

School Education Syllabus – Themes, objective and details

Outline of the themes/issues to be included in the proposed syllabus.

Introduction and Rationale:

Education is regarded as an important component of our society because it is assumed to be a vehicle for creating a desirable society, which is a just and democratic society. It aims to nurture children and enable them to develop their critical and creative capacities so that they can fully explore their potential and live in harmony as well as dignity. This is what we expect education to deliver. But this promise of education fails to be delivered by the existing formal education system in India. One of the most challenging aspects of the reality of Indian education is its apathy towards the most marginalised, especially female children in rural and tribal areas. Formal education often exacerbates existing inequalities and marginalisations, resulting in an increased drop-out rate for girls, as well as limited livelihood opportunities after school. Abhivyakti's own experiences from our 'Shodhini' project with rural girls demonstrate with evidence that school education plays a very limited role in the empowerment of girls or transformation in their social status. The question that troubles us then is, can schooling ensure the development of an active and responsible citizen? How can education become more meaningful for marginalised rural and tribal students? How can it contribute in enhancing their capacities to bring about change in their personal lives as well as communities? What role do teachers play in developing these capacities? What perspectives and methodologies would help teachers in using multiple approaches in the classroom to facilitate students' overall development, including emotional, mental, and physical aspects?

We are aware of this reality and are in the process of designing modules that address this lacuna. The syllabus would draw from our experiences of working with marginalised communities for many years, and will be based on our philosophy of commitment to a vision of social transformation rooted in the principle of freedom and justice for all. As Martin Luther King said many years ago " We must rapidly begin to shift from a 'thing'-oriented society to a 'person'-oriented society". When we mention freedom, we mean allowing students to practice it by assuming responsibilities for their choices.

At the core of our vision for education is engaged pedagogy. This assumes that students too have the freedom to express and make choices. When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, reveal, and answer to an authority figure, in form of a teacher. Any classroom which believes in such practice of holistic learning will also be a space where teachers can also grow and are empowered. Our pedagogy will be on a process of engagement where everybody counts including the students as well as the facilitators. When the facilitators bring narratives of lived experiences to classroom discussions, it creates a space to produce knowledge from our own realities, and reflect how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of

material in the syllabus. If experiences of exploitation, inequality and discrimination are brought as examples into classroom, the classroom then has the potential to confront and challenge systems of domination. What we hope is that such knowledge and perspectives will enrich and enhance the students' dignity and respect for their own context and milieu.

We have identified three broad areas from our experiences of working in rural/tribal area of Nashik. School education hardly gives any attention to the local context, history, struggles, and local knowledge that communities have accumulated from their experiences of living in the natural conditions. The syllabus will therefore like to introduce themes which are close to the students' life and make them celebrate, own, and feel responsible towards their own socio-economic-political and cultural contexts. The overall aim is to create an understanding of the self as a dynamic being capable of contributing to the overall well-being of the community and appreciation of the rich socio-cultural knowledge and heritage of their villages. The three areas that we would like to focus on and weave narratives around are -

❖ ***Self and Identity***

❖ ***Gender and Patriarchy***

❖ ***Social Context and Governance***

- **Constituency** – school children of classes 7th through 9th in the Nashik district as well as other youth from the villages.
- **Age group** – 12 to 15 years
- **Methodology** – Participatory, open and informal

A – Self awareness, identity and development

- Objective -
 - ✓ To identify and explore oneself and one's identity
 - ✓ To become aware of one's strengths and weakness
 - ✓ To enhance critical understanding

Sub points -

1. Self introduction
2. Self image
3. Who am I? How am I?
4. Me and the network of relationships
5. My family, my community
6. Mental resources: cognitive, emotional and intellectual
7. Exploration of my qualities and skills
8. My dreams and aspirations
9. My strengths and limitations
10. Opportunities and threats
11. Purpose of life, my needs
12. My leadership qualities and social responsibilities

13. Communication and its approaches
14. My social rights and values
15. Critical perspectives, creative expressions

B - Gender equality and sexuality,

- Objective -
 - ✓ To understand the concepts of gender, patriarchy and sexuality
 - ✓ To become aware of their impact on our self and identity
 - ✓ To confront gender roles and expectations
 - ✓ To prevent gender-based violence and to provide information about gender-just laws in India
1. Understanding gender and social identity
 2. Understanding sexuality and the body
 3. Introduction to our reproductive systems
 4. Sex and gender: Understanding roles and differences in our society
 5. Gender-based biases and discrimination
 6. Understanding patriarchy and its control
 7. Patriarchy and socialisation, social norms
 8. Understanding masculinity and its effect on identity
 9. Gender-based violence: Causes, preventions, and redressal
 10. Understanding laws related to women

C – Understanding social context and history

- Objective -
 - ✓ To create awareness about local history and local practices
 - ✓ To understand various local knowledges and how they are currently perceived
 - ✓ To learn about democratic functioning and local governance
 - ✓ To create environmental perception and appreciation
1. Village history and its relation to modern society
 2. Listing local resources and its current status and analysis
 3. What is local knowledge, how it is acquired and used
 4. Understanding and confronting social norms
 5. Understanding decision-making practices within family community
 6. Me and my relationship with the village
 7. Livelihoods opportunities and analysis
 8. Leadership: Types, approaches, features
 9. Understanding role of various institutions
 10. Understanding role of Panchayats and various forums like Gram Sabha

11. Role of community, and meaning of participation in institutions
12. Understanding democracy and its practices
13. Understanding caste-based organisation and its expression in villages
14. Access to services and its analysis
15. Understanding and advocating for accountability and transparency

Our Approach to facilitate Training workshops

We have been organizing and facilitating training programs for more than 25 years. Along the way, we have learnt to design and facilitate a workshop which will enable and optimize learning for the participants. Our philosophy of training draws from the methods developed by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist known for his work on developing theory of critical awareness. Our trainings are always centered around the process of action and reflection. We recognize the potential and energy within each person and each community and build on it to empower them to contribute to the shaping of a society where it is possible for all the people to fulfill their basic human needs. Dialogue is crucial in every aspect of the participatory learning process and of transformation. For years, traditional education and training has been seen as a process of passing on information, from one “person who knows” to those “who do not know”. But we know now that this way of teaching has not yielded the required results, nor has it erased the existing social hierarchies. We believe that each person may have valuable knowledge to contribute, and so we need dialogue to draw in the insights of all the participants of our training.

Our training atmosphere is based on the culture of co-learning. It means that we as facilitators provide a framework for critical thinking and reflection. We do this in creative ways by encouraging participants to ask questions and allowing the answers to unfold through participatory exercises and discussions. Hence, the participants, the learners are active in the social construction of knowledge.

Knowing the needs as well as the learner’s prior knowledge is critical in designing the training sessions. It helps the learners build trust that they are valued and respected, and that their prior knowledge is important part of the building further knowledge. The session flow is developed based on participants’ needs and experience. However, it is always challenging to develop this culture of learning which values and is sensitive to the needs of the group. All our training workshops have constantly explored ways to build trust, openness and honesty between the participants and us. We as facilitators are open to their feedback and suggestions as it provides insights to examine our own values and ways of working. Being a facilitator is a continuous learning process and that is what we value the most.

Conclusion –

We believe that ultimately our endeavour is towards creating future leaders. We look at this process as an opportunity to shape the leadership of the rural students. We would like to say that in its essence education is about sowing the seeds of leadership in the students, thereby also making it about shaping the future. We believe that leadership develops when students no longer feel that they are victims of circumstances, but rather see themselves as capable beings who participate in creating new realities for themselves and their communities. Leadership is about creating a society in which human beings continually deepen their understanding of reality and become more capable of participating in the unfolding of the world.