



INQUIRY

The Human Edge in Thinking



When AI makes answers easy, education must make thinking essential. The future belongs to learners who question, judge, create and connect.

A classroom may have many children sitting together, but they do not necessarily see or understand things in the same way. Each child comes with different experiences, knowledge and ways of making sense of the world. Understanding this process of thinking becomes particularly important at a time when artificial intelligence can provide information, answers and even written responses within seconds.

This was one of the central ideas discussed by Ms. Kinnari Pandya, Faculty from School of Education, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, during the 161st edition of Pallikkutam Global Connect, where she spoke on how children learn and its implications for teaching and

learning.

Pandya began from a basic understanding of how people make sense of what they encounter. During the session, an unfamiliar wooden object was shown to participants from different angles. People interpreted it differently, relating it to things they had seen before. The object was eventually revealed to be a small wooden pig. For Pandya, such differences point to an important aspect of thinking. What people understand is connected to what they already know and the experiences they have had. The same thing can therefore be perceived differently by different people.

This has an important implication for the classroom. A teacher may have many children in one class, but each child comes from a different home and family environment and brings different experiences. Pandya described how difficult, yet central, it is for a teacher to recognise this diversity while teaching. Learning, therefore, cannot simply be about giving children information and expecting them to receive it in the same way. Pandya emphasised the need to give children opportunities to think and experience things both inside and outside the classroom.

One way of doing this is through the questions teachers ask. When questions focus mainly on recalling information, children remain largely at the level of memory. If the aim is to develop active thinkers and problem-solvers, the nature of the questions becomes important. Open-ended questions can give children greater opportunity to think. The same applies to classroom activities. Pandya spoke about analysing, comparing, evaluating, group learning, problem-solving, observation, trial and error, writing and other experiences that allow children to engage with what they are learning rather than simply receive it.

She also gave creativity a wider meaning. Creativity is not limited to painting, drawing or art. It can involve constructing something new, building something or coming up with a new idea. A concept taught in class can become a creative endeavour when children are able to use it to think, develop and create something new. This question becomes even more significant in the age of AI. Pandya pointed out that children today can ask a phone or laptop to produce something for them. Earlier, students might read, discuss and debate before developing a response. Now, an AI application can provide one within minutes. Even writing is becoming something that technology can do for children.

This raises a difficult question- if something else can do so much for children, why do they need to think?

For Pandya, critical thinking matters because children need to make judgements for themselves about what is right and what is not. Not all information available to them is necessarily right. And critical thinking is not only academic. It also includes ethical thinking, moral dispositions and understanding relationships. These abilities are connected to experience. Thinking and experience should go hand in hand. This is also why she questioned what happens when more and more activities are handed over to technology. If

writing, responding, creating stories and eventually even listening or making meaning can be outsourced, what remains for human beings to do? The answer lies in continuing to develop the ability to think.

This does not mean that children should simply be kept away from AI. Rather, we should help children use AI effectively while developing the judgement to question and assess what they encounter. In the classroom, this can begin with something simple by giving children the opportunity to formulate their own responses, write them down, create their own questions, discuss ideas, learn from peers and engage with problems. Such experiences can help children learn, reflect and think actively.

The challenge for education in the AI age, then, is not merely about how much information children can access. It is about whether they have enough opportunities to think about that information, connect it with their experiences, question it, judge it and use it to create something new. When answers become easier to obtain, the value of the question and of the mind that asks becomes even more important.