

Solving Real Life Challenges Through Citizenship Education

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The guiding documents in the area of education, like the *Aims of Education* and the *National Curriculum Framework, 2005*, have constantly highlighted the need for human values and the awareness of rights, duties and principles of the Constitution. In the Indian context, the National Curriculum Framework, 2005 (NCF 2005) affirms that the responsibility of the development of citizenry that is conscious of citizens' rights and duties and depicts commitment to the principles embodied in our Constitution, is vested in school education.

In order to achieve this, there have been several curricular upgradations post-2005. However, despite this effort, in our experience of working with students and teachers, the feedback on Civics/Social and Political Life (SPL), is that it is generally theoretical, 'not relevant' or 'not practical'. For a country like ours, this signals a crisis. It means that on the one hand, we have a great many uninspired students coming out of schools every year, ill-equipped with the information and practical skills needed to be active and engaged citizens and, on the other, issues of poor governance faced in our villages and cities that could be addressed through effective citizen-engagement with the State machinery will persist.

We, *The People Abhiyan*, a civil society organisation with the mission of expanding an informed, active and responsible citizenry in India, has been working

to bridge this gap by focusing on the capacity-building of teachers and students through a carefully designed curriculum called, *Citizenship Education Programme (CEP)*.

Quality civic education is fundamental to inculcating responsible citizenry and it is commonly felt that this is best done in the primary school years. CEP focuses on understanding SPL as a subject, through the perspective of the citizen. It tries to answer the question – how is SPL education relevant to me in my life, as a citizen in a democracy? In this way, students access innovative methodologies in class and practical application through *Civic Action Projects (CAP)* and campaigns. Their learning journey is strengthened through the attitudes, knowledge and skills framework.

Our methodology

Our content is developed on the answers to these three fundamental questions:

- What shifts are needed in citizen's attitudes/perspectives?
- What information and knowledge are needed for civil society education?
- What skills and tools are needed to take action on the ground?

The content is organised around the framework outlined as:

Attitudes	Knowledge	Skills
'WHY' of a concept, like why we need freedom, why equality is important, etc.	'WHAT' of a concept, like what are fundamental rights, what is law, what is structure of the State, etc.	'HOW' to take action, like skills/tools required to take any action.

Different aspects of the Constitution are understood from the perspective of *what* and *how* a citizen can engage with them. It also combines a practical application of tools for civic action. We attempt to integrate CEP within the school curriculum and follow a Training of Trainer (TOT) model with Social Science teachers. Mapping of the curriculum is an essential step in this process. It enables us to create a strong

connection between CEP and the SPL curriculum.

'The activities helped inculcate interest in Civics among students and helped them see the value and practical relevance in the subject.'

- Mentor Teacher, Directorate of Education, New Delhi

'With all this exposure and methods, I am not sure

how much will finally get translated in the class. But one thing I can say for us all, we are not the same teachers as we were 6 months back.'

- Private school teacher, Pune, Maharashtra

Civic Action Projects

This is an action-driven methodology that has worked in many schools in Delhi-NCR and Maharashtra to empower students and teachers to be engaged and active citizens. Students choose a civic issue from their surroundings, inform and equip themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to initiate civic action and work closely with the authorities to solve the issue. The project creates opportunities for students to apply learned competencies to solve the real-life issues around them, thus practising aspects of responsible and active citizenship.

We carried out a study to assess the impact of CAP on the civic capabilities of students. To do this, we created two groups of students – a control group and an experimental group – to see how the capabilities of students were rated. The objective of the study was to assess how the two groups put their civic knowledge, skills and dispositions to use in writing their action plans and if there has been a qualitative difference between action plans recorded by the two groups.

The findings of this study show that experimental students who underwent the intervention exhibit significant enhancement in their civic knowledge, skills and dispositions as compared to the control group students. Action plans written by experimental students depict a well-researched and well-structured civic action. It is supported by several simple civic tactics, such as the use of written communication while working with government authorities. In contrast, while the action plans of the control group students displayed the willingness and appropriate perspectives to solve issues, they struggled with the knowledge and skills needed to substantiate their civic actions.

The experimental group students were able to write a civic action plan based on the activities that they undertook in their projects. They were also able to connect the hypothetical issue to the curricular concepts like fundamental rights and constitutional provisions around it. It is evident from the action plan that post-CAP intervention experimental group students gained significantly on civic capacities. On the other hand, control group students needed to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to transform their willingness to address the issue into

effective civic action.

'In order to solve this issue, we will firstly, see the concerned right from the Constitution and will look for the laws made for these rights.'

'We will go to the municipal corporation office, register a complaint and watch if they make note of it or not. If they do not accept our complaint, then we, all the students of the school, will collect money and get the drainage work done.'

– Responses of students in the study

Advantages and outcomes

Our experiences and impact assessment have highlighted that a well-planned CAP design is highly feasible in a school set up. The hands-on experience of CAP makes it a great tool for teachers teaching SPL. It enables them to make learning more practical and skill-based.

Students get streetlights in Majalgaon

During one such engagement, students at Mahatma Phule Vidyalaya, Majalgaon, Dist. Beed, Maharashtra chose to work on the issue of missing streetlights around their school premises. An application supported by well-researched documents and a location plan was submitted to the municipal council of Majalgaon. After consistent follow up and meeting of students with officials, a streetlight was installed.

Students use RTE to get a boundary wall for their school

Students of Mahatma Phule Madhyamik Ashramshala, Dist. Satara in Maharashtra made an application to Gram Panchayat Katgun regarding building a compound wall around their school. The school premises belonged to



the Panchayat and was being used by the school on a lease. Students attached copies of the Right to Education Act, 2009, which mandates every school premises to have a compound wall around it.

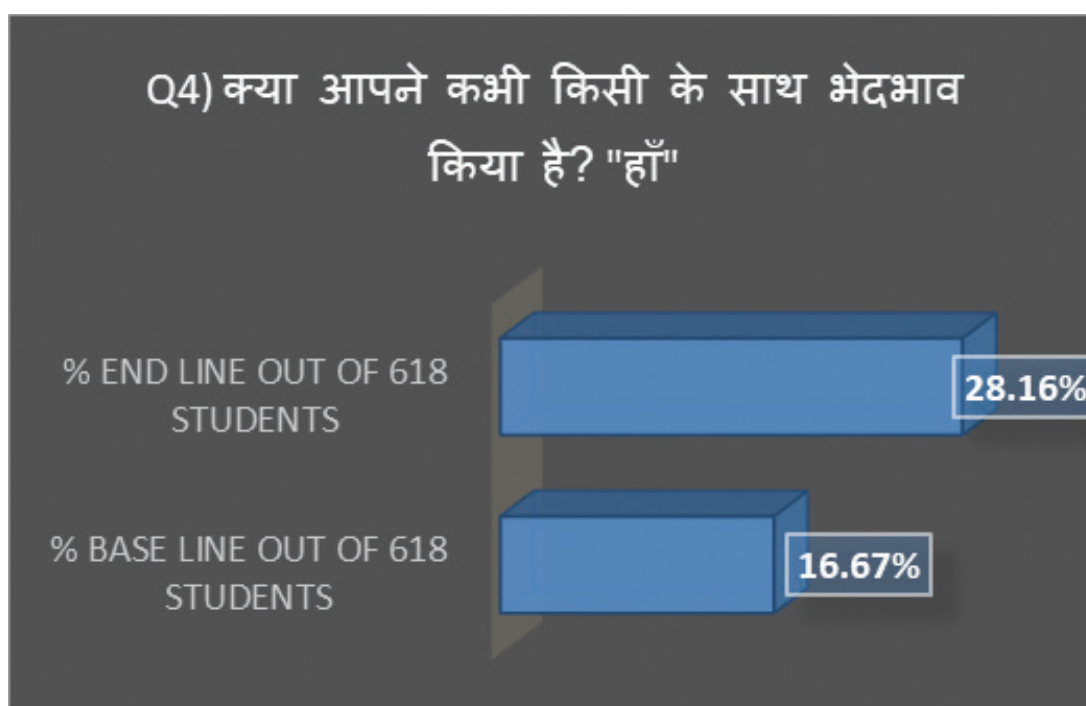
The application was submitted in the month of January and then was followed up for a couple of months by students. The Gram Panchayat used Rs 1,21,000/- from the budget and got the school its much-awaited wall.

Campaign on constitutional values

This form of interaction requires the simplest yet the most crucial resource: the lived experiences of individuals, even those of young citizens. Over the last few years, we have been working with Mentor Teachers under the Directorate of Education, New

Delhi. We have also engaged with students and all subject teachers from their government schools to work on *The Constitution at 70*, a short campaign on constitutional values.

The impact of the campaign was studied through a set group of teachers and students in different schools that we were constantly engaging with. Though the students in different schools were of different cultural and social backgrounds, their reflections were related to one crucial point - the Preamble of our Constitution. As a part of the campaign, they had to interact with similar groups of people around them - like everyone had to interact with their family members and people in their neighbourhood. Because these groups of people were similar for all, it helped all of them relate to what these values meant to people and how they engaged with the values on a daily basis.



Example from the Impact assessment of the campaign

Attempting to embed this consciousness and developing a lens of value amongst young citizens served as a way for us to continue to work on the *Preamble* with them. Further, we ensured that all subject teachers were involved in the campaign and it also served as a way for teachers to engage with constitutional values. Linking lived experiences with the subject matter seems to have made teachers and students interested in learning the *essence of the Preamble*.

With the Campaign, there are many stereotypes being broken about gender norms and caste-based discrimination amongst the students. Earlier, few wouldn't talk to the ones who did not match their economical standards but those are just stories now.

- Teacher, Government Boys Senior Secondary School, New Delhi

Conclusion

Studies from all over the world suggest that imparting civic education is not hurdle-free. In the Indian context, the biggest challenge has been to shift Civics, as a subject, away from rote learning methods and making it an engaging process of learning. Keeping this challenge in mind, We, The People Abhiyan

works closely with schools on enhancing civics learning methodologies in such a way that it makes the subject interesting, practical and relevant to our lives. However, it is the capacity building of teachers and their willingness to experiment that are the prerequisites for its success.

References

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Film: <https://youtu.be/u6EB6INiJ3M>



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