

Learning the Heart of Educating

G.K. Chesterton with his proverbial sense of humour affirms: “The main fact about education is that there is no such thing. Education is a word like ‘transmission’ or ‘inheritance’, it is not an object, but a method”. It is the avenue that one generation opens up for the next, so that the latter may advance in the knowledge of the human and cosmic reality, and thus make its own contribution to the evolving process of being truly and fully human. This requires, as M.K. Gandhi would underscore, that education be “an all-round formation drawing out of the best in the child and a person – body, mind and spirit”. In a similar vein, Don Bosco would add that education is a matter of the heart and is founded on reason, religion, and loving-kindness.

The HEART of Educating India!

As the title suggests, on the one hand we wish to focus on the ‘heart’ and ‘art’ of the educational process, and on the other, consider ‘India’ as the subject and referent of the educational endeavour. We need to analyse the present system of education in India; to explore the alternative systems of education in India; to revitalise the Catholic System of Education and in this way to possibly evolve orientations and strategies to enhance the present system of education in India.

We are into a search mode for a better system of education. We need to re-define the purpose of the educational systems in India today. We need to ask how the existing systems of education contribute to excellence? Don’t we have alternatives in India? Although mainstream education in India is based on a system introduced by Lord Macaulay, a few educators did dare to think differently. Since the early 20th century, educators have discussed and implemented alternate forms of education, for example, Rabindranath Tagore’s VisvaBharati University, Sri Aurobindo’s Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, and Jiddu Krishnamurti Schools. A number of schools in different Indian states are either run by these foundations or have been inspired by them. The pioneers in education in the West, like Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, believed that education should help in development of a child in many spheres: not only in the intellectual, but in the moral, spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical spheres. There are some schools in India that take inspiration from these educationalists. What can we learn from such schools?

Modern educators should imbibe an open and collaborative spirit. Teachers and principals should come out of the narrow mind-set that they are the sole agents responsible for the education of the child. Schools and classrooms should encourage dialogue and partnership with others. The parent community has many useful

resources that can be positively utilized for the education of children. To encourage this collaborative spirit, Don Bosco system of education advocates the formation of Educative Pastoral Community that includes various stakeholders like teachers, students, parents, past pupils and education experts who should be involved in decision making and implementation. When a variety of such agents are involved and the efforts are coordinated harmoniously, the educational environment for the child becomes much more effective and enriching. We need to continue to raise many pertinent and even troubling questions on curriculum, syllabus, methodology, quality of teachers and the quality of pupils we 'produce' from our schools and colleges. We ought to understand the strengths, limits, difficulties and challenges of the prevalent educational systems. How can we reduce or eliminate those systemic faults so that the demand for good education translate into higher standards in education and better job opportunities? How can we help the person discern his/her own intellectual capacity and make life choices? How can our system help the young to mature into personal, relational, moral and spiritual aspects of life?

A lot of attention is being given to the process of education today. We need to discuss how we can bring an all-round formation to the young person in our care so that the students learn to move from success-oriented life to excellence-oriented life. We have many new trends in Education such as digital citizenship, creativity in sciences, interactive education, cloud based technology in education and artificial intelligence. Our educational corridors have opened up for robotics and machine learning. What are we heading for? Skill training for both employability as well as entrepreneurship have begun at the school level. Students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn. While We as educators must do justice to the larger social, public, and institutional responsibility of our positions, and we must exercise courage in creating opportunities for change. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusive Education. We need more than ever value-based education comprising of compassion, civility and honesty. Public engagement and collaboration are inevitable today. More than ever, we need student-centred pedagogy and character building values in our education. This CBCI EDUCATION NEXUS is a compilation of excellent thoughts and practices on education. As we construct meaning from our contemporary thinking and past learnings, may our nation which is imbedded with layers of core values of education over the centuries unearth more and more inherent educational values and intelligence in our young people today! May we continue to discover the heart of educating India!

-Fr. Dr. Maria Charles SDB