

# Citizenship Education Through Mantri Mandal

Gururajrao K

School is the institution whose ultimate purpose is to provide citizenship education through all its planned and systematic processes, which include curricular and co-curricular activities. I am sharing the experience of our school in Imalpur which succeeded in providing citizenship education through some unique approaches.

## Our experiment

The Government Higher Primary School, Imalpur (Yadgir district) has around 200 students studying in classes I to VII. It is one of the border schools of Karnataka where the mother tongue of most of the students is Telugu. From 2012-2015, I worked with the School Leadership Development Programme (SLDP) for head teachers. As part of the programme, each head teacher had to pick one initiative in the school as a project and work on it with all stakeholders in the school. They had to also draw learnings from the experience.

Bassappa was working as Head Teacher (HT) in the school. He had 20 years of experience as an assistant teacher and 8 years as the HT. His project was creating a democratic space in the school through the formation and implementation of a *Mantri Mandal* (a cabinet of ministers). It was a unique initiative among all the others that the other head teachers of the block had selected because it dealt with the promotion of constitutional values and citizenship education. The work on this had already started in that school and the HT wanted to continue and sustain it through the SLDP programme.

The HT and teachers had a detailed meeting with all the children regarding the formation of a strong *Mantri Mandal*. They assured the children that they would provide them with a free and non-threatening environment to perform duties and make decisions as members of the *Mantri Mandal*. They also told them that it was the *Mantri Mandal* that would drive the school processes and have the right to implement democratic processes in the

school. These included, the students' rights to ask questions, express opinions and be equal partners in all the school processes.

A proper election with nominations and votes took place and the *Mantri Mandal* was formed with a Prime Minister and ministers for Education, Culture, Cleanliness, Environment, Finance and other members. All the members were inducted and familiarised with their roles and responsibilities. Quickly, the elected members started performing their duties. Bassappa and Venkatesh (Assistant Teacher) supported the students by clarifying their doubts related to their roles. It took almost six months for the children to understand their roles better. By then, there was a visible impact in the school. Children had started questioning their teachers. Following are some examples:

- Children had started questioning the teachers who came late to school
- They made official complaints to the HT about the lack of resources in the school. For example, chalk, dusters, drinking water pots and materials for teachers.
- The school attender was made answerable in the morning assembly for not cleaning classrooms and not the drinking water pots in the school premises even after several reminders.
- Teachers who gave children harsh punishment (or hit them) or humiliated them in any way were also named.

Children started enjoying real democracy in the school. There were monthly meetings wherein all the elected members met and discussed the issues of the school and actions to be taken. According to the HT, there was an increase in the children's confidence levels and a decreased fear of expressing themselves to teachers and elders. The students became well behaved in many ways; they started coming to school regularly, completing assignments, paying attention and participating actively in class.



### Beneficial results

The demand for becoming members of the *Mantri Mandal* increased every year. Experienced students started inducting junior members to perform their roles. Questioning was the major ability developed in the children. They started to question everything in the school. This made both teachers and students more accountable and punctual in their work. Because of this, the school gained fame in and around the area. Teachers, Block Resource Persons (BRPs) and children from nearby schools started visiting the school to see the students' increased confidence level and the idea of the *Mantri Mandal* which was now making all the school decisions.

Here are some examples of the work they accomplished in three years:

- There was a shortage of textbooks and children were complaining regularly to the HT to solve the issue. One day, the Block Resource Person (BRP), who was responsible for textbook distribution, visited the school as part of his day-to-day-work. The children stood around him and questioned/him. He promised the children that he would resolve the issue and within three days, all the children had received their textbooks. The BRP would later share this incident at the various teacher training platforms to motivate teachers to start such initiatives in their schools.
- There was only one toilet in the school which

was not sufficient for use by all 200 children. The girls would go to their homes during the break to use the toilet and the boys would relieve themselves outside the school, in the open. The *Mantri Mandal* took up this issue with the HT and the school team requested the local Gram Panchayat to construct toilets for children in collaboration with the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC). When the issue was not resolved even after three months, the students took the path of peaceful protest and gathering outside the Gram Panchayat, demanded the construction of toilets in the school. Within ten days, temporary toilets were in place and the new toilets were constructed within six months.

- In another incident, the children were able to explain to the Block Education Officer (BEO) how a temporary school attender hired to clean the premises had shirked his duties and threatened the HT. This resulted in action being taken against the erring attender. The BEO was impressed with the children for explaining the situation correctly, confidently and without any bias.

This initiative that was started to create a democratic process in the school through a *Mantri Mandal*, had a great impact on students. They were able to question, raise their voice against discrimination

and fight for their rights. It also helped them to better judge right and wrong and become aware of their duties and responsibilities.

This is how children learn about citizenship and become better citizens of society. There may be a few schools that are also working like this, but we need all schools to practice democracy in similar

ways. If children learn to use democratic ways of dealing with issues in the school, in their homes and in their villages, they will grow up to respect the value of democracy and become active citizens. This can be achieved through the regular and persistent efforts of the school's students, teachers and parents.



**Gururajrao K** is a Resource Person (teacher educator) with the Azim Premji Foundation, Field Institute, Mandya, Karnataka. He has a rich experience of working with teachers, head teachers and educational functionaries. Most of his efforts are concentrated toward bringing change in teacher practices and enhancing children's learning in government schools. He may be contacted at [gururajrao.k@azimpremjifoundation.org](mailto:gururajrao.k@azimpremjifoundation.org)

What should be the content and goals of an education for citizenship? This is not a simple question. There can actually be several ways of answering it, with serious disagreement among the various positions possible. It is also a dangerous question to ask, but schools and teachers have little option but to pose it, if they wish to be relevant to our times and be able to teach something meaningful to their students.

*Amman Madan, Different Cultures of Citizenship - Which to Teach?, p 03.*