

An Azim Premji University Publication

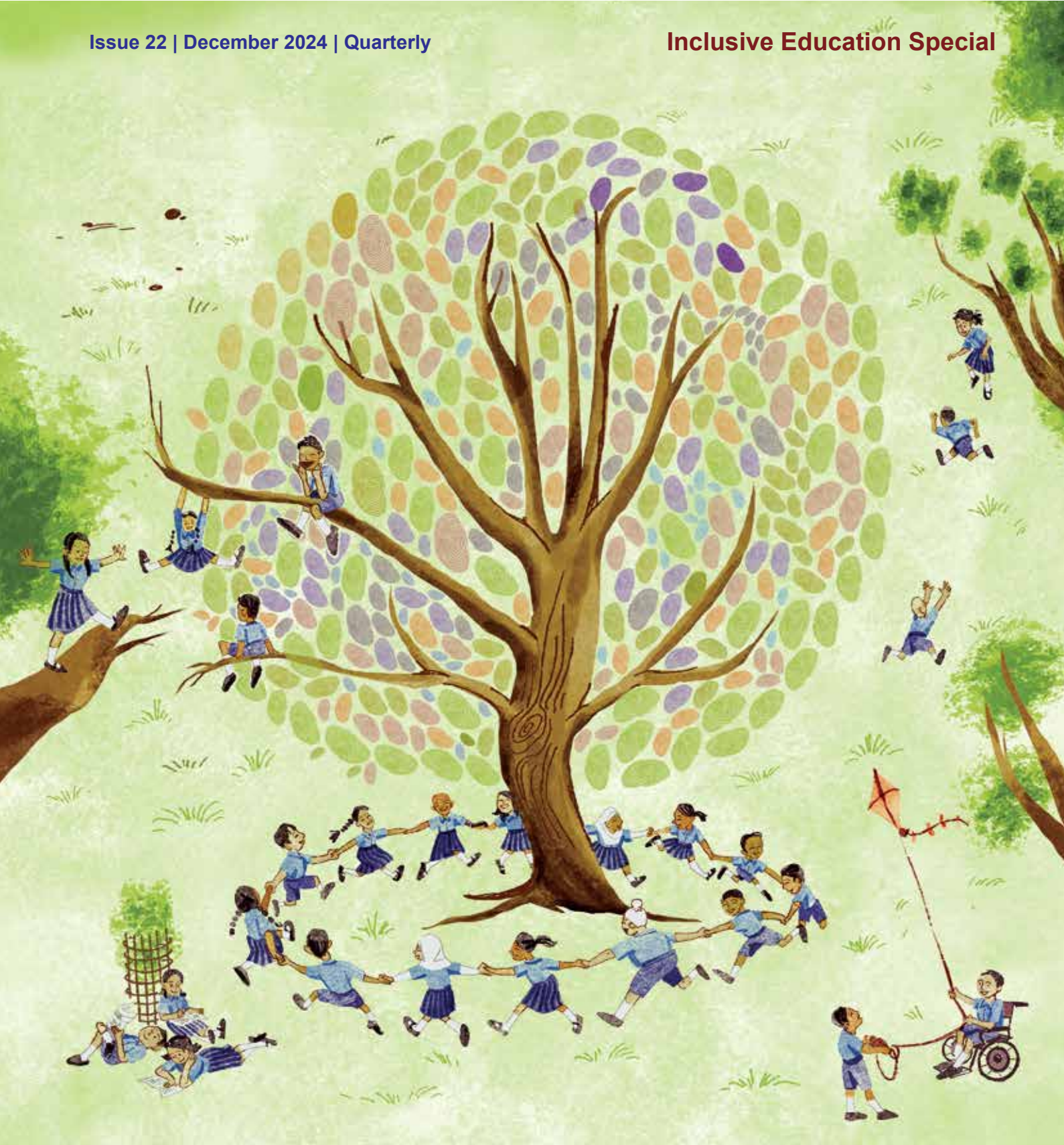
# Pathshala

## Bheetar aur Bahar



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Inclusive Education Special





**Bheetar aur Bahar**

December 2024 | Issue 22

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*Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* is Azim Premji University's quarterly publication on primary school education. The publication seeks to provide practice-based content for pre-primary, primary and upper-primary government school teachers across the country. It is a platform for them to share perspectives, experiences, reflections and classroom processes that reflect effective pedagogy aligned with NEP 2020, NCF-SE and NCF-FS. First published in Hindi, it is also translated into English and Kannada.

# Editorial

*Pathshala Bheetar aur Bahar* has successfully completed a journey of 21 issues along with you. Throughout this period, we have gained valuable insights from one another. The magazine has undergone several changes from time to time. With the arrival of the 22nd issue, you will notice some more changes. This issue not only introduces a fresh perspective on school education but also aims to broaden the magazine's reach. In light of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) and to connect the efforts of those working in the field of education in different parts of the country, the magazine is now being published in English and Kannada in addition to Hindi. By offering the magazine in three languages, we aim to reach a wider audience, including teachers, teacher educators and others engaged in school education across the country. You will observe that writers from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Puducherry, Telangana, the Northeast, Jharkhand, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh have contributed to this issue. We are committed to ensuring that the content published is valuable for fellow educators and resource persons working at the grassroots level. The magazine will continue to be released quarterly, with one issue every year focusing on a specific theme related to school education. For example, this issue focuses on the theme of inclusion in school education.

NEP 2020 states that '*Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. Inclusive and equitable education - while indeed an essential goal in its own right - is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society...*' This seemed like an important starting point for *Pathshala* in its changed avatar.

This issue on inclusion in primary schools aims to integrate the documented strategies for inclusion in school activities. It seeks to understand the perspectives, sensitivities, and challenges faced by teachers and teacher trainers regarding inclusion. It explores what they are doing, and how they are doing it through their experiential writing. In this issue, you will also come across examples of inclusive practices that teachers have tried in their classrooms.

Very often the word 'inclusion' is associated with children with different abilities. However, upon delving deeper, it becomes evident that this is not only about them but also about the education and resources of children from marginalised communities whose sensibilities are shaped by diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

It is also about those processes in which only a few children receive praise and are seen in specific roles. It is also about those competitions where a few students receive applause while others are relegated to sitting at the back, clapping for them.

The issue is not limited to deciding which subject a child should choose, which sports they should opt for, or which cultural activities they can participate in rather, the scope of inclusion extends to how gender roles and responsibilities are perceived and divided for girls and boys in school and at home too. What needs to be understood is that despite exemplary scientific accomplishments of reaching Mars or the Moon, young

girls continue to face challenges in completing their education due to biological changes, such as 'menstruation'. You will come across many such articles related to inclusion in education in this issue.

NEP 2020 discusses inclusion in detail, '*...The education system must aim to benefit India's children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of birth or background. ... large disparities still remain... particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged groups that have been historically underrepresented in education. Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) can be broadly categorized based on gender identities (particularly female and transgender individuals), socio-cultural identities (such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and minorities), geographical identities (such as students from villages, small towns, and aspirational districts), disabilities (including learning disabilities), and socio-economic conditions (such as migrant communities, low income households, children in vulnerable situations, victims of or children of victims of trafficking, orphans including child beggars in urban areas, and the urban poor).* (National Education Policy 2020, pp 24, 6.1, 6.2)

Human values, such as affection and respect, deeply embedded in our constitutional values, are essential for every child. In this issue, you will read about experiences where teachers have made human values the foundation for inclusion, and this has helped them improve their teaching and students' learning. The experiences, processes, and concerns that we read about in this issue, reinforce our trust and confidence in the efforts made by our teacher friends.

These teachers understood the reasons that often lead to exclusion causing some children to feel left out in school, classrooms, sports or cultural activities. Often, these factors are so subtle that they go unnoticed by both children and teachers. However, the larger question is: If every child in the classroom is not included in learning, playing, and school activities, is the purpose of education truly being fulfilled? To understand this will be an important step towards understanding inclusion.

This issue is a small effort to collate some examples, experiences and challenges of inclusion in primary education. It was not possible to include everything in a single issue. There are many more aspects to be discussed, which will continue in the upcoming issues. This is just like opening a window and seeing how awareness and sensitivity expand the sky of possibilities.

As perceptive readers, your suggestions and feedback have always encouraged us to improve the magazine. We hope to stay connected. Continue reading *Pathshala Bheetar Aur Bahar* and sharing your experiences through articles and feedback.

With the best compliments,

Pratibha Katiyar  
Chief Editor

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

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- Opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the Azim Premji Foundation.
- Names have been changed to protect children's identities.
- The material published in the magazine can be used for educational and non-commercial purposes. However, it is mandatory to obtain permission from the author and publisher and to mention the source.
- The cover illustration portrays inclusion in multiple ways with the tree composed of thumbprints illustrating diversity at the heart of the concept.

# Inclusion at Enrolment Level is Not Enough

**Madhu Kushwaha**

The article explains the policy ideas that have been presented for inclusion in schools and institutions in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the main problems in implementing them. A teacher from a teacher training institute expressed confidence that capable and sensitive teachers can become the bearers of the culture of inclusion in schools and other educational institutions.

**N**o education system and process in the world, including that of India, can claim to be fully inclusive. Two reasons stand out – first, inclusion is a continuous process. When we fulfil the demands of inclusion at a level or for a group, the spread of educational facilities creates new social identities along with new demands from new students.

Second, the officials and teachers responsible for implementing inclusive educational policies are all members of the same society that has been justifying non-inclusive practices on various grounds for ages. Therefore, creating a positive attitude towards the principles of inclusion in everyone, especially in teachers, and building their capacities becomes the prerequisite for implementing the policies on inclusion.

Almost all the commissions on school education and higher education in India have underlined the need and significance of inclusion in their reports. The National

Education Policy (NEP) 2020 also puts significant emphasis on inclusive education.

Education is the single greatest tool for achieving social justice and equality. Inclusive and equitable education - while indeed an essential goal in its own right - is also critical to achieving an inclusive and equitable society in which every citizen has the opportunity to dream, thrive, and contribute to the nation. The education system must aim to benefit India's children so that no child loses any opportunity to learn and excel because of circumstances of birth or background. This Policy reaffirms that bridging the social category gaps in access, participation, and learning outcomes in school education will continue to be one of the major goals of all education sector development programmes. *National Education Policy 2020, Chapter 6.1, Page 24*



Figure 1. When the teacher participates in activities, it helps in bridging the social divides.

The policy further states: The dynamics and also many of the reasons for exclusion of socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) from the education system are common across school and higher education sectors. Therefore, the approach to equity, equality and inclusion must be common across school and higher education. Thus, the policy initiatives required to meet the goals of equity, equality and inclusion in higher education must be read in conjunction with those for school education.

*National Education Policy 2020, Chapter 14.2, Page 41*

## Inclusion in teachers' training programme

No plan to implement inclusive educational policies can succeed unless the capacity and attitude of teachers are developed for inclusion. This was the reason for including a course on inclusive education in the curriculum of the two-year pre-service teacher education programme implemented in 2014. The objective was that teachers not only understand the concept, principles, and significance of inclusion but also make it an integral part of their teaching behaviour and practices.

In my opinion, if a teacher has ever experienced inclusion in her educational journey, they can understand the principle of inclusion better and can put it into practice. Teacher education programmes can make their trainees learn the strategies of inclusive education in a better way and inculcate a positive attitude towards inclusion. In this article, I will talk about some of the efforts taken for inclusion in my teachers' training institute.

## Developing a true and deep understanding of inclusion

Inclusion has several dimensions. However, most people, including students, understand inclusion only in the context of enrolment. They believe that giving preference in enrolment fulfils the purpose of inclusion and that the responsibility for success or failure in school is that of the students themselves. This understanding limits academic success or failure to merely a few individual factors, such as effort, hard work and intelligence, and fails to notice the socio-structural factors, facilities and barriers behind these. The prevalence of this superficial approach to inclusion, unfortunately, is pervasive and predominant in Indian society.

**“ Inclusion, in its true sense, demands accommodation, adaptation and changes in the linguistic, curricular, learning and assessment methods, teaching and learning material, and the overall daily experiences within the school environment. ”**

Inclusive enrolment is just the first step towards inclusion. Inclusion, in its true sense, demands accommodation, adaptation and changes in the linguistic, curricular, learning and assessment methods, teaching and learning material, and the overall daily experiences within the school environment.

To introduce teachers to the true and comprehensive meaning of inclusion is the responsibility of teacher training institutes. Trainees joining the teachers' training programme come from different educational backgrounds. Most of them believe that reservation in admission is inclusion, and they attribute academic failure to personal factors. Such a prevailing mindset makes it no less than a challenge to explain to trainee teachers that socio-structural factors play a decisive role in the success or failure of a student in school. The intersectional identity of a student based on their caste, gender and class creates for them a structure of facilities or deprivations in the school. Such structure is responsible for their success or failure. A student's innate intellectual abilities are not the only factor that is directly related to their success in school.

An effective strategy to explain the true meaning of inclusion is the sharing of the personal educational journey of the students (teacher trainees) in a class. I task them with documenting their personal educational journey for this purpose at the beginning of the course and ask them to think and write down answers to questions, such as: *What type of school did you attend? How much family support did you get in your studies? What did you want to study in higher education? Were you able to get admission to your desired course or institute? Did you face any difficulties in getting an education?* etc. If their answers reveal that they did not face any of these or just a few of these challenges, they are asked to write about the reasons or factors that made all this possible. Similarly, if they faced challenges in many or all of these, they are asked to identify the factors or reasons for it. Thereafter, I organise a discussion on their documentation, and the socio-structural factors responsible for school success or failure are thus identified based on their personal educational experiences. The students straightaway understand the relationship between gender identity and educational opportunities; class status and the opportunities for quality education and schooling in English medium, as well as the struggle of Hindi-speaking students and students with special needs to succeed in education.

Such discussions help these teacher trainees develop the understanding that even though reservations ensure some degree of inclusive enrolment, the school or institution still needs curricular and linguistic accommodation, and training in the access and use of infrastructural facilities (ramps, toilets, Braille printers, read-aloud computer programmes, etc.) so that all students can participate equally in the educational process.

## Linguistic inclusion

The dominance of the English language in education in India is indisputable. English medium students have better access to course material and books, and more opportunities to participate in the classroom processes. This intimidates the non-English speaking students considerably. Both Hindi and English are acceptable as languages of instruction, but quality course material, reference books etc. are mostly available in English. Therefore, Hindi medium students feel excluded and constantly struggle with both the content and the English language in their learning process. When I provided some translated course material in Hindi, the students were pleasantly surprised and their participation in the class increased. My association with Azim Premji University's 'Anuvad Sampada' programme made this possible. 'Anuvad Sampada' is a vast online resource of material on various disciplines in education either written or translated in Hindi. Such access reduces the linguistic exclusion of students.

## Inclusion in everyday school life

We understand that for students with special needs, educational institutions, especially schools, are challenging places. But when we talk of special needs, we consider only physical challenges. We generally do not include girls in this category. Their biophysical 'special needs' related to menstruation are not considered by planners, education officials and teachers.

A patriarchal mindset makes menstruation an issue of shame, stigma and impurity, and hence a 'culture of silence' surrounds it. The prevalent social notion that a girl or woman should manage her menstruation 'silently' and privately is detrimental. Neither a demand for public discourse finds prominence on this essential issue nor are facilities for menstrual management demanded in schools. Inadequate health education about menstruation is a global public health issue and it either facilitates or hinders our perception of several human rights.

Menstruators require certain facilities in school. The lack of such facilities affects their inclusion in schools and educational institutions. Despite negatively affecting

the educational opportunities for girls, this issue is absent from school education and teacher education programmes. Since teachers' training institutes initiate the trainee teachers, both male and female, into this culture of silence, they too carry forward this culture as teachers themselves.

I wanted to normalise the conversation around menstruation so that new menstruators grow up with a 'positive self' image, and not with the feeling that their body is a source of impurity or uncleanness because of menstruation. A recent study revealed that only four education boards in India have lessons on menstruation in their textbooks, and only two out of these have sections on misconceptions related to menstruation (Kushwaha & Maurya, 2017). Students participating in the study informed that both male and female teachers hesitate to teach the lesson on menstruation even though it is in their textbook. Teachers tell students to read this lesson at home on their own. I realised that the situation demands that we prepare teachers who talk openly on the subject of menstruation and become a source of support for their young students in the future.

I try not to provide menstrual products in a secretive way. For example, I tell students that they should not whisper but ask aloud for sanitary pads when in need. Further, I deliberately ask male researchers, if they are present in my class, to hand over the sanitary pads. The teacher trainees of my class, both male and female, openly discuss issues related to menstruation and are certain that they will be able to talk with and support their young students on issues of menstruation in the future.

By sharing some of my experiences, I have tried to articulate the strategies or efforts of adopting inclusive practices in teachers' education. These I hope will help future teachers, both male and female, to take forward such discussions in their classrooms and schools. Students now have a better understanding of inclusion, and their interaction with the content, their empirical writings, and their understanding shows promise for the future. It assures us that they will surely pass on their inclusive understanding and enthusiasm to their communities and their future workplaces.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

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# Small Steps to Inclusive Practices

Jayna Jagani and Rima Kaur

Inclusion does not mean only making big policy changes or waiting for those to come to our schools. Mrs Anita and Mrs Babita are teachers without specialised training in inclusive education, cross-disability education, or even special education, yet they make efforts to tailor their lessons to meet the needs of their learners.



Figure 1. Inclusion means the participation of all children.

## Vignette 1

Harshita is 6 years old. She goes to a low-fee private school in rural Meerut. When Harshita was 4 years old, her mother fell seriously ill because of which Harshita had to discontinue school for more than a year. She rejoined school when she was about 6 years old. This led to a gap in her learning. The school advised Harshita's parents to help her practise reading and writing so that she would be able to cope with the syllabus.

The varied demands of English and Hindi grammar, mathematics, etc. in class I overwhelmed Harshita. Any form of written work began to frustrate her. She began to hit other children, screaming and at times crying. When this became a regular affair, the school called Harshita's parents. Her mother was supportive and tried to notice her triggers of violent behaviour. 'Ma'am, please pay more attention to her, you know how she is. You give her work in class, and I will get the remaining work done at home,' Harshita's mother requested the teacher.

Mrs Anita, the teacher, decided to help Harshita by reducing her writing load. If the class had to write 8-10 words, Harshita was asked to write only 4-5. Mrs Anita wrote down the questions in Harshita's notebook so that Harshita could focus on the responses. Mrs Anita also introduced techniques like deep breathing and using flashcards of various emotions (happy/sad/angry/frustrated). Harshita is now managing her emotions better, interestingly, so are the others in her class!

## Vignette 2

12-year-old Mayur was diagnosed with epilepsy a few years after starting school. Though mild, he had frequent seizures. His parents took him to the few doctors they could afford. Mayur's condition is now stable. However, he frequently feels drowsy in class due to the medication. Though he has developed language and numeracy abilities to a fair degree, he finds it difficult to focus during a 40-minute period.

Mayur's mother looks after his physical health, but she has started calling him 'lazy' and 'useless'. Mayur's father has become quiet, withdrawn, and disinterested in Mayur's schooling. He is reluctant to engage in any form of discussion about Mayur.

His parents enrolled Mayur in a low-fee private school in class V. Ms Babita, the teacher, noticed that letting Mayur take a short nap during the day dramatically increases his alertness and activity in class. She also organises group activities so that other children get to know Mayur as a friend. He goes out and plays games like everyone else. Ms Babita also tries to understand Mayur's medical condition and keeps track of his progress.

One day, Mayur had a mild seizure in class. The entire class helped him. Such experiences reassured Mayur's parents, who hesitatingly enquired about his well-being in school from Ms Babita during a parent-teacher meeting.

## Including all children

Both Harshita and Mayur are children without disabilities. Both are sent to low-fee private schools in the vicinity. Both experienced exclusion, and in the case of Mayur, the home environment itself is exclusionary as he experiences name-calling and emotional neglect from his family. Inclusion is often associated with including children with disabilities, however, to be inclusive is to welcome and support all children.

Harshita experienced an interruption in her schooling, leading to challenges in learning. Interruptions in schooling due to an illness or death in the family, poor health, financial crises, seasonal migration, violence in conflict areas, etc., are not uncommon. Harshita resorted to unpleasant behaviour as a way of coping. We see how her mother understands the issue and tries to cooperate with the school. Most parents do not put in this effort.

In Mayur's case, we learn how epilepsy as a long-term condition can significantly alter the quality of a child's schooling and life. Epilepsy is often called a hidden or invisible disability because it does not make itself apparent unless someone has a seizure. It invites stigma and discrimination. Mayur is also at high risk of experiencing learning difficulties and needs a supportive environment.

## Inclusion in all landscapes

Harshita's teacher, Mrs Anita, makes efforts to ensure that Harshita is not overly burdened. Mrs Anita is mindful of applying age-old maxims of teaching, such as considering the prior knowledge of the learner and scaffolding her, bringing authenticity to learning by connecting lessons/concepts to real-life experiences, showing sensitivity towards her pace of learning and developmental progression, and presenting the right degree of challenge so that learning does not induce boredom but is fun and engaging. In short, Mrs Anita shows how inclusion can be exercised simply by being an observant, sensitive, and mindful teacher.

Mayur's teacher, Ms Babita, prioritises his physical and socio-emotional well-being. While it is important for Mayur to be supported to do well academically, the first step is to ensure that he feels welcomed, comfortable, and safe in school. Ms Babita not only gained the confidence of Mayur's parents but also ensures that Mayur is not stigmatised or discriminated against in school.

Harshita and Mayur's cases highlight the struggles of schools and teachers in supporting children who need care and attention beyond the norm, where chance encounters with hardworking teachers lead to meaningful

learning experiences. Mrs Anita and Ms Babita practise small pedagogical acts to make children feel comfortable in the class and learn better. Imagine the power they can wield if they are further equipped and resourced!

### Inclusive education as a right

The Right to Education (RTE) Act 2009 made education the fundamental right of every child in our country between 6 and 14 years of age, including children with disabilities (GoI, 2009). Furthermore, the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities (RPwD) Act 2016 states that any child with a benchmark disability between the ages of 6 and 18 years of age has the right to free education (GoI, 2016).

The RTE and RPwD are landmark Acts in our country. However, access does not equal inclusion. It is possible for a diverse group of children, including children with disabilities, all going to the same school and being taught the same curriculum by the same teacher in the same timetable, to experience a range of exclusions every single day.

Here are some questions that teachers can ask themselves to understand if their classrooms are inclusive for all children. These can be seen as guidelines for creating inclusive classrooms.

Aspects of curriculum	First steps	Next steps
<b>Learning environment (physical)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there distracting light or noise inside/near the classroom?</li> <li>• Are materials and other resources within easy reach of all children?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the classroom space comfortable for all children?</li> <li>• Are the blackboard and other display areas clearly visible?</li> <li>• Is the arrangement of furniture flexible and conducive to learning?</li> </ul>
<b>Learning environment (social)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do children feel free to drink water or go to the toilet?</li> <li>• Are the children free to ask questions and share their feelings in class??</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do the children like coming to school every day?</li> <li>• Do they like talking about their day with you and their friends?</li> <li>• Do they call you if they want to share something or need help?</li> </ul>
<b>Daily routine/ Time table</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do children have to sit for long periods of time?</li> <li>• Are there periods where you find children disengaged or tired?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is each period of a length that is appropriate for the children?</li> <li>• Is there a period which provides children with a choice in activity?</li> <li>• Are there designated toilet and lunch breaks?</li> </ul>
<b>Content (textbooks and other TLMs)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the content related to children’s daily lives and experiences?</li> <li>• Does the content represent topics and themes that interest children?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the content responsive to the socio-cultural context of learners?</li> <li>• Have you modified the content so that it is accessible to all children?</li> <li>• Is the content multisensorial and represented in different formats?</li> </ul>
<b>Pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is your pedagogy play-based with scope for children to interact?</li> <li>• Are children’s prior experiences included and valued?</li> <li>• Do you welcome children’s home languages?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a balance of activities for all the domains of development?</li> <li>• Do you scaffold learners in ways that they learn best?</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you observe children in different settings?</li> <li>• Are there different ways for children to express what they know?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a reduced emphasis on paper-pencil tests/exams or worksheets?</li> <li>• Is there a balanced assessment of all domains of development?</li> <li>• Do insights from assessment inform your lesson plans?</li> </ul>

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 underlines inclusion as one of the fundamental principles of education, particularly in light of the gaps in education experienced by students coming from Socio-economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs).

MoE, 2020, p. 24

Inclusion – The act of including; ensuring that each child has an equitable opportunity to participate in all school and classroom processes regardless of their individual learning differences.

*National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage, 2022, p. 340*

### Small steps to inclusive practice

Where there are humans, there shall be diversity - of language, family, culture, learning needs, interests and so

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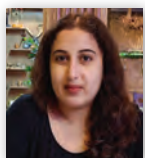
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much more. Hence, it is the responsibility of mainstream schools to provide inclusive education. Society certainly cannot be inclusive if our schools are not.

Big changes in policy are important – they bring attention to infrastructure, curriculum, textbooks and other resource materials, pedagogy, and assessment. But inclusion does not mean only making big changes or waiting for those big changes to come to our schools. Both Mrs Anita and Mrs Babita are teachers without specialised training in inclusive education, cross-disability education, or even special education, yet they make efforts to best tailor their lessons to meet the needs of their learners.

The theory of inclusion has been discussed for quite some time. The **act** of inclusion has been a result of larger demands for social justice, civil rights, and voices of the vulnerable (Kinsella & Senior, 2008). Teachers, teacher educators, and even parents must be sensitised and equipped with the know-how of **acting** to include.

# Impact of Social-Emotional Support on Children’s Learning

Deepika Jhala

When children from diverse backgrounds come together in a classroom, the role of the teacher becomes crucial in helping them develop understanding, compassion and empathy for each other and learn to respect differences.



Figure 1. Children display their drawings and poems in the classroom.

As a practitioner at Azim Premji School in Mandawa, Sirohi, Rajasthan, my journey has deepened my understanding of the impact of social-emotional challenges on children’s learning. India is a rapidly growing economy, yet its underprivileged children continue to experience some of the worst living conditions that I have witnessed working in the field. These children have to deal with various issues, like abuse due to the family’s financial circumstances, gender discrimination, malnutrition, child labour, diseases, dysfunctional families, societal pressure, etc. These hardships rob them of the opportunities that all children should have for equitable growth and development. This article reflects my experiences of

working in an inclusive classroom, particularly focusing on the journey of Indra, a student of class VIII in our school.

## Teacher’s role

The teacher’s role in an inclusive classroom is both crucial and challenging. Teachers are not merely dispensers of subject knowledge but also facilitators of emotional health, which can be considered as the foundation upon which academic learning is built. In an environment where children from diverse socioeconomic conditions come together, the teacher needs to be sensitive to the emotional and social challenges that hinder their academic performance.

Placing children with varying abilities in the same classroom cannot be labelled as inclusion. Inclusion means creating an environment where every child sitting in the classroom feels respected and valued and their needs are addressed. This demands a deep understanding of each child's social context, emotional state and background. Working in an inclusive classroom has reinforced my belief that without understanding the families they come from, their needs and challenges, how they are helped at home, and the potential they have, academic teaching alone is insufficient.

Many children who come from underprivileged backgrounds face various personal challenges. Their emotional distress may manifest in the form of low self-respect, anxiety, withdrawal from social interactions, and a lack of motivation to learn.

Indra, a student of class VIII, faces these challenges. She comes from a family of cultivators engaged in rent farming, and sometimes she also joins her parents at work in the fields, especially during harvest time. When she was in class VII, she was struggling with basic letter identification and often used to get confused with less commonly used alphabets. Her reclusive and introverted nature made her hesitant to talk to her peers, many of whom came from better financial and social backgrounds.

### Fostering trust

My learning from working with Indra and many other students like her who struggle academically is that to make them learn better, we need to build a connection and rapport with them. Indra's home happened to be on my way to school and as I was her class teacher as well, I visited her home frequently. Our informal conversations about her immediate surroundings – her cattle, farming and day-to-day work – helped her to open up and allowed me to connect with her on a personal level. During my visits, I also witnessed the financial hardships and daily life challenges faced by the family.

Indra gradually became comfortable with me and started sharing things related to school and classmates. This allowed me to tailor my teaching plan for her according to her needs, starting with the basics of the English language. We started with letter recognition and sounds, slowly fuelling her confidence and competence.

### Peer support and encouragement

I divided the whole class into three mixed-ability groups for activities and peer learning. Each group had students from rural and urban backgrounds, both genders and diverse social backgrounds. Indra was greatly supported by Shahista and Shorya, who were students at L3<sup>1</sup> and came from urban settings. They helped her in reading

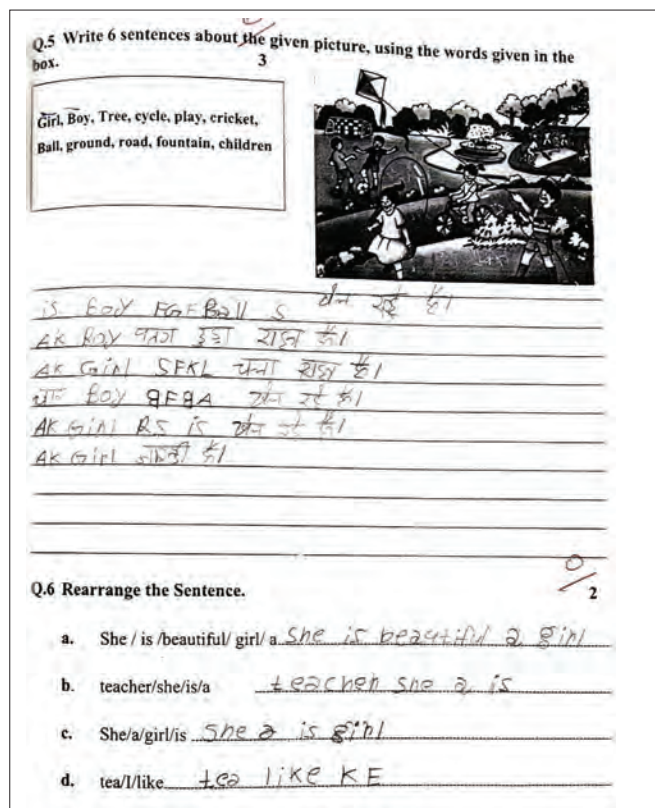


Figure 2: A sample of Indra's work, August 2023

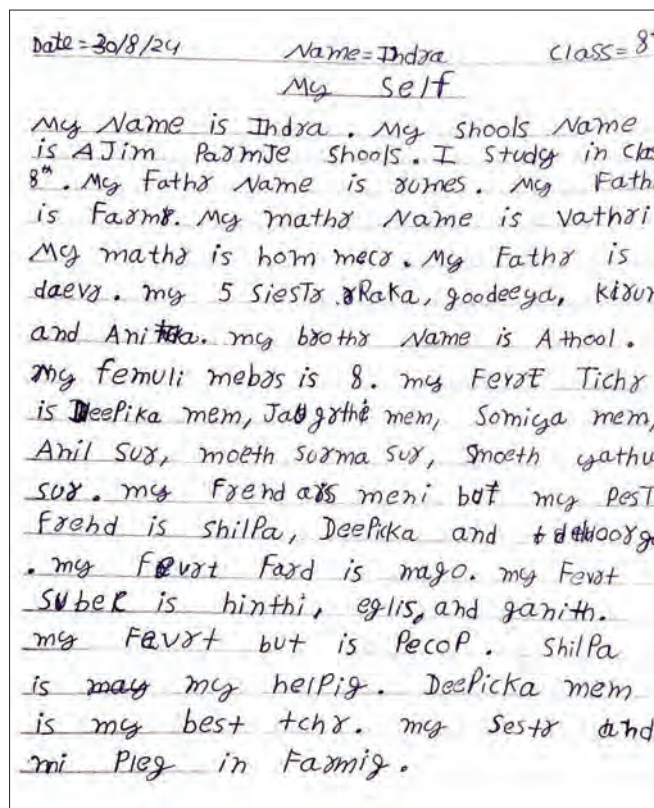


Figure 3: A sample of Indra's work, August 2024

and writing practice that continued even after the English period.

Indra's case features the value of emotional backing in the learning process. When children sense that they are loved and cared for, regardless of their academic performance or other factors, they are more inclined to engage with the learning process. I encouraged her to speak in class, even if it was just one word or a sentence at a time. This gave Indra confidence. When she would raise her hand to respond or to participate in the classroom discussions, all the other students encouraged her and wanted her to initiate and even clapped and appreciated her efforts. Small efforts like calling her by her name and giving her example, while teaching some concepts or asking her some basic questions that she could confidently answer boosted her self-esteem. The confidence and sense of achievement after accomplishing any task, no matter how small it was, were crucial in her academic development.

### Classroom strategies

As educators, we need to keep our motivation high, especially while assisting those students who are struggling with learning. Our trust in our own and the students' efforts is important to the process of creating positive changes. Though Indra's learning progress is taking time, her slow but noticeable progress motivates me to work harder.

As a teacher, I try to ensure that my teaching strategies meet the needs of all students, especially those from challenging socioeconomic backgrounds. Here are some approaches that have proven helpful in my experience:

- **Creating a healthy environment:** A healthy and emotionally safe environment encourages students to participate in the process of their learning without getting scared of failure or judgment.
- **Understanding unique needs:** It is vital to understand the unique needs of each child. For Indra, this involved beginning with the very basics of language learning and progressively increasing the difficulty level as her self-confidence developed.
- **Reinforcement:** Every achievement of Indra was

#### Endnotes

- i. According to NIPUN Bharat guidelines, children's learning progress at Level3 or L3 implies that they achieve learning outcomes on their own (without the teacher's support).



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**“ As we celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of each student by creating inclusive classrooms, we also have a big responsibility to foster an environment where all the students, irrespective of their background, can flourish. ”**

celebrated by her classmates, no matter how minor it was. Appreciating and recognising every small step motivates a child.

- **Peer support:** Now Indra is not hesitant to talk. She enjoys interacting with her classmates. Whenever she needs any support, she asks her classmates whether it is in reading a big word or framing a sentence. Peer learning not only develops social skills but aids learning as well.
- **Communication with parents:** Teacher's interaction with parents plays an important role in creating a support system for student's learning.

### Conclusion

As a teacher, creating a classroom where every child's needs are addressed and each one of them can learn according to their ability is a challenging task. Having academic knowledge is not enough. The progress of children like Indra can be slow and the result is not immediately evident but as teachers, we need to be persistent and optimistic.

When children like Indra learn, it gives teachers immense pleasure. Seeing a student who struggled with the alphabet, reading small passages and participating actively in the classroom gives a sense of satisfaction and hope to the teacher that all students can learn.

As we celebrate the diversity and uniqueness of each student by creating inclusive classrooms, we also have a big responsibility to foster an environment where all the students, irrespective of their background, can flourish. This demands an unwavering commitment to understanding the unique challenges, providing emotional support, and building trust, which will not only support students' learning but also contribute to their well-being.

# Everyone has an Equal Right to Learn

Vishnu Gopal

It is unjust to assign any game, task, or process based on people's identities. Despite our awareness of this fact, such instances frequently occur in schools. This is a significant challenge to inclusion. Its impact is evident on children's learning as well. Acknowledging these challenges and taking proactive measures to resolve them is the first step toward fostering inclusion.

Sports is generally considered a boys' activity. Girls do not play with boys, nor are they allowed to. Similarly, tasks, like cooking, serving food, cleaning utensils, etc., have been perceived as girls' work. If boys do such tasks, they are ridiculed. And when such tasks are to be done by a group comprising boys from all socio-economic classes – tribal, Dalit, and the rest, the issue becomes even more complicated. Not only do boys typically not do the cooking, but even if they are willing, there arises a problem with some of them refusing to cook with Dalit or tribal boys. To build a better, democratic society, it is the responsibility of schools to address these issues while adhering to constitutional values and principles. One such value and principle is that of inclusion.

The Gramin Shiksha Kendra (GSK) is based in Rajasthan's Sawai Madhopur and Tonk districts and works with the communities to improve their educational status. The main programme of the organisation is *Uday*, which focuses on community-based schools set up to demonstrate quality education to the community and the other schools.

The two schools run by GSK focus on inclusion. In these schools, efforts are being made to ensure inclusion through

both systemic reforms and continuous engagement with children, ensuring the equal participation of children and teachers from all communities in the school assembly, organising classroom seating arrangements, daily activities, and so on. The results of these efforts are gradually becoming visible. Our observation has been that collective activities, such as playing, cooking, and eating together, accelerate the pace of inclusion.

“ I realised that the process of inclusion had to begin with me and that I also needed to involve the other teachers. I also thought that the assembly needed to be conducted differently. ”

## Introduction of playing together

Playing together started with the introduction of indoor games, like *Carrom* and *Ludo*. When boys and girls were given the playing materials, we observed that the girls partnered with other girls and the boys with other boys.



Figures 1 & 2: Boys rolling out rotis and girls cooking together in the school.



Figure 3. Girls and boys playing a game together.

The next day, instead of forcing the boys and girls to sit together, I arranged smaller groups for them. These groups included both boys and girls, but a new problem arose. No one sat with the tribal or Dalit children, whether they were boys or girls. When asked why, they explained that they would not play with Dalits or Adivasis, whether they were boys or girls. This was also observed during lunchtime and while drinking water from the common tap. Since there was only one tap, children from the general category would wash it many times before drinking water. Among the girls, this feeling was even stronger. And why would it not be, given that they are constantly instructed about purity and identity? There was a sense of superiority based on caste and gender among these children. Children from the backward and Dalit categories kept their distance due to an unknown fear or past experiences. Even when I asked them to join, they refused and kept a distance from me as well. I realised that the process of inclusion had to begin with me and that I also needed to involve the other teachers. I also thought that the assembly needed to be conducted differently.

### Changes in morning assembly

While making changes in the assembly, I started having the children sit in a circle instead of in rows. No one occupied a seat in front of or behind another; they sat in an 'equal' arrangement. I also sat with the children.

Every child would call me to sit beside them and if I did not go, they would come and argue to sit next to me. So, I began changing my place every day, sitting alternately with boys and girls from all categories, talking to them, and singing with them. This gave me the opportunity to engage in the conversations that were happening among them.

### Participation in social occasions

One day, I learnt that one of my Dalit students had a wedding ceremony at his house. I decided to go, even though his parents had not invited me. I did not want to miss this opportunity. So, I said to the child, 'There's a wedding at your home, and I wasn't even invited?'

The child looked at me and, without saying anything, went home. After a while, his father came. He apologised very politely and said, 'Guruji, you know who we are. It was because of that fear that we didn't dare to invite you.'

I managed the situation quickly by saying, 'So, have you come to invite me or not?' He hesitated for a moment, but then, composing himself, said, 'Come, Guruji!' I started to leave, but my fellow teachers did not even move. Although everyone unanimously supports inclusion in training and speeches, they stopped short when an actual situation arose. It was important from an educational perspective that they accompany me. Only after I insisted did they come along. The house was right in front of the school,

so we reached there quickly. Everyone recognised us and started greeting us with 'Namaste'. Separate mats and utensils were arranged for us to sit and eat. But I made it clear that we would either eat with everyone, or not at all. They had to agree to my request, and we ate with everyone else.

This incident had a significant impact on Dalit children who from the very next day began to feel more at ease in the school. We held a discussion session and talked about this issue. The children had not yet internalised the caste (*varna*) system to the extent that they would dismiss reason and logic. They began to sit, talk, and study together. Regular discussions were held for this. Discussions would often involve debates about vegetarian and non-vegetarian food, along with the beliefs associated with them. Sometimes, arguments around *karma*, caste, occupation, food, and cleanliness would get all mixed up, and we would have to organise separate discussions for each topic. However, touching or pushing each other playfully, and eating together was still not happening. For that, we thought of introducing some games.

### The game of 'namaste-namaste'

In this game, all the children sit in a circle. One child who is outside the circle pats the back of any one child and begins to run. The child who receives the pat gets up and runs in the opposite direction. The two children meet at a point, shake hands and greet each other with a 'namaste'. Then, they race to sit in the vacant spot. The child who reaches first takes the place and the other repeats the process. By the end of this game, we saw that all the boys and girls had touched each other and shaken hands. In their eagerness to reach first, they forgot everything else. Later, even if someone remembered, they gave more importance to the enjoyment they got from the game. We also played other popular group games, like *Chooha Daur Billii Aayi*, *Koda Hai Jamalshahi*, and *Kho-Kho*. As they played these games, the children's desire to participate and win grew stronger. They forgot everything else and focused on improving their skills. To perform better, they started forming stronger teams. Whether the team members were Dalit, Adivasi, or from any other background, did not matter to them anymore.

### Eating together

The atmosphere had improved a little but during lunchtime, only a few children brought food from home. Some children, whose homes were nearby, would go back home for lunch, some others did not bring food at all. We asked everyone to bring lunch. I spoke to the parents whose children did not bring food to school, but nothing changed. I started having lunch with the children. I decided that I would take one bite from everyone's tiffin,

which was enough to fill me up, and I would give my tiffin to those who did not bring lunch. Seeing this, some children started bringing extra rotis. Gradually, having lunch together and sharing food, familiarity among the children from different communities began to grow.

Along with regular games, we started a kitchen garden and a cooking club. The children would bring compost, seeds, pesticides, tools, etc., from their homes for the kitchen garden that we created in a vacant lot in the school. They would work together to prepare the soil. The fruits and vegetables from this garden were available to everyone and when there was a surplus, the children could even take some home. From there, we began working on their food habits while running the cooking club. This was the time when the children while learning how to use a wood stove, utensils, and even making salads, took the initiative to cook.

In the tasks of serving food, feeding, and cleaning dishes, the boundaries between caste and class slowly faded away without the children even realising it. Watching the children behave naturally, the parents also stopped scolding them. Occasionally, parents would complain to us, but their complaints lacked firmness and were more out of their conditioning. We would simply tell them, 'Times are changing. You have lived your life, but these children have much further to go.'

While the parents accepted the school system, the rules at home remained unchanged. They were not ready for any changes at home. Since these matters were outside our scope, we continued to work with the new generation within the school.



**In the tasks of serving food, feeding, and cleaning dishes, the boundaries between caste and class slowly faded away without the children even realising it.**



### Some other efforts

In the daily activities, studying, eating, and playing, being together had become normal. The children were no longer just children; they were transitioning into adolescence. They started participating in various sports events and competitions based on their age groups and gender outside the school. However, we were never able to send mixed-gender teams for these competitions.

Some improvements in these schools regarding inclusion were possible because we made changes by constantly adjusting and analysing daily experiences. One such change occurred when due to the school's excellent

results, the number of boys started increasing. Prominent people began using their influence to get their children admitted to our school. At that point, we organised meetings with the school management committee and the community, and with everyone's consent, we reserved 50 percent of the seats for girls. Not only that, but we also decided to admit all boys and girls within a 500-meter radius of the school. This decision ensured a hundred percent enrolment of children from the nearby Muslim, nomadic, and Dalit communities.

By using peer learning and multi-grade, multi-level teaching methods, we worked to increase opportunities for children to help each other, learn together, and collaborate. As a result, the children became less dependent on the teachers. They were building better understanding and connections by cooperating. To resolve



Figure 4. Children forget all the differences when they play together.

conflicts, we formed a student council to address issues through collective discussions. This allowed the children to gain practical experience in building and managing their democratic systems.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



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# Children who Require more Attention and Opportunities

Sujatha Raavi and Dasanna Mareddy

Children in the age group of 3 to 6 years play and learn together in various setups, such as preschool and the neighbourhood. This is the time for them to discover differences in a positive light. An inclusive classroom should be designed to provide access, participation and support to all children so that all can learn and develop optimally.

When we first started to work with *anganwadis* in the Sangareddy district of Telangana, we often observed incidents of exclusion in the classroom, especially with respect to children whose pace of learning and development was slow. We noticed that most of the time, these children sat alone, struggled to complete tasks, got easily distracted and had a tendency to move around. *Anganwadi* teachers found it difficult to include them in the activities because it required extra time and effort. Also, the other children in the classroom did not seem interested in playing with these children. This impacted their regularity and duration of stay in the *anganwadi*.

Although there are only a few children in each *anganwadi* who need more support, any form of exclusion impacts their self-esteem, interest in learning and the continuation of their education. It can also manifest in attention-seeking by distracting others, including hitting them. Feeling excluded and alone creates many issues for the child, as well as for the teacher in class management.

### Awareness of principles of development

To address this issue, we started creating awareness among our *anganwadi* teachers regarding child behaviour, the role of inclusive classroom practices in child development and the importance of educating parents on these issues. This was done through workshops using specific cases and scenarios as examples and asking teachers how they would ensure the participation of all children, especially those who face challenges.

Along with this, during *anganwadi* visits, we supported teachers in practices for including children who require additional support. It took the teachers some time to understand and practise inclusion in their classrooms.

Once the teachers got acquainted with the principles of child development, they realised that each child develops and learns at their own pace, which is greatly influenced by their early experiences at home. Instead of labelling a child as a 'slow learner', this realisation made the teachers examine the reasons and understand the background of a child who needed more support.

Teachers improved their awareness of children's developmental milestones and age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for children, which helped them understand each child's developmental progress. With this understanding, teachers could identify the children who require more time and opportunities to learn and develop. With their improved pedagogical practices, teachers started ensuring that these children get adequate opportunities to learn in all activities. For example, during a conversation activity, if a child is not participating and sitting away from the others in the corner, the teacher ensures that she is making eye contact with the child and that the child is listening to the other children's responses. Now and then, she asks the child if they want to say or add something when she



Figure 1: Children being supported by their teacher to read.



Figure 2: Children waiting for their turn during a class game.

asks a question. She gives the child some time to respond. Without insistence, she continues to provide the child with such opportunities. The child gradually begins to sit with the group and participates in the conversation.

During home visits and monthly parent-teacher meetings (ECCE Day), teachers educate parents on what practices

they need to change at home to make the home environment stimulating and support the child to learn and develop.

In this article, we present two case studies where *anganwadi* teachers demonstrated inclusive practices for children who required more support.

**Case study 1**

A 2-year-old child's parents learnt that the child needs special attention and opportunities as the child finds it difficult to control reflexes and expressive communication, grabs things and pushes others. The parents wanted to admit their child to a preschool where the child could play and interact with other children. However, after learning about the child's condition, no private preschool was ready to admit him, even though the mother was ready to shadow the teacher. The mother then approached a nearby *anganwadi* teacher and assured her that she would take care that her child did not hurt other children. The teacher spoke to the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) supervisor who also understood the situation and admitted the child.

Initially, the teacher and other children faced difficulty in involving this child in their day-to-day activities. However, after understanding the child's behaviour patterns, both the teacher and *anganwadi* helper patiently included the child in all the activities with the support of the child's mother. In the beginning, the child's mother had to hold the child's hand all the time. By observing other children, this child slowly started playing and interacting with others. Currently, the child is engaging in *Corner Play* with other children, identifying shapes and colours, communicating needs and identifying other children by their names.

In the above situation, though the teacher was not an expert in managing a child with behavioural differences, she did her best. She first tried to include this child with other children but realised that she could not manage time well because the child needed extra attention, and she had to be extremely patient to engage the child and include her in the activities. So, she started planning her activities and time in such a way that the child could be given adequate attention,

other children also learned to wait for their turns, so the teacher had the space to encourage this child to participate – she created an environment where this child felt welcome, respected and valued. In this process, the child's mother's support was crucial to bring the child into the mainstream. She continues to engage the child in different activities using various materials at home and continues to learn teaching strategies to support the child at home.

## Case study 2

An *anganwadi* teacher found it difficult to engage a 4-year-old child who showed disinterest in all activities and signs of frustration and boredom. During *Circle Time* the child would take a long time to comprehend ideas and rarely played with other children during group activities. After careful observation of the child's learning patterns, behaviours and responses during the activities, the teacher understood that this child required more attention.

The teacher started focusing on balancing large, small, and individual instructional activities in a day. This gave scope for the teacher to interact, support and guide the child more frequently. During small group activities, she encouraged children to finish the tasks by supporting each other. This made the child feel happy for the small achievements with other children. During *Circle Time*, the teacher started practising 'wait a moment before responding'. This gave time to the child to think and respond. She started tracking the child's progress and identified areas that required more attention. Along with this, the teacher maintained open communication with the parents to gain insights into the child's learning habits at home and adjusted the teaching strategies as per the child's interests. The teacher recognised and appreciated the child's small achievements which boosted the child's self-esteem and motivated the child to continue learning. With all these efforts, now the child is eager to participate in activities and interacts and plays happily with peers.

## Conclusion

Engaging and nurturing children with learning difficulties in their early years requires sensitivity, patience and dedication. Each child's journey is unique and each one needs individual guidance and encouragement to

overcome challenges and achieve their potential. This is a big challenge for the teacher, and they too require continuous support to build their capacities and stay motivated.



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# Teacher's Role in Making the Arts Truly Inclusive

Deepika Sharma

Our fear of making art we, knowingly or unknowingly, pass on to the children we engage with. As teachers, our openness and beliefs about art will shape how children in our classes engage with artistic forms. Embracing a positive and open approach to art fosters an inclusive environment where every child feels encouraged to explore and express themselves creatively.

*'I cannot sing.'*

*'I cannot draw.'*

*'I am not good at acting.'*

*'I am not an artist.'*

How many of us can relate to these statements? As children, we were corrected to sing at a perfect pitch and tone that shaped our understanding of music and singing. Most of us avoided singing in the chorus in *Antakshari* rounds and at best, retreated to being *Indian Idols* in our bathrooms. When given a mic or a platform to sing, we would refuse to participate reinforcing our belief that we cannot sing, which further limited our opportunities to learn music.

For most of us, the fear of making mistakes – whether in

music, dance, drawing, or acting – has shaped our belief that 'the arts' is not our cup of tea. This notion stems from the traditional view of art judged as being right or wrong. For instance, a painting is often considered beautiful only if it accurately represents reality. Yet, some of the most celebrated international artists, like Vincent Van Gogh and Pablo Picasso, are renowned precisely because their work defies conventional standards of 'correctness' and perfection. If they too feared the arts like many of us, the world would have been devoid of their masterpieces.

As teachers, our openness and beliefs about art will shape how children in our classes engage with artistic forms. Embracing a positive and open approach to art fosters an inclusive environment where every child feels encouraged to explore and express themselves creatively.



Figure 1. Group collage art.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, supported by a well-structured National Curriculum Framework (NCF), emphasises the importance of 'art integration' in every classroom. This integration can be approached in two ways: as a curriculum component and as a pedagogical tool. Both methods play distinct but complementary roles in enhancing the classroom environment.

Let's dive into the *whys* and *hows* of bringing arts into our teaching. I will share my insights from my experience of working with children and educators in different contexts and learning environments. Hope this gives you some useful tips for your next class.

### Art as a curriculum component

By creating space for each child to participate, share their interests and skills, and collaborate on artistic projects, we foster a truly inclusive environment. This approach works across all age groups, provided we encourage individual expression and creative contributions.

### How collaboration works

One of my favourite activities is group collage art, which can be adapted for students from K-12. Once displayed, these collaborative artworks, continue to inspire and reassure students of their place in the school community. Peer dynamics shift dramatically in a positive direction when we introduce art-based collaborative projects. In one of the workshops with adolescent children, I observed that some students tended to dominate over others. However, through regular art-based interventions, these students were able to set aside power play, work side-by-side, and collaborate to create and present their group artwork. Another powerful memory I carry is witnessing a group of children, including one with learning difficulties, sing a group song together. The deep sense of unity and shared purpose in their collective activity was profound, something that is rarely achieved in most classroom settings.

### Why being non-judgemental is essential

The arts provide a unique, non-judgmental space for children to express themselves freely. Teachers must give non-judgemental responses to each child's work. These should be descriptive and detailed like, 'I see you have added minute details in drawing this part', 'Looks like you drew inspiration from your own life in writing this', rather than a subjective/opinionated response, such as, 'Wow', 'So beautiful!' etc. In this space, nothing is good or bad; correct or incorrect.

Unlike more structured or academic activities, artistic expression invites exploration without the fear of being



Figure 2. Arts must provide a non-judgmental space for children to express themselves.

wrong. Whether through drawing, music, dance, or storytelling, children can communicate their emotions, ideas, and perspectives in ways that are deeply personal and reflective of their individuality. This open-ended approach allows children to feel valued for their efforts rather than judged on the quality or correctness of their work. In the world of art, every contribution holds meaning, fostering a sense of confidence and belonging in the child. The artistic lens creates room for every child who chooses to draw a flat mountain or a pink sky.

### Process is important not the result

We need to recognise that the process of creating art holds far more significance than the final artwork itself. The true value of artistic expression lies in the child's involvement, the story behind every stroke, the way a script is shaped by personal experiences, and the originality of each dance step.

As teachers, when we shift our focus to how the art was created – the level of engagement, critical thinking, and the effort poured into shaping the final piece – we begin to truly understand each child's journey. By looking at each one's context, abilities, and growth, we see how art has provided them a space for self-expression.

Let me share an experience as a teacher. The art prompt was simple: draw a landscape. As I walked around, most children had created picturesque scenes - mountains with a stream flowing down the centre, leading to a small hut next to a well. It was familiar and predictable. But one child's drawing stood out: a half-visible tree, an empty sky, and a swing hanging from another tree far in the distance. Curious, I sat with her and asked her to talk about her drawing. I knew she was a recent migrant from another state. She explained that this was the view from her village home. When I asked if she missed it, she nodded. In that moment, her artwork became more than just a drawing—it was a window into her emotions, her memories, and her sense of loss. By creating space for her to share, we

uncovered a story far beyond what first met the eye. This experience reminded me how the act of making art and reflecting on it, can reveal layers of unspoken feelings, especially for children processing change or grief.

Healing through art can benefit anyone at any stage of life – it can be a child dealing with emotional distress, an adolescent navigating identity, or an adult struggling with anxiety. It is not just those with evident wounds or trauma but anyone experiencing stress, uncertainty, or simply the pressures of daily life can benefit from the process of making art. One of the classic art techniques, known as ‘Wet-on-wet painting’ has been a huge inspiration for me in witnessing the healing nature of art.

### Wet-on-wet painting

In this method, paper is soaked in water, and while it is still wet, children apply soft, translucent colours. The colours blend and flow into each other creating gentle transitions and subtle effects. This technique emphasises process over precision, encouraging children to experience the fluidity and interplay of colours rather than focusing on achieving a detailed or fixed outcome. The flowing colours promote a sense of calm and relaxation, as the child is drawn into the peaceful rhythm of applying the paint. The technique’s focus on the sensory experience rather than a perfect product supports the development of emotional balance, self-acceptance, and creativity.

### Art as pedagogy

Art pedagogy or the use of art-based processes to teach a concept in a classroom, has long been advocated and recommended. However, the challenge of integrating arts often arises due to a lack of resources, limitations of the teacher’s comfort with specific art forms, and the

pressure to meet academic goals on time.

### Resources must not be a constraint

The availability of resources is one of the biggest hurdles teachers face. The idea of collecting or requiring a lot of materials to make art discourages them from planning an art-integrated lesson plan. In reality, the most crucial tool for an art-based class session is ‘observation.’ We can find a lot of inspiration from the objects around us. For example, take up a simple poem from the textbook, and create a musical version of this using rhythmic sounds with a pencil, a duster, clapping hands or humming. Next, add singing the poem as an activity to help reinforce the poem and bring cheer into the classroom! These activities can be used in classrooms to foster conceptual understanding through music. Theatre and role play-based activities are also less resource dependent. Even techniques like puppetry are low or no-cost.

We can use these theatre-based methods to tell a story, introduce a concept and facilitate a discussion in the classroom.



Figure 3. Low-cost, easy-to-make puppets that teachers can use in their classrooms.



Figure 4. MA Education students of Azim Premji University learning to make and use masks with Umashanker Perodi.

### Why a joyful learning experience is important

Art as pedagogy not only enhances academic learning but also supports the socio-emotional development of children. It creates an atmosphere that makes way for children to express themselves, process their emotions and find joy in the learning process. A happy child is often more engaged, curious, and open to learning. Positive emotions can foster creativity, improve memory retention, and promote social-emotional skills, all of which contribute to better learning outcomes.

One of the easiest ways to introduce art into your daily

classroom sessions is through warm-up activities. These quick, creative exercises can seamlessly integrate art into your routine and infuse a positive mood. Children's responses to the activity can indicate to the teacher whether children are feeling motivated or not. Even a five-minute art-based activity to start the day can help learning and retention. These activities can be linked to the academic concept to deepen students' understanding and build curiosity from the start. Imagine starting your day with 2–3-minute storytelling about a historical figure, using a hand puppet!



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# Affection and Equality Facilitate Learning in Students

Mamta Singh

If we take pride solely in attributes, such as caste, religion, gender, region, language, appearance, etc., it can hurt a lot of people. This form of pride often pertains to aspects of identity that we had no role in creating. When discriminatory attitudes such as these exist among children in schools, it becomes challenging to foster a healthy and equitable society.

Schools are a small but significant unit of society. If we truly wish to understand the kind of society we live in – how people think, their values, and their ideals – we need to examine the environment in schools as children form the link between the school and the society. What children learn from their families and society impacts the school, and in turn, what they learn in school has an influence on their families and the society they live in.

The village in Uttar Pradesh where I live and work is a typical, feudalistic, Hindi-speaking region, where most people take immense pride in attributes, such as caste, religion, gender and region. It is natural then for teachers and students from such a society to come to school with the same mindset.

Let us take the caste system. It should be clarified here that the class factor is more dominant than the caste factor in schools run by the Basic Education Department of Uttar Pradesh. What this implies is that while it is quite

likely that an upper-caste child will enrol in these schools, it is highly unlikely that a child from a high-income background would take admission, even if they belong to a lower caste (or what society perceives as lower caste).

In this scenario, when a child who has studied till class V in another school enrolls in our school, it takes, not days but, months for them to accept that there exists a school in the same village where caste, religion, and gender have no significance. It so happened that a girl from a *musahar* family (forest dwellers belonging to Scheduled Castes) that resides on a hillock outside our village, enrolled in our school. She was the first girl child from the family who showed willingness to study beyond class V. Otherwise, no matter how hard one tried, no boy or girl from this family continued further schooling. Though with all our efforts the girl enrolled in the school in the new session in April, she was unable to adjust with the others. To begin with, she brought a plate for mid-day meals from home because in the school she previously attended, children did not eat food in the utensils provided by the school. This was because the utensils provided by the school were used by children of all castes, so every child brought the utensils they used from home.

## Our school never closes

Most of the children in our school belong to the OBC (Other Backward Class) or SC (Scheduled Caste) groups. For them, it was unusual to have a girl from a tribal background study with them. But a bigger problem was assuring the new student that in our school the utensils of not just the students but also the teachers were not separate and that she was in no way inferior or different from the others. These things are easy to talk about but difficult to follow. Kusum took weeks to trust the changed context of the new school. She was a slightly stubborn and ill-tempered child. She had been admitted into class VI, but she barely knew her alphabet. She never smiled. Be it the mid-day meal or her classroom, she preferred sitting by herself or if possible, next to another girl. The good part was that she had started to like the new school as was evident by the fact that she was not absent even



Figure 1. Students eager to use and learn on computers.



Figure 2. Children engrossed in learning to sew and darn.

for a single day, whereas in the previous school, her attendance had been very irregular.

April went by, and the school vacations started in May. I should clarify that be it the winter vacation or the summer break, my school never closes. There are two reasons for this. The first is a lack of a sufficient number of teachers. I single-handedly manage three classes and ten subjects. Second, during school breaks, students get busy with their homes, relatives, and agricultural activities and drift away from learning, making it difficult for them to get back to school and adjust to its routine when the school reopens. That is why our school is always open. Of course, children need not attend school during vacations, and it is entirely their decision whether they want to come to school during the holidays or not. What is interesting is that students seem to enjoy their time in school because nearly 80 percent of them continue coming even during the holidays. We had little hope of Kusum attending the school during vacations, but she did.

Since there is no provision for mid-day meals during the summer vacations, children bring their food from home. They refuse to eat until they share some of the food from their tiffins with their teacher. This is a good way of finding out what and how students eat in their homes. However, this creates a bit of a trouble for the teacher who has not yet swallowed the first bite of *parantha-aachar* before the next bite of roti with sugar is offered, which may be followed by an offering of rice and a fourth of a biscuit. All the students clamour to be the first ones to offer their food to the teacher. I saw that Kusum did not join us. She sat alone in a corner with her food – neither offering her food nor taking any. I got up and walked to her and said, ‘Kusum, will you finish everything off all by yourself? Will

you not share it with me!’ She raised her eyes in disbelief and said in Awadhi, ‘*Tu hamaar khaana khaboo?*’ (*Will you eat my food?*) I replied, ‘Of course, I am hungry. Give me some food!’ She raised her eyes and said, ‘I have got roti and pickle from last night.’ I said, ‘So, what? Don’t make excuses for not sharing. Give me some!’

Kusum probably did not have a tiffin box, so she carried her lunch in a black polythene bag; possibly a reason why she was hesitant about offering her food to the others. When she fed me the first bite on my insistence, it broke a big barrier among the children – the barrier of caste. Every new student understood that caste did not exist within our school. Now, four children of Kusum’s family study in our school – a fact that gives me immense joy and satisfaction. Kusum is currently in class VII. She has learned how to read and write in Hindi. She once wrote me a letter. She wants to become a doctor and all of us have faith in her that she will achieve her goal.

### Affection and equality – two magic ingredients

Based on my 22 years of teaching experience, I can claim that affection and equality are the two magic ingredients that can teach children a lot without anyone uttering a single word. What is unfortunate is that the situation is just the opposite in most schools. The student who is good at studies, and communication, and has a ‘good’ appearance is favoured. The children who do not conform to these standards are invisible in the school and remain anonymous when they leave school. I try to ensure that students’ marks, their behaviour, and the social background of their families do not become the criteria on which their popularity, respect, and rewards rest. Rather, the point from where they started their schooling journey and what kind of travellers they were during this

journey should be given equal importance. Some children probably attended school only for a total of a hundred days in their five years of primary schooling. But when they come to our school, they do not miss a single day of school. This is true even for those who manage to learn the alphabet only in class VI. And though their journey so far in terms of their scores may be far from satisfactory, we are satisfied that they show an eagerness to learn, continue to attend school, and get along with the other children in their class.

Keeping this in mind, during our Annual Day function at school, we ensured that the Block Education Officer gave prizes to those students who were often ignored or neglected. We made various categories of awards for the children – the happiest child in the school, the student with the best smile, the student who helps everyone, the student who appeared in the exam even though they learnt the alphabet only in class VI, the student who borrowed most books from the library, the most active child, etc. Because of this, children who were not toppers or who did not excel in dance, singing, elocution, etc. also received prizes. Affection, encouragement, and respectful behaviour boosted their confidence considerably. As a result, one of the students from this cohort cleared the class IX Sainik School Entrance Examination, and she is now studying in an English medium residential school after passing the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Test (NMMS) and higher examinations.

A major issue plaguing our society is the mindset of inferiority arising from physical appearance, height, weight, body type, and so on. And more often than not, it is girls who suffer due to this. Any girl who is taller or heavier than others of her age faces a tough time. In as early as class V, they are told that they are now mature (*sayani ho gayi hai*) and they are prohibited from playing and going out. The worst part is that the prohibitions that start at home, reach the school within no time.

Two such girls came to my school. They were taller and weighed more than the other girls and boys in their class. Although they were in class VI, because of their height and weight they would behave in a subdued and silent manner, which is more appropriate for adults than children of their age. In the afternoons, after the lunch hour, when other students would run around and play, these girls would sit quietly. They would neither respond nor ask questions in the classroom. Their routine was to

“ I try to ensure that students’ marks, their behaviour, and the social background of their families do not become the criteria on which their popularity, respect, and rewards rest. ”

come quietly to school and leave as silently as they had come. They would find it difficult to tell their names when someone asked. Any more questioning and tears would well up in their eyes. Gradually, my team, which includes local youth from the village, gave them indoor games to play. But these two girls would not even look at carrom, chess, or playing cards; let alone participate in games that involved running or physical movement. More than three months had passed since they joined our school, but we had completely failed to include them in our activities.

Then one day, something unusual happened. Very often, while the children played, I would sit nearby with a book to keep an eye on them so that they would not get into fights, fall, or get hurt. On one such occasion, these two young girls walked up to me and asked, ‘What are you reading?’ I was both happy and surprised by their question. I told them, ‘This is a collection of *ghazals*.’ They requested me to read out a *ghazal*. What does a blind person need but two eyes? I made them sit close to me and quickly read out two to three *ghazals*. This activity became a routine. During the lunch hour, the two girls would walk up to me and request me to read out a poem, a *ghazal*, or whatever text I was reading at that moment. One day, I said, ‘Now it is your turn to read something to me.’ Hearing this, both the girls dropped their heads and became silent. All these days of companionship had made me realise that they were interested in poetry but would not say anything because of hesitation and an inherently deep sense of inferiority. Not on that particular day, but from the very next day, a journey started with recitation of one poem, then two, and then three. And now they are at a stage where there is no other student in the school, who can recite poetry as well as they can. In conclusion, I would like to say that though we usually pay more attention to those children who are good at reading, writing, and talking, I believe that we could achieve remarkable success if only we would also focus on those children whose reading, writing and speaking skills are average or below average.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



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# Menstruation in Girls | How it Impacts Their Learning

Rubina Khan

There is a fine line between learning and not being able to learn. Often, the reasons behind children's inability to learn, despite implementing various strategies, remain unclear. However, when we start unfolding the underlying factors layer by layer, many reasons emerge. Menstruation is a key cause of girls' inability to concentrate and study in class. This article presents some experiences that have been shared on the connection between learning and this common physical phenomena.

It is important to understand how school processes integrate a routine yet taboo process like menstruation. 'Routine' because it is a normal biological process, and 'taboo' because it is seldom discussed openly. This lack of dialogue leads to disruptions in the regular attendance and learning of girls in school. Realising this, I sought to identify ways in which to incorporate this natural process into the school processes to ensure that girls come to school and learn during these days.

I work in the Berasia block of Bhopal. A large part of my work is to help teachers in government schools improve their teaching processes. We have often seen that the reason why children are not learning in the classroom is because of teaching methodologies that do not align with their needs and become a hurdle in their learning. Additionally, there are some behavioural and physical problems that impede their learning process, but these are

seen as separate from their overall learning experience.

## Changing uniform due to menstruation

To understand the issue, my plan included visits to three girls' schools and two girls' hostels in Berasia block for six months. I decided to discuss the issues related to reproductive health systematically with middle-school girls in these schools. During our first session itself, while talking about menstruation, girl students had all kinds of questions and shared their difficulties. Some of the girl students said that they do not go to school during these days because they are worried about staining their uniform, which is a white salwar and dupatta with a light-blue kurta. They said that they have to pay a fine if they do not come to school in uniform. This is why, unwillingly, they miss classes for 3-5 days every month, which results in the accumulation of homework.



Figure 1. A discussion on the difficulties faced by students during menstruation.

A class VIII student became emotional while sharing her experience related to menstruation. She narrated her experience, 'Once I came to school for a few days wearing my home clothes during menstruation. Seeing me in those clothes, a boy in the class would pass a comment every day. One day, he said to one of his friends, "You are wearing different colour pants, did your pants also get stained?" I felt ashamed hearing this.' To avoid this kind of trouble every month, the students said that the colour of their school uniform should be dark so that stains would not be visible. They mentioned that their opinion and convenience were not considered while deciding on the uniform. When some students shared these problems with their teacher, she took the issue seriously.

This teacher raised the issue with senior teachers, but it remained just a topic for discussion among them. Some teachers were of the view that the students may be using cloth instead of pads or they might not be changing their pads on time because of which they may be facing these problems. On the question of taking half-day leave to go home early during their periods, the teachers replied that some pain is normal during such times and that they too had been through all this but never faced such problems. They were of the view that children nowadays tend to exaggerate their problems. The teacher who expressed sensitivity on this issue finally said that she would provide whatever support she could, but changing the colour of the uniform was an issue to be decided at a higher level.

## There were other difficulties too

I told the principal that I would like to first conduct a session on menstruation with those girls who have not yet started menstruating. Most of these students were from classes V and VI. The principal replied, 'Why confuse them by telling them now? When and by whom were we told, but we also managed.' However, a few days later, a class VI student got her period in school for the first time. She knew nothing about it. Stunned, she started crying when her clothes got spoiled. Somehow, the teacher managed to accompany the child to her home. After this incident, the principal allowed me to conduct a session with these students.

Some other problems also came up during these sessions, mainly, the dearth of sanitary pads, water, dustbins, unclean toilets and no place for rest in the school. As mentioned above, no discussion or deliberation was held on this subject in these schools in the context of changes in behaviour during this time, reasons for menstruation, care, etc. What is more troubling is that this problem is seen as unrelated to the problems of learning, although it has been affecting the studies of girl students in one way or the other. Just as the students are connected to the school, this issue is connected to them, so, it is natural for this problem to have an adverse impact on their learning. At times, because of the pain, it becomes difficult for them to sit through the class. Similarly, when they show signs of



Figure 2. Ongoing conversations facilitate effective solutions.

withdrawal and irritability, they hardly have a teacher in the school who is willing to talk or explain things to them.

“ **The students said, ‘We feel better. Earlier we used to talk to the teacher only about studies, but now we can also talk about topics like menstruation.’** ”

Apart from the school, I also visit the girls' hostel to conduct these sessions. Staying away from their families, these girls face similar difficulties there too. After a prolonged effort, a joint dialogue was organised on this issue with these students and the teacher, who is also their warden. Owing to the continuous efforts of the students, discussions related to topics like reproductive health, menstruation, etc. began to take place regularly in the hostel on the last day of every month. Proper arrangements for sanitary pads were also made. The

students said, ‘We feel better. Earlier we used to talk to the teacher only about studies, but now we can also talk about topics like menstruation.’

Considering such a topic important in the hostel and the work done on it has brought awareness among students, and efforts are on to talk openly in the group, and to bring everyone's questions to a single platform. If one pays attention, one can understand that many factors affect children and their education, while many of these may not be apparent, they need to be considered as part of the entire learning process.

This long-standing problem is likely to be addressed through the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023, which prioritises the creation of an inclusive education system that addresses the needs of all students, including those from marginalised communities. A classroom should be an inclusive, enabling, learning environment that provides every child with freedom, openness, acceptance, meaning, and belonging.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



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# How a Special School Became an Inclusive School

R Lalhmachhuani

Teachers should refrain from labelling a child as a slow learner or stubborn. What is needed is a little extra effort and patience. It is important for teachers to adopt a flexible approach and not rely on a single method. This may seem challenging, but with a little extra effort and patience, it becomes easier and helps build a child's confidence, which plays an important role in learning.

The state of Mizoram has the second-highest literacy rate in India, after Kerala. Mizo society is built on the code of ethics called '*Tlawmngaihna*', where everyone is expected to be hospitable, kind, unselfish, and helpful to others.

I set up a Special School for children with hearing impairment in 2018. The first batch had only 10 preschool students in the age range of 2.5 to 6 years. The need for such a school was felt by the parents of children with hearing impairment to whom I was providing speech therapy. These children were dropping out of mainstream schools due to academic and emotional difficulties. 5-year-old Soma was one such child.

Soma has severe hearing loss and learning difficulties. He had been wearing a hearing aid for 2.5 years and was receiving regular speech therapy, which improved his language skills. Seeing Soma's progress, Soma's parents developed high expectations and enrolled him in a mainstream school when he was 4 years old. Soma was excited and happy to go there. However, he needed support in his home assignments and oral presentations, which his teacher could not provide. Soma's progress suffered. His teacher suggested remedial classes after school, but his parents felt that he did not fit well in the mainstream school and decided to enrol him in our special school. With continuous speech therapy and support, Soma regained his confidence.



Figure 1. Children looking at picture books of their choice.

The first batch of 10 preschool students made remarkable progress, all of them wore hearing aids and received speech therapy every day. At the same time, we had a growing understanding of 'inclusion' as a school. The term 'inclusion' makes both regular teachers and special educators guarded because it seems impossible to implement. We too wondered how inclusion is effectively practised in those schools that claim to be inclusive. Initially, we associated inclusion primarily with including children with disabilities, but we learnt that inclusion encompasses all children regardless of their background, physical or intellectual abilities, emotional health, economic status, or family background, etc. We realised that many teachers already practise inclusion unknowingly. For example, adjusting the classroom lighting so that children can see the blackboard clearly is an act of inclusion by the teacher.

With this growing understanding, we opened the doors of our school to all children in April 2024. Thirteen students were enrolled in preschool – one with hearing impairment, one with speech impairment (cleft lip and palate), one with anal atresia, three with low Social Quotient, and seven students without disabilities. Opening an inclusive preschool was a significant and challenging effort due to the emotional barriers and stigma associated with disability in society.

Three 'tools' have been especially helpful in making our preschool more inclusive.

**1. Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** UDL is a framework to guide the design of learning environments that are accessible, inclusive, equitable, and challenging for every learner. The underlying belief of UDL is to change the design of the environment instead of seeing a perceived deficit within the learner as a problem. Let us understand this better with the example of 6-year-old Timothy.

Timothy needed an hour to complete tasks that his classmates could finish in 15 minutes. He made excuses to avoid study time and could not sit still for even a few minutes to write. Timothy's teacher called his parents to school and shared these challenges, also informing them how Timothy was still unable to identify letters and numbers and had bad handwriting. Interestingly, Timothy's parents shared that he was always very occupied at home, creating toy houses and other structures using junk materials, like empty bottles and cardboard boxes. The teacher was pleasantly surprised after this exchange and adjusted her strategy. She reduced pen-and-paper tasks and focused more on playful activities, such as cutting and pasting letters and numbers using



Figure 2. A child rolling out dough as for a chapati.

foam sheets and asking Timothy to notice letters on hoardings and signboards whenever he was outside. By changing the approach, Timothy's parents and teacher observed his developing interest in letters and numbers.

**2. National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage (NCF-FS) 2022:** The NCF-FS is the first such curriculum framework for the Foundational Stage and is built on the principle of equity and inclusion. The suggested trajectory of learning outcomes for the different domains of development, along with guidelines for inclusive content selection, pedagogy, assessment, and learning environment pave the way for inclusion in early childhood education.

Loma was 4 years old and very fond of junk food, expressing a strong dislike for nutritious, home-cooked meals. As the situation was dire, Loma's parents sought the help of an occupational therapist, who deduced that Loma disliked having no say in the meals cooked at home. At school, Loma's teachers focused on the learning outcome of 'Showing a liking for and understanding of nutritious food and not wasting food.' They took the children's help in creating a weekly tiffin routine. During mealtime,

children were encouraged to sit together and share their tiffin with each other. This approach helped not only Loma in trying new and nutritious dishes; it helped all the other children in class as well.

**3. Child activity matrix:** The activity matrix is a visual tool to organise teaching-learning opportunities

throughout the school day. Class routines are listed in the first column and the names of students (requiring specific support) are in the top row. The resultant matrix is used to list the specific goals for each child. This tool can be used by both teachers and parents to identify where and how the child needs support.

Table 1. Activity matrix for three children – Soma, Timothy, and Loma

Activity	Soma (5 years)	Timothy (6 years)	Loma (4 years)
Morning assembly	Greeting peers and teachers	Sitting still for 3 minutes during quiet time	
Circle time	Using a communication board	Sharing new models/constructions with peers	Suggesting more food items for the next weekly tiffin routine
Story time	Noticing pictures used during storytelling		Responding to thinking questions on a story about eating habits
Outdoor activity	Cooperative play using physical prompts	Tracing letters in the sand pit	
Tiffin time	Requesting items using basic gestures		Sharing tiffin with peers
Emergent literacy	Sequencing story cards of three panels	Cutting out letters out of foam sheets and pasting them in sequence on the wall	
Sensory play	Exploring vibrations using different objects (including musical instruments)	Playing with letters and numbers in set puzzles Collecting and constructing using junk materials	
Dispersal time	Saying goodbye to peers		

**Endnotes**

i. Know more about Universal Design for Learning and its principles at <https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>



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# Managing Diversity in Learning Levels: Some Strategies

**Akshatha S Belludi**

At Azim Premji School, Kalaburagi, where we consciously strive for diversity right from the process of admission, it is a marathon task for an early-grade teacher to ensure that all the children are welcomed and capacitated to learn at their own pace.

**W**e have children from different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds – children of agricultural labourers as well as those of university members. We also have an equal mix of students from rural and urban backgrounds, students of migratory labourers and single parents. We also have students with very good early childhood experiences and children with no prior schooling experience. There are also some children who have been continuously subjected to abuse. In addition to this, we also have children whose home languages are different – Urdu, Marathi, Lambani, Kannada and even within a language they speak different dialects.

This range of diversity results in huge differences in the learning levels of students. Currently, in class I, I have

students who can read class III-level texts with ease along with students with no knowledge of basic sounds; students who can perform two-digit addition and subtraction and children who have still not acquired number sense.

My role is to ensure that all the children gain grade-level competencies by the end of the academic year. Being a single teacher working with 30 children who have diverse learning styles brings up a new challenge every day. In this article, I would like to outline a few strategies that I have tried in my quest to support my students' learning.

## Multilingual assembly

Let us consider the case of our student, Faizan who was regularly falling sick and missing school. The child was



Figure 1 . A community member interacting with the students.



Figure 2. A parent showing a bird's nest to the children.

struggling to find his interests and identity. His problem was that everybody around him spoke in Kannada, which he was unable to follow.

To address this, we started the school assembly in Hindi once a week for our Foundational Stage classes (pre-school/LKG to class II). We could see the delight in Faizan's eyes when he was once asked to answer a question in Hindi. We now conduct the morning assembly four days a week in all three languages – two days in English, and one day each in Hindi and Kannada. Assembly activities include singing, dancing, story read-aloud, newspaper reading, and riddles for all levels of learners as well as Yoga, workouts and exercises for the physical development of all children. We include news items from the newspapers that children of this age group find interesting and can connect with – a tiger being captured, rains and floods, Indian sports teams winning matches, etc. – and have discussions to help children think, visualize and carefully follow the news. Every day, children organise the assembly on their own with minimal handholding by teachers. Faizan appears happy and does not miss school now.

### Thinking time

To promote the active engagement of every child in my class, we follow the rule of *no hands up* other than for asking questions. This is because I realised that as soon as I asked a question, the children who have had better

“ Inclusion for me is when all my students return home with a feeling of success; when all of them are engaged and are able to enjoy their learning.



opportunities, better support, and better ECCE experience would rush to answer, and the others would not even make an attempt to think.

So, now when I ask a question, one minute of 'thinking time' is given to all the children. This was modelled initially, now, it has become part of our process. I ensure that they understand the question by asking one of them to explain the question. Then I use ice cream sticks with students' names written on them to randomly select students to answer the question. This ensures that everybody gets a chance to answer. And since they know that their names can be called anytime, they stay attentive. It is interesting to watch them all think and then come up with different ideas.

### Help and support to peers

At the beginning of the academic year, my class had children with higher learning levels as well as those with no learning exposure. There was very little caring and sharing among them, so I had discussions with them to help them reflect on why they need to help each other. We talked about who helps them at home, why we all need support, how some of their friends are not able to get support at home, how they could support each other and how when they helped others, their own learning improved.

Children also want to share a lot of things, much of which cannot be addressed during circle time. So, we began a 'pair-and-share' activity where they share and listen to the diverse thoughts of others.

### Contextualizing Pedagogy

#### Haseena's pet

Haseena is a new student who has joined with minimal academic experience. She took more than a week just to learn to sit in the class. She is now able to speak a little in English although she is still struggling with the basic sounds. Haseena loves to share her experiences orally with her friends, especially about her pets – a puppy and a kitten. To support this child, I designed a lesson on Haseena's pets. Children loved gathering information from Haseena about her pets. Haseena showed high confidence and shared the details eagerly. She learnt two new sounds that day.

#### Let's study our village

We collated information about children's villages for all of them to know each other better. Children who come from remote villages talked to the class about the important places in their villages and then the rest of the students tried to gather more details by asking questions. This has also helped peer learning and relationship-building among my students.



Figure 3. Observing an insect on the wall.

### Parents' Day with us

Every Saturday, one of our children's parents comes to our class and spends an hour teaching a special skill, like weaving, craft making, flower making, etc. This instils a sense of pride in the children regarding their parent's profession or skills. Children also understand that there are many things to learn that may not be part of their lessons but are connected to their lives and learning. In these sessions, children with good fine motor skills support others in completing the tasks.

### Caring for nature around us

Our students in class I are exploring nature around them – observing the weaver bird building its nest, saving millipedes and ants from drowning in the water, saving

snails from being stamped upon. They have developed a sense of curiosity and care towards nature.



Figure 4. Ice cream sticks with students' names.

Inclusion for me is when all my students return home with a feeling of success; when all of them are engaged and are able to enjoy their learning. Every day I strive towards this. I cannot claim that mine is a completely inclusive class; there is still a long way to go in building my own and my students' empathy and listening skills, which are the basis of inclusion. The efforts are ongoing.

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# Music Education for All

Santhosh Raj Kumaravel

When music is taken up as a medium of expression, learning, and exploration with groups of students, along with the right planning and contextual discussions, it creates an immense potential for the awareness and practice of inclusion. In this article, I present a few instances in which I discovered the potential among my students to create a mindset for inclusion in different contexts. I could leverage this to benefit my pedagogy.

## Correcting the gender bias

In folk music performances (at least here in Rajasthan), women are more often seen singing or dancing than playing a musical instrument. More specifically, when it comes to playing percussion instruments (like drums), there is a prevailing bias towards choosing boys that perhaps goes unnoticed.

However, in simple class observations and performances where competencies connecting with rhythm and sur (pitch, notes) recognition are continuously assessed and compiled, the gender representation data states that there are girls who have a great sense of rhythm and are exceptionally good at playing percussion.

I noticed that many girls showed interest in playing drums, so we ensured the participation of girls based on their ability to play well just as we did with the boys. This was discussed in the classroom as well, assuring students

that if they practise well, they will get the opportunity to perform regardless of their gender. A mixed-gender group presented a musical performance on Independence Day for the community members. This also marked a focused intent of scaling the discussion on gender in other areas of the school functioning and gradually changing mindsets.

## Song wall

Our classroom practices ensure that students get exposure to singing and learn songs from different languages. In my classroom, it is done in part using a 'song wall'. Songs in English, Hindi, Marwari, Malayalam, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil, are written and displayed along with transliteration for supported reading and understanding. The song lyrics are written on charts in bold text, that are colour-coded according to song sections, such as verse, chorus, etc. for easy understanding. Because it is visual, it aids students' learning and since it allows easy access, the song wall helps them learn at their own pace.



Figure 1. A girl playing the drums along with the boys.

## Group performances

For most students, singing and playing instruments are pleasurable activities but if some of them do not enjoy these, they are included in supporting roles, such as preparing and managing props.

For one musical drama, we chose 'India is rich through the wisdom it collectively represents from all its languages' as the central idea. We selected *dohe* or couplets from a few languages – Tamil, Marathi, Marwari and Sanskrit – and wrote them in their original language along with their transliteration in Devanagari script so that all students could read those. We composed simple tunes for them and presented the meaning of the *dohas* through a short drama.

## Connecting with roots

One of the many aspects of the cultural heritage of Rajasthan is its rich musical identity. Barmer district, because of its vastness, fuels this musical identity with its array of folk musicians from various religious and communal backgrounds.

While discussing folk music, its roots, themes and significance, many students mention songs they have heard in their village, their family/community gatherings, etc., and they are given opportunities to perform them as part of their musical practice and exploration.

We recently screened a documentary 'Indus Blues', which highlights many communities of the Indus region that

overlap Rajasthan and Pakistan. After the screening, one of the students talked about his grandfather who plays the folk instrument *Alghoza* and shared his experiences of listening to it in his home and communal gatherings. Another student talked about another instrument *Murlī Been* that can be heard on the streets of their village during festivals.

This manner of connecting with common roots facilitates the following:

- Allows the students to understand and appreciate their own and each other's cultural practices in a positive light.
- Creates possibilities for the teacher to plan and invite musicians from the local communities and enable constructive discussions among students and artists.
- Creates a sense of belonging and establishes strong bonds.

In a region where discrimination based on caste and religion is frequently observed amongst the older generations, the awareness that students develop through these interactions is a step towards inclusion.

## No one left behind

Students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities can easily take part in learning together in a music classroom. As with other subjects, their needs may be divergent, and a teacher with sensitivity and awareness of these will be able to adapt their activities in ways that they too can actively participate.



Figure 2. Our Song Wall.

Example 1: I conduct an activity in which students are asked to close their eyes, actively listen to live/recorded music and visualise/imagine anything they like, which connects them with the music. Afterwards, they are given time to share their thoughts and imaginations. In one group, there is a student with a cochlear implant who also has speech difficulty. He is energetic and takes a lot of interest, so the other students cheer him on to share his ideas and appreciate his enthusiasm. They listen carefully and try to understand his words. If a teacher can facilitate and guide such activities, students start to bring in a scale of inclusivity that far exceeds expectations.

Example 2: Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may often have challenges in a standard classroom setting. Even on preliminary observations, we were able to notice that one of the foundational stage students with autism was able to calm down and sit for a longer duration when in the music classroom. These observations are crucial, as they provide vital information in developing a classroom and pedagogy towards the inclusion of all children in daily activities and learning.

Bringing inclusive practices into music teaching is possible and should be given considerable importance in classrooms. There are components of inclusion that are easy to do through music education and others

that are more complex. But with the right support and understanding amongst the school faculty, and appropriate preparation, it is achievable.



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# Kishan is Happy Now

Om Prakash Singh

The alienation that children from marginalised communities experience in school due to various reasons is a matter of concern. The responsibility of understanding these reasons earnestly, and thereby, mitigating this alienation rests with the school. In this article, we learn how despite many challenges, a perceptive teacher, along with a colleague, manages to include Kishan, who faces discrimination, in play and learning activities in the school.

**W**hy are the children so quiet? Is the school closed? These questions were running in my mind as I entered primary school. The school was so quiet, it seemed as though there were no children in the school. There are two female teachers in this school. Since one of them is unwell, the task of teaching-learning is undertaken entirely by one teacher. When I reached the school gate, I saw that it was locked from the inside. I thought that since there was only one teacher, she had closed the gate from inside so that children would not come outside and make noise. I knocked. A child opened the door. The teacher was not in the classroom, 22 of the 29 children were present. I asked the child, 'Where is your teacher?' 'She has gone to the village to call other children,' the child replied. I then asked, 'Why have you closed the door?' The child replied that since there was no teacher in the school, they were studying with the door closed.

This was a new experience for me, as children of this age are usually enthusiastic, noisy and fight a lot. How were these children so disciplined? I did not want to ask them too many questions since they seemed to be working through their foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) workbooks. I went and sat in the classroom. The children came up to me to ask questions whenever they needed help – they did not seem to feel any fear or hesitation.

The teacher arrived with a student. When she saw me,

“After much thought, we decided that we would do some storytelling every day, followed by discussions. Based on this plan, the teacher chose some interesting stories and started reading and discussing them in class.”



Figure 1. A teacher needs to observe children's emotions.

she looked happy and said, 'I had gone to call the students from the community. When I came to the school this morning, only two students were here, so I went to visit each student's home to bring today's attendance up to 22.' 'Do you have to go and call the students from their homes every day?' I asked. 'No. The children had arrived on time today; I got delayed in reaching school, so they had returned home,' she said.

Whenever I visited this school, I always noticed that the behaviour of this teacher towards the students was very gentle, and yet, one of the students, Kishan looked frightened. He did not participate in the discussion with the teacher. Even when I tried to include him in the classroom discussions, he would start looking troubled and uncomfortable. Why is he not participating in class activities? Why does he feel uncomfortable mixing with other children in the class? These questions ran through my head. 'This child is in class III but cannot even read or write. He is a slow learner,' the teacher said. I got a bit

uncomfortable hearing the phrase 'slow learner'. I wanted to know how the teacher had arrived at this conclusion. 'He stays away from all the other children and never participates in the class activities,' she explained. Since I visit this school often, the children are familiar with me. I said to Kishan, '*Mandi-i-chch*' (which means 'to eat' in *Kurukh*); though I do not know the language well, I have learned a few words from the children). He responded, 'No, I will eat later.' Hearing his response, I realised he was just like the other children.

### Why does Kishan not mingle with other children?

The other children at the school were very comfortable around me. I asked them, 'Why doesn't Kishan spend time with you all?' Their responses unsettled me. One child said, 'We do not talk to him because his family eats pork.' Another added, 'His father kills birds and eats them.' A third child said, 'Kishan's family is *Asur* (a term referring to a primitive tribe in Jharkhand), and we do not understand his language, so we do not talk to him.' Another child remarked, 'I feel disgusted even looking at him, so I do not let him sit near me.' When I asked this child why she felt this way, she replied matter-of-factly, 'Oh, you don't know! They are really dirty. Who would want to touch them?'

This experience was new for me considering the region had a tribal majority. All I could think about now was how to get Kishan out of this situation, how to get the other children to understand that he was just like them. The teacher was sitting at a little distance and intermittently listening to our conversations. Her face made it evident that she was not happy about the children speaking in this manner. Then during the mid-day meal, I discussed the behaviour of other children towards Kishan with the teacher. I assured her that if he was given a positive environment, similar to that of the other children, his learning too would be like theirs.

The atmosphere of the school had turned Kishan into a child who always remained quiet. He neither talked to the other children nor had his mid-day meals with them. I directed the teacher's attention to this. The teacher asked, 'How can I work with Kishan separately? I cannot ignore all the other children for one child.' I could empathise with the challenge the teacher faced.

### Kishan likes to play

Children love to play. While playing, they forget which child belongs to which religion, caste, or community. Something similar happened at school that day. After the language and maths classes ended, the teacher and I took the children outside and started playing *Chuha-Billi* (cat and mouse). Kishan actively participated in the game.

Whenever he played the 'mouse', no one could catch him. He ran incredibly fast. He was so fast that even class V students could not keep pace with this student of class III! With this, everyone in school came to know that Kishan is a swift runner! The teacher also understood that he was just like any other child. Now we wanted to get the other children in the class to accept that Kishan was their friend and that the teacher was also paying attention to him.

The teacher started focusing on Kishan's work in class. She was not able to believe that a child whom she assumed to be a slow learner was just like the other children. The reason Kishan was not learning like the other children was because of the discrimination or alienation he faced. After observing his enthusiasm for games, the teacher understood why he was not engaged in the classroom. She noticed that Kishan came to school on time every day, but he struggled to make a connection with the other children, which left him feeling sad and isolated throughout the day.

Now the challenge confronting the teacher was to work with Kishan while keeping in mind the learning level of all the other children in the class. What could she do in class so that the other children would mingle with him? After much thought, we decided that we would do some storytelling every day, followed by discussions. Based on this plan, the teacher chose some interesting stories and started reading and discussing them in class. Some of the stories in her selection were *Adiyal Gaay* (the stubborn cow), *Chatur Kargosh* (the clever rabbit), *Dost ki madad* (helping a friend) etc.

Children enjoyed listening to *Adiyal Gaay* a lot, since barring one or two characters, all others were very relatable to them. Children have often seen cows who trouble their owners while giving milk. Based on their experiences, children offered suggestions on how a cow can be moved off the road. Most children said that by pulling the cow's tail one can immediately get her to stand up. One child suggested that they could attach a rope to the cow and pull it. Even after a long discussion around the story, no one suggested that a cow could be moved from the road by affectionately offering her grass to eat.

The story of *Chatur Khargosh* was not new to the children. They were still enjoying it as if they were hearing it for the first time. However, the children did not take much interest in the activity of guessing what happened next by stopping the story midway. Here are some examples of the conversation with children after a story:

The first question that we asked the children was, 'Why would the rabbit have asked the lion to jump into the well?' The children answered that since the lion was killing the animals of the forest and eating them, the rabbit did this to save all the other animals.

The second question was, 'When all the animals in the forest had made a pact with the lion, would you still say that what the rabbit did was right?' The children unanimously replied that the rabbit was right.

The third question we asked them was, 'It is possible that the lion had children and after the lion died, they would also die of hunger. Should the rabbit have broken the pact?' Most of the children remained quiet on this.

We noticed that the children often put themselves in the shoes of that character in a story who was shown to be weaker. In the cow story, the children's sympathy lay with the owner of the cow, even when they knew that the owner had given the cow less fodder. They still suggested that the cow would start moving if hit by a stick. Similarly, in the second story when they were asked whether the rabbit did the right thing by breaking the pact, they said yes. Thinking through all this, we were satisfied that Kishan was also participating in the discussions that followed the stories. He had tried to share his ideas as well. Our experience suggested that when children are given an opportunity to have an open discussion after a story, they grasp values better.

Through the storytelling sessions, we realised that although children seemed to sympathise with the weaker character in the story, they were not doing the same in real life. We understood that apart from storytelling, we needed to make changes to classroom processes as well.

### Teacher's participation in the mid-day meal

We realised that we had to do some activities that would demonstrate to the students that Kishan was just like them and they could also be friends with him.

For this, the teacher started sharing the mid-day meals with the students. This was the first time in the school that the teacher was sitting with the students to eat. She asked Kishan to sit beside her. All the children were enjoying having meals with the teacher. In this manner, the teacher continued to have her afternoon meal with

the students. She continued to ask Kishan to sit with her. As a result, Kishan became quite comfortable with the teacher and slowly, the other children also started talking to him.

Although everything was going fine in school, the challenges for the teacher remained. The community was not willing to accept the fact that Kishan was sitting with the teacher during meals. Some parents even came to talk to the teacher about this. To address the issue, the teacher called for a parent-teacher meeting where she not only shared the learning progress of the children but also asked the parents to participate in other school-related activities. Seeing Kishan's enthusiasm and progress, the parents began to feel that like him, the other children could also learn much better.



**We noticed that the children often put themselves in the shoes of that character in a story who was shown to be weaker.**



### Getting all the children to participate in games every day

The teacher introduced an hour of play in the school each day. She got the children to participate in javelin throw, archery, playing with marbles etc. Kishan was very competent in these sports. He performed very well in the javelin throw. As an outcome of the regular organisation of regional games and sports in school, and because of Kishan's good performance in them, other children started to interact with him more.

Along with this, the teacher continued to speak and narrate stories in *Kudukh* in the class. It is now a pleasure to see Kishan in school. He is interacting with all the other children, and they also now talk to him.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

#### Endnotes

- i. Kurukh is a North Dravidian language spoken by the Kurukh and Kisan people of East India.



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## Pages from Teachers' Diaries

### Parents' trust in school led to children's inclusion

T Gajalakshmi



In my classroom, some students were very mischievous, and I found it challenging to change their behaviour both in school and in the classroom. About 50 percent of the children came from the Irular (Narikuravargal) community, and their learning process was shaped by their environment. For example, they would spit, bring sharp objects like knives or blades to school, and use inappropriate language. Recognising their unique learning needs, I focused on providing tailored support to help them succeed.

First, I spoke with their parents about their behaviour. I advised them to discourage the use of bad language and to check their school bags for sharp objects regularly. Then, I began closely observing the children's activities. I planned a few activities specifically for these children to redirect their energy to focus on positive learning. I assigned them responsibilities and supported them in completing tasks. Gradually, I noticed some changes in their behaviour. I helped them develop skills to manage their emotions and behaviour by teaching them the techniques of deep breathing and counting to ten when they felt angry. This proved effective. I rewarded positive behaviour with praise, privileges, or small incentives, which encouraged the children to repeat good behaviour.

Apart from the behavioural aspect, the students from this community faced several unique challenges in accessing education, which significantly impacted their learning experiences. Some of the key challenges included:

- Many students from this community came from low-income families, making it difficult for them to afford school supplies, transportation, and other educational resources.
- Frequent relocations due to housing instability disrupted their education, causing gaps in learning and difficulty in establishing consistent relationships with peers and teachers.
- Irregular attendance, often due to personal or family issues, led to significant gaps in learning, making it hard for them to keep up with their peers.
- Stigma or discrimination which they faced due to their background, led to feelings of isolation, which impacted their self-esteem and motivation.
- Experiences of instability, trauma, or stress often led to mental health challenges, affecting their focus, attendance, and overall well-being.

Some students struggled with reading due to dyslexia and other learning disabilities, which made decoding words difficult, leading to frustration and loss of motivation. Many students had packed schedules filled with homework, extracurricular activities, and family obligations, leaving them little time for reading. Additionally, distractions in their environment, noisy or chaotic surroundings, made it hard for them to focus on reading. Some students lacked a conducive space for reading or the necessary support from peers and family to encourage them.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach involving educators, parents, and the community. By providing engaging materials, fostering a supportive environment, and offering targeted interventions, we helped students overcome barriers to reading and cultivated a lifelong love for literature and learning.

I engaged parents in the educational process through regular communication and involvement in school activities. This helped strengthen the support network for the students. Using role play, puppets, and drama, I created a positive atmosphere; addressed bullying; and promoted respect for others. This helped children develop social skills, such as sharing, taking turns and communicating effectively.

As a result, the parents of these children began trusting the school and interacting with the teachers whenever necessary. The children's behavioural issues were almost completely resolved, and they all became unified as one group. These children no longer had time to fight or wander aimlessly; they were consistently engaged in activities like reading storybooks, gardening, drawing, colouring, and craftwork. They took on responsibilities in class and school-level activities, such as participating in morning assemblies, maintaining the classroom, and joining competitions. Additionally, they were more focused on their academic work.

*T Gajalakshmi, Primary School Teacher, Savarayalu Nayagar Govt. Girls' Primary School, Puducherry*

## The school belongs to everyone...

**Kusum Lata Sharma**



Like in other schools, in our school too, all the children sit together during the mid-day meal and enjoy their food. The children and I manage the arrangement together. While I take care of the food and its taste, etc., the children are responsible for ensuring that all children wash their hands before meals, hygiene is maintained during food preparation, and the seating arrangements for the children are proper, etc. The duties assigned to the children are shuffled among them.

One day, I was looking at the arrangements of the mid-day meal along with the children and I was pleased to see that everything was in order. Generally, after seeing that all the arrangements are in place, all the teachers gather together for tea and discuss teaching approaches, the behaviour of children, and related topics. That day, while we all were talking, my attention was drawn to the seating arrangement of the children. I saw the children from Sapera Basti (snake charmers' settlement) sitting together in one row, the children from Muslim families seated in another row, and the rest sitting in a separate row altogether. I observed this sitting arrangement for the next 4-5 days and discovered that all the children consistently sat in separate groups.

I started paying closer attention to the behaviour of children and their conversations. During a casual conversation with one child, I asked, 'Why do you sit away from the children from Sapera Basti? Did you fight?' The child replied, 'No Ma'am, those children are from a different section of society and work as rag-pickers. That is why we don't sit with them.' This comment struck me. I asked, 'You don't even sit with Sameer (a Muslim boy), do you?' He replied, 'Yes, Ma'am, we sit separately!' I began to wonder why they played together but sat in different groups while eating meals. I did not like this discriminatory practice.

The next day, when the bell rang for the mid-day meal, I joined the children in their dining area and told them, 'From today, I will sit with all of you for my meals.' The children seemed quite happy to hear this. However, I noticed that some children seemed uncomfortable to see me sitting with the children of Sapera Basti. I told them, 'I will have my food here

every day, but tomorrow I will sit in another row.' Then I asked the one serving the meals to give me a plate. She gave me a plate the way she gave to the others and served me my meal. After eating, I picked up my plate, washed it, and kept it in the basket. The next day, I sat in a different row and followed this pattern for a week. During meals, I would also have casual conversations with children about what they did at home the previous evening, whether they completed homework or not, and so on.

Gradually, in the hope of sitting next to me, I noticed that the children had given up sitting according to their caste, religion, or the place they belonged to. They began sitting wherever they could find a place and seemed to enjoy having their meals together. Sometimes, young children would bring food from home and would be keen to share it with me. They would feed me, and I would also share my food with them. After a week, I had to leave for a 5-day training workshop. Upon my return, I was pleased to find that the children were still sitting together and having their meals.

I also talked to my co-teachers about the issue and helped them understand that rather than making these subtle patterns of discrimination a big issue, it is important to identify them, talk about them, and think of alternative ways to challenge them.

*Kusum Lata Sharma, Government Primary School, Ajabpur Dehradun, Uttarakhand*

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

## Teach children the way they want to learn

### Madhumalathi



I would visit various government primary schools during my work with the Bangalore District Institute and the Government Model Senior Primary School (now, 'Bangalore Public School'), Puttenahalli was one of them. It is a big school with over a thousand children. I remember a teacher, Madhumalathi, who taught all the subjects in the Kannada medium class IV. With an experience of three decades, she never doubted any child's abilities and could identify students' needs, and the kind of guidance they required and planned her teaching accordingly.

Among her many useful practices was one in which she divided the class into three groups to facilitate the teaching process – FLN-level students, middle-level students and high achievers. She did this only to help her in her teaching process, not to separate them in class; it was done with no bias to make any child feel inferior or superior to the rest. She clearly understood why children's learning progress varies so much and they were engaged in the learning process according to the type of positive reinforcement they needed.

To improve children's learning, she prepared two simple questionnaires separately to assess their learning level progress. One questionnaire she gave to the students at the beginning of the academic year and the other, at the end of the academic year. This was for her own understanding. It helped her identify the kind of help each child needs – whether they need practice sheets, remedial teaching, printed resources, or library books – and respond earnestly to these needs of the children.

'Instead of teaching children like we want, we should teach them in the way they want to learn. Then, children learn according to their abilities. If we measure everything without even responding to their needs, all effort will be wasted. Shouldn't we consider the needs of these children the same way we consider the interests of our own children? These children have no other facilities; they will learn nothing,' she once told me.

Another noteworthy practice was how she managed the library session. The school has a very large library with many children's books. Room to Read has provided four levels of books published by Pratham Foundation according to children's learning levels. The library session is once a week and before the library session, the teacher herself would go to the library and take out the books that suit the needs of the children in her class. Then she would group these into picture books, storybooks with minimal text, bilingual books, books with fewer pictures and more text, and storybooks without

pictures. Next, she would select a story and read it aloud. After telling the story, she would discuss it to gauge if the children had understood the story. Children were asked to repeat the story; draw pictures of the situations of the story and display the pictures in the library.

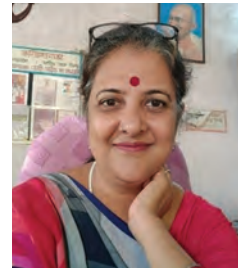
After this, the children were free to pick a book of their choice and read it. They were encouraged to keep a book diary in the library and write down their thoughts/opinions about the books they read. Children were also encouraged to tell stories of their choice. It was very heartening to watch the whole class become engrossed in the reading process during the library period.

‘There are so many good books in our school, what use are they if we put them in the cupboard? If we understand which kind of books a child needs and provide it to them, we can instil a taste for reading in them. If we don’t, we do great injustice to the children who don’t have any such advantages at home. Let the children participate according to their ability. If nothing else, at least let the child notice the book. Not all children may read books. Some listen to the story. Some draw pictures. Some tell the story themselves. Some people just see the visuals. But this is a part of learning for them, isn’t it? If we confine children to lessons, is it not as if we have deprived them of the opportunity to come to school, mingle with everyone, and become one with everyone by being involved in everything? Who knows which children have what talents? If it comes to light, it is great. But letting everyone get a chance is most important,’ were her words.

*Madhumalathi, Government Model Senior Primary School, Puttenahalli, Konnakunte, Bengaluru. (As told to Raghavendra Herle)*

## Inclusion in education is possible only through consistent efforts

**Poonam Bhatia**



There was a 7-year-old girl, studying in class II. She would stay aloof in the class. It was as if she wanted to hide away from everyone. When someone asked her something, she would shy away, and her eyes would well up. I was new to this school and felt worried for this anxious girl.

I spoke to the other teachers about her. I asked them if she had a mental or physical problem. I was informed that the girl had been like this since she enrolled in the school. I called her parents to school to talk to them. Her mother seemed troubled that with their poor economic situation and their daughter’s dark complexion, no one would marry her. I was quite shocked and asked her if she planned to get the child married right away. Not right away but whenever they would try to get her married, the child’s dark complexion would be a massive burden for a poor family like theirs, she told me. I tried to make them understand that they should not discuss her skin complexion with the child, that marriage would happen when it has to happen and that it would be better if they focused on her education now. I advised the girl’s parents to meet with me every 15 days.

I started engaging with the girl. Her complexion was quite dark, and I had never imagined that her complexion would have such a profound effect on her self-esteem and identity. However, society and the people around us intentionally or unintentionally impact us deeply. The girl never spoke; she would not utter a word when I asked her a question. Gradually, I started talking to her every day and requested all the teachers to interact with her the way they interact with other children because it was clear that the child was otherwise fine mentally and physically. We need to work patiently with such children. During this time, I gave her picture books and other small books to read. Through our consistent interaction and the help of books, the girl slowly started feeling at ease.

It was quite a challenge for us to make her understand ‘herself’ so that she would feel that she was just like the other children and was comfortable being with them. We wanted her to play, study, enjoy and be mischievous like other children. I wanted her to be able to express her feelings openly.

I learned about several psychological aspects of this issue by reading books and interacting with academicians and doctors. Following this, all the teachers collectively brainstormed for solutions. For example, during classroom activities, we consciously started involving the girl. While making a human chain, we would hold her hand. We would call her if we needed children to help in the class. She would also be encouraged to tell a story and so on. In addition, we would conduct regular conversations and discussions with the girl's parents. Gradually, she began to initiate conversations by herself, using simple words to express her thoughts.

One day, in a low voice, she told me that some children tease her because of her dark complexion. As she told me this, her eyes filled up with tears. How can one expect a child to concentrate in class and enjoy studies when she is struggling to understand her existence? I tried to counsel her and emphasised that anyone can be born with any skin colour. I told her if she focused on her studies and became a good person, she would earn the respect of the people around her. That is why, it was important for her to focus on her studies. After this, she felt at ease and began playing, dancing during festivities, studying, and so on. But of course, all of this did not happen in a day.

In reality, this is an ongoing process. Now, the girl has enrolled in class IX in another school. She has found her place in the mainstream. However, she is still not very expressive, but we are pleased to know that she has developed some self-confidence. We are not sure if her skin colour would limit her aspirations anymore, but we believe her education will empower her.

We never know when our children, adorned with various colours of our social fabric, are forced to deal with difficult situations. It is easy to introduce 'inclusion' as a concept, but it is a challenge to execute the strategies for inclusion. As teachers, we often tend to lose faith in the process, as it is a long and tedious process the rewards of which are not reflected immediately.

***Poonam Bhatia, Government Upper Primary School, Bambala Sanganer, Jaipur, Rajasthan***

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



## ‘Everyone has a right to education and respect’ – Sangeeta Farasi

Pratibha Katiyar

The story of a person is worth telling and listening to when it encapsulates deep social concerns, a strong desire to address those concerns, and the determination to face the difficulties in this journey. The story of Sangeeta Farasi, a teacher at the Government Primary School, Gahad in the Srinagar district of Uttarakhand, is woven with such threads of hope.



Figure 1. Children enjoying a play activity together.

On a beautiful hillside in the city of Srinagar, Uttarakhand stands the Government Primary School, Gahad. A story is being written here by the school teacher, Sangeeta Farasi. Education and respect are the main characters of this story. It is the story of a community in the city that survives on begging. Education has remained a distant dream for this community, constantly struggling to secure two square meals a day. The community also faces allegations of theft and pickpocketing, which results in the police arresting them at any time, on any charge. This is a story about understanding their challenges and earning their trust. It is also about a teacher who has guided the children to school and helped these children

reach state-level competitions, sparking their interest in learning; and about the children, filled with confidence, who now embrace education.

To understand and work on inclusion, there are two critical aspects and Sangeeta Ma’am is continually striving to address both. The first is understanding the need for inclusion, which means identifying the issues that lead to exclusion, both in society and in school. The second is the process itself – inclusion should happen so naturally that no one even notices it, allowing all diverse identities to blend while retaining their uniqueness. Ten years ago, when Sangeeta Ma’am took her first steps in this

direction, she did not know how long the journey would be or how much change it would bring. Her efforts toward inclusion can be seen in two categories: social change and academic initiatives.



Figure 2. Social and geographical conditions do not come in the way of learning.

## Social change

**Understanding the context:** Solving a problem is essential, but understanding its root causes is equally important. Sangeeta Ma'am did just that. When she came across this settlement (*basti*) where people, condemned to poverty caused by contempt, exploitation, and injustice, survived by begging, she realised that for those whose primary concerns were survival and identity, there was much to be done before even introducing the concept of education. There needed to be an effort to help this community understand the reasons behind their hardships and learn to trust her.

**Earning trust:** Gaining the trust of the community was a significant challenge. Sangeeta Ma'am understood their needs and said, 'I'll provide financial support equal to what your children earn by begging each day. Start sending your children to school.' She began providing groceries to the children's families, using her earnings. Before all this, she had started visiting the settlement daily, listening to the families' issues, understanding their struggles, and, to some extent, trying to address them.

**Regularity a challenge:** The issue of children regularly attending school remained a problem. They would often go out to beg, either due to habit or the pressure from their parents. To address this, Sangeeta Ma'am implemented two strategies. First, she decided that the mother whose child/children attended school regularly would receive the 'Best Mother Award'. This award would include groceries and clothes, all of which Sangeeta Ma'am bought herself. Second, she shared her concerns with Sub-Inspector Sandhya. As a solution, whenever the children were seen begging, Sub-Inspector Sandhya would lovingly guide them to the school.

These efforts resulted in improved regularity among the children. Naturally, this had a significant impact on their learning and provided them with better opportunities to study and acquire other skills. The first 'Best Mother Award' went to Ankul's mother. Ankul is now preparing for his high school exams and, in addition to motivating other children in the settlement to study, he also helps them with their studies.

**Preparing for school:** The children's regular attendance was still limited to Sangeeta Ma'am's house. Here, she would play games with them, tell stories, and explain the importance of education. The actual process of going to school had not yet begun. To prepare them for school, she had to teach the children how to interact with each other and with teachers. She also had to arrange for school uniforms, bags, books, shoes, and other necessities. Thankfully, gathering these materials had become easier as some people in the city started supporting the cause. The main challenge, however, was in their behaviour and language. The children had picked up foul language from their surroundings. They did not know how to communicate respectfully with adults. There was also the concern that this behaviour could cause problems for the other children in the school and their families. Sangeeta Ma'am explains, 'I had only two things to offer – patience and love. I knew this change would take time. Although there were times when I felt disheartened, then I would remember their innocent faces, and gain new energy.'

'Sangeeta Farasi is a dedicated teacher. The way she has taken parents into confidence to bring children into the mainstream can truly be compared to the work of a full-time organisation. Ensuring transportation for children to and from school using her own resources, and teaching them at her home in the evenings, is truly inspiring. The deep relationship she has built with the families in the community, winning their trust, is remarkable in itself.'

Ashwini Rawat, Block Education Officer, Khirsu,  
District Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand

**What will people say?:** On one hand, there was the challenge of bringing the children to school, teaching them, preparing them, understanding the struggles of their families, finding solutions for them, and earning their trust. On the other, there was the challenge of hearing people say, 'This is madness,' or doubting her efforts with comments like, 'She must be doing this for some reward, and will not be able to keep it up for long,' or 'How long can she keep funding this from her own pocket?' and 'There must be some other intention behind all this.' It's not that Sangeeta Ma'am was unaffected by these remarks – she felt sad, discouraged, and weary at times. But her family stood by her. She would think of 'what people will say' and in the next instant, smile and head back to the settlement.

**Giving children new experiences:** Learning does not just happen in school or through books. Sangeeta Ma'am understood this and began to introduce new experiences into the children's lives, experiences they had not had before. For example, taking them to nearby places, talking about them, riding in a car, eating at a table sitting on chairs, watching TV, and so on. One such experience was taking the children to a restaurant to eat. It was a place where they were often chased away from the doorstep itself, but this time, they went there fearlessly, sat at a table together, ate, and celebrated. It felt like a new world had opened up. She recalls, 'That day, I was with the children at a restaurant. It was raining heavily. One child was looking out of the window, quietly, staring. I asked him, 'What are you looking at so intently?' He looked at me with eyes filled with tears and said, 'Because of you, we're here today. While the whole city is getting soaked in the rain, we aren't getting wet. Any other day, we wouldn't even be allowed to stand here to stay dry. People would chase us away. But today, even the ones who usually chase us away are getting wet.' Sangeeta Ma'am saw something in the child's eyes that still fills up her eyes with tears whenever she remembers that moment.



Figure 3. The vehicle arranged by the teacher for the children's commute to school.

## Academic efforts

**Before going to school, after coming back from school:** The children had become friendly with Sangeeta Ma'am, and even the parents had begun to trust her, but this was not enough. As the children started getting prepared for school, she sometimes visited the settlement and at other times, she invited the children to her home, and in this way, their studies began. In this initiative, two youngsters named Rekha and Anil supported her, and a community member, Shanti ji not only joined in but also gave encouragement. Sangeeta Ma'am says, 'We used to teach the children for a short while every day. The effort was to make sure they didn't get bored of studying. Sometimes, there were games they liked, sometimes songs, and food and drink, but books were always there. Conversations would start with stories and poems and then connect with recognising letters and using math in everyday life. For the children, it was exciting to realise that things like who pushed whom and how many times, or who ate how many pieces of bread, could also be math.'

The children's lives began to change. Dressed in their school uniforms, they would sit in the motor vehicle arranged by Ma'am to go to school. They spent the entire day at school with activities like sports and studies, and afterwards, returned to Ma'am's home, where they enjoyed a meal. This routine has continued for years. Even now, after school, the children can be seen at her house, where they eat, study, play, and watch TV. Their school bags stay at Ma'am's house, ready for them to pick up the next morning and head to school.

Before these children joined, there were only 11 students at the school; now there are 23. But this story goes beyond enrolment numbers. There is no discrimination among the children, and parents are fully supportive, as the children play and learn together.

**Teaching with a context:** Sangeeta Ma'am hugs each child, pats their heads, and boosts their spirits. This is the first



Figure 4. The teacher working with competency-based groups.

part of her teaching method. This is how she creates a child-friendly atmosphere for her pedagogy. The children feel so connected to her that they eagerly participate in every teaching-learning activity that she organises.

Until we understand the children's backgrounds, there remains a gap between teaching and learning. I realised this one day when I visited the school. In a small school with two rooms and a little veranda, the children were studying in organised groups. Sangeeta Ma'am was seated among them, surrounded by groups of students at different skill levels, with whom she was working one by one. I befriended the children – some were shy, but we soon became friends. I sat with a group of first graders who were learning to make words from letters and to recognise letters within words. I thought, why not talk about what they were studying? I asked, 'Alright, what other words start with the sound 'B'?' Without any hesitation, the children started listing words: *baarish* (rain), *bakri* (goat), *bekaar* (useless), *bak-bak* (chatter), *badboo* (stench), *ber* (a fruit). Then with 'K', *kabootar* (pigeon), *kooda* (garbage), *kachra* (trash), *kana* (one-eyed), *Kallu* (a name), *kachumber* (mash), and *kaddu* (pumpkin). Teaching children in their context was vital, and here the context was unfolding quite well. We then spent some time on oral math questions to help the children understand addition and subtraction. Later, I asked, 'What food items do you like?' The children replied: *dal* (lentils),

*chawal* (rice), *bhaat* (rice), *dal-bhaat* (lentils with rice), *khichdi* (a rice and lentil dish), and little else.

**Using TLM and learning from each other:** Sangeeta Ma'am tried to understand the children's interests to make learning enjoyable for them. She introduced games, toys, and Teaching Learning Materials (TLM). There were additions, subtractions, word games, stories to listen to and tell, and steps toward reading and writing. Encouragement was working wonders. When one child learned something, she encouraged them to teach it to another. She created groups with children of varying skill levels, so they could learn from each other. She ensured that reading and writing did not feel like a burden but was fun. Despite various challenges, children are now comfortable with reading and writing.

**School resources and management were handed over to the children:** The school has two rooms. One is a combined reading room and library with a variety of interesting books for children of different age groups, along with a comfortable reading area. The children themselves manage this library. The second room houses various Teaching Learning Materials (TLMs), projects, and models for subjects like Hindi, English, maths, and EVS, which the children created with the teacher's help. The children can explain each project in detail and articulate



Figure 5. TLMs created by the teacher and the students.

its purpose. There is a computer in this room that the children use independently. They know exactly where to find the links to stories and discussion questions, and they confidently use the computer, often borrowing Ma'am's phone for internet access. Her phone, in fact, feels like it is within the children's domain, and she happily lends it to them. And yes, the children study outside in the veranda where the light is better.

Through this collaborative approach, both learning and play are integrated here. That's how four of the school's children are set to participate in state-level sports competitions. Although society may exhibit various forms of discrimination, there is no room for it in this school. All the children play, study, and eat together, helping one another in learning. Ma'am has organised them into groups for mixing children from all backgrounds. The study groups differ from the play groups, ensuring there is no space for discrimination in the school environment. The children learn as much from observing as from instruction, and this environment reflects that beautifully.

'There's a garden here that the children created,' Sangeeta Ma'am said, handing me a glass of tea. 'This has lemon from the tree planted by the children,' she added with a smile, her eyes twinkling as she pointed to the lemon tree lovingly nurtured by the children.

**Respect for every child:** Referring to children or their families as 'these children', 'their families', or 'these people' is inappropriate. The children may not say anything, but they hear all of this, and it hurts them. Such language can categorise them as different. Sangeeta Ma'am neither uses nor allows such terms to be used. She is uncompromising when it comes to maintaining respect for the children.

**Additional learning support:** The journey to literacy has not been easy. But it was crucial to recognise that these children are no less than anyone else. Sangeeta Ma'am began additional teaching sessions for the children in collaboration with others. This effort helped bridge gaps in learning, and slowly, the children's progress picked up pace. When COVID hit, it seemed like this process would come to a halt. However, with courage and trust, and adhering to all safety guidelines, the children continued to learn and grow even during the pandemic.

**The city that had much to say:** Sangeeta Ma'am says, 'The city that once labelled my work as madness, or believed it wouldn't last, or thought I was doing it for fame or awards, has slowly shed these misunderstandings. Those who doubted me have now come to support me. The children have given me so much love and trust that it brings tears to my eyes. Once, when I fell ill and couldn't go to school, the children took such good care of me after school. One brought juice, another cut fruit, and one even made tea for me.'

'People might wonder why someone would spend their money, time, and energy on this work, but the satisfaction I feel seeing these children learn is priceless. It wouldn't be possible without my family's support. Other colleagues at the school support me too,' she says. Principal Lalit Mohan Bisht adds, 'Ma'am is doing wonderful work. I try to support her efforts as much as I can' Bhojan Mata Sunita Devi says, 'Ma'am loves all the children like her own children and takes great care of them all.'

**Some regrets, some hope:** Things are going well, but there is still much that needs improvement. Nearby schools do not give admission to these children. Many more children still need access to schooling. Offering occasional help or praise is one thing, but truly embracing these children is more important – and that is still lacking. 'I can only educate them up to class V, but their journey is longer. Everyone must understand that education is their right. It pains me that a student from my school, Ankul, is taking his class X exams privately because no school would admit him, even though he deserves a place in any of these schools. I hope Ankul completes his education, finds a job, and helps his community believe that they have as much of a place in this world as anyone else. Earning a living with dignity is not a dream. This is just the beginning, and we still have a long journey ahead...'

Education is the single most effective means to achieve social justice and equality. Equitable and inclusive education is not only a necessary goal in itself but also an essential step toward building an equitable and inclusive society, where every citizen has the opportunity to dream, grow, and contribute to the nation's welfare.

*National Education Policy 2020*

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*



**Pratibha Katiyar**, after 14 years of journalism in Hindi print media, now works with the Azim Premji Foundation. She has published four books, and two short films have been made on her stories. A travel memoir written on the Andaman Islands and the poem *O achhi ladkiyon* are included in the curriculum of Karnataka's Rani Chennamma University. Her poems have been translated into Gujarati, Marathi, and English.

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## In the Company of Books

### There is Something About Ginny

**Reviewer: Sharoon Sunny**

*There is Something About Ginny* is a heartwarming tale of a young girl who embraces her differences and finds acceptance from those around her. Written by Vinita Krishna and illustrated by Suvidha Murthy, the story subtly introduces eight-year-old Ginny's physical challenges. This book is a translation from Hindi titled *Kuch Alag si Ginny*. Born with a radial club hand, nine fingers instead of ten, wearing thick glasses, and a wrist brace, Ginny faces obstacles that might seem insurmountable. However, her cheerful spirit and unique talents allow her to forge friendships and bring joy to others.

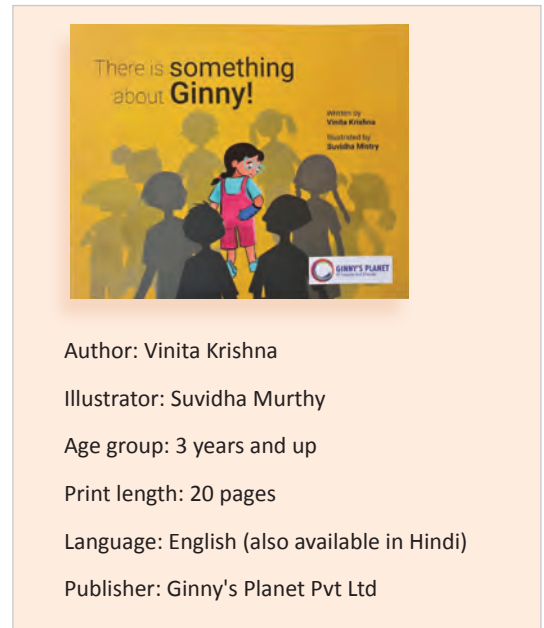
The book beautifully portrays the role of empathy, acceptance, and gentle humour in creating an inclusive environment. Ginny's physical differences do not hinder her interactions with others, and this is a powerful takeaway for young readers. The illustrations are striking and capture the moods of the characters superbly.

From playing dress-up with her collection of hairbands to building a model of the Qutub Minar, Ginny's creativity and enthusiasm shine through. She encourages her friends to embrace the joy of playing in the rain, demonstrating her ability to see the positive in every situation. The delightful description of the children playing in the rain highlights the power of imagination and the joy of embracing life's simple pleasures. Teachers can highlight this in the conversations following the storytelling to help children recognise that having fun is essential.

Teachers can use this book to initiate discussions about differences, both physical and in learning. Questions like 'Why do you think Ginny felt confident despite being physically different from the others?' or 'How did her friends make her feel accepted?' can encourage students to reflect on their own experiences and perspectives. It could even help children recognise that we live in a world full of differences and it is these differences that make this world beautiful. Bringing these conversations into the classroom will raise awareness and sensitivity around how children and even adults deal with differences.

While the cover suggests a target age of 3 years and above, the language might be more suitable for children aged 6 years and older. Some words, such as 'slight,' 'bent at an unusual angle,' and 'slung,' might be unfamiliar to younger readers. Additionally, while the title and blurb hint at Ginny's differences, the story could benefit from more explicit explanations of her physical challenges. There are slight transition issues between scenes and teachers might need to prepare for this to help children follow the story easily.

Overall, *There is Something About Ginny* is a heartwarming and inspiring story that celebrates individuality and the power of acceptance. It is a valuable resource for parents and educators looking to foster empathy and understanding in young readers towards others, especially those with physical and learning differences.



Author: Vinita Krishna

Illustrator: Suvidha Murthy

Age group: 3 years and up

Print length: 20 pages

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publisher: Ginny's Planet Pvt Ltd

**Sharoon Sunny** is an ELT professional and teacher trainer. As a creativity researcher and teacher of writing, she tries to find the thin line that brings together creativity, elegance and simplicity. She teaches at the Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.

# Chuskit Goes to School

Reviewer: Dhruva Desai

**C***huskit Goes to School* is a story about a young Ladakhi girl with a disability who has always wanted to go to school. Her family has supported her in every way, including getting her the incredible chair-with-wheels. However, the route to school - an uneven, rocky path with a small stream to cross in the middle - is not one that she can navigate in her wheelchair, and so until the age of 9 years, she has not been to school. One day a boy from her village talks to her about it, and seeing her eagerness to attend school, he speaks to his headmaster about trying to find a way to get Chuskit to school. The story opens on an exciting day for Chuskit!

One of the lovely things about this book is the insights one gets into the Ladakhi culture and language - several common words and salutations in the text are in Ladakhi, with a glossary at the end. However, the narrative context is set so well that it is not difficult to make out the meanings of unfamiliar words. Along with this, the brilliant illustrations also offer a peek into Ladakhi lives. While deftly depicting the story, they also show the Ladakhi landscape, architecture, and other details that help the reader visualise the setting.

The main idea of this story is introduced gently and honestly. While the reader gets to know about the challenges faced by Chuskit and her family members, there is an overall tone of inclusion – nearly every character in the story is working towards a more inclusive society in general and for Chuskit in particular. There are also voices against such attempts in the form of some of the teachers at the school - who are (as in all societies) not necessarily against Chuskit's participation in school but are perhaps unwilling or unable to envisage/do the work required to make it happen. These characters are addressed firmly, and the plot of the book responds to their objections.

All of these aspects make it a wonderful book to engage children with questions of disability, diversity, and inclusion. There is a tendency among educators and parents to avoid 'difficult' conversations with young children, however, sometimes forgetting that they too inhabit the same world. Reading books like this in the classroom helps introduce these ideas and start these essential conversations in subtle, interesting, and fun ways.

Chuskit and her family also help demystify the idea of disability and diversity - they are not self-pitying characters; they are joyful and multi-faceted characters for whom this challenge, while real, is just one aspect of their lives. Like all good books, this book also acts as both a mirror and a window for readers – displaying a new and different world, while also resonating with the familiar in their worlds.

The story can come across as slightly heavy-handed in some parts, such as when Chuskit's young friend talks to the headmaster and connects his efforts to the 'fundamental rights of citizens', but it does not take away from the narrative. Nor do the many complex aspects of the resolution of the story (like the bureaucratic processes) that are fast-forwarded.

Pratham Books targets this storybook at level 3 readers, that is, readers who can read independently. In our country, with the complexity of languages in the classroom, levelling uniformly is always difficult. This story can be read aloud to younger children as well, who with the help of a teacher/librarian/parent would certainly be able to engage meaningfully with the story.

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**Dhruva Desai** is part of the teacher education team at Azim Premji University. He spends most of his time either playing and thinking about physical education or reading and thinking about children's literature.



Author: Sujatha Padmanabhan

Illustrator: Madhuvanti Anantharajan

Pages: 22 pages

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publisher: StoryWeaver by Pratham Books

# Gappu Can't Dance

Reviewer: Nisha Nag

It is well known how children, especially those with special needs – often referred to as ‘special’ – navigate an unequal society. Generally, it is assumed that a special child is someone so different physically, socially, and emotionally or their intelligence is so different from regular students that they are unable to make efficient use of regular programmes of schools; that they need special education or supplementary teaching.

The fundamental base of inclusive education is equality. The feeling of equality ensures that every student gets equal opportunities for learning and taking part in class activities despite their diverse abilities. In an inclusive education setting, special children are given education along with the other children without any discrimination. This thought is the result of the idea that these children must have the right to grow up and get an education alongside the other children so that they do not feel isolated or disconnected from society.

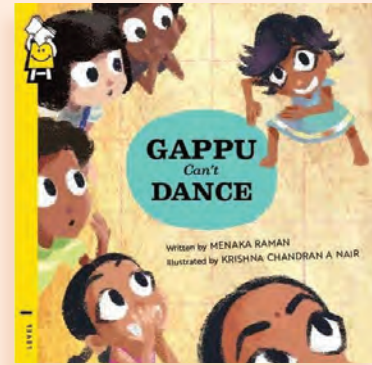
The equal participation of every child in classroom activities is important. But what if, there is a special student in the class who has some difficulty with the left leg and arm and does the exact opposite of what has been instructed by the teacher for classroom activity? How do we make these children feel inclusive within the classroom? *Gappu Can't Dance* is an appropriate answer to such a situation.

Gappu is a child with an orthopaedic difficulty. The bones, joints and muscles of her left hand do not function properly. Knowing the limitations of Gappu, Gappu's teacher asks her class to cooperate with Gappu. She uses the personal differences of Gappu as a resource in her classroom. Finding solutions to problems is this teacher's skill. Instead of letting Gappu be isolated from the classroom, the teacher thinks about solving the issue differently. She boosts the morale of Gappu by asking the class to coordinate with her. She changes the dance structure according to Gappu's needs, which helps her to develop group activity skills along with other students. This initiative by the teacher helps develop skills, like positive thinking, acceptance, patience, friendship and endurance in students. The teacher's effort to include Gappu in the classroom brings out a different perspective of inclusion in the practice of learning.

This short story of 130 words is an excellent example of experimenting with inclusion within the classroom. Rhythmic word structure is the speciality of the story. Skimming through it, the entire scene of Gappu's class pops up in front of me. Where the teacher is instructing '*tak dhimi tai*, put your left hand up!'

'Oh no! Gappu puts her right hand up. Gappu Can't dance!' The sentence 'Gappu Can't dance' along with other actions occurs three more times in the story. Similarly, when students are instructed to twirl with speed, Gappu twirls slowly. The reason for this is her physical limitations. When the teacher instructs, 'Drip, drip, drip, everyone jump fast!' Gappu sits down, and when the teacher asks students to put their right leg in, Gappu takes it out. When Gappu does everything opposite to her teacher's instructions, her classmates point towards her and laugh. Seeing this, her teacher changes the instructions, and says, '*Tak dheemi tai*, some children keep your hand down and some keep it up.' She changes the instruction of twirling and says, 'Move around the room quickly or slowly or jump however you feel like. Just join in without overthinking.' This change in instruction to twirl allows Gappu to dance, as she no longer feels constrained by her physical limitations. The credit for this solution goes to the teacher. The teacher gives one more message along with this – how students with disabilities should be included in the classroom activities.

This storybook has attractive print. The cover and the inner illustration immediately catch the eye. A distinctive feature of the artwork is the use of colours – the teacher's expressions stand out as well as the children's eyes because the wonder



Author: Menka Raman

Illustrator: Krishna Chandran

No of Pages: 13

Language: English (also available in Hindi)

Publishers: Pratham Books

and curiosity reflected in them seem to bring childhood to life. The book is not only for reading but also integrates activities, making it interactive.

It also carries an underlying message that in a child's learning process, nothing is wrong. Breaking away from rigid conventions, the story emphasises that children can learn a great deal through alternative activities as well.

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

**Nisha Nag** is a senior lecturer at Miranda House, University of Delhi, where she has been teaching for 26 years. Her reviews, articles, and stories are regularly published in various literary magazines.



*Storybooks within easy access of children at a government primary school in Uttarakhand.*

Stories are a particularly good medium for learning about social relationships, ethical choices, understanding and experiencing emotions, and becoming aware of life skills. While listening to stories, children learn new words, thus expanding their vocabulary, sentence structure, and problem-solving skills. Children with very short attention spans concentrate for a longer time when engrossed in a story.

*National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023, 1.5.2.2. Storytelling. p.204*



## Let's do Some Activities!

The activities given here have been chosen keeping inclusion in mind. These activities are such that children of various identities, abilities and personalities (active, shy) can not only participate equally but can also enjoy these to the fullest. The activities are simple and ensure that no child is left out.

### Music activity

This activity can be done with a group of 15-20 students. In this activity, every student gets the chance to lead. The child who leads demonstrates an action once, and the group follows and repeats it twice or thrice. After that, another student takes the lead.

#### Easy/ moderate level

Students play their own beat or a rhythm pattern using claps, foot taps and vocal sounds.

#### Complex level

Students make their own tune for the sentence, 'I am [their name], and I love [an activity]'. For example: I am *Kamla*, and I love singing.

#### How does this activity address inclusion?

This activity gives every student the opportunity to lead the class. There is no right or wrong in the action a student chooses, and all the others accept and follow them.



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

### Visual arts activity



Illustration by Shivendra Pandya

This activity can be done in small groups of 5 to 6 students. Each student gets a turn to give instructions or draw something and others are given a minute to follow.

#### Easy level

Each student, takes a turn to think of a simple object or living being that can be visualised and names it aloud. Others in the group draw it.

#### Moderate level

Each student, by turns, creates a simple pattern or drawing and shows it to the others. The others have to draw it on their paper/drawing books with as close a resemblance as possible.

#### Complex level

Each student creates 4 to 5 flashcards with simple drawings or patterns. They keep one card and exchange the rest with

their group members. Then each of them composes a picture using the images from all the flashcards they have after the exchange.

The time limit for medium and complex levels can be slightly more than for the easy level.

### ***How does this activity address inclusion?***

Each student's idea is given a place in not just their own artwork, but also in the artwork of others. It encourages all students to accept and work with the ideas and expressions of their peer group. The activity can be adapted to mediums like clay if there are students who have visual impairment.

Depending on the needs and abilities of students, these activities can be modified. The aim is to ensure that all students participate in the activities and enjoy!

*These two activities have been suggested by Malavika Rajnarayan, a visual artist and educator based in Vadodara, Gujarat. She provides support and resources for the Visual Arts and Music teachers of all Azim Premji Schools and is also a visiting faculty at Azim Premji University, Bhopal.*

### **Musical Chairs with a twist!**

Everyone, however old or young they are, loves *Musical Chairs*. Like most group games, in this too, players keep getting out until there is only one person left and that person is declared the winner.

This common game is presented here with a twist. The Japanese have been credited for this version which we can call 'Musical Chairs with a twist!'. Here is how it is played.

1. This game is played in 2 to 5 groups of 4 to 5 children each.
2. For each group, place a set of chairs in a circle facing outside. Place one less chair than the number of players – so if there are 5 players in one group, keep only 4 chairs. (In place of chairs, newspapers can be used for sitting.)
3. Play some music as the children walk around the chairs.
4. When you stop the music, each child must find a chair to sit on – they cannot go back to find a chair, only forward.
5. All children have to be seated. They have to make space for those who could not grab a seat because if any child remains standing, the whole group is out!
6. As the number of chairs is reduced, the game becomes more challenging and fun. Children begin to sit on each other's lap.
7. When only one chair remains, the group (or groups) that have accommodated their entire group on a single chair is the winner!

*This activity has been suggested by Pratima Sharma, a Special Educator based in Faridabad, Haryana.*





## We've Got Mail!

### Being mischievous is okay!

I read Deepali Shukla's article 'Matti, sit down! Sit down Matti' in the 20th issue of *Pathshala*. I had taught this book to the children in my class. The ways in which I taught and the ways in which Deepali Shukla suggested teaching this book are considerably different. The truth is that our classes have many hyperactive children. They don't dance like Matti; instead, they talk to each other and engage in mischief to express their hyperactivity.

I gained two key insights from reading this article. First, it is natural and normal for children to exhibit mischievous behaviour in the classroom. As teachers, our role is to guide them and channel their hyperactivity into creativity. Second, storytelling provides immense opportunities for classroom engagement. This article has significantly transformed my approach to storytelling, making me more thoughtful and sensitive as a teacher.

Arvind Kumar Singh, Assistant Teacher, Primary School Bangla Poothri, District Bulandshahar, Uttar Pradesh

### Towards creating a new culture

I liked the article 'Learning through constructive dispute' published in the 20th issue of *Pathshala*. The most valuable insight from this article by Amman Madan is the idea that we can learn a lot from constructive disputes. The ways to resolve disputes, as suggested by the author, also relate to my class and my calling. I too, at times, ignore the work and words of the children and impose my decisions on them. The article convinced me that mine was a faulty approach. Children too often form two groups in my class. For example, when one group says, 'Sir, let's play', the other says, 'No Sir, please teach'. I could not come up with a solution until now, and if I had not read this article, I would probably still not have thought about it. This article suggested a new approach of talking to both groups to find an amicable solution.

Charanjeet Singh, Assistant Teacher, Primary School Khurai, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

### The need for patience and consistent work

The 21st issue of *Pathshala* carries an experience rich interview of Archana Arora. One can develop an understanding on the patience and consistent work required with children while going through this interview. Suman Patel, in the same issue, offers a thought-provoking article 'Hum nayin banaat roti'. It helps build an understanding that boys and girls or women and men are not different; we are all human beings, and are born of nature. Division of labour was done by us and our society. We should shun approaches that widen this gap. Heartfelt thanks to the entire team of *Pathshala* for publishing such an article and making it accessible.

Rajni Bai Devatwal, Teacher, Senior Secondary School Rampura Ooty, Sanganer Rural, District Jaipur, Rajasthan

### An atmosphere of fear adversely affects young minds

I appreciate the article 'From the mind to the brain of children' published in the 21st issue of *Pathshala*. It highlights how teachers should explain a subject to students in a school environment. The article advocates for creating an environment where children can approach and comprehend subjects without fear and with confidence. The article rightly states that an atmosphere of fear adversely affects the young minds of children, ultimately affecting their learning process. The article explains it easily through the simple story of a man and a tree.

Satyavan Khalkho, Assistant Teacher, Government Primary School Harra Teentangar, District Gumla, Jharkhand

### Bridging the gender gap will take time

The present scenario needs articles like 'Hum nayin banat roti' written by Suman Patel in Issue 21 of *Pathshala*. Gender discrimination continues to present countless challenges for women, not just in our society but globally. The article emphasises the importance of educating children about the irrationality of such discrimination from a young age, as this could lead to meaningful change in the future. We also come to understand that everyone discriminates. It happens in school, family, society, on the playground and cultural stage too. That is to say, women, as a result, face these biases in

almost every sphere of their lives. The gender gap is wide, and bridging this gap will take time. We need to work with children through conversations and activities to bridge this gap.

Anita Sharma, Teacher, Mahatma Gandhi School Pratap Nagar, District Jaipur, Rajasthan

### Starting in the morning with renewed energy

I read an article by Anshika Sharma titled 'Morning assembly: The beginning of change' in Issue 21 of *Pathshala*. The writer has explained how she modified the morning assembly, starting it with renewed energy. The traditional morning assembly conducted in schools becomes a cumbersome process not only for the children but also for us teachers.

As mentioned in the article, the idea of sharing a death in the family of a child in the morning assembly was a unique effort in itself and points towards building deep relationships between the teachers and their pupils. This assembly became a platform for the children to share their thoughts. The teachers too diligently documented how many times each child shared her thoughts. Following this would help us to encourage children, who are hesitant to come forward in the morning assembly.

Pallavi Diwan, Chagorabhata Pre School, District Raipur, Chhattisgarh

### The library is key to learning

I found the article 'Library in School: In the Context of Reading and Writing' in Issue 21 of *Pathshala* quite comprehensive. Dheeraj Patel has explained the creation of a library in the classroom and related activities point-by-point in a meaningful and systematic way. For instance, the author writes that the objective of the library is 'to connect school books with the habit of reading and teaching; to develop skills like reading, listening, storytelling and creating their own stories; to lead them towards independent expression and writing; etc.' He has enriched the article by linking the objectives with learning outcomes.

The oral and written activities associated with the library, as highlighted in the article, were quite engaging. Inspired by these, schools began incorporating oral storytelling into morning prayers. Such activities make the morning prayer more dynamic and interactive. The author structured the writing exercises in stages: in the initial phase, he made children rewrite a story they had read, subsequently, they were asked to create original stories. This is an effective method for teaching reading and writing. I can relate this to my own experience of teaching children to read and write using stories. Stories facilitate quicker learning as children can draw upon their rich experiences and enjoy the creative freedom to include anything they wish.

Suman Patel, Member, Azim Premji Foundation Rahatgarh, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh

### It is important for children to browse through books

I read Dheeraj Patel's article 'Library in School: In the Context of Reading and Writing' in the 21st issue of *Pathshala*. Although the 'Muskaan' library is present in all our schools, hardly 10 percent of the children use the library regularly for reading and writing. Teachers also rarely see the library as a means for inculcating reading and writing skills in their pupils.

It is important that children browse through the books in the library, looking at pictures, and talking to books. I really like the process of narrating the stories of the books in the morning prayer to generate interest in reading.

The article gives examples of taking children towards written and oral expression through the stories that they have read. Children narrating stories in the prayer assembly is one such example. When it started, some children narrated the story in a sequence; some tried to narrate the story by reading from the book; and some in their own words. I believe this approach successfully cultivated a love for reading among the children. I plan to implement this method in my school, as I am facing a similar challenge of motivating students to engage with books.

Sonal Tiwari, Chagorabhata Main School, District Raipur, Chhattisgarh

## Nurturing children's interests and talents

I read the article 'In the name of Ferdinand: Discussion on the Confusion of Human Identity and Personality Development' published in Issue 21 of Pathshala. Penned by Anil Singh, the article uses the story of 'Ferdinand' to question the traditional methods and thinking of the present educated society, family, teachers and parents in developing the personality of children, and in polishing their talent whereas the National Education Policy 2020 speaks of giving importance to skills across all areas, treating them equally and strengthening individual skills.

Most societies link education and the criteria of being educated for the so-called 'prestigious' jobs even today. Family or parents pressurise children to achieve the set goals as per the expectations of society and the market. They show an urgency to achieve the goal within the stipulated time in the race to get ahead of each other. This relentless pursuit of success frequently leads to disappointment and heightened anxiety for both children and parents when outcomes fall short of expectations.

The article pulls out all the stops to point out the joint responsibility of the state and society in allowing children to develop their personal interests. We need to allow our children the opportunity to develop their talents, shape their personalities according to their interests, and create an environment for them to think, understand and grapple with challenges, find solutions, and become rational human beings.

**Avnish Kumar Mishra, Resource Person, Azim Premji Foundation, District Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand**

## Reading fluently - what do experiences say?

The article 'Fluent Reading' by Ravishekhar Verma in the 21st issue of *Pathshala* is interesting and worth reading. It makes sense for the class to include such activities that help children to read widely across themes and with understanding. It also relates to my experience, which shows that children read the book and discuss the story that is read to them. At times, I think that children do speculate in the entire process and subsequently develop their understanding of the whole process. That the children get opportunities to read is, therefore, important.

My experience also shows that we can work on letter and diacritic recognition with the children who are learning to read by reading and understanding a story. Children enjoy this exercise as we pick letters to work on from the ongoing story itself. Children begin to pick up words that occur repeatedly while reading as soon as they see them. This helps them immensely in reading the text. I will include this in my teaching process.

**Sujata Patel, Integrated Government Secondary School Korasa, Khurai, District Sagar, Madhya Pradesh**

*Translated from Hindi by Eklavya, Bhopal*

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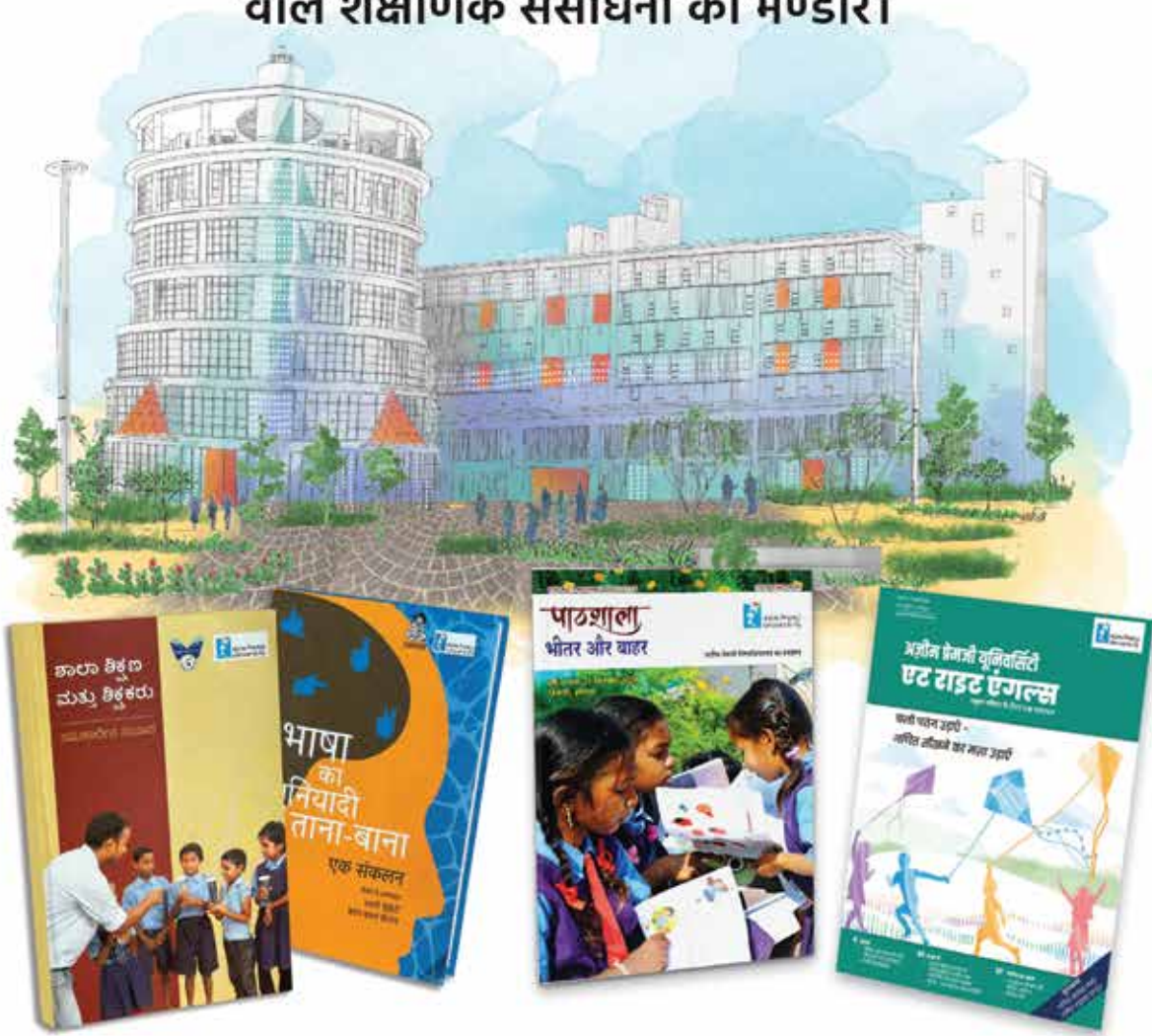
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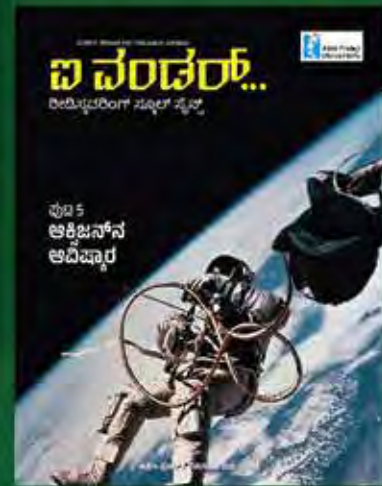
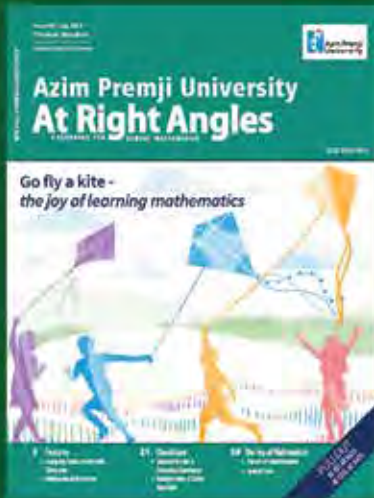
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