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COVER STORY

The XSEED REVOLUTION

On February 13, a specially designed real-time electronic counter flashing red numerals in the office of Ashish Rajpal, promoter-chief executive of iDiscoveri Education Services Pvt. Ltd, confirmed that the number of students enrolled in the company's flagship Xseed programme in 303 schools had crossed the 100,000 milestone. **DILIP THAKKUR REPORTS**

And by all accounts this year iDiscoveri's 180 employees spread across the head office in Gurgaon and over a dozen locations countrywide, partied harder than ever before.

"Although our Xseed curriculum was introduced to K-VII schools as recently as 2007, and was accepted by only three schools in the first year, it is currently being taught in 303 primary schools in 22 states across the country. This curriculum which has been developed by our in-house CDR (Content, Design and Research) division after three years of intensive research, testing and refinement, has received excellent word-of-mouth publicity and is being increasingly welcomed by educationists, teachers and primary schools. By the end of the current academic year ending June 30, we expect the number of client schools to be close to 500, and the number of children learning the Xseed way to reach 200,000," says Rajpal.

The growing acceptance of iDiscoveri's innovatively-designed primary and middle school curriculum by leading private schools — government schools are not yet on the company's radar — across the country is a personal vindication for Rajpal who in the millennium year forsook an enviable, high-flying transnational corporate career to venture into the stagnant waters of India's education sector. An economics graduate of Delhi University with an MBA (marketing and finance) from the highly-reputed XLRI, Jamshedpur, Rajpal began his corporate career with Procter & Gamble India in the early 1990s, and served in Moscow as marketing manager of the Brussels-based Sun Intertreb before bagging a spectacular appointment as the world-wide marketing director of Danone, the Paris-based dairy products and Evian water vending multinational (1998-2001).

Prior to the birth of his daughter in 1997, he became increasingly disillusioned with early childhood education practices and pedagogies worldwide.

iDiscoveri talent pool: historic landmark celebrations

THIS YEAR THE ANNUAL DAY CELEBRATIONS OF THE DELHI-BASED I-Discoveri Education Services Pvt. Ltd (estb. 2002) usually celebrated in end January with fun and games events for employees' families, and topped off with a grand luncheon in the sprawling 10,000 sq. ft. offices of the company abutting the campus of the Heritage School, Gurgaon, were postponed to coincide with Valentine's Day on February 14.

Not without good reason. The previous day on February 13, a specially designed real-time electronic counter flashing red numerals stationed in the anteroom of the office of Ashish Rajpal, the Harvard-educated promoter-chairman of iDiscoveri, had confirmed a milestone. The number of students enrolled in the company's patented and flagship Xseed primary school learning programme adopted by 303 schools countrywide, had crossed 100,000. This year the company's annual day celebrations had been postponed to await the crossing of this historic landmark.

This prompted a change of heart and direction. Back home together with former hatchmates and like-minded corporate professionals (Rony Gulati, Lokesh Jindal, Tarun Chandana, and Gourav Saktiani), he co-prototyped the Delhi-based Youreka Outdoor Pvt. Ltd (originally Discoveri Outbound) — an outdoor experiential and hands-on education company. Convinced he had found his true calling in education, in 2001 Rajpal put in his papers at Danone, signed up for the Master's programme of the Harvard School of Education where he studied under the tutelage of multiple intelligences guru Dr. Howard Gardner, and returned to India in 2002.

"Giving up the business world to enter the education sector which offers the opportunity to shape the leaders of 21st century India, is a decision I have never regretted," says Rajpal.

Xseed programme helping every teacher improve her teaching, and every student her learning every day, iDiscoveri has received excellent response from progressive school managements in Tamil Nadu. In the year 2007-08, the Xseed programme was adopted by a mere three schools in the state. That number has risen to 71 currently and will increase to 150 schools by June 30, and to 500 by the end of the academic year 2011-12. Tamil Nadu hosts 4,500 English medium private schools and all of them are potential customers," says Anant Nayak, an alumnus of IIT, Roorkee, Georgia Tech (USA) and the Harvard School of Education, and partner and co-promoter who heads the company's operations in this high-potential southern state.

Yet although this new green company has made — and continues to

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Xseed success formula

THE ILLUSTRIOUS FEATURE WHICH REVEALS THE Delhi/Gurgaon-based iDiscoveri Education Services Pvt. Ltd (estb. 2002) in the growing number of companies entering the school education sector, is its proprietary Xseed K-VII teaching-learning programme which is taking private schools across the country by storm, and could dramatically improve learning outcomes in India's classrooms. Introduced into the conservative Indian education market which is wary about wonder pedagogies and silver bullet technologies in 2007, after four years of research, development, testing and refinement by the company's 40-strong Content, Design and Research division, in the first year of operations Xseed (priced between Rs.3-7 lakh per school) was installed by

indicate that learning outcomes of all students in Xseed classes has improved dramatically," says Dr. Tapaswini Saha, an alumna of IIT, Delhi and Cambridge University (UK), and partner at iDiscoveri who leads the assessment team in the Content, Design and Research division.

Yet the prime factor behind the growing acceptance of the Xseed study programme in primary schools countrywide is not merely improved pedagogy. Although iDiscoveri top brass prefer not to dwell on it, a major factor behind its success is that it takes the unarticulated aversion of the teachers' community to new ICT (information communication technologies) into consideration and offers step-by-step lesson plans in familiar print medium teachers' manuals for teaching English, maths, science and the social sciences. The programme simulta-

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Rajpal true calling

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