

# The Opening Bracket . . .

## Learning how to think

Looking around the world, one sees that things are in an absolute mess. Climate change is becoming more fearsome by the day, and violence and divisions are tearing humanity apart. Wars are being fought at this moment that are going to result in widespread suffering and starvation. We seem to be almost incapable of responding to these problems in a sane manner. What are we to do in such a situation? Rather than seek the solution through negotiation and treaties and agreements, must we not approach the problem through education?

Education is desperately in need of major reform, but where do we start? In NEP 2020 we read: “It is becoming critical that children . . . learn how to learn. Education must move towards learning about how to think critically” (page 4) and also: “Education must develop not only capacities such as critical thinking and problem solving but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities” (page 5). How would one go about setting up such an education system?

We shall express it this way: *Education must emphasise learning how to think and not what to think*. This has been said by numerous educators. It is repeated so often that it has lost meaning. Who can disagree with the statement that we must emphasise learning how to think? But are we capable of doing so? Are we capable of teaching children how to think?

There is a lot of talk about computational thinking these days. It is obviously important that we learn this skill for ourselves and ensure that children learn it too. This is not merely because of the needs of any particular nation or organization, but it is important to be able to think clearly and objectively and in sequence when we are solving the important problems of life: problems of food distribution, problems of rational budget allocation, problems of transport, problems of supply chains, problems of banking and interest rates, problems of corruption, and so many other problems.

But surely, learning how to think goes far beyond this. We need to understand for ourselves why we are capable of hatred and violence, why we love power, why we love to compete, why we consume so much, why we need to be entertained, why we deceive ourselves so easily; and so many other such matters. A statement attributed to Albert Einstein is this: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Do we understand this statement truly? To do so requires great humility; we need to take responsibility for the fact that we are the creators of the problems we see around us, and we need to feel this deeply, in our hearts, and not just our minds. Perhaps then we can begin finding out what it means to think for oneself. And most importantly, we need to learn to think without self-interest. But to do this we need to understand ourselves, we who are the creators of problems. This is what we must, profoundly and with utmost humility, endeavour to learn and to teach.

Can we not create such schools, such centres of learning?

Can we not all join in this endeavour which is so vitally important for the well-being of the Earth?

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