

Perspectives and Practices for Holistic and Transformative Education: A Special Issue on the Philosopher and Educator J. Krishnamurti

Special Issue Editorial

Education for Transformation: The Work of J. Krishnamurti

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This special issue offers an exploration of Krishnamurti's philosophy of education and life. Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) is one of the most highly regarded philosophers, educators, and institution builders of the twentieth century. He was born in South India and was adopted by Annie Besant (the then President of the Theosophical Society) when he was only 14. The theosophists believed that he would be the next World Teacher who would help resolve the conflicts and problems that plagued the earth. While outwardly Krishnamurti was being groomed according to theosophical ideals, deep down he was questioning the tendency to have faith in belief, hierarchy, and authority (Jayakar, 1986; Lutyens, 1990). In his late 20s and early 30s, Krishnamurti went through a psychological and spiritual change, and ultimately distanced himself from the Theosophical Society. He expressed:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. That is my point of view, and I adhere to that absolutely and unconditionally. Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or to coerce people along any particular path. (Krishnamurti, 1929, para. 3)

Krishnamurti lived for 91 years, and he spread the seeds of his revolutionary teachings far and wide. He is credited with publishing 70 books comprising authored texts as well books based on his talks, question and answer series, and dialogues with teachers, students, and renowned scholars. A few key examples of his books include *First and the Last Freedom* (1954) (with a wonderful foreword by Aldous Huxley), *Education and the Significance of Life* (1953), *The Ending of Time* (1985) (a collection of his intriguing conversations with the physicist David Bohm), *A Wholly Different Way of Living* (2000) (a collection of his conversations with Professor Allan W. Anderson of San Diego State University), three volumes of *Commentaries On Living* (1971), and *Collected Works* (Vol. 1–17, 1991). He covered a wide variety of themes in his works including meditation, truth, beauty, nature, consciousness, education, and world peace, among others.

Krishnamurti's key insights come from his exploration of what he calls the crisis of human consciousness. In his view, human beings share a common reservoir of consciousness which is in crisis. The consciousness of human beings, which is characterized by fear, anxiety, conflict, pleasure, and hate, undergirds human thinking and action and is responsible for widespread crises including personal, relational, social, racial, religious, and nationalistic conflicts, as well ecological crises. He proposed a deeper, existential inquiry into the nature of human consciousness through meditative awareness, to cleanse the mind of its conditioning and conflicts. Without this inquiry and the resultant self—and relational—knowledge, the crises of human consciousness and society will continue in one form or another, endangering ourselves and our planet. He shares,

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 challenge, is not in politics, in religion, in the scientific world; it is in our consciousness. One has to understand the consciousness of mankind [womankind], which has brought us to this point. (Krishnamurti, 1983, p. 9)

Education, Krishnamurti believed, is central to igniting such inquiry and exploration among teachers, students, and all of humanity. For him, education is not just to gain employment and seek security, but to learn about oneself and the significance of life as a whole. He argues,

Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering and correlating acts; it is to see the significance of life as a whole ... The function of education is to create human beings who are integrated and intelligent. (Krishnamurti, 1953, p. 14)

His work offers a profound critique of measurement-oriented, behaviour-focused, and economic thinking in education, and provides us with holistic and transformative perspectives that can deeply change teaching and learning and thereby society and its institutions. Krishnamurti was not merely an armchair philosopher. He founded several schools, study centers, and foundations in India, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America that offer practical examples of his philosophy, centered on understanding and transforming human consciousness (Kumar, 2013).

My work on meditative inquiry (Kumar, 2013, 2019, 2022; Kumar & Acharya, 2021a; Kumar & Downey, 2018, 2019; Kumar & Fischer, 2021) is deeply influenced by Krishnamurti. I came across Krishnamurti's ideas during my Bachelor of Education program, and I incorporated them in the development of a view of global citizenship combining critical thinking with critical self-awareness for my master's thesis (Kumar, 2007). During my doctoral work at the University of British Columbia, I juxtaposed Krishnamurti's ideas with the work of James Macdonald (1995), a U.S. curriculum theorist, to theorize the idea of

curriculum as meditative inquiry (2011). In my work as a professor of education at Mount Saint Vincent University, I have not only experimented with Krishnamurti's insights pedagogically but have also provided space for his texts to be included in my course curriculum. While finding his work challenging at first, the majority of students have shown an appreciation for how his insights can help them understand, respond to, challenge, and transform their own educational contexts.

Krishnamurti's insights into the nature of personal, social, and educational problems are unique and profound, and they are more relevant now than ever. In his work, Krishnamurti emphasizes the need for global unity and peace rather than continual occupation with divisiveness, conflicts, and wars—a perception that is particularly appropriate to us now, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccine nationalism, the Russia-Ukraine war, the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, and the crises in the Middle East. Through his writings, talks, and dialogues, Krishnamurti made it clear that unless we begin to see the source of our personal and collective suffering, we will never create internal and external peace. He pointed out that we need to have a deeper connection within ourselves, with each other, and with nature in order to respond fully to our myriad crises, including the climate crisis.

I co-organized the J. Krishnamurti and Contemporary World Crises free online conference last year to introduce a wide range of people to the work of Krishnamurti and its transformative potential in educational spaces and wider society. The conference was very well-attended, and its proceedings were published by *Other Education* (Kumar & Acharya, 2021b). The success of the conference inspired me to bring out a special issue focused on Krishnamurti's work, and Helen Lees and Gina Riley, Co-Editors-in-Chief of *Other Education*, kindly agreed to provide a space to house this special issue.

The special issue features six pieces that explore Krishnamurti's writings in diverse contexts. The first, *Instigating Insight with Dialogue and Deep Inquiry: J. Krishnamurti's Innovation for Higher Education*, is an article by Jerry Flexer. It explores Jiddu Krishnamurti's dialogic approach and its implications for what Flexer calls insight education—something which educators from diverse contexts can incorporate in their own teaching. This paper is a unique contribution in that it attempts to identify and describe the structure and pattern of a Krishnamurti-style conversation, in order to understand the key features of Krishnamurti's dialogic approach. Krishnamurti loved dialogical exploration. His dialogues with philosophers, scientists, educators, students, and the general public offer a profound investigation of psychological, educational, and social problems, so a closer examination of the structure and process of his dialogues is a very worthy project. Based on his careful analysis of a transcript of a dialogue between Krishnamurti and a small group of American students, Flexer comes upon what he names the dialogue and deep inquiry (DDI) approach. The DDI approach, Flexer argues, can help educators to move away from transmitting knowledge towards creating transformative educational spaces. By adopting DDI in classrooms, we can create deliberate pedagogical processes that then instigate insight without depending on chance occurrence.

In his article, *Responding to Contemporary World Crises: The Educational Work of J. Krishnamurti*, Shailesh Shirali shares his journey with Krishnamurti's work as a human being, a teacher, and an administrator. Through an exploration of Krishnamurti's radical approach which questions belief in tradition and authority, Shirali reflects on the need to understand deeper roots of fragmentation and conflict, violence, and climate crisis. Shirali feels that Krishnamurti's educational approach, focusing as it does on understanding oneself and one's relationships, recognizes the limitation of knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of deep listening and awareness. He sees it as gravely important to understanding and resolving contemporary world crises. In addition to offering a rich theoretical exploration of Krishnamurti's ideas, Shirali offers glimpses of how Krishnamurti's philosophy of education unfolds in the life world of a school, and the challenges and opportunities that come with teaching and learning from a Krishnamurti perspective.

Vaishnavi Narayan's essay, *A Living and Learning Space: Approaches to Education in a Krishnamurti School*, offers autobiographical reflections on her journey of transformation as a teacher and administrator in The School—a Krishnamurti school in India. Narayan describes her experiences of engaging with Krishnamurti's work as something deep and moving that helped her examine her beliefs, challenging her to go out of her comfort zone and deeply reflect on life and education. Through her personal and pedagogical reflections, Narayan shares with us how Krishnamurti's work influences teaching and learning in the everyday life of her school and classroom. Narayan's moving and touching descriptions of the school, its ambience, and the interactions that happen between teachers and students, show us that education is more about asking questions and exploring them deeply than simply being satisfied with ready-made answers. Thoughtful listening and speaking, potent pauses, and reflective conversations create a transformative educational space where Vaishnavi and her colleagues and their students contemplate the meaning and purpose of life in The School.

In her reflective piece, *Rural Reflections: Krishnamurti in the Rural School*, Carolyn Prest contemplates the conversations between Krishnamurti and Professor Allan W. Andersen and their implications for her personal and professional life as a teacher in rural Canada. Prest discusses the key ideas that Krishnamurti and Andersen explore in their dialogues, including self-understanding, knowledge, listening, beauty, hurt, experience, and comparison, among others. Prest believes that Krishnamurti's insights allow her to connect with herself and her students at a deeper level and that they support a mutually experienced journey of self-exploration. She particularly highlights the importance of connecting with nature and the outdoor environment for her and her students in their beautiful rural Canadian setting. By offering her students the opportunity to learn about relaxation and meditation in nature and to reflect on their thoughts and feelings in the classroom setting, Prest shows in practical ways how Krishnamurti's work can inform teaching and learning in rural settings and beyond.

In her short insightful piece, *Reflections on Freedom as the Real Goal of Education*, Tara Brahme talks about her experiences of studying in The School. Brahme, who graduated from The School in 2018 and who is now an undergraduate student, shares how her education in a Krishnamurti school has shaped her thinking and contributed to her growth and development.

Brahme discusses three themes: fear, freedom, and loneliness/aloneness, and their importance for teaching and learning. She questions the belief that Krishnamurti's ideas do not provide insights into the oppressive social and political reality. Brahme believes that the emphasis on listening, dialogue, and self-reflexivity in a Krishnamurti school equipped her to learn deeply, ask questions, and engage with personal and wider social problems rather than escape them.

The final part of this special issue is a review of the edited collection *J. Krishnamurti and Educational Practice: Social and Moral Vision for Inclusive Education* (Thapan, 2018) by Bonnie Petersen. Petersen provides a thorough review of the contents of this invaluable collection and describes the ways in which the ideas and practices offered in this volume can support the work of educators who wish to understand and incorporate Krishnamurti's insights into their own teaching and research.

I believe that this special issue on Krishnamurti's educational philosophy will be a valuable resource for those who are new to his work as well as for those who are already familiar with his writings. The writings contained in this issue will support the work of schoolteachers, teacher educators, administrators, higher education instructors, and parents who want to question the widespread belief in standardization, testing, comparison, competition, and neoliberal-capitalistic thinking that are ruining education globally. This collection of engaging essays will inspire the educators who want to work toward a more holistic, transformative, critical, and creative educational experience for teachers and students.

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