

A school is a second home for children as they spend most of their time there and it is the teacher who makes them feel welcome, loved, and safe. It is a universal truth that when we feel loved, we perform better; when we feel safe, we gain confidence. Making school a happy place for all children is not easy for the teacher when the teacher is loaded with work. It is all the more difficult in a single-teacher school where the teacher has to pay attention to the learning of each student, as well as their well-being and perform all administrative tasks single-handedly.

I met one such teacher, Prabhu Ram, at the Government Primary School, Ladla ki Bhagal, located in the historic Kumbhalgarh rural block of Rajsamand District in Rajasthan. Prabhu Ram's influence on his students' education becomes apparent to anyone who visits the school. I first met the teacher when I visited this school during the pandemic. What struck me at that time were the valuable teaching-learning materials (TLMs) that

he had painstakingly produced. Creating a vibrant and fun environment based on students' learning levels helps engage children better in the learning activities.

One TLM that stood out was a TV set that the teacher had created with thermocol sheets. Inside this frame, the display content had printed stories and slides that could be manually scrolled left and right. The 'TV screen' displayed large, colourful storybook pages and students could 'change the channel' and 'watch' other stories. The teacher used it by running the story on the screen manually, and as the story progressed, he paused to ask questions and engage students in predicting what might happen next. After the story, students broke into small groups to draw their favourite scenes or write a short continuation of the story. By simulating a television experience with this handmade TLM, the teacher created a dynamic and interactive learning environment that made reading and learning both fun and educational.

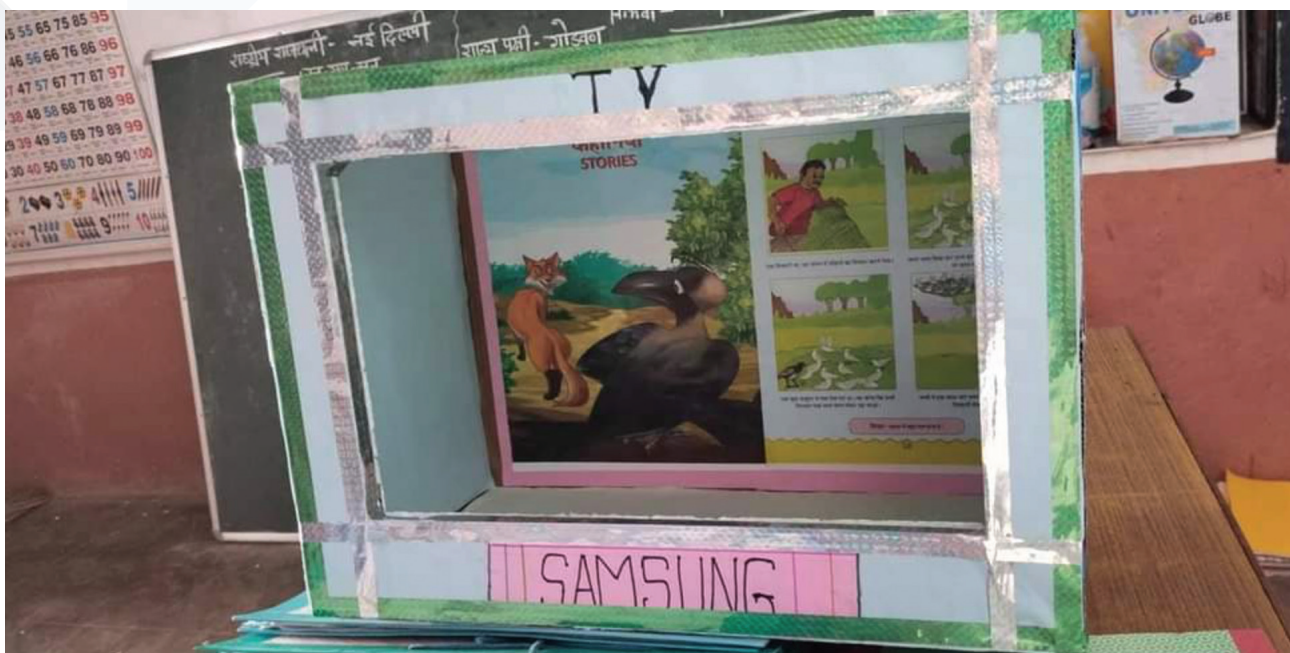


Figure 1. The 'TV set' created by the teacher.

When I visited the school a second time for an assessment study of the children, I had more time to spend with them and was amazed by their remarkable learning and confidence levels. In many schools that I visit, students appear self-assured during informal conversations but when I ask questions to assess their learning levels, they start to show signs of nervousness. Here, the students freely responded to my questions, even though this was the first time I was interacting with them. It seemed like the school was a happy place for them, and to find out more about what made it so, I decided to spend the whole day at the school.

### Encouragement and support

The school has only two classrooms so classes I and II sit together in one and classes III, IV and V in the other. This arrangement is carefully designed, keeping in mind the student's cognitive and academic development. Having all the younger children in one room enables the teacher to better understand their individual needs and learning styles, providing instruction accordingly.

Additionally, this arrangement fosters peer support when the teacher is not present in the classroom. During such times, class II students often take the lead and support class I students based on the instructions given by the teacher. I have observed that they collaborate effectively and offer mutual support.

Unenrolled children (who come along with the enrolled students) also sit with classes I and II and begin learning alongside them. In one instance, during a lesson on letter recognition, the teacher wrote all the letters on the blackboard, and then, as he called out a letter, he also called out a student's name to come up to the blackboard and identify the letter by circling it with chalk. After some time, an unenrolled child also approached the teacher and requested a chalk so he could participate. The teacher gave him a piece of chalk and the child went up to the blackboard to circle a letter. The teacher asked the class to clap for him. When I discussed this later with the teacher, he explained that this is the first step in learning for the child and for the others, this encourages inclusive participation.

Prabhu Ram's teaching approach is child-centric, and he incorporates resources beyond textbooks, some of which are created by him and displayed on the classroom walls. The classrooms are rich in print environment that he has created in his free time.



Figure 2. The print-rich classroom created by the teacher.

One of the best aspects of his teaching was the effective use of available resources. While discussing the maps of India and Rajasthan displayed on the wall, the teacher showed students how to read maps. Then, each student was asked to share what they had learnt, with the teacher prompting them with related questions. If a student was confused, the teacher modified his questions to assist them. He used many other resources, like the newspaper and the globe, to teach language.

Prabhu Ram pays equal attention to every child and ensures that they all receive equal opportunities. For example, when teaching the chapter on festivals in the country in class V, he listened to the experiences of the children in celebrating the festivals mentioned in the chapter, giving them space for discussion. All students from classes III, IV and V participated in the discussion. Later, the teacher encouraged all of them to write answers to questions based on their respective grades.

I did not find a single student who was not taking part in the class proceedings, and every child in his class was happy and confident. They responded and asked questions when they did not understand something without any hesitation. If they wanted to say anything during the discussion, they raised

their hands, waited for their turn, and engaged in their work. Class decorum was maintained by the students even though there was more than one grade sitting together.

### **Ownership and responsibility**

The teacher is fostering a positive learning environment where children feel a strong sense of belonging by actively involving them in daily activities, such as assembling in school and entrusting them with the care of classroom materials. This approach empowers students, instilling in them a sense of responsibility for their learning space.

By allowing children to participate in organising and maintaining classroom resources like toys, books, and teaching materials, the teacher is cultivating a culture of ownership among the students. This

not only teaches them essential life skills but also nurtures their connection with the school community.

Observing children taking the initiative to responsibly use play materials during lunchtime and then meticulously organising them afterwards reflects their understanding of the importance of respecting shared resources and their commitment to maintaining a tidy learning environment.

Overall, through these inclusive practices, the teacher is creating a supportive and empowering school environment where children feel valued, respected, and actively engaged in their learning experiences. The teacher is empowering these children with essential skills and confidence that will be a part of their personalities for life and form the basic culture of this school.



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