

## **Instigating Insight with Dialogue and Deep Inquiry: J. Krishnamurti's Innovation for Higher Education**

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**Abstract** *This article describes Jiddu Krishnamurti's dialogic approach and proposes that this innovative approach, with its unique features, offers a novel "insight education" for educators to adapt for use with their own curriculum. Following a brief introduction of Krishnamurti's philosophy of education, emphasis is placed on Krishnamurti's notion of insight and on his dialogic approach to instigating insight for education, as a facilitator of dialogue and deep inquiry with small groups. Since Krishnamurti had not, to my knowledge, explicitly discussed or written about the particular features or method of his dialogic approach, I have chosen to closely read a transcript of one dialogue Krishnamurti had in 1981 with a small group of American college students in California. I go on to describe some of the learned content ("curriculum") covered in this one-hour dialogue, and then I describe specific features of Krishnamurti's dialogic approach, as revealed in the transcript.*

**Keywords:** Jiddu Krishnamurti, insight, education, dialogue, inquiry

### **Introduction**

Readers familiar with Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) will have encountered his publications, interpretations of his philosophy, the extraordinary nature of his life story, or educational approaches inspired by his philosophy (Kumar, Walker, Piirto, Thapan, and others). In his talks and writings, Krishnamurti dealt with everyday themes such as peace, conflict, desire, sorrow, the individual and society, nationalism, fear, psychological freedom, self-knowledge, conditioning, relationships, awareness, and more. He also touched on themes implicated in peoples' search for greater meaning, such as consciousness, fragmentation, disorder, God, gurus, yoga, meditation, and religion. But Krishnamurti's main concern was with the influence that conditioning has on the problems of the individual and society, as exemplified by this statement: *Human beings have created society, and that society is now conditioning me, conditioning each one of us. Therefore, I have*

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*to change first, not society.* (Krishnamurti, 1984) Especially with smaller groups, Krishnamurti's dialogic approach reveals features we can adapt for enhancing learning in higher education. I call this approach "dialogue and deep inquiry" (DDI), and I will describe DDI based on my reading of a transcript from a discussion Krishnamurti had with a small group of American college students in 1981 (set out in Krishnamurti & Khar, 1988). This article introduces J. Krishnamurti as philosopher educationist, describes Krishnamurti's curriculum themes covered in the 1981 discussion, presents features of Krishnamurti's DDI, and proposes that DDI, with its unique features, as part of an innovation I call "insight education," can be relevant to collaborative learning.

### **J. Krishnamurti, Philosopher Educationist**

Over six decades, between the 1930s and the 1980s, Krishnamurti spoke before audiences large and small, in English, in different parts of the world, under the auspices of not-for-profit foundations established for arranging his travels and talks, and for disseminating his teachings. He also participated in many small group discussions and was sought out for personal interviews. Though some compare his philosophy with Hindu and Buddhist thought, others assert that it is impossible to categorize Krishnamurti within the field of philosophers of either East or West, such as Jones (p. 658). Others, Hillary Rodrigues, for example, consider Krishnamurti to have been a "religious philosopher." My focus here, though, revolves around Krishnamurti's contribution as an educationist, but not in the formal sense, since he held no degrees and had never taught professionally. Education, however, was a singularly important theme for Krishnamurti, as he expressed often. Here is one example, from a talk at Benares Hindu University on January 10, 1954:

I think it is very important to find out for ourselves what the function of education is. There have been so many statements, so many books, so many philosophies and systems that have been invented or thought of by so many people, as to what the purpose of education is, what we live for. Apparently, every system so far has failed, including the very latest, because they have produced in the world neither peace among human beings nor deep cultural advance, the cultivation of the mind....Is it not the function of education to...bring about a total revolution...at all the levels of consciousness, of life, of being?....But the revolution, which is essential at the present time, can only come into being when there is a total apprehension of [how] the mind works, not according to any particular religion or any particular philosophy...[but] the understanding of ourselves as a total process. It seems to me, that is the only revolution that can bring about lasting peace. Surely, such a thing implies, does it

not, the unconditioning of the mind, because we are all conditioned by the climate, by the culture, by the religion, by the political or economic system, by the society in which we live. Our minds are shaped from the very beginning till we die, and so, we meet the problems of life either as a Hindu or as a Christian or...something else.... Yet the way of our living is made by a conditioned mind and the conditioned mind translates the problems of life according to its own limitations. So, is it not important, if we would solve this problem, to find out how to uncondition the mind? (Krishnamurti, 1954)

Krishnamurti's view, then, is that we are all conditioned by society, culture, the environment, and the family, and that this conditioning prevents "lasting peace." And, since Krishnamurti feels that we, the people, create society (even as we are conditioned by it), the function of education must be to free us of these peace-preventing conditioning influences. Education, as Krishnamurti sees it, should teach people to become aware of their conditioning, and, as a consequence, to allow them to transcend influences derived from this conditioning so that they act as psychologically free individuals. Krishnamurti calls this a revolution, but it is an inward revolution, which precedes outward revolution towards a more peaceful society.

### **Krishnamurti's Conception of Insight**

In his public talks, Krishnamurti presented his own unique meaning for words such as "attention," "listening," "awareness," "thought," "knowledge," "education," "dialogue," "inquiry," and "insight." Krishnamurti's conception of meditation was unconventional, and several scholars (Daniel Goleman and Constance Jones, for example) recognize his novel phrase "choiceless awareness," which in Krishnamurti's teaching is a prerequisite for insight. These three conceptions—meditation, choiceless awareness, and insight—comprise the essential components of Krishnamurti's insight education approach, or dialogue and deep inquiry (DDI). Of these three, though, Krishnamurti's notion of insight as a learning event that can be *instigated*, makes insight with DDI an interesting subject for educators to explore. (I focus here mainly on Krishnamurti's conception of *insight*, leaving aside for now a full discussion of Krishnamurti's conceptions of meditation and "choiceless awareness," but readers can find a comprehensive analysis of these concepts in Constance Jones' "Techniqueless Meditation.") When asked at a 1979 public talk "What do you mean by insight," Krishnamurti explained:

...the word "*insight*" [means]...to see into things, into the whole movement of thought...It is not analysis [and] not the exercise of intellectual capacity. Nor is it the result of knowledge. Knowledge is that

which has been accumulated through the past from experience, stored up in the brain....Then what is *insight*? It is to perceive something instantly... It is not that one has an *insight* and does nothing about it. If one has an *insight* into the whole nature of thinking there is instant action...Have an *insight*, for example, into the wounds and hurts that one has received from childhood...psychologically....The consequences of that hurt are isolation, fear, resistance, so as not to be hurt more....The hurt is the image that you have created for yourself about yourself. So as long as that image remains you will be hurt, obviously. Now, to have an *insight* into all that, without analysis, to perceive it instantly, then that very perception is *insight*....In that *insight* the hurt is dissolved. (Krishnamurti, 1991, p. 128; italics mine)

And on April 20, 1983, Krishnamurti recorded, in part, these thoughts about insight:

Watching and listening are a great art, watching and listening without any reaction....When there is this simple, clear watching and listening, then there is an awareness...that leads us to an awareness without choice, to be aware without any like or dislike....When one is attentive to all this, choicelessly aware, then out of that comes *insight*....You see with absolute clarity, all the complications, the consequences, the intricacies....This is pure, clear *insight*, perception without any shadow of doubt.... This whole movement from watching, listening, to the thunder of *insight*, is one movement, it is not coming to it step by step. It is like a swift arrow. (Krishnamurti, 1987 pp. 73-74; italics mine)

Krishnamurti's insight can be described in terms of what it is, on the one hand, and what it is not, on the other. Insight is to perceive new facts instantly. But it is not knowledge. And it is one "movement" but arrives instantly. Although there is no method for enabling insight, I contend here that Krishnamurti had developed a dialogic approach, with identifiable features, that, taken together and applied in dialogue, create the conditions for insight, and that this approach, and its features, can be adapted for higher education settings.

### **Views of Krishnamurti's "Insight Education"**

David Moody was director of education at the school Krishnamurti founded in California in the 1970s, set up to integrate Krishnamurti's philosophy into the curriculum. Moody developed what he calls "insight curriculum," and his example for how insight works involves correcting common misconceptions learners have about the cause of the changing seasons. In Moody's experience, many learners mistakenly believe that since the orbit of Earth around the sun is elliptical, the

seasons change over the year because the distance from the sun to Earth changes as the year goes by. But Moody explains that the seasons change because Earth's axis of rotation tilts in relation to the plane of its orbit around the sun. This somewhat complex scientific truth makes it hard for people to realize that seasons change as the earth rotates, and not as a consequence of the changing distance of the sun to Earth. Moody describes his application of insight as a shift in understanding of a whole constellation of relationships among apparently unconnected facts and events. This constellation of relationships, he tells us, involves four distinct elements: the axis of rotation, the plane of the Earth's orbit around the sun, the angle of the sun's rays, and the corresponding changes in seasons (Moody, p. 158). For Moody, this example of his insight curriculum follows Krishnamurti's conception of insight, as a moment of understanding that arises when the mind is quiet, quiet in a way that opens space for a new perspective (Moody, p. 178). Krishnamurti's conception of insight has also been considered by David Bohm, Hillary Rodrigues, Ashwani Kumar, and Giddu Narayan, among others. Bohm, who was for a time a dialogue partner of Krishnamurti's, discusses insight as one of three components of Krishnamurti's dialogic approach: insight, imagination, and reason. For Bohm,

insight is an act of perception, permeated with intense energy and passion, that brings about great clarity. This makes possible the dissolution of strong but subtle emotional, linguistic, intellectual, social and other pressures that tend to hold the mind in rigid grooves and fixed compartments, and so, to cause it to avoid fundamental challenges. From this germ can unfold a further perception not contained in the entire previously existent field of the known. (Bohm, 1982a, p. 47)

Bohm, then, concurs with Krishnamurti's conception of insight as unfolding clarity of perception. But rather than referring to Krishnamurti's theme of conditioning, Bohm prefers to speak in terms of "rigid grooves." What Bohm proposes, extending Krishnamurti's thinking, is a two-phase change in perception, suggesting that insight is an "act of perception" that then leads to "a further perception not contained in the entire previously existent field of the known." Bohm sees insight, as does Krishnamurti, as a departure from "the known," though Krishnamurti describes the "known" in terms of knowledge, memory, and experience. In his "An Introduction to The Work of Krishnamurti," Bohm explains that

Krishnamurti's work is permeated by what may be called the essence of the scientific approach, when this is considered in its very highest and purest form. Thus, he begins from a fact, this fact about the nature of our thought processes. This fact is established through close attention,

involving careful listening to the process of consciousness, and observing it assiduously. In this, one is constantly learning, and out of this learning comes *insight*, into the over-all or general nature of the process of thought. This *insight* is then tested. First, one sees whether it holds together in a rational order. And then one sees whether it leads to order and coherence, on what flows out of it in life as a whole. (Bohm 1982b)

For Bohm, then, there is a two-stage process to learning and insight. In observing consciousness assiduously, we are constantly learning, and as we are constantly learning, out of that comes insight. But then the insight needs to be tested to see if it is rational. It seems to me that this latter explication of insight by Bohm does not accord with Krishnamurti's meaning, though most likely inspired by it. *Krishnamurti speaks of an instant realization that leads to action, whereas Bohm speaks about an event that must be tested rationally to see if it fits.*

The way Rodrigues describes it, Krishnamurti's approach often reveals that a psychological problem originates in thought, and not necessarily in any independent, external cause. If we look at psychological fear, for example, we might find that fear arises from fearful thoughts, and not from some event or external circumstances. But, as Ashwani Kumar rightly notes, this is not always the case. Krishnamurti also refers to fears when you meet a dangerous situation, which Krishnamurti calls "self-protective" fears (personal communication). In a dialogue or reflection about fear, one might come to an awareness – an insight – that it is her or his resistance to fear that actually bring about fear. What Krishnamurti proposes is that as a consequence of having such an insight, this in and of itself dissolves the fear (Rodrigues, 2001 p. 27).

Giddu Narayan adds to the insight conversation when he proposes that learning has two important aspects: *one is the cultivation of memory; a second is a different kind of learning that has nothing to do with cultivation of memory.* We could describe this non-memory kind of learning, says Narayan, with words like "insight" or "understanding," thus stressing that "insight and communication go together" (Narayan, p. 154). Narayan delineates three types of insight: (a)...a capacity to see the whole and the parts in relation to the whole....If you put all the parts together it does not make up the whole....If you see the whole and the parts, you can see the significance of the parts and give the needed importance to the parts in relation to the whole, but if you don't see the whole, it only leads to presentation of parts bit by bit and [to] memory cultivation; (b) a capacity for reflection, without distortion. You can teach mathematics, science, and history in this way. You can present various distorted views and see how each of them is distorted, and in seeing the nature of distortion you begin to see more clearly [and] reflect with clarity, and; (c) a "deeper aspect of insight" [that] is the way of renewal, where the learner takes in information, knowledge, and experience, but is not conditioned by it. In other

words, learners who arrive at this deeper aspect of insight absorb new learning “without the gatherings of the past and so...are able to look at it anew.”

To elucidate his third type of insight, the aspect of insight most closely resembling Krishnamurti’s conception, Narayan tells the story of the scientist who discovered jet propulsion, who had been an expert on the internal combustion engine, “but he had to forget all his knowledge of the internal combustion engine before the idea of jet propulsion occurred to him.” This freedom from past knowledge, asserts Narayan, fosters the potential for that deeper insight to arise, for seeing the problem clearly, and for arriving at the appropriate solution (Narayan, 1982 p. 156).

Perhaps all we can say for sure is that Krishnamurti’s insight is a slippery concept. No doubt, Moody’s insight curriculum has been influenced by Krishnamurti, but my sense is that Krishnamurti’s insight points to something different. Here, further elaboration might help clarify what I mean. In a 1985 discussion with Buddhists, Krishnamurti said this in reply to a question: “Insight is not dependent on the intellect, it is not dependent on knowledge. It is not dependent on any form of remembrance...” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 90). And in another public talk, Krishnamurti asserted that “insight is like a flash of light. You see with absolute clarity....This is pure, clear insight, perception without any shadow of doubt (Krishnamurti, 1987, p. 73). Given these examples, and others cited above, we should distinguish between Moody’s conception of insight and Krishnamurti’s. Moody’s insight seems limited to problem-solving. Perhaps it envisions a kind of “aha!” eureka event, a new way of looking at a problem, with a completely revised apprehension of scientific truth. Moody’s example suggests that with different knowledge inputs—in this case, the four interrelated facts about Earth’s rotation and the four seasons—learners are able to experience an insight that corrects their misconceptions. But Krishnamurti’s conception of insight specifically refutes any involvement of knowledge, memory, and experience. Here, I should note, however, following Ashwani Kumar, that Moody and Krishnamurti are talking about different learning contexts. On the one hand, Moody’s context is intellectual, in the way it gives students access to correct information, which then leads to right understanding. Krishnamurti’s context, on the other hand, concerns insight into the nature of thought, facilitated by a meditative exploration without any need for information. On the same point, another reviewer rightly brings up this interesting question: How might Krishnamurti’s DDI be applied with a “science” curriculum? Is the domain of science wholly within the realm of knowledge, memory, and experience, and therefore outside the realm of Krishnamurti’s notion of insight? I must concede that this important question, though immensely relevant, must be left for future explication. (All I can say at this point is that since Krishnamurti had, on several occasions, held discussions with scientists, perhaps a review of transcripts

of those discussions might help resolve this quandary. I welcome reader suggestions.) Here is Krishnamurti on the theme of guilt, for example:

Like a flower, if you keep pulling it up to see if the roots are working properly, it will never bloom, but once you see the fact, which is the seed, and then stay with it, it shows itself fully. All the implications of guilt, all the implications of its subtlety, where it hides, is like a flower blooming. And if you let it bloom, not act, not say, “I must do or must not do”, then it begins to wither away and die....With every issue you can do that....That is *insight*, not merely remembrance, adding...you see that it is so, then psychologically it is an enormous factor that frees you from all the past and present struggles and effort (Krishnamurti, 1986, p. 122).

What we find here is that Krishnamurti’s insight, unlike Moody’s example from the science of changing seasons, relies not at all on knowledge, memory, and experience. Nor does it involve seeing the interconnection between multiple seemingly unrelated factors. What are we to make of Krishnamurti’s analogy? Like the flower, guilt has a seed that is buried in consciousness. That seed is analogous perhaps to Krishnamurti’s notion of conditioning. Usually, we do not have the capacity to perceive our conditioning. And no amount of memory or prior knowledge can dig up this buried treasure. Krishnamurti tells us that it is futile to look for the seed, or source, of the flower by pulling it up by the roots and looking for it. That seed of conditioning, buried in consciousness, once revealed, comes by way of insight. What I think Krishnamurti suggests is that just like the flower blooms all by itself, without thinking “it is now time to bloom,” once we have had that insight into that item buried in consciousness, there is nothing left to do. Insight in itself frees the mind from the hold of that conditioning influence.

Narayan’s third type of insight comes close to Krishnamurti’s conception. However, we should look at this formulation more closely. Can we say for sure that the scientist who discovered jet propulsion came to an insight in the way described above by Krishnamurti? We can accept that he had to let go of his knowledge about the internal combustion engine before he could imagine something completely different. Still, Narayan does not say if this scientist had utilized some other kind of knowledge, unrelated to engines and propulsion, perhaps within the realm of physics, or thermal dynamics. Krishnamurti suggests that seeing is likened to the seed that gives birth to the flower—this is Krishnamurti’s insight. No new knowledge is required. On the contrary, new knowledge is likely to prohibit insight. One popular use of “insight” refers to *any* advance in *knowledge*, but most researchers and educators recognize insight as a newfound intellectual discovery, an elegant solution to a problem, or sudden clarity replacing cerebral fog. However, one notable aspect of Krishnamurti’s insight is that he has not only pointed to a new

way of seeing the fact of a problem, but he has also developed an approach intended to foster insight. I suggest that Krishnamurti's insight education involves *instigated* insight, that Krishnamurti's DDI approach holds the greatest potential for his novel conception of insight to arise, and that educators can apply DDI to *intentionally* foster insight in learners. Following Krishnamurti's example, educators could design some of their curriculum intentionally to educate for insight. We expect, occasionally, for insight to arise by accident or by way of coincidence, or some other unexplained circumstances. What I propose to show here is that Krishnamurti developed an educational approach of dialogue and deep inquiry that instigates insight, by creating an opportunity for insights to arise. My choice of the word "instigate" to describe how Krishnamurti "teaches" insight, is intentional. I mean to suggest that Krishnamurti's approach—through the skillful application of what I call DDI—*actively* engages students in the "pursuit" of insight. However, it is important to note that this choice of language is very much open to contestation by Krishnamurti scholars. For example, for Ashwani Kumar, "instigate" implies a conscious, planned action, with a sense of control. Kumar prefers the word "invite" over "instigate." As Kumar quite rightly notes, Krishnamurti's style of deep inquiry "invites" insight, by creating opportunities for insights to emerge (personal communication).

Since, as far as my research has disclosed, he had not described or discussed his approach, we need to identify its specific features as Krishnamurti employed them in an actual discussion.

### **Krishnamurti's Dialogue and Deep Inquiry (DDI) for Insight Education**

Krishnamurti's educational approach integrates dialogue with deep inquiry, in order to create the conditions for instigating insight. As indicated above, Krishnamurti's philosophy addresses the problem of the conditioned mind. In many of his talks, he describes an attitude he calls "choiceless awareness," an awareness that opens a space for seeing "what-is." Seeing this what-is, as explained by Rodrigues, is like a flash of light that reveals conditioning influences. And this is another way to describe Krishnamurti's conception of *insight*. Krishnamurti's approach to education intends to instigate insight. I will show how he applies his DDI approach by close reading of the transcript of a one-hour discussion he had with college students in 1981. Note that Krishnamurti is not a conventional teacher, but an extempore inquirer, who uses no prepared lesson plan or notes, and improvises as he facilitates a discussion of themes in his "curriculum."

In this 1981 discussion with college students, one of the students opens the conversation when he asks Krishnamurti why mediocrity seems to characterize individuals, as well as society as a whole. Krishnamurti improvises as he shifts to the theme of conditioning, by connecting conditioning with mediocrity. What Krishnamurti says is that breaking through conditioning allows a person to

overcome mediocrity. One of the students then asks if breaking through conditioning should be a goal in life, but Krishnamurti responds with a question of his own, “why establish a goal?” and then another, “why do we project these things and then try to achieve them?” This manner of posing questions that do not respond to or accept a question on its own terms, is an important aspect of Krishnamurti’s DDI. One of the students offers a possible answer, that people are conditioned to strive and struggle to attain goals. But Krishnamurti asks “who has projected the goal?” and, after a pause, he provides his answer: “parents, religions, philosophies, all that has helped us to project an ideal, a concept, a goal towards which we are all striving” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 50). And so the conversation continues, with Krishnamurti asking and responding, often with his own questions, and the students injecting their own questions, in some cases seeking clarification, while at other times offering their own suggestions to further develop the discussion. It reads like a dance of dialogue, or an improvisational jazz performance.

At one point, Krishnamurti says that we never *are* because we are always *becoming*, and he asks if there really is a “becoming,” as a psychological process. Receiving no response, Krishnamurti elaborates, saying that there is becoming in knowledge, but that this kind of becoming through accumulating knowledge should be distinguished from becoming at the psychological level. Soon Krishnamurti introduces the theme of self-knowledge. And later, he circles back to the theme of conditioning. In Krishnamurti’s view, conditioning is brought about by economic status, climate, food, clothing, nationalism, and other influences. Krishnamurti points out that self-identifying as a nationalist, or a scientist, for example, contributes to conditioning. But if people can become aware of their conditioned thinking, then with that awareness, they can be free of the influence of that conditioning. They simply decide to no longer identify as, say, Hindu nationalist or scientist, but to see themselves as being human. In this way, Krishnamurti connects his themes of becoming and self-knowledge, with the theme of conditioning. When a student asks if striving to not belong to any group is not in itself a goal, Krishnamurti replies “No, it is a fact. If I am a nationalist, I contribute to war.” So, here Krishnamurti is making the point that one of the causes of war is the conditioning influence of nationalism. But the student persists, saying that there must be some striving towards a goal. And Krishnamurti says “No... I see the consequences of nationalism and it is finished... it is not a goal, it is seeing the results of all that, how it divides man.” He emphasizes that the *influence* of conditioning ends when one has an insight—that flash of understanding—into the *consequences* of that particular conditioning influence. Nationalism contributes to warfare, and once insight of that fact arises, then, according to Krishnamurti, one is instantly free of the conditioning influence of nationalism—such is the transformative effect of insight.

Then one of the students says that people in different cultures understand their environment differently, and are therefore influenced by different sets of conditioning influences, but Krishnamurti points out that “it is still conditioning...” [and]...the demand for security is common to all of us.” He does not add information or knowledge, but throws light on connections that have been, for the students, hidden from view. Krishnamurti here connects the theme of conditioning with the fact that all of us are conditioned, and that conditioning is common in society. Krishnamurti says “everyone suffers...[people] go through agonies...fear...” and he puts the rhetorical question: “...[but] are we not all psychologically, essentially similar, basically?” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 55). And so, the conversation proceeds with an inquiry into Krishnamurti’s “curriculum.” Throughout the discussion, Krishnamurti invites the students to observe their own thinking, to look at their own conditioned views about differences between people. He invites students to explore his curriculum on-the-spot.

At one point, Krishnamurti senses that the dialogue is veering off course, so he restores focus by asking, “What is the self?” He continues along this line when he says “Let’s examine it—the self. What is the self? The ‘me,’ the ego, the whole structure on which thought moves. What is that?” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 56). He takes the group into a deep inquiry, combining a series of questions with a series of his own elaborations. But he does not supply his own answer unless and until he feels it is necessary to move the dialogue forward. One of the students responds with “... in essence, it is me,” and Krishnamurti simply agrees: “It is me.” But Krishnamurti follows with: “What is the ‘me’ composed of?” Another student suggests: “feelings...thoughts,” and Krishnamurti adds “thoughts, reactions...desires, fears...the ‘me’ is “my consciousness.” (Krishnamurti, 1988) He leads an inquiry into the theme of “self” and how it relates to the theme of “conditioning,” introducing the theme by saying the self is the “me.” But here he injects his notion that the “me,” or the “ego,” is the “structure on which thought moves.” This advances the inquiry, as it now shifts to deeper questions, but in a somewhat collaborative manner.

Moving forward with the deep inquiry, Krishnamurti, without pause, asks “what are the contents of my consciousness, *common* consciousness?” and when a student proposes “basically, we all share the same content,” he exclaims “Exactly” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 57). The idea that the self, made up of consciousness, is conditioned to think in particular ways by manifold influences has been inquired into and accepted. I present this last exchange as an example of DDI as collaborative inquiry with potential to instigate insight. This realization by the student, that we all share the same content of consciousness, expresses his insight, an insight from Krishnamurti’s inquiry into the theme of *common* conditioning.

One of Krishnamurti’s most challenging themes is *thought*. As he describes it “thought is the response of memory...memory is knowledge, knowledge is

experience...so, thought is always incomplete...Thought has put together my consciousness...my consciousness with its content is the movement of thought... So...one has to understand and explore what is thought, which is common to all mankind” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 57). He urges participants to “see the limitation of thought... and whether there is something limitless, whole.” Then one of the students says “...you are saying that...we think we can solve everything with thought, and it’s not true.” Krishnamurti replies with a straightforward “That’s right. You haven’t solved a thing” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 61). Here, shifting to the thought process and its impact in relationships, he suggests that thought is extraordinarily limited, and suggests “...thought has bound us, shaped us, our thinking, life, our relationship with each other.” All our education, says Krishnamurti, “is the cultivation of thought. And we are trying to resolve the problems which thought has created by thought. And so, it is hopeless... If we...see that thought has created such chaos in the world, such violence, such brutality, such agony in the world, then what shall we do? How shall we go beyond thought? Not stop it, because thought is necessary to communicate.” Krishnamurti declares boldly that “thought is a dangerous movement in relationship. Life is relationship. And [in life], thought is creating havoc” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 64).

Since thought is based on history, on the past, and stored in memory as images, according to Krishnamurti, relationships are never freshly experienced as they develop, but rather are always muddled by images from the past, which may or may not be a reliable guide for deciding how to relate in the present. Krishnamurti poses the essential question, “So what shall we do with thought?” He declares that thought has become “...psychologically a dangerous instrument, because it has divided man. Belief, your belief, my belief...it has divided man and destroyed man” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 64). He summarizes: “We act this way: experience, knowledge, memory, thought, action. That is the chain in which you are caught. And we think that is perfectly all right...But see the danger of it.” The problem, Krishnamurti repeats, is this: “So what shall I do?...thought is necessary in a certain direction...[but] I see thought as the most dangerous thing in relationship. I am stuck here...I discard all authority. The priest...all that stuff.” And he asks “So, what takes place then?” When one student suggests “You look to yourself,” Krishnamurti cautions “No, wait...do it and see what happens actually.” The same student comments that “we need to be concerned with complete analysis of our inward self so that we don’t find ourselves in the position of going through this eternal cycle.” He agrees, but modifies: “Yes...but not through analysis...just observe” (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 66). Krishnamurti knows it is not efficacious to tell students what to do about the danger of thought in relationships. He puts the question; he modifies the response. His facilitation is measured, encouraging, and collaborative, but always directing the dialogue.

My reading of the discussion's transcript suggests that the students have engaged with the following key insights that are central to the Krishnamurti "curriculum":

**On conditioning:** Mediocrity means not living up to our potential, and understanding our conditioning helps us overcome the limitations of mediocrity.

**On becoming, knowledge, and self-knowledge:** We never "are" because we are always becoming, but is there really a becoming at all? There is becoming in acquiring knowledge, but at what level? And self-knowledge can only take place in relationship.

**On psychological progress, suffering, and transformation:** Krishnamurti says that throughout history people have not changed much psychologically. People suffer, experience pain, and live with fears. What he calls for is a total psychological revolution.

**On the self and consciousness:** The self is the 'me,' and the 'me' is the content of consciousness, made up of thoughts, reactions, desires, fears. All of us share a similar content of consciousness.

**The limitation of thought in relationship:** Thought shapes everything about our lives and our relationships, and education involves cultivation of thought. Thought, says Krishnamurti, is the most dangerous instrument that man has. "How shall we go beyond thought," he asks. "Not stop it, because thought is necessary to communicate," but to move beyond thought. (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 64).

**On relationship:** Knowledge is stored in the brain as memories, and those memories govern how people act in relationships. Psychologically, people are influenced by images from their prior knowledge about others and about the world. Though we need all kinds of knowledge in order to live and to thrive, knowledge might harm our relationships. On the one hand, it seems obvious that knowledge helps us avoid unnecessary harm. But Krishnamurti says that when filtered through images of conditioning and prior knowledge, relationships suffer.

Having seen how Krishnamurti's dialogue covers his curriculum learning outcomes, I point out these features that Krishnamurti uses to instigate insight because he:

- emphasizes precise use of language,
- communicates with all politely and respectfully, develops intimate familiarity with curriculum themes, which helps facilitate and lead the discussion,

## *Instigating Insight with Dialogue and Deep Inquiry*

- skillfully asks questions and explores deeper meanings for themes, concepts, and problems, but also strives to elicit self-reflection by students,
- asks probing questions that help instigate insight,
- improvises but listens with full attention and relies on collaborative inquiry, which forms organically and validates students' engagement and contribution,
- holds focus, but not too rigidly; moves forward and corrects course when necessary.
- articulates no particular agenda or rigid plan. (However, Krishnamurti had developed, over years of public talks, a good idea of the themes that made up his "curriculum," and he seemed to have a sense of what he wanted participants to find out through listening to him. This seems apparent from the way certain words, ideas, and themes kept coming up in his talks and dialogues.)
- avoids telling students how to think or what to do, but sometimes shares from his own (or others') experience, to suggest what is possible,
- tries not to expect that students will gain knowledge or change in accord with what he says,
- if possible, lets go of the need to strive for specific learning outcomes, and trusts that learning will take place,
- leaves out assessment or evaluation of student learning (some of what they learn will only gel later, and some of that learning may be hard to articulate in "assessment" language),
- tries not to interrupt, and only when unavoidable; takes care not to cut off students' contributions,
- refrains, if possible, from providing a straightforward answer to a question that seems to require deep inquiry, but offers his ideas when necessary to move the dialogue forward.

In this discussion, Krishnamurti sincerely expresses his own uncertainty in communicating ideas, which helps to ease tension and enhance student participation. He says, for example, "I don't know if I'm making myself clear." Krishnamurti's approach seems at first to allow for a free flow of ideas, but close reading reveals that Krishnamurti is skilled at holding the focus on themes he wants the group to explore. Another distinctive feature is the way Krishnamurti balances talking and telling, on the one hand, with listening and observing, on the other. Also, he balances his role as facilitator, one who is directing and leading, on the one hand, with his role as collaborator aiming for shared understanding, on the other. We find an example of this when he says "We think all that requires time. I question that. That's all." This statement redirects the flow of the conversation to

the concepts of process and time. But instead of telling the group his own ideas, he introduces these themes gradually and by way of his own sincere questioning. Expressed this way, learners are likely to reflect on Krishnamurti's bold assertions with a more receptive mind.

But how does DDI foster the potential for insight? One exchange from the 1981 discussion begins with a student's suggestion that the desire to change one's conditioning amounts to a goal to strive for. Without completely rejecting the student's contribution, Krishnamurti instead corrects this suggestion by asserting that once a person sees the potentially harmful consequences of nationalism—war—for example, then the conditioning influence of nationalism evaporates. He corrects the notion that the desire to change is a goal to strive for, firmly: "...No, I see the consequences of nationalism and it's finished." When another student then asks "Is that why you are saying then there is no time involved?" Krishnamurti replies "That's what I am trying to get at." One of the students then exclaims: "It just happens when you see the problem" (Krishnamurti, 1988, p. 52). This student has had an insight into the problem of nationalism. Seeing it now for the first time, as a conditioning influence, his new perception arrives as an insight, without accumulated knowledge from some external source. I consider this exchange an example of instigated insight.

What we frequently see in Krishnamurti's approach, also, is that he responds to a question with his own question, and then, he often follows up another question with still another question. This seems to be a natural and organic approach to dialogue that Krishnamurti employs as he facilitates and encourages a closer, deeper, inquiry. He also floats questions to the group as a reply to their questions, coaxing them to dig deeper. In this way, Krishnamurti's DDI becomes a collaboration, and a kind of shared inquiry. This kind of sharing seems to be conducive to instigating insight. Let us consider, for example, his stated contention that there must be an inward, psychological change. Krishnamurti finds a way to organically inject this point into the dialogue through collaboration with the participants. Likely he is well aware that simply stating his contention without subjecting it to dialogical inquiry in collaboration insight or meaningful change in perspective will remain elusive.

Krishnamurti connects related concepts to keep the dialogue focused. He prevents the dialogue going off course by revealing certain important connections between themes, when necessary. He listens with avid attention, injects encouraging remarks and modifications, such as "yes," "not necessarily," "certainly," and "we know all this," but is always in control, never losing sight of the main themes that keep the dialogue moving forward. Krishnamurti is not deterred in the least by skeptical questions. Quite the contrary, he values such questions for the potential they carry to enhance shared learning, and also because they help him gauge the group's level of engagement and understanding. Though improvisational,

Krishnamurti's approach involves leading and directing the dialogue and inquiry. He explains, restates, and summarizes a problem, concept, or theme. Sometimes he does this by relating a story or offering an analogy or a concrete example. He might even suggest slowing down the conversation, or even taking a short pause. Simply proposing a pause opens space for self-reflection.

Krishnamurti seems quite comfortable addressing students' doubts about his contentions. In one particular exchange, for example, he first states his ideas about knowledge and relationship, then he asks questions about experience, and then he affirms certain points made by the students. However, he refrains, for the most part, from supplying an answer directly. Instead, he invites the group as a whole to come up with an answer in a collaborative way, though he is not reluctant to state his own understanding of a problem if the dialogue veers off focus. My reading of the 1981 discussion, suggests that DDI, with its features described above, has the potential to instigate insight. Thematic problems and concepts that seemed vague and abstract can sometimes be understood instantaneously, "like a flash of light." At the final exchanges in the dialogue, for example, one of the students expresses this kind of insight, with great enthusiasm, when he says: "Ah, that's *thought*. Right. *I see. I see. Yes.*" This student has had an inner seeing of a fact for the first time. This is the delight of instigated insight.

### **Adapting Krishnamurti's DDI in Higher Education**

Krishnamurti's approach could be emulated or adapted in higher education. That Krishnamurti does not use notes, handouts, or lesson plans, but rather prefers to facilitate an improvised, shared conversation around his "curriculum" themes, hopefully should not discourage educators who are comfortable with more collaborative and inquiry-based approaches. While Krishnamurti's skills with dialogue and inquiry must certainly come partly from his intimate experience with his themes, and also from decades of practice, I expect many educators possess similar skills and talents, while many others could borrow from Krishnamurti's DDI to suit their curriculum and educational objectives. To what extent such an approach can be practically applied in traditional higher education settings, given limitations such as lesson time limits, and assessment requirements, for example, has only just begun to be explored. (For descriptions of at least two examples of how a Krishnamurti style of dialogue and inquiry has been applied in higher education, see Kumar, 2018 and (2021). We can now add, however, Krishnamurti's innovation of insight education to several recently developed approaches aligned with the current rise of holistic and transformative approaches. (Aside from David Moody's insight curriculum, see also writings on holistic learning, transformative learning, community of philosophical inquiry, and other similar terms for alternative approaches in higher education, including Ashwani Kumar's *Curriculum as*

*Meditative Inquiry*. For an excellent introductory guide, see also Edward Taylor and Patricia Cranton's *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*.)

This article identified and described features of dialogue and deep inquiry in the style of Krishnamurti, as a unique educational approach with the potential to instigate insight. Insight, in the traditional sense, differs from Krishnamurti's conception of the event. Commonly, insight is associated with problem-solving situations, where a solution comes to mind suddenly, in a kind of *aha!* moment that brings to mind an elegant solution. But, as shown above, insight, in Krishnamurti's conception, is like a flash of light, a change event that goes beyond problem-solving and emphasizes that "insight transcends learning," (Krishnamurti, 1991, p. 23). Krishnamurti's DDI approach might be applied in higher education formal settings. First, courses could be based on Krishnamurti's philosophy generally, and also on Krishnamurti's thinking around certain themes, such as education for peace, religious and spiritual education, freedom from conditioning and self-knowledge, the nature of relationships, and the individual and society. Second, Krishnamurti's approach could form the basis for a course designed to help educators adapt DDI features to particular types of curricula. I find that DDI is aligned with those engaged in the evolution of higher education from knowledge transmission to transformative learning. But though aligned with several approaches gaining influence in recent years, DDI is innovative and unique in its wholly dialogic process. In other words, DDI relies on nothing more or less than dialogue, or conversation. My aim here was to describe what is possible. It remains for educators to adapt, adopt, or emulate Krishnamurti's DDI in order to gain a measure of confidence about its efficacy and practical viability, through testing, evaluation, and feedback. Not only would such experimentation provide valuable information about DDI's potential efficacy, it would also help to adapt the approach to particular thematic content and educational settings. Most notably, Krishnamurti's DDI could be an effective approach for instigating insight, an event many educators encounter only by accident. In the 1981 discussion, we have two insight events articulated by learners. In one of these, a student says "I see. I see," expressing exactly the kind of insight—that flash of light—that Krishnamurti speaks of. When insight arrives in learning, we welcome it with delight. We can, however, I think, do more than delight in the occasional accidental arrival of insight. We can also prime for, or intend for, insight in education. But even more than that, we can, as Krishnamurti shows, intentionally and actively foster—or instigate—insight in learners, to their benefit, and to our increased delight as well.

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