

## Editorial

# Education as Awareness: The Educational Philosophy of J. Krishnamurti

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I am delighted to present this special issue on Jiddu Krishnamurti for the readers of the *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was an Indian philosopher and educator who published about 70 books on philosophical topics like consciousness, truth and meditation, founded educational institutions in India, the UK, and the US, and gifted the world key insights regarding the roots of human conflicts and possibilities of personal and social transformation.<sup>1</sup> The core of the human conflict, according to Krishnamurti, lies in our consciousness, which he believed is in existential crisis. According to Krishnamurti (1983),

We are facing a tremendous crisis; a crisis which the politicians can never solve because they are programmed to think in a particular way – nor can the scientists understand or solve the crisis; nor yet the business world, the world of money. The turning point, the perceptive decision, the

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<sup>1</sup> Free Krishnamurti books:

<http://krishnamurti.abundanthope.org/krishnamurti.htm>

Krishnamurti and his ideas:

<https://jkrishnamurti.org/about-core-teachings>

Krishnamurti's schools:

<http://www.jkrishnamurti.org/worldwide-information/schools.php>

Association of Krishnamurti Studies:

<https://www.krishnamurtistudies.org/>

Documentaries on Krishnamurti's life and work:

Krishnamurti: The Challenge of Change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWVtovuTREQ>

Krishnamurti: With A Silent Mind

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAzpDI7VvM>

Journal of Krishnamurti Schools:

<http://www.journal.kfionline.org/>

challenge, is not in politics, in religion, in the scientific world; it is in our consciousness. One has to understand the consciousness of mankind [*sic*], which has brought us to this point. (p. 9)

The crisis of human consciousness, Krishnamurti suggests, can only be overcome if every individual perceives the truth of the crises within themselves. Education, Krishnamurti maintained, has a tremendous potential in providing pedagogical spaces to deeply understand and transform our consciousness through authentic meditative inquiry and exploration (Kumar, 2013).

While Krishnamurti offers no method or technique to deepen our understanding of ourselves, reading his writings and listening to his dialogues, especially with physicist David Bohm, have inspired me to experiment with his work in my life, and by extension, in my teaching and research (Kumar, 2013; 2022; Kumar & Downey, 2018). Krishnamurti's perspectives on education are uniquely insightful and important, especially if one considers education to be responsible for developing integrated human beings. The holistic perspective and approach to education propounded by educators like Krishnamurti is underemphasized and overshadowed by dominant neoliberal and Eurocentric perspectives (Kumar, 2019). Introducing students in the teacher education and graduate education programs at Mount Saint Vincent University to Krishnamurti's perceptions enables me to show them alternative ways of seeing the world which may, in turn, influence their approaches to teaching and learning in varied contexts.

Based on my studies and exploration of Krishnamurti's work, I can say without a doubt that he is one of the most authentic and original thinkers that I have encountered. By paying careful attention to Krishnamurti's thinking, one can begin to experience one's intelligence and creative spirit become unlocked. In his writings, Krishnamurti critiques educational structures that are productivity-oriented and economistic in their outlook because they undermine the very essence of education. Education that is designed for neoliberal reforms and guided by market principles is inadequate and leads to educators and students being scrutinized through their performance on standardized tests and compared with each

other (Kumar, 2019). This measurement-oriented approach to education, Krishnamurti rightly believes, induces fear, and ultimately leads to misguided thinking and a narrowing of the mind, rather than the creation of open-mindedness and intelligence, which should be the focus of a good education.

Krishnamurti (1953) writes,

The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and therefore intelligent. We may take degrees and be mechanically efficient without being intelligent. Intelligence is not mere information; it is not derived from books, nor does it consist of clever self-defensive responses and aggressive assertions. One who has not studied may be more intelligent than the learned. We have made examinations and degrees the criterion of intelligence and have developed cunning minds that avoid vital human issues. Intelligence is the capacity to perceive the essential, the what is; and to awaken this capacity, in oneself and in others, is education. (p. 14)

From Krishnamurti's perspective, one of the central goals of education should be to develop awareness. Awareness implies listening and observing the world with one's whole being. Awareness is the source of intelligence that releases intelligence and creativity and helps us to understand ourselves and others through direct experience. Krishnamurti (1964) shares,

It is the mind that has created the present civilization, this tradition-bound culture or society and, without understanding your own mind, merely to revolt as a communist, a socialist...has very little meaning. That is why it is very important to have self-knowledge, to be aware of all your activities, your thoughts and feelings; and this is education, is it not? Because when you are fully aware of yourself your mind becomes very sensitive, very alert. (p. 80)

As awareness promotes deeper inquiry and exploration of the self and its relationships to the world, it inculcates the development of original thinking rather than repetitive and regurgitative thinking. In my

experience, our educational institutions rarely promote or encourage originality. In fact, our systems of education encourage unoriginality since they rely primarily on reading and commenting on other's work rather than thinking deeply for oneself. The curriculum is imposed on teachers and students, and they are rarely encouraged to develop their original voice. For Krishnamurti, rather than imposing external knowledge on students, education should help students see the significance of learning from life through direct existential contact with oneself and with others. Such direct and existential seeing is the source of creative and original thinking.

In order to promote awareness, Krishnamurti suggests that we study ourselves, our relationships, and the world at large including nature. If we encourage students to study themselves and their individual and relational conflicts, problems such as bullying and indiscipline can be understood and responded to more holistically. Since students are not taught to study themselves, they do not know when they are hurting inside, which may cause them to hurt others. Restorative justice, for example, demonstrates that through honest discussion rather than punishment, individuals can explore why problematic behaviour exists in the first place. As our educational institutions have not provided the space for us to study ourselves in a way that is deeply meditative, spiritual, and creative, we experience internal strife and external conflicts. Self-study allows us to understand ourselves and our relationships at a deeper level and thereby promotes connection and collaboration rather than competition and conflict.

One unique insight that is core to Krishnamurti's work, is what he called a *negative approach* which is central to cultivating a deeper awareness. The word "negative" in this context is misleading though; it doesn't imply "bad." We can understand the essence of the negative approach by means of a simple example. Suppose I feel a conflict and I want to find a solution to solve that conflict. I could take an antidepressant pill, or I could go to a psychologist, or I could drink alcohol. Krishnamurti calls all

those solutions that aim to superficially address conflict by depending on external sources *positive approaches* because they involve doing something to make the feeling of conflict disappear. Positive approaches generally either suppress the conflict or smother it, but they do not allow one to understand it at a deeper level and independently. The negative approach, on the other hand, aims to understand the problem by allowing the conflict to exist—i.e., not doing anything to hide its existence. Perceiving the root of the problem is itself the essence of the negative approach. Krishnamurti proposed (and I can vouch from my own experience) that when one investigates a problem, one discovers that the problem under question has profound layers. And if one wants to uproot the problem, one needs to address it deeply and directly. Rather than suppressing the problem or controlling it superficially, one should allow oneself to dig down into it so that one can remove the roots to ensure that it does not grow back again. This insight into human problems and solutions is a remarkably unique contribution, distinct from most other approaches, which prioritize taking positive action to suppress or smother conflict. An appreciation of Krishnamurti's negative approach in the context of education can be extremely helpful. In the educational context, we often choose to address behavioural issues with reward or punishment rather than gaining deeper insights into the source of the problem. Krishnamurti (1953) points out:

One may compel a child to be outwardly quiet, but one has not come face to face with that which is making him obstinate, impudent, and so on. Compulsion breeds antagonism and fear. Reward and punishment in any form only make the mind subservient and dull. (p. 32)

Rather than suppressing or hiding a problem, if we take a deeper look at behavioural and psychological problems through dialogue and self-inquiry, we can raise children who are emotionally intelligent and can meet the challenges of life holistically rather than giving in to them.

While the negative approach intensifies our awareness, the process of conditioning greatly undermines it. Krishnamurti discusses the problem of conditioning in detail in his work, as it has a

significant influence on human beings and their relationships with one another. Krishnamurti (1970) explains,

We are conditioned – physically, nervously, mentally – by the climate we live in and the food we eat, by the culture in which we live, by the whole of our social, religious, and economic environment, by our experience, by education and by family pressures and influences. All these are the factors which condition us. Our conscious and unconscious responses to all the challenges of our environment – intellectual, emotional, outward and inward – all these are the action of conditioning. Language is conditioning; all thought is the action, the response of conditioning.  
(p. 10)

It is important to realize that we are all conditioned in many ways. The facts that we are conditioned by the culture we grow up in (including the religion, the political context, etc.), and that this conditioning shapes who we are very important for us to understand; conditioning forces influence our thinking, our perception, our sense of self, our behavior, and the way we relate with other people. Conditioning can take many different shapes, can arise in a variety of contexts, and can be conflicting in nature. For example, there are so many cultures, nationalities, and religions in the world which are often at odds with each other primarily due to conflicting conditioning influences rather than any real difference. According to Krishnamurti, global peace is only possible when we deeply look into our conditioning and free ourselves of its damaging effects on our relationship with one another.

Although our conditioning can lead us to conflict, our basic human condition—permeated with fears, anxieties, and worries—is universal. Krishnamurti suggests that we all possess an internal consciousness, one that is common to us all. It is full of these indicative emotions that affect us and our relationships on a daily basis. A person in India, a person in China, or a person in Russia all experience fear, although the sources of their fear and their expression of it may be very different. Our human

condition is similar across all contexts, and, beyond the thin layer of conditioning, we exist in very similar and connected ways.

Despite this foundational strand of connectedness, however, we have lost connection with each other, with nature, and with ourselves. Our conditioning and the conflictive nature of our consciousness do not allow us to connect with our selves, with each other, or with nature in a very deep or existential way. As Krishnamurti often said, "You are the world, and the world is you." Everything is connected; we are not disconnected from each other, or from nature or the world around us. Somehow though, we assume the contrary—that we exist as isolated individuals. We have caused a lot of trouble not only for ourselves and the people around us, but also for the entire Earth due to this erroneous perception that we are all completely distinct from each other. Given the problems of ever-growing divisions and conflicts in the world, one of the goals of education should be to inculcate this sense of interconnection and shared existence. In Krishnamurti's (1953) view,

Without love and right thinking, oppression and cruelty will ever be on the increase. The problem of ... [one person or group's] antagonism to ... [another person or group] can be solved, not by pursuing the ideal of peace, but by understanding the causes of war which lie in our attitude towards life, towards our fellow-beings; and this understanding can come about only through the right kind of education. Without a change of heart, without goodwill, without the inward transformation which is born of self-awareness, there can be no peace, no happiness for ... [human beings]. (p. 68)

Krishnamurti's work has influenced many philosophers, scientists, and educators (see Blau, 1995) including myself. Cultivating originality of thought and dialogue in the classroom and encouraging students to connect with everything from a meditative and holistic perspective is central to my approach and has been influenced by the ideas put forth by Krishnamurti. I often use Krishnamurti's texts in my

holistic education courses at both the Bachelor of Education and Master of Education levels, and students respond very positively to his work. My first book, *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* (Kumar, 2013), drew heavily on Krishnamurti's ideas. Recently, I gave a talk that details my engagement with Krishnamurti's work for more than a decade (Kumar, 2023). I also organized an international online conference on Krishnamurti's work in 2021 which was very well attended; the conference proceedings were published by *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives* (Kumar & Acharya, 2021).

This special issue of *JUAL* is another of my attempts to bring Krishnamurti's ideas to teachers, researchers, students, and parents who are committed to alternative educational philosophies and practices. This issue on Krishnamurti features three peer-reviewed articles and a book review. The first article, *Krishnamurti and Transforming the World's Mind* by Kathryn Jefferies, explores the significance of Krishnamurti's work for herself and the students she teaches in a Bachelor of Education program. Jefferies highlights key themes in Krishnamurti's work and describes how she encourages students to understand the nature of their minds and thinking as well as the manners in which they live their lives internally and in relationships with other people. In the second article, *Mutual Futures: A Conversation Between Krishnamurti and Deloria*, Adrian Downey examines the connections between Krishnamurti's and Deloria's ideas concerning human liberation. Based on his analysis of their work, Adrian highlights how both Krishnamurti and Deloria critiqued the mechanical, superficial, and fragmented nature of modern education and advocated for a holistic educational paradigm. In the final peer-reviewed article, *Learning from "What-is": Resonances with Krishnamurti's Pedagogy*, Hillary Rodrigues provides a personal narrative of how his pedagogical approach developed due to the influences of Krishnamurti's ideas. Through reflections on personal stories and incidents in light of Krishnamurti's ideas, Rodrigues highlights the significance of openness and vulnerability to the creative



flow of life as being central to teaching and learning. This issue ends with a book review by Laurie Cook, who provides an engaging and contextualized review of the book *The Future of Humanity*, which is based on dialogues between Krishnamurti and physicist, David Bohm.

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