

Spell P for Puzzle

Board games and puzzles can be an effective answer to the problems of rote learning beginning at the Kindergarten level

Aditi Guha

It is a game of five in a row. Black plays first and as the players rack their brains on how to get an unbroken row of five stones horizontally, vertically or diagonally, it becomes by nature a pedagogy that's abstract yet strategic. This new wave of learning, through games such as Gomoku or chess, can be the best teacher for your little one as he steps into the world of real learning.

Imagine your child, all of four years, beginning to play this game and ending up thinking and exercising his mind like never before! You can thank the Japanese origin of this game or puzzle games such as Nonogram, Shikaku, Sudoku and Kenken that give rote learning stiff competition in shaping young minds.

"Rote learning comes in different shapes and forms. When we look back at our own school days, we sometimes feel we have wasted a lot of time memorising

facts. History for us was a blur of dates and names. Chemistry and physics were a concoction of symbols. We studied without understanding," says Arghya Banerjee who teaches children in Tier 3 cities through the mediums of puzzles and board games, among other things.

For a child at the Kindergarten level, learning to spell numbers or copy them in neat handwritings is all about education. Not always though. Experts feel, this methodology of succumbing to rote learning, begins early and catches on fast. Says psychologist Animesh Dhar, "Education for a child is pre-conceived and the inevitable. It is all about rote learning. This often impairs the child's thinking faculty and he gets more used to memorising and mugging. This kills his ability to understand and create."

We often realise that a child in KG can spell 59 but cannot say if 71 is bigger than 59! "In most schools, numbers are not taught as quantity but as pictures or

words at the beginners' level," says Banerjee. The same pedagogy is at work at the primary level of education too.

"In most schools, multiplication tables are memorised as rhymes. Older kids can do long multiplications but cannot say, without working out, if the answer is greater than 10,000 or not. This is due to learning without understanding. Testing application orientation and higher-order thinking is absolutely necessary," he adds.

While most parents are yet to understand this way of teaching with focus on think-

ing orientation, Japanese puzzles and strategy games like chess and Gomoku set the little minds to think and strategise.

"Application-based education, as opposed to rote learning will encourage children to learn from unconventional sources like puzzles and board games," says an educationist involved in this new way of teaching in Birbhum. So, if you are one who wants your child to have a mind of his own and to take the best decisions he can in life, it is time to begin young and say bye bye to rote learning.

