

XSEED Sapling Growing at Slow yet Steady Process



Ashish Rajpal, Co-founder of XSEED, speaks on the way XSEED is gradually taking over educational development with the highly integrated curriculum based on the guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005. The syllabus seamlessly integrates with schools following CBSE, ICSE, state boards or even international certifications such as IGCSE. Through the use of rubrics, student assessment in XSEED is kept objective. With the evaluation of tasks at every critical juncture, the assessment is also kept formative. The summative assessment at the end of the unit then feeds into the learning and developmental goals for the next unit or lesson. XSEED Assessment takes a wider view of the child's capabilities and ensures that the unique talents and skills of every child get showcased.

First person account on the journey towards corporate world

It was a personal journey for me, the journey of an idea. I grew up here in a middle-class family in Delhi. After MBA in XLRI, I joined Procter and Gamble in Mumbai and the worldwide marketing director in DANONE. I was still fashionable in the 80's to do something different, wanted to join an NGO. But I was very disillusioned, partly because there was no quality model and partly because of corruption. I was interested to do here in self-sufficient way and education, in particular, sparked by the birth of my children, especially by birth of my daughter. I was fascinated that how my children would be different, quit my job and came back in 2002 with mission to improve the quality of my teaching. It was my core bug.

The initial days in the world of teaching

I think if am credited, it would be for assembling an uncommon team. In India, my core idea always has been how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the class. We have never deviated from that. I came back here from Harvard earning a degree. It was my hypothesis that India has six million teachers and who wants to do a B.Ed? We were involved in three years training, but when we went back to school, we found that training was not effective as it's a very poor tool to upgrade anybody. People are not going to teaching by choice, they somehow end up there. In our country, teacher training is a very poor tool to teach anything. Like training horses or dogs, no human learning can happen especially in short doses of train-

ing. We need a number of other things, like understanding of why that thing is happening and need daily tools of teaching. With those insights, I stepped in classroom and started teaching myself.

As per my experience, it's a very hard job. If the teacher is paid 8,000 to 10,000, it doesn't mean that the job is easy. Giving teachers Gyan that do this or do that is easy, but important thing is that can you give a better mouse trap? Then our programme XSEED started. We built an entire library of 8,000 plans and how to teach every topic from nursery to class 8th minute by minute. Then we added teacher's training and later leadership training. We have beta tested in three schools but we were shocked with just 20 to 30 % improvement in scores of children. We saw that bottom of the half class is doing much

better. Then we started in a wide manner. Now we have four hundred schools, the story is to take a lot of time in getting movement in eight years.

The USP that sets us apart

In India, three parts needed to come together, just like cooking a good food. In our country, we talk a lot about lesson plans, but teachers have no plans when they go into classroom. They only have a text book or a summary written in papers that is difficult for students to understand.

One day, I went in the class and did a quick activity. I took a bowl of water and dropped a pen. It was floating. Then, I dropped a fifty paise coin, it sank. Children asked what this was. Then I asked “if both are made of metal then why I that one is floating and another sank?” “Jadoo hai sir”, slowly they said. Then, I said, this property is called surface tension. That is why we have dew drops. This is science not jadoo. It was an amazing experience.

My USP is that of bringing all aspects of academics, teacher training and technology and thereby, integrating in a research manner and focusing on the result.

We learnt a lot about curriculum development from the American educational organisations, a lot of them are non-profits. Since the 80's when the National Science Foundation and other such organisations funded a lot of efforts, several innovations happened.

Changes in education to keep up with globalisation in economic sector

Aspirations of parents have changed in globalisation. Since mid 90's, the poorest guy in India wants to spend on education as he believes in the obsession. The obsession is all about getting educated as when I visited a remote village in Andhra Pradesh, the labourers I talked to over there almost everyone has a relative in America doing well. Now that perspective has taken a strong and solid place in these people's mind. For a poor person it is godly. That aspiration has changed. When we go to

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small towns, people are really spending because people see value in education. If we look at Andhra Pradesh, things have changed like this. From their eyes, this is investment they are making...in terms of creativity, ability to collaborate and do innovative thing and alternate career options. It has opened a lot of avenues for them and things are not stagnant in the pool of engineering and medical.

Views on changes in school curriculum made by CBSE

CBSE is talking about assessment. It's a good step. The only issue is that schools still don't know about its implementation. The intention of CBSE is very good; unfortunately, the mind set is the same. I think it is a much needed step. Its a fundamental idea but it will take a much needed time to actually get implemented for the set mindset that we have is rigid.

Long term impact of XSEED services

Obviously, the results have been fruitful as our whole programme was on results. Initially we had applied in on class four and five students and the average students showed progress in their scores by 20 to 30 per cent and the bottom part of the class to even higher results. Now we are doing a test in control study where we find significant difference in XSEED and non-XSEED schools. There are schools which are not using our programme, but we are offering them in confidential basis for free. Now we want to test it in almost every school for the next two three years before we publish a study around. Followed by it we want to have an independent outside agency. I

had also talked to Stanford Research Institute about this and unless big-shots approve us, we cannot reach our goal.

Areas where your technology is being used

We have started Pre Schools, and we will be expanding those and at will be served as a model of XSEED programmes. We have a three year blue print. We want to reach a million children; we are working in XSEED system. I think if you reach million children it would be a critical mass. That is difficult to ignore this mass. Today, XSEED is working on paper and pencil but we are working to take in new technology. Moreover on making people speak better English and teach English to them who actually aspire it from the core of their heart.

Where is India in the whole process of education and where do you see is the vacuum?

In India, there is a vacuum of leadership and crisis of leadership in education entrepreneurship. In a funny way NIIT came in late 80's and early 90's. It was seen as a wave. My message for the young people to come with passion and mission first, the money will follow and business model would follow with constructive products.

If we see Google and Microsoft, they had thought in this way. Those sense of craziness about your work to invent something otherwise its trading. Our country needs innovations and that comes from leadership and courage to be creative.

Your dream

I am living it and will certainly take education to the next level with our innovations. \\\