

A School Experiment

In Janwaar we radically rethink the idea of a “school”. Many of us agree that the existing education system doesn’t meet the needs of rural communities and knowing that good teachers won’t stay for long in such a remote area – we decided to make our Janwaar kids fit to run their own school.

Together with Prakriti School in Noida we are setting up a two year program for five kids – Asha, Arun, Brajendra, Anil and Ajeet (see their profiles on the following pages) – to make them fit for the purpose.

We conducted an assessment in September 2018 and selected the five kids out of 25.

It’s an experiment and we are fully aware that we might fail – but out-of-the-box thinking is desperately needed to close the existing gaps and come up with something more suitable. Only last week we signed the contract for the apartment in which the children will stay – it’s just across Prakriti School.

The experiment will start in January ... we are pretty excited.

While the regular school hours in the morning at Prakriti will aim to close their gaps in Hindi reading and writing and introduce them to better ways of learning (they are only familiar with the one-to-many frontal method which is practiced at government schools,) the afternoon and evening sessions are kept free for informal, hands-on and self-organized learning – mainly in fields they are individually eager to explore.

The kids will become tech-savvy (focus on how to use digital technologies well) and learn English in a combination of online/offline courses. They will attend courses at the British Council.

Prakriti has defined milestones for them during these two years. Experienced “learners” from our network will help them to find they way forward and be there for regular advise.

And – after two months – every week another kid will go back home to Janwaar with a project to engage the other kids in Janwaar. It will be held at Villa Janwaar and will last for one week.

They will pass exams under the NIOS Board (National Institute of Open Schooling). We expect them to be fit to certify for IX grade after this period.



It started with a skateboard



Ulrike Renhard started we-school/Janwaar Castle in February 2014 as a private initiative. In an international campaign SKATEBOARD/ARTBOARDS she asked artists around the world to transform a skateboard into an artboard. The boards were auctioned on the ebay platform of skate-aid, a German NGO which is well-known in the international skateboarding arena. Ulrike's idea of the skatepark was to give kids in rural India who DON'T know what a skateboard is and who are lacking in self-confidence the chance to bring some fun into their lives and learn new skills by playing. She was confident that this will give them trust and raise their self-confidence as they learn to develop new social skills and learn what it takes to commit themselves to a set goal.

Inspired by the work of Skateistan she took a slightly different approach and framed Janwaar Castle as an open sandbox. This basically means:

- a clear set of values and principles in which all activities take place
- no defined outcome (which DOES NOT mean having no vision) and
- no pre-defined programs

Her basic assumption was that this skatepark would interrupt the village in a way that it could drive positive change. And it did.

The story of Janwaar Castle only started in April 2015 and it has inspired many people in India and abroad to think about skateboarding as a tool for change. It is NOT skateboarding for skateboarding sake – we use skateboarding to drive fundamental social, cultural and economic change!

Ulrike herself is currently involved in five new skatepark projects all over India. Janwaar Castle has become a small little movement what we now call The Rural Changemakers. The skateboarding virus is spreading while the stories coming out of Janwaar keep emerging.





Asha Gond, 19 years old

Asha was the first person in the village to get a passport and go abroad. This was no easy feat. As an Adivasi (indigenous people) AND a girl – there was nothing like a green card for the entire process. What a bumpy journey we had to overcome all the hurdles laid out on the way. From intrigues in the village to vicious slurs and defamation on various sides, all kinds of stuff happened which we never thought or even dreamed of when we asked her if she wanted to go abroad to learn better English. But she managed it all and is now slowly but surely finding her own way.

She learnt a lot as she moved forward. Besides English – and skateboarding what she has learned the most is how to be herself. She became self-confident and how to stand up and fight for her desires and dreams. Even if this means trouble. She has taken responsibility for her own life and is learning to learn. She might lack a bit of passion and energy – but I believe that passion and energy are what she has seen plenty of during her time at the World Skateboarding Championships in Nanjing where she represented India.

She had this kind of all-important spark when she was standing with all the other female skateboarders at the Olympic bowl in Nanjing. When she saw how energized, fearless and passionate her fellow competitors were and how much they wanted to drop into this bowl and master a safe yet tricky passage, she felt the difference. It kept her thinking until she concluded after a few days that it was exactly this energy and passion that made the vital difference. The big challenge will be to keep this fire alive and burning and translate it into her daily activities.





Arun Adivasi, 16 years old

Arun has come a long way. He “earned” his first brownie points during our Janwaar Castle Skateboarding Challenge in November 2016 when he won the “social award” of the tournament. He wasn’t among the best skateboarders by then but this event sparked his interest – in multiple ways. He started to go to school, his social skills improved and he became our best skateboarder.

Arun is a very honest and very reliable young boy. He doesn’t shy away from responsibilities and definitely grows with the tasks. The kids love him and I feel, he loves the kids. He shares and he cares. His way was quite bumpy one, the Yadav boys weren’t pleased when they realized that the village kids had chosen Arun, an Adivasi, as their leader – and every now and then they would really challenge and threaten him. Nowadays this rarely happens and some of the Yadav guys have become best friends with him ... which is wonderful.

His trips to Europe and China made Arun self-confident and improved his English speaking skills. He also realized that he has a long way to go – in learning and skateboarding and he is ready for it. For him it will be a challenge in Noida to see that he is not the “leader” when it comes to school – especially his younger brother will out-perform him. It will be interesting to see how the two will handle it. I am sure they’ll find a way and Arun will understand that he has to give space to the “little” one to grow and maybe even by-pass him.





Brajendra Singh Yadav (right), 15 years old

Brajendra has always a smile on his face. He is really excited to be part of our experiment – his excitement is almost hindering him to get things done. His major challenge is to focus and to stick with a task. He easily gets distracted even though he wants to focus. Sometimes I feel he is standing in his own way. He is a good guy, he is willing to learn and open to the new. He is refreshing in so many ways. He feels some pressure from his parents and doesn't know how to channel this. To unleash this pressure and turn it into positive energy will be part of his journey in Delhi.

Via the skatepark and our Villa Janwaar he has got a sense for community which will certainly help him within this group of five. So far he was considered as a good student but slowly he is realizing that he – like all the others – have plenty of gaps and that he has a lot to learn. Reading and writing have got a new meaning for him – he realized that reading and writing in this new environment will include, that he understands and is able to summarize what he is reading and writing. Meaning in general is a new concept for him – and asking questions is an important part of it. Not taking things for granted is what he needs to learn first.





Anil Adivasi, 14 years old

Anil is Arun's younger brother. When Arun was first confronted with the idea that his little brother would join the team of the five students he immediately said, he cannot go. He said, his parents won't allow him. But in contrary, the parents said immediately yes. They asked Anil, if he wanted to join and that was it.

For Anil himself it wasn't an easy decision. It took him a few days – he was bothered how his current school teachers would react and he lacked self-confidence. Being the younger brother of Arun, who always stands in the spotlight, he has to learn to step out of the shadow. And surprisingly the moment he had made up his mind, he fully embraced his chance and took his stand – not yet on eye-level with the elder brother but we feel it is only a question of time. One can see he is very happy with his decision – it has completely changed the way he talks, acts and practices. He is certainly on fire and highly motivated.

Anil is one of the brightest kids we have in the village. He is way above village average when it comes to reading and writing. He quickly understands context and is capable of connecting simple dots. He is a very polite kid, certainly not a front-runner but rather a very honest and reliable back-up. A must have in every team.





Ajeet Singh Yadav, 15 years old

Ajeet is the youngest in his family and slightly spoiled. He enjoys all the benefits of being “male” and the last one in line. His sisters and mother would do anything to please him – and he surely knows how to “live” this to the fullest. When he first traveled with a group of kids for three weeks to ProtoVillage, where the group learnt English and trained the kids there in skateboarding it was quite a tough learning for him NOT to be served and to clean his own stuff. Slowly he accepted and by now he has understood that this kind of behaviour has no place in our experiment.

He is one of the best we have at school – at least when it comes to reading and writing. In Janwaar and Panna where he last went to school, he finished 10th grade without any problems. He accepted the challenges which are going along with the privilege of being part of this school experiment and he has understood – even though he isn't always yet practicing it – that he has to work on himself and invest time and efforts to improve. He needs to wave his motto “I am the youngster and everything will be done for me!” good-bye.

His skateboarding skills have very much improved since he knows he is joining the experiment. Also his attendance at Villa Janwaar has tremendously increased and he does take responsibility and is contributing to the community. He is on a good path.



Budget

We've calculated the costs on a **monthly** basis per child. Here is the breakdown

INR 2500	Rent/electricity/water
INR 12500	Teacher/learning materials/individual coachings
INR 2000	Commute / travels
INR 5000	Food
INR 1000	Internet and phone charges
INR 2000	Miscellaneous

INR 25000 (approx. € 300)

Project cost per month

INR 25000 x 5 = 1.25 Lakh (approx. € 1600)



About Prakriti School

Prakriti intends to provide an environment where children develop a lifelong love for learning. The guiding principle for Prakriti is – nothing can be taught – it can be only be learnt – by experiencing, by igniting a desire within to learn, and by showing the path to discovery when that desire is ignited.

Formal education today is mainly focused on dissemination of facts to children from a very early age, without any regard to their readiness for it, and without any effort to encourage them to think independently. A child who is able to conform to the standards set by the school/ institution is accepted; outliers are branded and rejected.

Prakriti aims to encourage holistic education by incorporating art and craft, music and dance, drama and sports in its curriculum in a manner that encourages creative thinking, progress at one's pace, and does not expect children to conform to externally imposed standards.



The Rural Changemakers e.V

In May we registered **The Rural Changemakers e.V. – Verein zur Förderung der Jugend-, Erziehungs- und Entwicklungshilfe** – in Berlin, Germany. The goal of the Verein is to raise funds for our activities in Janwaar.

Andreas Schulten, Axel Pfennigschmidt and Ulrike Reinhard (chairperson) form the managing committee. Astrid Ränge, Volker Schönbühler, Kirsten Hense and Tim Reinhard are founding members.

You can reach us by dropping a line to:
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