

GREY CAPS GREY CELLS

When we made our foray into schools, general knowledge at best was seen by kids as boring, intellectually draining and an activity that a bunch of 'nerds' indulged in. We found GK to be nothing but repackaged academics in the form of questions and answers or a bunch of data that simply did not excite or add value to the 'gimme more' generation that we cater to these days. Giri Balasubramaniam, affectionately called Pickbrain, heads Greycaps India Pvt Ltd; India's second largest quiz and knowledge services company. Pickbrain is known for his unique quiz shows and his trademark sense of humour. Pickbrain in a tête-à-tête with MENTOR...

The revival of GK in schools...

What made matters worse was the fact that the interpretation of what constituted GK came largely from the background of the teacher handling the subject. For example: If it was a history teacher handling GK, then the battle of Panipat would qualify, if it was an English teacher then it would be the starting lines of the Solitary Reaper. What actually mattered was the comfort of the teacher with the subject that s/he taught and obviously draw extensively from that resource. This interposed the question as to 'Is GK all about helping the child know beyond his academics?' Some schools even perceived general knowledge as a requirement for only those who represented the school at quiz shows ignoring the fact that almost every entrance exam after school has a GK paper to be cleared. What really pushed us to start something worthwhile was when we discovered that there were schools rising spuriously where the GK period was used as a default class to allocate for completing portions, or for school day and sports practice.

Kindling the curiosity of the child...

From the student point of view; having a structured GK program helps kindle the curiosity of a child, makes them more conscious of the world they live in, helps them contribute more to daily conversations and thereby boosts confidence levels tremendously. What is also very important is GK in many ways teaches a child to ask questions, while our system of education largely focuses on equipping them to answer not ask.

From a school's perspective a structured GK program helps bridge the student teacher divide. The teacher relates better to the likes



and dislikes of the student and can be a lot more generation relevant by understanding the pulse of the student.

In our days the teacher would say "You need to keep pace with me." Today, we live in a world where kids are growing older at a younger age and it has become imperative for the teacher to keep pace with the ever changing student.

The key to all the books that we have created for children is to be able to capture their imagination and cater to their curiosity. It is also very important especially for areas like GK to start early. We recommend that schools try and build a strong

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GK foundation from standard three – that is the age when interests get formed and once we teach them the value of information and the joy of knowing new things they will remain curious for life.

A different perspective...

What is heartening is the fact that our quizzes not only draw huge audiences in the major metros; but we have been successful in creating Indian language content and engage children in rural areas as well. The success of these programmes with schools

across India, has also opened doors for us to interact with children in the Middle east and Singapore which is very encouraging.

We would also like to believe that the vertical quizzing or topical quizzing that we started for schools be it in the arena of Information Technology or Science or Sports has encouraged more kids to embrace quizzing as these quizzes cater to a specific line of interest that they possibly have.

A lighter note...

When we started quizzing in Indian languages we were still not sure as to what content metric would appeal to these kids until I met a little boy who was so happy with the quiz we did and made a very innocent remark that opened my eyes. He told me in his mother tongue "I don't know too much of English but that has not stopped me from knowing what is 'Microsoft' or who George Bush is!" It was truly touching to realise that the power of knowledge has no language barriers.

I truly like the word 'Mentor' for that is the role each one of us has to play, be it as a teacher, parent, principal or even a quizmaster, to ensure that we are ready for the future.

Blending GK with the curriculum...

I have always believed that it does not really work well if a programme does not blend with the system that the school follows. That is the reason as to why we as a quizzing company decided to

stick to our strength which is 'research and equip the teacher to teach from our material.' It also helps the schools to have greater



control on the flow of the programme and enable them to monitor the effectiveness on a real time basis. Schools need to prepare their kids for the world at large and it is almost imperative today for a child to be as comfortable with his extra curricular activities as much as he is comfortable with his academics.

As a quizmaster, I have found Indian kids far sharper and comfortable with information compared to kids in a lot of other countries that my profession has taken me to. The challenge for us is to harness this potential and prepare them to be global citizens who will take on the world. In this context, I truly like the word 'Mentor' for that is the role each one of us has to play, be it as a teacher, parent, principal or even a quizmaster, to ensure that we are ready for the future.

For the future...

We have experimented with an interesting model called the 'Quizmaster's Club (QMC)' for schools across Karnataka where schools pick students to play quizmaster while we support them with a ready to run quiz show on a CD. The intention is to foster more quizzes in schools while not draining their time on research. The success of this model has encouraged us to extend this to other cities across India.

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