

Giving Back to Society

Sameera Vasa

As the news for an article regarding citizenship education came up amongst the group, I wondered about it and soon found a mentor who had enlightened me through an article in *The Bastion*. The article focused on civic education in schools and the differences in curriculum versus reality in our country. The article surely gave me an idea about citizenship education but there was a gap in my understanding with respect to how it relates to our lives, in general.

As though the universe was leading me to further my knowledge about citizenship education, the very next day, I got a chance to sit in a class while a legendary teacher taught class VII children about *Mylara Mahadevappa*, an Indian revolutionary from Karnataka, who resisted British rule. This legendary teacher, who I have had the chance of meeting several times, has an abundant repository of stories and analogies. She started to explain how the protagonist of the story had felt *videshi* as he put on a cap made by Britishers and immediately threw it away. She moved on to explain *videshi* and *swadeshi*. At this point, she asked children to imagine growing a plant, adoring it, caring for it and finally watching a beautiful flower bloom.

The teacher wanted to highlight the sense of belonging that comes with the feeling of *swadeshi*. She asked the children to describe how they feel about a flower that they planted themselves as against a flower they bought at a market.

This teacher then used another story that everyone could relate to, to explain the definition of responsibility. She spoke about a man who had studied in a government school in India but finally migrated to a foreign country to live a better life. She then, asked the students if they knew of anyone who had made full use of the country's resources but had not given anything back. She provided children with food for thought and she made me also think of what I owed to society. The teacher ended the class by asking each child to think about their responsibility towards their parents as a child,

as a sibling and as a student.

The class did not end there. The children came forward and helped their teacher to go to the bathroom, clean her plate, open her lunch box and hand her anything that she required before they left for another class. This might seem odd without context – this teacher has disabilities and needs help to move around. The surprising thing is that children in her class never have to be specifically told to help, they reach out on their own accord and take turns to help their teacher in a very systematic way.

This teacher has won many accolades and one of her traits worth mentioning is that she practises everything that she preaches, and she does so in a way that inspires and motivates others to do better and live a better life. This teacher who is seven months away from retirement has planned to go back to her hometown post-retirement and volunteer her time at the school that she had attended as a child. She explains that it is her responsibility to the hundred-year-old school in her hometown because that school is the reason she is where she is today and that she owes a great deal to her teachers, her hometown and her community.

This teacher always makes me feel motivated and inspired to do more than just exist as a human being. She has the ability to instil good values in her students through language, math and general conversations. I notice how instilling values in children leads to behavioural change and subsequently influences children's learning curve in the positive direction. The children in her classroom are happy to learn, they are empathetic, assertive, problem solvers and work in collaboration. They have a role model who practices what she preaches. Teaching words like *responsibility*, *sincerity*, *giving back to society* would be more effective when these are taught by invoking emotions, making these relevant to children and most importantly, by practising what one preaches every single day, patiently and happily.



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It was part of our rules that everybody, including the teacher, would wait for their turn to speak, raise their hand, and not interrupt when someone else was speaking. Every voice would be heard and if there were differences in opinion, we would hear the reasons and let children decide if they could agree with each other. This system helped those students who thought they knew everything and would always speak and give answers first. They learned to wait for their turn, respect others' opinions and accept their own mistakes.

Pooja Vishnoi, School as a Microcosm of Society, p 74.