive at the following claims:

1. To respond to the literature's demand for a commitment towards including "reified blocs", efforts were made by the researcher to make the classroom discussions inclusive by giving more opportunities to students, whose voices were otherwise silent in class, thereby trying to mitigate power structures in students.
2. To address the "plurality of perspectives" in the classroom, efforts were made towards providing students with diverse perspectives and ways to express themselves in classrooms through using different kinds of case studies, documentaries, or performances by oneself.
3. To make students realize that their identities are in fact "multiple embedded constructs", one has to embrace confrontational conversation with students, considering them as potentially transitional moments of discourse.
4. To develop "civic courage" for "democratic public reforms", students' experience was attempted to enrich by introducing creative expressions like the dramatic arts where students had to successfully convey the point of view that their character demanded of them.

The findings of this study are useful in the sense that it attempts to apply the macro-sociological perspective of the "public sphere" in a micro-subjective environment, such as that of a classroom. While such an analysis might *prima facie* seem to be irreconcilable, the findings indicate a pedagogical connection between the social theories from which this study draws and the content and contexts that the NCERT textbooks seem to cater to.

### **Conclusion:**

The key reflection from the entire exercise would be that since the school is a site for differences and contradictions of opinions by it being more than a mere site of the transaction of knowledge, a pedagogy that intends to achieve reflective goals in students can potentially lead to generating discursive practices among students.

The path towards guiding students towards emancipation has to be a developmental one, where the first prerequisite for a teacher in terms of mindsets is that of honesty and tolerance. While a teacher needs to have an unconditional commitment towards engaging in meaningful, genuine

interactions with the students, it also entails that the teacher must give the students a benefit of doubt, considering them potentially responsible citizens. Based on this foundation, it is possible to encourage students to hold an unconstrained discourse even in the face of the authority, provided that there are no epistemic gaps in the pedagogy.

Since the identity of the researcher as that of an external temporary teacher had been established in front of the students, the only way he could achieve focused discussions with the otherwise “lesser preferred” groups was by leveraging on the incidental segregation due to different factors. But in a different identity setting, the teacher might have been a facilitator for the students to indulge in conversations in a democratically inclusive way.

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