

Children's Experiences and Their Relation to Social Issues

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Introduction

While studying Social Sciences, students should be able to understand contemporary social issues as well as their experiences in the classroom and be able to link it all up with the subject. There is not just one way of evaluation. What is important to see is to what depth children have understood the topic and if they have been able to see its linkages to their daily life. If they are able to articulate their views in writing, related as they are to their experience, this would be fulfilling the objectives of education.

The Constitution of India has made many provisions for the country's citizens including those of equality, fraternity, secularism etc. The citizens of India have also been granted certain rights – the Right to Education, for instance, and the Child-Rights. Keeping in view the significance of Education, the 86th Amendment to the Constitution, the Right to Education has been included in the Fundamental Rights. Articles 45, 21 (A) of the Indian Constitution contain the Right to Education under which all children in the 6-14 years' age-group are to be provided free and compulsory education irrespective of sex, caste, religion and other discrimination. They also have certain other rights – without discrimination on any of the grounds cited above, they should be listened to and respected and protected from exploitation, and children who are differently abled, those with special needs should also have their dignity defended. Children should get enough opportunities for progress and they should be kept away from tasks involving some risks.

Whatever the children have understood and learnt should also be felt by them in real life and they should also be aware of any incident or child whose rights are obstructed or kept deprived of education.

I gave a project-work to children of Class 8 in which they would have to conduct a survey and talk to people around them and identify five children who are deprived of the Right to Education or their rights as a child and find the reasons for this. They were to gauge how much the children had understood the issue of these rights. Also, there are many

occasions when we are unable to connect what happens in real life with what we study in school. The aim was also for them to be able to do so and to develop sensitivity towards such things.

The children took up this task happily. When we talked about it in the class, it gave rise to many questions about the deprived sections of society with very limited means at their disposal, those who have no parents or those that do not have any earning hands and one could sense a degree of sensitivity in the children about these issues. The questions that came to their minds included the one about choice – if the children are in poor circumstances what would they choose – the school or the home? If they come to the school, the home suffers and if they work, it would mean a violation of their child-rights. When they shared their experiences, it was quite obvious that they felt concerned about the deprived sections of society – the government does say that the right to education and child-rights should be provided to each child, but is this really possible? If yes, how then can it be made possible? How can the children working in hotels or garages go to school? If they go to school, who will be ready to retain them for work? When will they go to work? The law protects our rights and stops them from being violated. We might have to do something risky under compulsion and yet we cannot complain about it, afraid as to what would happen to other members of the family. There were other such difficult questions with no easy answers, and I tried to get the answers from the children themselves.

I asked the children to give expression to their experiences in writing – what they felt, what they liked and what change had come about in their thinking after their survey-work in society.

The children's experiences were very different. They became very emotional. They said that they did not like it at all because there is a law in place but the reality is altogether different. Problems cannot be solved just by making laws – there is a need to think of other methods and means too. Those with genuine problems at home cannot stop working, but there is a need to open schools for



them with timings that suit them so that they can get education even as they are working. Only then can the Right to Education (RtE) and Child Rights guaranteed by the Constitution be implemented.

Children's Experiences

Here are some reactions

- I liked doing this work because while doing it, I came to know that so many children in my village don't go to school and they have to face the violation of their rights as children. I also liked it because I got an opportunity to go out of home and roam around. Though I wanted to know the reasons for not being allowed to go to school, I was disappointed because they did not want to speak about this.
- I went for the survey during vacations and gathered information about children by going to various places. When I went to Suman's (imaginary name) place and asked her mother why she did not allow her to go to play, she said that their financial condition was not good, and she did the work of sewing quilts for which she got just 800 rupees per month. If Suman worked, it would be a help and she would also be well-equipped to work at her in-laws' place when she got married. I said to Suman that she should quickly complete her work and come to play. Suman's mother scolded me for this and I felt unhappy and sad that many in our society don't allow children to play and even study – how will our country develop and progress in such an atmosphere?
- While doing this work, I felt good as well as bad. I came to know that in our villages, cities and society so many children are unable to get education. I feel that information about those who don't send their children to school should reach to the government with the help of the media. The Constitution says that every child, whether rich or poor, male or female, has the right to education and also that parents who do not send their children to school may have to face legal consequences but we know that no parent has been punished. . Most girls have to do much of the work at home whereas everyone knows that a girl should be educated and well-read, for she is a mother – and if there were no women, no males would be born.
- In my village there are no children who face a violation of child-rights. I therefore went to a neighbouring village. We found three children

there who wish to study but are not in a good position economically. We came to know that their father is no more and mother is the lone earner and they are many brothers and sisters. I enjoyed doing this work but felt bad to learn that children in our society can't read even though they wish to, and have to work even at such a young age. They are not free to play and roam around at their leisure.

- I liked doing this work because I got an opportunity to meet so many people and talk to them and was also able to add to my knowledge. I did not like that even today many children are not going to school.

Working on this project, children have learnt a lot:

- There are many children in our society who do not want to go to school and their parents too do not send them to school. They work in shops and hotels, spend their earnings in wrong ways and become victims of drugs, etc.
- This was an opportunity to listen to the problems of children who do not go to school. The economic condition of some families is not good and I suggested that they should send their children to government schools that charge no fees for education. Parents should surely send their kids to school so that the campaign initiated in this regard by the government is a success.
- There are some who have got their children married very young and others who don't send their wards to school and involve them in hard work.
- I saw two brothers but could not go to them in spite of making an effort to do so and so I sent a friend to them who came back to me saying he could not understand their language as they were from Bihar. I saw that both of them live in a shop. The first brother works in the shop near our house and the second, in a shop in an iron goods shop.

Some suggestions given by children

- Everyone should be given education for the country to progress.
- There should be a separate provision for children working in shops, garages, etc.
- Those who have financial challenges have to choose between going to school and going to work. What should be given priority? Their

need is to somehow get on with life. In such a situation it will be good if such children can be kept in hostel and they are able to study as well as learn some work/occupation so that they can earn something and be a support for their family.

- o Children in senior classes should be given the responsibility of coaching and helping these students in studies so that deprived children can also study and there is social-cooperation also.

Conclusion

Two facts came to the fore:

First, the children found this a joyful task. They felt good doing it. One reason for this was that they could get out of their homes and talk to people. As a result they gained in self-confidence. They were able to witness the real face of society upfront. Had they not got this opportunity, they would have been

limited to reading books and not been acquainted with reality. They came to realise the significance of the Right to Education and of Child Rights, as also the shortcomings in the application of law at the level of the government and the circumstances in which parents do not send children to school. They also became aware of how child rights are violated by shopkeepers who employ children and make them do work.

Secondly, the children also came to think about the solutions and were able to present their views frankly without worrying as to whether what they say will be heard or not. And they gave some good suggestions too – like the one of reaching their views to the government through the media and of the senior students taking up the project of teaching such children, of a separate hostel for working children so that they can study even as they do productive work that helps them improve their economic condition.

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