

**Journal of the
Krishnamurti Schools**

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JOURNAL
OF THE
KRISHNAMURTI
SCHOOLS

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An Educational Journal

This is a journal on education brought out annually. It is an anthology of writings by educators, teachers, and thinkers exploring a new vision of education in its many dimensions—philosophy, psychology, classroom experience, curriculum, nature and environment, and contemporary issues. It lays special emphasis on J Krishnamurti's principles of education, and will be of use to teachers, parents, educational administrators, teacher-educators, and anyone interested in education.

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Dear Reader

Kindly share this journal, after your perusal, with a school nearby or a school you know, or a teacher who you feel will enjoy this, so that it reaches more educators.

Many thanks
The Editors

GOODNESS

Goodness can flower only in freedom. It cannot bloom in the soil of persuasion in any form, nor under compulsion, nor is it the outcome of reward. It does not reveal itself when there is any kind of imitation or conformity, and naturally it cannot exist when there is fear. Goodness shows itself in behaviour and this behaviour is based on sensitivity. This goodness is expressed in action. The whole movement of thought is not goodness. Thought, which is so very complex, must be understood, but the very understanding of it awakens thought to its own limitation.

Goodness has no opposite. Most of us consider goodness as the opposite of the bad or evil and so throughout history in any culture goodness has been considered the other face of that which is brutal. So man has always struggled against evil in order to be good; but goodness can never come into being if there is any form of violence or struggle.

Goodness shows itself in behaviour and action and in relationship. Generally our daily behaviour is based on either the following of certain patterns—mechanical and therefore superficial—or according to very carefully thought-out motive, based on reward or punishment. So our behaviour, consciously or unconsciously, is calculated. This is not good behaviour. When one realizes this, not merely intellectually or by putting words together, then out of this total negation comes true behaviour.

Good behaviour is in essence the absence of the self, the me. It shows itself in politeness, in consideration for others, yielding without losing integrity. So behaviour becomes extraordinarily important. It is not a casual affair to be slurred over or a plaything of a sophisticated mind. It comes out of the depth of your being and is part of your daily existence.

Goodness shows itself in action. We must differentiate between action and behaviour. Probably they are both the same thing but for clarity they must be separated and examined. To act correctly is one of the most difficult things to do. It is very complex and must be examined very closely without impatience or jumping to any conclusion.



In our daily lives action is a continuous movement from the past, broken up occasionally with a new set of conclusions; these conclusions then become the past and one acts accordingly. One acts according to preconceived ideas or ideals, so one is acting always from either accumulated knowledge, which is the past, or from an idealistic future, a utopia.

We accept such action as normal. Is it? We question it after it has taken place or before doing it but this questioning is based on previous conclusions or future reward or punishment. If I do this - I will get that, and so on. So we are now questioning the whole accepted idea of action.

Action takes place after having accumulated knowledge or experience; or we act and learn from that action, pleasant or unpleasant, and this learning again becomes the accumulation of knowledge. So both actions are based on knowledge; they are not different. Knowledge is always the past and so our actions are always mechanical.

Is there an action that is not mechanical, non-repetitive, non-routine and so without regret? This is really important for us to understand for where there is freedom and the flowering of goodness, action can never be mechanical. Writing is mechanical, learning a language, driving a car is mechanical; acquiring any kind of technical knowledge and acting according to that is mechanistic. Again in this mechanical activity there might be a break and in that break a new conclusion is formed which again becomes mechanical. One must bear in mind constantly that freedom is essential for the beauty of goodness. There is a non-mechanistic action but you have to discover it. You cannot be told about it, you cannot be instructed in it, you cannot learn from examples, for then it becomes imitation and conformity. Then you have lost freedom completely and there is no goodness.

From *The Whole Movement of Life is Learning: J Krishnamurti's Letters to his Schools*, Chapter 2



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Editorial



For days the rain has been drumming heavily or dripping gently, as we complete the task of editing this twentieth issue of the *Journal*. The pavements and streets of Chennai are getting flooded, and the city is bracing itself for a continuing deluge. We hear that the tanks in the countryside, brimful with life-giving water, are beginning to breach. From across the country there have been reports of simmering social tensions, which now and then break out into violence. On the world stage, deadly terrorist attacks, continuing war zones and the plight of displaced refugees is the stuff of daily news. As inner fires and outer fires rage, the urgency of global agreements on mitigating the disastrous effects of climate change appear to recede to the back-burner. Nature takes its own course, and we are made aware of the deep divisions, growing intolerance, calculated violence and ongoing destruction of lands and lives. This is but a slice of our times!

In such a scenario, is it possible to evoke a redemptive flowering of goodness, or a quality of wholeness, in human nature? Perhaps it is in probing and transcending the deeper causes of these apparently disparate phenomena, that we may come upon reasons for hope. This makes Krishnamurti's insights and exhortations, and his vision of education, even more compelling thirty years after his death.

Completing two decades now, the *Journal* has held within its covers articles that explore a wide range of human predicaments—both inner and outer—and their intimate connection with this educational vision. It has also carried a range of practice-based articles that bring to life the experiments and thought-processes of teachers who teach different subjects or address other curricular concerns in schools.

What makes this landmark issue of the *Journal* special?

We invited this time a number of people who have been deeply involved for decades in the schools founded by Krishnamurti, to share their understanding of 'the teachings' and their concerns as educators. The response has been overwhelming and you will find here several valuable contributions. There are broadly sketched accounts of the

requirements of a school as a ‘religious place’ and of an education that is based in enquiry. There is an exploration of how values can be derived from the teachings and woven into the curriculum, even as teachers are invited to transcend the field of values and respond to the truths revealed in self-knowing. We read of a personal journey that is an exploration into education, provoking inward looking, new questions and a capacity to ‘rest in confusion’. An experiential account of what it means to teach the ‘teachings’, in teaching subjects, is presented. Then there are reflective expositions on the implications of working from the space of inner consciousness, the importance of beginning anew each day, the role of nature in teaching values and the demands of a ‘new’ culture that includes the religious spirit and the scientific mind. All of these pieces, in one way or the other, refer back to Krishnamurti, but highlight in distinctive ways a wide spectrum of concerns. Taken together, they cover a vast ground, and set the bar high for what schools and education are meant to be in our troubled times.

We also invited short individual reflections from teachers on three themes — *attention*, *conflict* and *excellence*. The response was heartening and you will find a set of pithy, well-written pieces that uncover different facets of these notions, each one in a manner unique to the author. These are organized into three small sub-sections that are interspersed among the longer articles in this volume. We hope you enjoy the taste of these brief exploratory writings that focus on a single theme, and make you think, often in concrete, experiential ways.

Apart from the above, the *Journal* features an article that explores the vexed questions around ‘personality development’ in schools. It also contains two solid classroom-based writings from teachers who are trying something new: researching issues of freedom and order in the classroom and learning about our conditioning.

And finally, there are two articles that strike a cautionary note. One of them asks, with analogies from playing a game of football, ‘Are not schools with deeper intent also subject to the inner compulsions of an individualistic worldly culture?’ The second piece, written on the margins of forest, tribal village and cityscape, is apocalyptic yet lyrical. It compares modern schooling to a forced labour camp (the infamous Soviet Gulag), and sees education in today’s world as complicit in eroding all sense of community, culture and nature among the young.

We are thus brought back to the question, ‘Is a flowering in goodness, a quality of wholeness, possible for human beings in today’s world?’ This is the question that Krishnamurti challenged the schools to engage with. Dear reader, we hope that you will find in many of the articles in this *Journal* possible grounds and reasons for hope.

16 November 2015

The School as a Religious Place

P KRISHNA



Krishnamurti did not accept the conventional meaning of religion prevalent in society. He said that temples, mosques and churches are not religious places as no learning takes place there. To him the real purpose of religion is to come upon virtue, which is not a set of prescribed actions but a state of being in which there is complete order in consciousness. To arrive at such a state one has to observe the causes of disorder in our consciousness by watching it in the 'mirror of relationship'. Disorder in our consciousness in the form of conflict, anger, jealousy, enmity, hatred, fear, sorrow, guilt and frustration arises due to various forms of illusions in our mind. It can be ended by discerning for oneself what is true and what is false. Illusion is something imaginary and has no real existence but is accepted as fact by the individual. This is a process of unlearning the false and such learning may be termed as self-knowledge. This is totally different from the other kind of learning which is the accumulation of knowledge and

techniques. Self-knowledge is so-called because it cannot be obtained from books or teachers; it has to be learnt by oneself.

Krishnamurti emphasized that a school must provide the ground for both kinds of learning and help the student to excel in both, namely the understanding of the external world around us as well as the understanding of the inner world of our consciousness. The true function of religion is to liberate our consciousness from the disorders it is prone to. Self-knowledge, he suggested, is the key to wisdom as it ends the disorder in consciousness. Such a learning mind is the true religious mind and not one which is burdened with only knowledge or techniques. If a school imparts knowledge that empowers the individual to act in the world, then it must also accept the responsibility to enable the student to come upon wisdom through self-knowledge. Krishnamurti called this the 'awakening of intelligence'. Without wisdom, the power of knowledge becomes dangerous since it can be used to dominate, exploit or destroy

others. He said there is no intelligence without compassion and one is not truly educated if one does not have love and goodness, which flower through the understanding of oneself.

Hence, the aim of a Krishnamurti school is to nurture in the child excellence in knowledge and skills, and self-awareness in consciousness and relationship. This he referred to as 'the art of living'. This requires tremendous sensitivity, the perception of beauty in every aspect of life and the capacity for love and compassion. A school that enables this is a religious space. Such a place nourishes a learning mind interested in discerning what is true and what is false; it attracts the true pilgrim; and it is a sanctuary for all life. Such a vision requires a completely different approach to education.

Such schools must be located in a place of great natural beauty, with trees, birds and animals coexisting with human beings. Such an atmosphere is conducive to sensitivity which is essential for a religious mind. Sensitivity develops through quietness and attention, and it cannot be obtained through books or thinking alone.

The student-teacher ratio must be small so that personal attention and care can be accorded to every student in all aspects of life—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The physical

aspect requires right diet, adequate sleep, various forms of sports and games, dances and exercises including yoga. The intellectual aspect requires an introduction to good literature, languages, poetry, art, science, mathematics, logic and reason, and knowledge of the external world. The emotional aspect demands sensitivity, self-knowledge, friendship, cooperation with respect, and affection. The spiritual aspect demands enquiry, self-understanding, freedom from self-centred activity, awareness, sense of responsibility, care and compassion. All of these are a part of flowering in goodness. The school must provide activities and opportunities for the development of all these aspects in the child.

The relationship between the teacher and student needs to be free from fear. One establishes a relationship of friendship, affection and mutual respect and not of control through fear and authority. The teacher encourages enquiry and a learning mind, not only in the academic curriculum but also about society, about life, about rules and structures and right conduct. A learning mind is different from a knowing mind or an intellectual mind. It is a mind that senses and learns through watching, listening, awareness and enquiry. It has a harmonious blend of reason and love. The teacher learns along with the student. The teacher may know more

about a subject than the student, but he may not know what right living is. There have to be forums where all questions of life can be discussed in a spirit of dialogue without anyone dictating to anyone else. The state of our society reveals that we have yet to discover what right living is. A Krishnamurti school can be regarded as an experiment in right living in which all of us, students and teachers, are learning the art of living.

It follows that the school must be free from comparisons, judgements, punishments and rewards. The purpose of evaluation is not to compare and classify students as intelligent or dull but to become aware of their actual strengths and weaknesses, so that one can accordingly help them to grow. There is no such thing as an unintelligent child. Intelligence manifests itself differently in each child and we need to watch and help the child in every direction. We are all different from each other but no one is superior or inferior to anyone else. When we do not compare, there is true equality and mutual respect. The role

of a teacher is thus not to judge and criticize a student but to investigate together with the child every aspect of life in a spirit of friendship, and discover the beauty therein. There is great beauty in nature, in games and sports, in literature, in music and the arts, in science and mathematics too. It is that beauty which produces joy when we engage in that activity. If one can feel that beauty one is not bored and there is no need to pursue pleasure as an escape from boredom. Learning all this is to come upon sensitivity which is the main aim of both religion and of education.

It may appear that this is an impossible task. But a religious mind does not assess what is possible or impossible. The political and business mind does that. The religious mind is concerned with right action, irrespective of whether it succeeds or fails. It asks the 'impossible' question. In doing so one may not attain the full vision, but it does not thereby diminish the vision, which organized religions have done, thus betraying the teachings that lie at their core. Let us not make the same mistake.

What do I Teach when I Teach a Subject?

KABIR JAITHIRTHA



What does one teach when one teaches a subject? I notice there are three different kinds of learning. First, there is the learning of a skill. How can one make the learning of a skill totally free of the effort of memorising and struggling to remember? Can the learning of a skill be done so that it follows the contours of the learning brain, where the acquiring of a skill is natural, as in the learning of the first language? I am learning a new language on *Duolingo* (an app for learning a foreign language). It interests me how my brain can retain structures through familiarity and repetition without the need to consciously memorize. I do not have to go through the tedious process of memorizing words and sentence structures. The lessons are short and build on each other, so that repetition is built into the structure. Words and grammatical structures are linked to familiar objects. All of this allows for absorption without effort. I wonder if in the teaching of a skill I can bring the same effortless quality to the learning,

by relating the context to an activity, an object or a situation. As a teacher can one be skilled in knowing when to repeat and how much, so that the learning is effortless?

Then there is conceptual learning where there is knowledge and insight into the structure of a concept. How does one make sure that the learner sees the concept that is being learnt rather than merely remembering the linear exposition of the idea? This is particularly true in the teaching of mathematics. Often, my role as a teacher is limited to the raising of questions based on what the student already knows. There has to be space where the student can learn to hold the question without immediately seeking an answer and getting frustrated in the attempt to do so. The space strengthens the capacity and demand to see clearly, rather than being satisfied to work with a verbal explanation or procedures. I feel this is parallel to Krishnaji's demand that we see directly what is being said. The seeing brings

about a creative engagement with the concept rather than a laboured ability to work with the technique. Insight here means the movement from a fragmented collection of ideas to seeing the underlying pattern. The question remains of course as to whether the pattern is there to be discovered or if the pattern is imposed.

This leads to the final movement of learning—insight into the very structure of thought. Thought creates the illusion of an ‘observer’ separate from the ‘observed’, and yet has the ability to reflect upon itself. How does one help bring about this insight in the learner? Here, help cannot be seen as assisting another. Rather, can the educator co-operate with the learner so that the space is created where such insight is possible? This is perhaps the most significant creative movement of learning. To watch the sense of being a watcher and allowing it to die away. This insight seems to be radically different, in that the deepest assumptions about time, space, distance are abandoned by the brain that is in a state of watching. Is this what Krishnaji meant when he said that we never look or listen completely? To listen without any resistance or translation is to listen to the whole. Every interaction is an opportunity for listening. Can every interaction between the teacher and student evoke this quality of listening? This is particularly true

with the young. This listening is true relating, much more than words and things done for them. Patterns of resistance begin to form because the adults do not bring this quality of listening in their interactions with the young. So just as one begins to absorb the right grammatical structures without having to learn them through conscious effort, this capacity for listening becomes part of the child when the adults around are also doing it. It is natural for a child to do this just as it is natural for a child to respond to affection with affection. To listen and to look without actively seeking to grasp is a negative capability. The brain is in a higher state of attention in this state than when actively seeking to grasp something. Perhaps this has a role even in learning a skill or a concept.

When I teach, I also teach moving between the particular and the general. This means to see the general in the particular and to respond to the particular with the understanding of the general. Through the particular there is insight into the general, for example, in mathematics, where through the investigation of a particular example we try to understand the general principles. This capacity to see the general through the particular is distinct from generalising. Generalizing is the creation of a model by abstracting certain aspects, while this is seeing the whole through

the window of the part. This is very important in the teaching of the sciences and mathematics. Children who struggle with these subjects are often lost in the particular. Teaching and learning in this way is perhaps difficult for us because we tend to get lost in the perceived complexities of the particular and are forever trying to master and control the particular. With the perception of the general, the particular falls in place. Take, for example, the solving of simultaneous equations. Once it is seen that there are two unknowns and two pieces of information needed to solve them, the particular problems become easier to handle. It does not seem as if separate unrelated rules are needed, which need to be memorised.

From the particular to the general is perhaps also the process of investigating into oneself. We are used to thinking of order in terms of symmetry, predictability and pattern, amongst other things. Is there an order underlying all form, which is in essence freedom from contradiction and conflict? And what is the nature of learning that can approach this order? Can I, as a teacher, interest the student in this question even while I am teaching a subject? Can the mind move beyond order in form to order underlying form? The seeing of the general through the window of the particular is a movement of insight, but

this is partial if there is no letting go of the most basic structures that thought has created—separation, distance, time and self. These still colour and distort perception and so the brain is content with models which describe, rather than demand to see directly. This again is related to self-enquiry, where the observation of the particular conflict or fear allows for an insight into the structure of conflict or fear.

I also see the importance of gatheredness and attention when the teacher and student are in communication with each other. Thus, the speed with which I speak, how I speak, and my own quality of attention become very important in creating an atmosphere of learning. My attention is their attention. We are in a state of attention together.

Can I alert the student to the movement of thought and memory that does not come out of attention? Let me illustrate what I am trying to say with two examples. Often, when a student answers a question, it is an automatic and unexamined reaction of memory. It may be right or it may be wrong. But that is not the point. Likewise, reading aloud often becomes mechanical. One gets absorbed in the activity of reading and one is not actually listening to oneself reading. This is similar to a machine capable of a certain activity

being switched on, wherein there is action but there is no awareness. This is not very different from the mechanical reaction of memory which constitutes our psyche. Can the brain be alert to this phenomenon of unexamined thought? This is an opportunity to learn awareness. Krishnamurti talked about listening, not only to the word, but to the sound of the word as well. How intimately woven into everyday activity is this movement of awareness!

Can I go beyond the teaching of the subject to show them the state of the world? A student may be isolated in a comfortable bubble which encourages focus primarily on oneself and one's immediate relationships. Can he see that such a narrowing down is itself a source of insecurity and unhappiness in the world? There is the need to direct the student's attention to the state of the world, the conflicts, the injustices and inequalities that pervade everyday life. Some subjects like geography or economics or sociology lend themselves to this in a natural way. When an adult is concerned with such questions there will be opportunities to bring up these questions regardless of the subject being taught. In doing so, one can raise questions about the individual's responsibility for such a state. Would a feeling of responsibility to the whole of mankind bring about the energy to

go beyond the underlying cause, which is the disorder in the human consciousness itself?

I am never teaching only a subject. One is always teaching and interacting with a human being. And there are many things operating in the human being, arising from within the structure of thought. Can I speak to the 'unconscious' of a student who is getting caught in a movement of lethargy and habit, seeing that reasoning does not help? Krishnamurti often pointed to the possibility of speaking to the unconscious of a person, as the unconscious sees danger quicker. The conscious mind is the structure of the self with its resistance, opinions, and conclusions. All these interfere with the capacity to listen without resistance, without justification or defensiveness. The unconscious, it seems to me, while still being in the field of the psyche, is without the structure of the self that creates barriers in communication.

Many children in today's world experience a persistent unhappiness, which is different from the passing unhappiness that we all may experience. This unhappiness has its roots in a profound insecurity brought about by the environment in which the child is growing up. The outward manifestations of this are many and even radically different in different children.

It could be clinging, anger, restlessness, lethargy, anxiety and many other forms. Fear, unhappiness, resistance are active even as I am teaching. Do I ignore them and come back to them later? Do I deal with them first and come to the teaching of a subject later? Or is there a way of dealing with them simultaneously? Is there a way of touching the psyche without reasoning and persuasion? In our attempt to deal with psychological issues we are constantly invoking thought and time because we take it for

granted that time is needed to bring about change. However, conscious thought is not able to deal with this unhappiness, because it is created and sustained by thought. Can the sub-conscious be alerted to the danger of this movement? Can this be done in simple words? I ask myself (and you, my colleagues) whether it is possible to create this movement of learning in which there is space and leisure to observe oneself and respond to the student without bringing in time.

Oaks, Mountain Vistas and Children

An inner exploration in education*

KAREN HESLI



I consider it to be a great good fortune to have lived alongside the people and trees of Oak Grove School for most of my adult life. This good fortune has surrounded me with oaks, mountain vistas and children of all ages to ‘understand the vast field of our existence’. It has meant staff and parents together exploring with a wide-angle lens what it means to ‘unravel the confusion of one’s own nature’. The ‘vast field’ and ‘our own nature’ have meant coming to terms with the persistent stranglehold that traditional schooling and parenting practices have had on our hearts and minds.

While writing this essay and taking stock of myself as a student and teacher, I realize that after decades of being immersed in the world of education, I don’t know whether I know more or whether I know less than when I started teaching in 1970. Much of this confusion is due to the schizophrenic nature of ‘knowledge’, which both solves and causes problems. Similar conundrums exist with other terms in Krishnamurti’s lexicon. Does the word ‘learning’ mean acquiring information? Or does it refer to learning as being present, mindful and engaged in the now? Or does it mean looking, observing and noticing? Perhaps context clarifies the meaning. The phrase ‘self-knowledge’ also poses many discrepant connotations. However, it is not the intention of this essay to burden ourselves—or Socrates, Shakespeare, Krishnamurti—with an exercise in semantics, or worry about who knows what, or to exactly which aspects of the self, one is to be true.

I wish to outline the common ground for this essay with three baseline observations. First, multiple crises in the world exist and

*All quotes attributed to J Krishnamurti, unless otherwise stated

knowledge alone will not solve them. Second, teachers and parents must devote huge energy to self-understanding. Third, all education is ecological and relational.

Looking at the backdrop of traditional schooling, I notice a residue of feelings caused by teachers and parents who have not understood the invisible, unconscious, conditioned assumptions that imprison their hearts and minds and prevent real transformation of consciousness. I unwittingly perpetuated a one-sided love affair with knowledge throughout my teaching career, ever hopeful that just a tad more information would improve if not solve things once and for all. It was much later when I realized that educational fads and technologies were like the dispersants used in the *Deepwater Horizon* oil rig in Gulf of Mexico oil spill in 2010—the dispersant heaped more damage onto the original problem.

I think this poem of Ron Koertge's may prod some early memories of our long-forgotten or never-forgotten teachers. I enjoy sharing it because in just a few lines he captures the essence and depth of the problems:

First Grade

*Until then, every forest
had wolves in it, we thought
it would be fun to wear snowshoes
all the time, and we could talk to water.*

*So who is this woman with the gray
breath calling out names and pointing
to the little desks we will occupy
for the rest of our lives?*

Or these lines, excerpted from *The First Reader*, a poem by Billy Collins:

‘...we were forgetting how to look, learning how to read.’

Conditioning is difficult to dislodge. How are we to liberate ourselves from what we were taught? When I realized that I had been that woman with the ‘gray breath’ during much of my tenure in Minneapolis, I wondered what were the ‘desks that I occupied’ as a teacher? One early

belief was that by changing the system or methodology, learning would improve. Perhaps that is true for learning about stuff, but when learning about stuff excludes the learner and relationships, we find ourselves circling round and round the same issues.

New and improved educational tools and methods are designed to improve outcomes, but like a boomerang, if you don't pay attention, they lop your head off. I was eager to try a new environment where children had freedom to move around and make choices in an 'open classroom environment'. So I transferred to a 'state of the art' school across town in Minneapolis. The two-story, multi-million dollar monolith housed 3,000 students and was the largest elementary school constructed in the United States. Instead of walls there were large rolling coat racks on wheels to define the spaces where groups of sixty students were vertically organized. Every moment we struggled with the reverberating cacophony; so eventually after a few years, walls were installed. But walls could do nothing to repair the damage of failed philosophy and failed students. If this fiasco of educational faddism was the best that professionals had to offer, we were in deeper trouble than I had imagined. In building this monstrosity, how could we not see that something so essential had evaded us, that learning about ourselves and our relationships did not receive the necessary attention? Was it any wonder that other systems—economic, social welfare, political—were failing? Thoroughly dismayed, my disturbance almost drove me from teaching for good.

But it was a turning point, not an ending. I felt driven to recover a field of vision, to search for an intelligible school, a panorama void of slogans, quick fixes and fads. Was there such a place, where abiding coherence and economy of scale oozed from its nooks and crannies? Funnily enough, as things happened, a Krishnamurti book crossed my path and wheels took me on the road to Ojai—to discover why “the major problem is not the pupil, but the educator; ...If the educator himself is confused, how can he impart wisdom or help to make straight the way for another?”

Rare is a school founded to 'revolutionize the human psyche', to allow the 'flowering of goodness' and for students to be a 'blessing on the

world'. Rarer still is it to lay the responsibility for human problems with each single human being. Given this unique intention that, 'truth is not to be bought, sold, repeated; it cannot be caught in books... but found moment to moment in the smile, in the tear, under the dead leaf, in the vagrant thoughts, in the fullness of life,' and the magnitude of it, we who work at these places faced the necessity to 'look inward'. Accumulative knowledge or methodologies have little to offer toward creating these transformative learning environments. If something worthwhile is going to happen it needs to grow from a different kind of seed.

The notion of 'inward looking' was as unfamiliar to me as the chaparral that surrounded Oak Grove. Big questions or discussions had not been a part of my family life nor school culture. My parents sent me to church and did not entertain any discussion about the dogma. Questions from teachers had always seemed predictable 'call and response' exercises. That is, until the first day of Mr Ario's philosophy elective. The memory of Mr Ario's class is so distinct because it registered in my seventeen-year-old mind at the time as something truly unique! He was actually asking us to consider a question by 'looking within' rather than by reading a textbook! This divergence was so startling that it indeed pointed to the pathetic state of my experiences in school. We had enormous energy for these discussions, in which Mr Ario invited us to open our minds and dig around to see what was there.

The spirit of Mr Ario's class did not take hold for another twenty years, when I stumbled upon a book by Krishnamurti. Then began a love affair with the real meaning and work of education—'to draw out'. Krishnamurti did not write a teacher's manual but thankfully the staff met for hours every week to discuss things, and for the next five years until his death, I enjoyed the privilege of attending the annual series of discussions with faculty and parents. In exploring issues together I learned the power of enquiry, of a state of learning and finding-out that is both ferociously alive and also silent, markedly different from accumulating information. I noticed the mind squirming, as authority was wrested from teachers, priests, parents, and from Krishnamurti himself; my dusty confusion sprouting questions rather than answers! Spanish poet Antonio Machado made sense, "...there is no path. The path is made by walking."

So many unknowns and expectations flooded my mind the summer before my first year of teaching at Oak Grove. Someone suggested that all classes begin with silence, but silence was even more unfamiliar to me than inward looking. I was an ‘experienced and credentialed’ teacher, but my experience was a liability which prevented fresh, new and innovative thinking. I feared entering the classroom without some tried and tested gimmicks. I feared loss of control, students in disengaged chaos, the school Director’s disappointment and disapproving parents. It took weeks to simply get over the shock of being in a new school: from sixty students to eight; from parents who didn’t attend conferences to parents hovering nearby; from asphalt surfaces to acres of rolling oak woodland; from a state-mandated curriculum, high stakes testing and graffitied textbooks to student-driven programs, no grades and hand-made resources; from smoke-filled teachers’ lounges with grumpy, bored, tenured teachers on strike to teachers enquiring about love for learning and grateful for half the salary of their former jobs.

So this door called ‘inward looking’... what is it exactly? I often share with my students what Carl Jung said, ‘the deeper we go into ourselves as particular and unique, the more we find the whole human species,’ or the lines excerpted from the poem, *Now I Become Myself* by May Sarton:

*Now I Become Myself
Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces[...]
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent,
Falls but does not exhaust the root.*

I have found that if students develop a working vocabulary, and a reference point or prior activity with the notions of self-reflection, and the nature of thinking, they are more equipped to openly address sticky situations. Because they are also less self-identified, role-playing and script writing exercises are more helpful. One of my favourite no-fail activities is to enact and discuss Anderson’s fairy tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. This story is guaranteed to bring piercing insight into human

behaviour. What about introducing the shadow side of humanity, to take time to find all of the characters residing in each of us? Writing and then enacting various scripts that explain the royal court members' behaviours can be hilarious. I also like various poems or quotes, such as this one from economist E.F. Schumacher, "...the whole of mankind is in mortal danger not because we are short of scientific and technological know-how, but because we use it destructively, without wisdom. Education is for people to learn inner clarity, to understand the meaning and purpose of life."

Many situations in schools and day-to-day operations border on the surreal, and others can be heavy and overwhelming. But all these most likely require creative problem solving and open communication. I wonder what it would take for right intention to marry right action in everyday life. In educational settings I have witnessed thousands of complex and difficult situations restored amicably. With thoughtful intent, careful and active listening, and competent speaking, issues have been deconstructed to reveal the misunderstandings and assumptions. When I notice that my actions or those of others have triggered misunderstandings and confusion, or that words that I or others have spoken have fallen short of one's intentions of goodwill and respect, I find myself drawn inward, the mind searching to reassure itself amidst the scolding chatter. Reflecting on the complex, nuanced and intertwined nature of language and relationships and our habituation to thought and ego-driven action, we sometimes need to rest in our confusion. Resting in confusion or in anger is an unfamiliar exercise, but one that supports our need to authentically experience difficulties.

Why is the power that propels people to behave so incoherently stronger, apparently, than the power to behave from intelligence or insight? Reflecting on the kernel of why our actions range so far from the espoused intention is critical to exploring among students, parents and colleagues. Krishnamurti certainly shed light on the human condition, yet we who have held his teachings foremost in our hearts have been fraught with long-standing unresolved conflicts. Why haven't we been more effective in resolving conflicts and sustaining our relationships? After nearly five decades in education, I find myself not knowing what is

gained and what is lost. Stumped and disheartened about the wasted energy of conflict and sometimes euphoric when we come together ‘to understand our complex natures and the vast field of our existence’.

The listening that is required for self-understanding is rare. But when it happens, a kind of collective barn-raising is possible—where communion and community rather than individuality is birthed in that moment. Perhaps teachers and parents will put knowledge in its right place, listen adeptly to the children and to the earth and consider what the first century Roman philosopher Seneca said, “As long as you live, keep learning how to live”.

Education and Enquiry

STEPHEN SMITH



If mediocrity and worldliness are the twin foes of J Krishnamurti's teaching, education and enquiry are its pillars of strength. Indeed, they are not two separate activities—the search for wholeness which is the goal of enquiry is, at the same time, the backbone of right education. Krishnamurti puts the challenge thus, 'Is it possible through education to bring about this integrated human being, that is, a human being who is thinking in terms of the whole ... who is thinking as a total entity, a total process, and not indulging in divided, broken-up, fractional thinking?' *Is it possible?* That is the question. It is a question we cannot afford to ignore.

Traditionally, education has been seen as a lengthy process of building knowledge. It is anchored in the notion of transmission. I go to a teacher because he knows and I don't and, if I am lucky, he tells me what he knows. I build on what I've learnt, adding more, contributing to the general storehouse of knowledge which then becomes greater

and more highly specialised. This, *grosso modo*, is what has happened. There has been a prodigious expansion in the volume of knowledge, particularly over the last 150 years, and it is now impossible for a single human being to have anything more than a general overview.

So, in terms of knowledge, *homo sapiens* (= *knowing* human being) has advanced dramatically, and perhaps this is why he lays such store by it. After all, he has built castles and cities, monuments and missiles, skyscrapers and cars. What he has significantly failed to do, however, is procure any lasting peace for human beings. The fruits of our actions lie all around us: the decimation of plant and animal species, social disintegration, domestic violence and so on. *Homo sapiens* may *know*—but what about what he has done to the planet, and what about the way he *lives*?

And yet, his faith in knowledge continues. There are tighter controls, increased testing and a pervasive sense that measurement is all. Schools' exam

results are published in the media so that readers can assess which schools are doing 'best'. Schools themselves are ranked by undisclosed criteria and the results of that ranking similarly published. But, what exactly are we trying to prove? If the consequence of competition is nervous breakdown and depression, if the ultimate outcome of conflict is war, where is the benefit in human terms? If the way we are living makes no sense, what will make it make sense, what will turn it around? Right education is one place, and a good place, to start.

Most people in today's world receive an education of some sort, but with the increasing impact of government control it does not empower them to become free human beings. Indeed, one could argue the contrary that it is doubly difficult in contemporary society not to conform and, hence, become mediocre. Against such a backdrop, Krishnamurti's teachings stand like a beacon in a dark world. In the first place, education is not *for* something—to gain money, power, position—it has intrinsic value, it is good in itself. We are so accustomed to doing something *for* something else that we ignore the present-tense situation we are in, in order to 'advance' to some imagined good. But even if we get or gain what we want, the 'I' that wants it is still in

operation: it wants something better, something more.

In other words, we think in terms of time: time is the medium, the carrier, of our lives. Learning-as-knowledge is also part of time—it is built through time, in time, by time. When we call someone *learned*, this is what we mean. At present, the entire educational system—whether the school is run by the government or by a well-established body of governors—subscribes to this timeworn view of things. It is part of the structure of consciousness, which every individual absorbs at birth and which he replicates in his own particular way. It behoves us, then, as educators and enquirers, to consider together the nature of consciousness. For, if consciousness is common—and it is—that is the ground on which we all stand. At the same time, it is our port of entry, what distinguishes dialogical enquiry from psychoanalysis and personal therapy. We are *together* in our common search.

This is not some far-flung exercise: it is as practical as baking bread. But it does require, and at the same time invoke, a different quality of understanding, what Krishnamurti calls *intelligence*. "Intelligence," he says, "is neither yours nor mine". It is something that flows between human beings when their minds are in focus and they are truly listening. It cannot be established *a priori*, nor is

there any preparation for it other than the ordering of one's own mind-heart. It is not part of time and has no continuity; nonetheless, it is palpable and real. It is waiting, so to speak, to be activated. As Krishnamurti put it, 'Intelligence *wants* to manifest'. It is there when we are aligned, when we are thinking together 'at the same time, at the same level, with the same intensity'.

That this happen much more in our schools is imperative—name and fame are not enough. For it is only by building this fluid intelligence, this subtle spirit, this quick understanding that we can hope to meet, and adequately deal with, the mounting crisis, the tsunami of our times. It requires, since consciousness is common and intelligence flows between human beings, that we develop a sense of impersonal friendship. We have divided existence as 'consciousness within', the mind, and so-called objective reality, the world. That this division is false has been amply demonstrated, not least by the discovery of the quantum world which makes no sense without subjectivity. We are *here*, whether we like it or not. We cannot continue in ignorance of ourselves, leaving the vast reaches of the psyche unattended.

In other words, in our investigation we need both the impersonal spirit of scientific enquiry and the personal sense

of something shared. Both factors are equally important. What we have today is a disconnect—in education, the pursuit of knowledge as facts; in life, the pursuit of goods as promise. Neither can lead to harmony or happiness. It is only by drawing together as one, without mutual dependence or attachment, that we can establish a wavelength propitious to enquiry and so lay the basis *in relationship* for the coming, and much-needed, next phase of our development. And, paradoxically, though one may speak of development, it is essentially a movement of the timeless, not of time. It involves a different kind of learning.

We are identified with our 'mortal coil', which is obviously why the pursuit of knowledge has become of such importance to us. More knowledge, more security, greater progress—or so we think. Actually, however, knowledge is neutral. The vast advances in computer technology have enormously facilitated instant communication; this has also led to hacking, shaming, online theft and narcissism. Inwardly, as human beings, we are exactly where we were—unless, as many think, we are degenerating fast. With the overall decline in religious beliefs, the moral tenets they supported have also declined and nothing has yet emerged to take their place. One is left with a sense of void, of no meaning, a sapped and pervasive feeling of futility. It is almost as if the 'motor of

man', his driving force, had run down, become entropic.

What conventional education is trying to do is repair the motor with old, worn tools. This is patchwork repair, at best. What we need is a learning that is instantaneous, perceptive and, by its very nature, non-accumulative. It does not go from A to B because it exists 'in the middle', between A and B. In fact, it is what makes A and B possible. Without the perceiver nothing is perceived, and it is our perennial obsession with the thing perceived, to the exclusion of the perceiver and the act of perception, that has led to our lopsided view of things, with its inevitable consequences of chaos and destruction. In these schools, if at present in no others, this basic imbalance needs to be addressed.

It is necessary to shift the emphasis from the thing being learnt (the subject matter) to the world of the learner and the process of learning—not artificially

or arbitrarily, but because they are part and parcel of a unitary movement. If, for instance, I am studying biology, I become aware of the growth processes within myself; I also watch my own way of learning, the *how* of learning as well as the *what*. In this way, my learning is vastly enriched; it is no longer about name and form, about facts and figures in a disembodied world—a world from which my consciousness is absent—but what I call 'me' is part of the process. In studying the world, I am studying myself since the world process is going on in me and I am a node or focus of it.

This new dimensionality of learning explodes the timeworn categories of the learner and the thing-to-be-learnt and gathers both up in a two-way process where 'unitive perception' is the key feature and the 'bridge'. Released from the trap of Cartesian consciousness, from a mind abstracted from the world of 'things', we are free to wander, to question, to enquire.

ON ATTENTION

What do we mean by attention? Is there attention when I am forcing my mind to attend? When I say to myself, "I must pay attention, I must control my mind and push aside all other thoughts," would you call that attention? Surely that is not attention. What happens when the mind forces itself to pay attention? It creates a resistance to prevent other thoughts from seeping in; it is concerned with resistance, with pushing away; therefore it is incapable of attention. That is true, is it not?

To understand something totally you must give your complete attention to it. But you will soon find out how extraordinarily difficult that is, because your mind is used to being distracted, so you say, "By Jove, it is good to pay attention, but how am I to do it?" That is, you are back again with the desire to get something, so you will never pay complete attention. When you see a tree or a bird, for example, to pay complete attention is not to say, "That is an oak", or, "That is a parrot", and walk by. In giving it a name you have already ceased to pay attention. Whereas, if you are wholly aware, totally attentive when you look at something, then you will find that a complete transformation takes place, and that total attention is the good. There is no other, and you cannot get total attention by practice. With practice you get concentration, that is, you build up walls of resistance, and within those walls of resistance is the concentrator, but that is not attention, it is exclusion.

J Krishnamurti, *The Book of Life*

To Stretch Oneself...

AKHILA SESHADRI



The nature of attention has always been a vexatious issue with me. From the days of being a student, the purpose of attention has always been to gain something. My parents would be full of injunctions that I persist with the task given and learn from it—attend to it. Attention was for a purpose, I was told. To illustrate this, the story of Arjuna and the eye of the bird from *The Mahabharata* would be told:

One day, Dronacharya lined up the Kauravas and the Pandavas to demonstrate the power of attention.

*The guru explained the purpose of the lesson: Each of them had to put an arrow through the eye of the bird set up on a tree in the garden. As each of them lined up with their bow, he asked them the same question, “What do you see?” Each time the student would describe **all** that he saw.*

He obviously kept Arjuna as the last one and asked him what he saw. Arjuna replied that he could see the eye of the bird. The guru persisted, “Do you not see the trees, the flowers, your brothers, your cousins, the butterflies the blue sky, the ripe mangoes...” Arjuna, that model student, replied in his steadfast manner, “I see the eye of the bird and nothing else.” He alone was allowed to release his arrow and, sure enough, he got the target.

Thus, my parents would conclude should be my state of mind too. And they would leave after they had given me this little homily. And I would feel vindictive about the mythological hero and wish he had not been such a model student.

While my juvenile reactions to this soon ended, and I was able to see the reason behind what I now understand as focussed attention, I still had some questions. I learnt about focussed attention, which is a skill

that is needed when one wants to learn or understand something. Certainly, the greater the focus, the clearer, deeper and better the understanding. So, in the story, the prince's focus in that situation was necessary, as the intention of the lesson was to show how focus brings accuracy. This is the classroom attention that, as a teacher, one would want from students. Any disruption is upsetting, mainly, one thinks, for the keeper of the intention, unless one shares that intention with the students and welcomes them into it as well.

A recent article I had read about building the 'attention muscle' in the classroom context, railed about diminishing attention levels, and the catering to this by all concerned—textbooks, the new media as well as the teacher. The digital age, it complained, had oversimplified things and now the attempt in all pedagogical situations is to break things down to chewable sizes—through short worksheets with breaks, bite-size information capsules, and even short videos. It made a compelling argument in which it decried today's classroom practices that accepted this as a *fait accompli*. There was no longer a demand for sustained attention from students. The question the article raised was: Should schools and teachers downsize their lessons, their classes and their plans, or should they build a quality of sustained attention?

Clearly, schools do have a mandate to build into their programme the building of attention. My disagreement with this is, however, against building this skill *for a purpose, to an end*. I have wondered whether attention is not a *quality* that I would have my students learn or imbibe, rather than see it as a *skill* required to meet an end?

Krishnamurti has spoken of attention as a kind of mindfulness or awareness, very different from the concentrated attention that is often held up as the ideal in educational paradigms. He narrates an incident in which he was sitting along with the driver in a car while he and his companions were talking about 'awareness'. The driver in his haste knocked down a goat crossing the road and all the while his companions, avid in their discussion of 'awareness', were completely oblivious to what had happened. The irony of this cannot be sufficiently underscored.

If one were to go back to the etymological roots of this word, it might give us a glimpse of what attention is actually capable of. It comes

from the root French word, *attendre* and from the Latin, *attendre* which literally means 'to stretch towards', (*ad* [to] + *tendre* [stretch]). The notion is of 'stretching' one's mind toward something. There is also a sense of 'take care of, wait upon' that emerges in the fourteenth century.

If I were to translate that, attention would mean 'to care'. In the words of the French philosopher, Simone Weil, in *First and Last Notebooks*, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." Indeed, that is what I would aspire to in my life, and wish for my students as well.

This gives me the key that I have been looking for, the key that schools have misplaced. Attention is not about mere focus, though it is about that *as well*. Attention has to do with observation without the self, without a motive, without conflict, without effort.

When I have read about a character who forgot many things, but never forgot a kind face, I have thought about how attentive that particular character was. It is in the attention to the silences in between, as Krishnamurti would say, that there is space and that space is attention. I see how inattention can be equated with thoughtlessness and self-centredness. And is that not something to look at very carefully?

In a Harvard study on focussed attention, two professors created an experiment called the Invisible Gorilla Effect (which can be viewed at www.theinvisiblegorilla.com). A video directs viewers' attention to a specific thing, such as a game of basketball being played on a court, and they are asked to focus on a particular task. In the middle of the video, a person in a gorilla costume walks across the court. But the viewers, absorbed in their task, often completely missed seeing the gorilla. This showed that as we focus on what we know, we miss out on all else that we ought to see.

If it is such attention and not self-directed 'will' that can cure us of our faults, then is it not this quality of attention that we must attend to? Going back to Simone Weil again, in *Grace and Gravity*, "Attention taken to its highest degree is the same thing as prayer. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer".

If we could give ourselves and our students this gift through both demand and practice, through conversation and reflection, I think we would have done our task rather well. What I wish for, truly, is this grace.

The Gardener in Me

TANUSHREE BORUNDIA



The link between the gardener and the teacher has fascinated me over the years.

At Yewfield in the Lake District of the UK, while walking around the garden, I learnt how weeds are dominant and take over a patch and how you just cannot take all the weeds out. So you control their spread, while keeping them there to do their bit. Weeds are an important part of the ecosystem. The teacher in me heard this example and it fitted in with 'a bully' in a class. You can't just get rid of them, but you bring order into the system by other interventions. And when I watch a gardener who with all attention and love wipes the underside of leaves, makes the right combination of soil to put into her pots, where some plant will blossom, the teacher in me again resonates with that feeling of care and concern.

There is no one single or right way to nurture the environment for the growth of the child. Nurturing, by its very nature is a dynamic and creative

process. Like each plant, each child is fragile, but with the strength to take on the world. Our committed love, attention and care can facilitate this process.

A builder makes a building out of what he has imagined and it comes to completion, whereas a gardener stays committed to the plants in all the seasons and is part of its life cycle. So it is with a teacher—one grows and evolves with the children.

The gardener cannot control the growth of plant. His or her only commitment is to nurture the seed, pause and observe. One cannot make a plant grow, the plant grows by itself. All one can do is to provide the conditions for growth. One doesn't blame the plant for not growing, for not blossoming or for wilting. One can only intervene in the environment and facilitate the growth of the plant. And this is yet another important fact when one is with children. One cannot mould them, make them into this or that. If you try to do that you destroy them.

Not all seeds grow the same way, not all blossom at the same time. Some grow with a wild urgency and some, so quietly. Not moulding the children, not grafting them to yield in particular ways, opens up a world of discoveries, where there is freedom to watch and learn as they grow with the gardener. There are seasons of plenty, and seasons where, to an onlooker, there seems no movement.

Like a gardener the teacher must take good care of herself, not be out in the blazing sun just because one has an idea of hard work. The moments one takes to pause and to look at the colours, smell the flowers, all lend themselves to action in nurturing the environment. To take a moment to pause is to take in the joy of their blossoming.

Working in the junior school is like being in a plant nursery. You have all these tiny seeds with all the potential in the world embedded them. To discover the right soil for each seed, the right amount of sunlight and water, and then watch them grow is the challenge I face every day.

In the junior school space where I teach, there is a sand pit, trees, lots of art material, some equipment for exploring like magnifying glasses and magnets, toys and games, as well as books and

random material like cloth, cardboard, pipes and ladders. All this is in the environment and depending on the interests we see in a child we bring out more appropriate resources.

Now the children—the seeds—are free to learn. One watches them and has a feeling of watching bees that are buzzing with a passion to live each day fully! Making houses, setting up shops, planning weddings, cooking, painting, collecting iron filings, reading, constructing, doing crochet, creating puppet shows, and much more. The children find many possibilities and are involved with their hearts through the day.

So what is our role?

We are the facilitators in the space. Not only with the activities the children are engaged in, but more in helping them relate with each other and the space. Teasing, talking rudely, comparing, and excluding, these are habits that they often find themselves caught in, and to help them pause and acknowledge these movements seems to be our primary role. Together finding confidence, trust and comfort with each other, being on one's learning journey without conforming to received ideas and habits, is the essence of our relationship. Through these interactions the children discover a ground that is secure and alive.

To Pay Attention to Everything

YASMIN JAYATHIRTHA



In Pala, a fictional place in Aldous Huxley's novel *Island*, the myna birds called out "attention, attention", "here and now boys, here and now". As I stand in line before lunch to rewash a badly washed plate, I ponder over the use of *mynas*. Would a few dozen, calling out "attention" or maybe, "is your plate clean?" help take away the burden of my saying the same thing?

I want our students to pay attention to what they are doing, but what is it that I want when I say 'pay attention'? The words 'concentration' and 'attention' are used almost interchangeably. Focus on tasks being done. In India, the archetype of concentration is Arjuna in *The Mahabharata*. In an archery exercise, his brothers and cousins tell their teacher what they see as they focus on the target:

"I see you, my brothers, the tree, the leaves, the bird..."

"Stand aside."

"I see the tree, the branches, the bird..."

"Stand aside."

"I see the branch, the bird..."

"Stand aside."

"I see the eye of the bird."

"Shoot."

This idea, that the task is the focus and everything else is distraction, is not borne out by studies on the brain and behaviour. Biologically, we seem geared to react to new information coming in, and attention keeps

shifting. When concentration is demanded in the classroom, we are essentially saying, “the task is clear, do it without deviation”. But the world persists in impinging on our minds, making concentration an ideal we cannot experience often.

A more modern formulation of attention is mindfulness—do your tasks mindfully, that is, think about them as you do them. This is not automatic, because you need to get input from the surroundings to decide what to do, but the focus is still on the task needing to be done. We pay attention to our surroundings so as to be able to deal with them. But we have to be selective, because our brains cannot deal with more than about five to nine items at a time. When information comes in faster than we can process it, our attention keeps shifting and there is a metabolic cost on the brain. Walk on an unknown path, and we notice details in the surroundings and everything is fresh and rich. Walk a known one, and our thoughts occupy our minds. There is no memory of the path taken, but I have reached my destination. Mindfulness perhaps will make sure that I am alert to the here and now, and remain connected to my surroundings, not lost in an environment of my thoughts. But it is still *I* who am alert to what surrounds *me*. I am the centre of the seeing. When my ego is in abeyance, I see the mountains as awe-inspiring and myself as insignificant. I can look at an insect and see that it is as important as me. This kind of seeing changes our sense of proportion.

What does it mean to pay attention to everything, when there is no foreground, background or focus? Sometimes, early in the morning, on just waking or when walking around, there is a brief moment (literally) when the world appears this way. How does it differ from the usual? There is no centre, so no proportion. No focus, because there is no response. A jolt and it is gone. I click into myself. I wouldn't know what to do if it lasted longer than that, how my life would change. But these moments give a glimpse of a reality not usually seen. They act as a reminder that my view may be biased, or at the least, narrowly focussed.

Reflections on Values and the Culture of Schools

RADHIKA HERZBERGER



Krishnamurti's educational philosophy forms a complex but coherent whole. I attempt in this article to disaggregate salient aspects of this wholeness. In the process, I challenge the basis of the division, so vividly captured in Professor Meenakshi Thapan's book *Life at School*, a sociological portrayal of Rishi Valley School in the 1980s, that characterizes Rishi Valley in that period as a school divided between 'ideologues', those who teach Krishnamurti, and 'pedagogues', those who teach academic subjects, such as history, biology and so on. I argue that the divide between ideologues and pedagogues is artificial. It is bridged if the values drawn from Krishnamurti's teachings are reflected in the subjects taught at school. I believe that a close study of his work reveals a coherent set of values that can be embedded into the teaching of subjects. This requires not only a close study of his work but also a cooperative effort. A Krishnamurti school should be a work of art whose parts when fitted into a coherent whole and imbued with a living spirit of inquiry, create an afterglow—what Krishnamurti, using a French word, referred to as *éclat*, implying both clarity and brilliance.

This article is divided into three parts. Part one outlines several broad features of the values Krishnamurti espoused. I argue, firstly, that these values and principles drawn from his thought are not unique to him but shared with a number of philosophers, poets and ecologists. Secondly, in Krishnamurti's talks to students and teachers we observe a vivid awareness of the reality that surrounds his educational institutions. This awareness is overlaid with a pained sense of the injustice, violence and degradation reflected in what he sees. I take this to mean that relevance to the immediate environment is an important principle in framing curricula in the schools.

Part two is a brief overview of Rishi Valley School's history curriculum, fleshed out on the basis of selected values rooted in Krishnamurti's teachings and exemplified in the writings of other poets, philosophers, scientists and historians as well.

Part three sketches Krishnamurti's critique of an educational philosophy based *exclusively* on values and principles. It explores Krishnamurti's concept of 'negative thinking', a phrase he uses interchangeably with 'right thinking'. Negative thinking distinguishes his educational thought from liberal thought. It draws attention to what may be described as 'educating the emotions', but is better captured by his idea of 'educating the whole person'.

I

In the winter of 1982, Krishnamurti handed me a copy of Chief Seattle's famous speech made in 1854, addressed to the President of the United States. The Chief's letter contrasts the values by which the Red Man lives with those of the recently arrived white immigrants, and contains a warning. Because "all things are connected" the chief argues, "even the white man cannot escape the common destiny" of man and beast, "Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth."

The following year, Krishnamurti gave me a book about whales. *Mind in the Water* is a plea to conserve the oceans and the large mammals that inhabit it. It is an anthology containing essays by leading scientists in whale brain studies, neurology and societal habits. The collection however extends beyond science to include the poets DH Lawrence, Pablo Neruda, Michael McClure as well as scholars of whale myths in world literatures. Handing me the book, Krishnamurti said, "Create a school the like of which there is no other." It was an impossible challenge. The unspoken identification with these increasingly threatened creatures of the sea was evident from the tone of his voice.

I took these two texts as pointers to what he felt should be taught at school. I asked myself a few broader questions: Did these documents contain values that could be embedded in a larger vision for the school? Did Krishnamurti share the values of the poets and philosophers embedded in these works?

The following poem by Pablo Neruda, from *Mind in the Water*, does illustrate several of the values Krishnamurti's educational philosophy has in common. The values of silence, of non-action, of solitude, of non-violence, of self-knowledge, for instance, are prized in the writings of both.

Keeping Quiet

*Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still.*

*This one time upon the earth,
Let's not speak any language,
Let's stop for one second,
and not move our arms so much.
It would be a delicious moment,
without hurry, without locomotives,
all of us would be together
in a sudden uneasiness.*

*The fishermen in the cold sea
would do no harm to the whales
and the peasant gathering salt
would look at his torn hands.*

*Those who prepare green wars,
wars of gas, wars of fire,
victories without survivors,
would put on clean clothing
and would walk alongside their brothers
in the shade, without doing a thing.*

*if we could do nothing for once,
perhaps a great silence would
interrupt this sadness,
this never understanding ourselves
and threatening ourselves with death,
perhaps the earth is teaching us
when everything seems to be dead
and then everything is alive.*

*Now I will count to twelve
and you keep quiet and I'll go.*

—*Full Woman, Fleshly Apple, Hot Moon*, tr. Stephen Mitchell

We live at a time when there are few remaining commons on the planet, and the oceans and the polar regions, for instance, are under threat. The texts that Krishnamurti gave me pointed to a realm where both the abstractions of scientists and the lyricism of poets meet in the service of conserving nature. It was an important lesson as I undertook to begin crafting study materials for the middle school students.

Another of Krishnamurti's concern is that students and teachers cultivate the art of looking. At his school in Banaras, he asks, "You see those poor women go by, day after day, and you do not even know that they wear torn clothes and carry so much weight. You do not even notice them because you are used to them. Getting used to something is to grow insensitive to it. This process is destructive, as such a mind is a dull mind, a stupid mind." (Fifth Talk to Students at Rajghat School, Banaras, 1954)

Krishnamurti's exhortation drew my attention to a second, much larger area of concern. It suggested that direct perception be integrated with intellectual analysis in what we teach. Since learning cannot be merely abstract, the curriculum should be relevant to the school's immediate surroundings. While it may be relevant in the context of creating a global outlook to study the great fires that are now ravaging the rain forest in Indonesia, it is equally important to study the fires in the surrounding hills and the reason why local shepherds are reduced to starting these fires. This draws educators into a more complex understanding of problems of poverty and degradation of landscapes. Such relevance was a second principle that I hoped to incorporate into the materials for the classroom.

In order to grasp the reach of Krishnamurti's philosophy, it is moreover necessary to step beyond curricular values to the more comprehensive area of moral responsibility and action born of responsibility. Krishnamurti held that not only individual students but schools too should be responsible for their immediate surroundings— for instance,

in the case of Rishi Valley, for the barren hills, the depleting virgin forests on Rishi Konda, as well as the stone cutting, shepherding and farming communities that live here. Over a period of time, we created outreach programmes in the areas of reforestation, rural education and health. We also realized that taking responsibility was a lifelong commitment.

Based on the discussion so far, I conclude that curriculum in a Krishnamurti school should reflect both global and local contexts; and it should be coherent and value-based.

II

This section is meant to outline in broad brush strokes the manner in which Rishi Valley School's history curriculum has been framed within intellectual, moral and aesthetic values embedded in the philosophy of the founder. These values include the unity of humankind, a concern for species that share the Earth with humans and a global world view. Against the backdrop of contemporary realities, these values are brought together to create a rational relationship to the past. This is based on the understanding that the past is reconstructed on the basis of evidence and that fresh evidence can overturn our understanding of the past.

This runs counter to the contemporary trends in the teaching of history, which seek to glorify the past of a nation at the expense of truth. It is clearly a disservice to students to present history in distorted ways, that is, in the face of available evidence. When students lack the ability to test beliefs against available evidence, they are unable to debate contending ideas and think independently. Debate and dialogue have ancient roots in India and remained in the public sphere as a way of settling disputes between schools of philosophy—the Jainas engaged the Bauddhas, who in turn debated with the Lokayatas, and the Nyaya philosophers in the presence of kings. Teachers too should invoke this spirit inside and outside the classroom.

From common human origins to simple and complex societies

The social studies curriculum in the Middle School, that is, in classes 7 and 8, begins with an account of Charles Darwin's voyage to the Galapagos Islands. At the end of his voyage Darwin concludes that all life forms have a common origin, that human beings have common

ancestors, and so are related to each other and also to other living beings. His theory destroys old prejudices about race and caste while affirming the universality of human nature. A humanist strain in scientific thought is thus brought into the classroom.

The livelihoods of stone cutters, shepherds and cattle farmers in the isolated valley where the school is located can be traced back to prehistoric times. The diverse social formations here resonate with the observations of the great historian D.D. Kosambi. He noted that the telescoping of time, in other words, the contemporaneous existence of many stages of human development, is a general but unique feature of India's history. According to Kosambi, India is a country of "long survivals". His observation, in addition, helps frame the sequential development of human cultures from Stone Age societies onwards. It also clarifies an important conceptual distinction between simple societies, such as those found in the Andamans, and complex societies that emerged during Neolithic times, leading during the third millennium BCE to the cities on the Indus. Students come to understand that concepts such as 'surplus', 'division of labour' and 'hierarchical organization' characterize complex societies.

Poems, painting and stories are used to illustrate this pre-historic period of cultural development. Wall paintings from Bhimbetka and Alta Mira, a Psalm from the *Old Testament*, a poem by Jalaluddin Rumi and a hymn from the *Atharva Veda* to the Mother Goddess round out students' understanding of food-gathering, pastoral and farming communities. Three case studies of ancient formations surviving into modern times provide occasions for highlighting a variety of issues that are relevant to the present. One is the study of life among the food gathering tribal populations in the Andaman Islands, which focuses on the place of ritual in settling conflict between clans. This encourages pupils to examine the level of violence endemic in modern societies, in contrast with the comparatively more peaceful life of the island's tribal population. Second, we look at the place of myth in deciphering the past, as featured in a case study of pastoralists of the Deccan. These myths explain the success of nomadic shepherding communities and their symbiotic relationship with settled farmers that emerged in the semi-arid regions of the Deccan. The aim is to provide students with a

framework through which they may view the subsistence practices of the local rural population. A third culture we study is Bali, whose terraced rice fields and water-sharing rituals provide a striking example of a culture that distributes water rights in accordance with the needs of rice cultivation rather than property rights. The complex civilization that developed in Bali, without the benefit of any significant urbanization, is intended to offset the Eurocentric view that civilization is identical with city life.

The course that begins with Charles Darwin's theory of common human origins ends with a chapter on the nature of prejudice and how prejudice afflicts our lives. Students are expected to write about their prejudices and how they overcame them. This is an exercise in ethical thinking.

Ancient India

Ancient Indian history is a fanatically contested field today. European racial theories of the nineteenth century cast a shadow over this period. To counter these theories, students are taught that speakers who share a language do not necessarily belong to the same race; in fact, the very notion of an Indian race characterized by a unique set of genes has never been established. The chapter reinforces the lesson that evidence drawn from very different sources, such as archaeology and linguistics, supports our understanding of the past and helps to draw the scientific spirit into the study of history. A chapter on the Indo-Europeans traces the transition from early worship of nature gods, to the growing importance of rituals and *mantrams* to win the gods' favour. This eventually leads to the idea that doubt and persistent questioning of reality alone paves the path to truth. This sense of progression and change in unlikely areas, such as religion, is communicated to students. The *Mahabharata* is an important focus of study at this stage. The stories of Ekalavya and Karna are occasions for students to reflect on ideas of injustice in a hierarchical society.

World Religions and European History

European History, in particular, the Bill of Rights and the French Revolution, form a prelude to a study of the Indian Constitution. The constitutional protection of religious freedom is highlighted as students

get acquainted with two major religious faiths, namely, Islam and Christianity (the Vedas, Upanishads, Jainism and Buddhism having been covered in earlier years). The unit provides an occasion for demonstrating that art, architecture, literature, mathematics and science flourished around each of these world religions. The interplay between the rights of the community articulated in one of Ashoka's Edicts, which form such a distinct aspect of traditional thought, is contrasted with the modern idea of the individual as the repository of rights. The tension between the two is foregrounded today in the context of community patents, and the larger conflict over the commons.

Colonial History, the Freedom Struggle and Nationalism

Students are introduced to the great diversity of cultures found in India with a view to contrasting this with the relative homogeneity of countries in Europe, where the idea of the nation originated. Two passages detail the difference between cultural formations and military styles in seventeenth-and eighteenth-century India and Europe. The first reading consists of an extract from Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain*, which describes the diversity of Indian cultures, with tribal societies existing contemporaneously with feudal ones and contrasts the slower styles of military engagements in India with the agility and superior tactics of European adventurers. The second passage is from *A Voyage to Surat* in which a chaplain in the employ of the East India Company urges the then Government in Britain to subsidize the Company's commercial venture. It presupposes that the 'general good' is congruent with what benefits England's commercial interests. The passage sets the stage for the study of nationalism.

The idea of nationalism is communicated to students in terms of its two salient features—territorial sovereignty and the cultural homogeneity of the people within the territory. The homogeneity is captured in the romantic ideal of the nation having 'a soul'. Rabindranath Tagore, the great poet and Nobel Laureate from Bengal, was the first to point to the dangers of adopting nationalism as a unifying principle for a country of diverse cultures such as India. In his novel *Ghare Baire*—a story tracing the consequences of the *swadeshi* movement following the partition of Bengal—he warned against the

price nationalism would extract, namely a division between the Muslim and Hindu communities. Nikhil, the tragic hero of the novel speaks for Tagore when he says, “I am willing to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it.” At a time when the planet is in peril and nation states spend several trillion dollars arming themselves, it is important to point out to students that divisiveness is inherent in nationalist ideologies and that it is in the interest of humanity to look at groups other than your own with sympathetic eyes.

A word of caution is however necessary at this point because nations do have a liberal side, which upholds justice and intends to transcend internal divisions. The Indian Constitution with its list of fundamental rights and guarantees of equality before the law is a commitment to justice. Students should be taught that India is founded on a secular constitution that guarantees equal rights for all its citizens. The Indian Constitution is a commitment made by men and women, among them the Dalit leader Baba Saheb Ambedkar, who struggled to win freedom with justice for all of India’s future citizens.

To orient students in a broader historical context informed by present realities, to free them from a false view of the past, to point out that pride takes second place to truth, is not to strip them of love of the country’s culture. A love of the mountains, forests and rivers is part of human consciousness; it does not have to be reinforced with military parades. “Our mind”, said Rabindranath Tagore, referring to people of this land, “has faculties which are universal, but its habits are insular”. The main thrust of Krishnamurti’s philosophy too was to break down this insularity of the individual. Freedom and truth, according to Krishnamurti, go hand in hand. Therein lies an important lesson for teaching history at school.

III

A rational, value-based curriculum, though important, is however only one feature of Krishnamurti schools. Krishnamurti was acutely aware of the limitations inherent in such an approach. Based on his perception that thinking and feeling are unitary, Krishnamurti critiques all

institutions that treat values merely as inspirational goals, while ignoring the underlying emotions attached to the ideals they promote. He points out that values cut off from self-knowledge create the platform for the divided self. “Right thinking,” he says, “is not the outcome of mere cultivation of the intellect, nor is it conformity to pattern, however worthy and noble. Right thinking comes with self-knowledge. Without understanding yourself, you have no basis for thought; without self-knowledge, what you think is not true.” Untruth has the undertone of inauthentic emotions—patting yourself on the back narcissistically or kicking yourself masochistically. It is ‘false consciousnesses’. In its implications for education, Krishnamurti’s idea of untruth is worthy of notice:

...the discarding, the tearing through of false things, breaking down the things that man has put together for his own security, for his own inward safety, all the various defences and the mechanism of thought which builds these defences. I feel one must shatter them, go through them rapidly, swiftly, and see if there is anything beyond. (London, 11th Public Talk, 25 May 1961)

This challenge addressed to individuals, teachers, students and the population at large is intended to make persons turn their gaze inward, to face the darker sides of their nature, to cast aside their inauthentic social selves, and learn to live a life of virtue. In other words, to examine their lives not only critically but in transformative ways. “You can”, he tells students:

...observe a cloud or a tree or the movement of a river with a fairly quiet mind because they are not very important to you, but to watch yourself is much more difficult because there the demands are so practical, the reactions so quick. So when you are directly in contact with fear or despair, loneliness or jealousy, or any other ugly state of mind, can you look at it so completely that your mind is quiet enough to see it? (*Freedom from the Known*)

It is typical of Krishnamurti’s style of communication that the last quotation ends with a question. It is a point where the art of observing and of questioning merge. For questions spark the art of observation, and persistent questioning creates an actively observing mind. When he urges students and teachers to observe their inner lives, he is teaching

them to carry over minute observation of details in the natural world into the inner landscape. The inward turning reveals a wilderness, to be observed with the eyes of a naturalist and not those of a gardener intent on pulling out weeds and manicuring the landscape.

Finally, Krishnamurti held that the ability to ‘see’ the real, however ugly, is liberating. It liberates the mind frozen in ideologies and opinions. The art of seeing things as they are releases the hidden streams of compassion:

If you can see all these things and have great sympathy and understanding—understanding for the rich who go in big cars blowing dust everywhere, and understanding for the poor beggar and the poor ekka horse which is almost a walking skeleton. Knowing all that, having the feeling of it not merely in words but inwardly. The feeling that this world is ours, yours and mine, not the rich man’s nor the communist’s, to be made beautiful—if you feel all this, then behind it there is something much deeper. But to understand that which is much deeper and beyond the mind, the mind has to be free, quiet, and the mind cannot be quiet without understanding all this. (Fifth Talk to Students at Rajghat School, Banaras, 1954)

The outstanding question is whether teachers are positioned to communicate this dimension of his educational philosophy. The responsibility of the educator to work with a free and quiet mind and help students to “to give right value to property, to relationship, to ideas”, is indeed a strenuous challenge. It is, in Krishnamurti’s words, an “arduous” task. (Madras 11th Talk, 28 December 1947)



I began by drawing on a study of the values implicit in Krishnamurti’s philosophy. I unravelled some elements of Krishnamurti’s complex educational philosophy and documented a possible application of these values to the history curriculum. I end now by locating Krishnamurti’s educational challenge in contemporary times.

Krishnamurti was a radical thinker who called for a new kind of education to bring about a good human being for a good society. He saw traditional education as a servant of national or economic interests, designed to produce chauvinistic citizens and efficient workers. In

contrast, the kind of education he favoured was designed to help people to keep alive 'a flame of discontent'. He was ever a stern critic of social conditions and the ways of living that support those conditions. He often began his talks with comments on the state of the world, followed closely by a call for change. He was acutely aware of the lack of moral progress in human history. In his long life he had witnessed two devastating wars, social revolutions and the creation of weapons of mass destruction. He saw repeated failures of disarmament campaigns, social reform, peace movements and attempts at world government.

However, Krishnamurti tempered this awareness of human deficiencies with a radiant sense of human possibilities. He offered a vision of a good society, free from all kinds of violence, aggression and brutality. He insisted that this vision was not utopian, but an actual human possibility. The agents of this kind of change would be good human beings with a robust sense of responsibility. The right kind of education would produce 'a new generation of people' who in turn would create a new society. I feel it is essential that teachers in these schools study his writings in much greater depth so that they are better positioned to fulfil the founder's moral vision.

I end with a quotation that states the aims of education and the need for creating 'the right climate and environment', in other words culture, in his schools.

The purpose, the aim and drive of these schools, is to equip the child with the most excellent technological proficiency so that the student may function with clarity and efficiency in the modern world. A far more important purpose than this is to create the right climate and environment so that the child may develop fully as a complete human being. This means giving the child the opportunity to flower in goodness so that he or she is rightly related to people, things and ideas, to the whole of life. To live is to be related. (*On Education*)

Uncovering Conditioning*

COLIN FOSTER



A school is a place where teachers and students 'discover' their own conditioning and how it distorts their thinking. This conditioning is the self to which such tremendous and cruel importance is given. Freedom from this conditioning and its misery begins with this awareness.

J Krishnamurti, Ojai, 1984

Many students come to Brockwood Park School unaware that they have a deep conditioning imposed upon them by their culture and society through schooling, advertising, music, the media and sports. We ran a course at Brockwood last year, primarily for grades 11 and 12 students, with the aim of uncovering this conditioning. Of course the staff come with their own conditioning, the depth of which is not to be underestimated. The deepest division that our conditioning takes for granted is that the observer is separate from the observed, and that the world is a separate entity from us.

In this course we tried to show the falseness of these divisions without wishing to impose, overtly or inadvertently, another type of conditioning. One thing this meant was to not negatively label 'conditioning' as undesirable; this labeling is already part of a conditioned habit, and would also imply that we understood the content and processes of conditioning well enough to make that judgment.

So the intention of the course was just to look at the 'what is' of conditioning and then, perhaps, any seeing of the fact of it would have its own action. However, at the end of the course we

*This article follows on from the topics raised in the last issue of the *Journal of Krishnamurti Schools* concerning conditioning.

felt it was important to do an activity (which is described later), the aim of which was to go beyond conditioning.

The course did not involve much discussion of conditioning as such, as we wanted to engage the student in activities that reveal its nature. The difficulty with conditioning is that it is like my glasses; it shapes my vision but can't be seen directly. Fortunately conditioning acts in nearly all our perceptions, reactions and behaviour, so that there are many types of areas where it could reveal its consequences.

I would like to sketch some of the activities that challenged the students' assumptions about the nature of everyday perception and that also showed how we construct our world.

One such activity involved optical illusions. These are usually addressed as amusing phenomena that, though surprising, don't have much significance. I beg to differ. They show clearly and directly how conditioning works in our perception. They have a further significance in that they remain as an illusion even when we know they are illusions!

Related to optical illusions are 'low information' pictures, where the students have to construct an image from the given data. Some see it directly, others have difficulty until they have the 'ah-ha' moment. Also, the 'gorilla in the basketball court' experiment (see

www.theinvisiblegorilla.com) is available online, where one is 'blind' to what one doesn't expect to see.

A very different area we then looked at was Zeno's paradoxes and Einstein's theory of relativity. The physicist David Bohm has theorized, using the psychologist Jean Piaget's work, that these space-time phenomena are surprising to us because we have forgotten how our conditioned concepts of space and time were formed as young children. This area often left the students in a healthy state of bewilderment as to what the words 'reality', 'truth' and 'actuality' meant.

We also tried to get at the conditioned assumptions that our students had, by asking how they were thinking about a 'hot' issue in the school, in particular to do with, say, a decision to ask a student to leave Brockwood due to misbehaviour. We set the scene so that this elicited strong responses not so much to do with the decision but to do with values and priorities.

My point here is to show that the scope of resources is really quite large. The intention of these activities was to become aware of the processes and depth of conditioning without the distorting assumption that it needs to be eliminated.

However, it seems clear that to encounter life only with conditioned

responses is an impoverished way to live. An activity that tried to go beyond conditioning involved asking students to go out of the classroom and, firstly, to look at an object in nature in such a way that the object tells its own story, not to project 'naming' and 'judgements' on it, and perhaps to see it in some kind of detail. A second activity was to close one's eyes for a moment and then look again to see something of the object not seen before. With other experiments

like this, including experimenting with looking at the 'whole', the aim was to experience a perception where conditioning was not needed, where it had no place, and so was quiet. We said to the students that it was not necessary to verbally report their observations; it was the doing that mattered and not the words that described it. Whether or not this activity achieved its aim, it seemed the students were quieter and more reflective at the end of it.

The Spirit of the Game

JEFF WELCH



I have played soccer for thirty-three years. During this time, several old timers like myself have tried to encourage a non-competitive game by asking players who must keep score to keep it to themselves and to make the game as fun as possible with no overeager competitiveness. We encourage new players to pass the ball rather than try to dribble around opponents, which often ends up with their being dispossessed of the ball, to the frustration of the rest of the team. We also try to avoid blasting the ball at the goalkeepers and instead use skill to get the ball into the small goals that we have. These may seem like minor points, even trivial, but let us take a closer look. The culture here in the US with its motif of ‘the American dream’ emphasizes the individual. Nowhere is this more evident than in sports where individuals, not teams, are given huge incentives. It follows the model of corporate America where the CEOs are rewarded with huge salaries and bonuses if the firm is succeeding, and even if not.

I love playing soccer, especially when there is a working together as a team and when just, sometimes, there is a sense of what is called ‘being in the zone’, where there is a movement—maybe a series of passes—that has a flow or beauty that makes the rest of the game worthwhile. The end result of the movement may or may not result in a goal being scored. For me, the feeling of life moving through me and giving myself up to it is enough to keep this tired old frame returning twice a week. It reminds us, in a satisfying way, that we are all connected and, if we can work as a team, learning is that much more effective. For clarity here I must emphasize that it is not ‘me’ that is learning, since, at the most receptive times, ‘I’ is not present; being in the zone is actually ‘not being’, and therefore not getting in the way of the movement of life’s energy. Insight comes through the absence, not the presence, of ‘me’. Sadly, I see mostly the influence of the ‘me culture’ where it is so hard for players to pass the ball, especially the younger ones and those

who have learned dribbling skills, often at the expense of their passing skills.

Giving the ball to another player is very difficult if you think that you are losing something you have, and are also losing the future possibility for the ultimate prize and status of scoring. You may have more confidence in yourself than in the other players, and do not want to risk losing the ball by passing, and this will be your rationale. Such persons—often with natural talent—can ruin the fun if they are not team players and don't want to include others whom they see as below them. This can also create an atmosphere of fear, with the less gifted making even more errors due to the subtle and not so subtle pressure, like comments about whom not to pass to. Anyone who has taught soccer will know the phenomenon where the 'good' players will pass more frequently to the other 'good' players, ensuring that the weaker players will learn slower or not at all, due to lack of experience. Trying to change this culture is a formidable task indeed. We can try to mitigate the non-inclusion by offering, for example, games where a certain number of players in the team have to touch the ball before a goal can be made, even though this will be frustrating for the more skilled players. Hopefully, we can talk about that at the end of the period. However, this will not reverse the much deeper on-going conditioning permeating the 'me' culture.

In the classroom this would be akin to a teacher calling upon all the students to either read or to respond to questions, regardless of their academic levels. It is frustrating to hear weak readers, or those who stumble over their words, if you have the idea that there is an object to the lesson and that you are somehow losing out if you allow for 'weakness'. This is just like the frustration in a game when a player makes lots of mistakes, when your goal is to win the game. Having myself been taught in the traditional mode, it is hard for me too, at times, to pass to a player who is not as skilled as some others. However, something in me is also cognizant of the fact that this player has worked hard to create the space that allows her to receive the ball, and I notice that I respect that by passing. Year after year I also notice that the 'most improved player' will not be one of the so-called 'good' players but rather one who has struggled to improve despite limitations. I feel some satisfaction in having possibly helped that growth by my extra attention and encouragement to him or her. I find it curious that one or two of the more competitive older players will rarely pass to players perceived as weaker, and year after year they play the same game even though they constantly make mistakes themselves. Since these are adults, they often take umbrage at actual conversations about how to improve the game by including everyone

and working as a team. Though my weekly refrain of “pass the ball for god’s sake!” seems to go unheard, it also seems that I can only be the change that I want to see, for no other reason than it feels right. I could go on about the inner game of soccer, but let us just take this analogy and see how it might apply more generally in our lives.

You probably do not play soccer; however, the psychology as seen on the soccer field will most certainly be affecting your life, no matter what field you are in. Even in the protected ‘ivory towers’ of our schools, it may be no different from elsewhere. We are not so far from the madding crowd as we might think. The point is, can we approach our educational experiment as a team, each one equally responsible (taking now a boating metaphor) not only for rowing but also, far more importantly, for setting the course and navigating? Some questions that we could be asking ourselves are these: Are we gradually being sucked into the mainstream? Are we out to win the game, and what cost are we willing to pay for that? Is the game less fun? Will we appoint team leaders for their perceived successes? Do players have to constantly ‘perform’? Will learning suffer in an atmosphere of fear where the playing field is not level?

Can we have ‘state of the union’ meetings regularly with all the players

involved, to ensure that all voices are heard and everyone gets to have the ball—or talking stick—occasionally, so that they feel part of the team and see that their contribution matters? It is easy to talk about classroom management or teaching techniques, but teachers also unwittingly teach much more by their actions. It is therefore incumbent upon them to discuss and address all things that affect them and the classrooms, whether these be uncomfortable or not. Do teachers feel free enough to express both what they would love to teach and what they might like to change, without thinking that they may be told they cannot play the game anymore?

There are a few young players who have played with us for years and who exhibit generous, gentle, skilled, intelligent behaviour on the field. Of course, it really has nothing to do with them; life lives through them in this way and has shown them that in the long run if we share, we win—not this particular game maybe, but the larger game of life. It is just wisdom. I am really addressing the human condition here, which is a reflection of the mistaken idea that we are all separate and need to fight others to survive. We can only hope that the younger players can display the wisdom to influence the rest of us so that there is more connection and, of course, more fun for all in the game.

Patchwork Stories

VENKATESH ONKAR AND KAMALA MUKUNDA



We are all patchwork, and of such an unformed and diverse composition that each part, each moment, plays its role. And one finds as much difference between us and ourselves, as between us and others.

Montaigne

A twelve-year-old student had been bullying a younger boy on the school bus. When confronted with his bullying, he dissolved into tears and said it was not fair that only he was being blamed for something others also did. I recounted this story to a colleague, who commented, “So it’s just a front, then.” But was the boy basically a bully putting on a vulnerable exterior, or basically a softie putting on a tough exterior? Which statement depicts his ‘true’ character?

Is there such a thing as the real person, fixed in orientation to the world?

We do observe quite predictable patterns of behaviour in adults. We experience personalities that are essentially cautious, uptight, bristly, gentle, angry, humorous, preachy! Children too seem to possess essential personality traits, even though our descriptions of them (compared to adults) may seem more fluid. We teachers are often struck by how closely our perceptions of individual children agree. Images certainly have the potential to be rigid, but it is interesting that our images of the basic constitution of a person can concur. More often than not, we see stability over the years in children’s personalities. Often we despair that there has been no change in dysfunctional traits such as one child’s resistance to work or another’s aggressive tendencies.

Moreover, we seem to like our images of people and seek confirmation of them, both from their actions, and from others' descriptions. Even when children display inconsistencies, we look for the 'real' person underneath it all. We look for consistency and neatness to explain the situation. So when a child is a bully on the bus, but kind and helpful in class, we struggle to pigeonhole him, to settle on the final explanation. He's essentially X, but at times some factor Y makes him behave in uncharacteristic ways.

How did this 'real person' emerge?

Adults certainly seem to display full-blown personalities, but where did these come from? Developmental psychologists have long been interested in the question of temperament. Temperament has two aspects—it is thought to be genetically influenced (even newborns have recognizable temperaments), and there are differences among newborns on temperamental dimensions. All babies show attachment to their caregivers, so that is not an example of temperament. But some babies are more active than others, or some babies show more negative emotion than others—these are examples of temperament. There seems to be something inevitable (biological) about these early differences. However, very quickly the environment begins to act on, and be acted upon by the newborn's temperamental qualities. As the years roll by, human interactive processes can channel a few basic temperaments into a variety of colourful personalities! Temperament evolves into personality along pathways that now seem much less inevitable, and also much more sensitive to context. That is, our behaviour is not always the same across different situations. Yet repeating patterns of responding do exist, because both genetic and environmental forces condition us to behave in habitual ways. No wonder we are tempted to, and yet find it difficult to, peg our twelve-year-old bully (or is it softie?).

Early personality is soon recognized, described and amplified by others in the child's environment. We may not see it, but we are forming our own and each others' personalities in subtle and ongoing ways: in community life, in families, in offices, in intimate relationships. In her ways of reacting to a parent, a child fashions her life along a

certain trajectory. If her family's politics are conservative, she may create for herself a radical personality. Conversely, another child may be broadly shaped in line with family beliefs. A father's anxiety may be heightened by a child's rebelliousness, but the way he responds only increases the rebellion and therefore his own anxiety. Or a child's rebelliousness may lead the parent to give in, with different consequences for both personalities!

The picture of personality formation gets more complex and interesting as we move further and further away from the newborn with its simple temperamental tendencies. A peer group, a romantic interest, a hobby, a cultivated eccentricity, a talent—there are many arenas in which personality is formed. We adopt an interest, and want it to endure and define who we are. It makes us feel comfortable to be describable. 'I am not like that', 'I hate pink' and 'My favourite actor is so and so'. We can become obsessed with these markers of personality.

Society certainly encourages us to do conscious self-definition. Today this is true for certain sections in society, but the trend will doubtless extend eventually to many other social groups. What is common to all of us, regardless of our social position, is the urge to develop a story of ourselves in which we are the heroes. This narrative of uniqueness is enthusiastically encouraged at every turn by our contemporary social environments. We are constantly building, tweaking, communicating and acting out our narratives. Children's rooms (and adults' homes!) are decorated with their thoughts of who they are and who they want to be seen as. Advertisements seek to appeal to our sense of ourselves through what we choose to buy, 'Express *Yourself* through our product', they tell us. Virtually any aspect of daily life can become the theatre of our personality.

Increasingly, there is a feeling that developing this personality is the key to success or happiness. An online search of the phrase 'personality development workshop' yields almost a million results. Catch phrases include 'a better understanding of your personality', 'become a better person', 'discover yourself', all of which will 'help further shape your personality, to make a bigger mark'.

What relationship does education have with the development of personality?

For the purpose of this article, we are not looking at the skill- and knowledge-building aspects of education, but rather the way education impacts personality. A significant amount of teacher energy goes into moulding students' personalities, fixing the little flaws, changing the person into a more 'manageable type'. None of this is a part of the organized curriculum, but there is something about bringing many children into one space that triggers our impulse to control and contain. Thus in most schools, a certain kind of personality is rewarded—the obedient, polite and hardworking child. The urge to respect authority is inculcated, but so too is ambition and looking out for oneself. In so-called 'alternative' schools, the attempt may be quite different—to nurture kindness, sensitivity, responsibility. But if the struggle for the student then becomes to define herself as kind, sensitive and responsible, doesn't that too turn into a kind of personality development?

In contrast, in some circles of 'child-centred' education, it is almost obligatory to celebrate the unique personhood of each child! The idea seems to be to encourage personality formation, to reinforce small tendencies in children. In cultivating strong declared likes, dislikes, favourites and idiosyncrasies, a stronger personality emerges. The phrase 'individual attention' is often used these days to characterize this kind of education. Many parents instinctively feel this will be good for their child, in contrast to the assembly-line approach of traditional education, and schools accordingly advertise themselves in this vein. Students certainly seem to reap some positive benefits from this approach. They feel special, and this may lead to increased motivation and eventual success. They can take control of a specific facet of their lives—becoming part of a musical sub-culture, for example—and sustaining it to feel secure.

Whatever the educational thrust, it seems important to pay closer attention to the process of personality formation. It seems an essentially benign process, but the darker undertones emerge just beneath the surface. Catering to personality nourishes the ego and justifies an outlook that is already essentially self-centred. There can be a profound

disregard of others and the ways in which ‘we’ are actually formed by many threads of life. There is the additional bias, that our inner package of self-images is justified—in other words, we always have excellent reasons for why we are the way we are! Sustaining a personality takes an energy that can become all-absorbing. There can be a diminished capacity to appreciate the bigger picture as the person grows up, when the person is geared towards ‘my’ particular outlook. If billions of humans approach their inner and outer worlds in this fashion (as is certainly the case), the capacity for living lightly with a sense of freedom from the tyranny of the self is massively crippled. The personal, social and ecological consequences of this self-absorption are terrifyingly self-evident across the planet.

Another possibility...

There is another way to look at this whole question of personality. There is the fact that our psychological lives are shared across all humanity; we are not uniquely trapped within our minds. A deeper reality connects us all, humans and all other life forms. As many mystics have observed, we are essentially empty and free within. Upon this emptiness is the construction of our seemingly separate identities. As for the personalities we experience in each other, just because a person’s behaviour is repetitive and predictable does not imply that there is ‘someone inside’. In the light of all this, how are we to live and work with the young entrusted to us, and also with each other?

As we have seen, the child certainly comes to us with some tendencies and dispositional habits. We will soon recognize these as patterns of responding to situations in school. The way we respond, in turn, could potentially crystallize these habits, so we need to watch this process of solidification. Very soon, we will begin to describe the child to each other, to her parents, to herself. We write long, descriptive reports of the child each year—these are helpful and insightful, but how can we ensure that they do not become rigidly limiting? We have to respond to situations afresh, watching the need to fix the child as being one way or another. Can we, as learning communities of adults and students, experiment with both temperament and personality, not pushing for a continuing narrative of self-definition? By watching ourselves, by being

curious about the formation of identity, by wordlessly questioning our assumptions regarding this matter, we lighten the energy of self-occupation that personalities generate. The personality can be seen as rising and falling naturally, fading and swelling, as do the sights, sounds and smells of daily life, without a centralizing power and without the need to control the process of living. As the child grows older and more self-aware, we could invite her to watch the need to feed the personality as it arises and to remain interested in the question of the essential unreality of the self.

One must clearly understand that the narrating self is none other than the narrated stories. Apart from the stories there is nothing. Or rather, no one [...] Most people find that a shocking assertion. I've never understood why. I find it quite pleasant that that's how it is. Somehow [...] liberating.

Pascal Mercier

ON CONFLICT

Conflict of any kind—physically, psychologically, intellectually—is a waste of energy. Please, it is extraordinarily difficult to understand and to be free of this because most of us are brought up to struggle, to make effort. When we are at school, that is the first thing that we are taught to make an effort. And that struggle, that effort is carried throughout life, that is, to be good you must struggle, you must fight evil, you must resist, control. So, educationally, sociologically, religiously, human beings are taught to struggle. You are told that to find God you must work, discipline, do practice, twist and torture your soul, your mind, your body, deny, suppress; that you must not look; that you must fight, fight, fight at that so-called spiritual level which is not the spiritual level at all. Then, socially each one is out for himself, for his family.

So, all around, we are wasting energy. And that waste of energy in essence is conflict: the conflict between “I should” and “I should not,” “I must” and “I must not.” Once having created duality, conflict is inevitable.

J Krishnamurti, *The Book of Life*

To Take the Arduous Path

P RAMESH



Conflict, then, can exist only between environment—environment being economic and social conditions, political domination, neighbours—between that environment, and the result of environment, which is the ‘I’. Conflict can exist only so long as there is reaction to that environment which produces the ‘I’, the self. The majority of people are unconscious of this conflict—the conflict between one’s self, which is but the result of the environment, and the environment itself; very few are conscious of this continuous battle.

Second Talk in The Oak Grove, Ojai, 17 June 1934

If you are aware you will realize that your mind is constantly engaged in the activities of the ego and its identification; if you pursue this activity further, you will find the deep-seated self-interest.

Reflection on the Self, First Talk in The Oak Grove, 7 April 1946

‘Conflict’ is the buzz word. Recently, a long retired but still immensely respected cricketer was being asked for his views on the question of ‘conflict of interest’, an issue that has been plaguing Indian cricket authorities for some time now. He himself perhaps had two roles to play, namely those of an advisor and a commentator. He was unable to see why there should be a conflict of interest at all and asserted that there wasn’t. I bring this up because the two words ‘conflict’ and ‘interest’ are suggestive in a Krishnamurtian context. As Krishnamurti put it, “where there is division there must be conflict” and “where there is self-interest there must be corruption” (By corruption he meant much more than merely passing money under the table). However, in today’s world, there

could be not one but a double interest, and yet one can carry on breezily saying that there is interest but no conflict, as there is no division! Apparently, as long as the money from both sources goes to the same person, there is no division, hence no conflict of interest—QED. If you did not notice, integrity just went out of the back door.

The sport-related issue mentioned above would be helpful in moving from the outer, the world out there, to the inner, our psychological world where all our hypocrisy, insecurity, anxiety, greed and ambition reside. What we see 'out there' is of course the spill over from this inner world. In the world we have made there is grievous economic inequality, appalling corruption, unprecedented levels of private and public violence and so on. In order to address these issues, governments put up structures of all kinds and imagine that much amelioration is taking place. However, this is the old story of the thief dressing himself as a policeman and searching for the thief, only that all of us are in this together. There is no 'they'.

In our personal lives, especially among adults, there is tremendous loss of energy due to deep-rooted selfishness and self-interest leading to conflict. We can observe in ourselves an endemic inability to work with one another and great difficulty in listening to each other. Terrible wars have taken place before and man's inhumanity to man is not a recent phenomenon, but I wonder if the world has ever witnessed such levels of religious bigotry, xenophobic paranoia and edgy, neurotic intolerance that haunt us today.

For all this what answers do governments have? They have conflict resolution and disaster management programmes for its officials that at best help them deal with conflicts and disasters *after* they have happened. Even for facing natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, these preparations have been found wanting. What of human-inspired conflicts? Where shall we begin to address them? In the epigraph with which this piece begins, Krishnamurti pithily defines conflict as a reaction to the environment, that is, everything other than the 'me', which is itself the result of the environment. Our present predicament is the price we pay for our apparently inherent inability to see the truth of what Krishnamurti says.

We refuse to see the breakdown in personal relationships, or are unable to see that we ourselves contribute to it. The young increasingly find comfort in electronic friendships and self-absorption has taken bizarre routes to achieve pleasure. We confuse being 'touchy' with being 'sensitive', the latter term giving us a cosy feeling that we are alive to other people's feelings and to the 'non-human environment'.

So, how shall we sing our lament? As the poet WH Auden wrote in his poem, 'It's No Use Raising A Shout' in 1929, in the aftermath of World War I when the western world was engulfed in a 'tidal wave of cynicism':

[...]

*Put the car away; when life fails
What's the good of going to Wales?
Here am I, here are you:
But what does it mean? What are we going to do?*

[...]

Krishnamurti pointed out that the only way is to take the 'arduous' path of self-knowledge, which requires great honesty and integrity. To begin with, we would need to look closely at our dearly held ideas and prejudices and own up to them. Why is this so difficult?

Have you ever tried, or lived a life without self-interest? If you have, then you will have quite a different activity in life. Because we haven't done it, we say it is impossible. If you have to climb a mountain, and you have to climb that mountain, you don't begin by saying it is impossible. You go up it, with your capacity, with your energy and drive. And if you want to find out whether it is possible to live in this world without conflict, you have to do it, find out. That is, can you live without self-interest?

Third Public Talk at Madras, 5 January 1985

Witnessing Conflict

ASHWIN PRABHU



It was a bright, sunny day in the hills, with clear skies, and the children were bustling around trying their hand at bouldering. This is an activity which involves scaling a smooth, inclined face of rock with bare hands and nothing else. Some children discovered, sometimes to their own surprise, that they possessed the natural light-footedness of a mountain goat and quickly bounded up the rock with a wide smile on their faces. Others figured out after a few failed attempts that all they needed was a 'fast start', so they allowed the teacher on hand to give them a push up and scrambled up the remainder of the rock by themselves.

My attention centred on one boy whose repeated attempts at climbing up the boulder were met with disappointment. This was a child who prided himself on his intellectual breadth of knowledge, his agile and sharp mind, and his determination and drive to do well in everything he chose to do. He refused any kind of assistance from the

teacher and insisted on trying again and again, refusing to take even a short break. He would clench his jaws, have a steely look in his eyes and seek a toe-hold as he started going up the rock. Midway through, he would struggle to balance himself on the sheer surface, claw desperately at it looking for a hold, even as he would begin to slide back down with a look of frustration and puzzlement. Here he was, clearly trying his best, throwing all his energies, both mental and physical into the exercise, willing to persevere and yet, success seemed elusive. He wrung his hands, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head in dismay, displeased with himself and the situation he was in.

After what seemed to be an appropriate amount of time trying, and when his energies finally started flagging, we sent him on his way to the next activity, rappelling. After an hour or two, it was the boy's turn to rappel down an almost 20-metre vertical rock face wearing a safety harness. He took on the task

bravely and in less than a minute he planted his feet firmly on the ground. Even as his feet touched the ground, almost reflexively and certainly in an unplanned manner, the boy let out a loud cry. A sound which was equal parts joy, celebration, and relief. The act brought out good-natured laughter both in the boy himself and the other children watching from the sidelines.

I let the episode pass, even as I tried to process my own thoughts and reactions to what I had witnessed. I had understood 'conflict' until then as a primarily extrinsic phenomenon—a tense state of affairs between two or more physical entities. Something which could be resolved through reasoning, negotiation and essential fairness. Yes, no doubt, I had also been in situations where I had experienced a conflict of the 'mind', caught between two or more courses of action and unable to choose satisfactorily among them. But what I had seen that day had allowed me a glimpse into a more deep-seated and seemingly incomprehensible kind of conflict, a conflict between one's self-image and oneself. A conflict which all of us have experienced in our lives, yet

perhaps, not recognized or realized. Here was a child who had an extremely positive self-image—of being an achiever, a person who believed that honest effort and persistence, both physical and intellectual, always leads to a desired goal. A child who had perhaps defined himself all along by the result of his effort. That day he was clearly frustrated that he was not able to 'meet' that self-image in spite of his best efforts. When, through the rappelling exercise, the boy finally met with success, the celebratory cry was perhaps an involuntary expression of relief and comfort that his self-image had been reinstated.

All of us tend to grapple with this self-image we have of ourselves, our roles and how well we play them in our lives. The 'caring parent', the 'promising employee', the 'effective teacher', the 'dependable friend' and so on. And when we perceive a conflict between *what is* and *what we want to be*, what are our actions, our struggles and what impact do these have on our thinking and on our lives?

I came away from that school trip, seeing Krishnamurti's statement, "All conflict is internal", in a new light.

Examining Conflict, Outer and Inner

SUSHIL SHINTRE AND CHAITRALI RANADE



It is 'circle time' and the class has to decide on a cooperative game for sports day. The emphasis is on choosing a game or activity that allows for the coming together of the group in a safe and cooperative manner. Various options are listed on the board and are deliberated upon. One set of students fervently argue for playing a particular game which is unsafe. After much discussion, the teacher asserts that it cannot be considered as an option, though she is open to continuing the conversation about the propriety of the game. Disappointment slowly spreads in the class at the finality of the statement made by the teacher, and the children struggle to take the discussion forward.

We regularly experience such situations of conflict, especially while working with children between ten and twelve years of age. There often seems to be a wariness while getting into conversations during such situations. However, conversations have a vital role in our work as educators. Situations of

conflict present ample opportunities for both, the educator and the student, to examine their ways of thinking and of relating to other people. In these conversations there is an opportunity to unravel the working of the mind of each participant. Today, children are exposed to a world that is ridden with violence, disorder and unrest—both outside and within oneself. It is, therefore, imperative for us, as educators, to inquire into the nature of conflict if we are to help them make sense of all that they perceive and experience in the world.

Going a little deeper into conflict, we realized that it stemmed from some basic mental constructs like identity, choice, denial, resistance, authority, and ownership. The manifestations of these conflicts could be internal, external or both. However, no situation can be strictly compartmentalized, and depending on the context and the people, many of the constructs of the mind listed above could be simultaneously at work. Authority and power appear to be

at the root of the conflict described in the situation of the class trying to decide their cooperative game. For the educator, different images of herself that make up her identity seem to be in conflict. While she strives to be open-minded and willing to engage in a serious enquiry over the nature of games, she also seeks efficiency as she works towards the outcome of conducting a cooperative game.

Here is another situation: a student is supposed to make a presentation before a class and she appears very worried. A conversation with the student reveals that she feels unprepared, and therefore, nervous of making mistakes and being teased. The conflict here seems to stem from a self-imposed need to live up to the image that the student carries of herself and others have about her. There is an idea of how she must be seen by others at all times, and any deviation from it seems to trouble the student. "Is it really possible to be the same, fixed person at all times?" we ask her. Through the conversation we explore the construct of 'images' and how holding on to them affects us.

Think about this scenario where a child is alone at home for some time. She has been asked by her parents not to watch television. The child is anxious about turning the television on but chooses to do it anyway, because there is no way the parents will find out. Here,

what the child wants is in conflict with what her parents want. From another perspective, the child might struggle with a choice to be made between giving in or not giving in to her desire to watch television. She may think of herself as a trustworthy individual and giving in to her desire would contradict this image that she has created about herself. Here, the child seems to have arrived at a quick resolution of the conflict and avoided the discomfort that comes with it. If the adults in contact with the child openly shared their own experiences in similar situations, it could help her understand the conflict better before seeking a resolution.

It is clear that while in conflict, the self takes over the mind, and that prevents it from seeing the nature of the conflict. When one is able to look at situations from a distance, it is seen that all conflicts reduce to a simple one between 'what should be' and 'what is'. This discovery also makes us wonder if all outward conflicts are mere manifestations of inward conflicts. Is it possible to be in conflict with others while being free of all internal conflicts? In the understanding of our notions of how things 'should be' lies great insight into the working of our mind and the influences that act on it. This insight can be arrived at by seriously enquiring into our notions.

There seems to be an intimate relationship between conflict and peace. The dictionary defines peace as 'freedom of the mind from annoyance, anxiety, distraction, and obsession', which are really all characteristics of a mind in conflict. Acceptance is a term that is often used in the context of peace and conflict. What does this acceptance look like? Does it mean being completely free from ideas of how things should be? Or can we be accepting of others' ideas while being fluid and amenable about

one's own. Perhaps the recognition of our own notions will lead us to answers.

This leads to the question of what is peace. Is it the resolution of conflict? Or is it the absence of conflict? While it is difficult to accept the mere absence of conflict as peace, it is also challenging to articulate what that state of mind is which we call peace. It might be futile to project peace as an end. Our serious pursuit of understanding conflict, and thereby ourselves, should allow peace to germinate in our being.

Exploring Uncharted Territory in the Classroom

MARY KELLEY



The 'uncharted territory' of my title is the world within us. As Krishnamurti has pointed out, the world without is merely a reflection of the one within; and so, we can learn about ourselves by being fully aware of the reality outside of us, the chaotic world in which we live and act in relation to other people. Exploring that unmapped, or unknown, world within us in the classroom—that is, in our actual, everyday school setting—is however a formidable challenge. This is not necessarily so just because that inner *terra-incognita* is inherently difficult to explore. Perhaps it *is*, but that's not the first problem that confronts the dauntless explorer in a school setting. It is tremendously challenging because the classroom itself, the world without in which we are actually learning, is fraught with conditions that effectively militate against any real learning. These include the pressures to conform or the temptation to compete! And yet, as a fifth-grade teacher at Oak Grove School, that world without, is to *me*, in my experience, the classroom—so that is mainly what I'll be drawing your attention to in this article.

Before I begin describing my own little day-to-day world, I want to try to put it in the greater context of *The World Within*. This is the title of a recent publication of a collection of Krishnamurti's dialogues with visitors to Ojai during the War years of 1939 to 1945. In meeting a wide variety of people who brought a range of problems and conflicts to discuss, Krishnamurti turned their attention inward towards the private, psychological world within, to address their concerns about what was happening outside. In fact, the sub-title of the book reads, *The Story of Humanity*. Krishnamurti told one of his visitors:

There is only one humanity and one righteousness, and the way to its realization does not lie through any other path, through any other person, save through yourself. Seek your own deliverance, and then you will be delivering the world from its confusion and conflict, its sorrow and antagonism. For you are the world and your problem is the world's problem.

What that means to me as a teacher is that I can only do my duty—that is, help to provide an environment in which my students can learn—by learning myself, about myself, and openly, with affection, sharing that experience with them. In each of the three major Krishnamurti Foundations—in India, the UK, and in this country—the serious study of Krishnamurti's teachings by adults has been combined with the education of children and young adults. And these two settings—the schools, on the one hand, and the adult study-centres, on the other—present distinctly peculiar challenges.

The challenges facing the schools—that includes the students and teachers, the parents and administrative staff—can be much more daunting and confusing than those that confront the adult study-centres, where participation is, for one thing, wholly voluntary. This is simply because, while the primary objective that we are aiming at—understanding our lives—is the same in both cases, the agents in the classroom—the teacher, students, administrators and parents—are caught in a complicated goal-oriented relationship made further complex by the 'financial' element. Our young students are required by society to undergo an education in one way or another, their parents are required to provide the fees, and the teachers are paid to do the job. So we teachers, in turn, are required to fulfil that legal obligation. There is a ubiquitous element of the pressure of these involuntary requirements from society. So the classroom, by its very nature, seems to present obstacles to learning and teaching in the unique sense that Krishnamurti used those terms!

The classroom does not represent positively ideal conditions in the context of Krishnamurti's teaching. When you take the most fundamental activity of a Krishnamurti study-centre—dialogue—and try to implement it in the classroom, there are bound to be some

conflicts with the very structure of the classroom, which cannot allow dialogue to take place naturally among young students. Since they are placed in a room with each other day after day, there are bound to be issues amongst them that are sometimes brought over from yesterday and have to be dealt with.

How do we deal with this complicated situation? I describe here two practices that we have attempted at Oak Grove School. We have a dialogue session with students in the first hour of each Wednesday. The general topic under discussion for that week is already written on the board. When the students first come into the room that day they write down their first reflections on the topic in their journals. Then we sit together for dialogue and pass around a 'talking-piece'—for us, it happens to be a small, sand-filled object of some weight—that only the person presently speaking holds in his or her hands. In this way the pressure and ambiguity over who is speaking and who listening is removed, allowing each student to have an opportunity to share something they are thinking or feeling about the topic under consideration. In this way they are able to share something of their inner lives, and also listen to others. Even those who may not have anything to say at the moment hold the talking-piece for a short while.

A shorter variation on this procedure is something we practice at the close of each day, which we call 'Council' (named after a Native-American custom). Here, one student is designated to make a selection from a box of 'Council topics'—ideas for discussion by the whole class that have previously been submitted in written form by the students themselves. When the topic is chosen, we pass around the talking-piece to whoever may have something to say on the subject.

Such regulated, or organized constraints on free speech and behaviour may not be required for more mature adults gathered together on a voluntary basis. But they do help my young, impulsive students to look into their inner world. So that is the way we engage in dialogue in the fifth-grade at Oak Grove School.

Even more challenging is the practice of meditation. To put it briefly, we do that by expanding our classroom to include all of the Oak

Grove campus and its pristine surrounding environs. We take various kinds of 'mindfulness walks', on and off the school grounds every Friday afternoon. We also engage at times in some 'quiet games' in order to try and appreciate a more relaxing, yet *fun*-filled, awareness of others, as opposed to the mere stimulation of competition.

Thus, both in our talking and in our walking at Oak Grove School we attempt to go beyond the constraints imposed by the classroom, in order to engage in serious thinking about that unknown 'world within' ourselves in relation to others.

The Role of Nature in Teaching Values

GARY PRIMROSE



The world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts.

John Muir

It was the centenary of John Muir's death on 21 December 2014, an event largely unreported in the UK even though Muir was born here. It gave me pause to reflect on his life, his writings and his message. He was a remarkable man and instrumental in the formation of the Yosemite National Park in America. He convinced a gun-toting, pro-business Republican president, Teddy Roosevelt, to set aside from the pressures of economic development, large unspoiled tracts of land so that their beauty and wildlife could be enjoyed by future generations. How did Muir do it? He took the president camping in Yosemite—for four days. Muir knew that nature was the best teacher. For Roosevelt to understand the need to preserve these places, he needed to have a direct and sustained contact with nature with, of course, a little bit of guidance from Muir.

What has this got to do with education? I would like to make a case for there to be a stronger role for contact with nature in our schools, not only for scientific and aesthetic reasons, but because I believe it is an effective medium for teaching values. By the term 'values', I mean our inbuilt or acquired assumptions, some of which we may not be very aware of. Muir has pointed out one such in the quote above and I would like to relate it to education.

Some educators question whether we should at all teach values at school; after all they are implicit in all our syllabi and curriculum. Our values reflect our motives. Naturally, we humans need food, shelter, fuel, water and whatever else nature provides, as do other creatures. As educators and parents we want our students to be prepared for higher education so that they can

compete effectively in an increasingly competitive job market. Our curriculum demands that we teach knowledge, facts and skills. Reading, writing, math, sciences, languages, art and so on are taught in preparation for standardized exams. Further, students may learn study and research skills, how to discipline themselves, and how to respect other cultures and faiths. If the students are lucky they may discover a talent or gift which will help them to find a way of earning a livelihood that they have a liking for. Many educators would argue that that is enough. John Muir disagreed. That isn't enough. He suggested that we are not telling them 'all the facts'. We are leaving out our relationship with the rest of the non-human world.

Nature is, after all, the basis for our existence. We exist in a living, interconnected world, a fact Muir experienced intuitively long before the science of ecology proved him right. And yet, understanding our relationship with, and our effect on, nature still plays, I suspect, as minor a role in our education today as it did a century ago. One manifestation of this is the almost complete lack of awareness that according to most conservation biologists we are experiencing the sixth mega extinction of species and the first to be brought about by humans. They are calling this period in Earth's history the *Anthropocene*—an epoch where the

geophysical and biological forces on earth are being influenced more by humans than by other forces in nature. This loss of biodiversity is the result of global economic development, dramatic population increase, urbanization, increasing natural resource use, the spread of non-native invasive species and increasingly, the effects of climate change. Habitats are declining or fragmenting and consequently species dependent on these habitats disappear—many without us even knowing of their existence. Estimates vary, but it is thought that between 4,000 and 25,000 species are lost per year—forever. These extinction rates far exceed speciation rates. With the previous mega extinctions there was time between them for species recovery—millions or hundreds of millions of years. But at this rate of loss we don't have the luxury of time.

Losing biodiversity is an ecological and a spiritual crisis. What does it feel like to lose a species forever? I believe it is also an educational crisis. Something critical is lacking in the human psyche, in human culture, in human values and consequently in education. It has to do with a lack of sensitivity to the creatures of this living world and the reality of our interdependence with them. I think Muir put his finger on it when he said that, "the world, we are told, was made especially for man". In other words, our curriculum is essentially

anthropocentric, celebrating the remarkable achievements of human culture and civilization, but neglecting the necessary ecological knowledge and understanding for coexisting in a living world. All living creatures are absolutely dependent on the air, water, soil, other plants and animals, and the recycling of nutrients that is provided by nature. We are parts of a greater interconnected whole. And increasingly other species are becoming dependent on us for their survival. Do our curricula and educational experiences sufficiently reflect this?

Richard Louv has coined the term 'nature deficit disorder' in which he speaks about the extreme reduction in the time that humans, especially children, spend outdoors or in contact with nature. According to him this has led to a host of behavioural and psychological problems in our contemporary cultures. To correct this imbalance we certainly need to teach more natural history and ecology to our students, to base it as close to the school as possible and to teach it in a way which brings it alive for them. But to address the ethical deficiency there is much that can be learned from a sustained, direct contact with nature. We teach children how to weigh, measure and divide, but do we encourage them to revere and sense the sublime? As Keith Critchlow, architect of the Study Centre at Brockwood said, "The human mind takes apart with its

analytical habits of reasoning but the human heart puts things together because it loves them." Our experience of nature is personal and often ineffable—so can reverence and wonder be taught? Probably not, but we can create opportunities where the likelihood of experiencing them is greater.

This can be illustrated with a simple example. I sometimes take students out to a wooded area and ask them to take a vow of silence for half an hour, or better still an hour, if the weather is suitable. I suggest they remove their shoes and socks and then go off on their own out of sight of each other, but within earshot, to sit in a place that for some reason interests them. They are to get to know that place and for the place to get to know them. I also ask them to bring back an object or sketch, something that symbolizes or summarizes what, or part of what, they felt while they were there. When the time comes we pair up to discuss our experience with a partner. The ensuing conversation is always lively and engaging. The increased sensitivity they bring to their surroundings flows into the social encounter afterward. The sense of connection to nature and each other by this phenomenological experience is surprising. Why? I think it is affection. Our affection emerges in unexpected ways in nature. It is born out of a sustained observation and sensitivity to our surroundings, human

and non-human. We enjoy being surprised by it and sharing that surprise with another.

So along with inquiry into the construct of the human psyche that Krishnamurti schools are intended to be grounded in, it is, I feel, equally important to have a direct and sustained contact with nature. As Krishnaji said to some friends in Brockwood in 1985, only months before he died, “Keep the teachings clean and take care of the land”. Like Muir, Krishnaji knew that the land in our care was an important educational medium to introduce and reinforce the values of affection and responsibility more generally. As with our psyches, we don’t need to look or go very far.

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Strangely Like Gulag

SUPRABHA SESHAN



We were not meant for this. We were meant to live and love and play and work and even hate more simply and directly. It is only through outrageous violence that we come to see this absurdity as normal, or to not see it at all. Each new child has his eyes torn out so he will not see, his ears removed so he will not hear, his tongue ripped out so he will not speak, his mind juiced so he will not think, and his nerves scraped so he will not feel. Then he is released into a world broken into two: others like himself, and those to be used. He will never realize that he still has all his senses, if only he will use them. If you mention to him that he still has ears, he will not hear you. If he hears, he will not think. Perhaps most dangerously of all, if he thinks he will not feel. And so on, again.

Derrick Jensen, *The Culture of Make Believe*

Every morning between 8:00 and 9:00 am in this upwardly-mobile-yet-backward district, the country-roads are full of children commuting to school, hoisting bags laden with what they believe is the wisdom and knowhow of modern culture. They are going for *vidyabhyaasam* (education, or more literally speaking, ‘the exercise of knowledge’), and they go to the keepers of this knowledge, to teachers in schools. Everyone (parents, children, the state and society) deems this to be good and necessary.



For many years, I’ve been observing more and more of my rural and tribal neighbours pack their children off to school. While I’ve long been a champion of equal opportunities (including equal wages), I’m now starting to believe that a dark and dangerous psychic predicament is

falling upon this land, in part aided by the simultaneous entry of television into village homes, and a slew of fickle government policies, in the bid for progress, modernity and the end of poverty.

I've been observing how self-reliance and land-based sustenance have been, more or less, replaced by a mobile populace commuting daily in the hope of finding skills, knowledge, support, wisdom and security elsewhere. I believe that the notion that the 'other is better' than self and home, that this 'other' can be acquired through hard work, enterprise, subsidies and bank loans which constitute progress, that everyone is now entitled to this 'other', is here in our midst.

Since mental and social strife are also increasing (in the form of various disorders and illnesses), perhaps this version of modernity, underneath all the glitter and promise, needs some examination. Is it for instance, instilling aspirations that can never be truly fulfilled? Is it exchanging one type of poverty for another? What happens to family and community relations once the young leave? Where do these children go on to, once schooled?



The subsidiary thesis of this essay is that modern education serves a version of Gulag, by forcing our young to suffer unspeakable conditions at an early age, by compelling them to do school work and home work for a greater part of their day. By sustaining this over long periods, at the most crucial time in their vulnerable years, it breaks them, to refashion them into a pliable workforce. By the end of schooling, the young are yoked, through fear and the promise of salvation *if* they succeed. If they fail, as indeed most do, they are consigned to lesser destinies. This arduous entrainment, under enforced routine and vigilance, is essential for the great global workplace, and can only happen with various forms of rewards, promises, threats, violence and incarceration.

Incarceration (both voluntary and involuntary), when sustained and normalized, leads to a range of issues—shutdown, frustration, disorder, escape, split psychologies, helplessness, dissociation, physical ailments and phobias. These can be seen amongst children, prisoners, slaves, caged and beaten animals, controlled peoples.

The primary thesis of this essay is that the psychic predicament just outlined goes hand in hand with the destruction of life, with the catastrophic end of the biosphere.



I am the resident environmental educator of the Gurukula Botanical Sanctuary, a tiny conservation centre in a rural setting at the edge of a forest in Kerala. My work is to enable educational processes ranging from the short-term single encounter to entire curricula based on nature. While my friends and I teach mainly about plants and animals and the tropical forest environment, our mission is to grow a culture based on nature. We believe this to be of paramount importance in the coming decades—to create places of resilience, where plants, animals and humans have a chance of surviving the ecological holocaust that is upon us all.



A DIY manual for starting schools in a new land might read:

First persuade, seduce, bribe or devastate the people. Break up their society, their beliefs, and their ways of life. Take over their rivers, and their forest. Do this by hook or crook. Or use plain force, no pretence. Convince them that it's for their own good; even better, work on the young. Instil the idea that you have something supremely better to offer.

Draw them into the concrete jungle, into the cyber machine, into the factorial workplace, into the idea of the good life in the shining city. At all times control their food and water; this instils fear and compliance. Then, sever their allegiance to their bodies and psyches; hook them to the machine.

Be the mighty provider.

Evicted populations, trans-located communities, weakened land-based cultures, migrant workforces need to be dealt with; they need to be fed, watered, educated, employed, treated, housed and kept docile with

entertainment. You have them when you've sold them the idea of choice while you've closed all the exit points, and they eat what you supply.

Enter a new species of human bred on petroleum-driven food, petroleum-driven water, petroleum-driven health, petroleum-driven culture, petroleum-driven mind. The trademark of this taxon? Supreme entitlement.



Little bodies I've known, bodies tumbling, climbing, swimming, running, now sit still for long hours, with book/notebook/pencil in hand, in thrall, if not of the authority at the far end of the classroom, then of their fantasies. Little minds I've known, curious, aware, sensitive, attuned to the lives of creatures, rivers, land and each other thrown into the maw of the global machine, to be carried away to faraway lands and cities.



The word *teacher* comes with hefty lessons. The young are given thoughts, ideas and behaviours to follow or imitate, and to believe without question, to accept without dispute, and to ignore the call of their own bodies. By the end of schooling students take the following to be truths—everything comes with a price tag; it's possible to have an economy without an ecology; the earth is irrelevant; other humans are irrelevant; life is a matter of goods, gadgets, cash transactions and services.



It's a rare teacher who hugs a child, a rare school where children spend more time playing than sitting at desks; a rare home, and a rare community that does not send its children away to the cold vigilant 'care' of ever-distant adults of varying backgrounds and temperaments, teaching ever-distant things, for the sake of progress and human betterment.

This sending away, for many children, experienced variously as severance, uprooting or exile, is done with good intention, and full conviction. Indeed, the state of most homes, and most communities, is

pretty bleak. Adults send their young ones away, to be saved mostly from themselves, from lives of mental, social or physical penury.

At school the attention-commanding teacher spawns inevitably a secret second life for the child, open eyes with still bodies, and minds ranging far and free. 'The split' that is now widely recognized to be at the root of social dysfunction and psychopathy is spawned by authority, in other words fear, and mostly in school. Forced bodies, forced behaviours and forced thoughts. Deviance is the only way out.



The Left, the fringe, the rebels and the spiritually-minded have clearly outlined how schools breed factory workers, zombies and psychopaths. I'd like to propose that schooling is necessary for building a hierarchy of egos by destroying the individual's inherence in community through an insidiously brutal system of reward and punishment normalised in the name of education and social advancement. This hierarchy of egos, with an elite at the top commanding much of the world's wealth and people, is essential to genocide and ecocide.



Today, I'm on a journey with a friend of mine, a Kurchiya tribesman. We've just come out of a forest to a town bursting with tourist operations, shops selling trinkets, hippie clothing, foods and multinational beverages. A protest march is spilling onto the streets. I look back towards the jungle, with its thousands of species of living beings, its hills, rivers, valleys, and rain clouds swirling, upswelling. Then my gaze cursorily moves over a famous quote painted on a compound wall, 'Education is the most powerful weapon with which you can change the world'.

My first thought is that different realities can be juxtaposed in one eye sweep. Second, obviously Mandela was not a pacifist. Third, there's a premise here, that education is a positive thing, and that there is a shared definition of education. Fourth, Hmmm, that sounds like propaganda, it's a statement aiming to change the world. Fifth, if the word weapon is being used, surely there's a war going on, or theft, injustice, or unspeakable violence, and that education is part of militant struggle. My

sixth thought is that that quote is now used by liberals, right-wingers, leftists, corporate-types and has over two million hits on Google! Just goes to show how great quotes can be co-opted to serve any agenda!



Are the following true or false, or just inconvenient?

Modern education serves the corporate mindset, which serves a psychopathic mind-set that is behind planetary destruction.

Modern education feeds young minds and bodies into the industrial machine. It does this, overtly or covertly, by destroying traditional forms of community and replacing them with notions of the global workforce, the global market. By doing this it ends up serving forces of capitalism, industrialism, and a system that rewards the elite.

Increasingly, modern education is predicated on authoritarian expertise, as well as what Lewis Mumford called authoritarian technics. These are indispensable to the dominant culture.

Modern education fetishizes abstraction. It rewards adepts of abstraction and standardization. By starting this early in life, the body becomes subservient to concept and clock, to the virtual, the distant and the measureable.

The standards set by modern education are impossible to achieve for a greater part of humanity. These are set by the dominant culture against its own people, let alone other cultures and traditions, and require a failure system, thereby providing the labour for industry. In other words, modern schooling fractures the individual in a number of irreparable ways, in the name of progress and human betterment.

The fractures are complex, and many: the child from sustained intimate body contact with mother, with family, and from neighbours; the child's mind from its body, from the natural environment, common/community sense, the land-base; the real from the abstract; from the multi-dimensional, to the two, and the virtual; from local history to the distant and someone else's future or past (presented as if it's 'ours'); the child from the organic; the child from wholeness, towards a fragmentedness (to a state of continual defensiveness); the child from

magic, oral histories, gleaming cosmologies, peopled and alive to facts derived by unknown people and machines; the child from living beings to inanimate things; the child from rootedness and sense of place; the child from natural, cyclical, expansive time.

Through the process of indoctrination, enculturation, socialisation and a belief that the children are *tabula rasa*, and need to be filled, a splitting is achieved in a slow and deliberate way.

Life is thus reduced to a matter of negotiating between split worlds, split mind-bodies, split communities, split realities, split values, split responsibilities, split knowledge domains, split geographies (this is home, that is school), split identities, split loyalties.

How can a little human being possibly tolerate this?



R D Laing wrote:

In order to rationalize our industrial-military complex, we have to destroy our capacity to see clearly any more what is in front of, and to imagine what is beyond, our noses. Long before a thermonuclear war can come about, we have had to lay waste to our own sanity. We begin with the children. It is imperative to catch them in time. Without the most thorough and rapid brainwashing their dirty minds would see through our dirty tricks. Children are not yet fools, but we shall turn them into imbeciles like ourselves, with high IQs, if possible.



Is it a stretch of imagination that school life is a continuous process of disintegration and estrangement? By the end of formative education, study after study guarantees that few remain with healthy levels of self-esteem and self-worth, including the ones who worked hard, and proved to themselves that they could achieve their goals and desires. How many students leave school with vibrant connections to communities that they will contribute to, as it has contributed to them? How many are comfortable in their skins? How many remain 'whole'? The subtext for graduates of schooling goes thus—her body is better than mine, their body type is better than our body type; his mind is better than

mine; their minds are better than ours. Their culture is better than mine—television says it's so.



My friend, a superlative tracker, now raises his children on a diet of Animal Planet and Discovery channels, homework, white rice, white sugar. No jungle meat, no walks on the wild side. I ask him if he intends to teach his jungle craft to his children, for what use would it be if they can't hunt anymore, if there are bans on collecting wild medicinal plants. He says he will, that he wants his children to know healing with plants, and the ways of animals, but that he also wants them to go to school. *Vidyabhyaasam* is a good and necessary thing, he too declares. I ask him about Kurchiya *vidyabhyaasam*. He misunderstands me and says they have no schools. I ask him how they teach their young. He replies that girls and boys are socialized to become responsible members of their community, with different sets of instructions for either sex, offered by elders in the community or their parents, through a variety of rituals, celebrations, guidance and tasks. Children start early to follow adults. Boys, for instance, have bows made for them when they are very small, just to play with, and then they start accompanying the men to the forest, where there is a lot to learn about every animal, and about the forest.



I figured out today that at any given moment in this decade, approximately two billion humans are at school- (and university-)going age. Whether they receive an education or not, that's two billion human bodies in preparation for industrial capitalism's greatest venture—converting the living body of the planet into profit through manufacturing goods and services.

The math itself is not hard, it's far from cognitively challenging. Assuming that most of them get to the tenth standard, at any given point in time 200 million are either graduating or failing to graduate. Those failing to graduate will end up in factories, slums, the streets, the military, and of course detention facilities.

Those graduating will go on to higher education. Assuming that 10 per cent go on for higher education, twenty million are in univer-

sities. After three years of college, approximately seven million graduate or fail to graduate. Those failing to graduate go to factories. Those graduating go on for PhDs, and most of them will serve the corporate research agenda. It is guaranteed that all will serve the dominant culture in one way or another; all will serve the industrial production system. As will my Kurchiya friend's children, assuming that the world's still here when they reach adulthood.



Pink Floyd asked "Did you exchange a walk on part in the war for a lead role in a cage?" in the song *Wish You Were Here* (1975).

The Kurchiyas were mercenaries in the battle of a Malabar chieftain against the British colonizers. They were fierce rebels and proud fighters. They could read the forest better than you and I can read a book. Now they work for wages, and their children go to school. Once they've been educated and urbanised, their bows will be mass-produced for tourist outlets; their elders will recount tales of valour to travellers in home-stays, between television commercials; and their amazing bodies will succumb to various forms of civilization-induced diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cancer.

An oft-touted development mandate goes something like this, 'Get the children in school, the crime rates will drop'. The more I see the effects of modern civilization the more I think, "Get those children in school, make them extensions of the machine, and sure, the living world, the real world, including themselves, will drop."

Krishnamurti writes in *Education and the Significance of Life*:

Where there is love there is instantaneous communion with the other, on the same level and at the same time. It is because we ourselves are so dry, empty and without love that we have allowed governments and systems to take over the education of our children and the direction of our lives; but governments want efficient technicians, not human beings, because human beings become dangerous to governments and to organized religions as well. That is why governments and religious organizations seek to control education.



A little more on Gulag, used here metaphorically to lift a veil of denial of a cruel and inhuman system of oppression under our very noses, one that most of us have been through, and even subscribe to. People survived Gulags, the official acronym of the Soviet penitentiary system, one intended to punish, or re-educate criminals, psychopaths, and tens of millions of political dissidents, a system that was promoted as a progressive and educational service to the state, through enforced labour. The conditions were brutal, saturated with death and deprivation, and more than a million died. Likewise, our schools are mostly brutal, saturated with fear, where billions of souls die in their hearts and minds, hardly the stuff of human betterment and progress. How many of us survive our schooling?



Coincidentally, as I do my final edits on this piece, a friend of mine shares an Occupy Wall Street protest movement poster on Facebook that reads:

Feeling sad and depressed? Are you worried? Anxious about the future? Feeling isolated and alone? You might be suffering from CAPITALISM. Symptoms may include homelessness, unemployment, poverty, hunger, feelings of powerlessness, fear, apathy, boredom, cultural decay, loss of identity, self-consciousness, loss of free speech, incarceration, suicidal or revolutionary thoughts, death.



Krishnamurti also says, “It is no measure of health to be adjusted to a profoundly sick society.”

And what a sick society it is leading to planetary collapse largely through the toxic end-effects of industrial civilization; a society that accepts systemic violence, overt and covert, threatening to destroy human societies and all of nature. What will it take to bring about a sane society in a world run by supremacists? Do current educational practices

not serve this dangerous state of affairs? Can education, instead, bring about a new culture? More crucially, is there time left for a different education? How can the young, and the wild, survive this toxic era? In the face of collapse, can different kind of education bring about a new culture, one that is not based on hatred, domination and control (of humans and the environment)? Who is going to do it?



I encounter the dream, materialized, every time I enter Bangalore, through the ever-sprawling new towns of Nagarabhavi, Kengeri and Bidadi. Houses upon houses, tiny cement buildings, endless traffic lines of shiny new cars, smoking rubbish heaps, malls, the gargantuan never-completed flyovers. I join the millions who throng the city, where not so long ago, hills and streams and farmland used to be. Little children play cricket on the melting tarmac, pi dogs frolic in the filth, potholes grow treacherous; and the air is thicker, more toxic.

Being a biophiliac, however, I am drawn to bodies, living beings. I see the force of life surging through every attempt to cage, poison or smother it. Something wild and true surviving despite the worst nightmare it finds itself in. A thing that has never known a forest, and does not seek it, and yet is still wild, this play of nature through human bodies, in these creatures of the earth, these children playing cricket, these men and women going about their daily lives, these lungs breathing, these hearts beating. Now seeking a tap, now a bottled drink, a mobile phone, a slightly larger house, more paint on the walls, a uniform, a school bag full of books; an education. Salvation. All in order to find happiness, joy, fulfilment, security. This wild thing mistakenly identifies the source of its life to be the machine, a sleight-of-hand trick achieved through decades of relentless and systematic misdirection.

I place my hope on the fact that tricks can be undone. Like the last remaining wild places on the planet, surely at the core of every being is a fierce and deep awareness of what it's like to be free.

The End is Where We Start From

WILLEM ZWART



How do we communicate the deeper intent of our schools to parents? This brief piece contains the thoughts expressed by the Head of Oak Grove School to the school community at the start of a school year.

I often wonder what is the meaning of my life. I generally wish that I could act in wiser, gentler and more enlightened ways. Why am I here and what is my life's purpose? Well, I finally received a satisfying reply to this question when, after a particularly rough day and an unhealthy Chinese meal, I opened a Zen fortune cookie, which read, "It may be that your sole purpose in life is to serve as a warning to others."

A rough day indeed! Though I admit it left me with a rather large smile on my face as well.

The summer vacation has come to an end and it is time for a fresh start. We find ourselves at once at an end and a beginning. The poet T.S. Eliot addressed this paradoxical feeling in his poem *Little Gidding*, when he wrote:

*What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from.*

So, let us start from the end and make a beginning. It's the end of the summer vacation and also of the rhythms, challenges and joys of that long break. It's the end of who we were and who our children were, last year, last month, even last week, as we settle into new routines.

For our students it's the end of some of their habitual ways and patterns of thinking and doing, as they are exposed to new knowledge,

form new relationships, grapple with challenging and exciting math and science problems, analyze the meaning and relevance of historical events and learn how to explore and inquire into all these subjects using the tools of listening, reading, thinking, writing and speaking.

The transition from an end to a beginning is not always easy. Our own thoughts, assumptions, ideas, and images can get in the way of seeing things through new eyes, with what in Japan is sometimes called *shoshin*, or beginner's mind, characterized by an attitude of openness, eagerness and a lack of preconceptions.

"Meditation is the ending of thought", our school's founder, Jiddu Krishnamurti, once said. He felt that meditation is to have the quality of a mind that is both innocent and vulnerable. "Wander by the seashore and let this meditative quality come" he said. "If it does, don't pursue it. What you pursue will be the memory of what it was— and what was is the death of what is."

He went on to say, "When you wander among the hills, let everything tell you the beauty and the pain of life so that you awaken to your own sorrow and the ending of it." For Krishnamurti, meditation is not just about the ending of thought but also the ending of sorrow.

To have a beginner's mind we need to be able to end thought and sorrow, even just for moments. To be able to go on the journey of exploration that is the school year, we need to see with fresh eyes. We need to be able to see what is without what was.

As Eliot said, "The end is where we start from."

Here at Oak Grove School we seek to cultivate both the mind and the heart. We want to be academically rigorous and encourage academic excellence. At the same time we want to nurture the quality of a mind that is sensitive, innocent and vulnerable. We want our students to work hard, be challenged and give their best. And we want to give them time and space to be by themselves, to reflect, to contemplate, to be mindful.

We ask our students to come on time, be organized, do their homework and meet deadlines. We also want them to play, be carefree and creative. We want to equip our students with the practical tools

and skills they need to live and work in this world and make a positive and meaningful contribution to it. We also encourage them to ask the deepest and most enduring questions about life and its meaning, including what it means to live a good life and be fully human.

During our faculty in-service week, we examined the question, “What is a ‘Krishnamurti education?’” One group came back with a poster saying, ‘What Krishnamurti education *is not*.’ They said it is not conformist, it is not a religion and it is not divisive. It is not fear-based, not traditional, not hierarchical, not fragmented and it is not a system.

Many of our faculty mentioned enquiry, curiosity and exploration as being at the heart of our approach to education. This brings us back to where we began, in the company of T.S. Eliot, who writes a few verses down in the same poem:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

ON EXCELLENCE

When the nature of freedom is understood, then you eliminate all competition; on the playing field, in the classroom. Is it possible to eliminate altogether the comparative evaluation, academically or ethically? Is it possible to help the student not to think competitively in the academic field and yet to have excellence in his studies, his actions and his daily life? Please bear in mind that we are concerned with the flowering of goodness which cannot possibly flower where there is any competition. Competition exists only when there is comparison, and comparison does not bring about excellence. These schools fundamentally exist to help both the student and the teacher to flower in goodness. This demands excellence in behaviour, in action and in relationship. This is our intent and why these schools have come into being; not to turn out mere careerists but to bring about the excellence of spirit.

Letters to Schools Volume One, 1 November 1978

An Ode to the Valley of Unnamed Wish Plants

INDUS CHADHA



I first arrived in the Valley 20 years ago, in June 1995, wearing a flowered cotton dress stitched by my grandmother. I didn't understand then why my parents, inspired by a slim paperback called *Freedom from the Known*, had moved back to India to seek out this school for me. Over the next few weeks, as red mud stained the bottom of one cotton dress of mine after another, I walked beguiled around this unusual wonderland where wildflowers and wish plants bloomed riotously, and elephants, panthers, and sometimes snakes wandered by to visit.

We wove our way through the junior school quadrangle with its carpet of yellow flowers, through middle school mezzanines with skylights and mosaics, to the senior school courtyard with tree-top-high terraces. We picked gooseberries and sour cherries, rubbing them on our dresses for a second before tossing them into our mouths. We sat on the stone bench under the *neem* tree, underneath the banyan tree that held

the amphitheatre in its arms. We lingered beside the pond at the Art Village amidst overgrown marigold bushes at the edge of the bamboo grove. We flooded the art room and the pottery shed with chatter, as we dipped our hands into paint, clay, and plaster of paris, making paintings, shaping pots, and tapping our small feet.

We waited for the monsoon to come so that rainwater would collect in the lake. Once the pool was deep enough, we slipped off our sandals and skipped into the lake's green waters. We listened for birdcalls and observed the tiniest insects, seeking out unbeaten paths, knowing they would be replete with undisturbed wonder. We lay down on the games field on a starry night and discovered constellations. We slid into cool streams to study water and dug deep into the earth to learn about soil. We climbed onto rooftops and recited Shakespearean monologues, "Friends, Romans, countrymen...". Little by little, as I too began to bloom riotously, I

began to understand what had drawn my parents to the Valley.

Before we left, you whispered, “If you love the Valley so much, you should come back here...”. We burst forth into the world with a heady curiosity. Writing poetry, making music, curating art, acting in plays, teaching in schools, learning how to build with mud, understanding sanitation, unravelling transportation challenges, working on waste management, on how handicrafts can be livelihoods, studying law to promote justice, leveraging technology to improve the lives of the marginalized, singing, dancing, reading, painting—myriads of meaningful choices, each one as unique as each of us—for we had learned, early on in the Valley, that the paths would always be countless and so we must follow our hearts.

As I followed a poem of Sylvia Plath’s to college all the way across the world from home, and the world split open at my feet like a ripe juicy watermelon just as she had promised it would, I discovered that growing up at the Valley had made me both wide-eyed and a little bit wise. At graduate

school in New York, where countless stories unfold in parallel, each time I told someone new about the unusual wonderland where I grew up, I watched their eyes light up in wonder, and felt a prickly pride swell in my heart. “Come back...”, the Valley seemed to whisper.

It rained before I returned to the Valley. May carpets of *gulmohar* petals lined the slopes and water lilies bloomed in each small pond. As I began to discover the thoughtfulness behind our seemingly effortless experiential education, I developed a newfound respect for the philosophy, pedagogy, and practices of this truly unusual place. I saw a familiar silky, pink weed grass that we used to wish upon, spring up after the rains and asked if anyone knew its name. Until a wise seven-year-old reminded me that none of the wish plants have names because that would make them ordinary. Wandering through the pathless land of nameless wish plants, reconciling fearlessness with mindfulness, perhaps it is inevitable that children become somewhat extraordinary. Maybe excellence is impossible without freedom?

The Unpursued Excellence

ARVIND RANGANATHAN



In the world of education, 'excellence' is thought of as synonymous with 'success'. One of the consequences of this thinking is that school and college education is structured around competition and a need to categorize people by measurable ability. Moreover, ambition is instilled as the basic motive for growth in life. Ambition is encouraged, applauded and rewarded by the immediate family and society at large. Thus, the pursuit of success becomes the primary motive force in life. To me, this equivalence of success with excellence seems to be a grave error, leaving us with little time, energy or inclination to discover the deeper meaning of life.

Success is the construction of one's self through the shaping of demonstrable ability. It lies in the gap between 'what one is' and 'what one wishes to appear to be'. In this sense, it is the chasing of a mirage. And like all mirages, once you come close enough, it turns out to be not quite what one expected it to be, and so the eye casts further into the future for another mirage to chase. How can this be considered excellence?

Isn't excellence an intrinsic quality recognizable not so much by what one does but by how one is? Excellence is perhaps that which emerges quite accidentally, unsought, taking one by surprise at its emergence. The specific manifestation of excellence may not be preconceived and hence, sought after. Yet it is palpable and obvious when you come in contact with it. Perhaps the quality that makes it cognisable is the lack of gap between the being and appearance of the person at that moment. It might be felt during a music concert where the music emerges from a deeper place than the singer's abilities,

or perhaps it might be in the speaking of simple and authentic words. Always it is accompanied by the 'loss of one's self', if only momentarily.

If excellence may not be pursued, then what is one's motive force in life? I think it is the observation of the gap between one's being and appearance—that 'which is' and that 'which is thought' and thereafter sought. Observation of the gap reduces the gap. From the absence of the gap, authenticity speaks.

Much of education is built around the shaping of one's self around an ideal. The pursuit of success is an additive process, building more layers between one's being and one's appearance. The emergence of excellence, on the other hand, seems to be the product of a subtractive process, a stripping away, a paring down of the non-essentials. This enables one's appearance to be as close to, if not identical with, one's being, which is essentially quiet, not striving to become other than what it is.

How then might we conceive of an educational process where a human being is not sucked into this vortex of 'becoming'? During the many years of growing up, it seems essential to understand the futility of constantly becoming someone in the eyes of the world. To help children be free of this corrosive urge without retreating from the challenges of life is thus an essential aspect of school education.

An Excellent Enigma

CHITRA GOKHALE



‘Excellent!’ says the remark in red ink, next to a hundred per cent score on a test. A glowing face looks at the rest of the class, looking for admiration. The face gets admiration and more—adulation, envy, dislike. The face takes the paper home and there are more glowing faces there.

In the dictionary, ‘excellence’ is defined as the “quality of being the best, better than anyone else.” The word comes with the built-in feature of comparison. In a field like sports, it is an easily recognizable quality. At the time of writing this, the Wimbledon Tennis Championships are around the corner, and if anyone is asked, they would say without hesitation that Serena Williams or Roger Federer excel at tennis. “Look at him”, we say, “he has worked very hard to get there to the top; he is amazingly talented.” And we wouldn’t be wrong.

Putting aside the idols, what of the humdrum classroom? How does one define excellence there? A student presents his or her work. Everything is

complete, neatly done, correct; he or she has decorated the edges of the page with some design, made a cover page. Another one gives in his work. Everything is correct and complete but the work looks untidy. A third gives in his work. It is mostly complete, everything is correct and legible, but this one has a mind that thinks differently—he has solved the problems by using different methods. So then? ‘Excellent, excellent, excellent?’ Or not quite? Who gets the title and for what exactly?

And even in that last question, there lurks that requirement—a title given—*by* someone, *to* someone. A bit of judgement there, well, quite a bit of judgement, surely? And who decides, and on what basis, from whose viewpoint? What of a child who has a learning difficulty? How do we recognize this elusive entity there? When there are children with such difficulties, everything seems to become complicated. A severe difficulty is obvious. What of a less severe one? And here there is always the discomfort—is this all that the child

is really capable of, or is she becoming complacent in her own acceptance of it? Is she taking the easy way out?

Does one see excellence in oneself—sense it, feel it? You have put your heart and soul into that bread you baked, you were supremely unaware of everything except the feel of the dough as you kneaded it, felt its silky elastic bulk move on the counter, sniffed the aroma as it baked and then when you sliced it, the feel of the crisp crust under the knife giving way to a lacy softness, ‘excellent’, you said. Is this it—these fleeting moments of your complete being giving itself over to the task at hand—without thinking of the end product or being apprehensive of other peoples’ opinions?

Yet, we recognise it in others—we see the end product and say that such and such a thing was an excellent piece of work, or that this or that child brings excellence to this or that job. And over

the years as we work with scores of children we also see that there are a few individuals who seem to bring this quality to everything that they do. So is this it then? Something that automatically touches all that we do? But for this star performer, what of all the backstage supports—hard work, stamina, perseverance, passion—where do they come in? Or the backstage hindrances—expectation, pressure to perform, fear of failure? The glowing face with the perfect score—did he do it all from some inner source, by himself, and not for himself, but simply because he knew this and no other way? Or was there pressure, a desire to please? And would it still be excellent if there was the latter?

A word and an idea smoothened by use over centuries, like the smooth rounded stone picked up from a river, and we don’t see everything that has gone into eroding it. And now, I am almost afraid to say it to anyone!

Centres for Excellence

ASHUTOSH KALSI



J Krishnamurti created these schools intending them to become centres for excellence—places where students, parents and teachers would come together to discover the highest form of intelligence.

An organization is made up of its people; without the people the organization does not exist. So to keep the intent of the school alive I believe there must be deep interest in each one of us to discover what that excellence is. If I, as an individual, am really interested in understanding myself, then the very passion would also fuel the ‘fire’ of the school. So the primary responsibility of this lies with me and not with some abstract entity called ‘school’.

What do we mean by the word excellence? The word comes from its Latin root *excellētia*, which means ‘superior’. In colloquial usage the word usually implies a comparison. Excellence is generally ‘in comparison to’ something. However, I am quite certain that Krishnamurti did not use the word in that sense, for he totally denied all forms of measurement. His understanding of excellence was absolute and beyond all comparisons.

So what do we mean by excellence? I believe we cannot know its meaning through verbal definitions but must explore the essence of it for ourselves. Then our understanding of it would be authentic and not intellectual. We need to set aside all fixed ideas about it, for only then can I truly explore. If we already know what ‘excellence’ is, then our very knowledge of it would hinder our unravelling of the same. Excellence is not something that can be posited, for all that is posited is result of the categories of thinking. Our habitual pattern of thinking divides life into separate compartments—we speak of excellence in art, excellence in music, excellence in academics, and so on. However, the moment we fix,

define, and thus fragment, something, it becomes an object to be pursued and not something to be discovered.

In our usage of the word this meaning has been completely reversed, for we are not speaking of excellence in relationship to something, but of excellence *per se*, the very essence of excellence. That excellence can never be an object of pursuit; for it is of the 'whole' and the 'whole' cannot be defined positively. The 'whole' is when the 'fragment' is not. So the very effort to seek excellence in a particular sphere is the denial of it, for the effort hinders the creative explosion of life. Thus, we find that the only way to discover it is to approach it through negation. It is not through the exercise of will, but through clearing up or negating the obstacles hindering excellence, that true excellence can flower.

Excellence to me lies in the very negation of life as we tend to live it—a dull, repetitive, conflicted existence that has very little semblance of joy or beauty in it. To seek comfort, to live in patterns, to be successful, is all part of mundane existence. The desire for security does not go together with excellence; for seeking comfort makes us dull, anxious, afraid and aggressive. It kills the feeling for beauty and passion. I feel that excellence can only come into being when the mind learns to live with the flow of uncertainty; for where there is uncertainty there is also attention. With comfort comes dullness, but with uncertainty comes alertness. So excellence to me is a state of being where the mind is totally alert.

To live with uncertainty entails hard work, but I feel that it is only in uncertainty can true excellence flower. When we are standing at the edge of the precipice all our senses come alive, for there one cannot afford to be inattentive. Similarly, living with psychological uncertainty demands total alertness of our being, as the mind then has no space to 'settle down'. To sustain that level of attention one has to draw on capacities from the unknown. This 'drawing out' of capacity to me is excellence. Perhaps such is the link between excellence and psychological uncertainty.

From there perhaps we can go even further to uncover the highest form of excellence. Krishnamurti demanded of us nothing short of the highest intelligence. I believe that if each one of us is deeply earnest in finding that out, this would help sustain the environment of excellence in the school.

Bringing out the Good in Good Practice

ANTONIE ZWEERS



When trying to educate in the right way, one of the things we can and probably should do is follow good practice, or ‘best practice’ as it is called in common parlance. By this I mean practice that is thought to be both effective and ethically sound, usually based on traditional wisdom or academic research. In the context of education this constitutes the approaches to teaching, management, and school support that get the job done effectively in a way that is morally good. It is *good* practice both in *instrumental* and in *ethical* terms.

Yet, when we study what happens when education is truly good, for example through phenomenological research or, more informally, through the kind of enquiry Krishnamurti spoke about, we find that a lot happens in our relationships that is neither described in accounts of good practice nor seen to originate in the practice itself. What is more, when we come into contact with that other dimension of the relationship, a dimension that is beyond the practice, we may well experience it as much more

significant than what happens at the level of the mechanics of good practice.

Let us call this other dimension of the relationship ‘the space of inner consciousness’. We experience this space when we are interacting with others and with nature, and also when we are in a state of meditation. To the extent that our relationships are formed in this space, they appear to have a deeper ground than our reactions of like and dislike, our emotional responses, our specific actions, and the ideas we may hold. The essence of our relationships appears to be deeper than practice. For example, good practice may describe the kinds of listening skills a good teacher or school manager needs to display, such as making eye-contact, being genuinely engaged, and showing they have understood and taken on board what is being said. But, however good the practice, it may still not be good at the inner level of consciousness because good practice in itself is no guarantee that the relationship is good at the level that matters most. Likewise,

the school community will only be a true community (as opposed to a tribe, a faction, a sect, or an interest group) if it is based on a sense of connectedness at the level of inner consciousness, which is different from the kinds of cohesion that come out of team-building exercises. This is like the light emitted from a lantern through the cracks in the paper, perhaps forming a star or a smiley face. This light does not originate in the paper that shapes it like a face or a star, but comes from inside the lantern. In the same way, the goodness that may manifest in our practices does not originate in these practices, but in the space of inner consciousness.

And yet it also seems important that we seek out 'best practices'. As a teacher, I know I need to adopt the best methodology I can find, just as the cook needs to make the healthiest food, and the head of department ought to develop the best possible management practice that responds to given needs. So how can best practice and good practice be reconciled? Here, I will explore my understanding of inner consciousness and its essential nature, and try to suggest the ways in which it might manifest (or not) in the practices of an educational community.

The first thing we can say about the space of inner consciousness is that there are no divisions within it. It is whole. Therefore, teaching and organizational

practices should reflect its undivided nature. The school community that best reflects this would not have factions and divisions, insiders and outsiders, favourites and those whose presence is merely tolerated. Where there is functional differentiation between different groups and individuals, this separation is only for practical purposes and the overall atmosphere should be inclusive. Among all those involved in the school there needs to be a sense that inwardly there is only one consciousness of which all individuals are part, and this needs to be reflected in the spirit of the school and in the way the organization is run. And this sense of oneness should extend to the animals, plants, and nature in and around the school. Aiming for such a sense of inclusiveness is, therefore, not merely good for effectiveness or productivity; it is a way of basing relationships on the understanding that the space of inner consciousness is undivided.

Another characteristic of the space of inner consciousness is that, in it, all living beings exist as much for their own sake as for their relationship with others. So the practices we adopt should emphasize the value of each individual, and reflect a sense of equality rather than hierarchy, without ignoring the different responsibilities that come with different roles. The ability to meet another human being without hiding behind either a superior or subordinate

status can be hard, as it may make us feel exposed and vulnerable. But it is important that we aim to do so, because it has deeper significance at a level that really matters that we acknowledge that all are worthy in themselves and none more worthy than the other.

What is more, the space of inner consciousness is essentially transparent. So if we want our practices to reflect this, it requires openness to questioning and listening with a truly open mind to those who voice concerns. While our capacity for honesty may be limited by how transparent our thoughts and feelings are to ourselves, we should be as honest as we can be. Hidden agendas on the part of the teacher, backroom deal making on the part of the management, a secret disregard for the school's stated aims, all these undermine the striving towards good practice.

Related to this is trust and a sense of security. This means that, where management practices are arbitrary or teacher behaviour is erratic, it becomes much more difficult for individuals to truly connect with themselves and each other. Ultimately, there may never be genuine trust and security so long as we feel compelled to operate only for our self-interest. To encourage individuals to take this step into the space of inner consciousness, it helps if we adopt educational and organizational practices

that are not only inclusive and transparent, but also trustworthy and which promote a sense of security for all.

Further, in the space of inner consciousness, who we are and what we do matters absolutely—not in the sense of being measurable or countable in comparative terms—but in the sense of each of us existing in a way that is not relative to others' perspectives, aims or desires. And this means that the practices we adopt should allow all involved to take initiative and to have the contributions they make acknowledged, from the youngest to the oldest, from the headmistress to the person doing the lowest-paid job. Our classrooms and communities should be places where every individual has a voice, and all are seen to count.

If we consider it carefully, there is only one inner realm of consciousness. There is only one world and our practices should reflect this. Maintaining a deep and sustained connection with the natural world is essential. Even if we distance ourselves from commonly followed practices in the rest of human society and for pragmatic reasons thus isolate ourselves, the individual or the community cannot separate themselves, in spirit, from the world around. Indeed, a teacher who refuses to be open to learning from others at a deeper level, may well be bound to repeat the worst

of educational practices that he might have sought to isolate himself from. Similarly, a community that retreats into a psychological bubble of self-absorption may well eventually be absorbed by the world around it, altogether losing its uniqueness. There is only one world, and all of it is part of the natural world, and our practices should reflect this.

The more we come into contact with the realm of inner consciousness, the more we may find that it has no boundaries. This means that the greatest results come from those practices that take their point of reference not in well-defined worldly goals, but are the manifestation of the goodness that originates in the space of inner consciousness. This is not to say that we should, for example, refuse to pass exams or be financially viable as an organization. Nor does it mean that we should not bother to support those in need or be involved in nature conservation. Rather, it means that passing exams, being financially viable, supporting charities, and protecting wildlife should happen in the service of manifesting this quality of goodness. This good may then spread in unexpected ways, because the unbounded nature of the inner realm knows much better than we ever can how to find the cracks in the paper that make the lantern shine.

As we make the demand on ourselves to combine best practice with relationships that are based in inner consciousness, the space for education opens up. Then the demands of good practice are ones we can and should make on the students, to the extent that their age and level of maturity allows. Then students may learn to treat all as worthy of respect, including themselves, their teachers, support staff and fellow students; they may learn that animals and nature are just as much part of the whole and valuable in their own right; they may learn not to form factions amongst themselves or be antagonistic towards the staff; they may learn to be transparent in their being and not hide parts of themselves; they may learn not to become self-absorbed or tribal in their outlook; they may learn to trust and be trustworthy; they may have the manifestation of the good in mind even as they study for their exams and prepare for a role in society; and they may understand that it matters absolutely who they are and what they do. Ultimately it means that we will have opened up a space for the student to learn that who they are, in absolute terms, is not their outward persona but the one they are at the level of inner consciousness—undivided, transparent, valuable in their own right, trusting and trustworthy, one with the whole of existence, and unbounded in who they can be at that inner level.

An Experiment with Order and Freedom in the Classroom*

KRISTY LEE



Knowing how young children find stability and benefit from order and structure, how will increased structure and predictability of work in class affect the quality of the attention and engagement of older students? This question came about from my interactions with my young son. I observed over time what looked to me as his need for structure and routine. For example, evening preparation for bed had developed a set rhythm and order. I began to notice that my son really preferred knowing what would happen and sticking to a pattern. He would even take the initiative to remind me if I went off course or forgot something. It seemed that the predictability gave him a sense of ease and control. If we went off schedule too often he would become agitated and grumpy. On the other hand he thrived when he was able to rely on his routines. I have heard other parents sharing similar observations of their children and there are numerous studies and research papers that discuss the positive effects of order and structure on very young children.

In the classroom I try to teach in a style that I feel would be the most beneficial to the students. However, I also realize how my teaching is influenced by how I would like to be taught and how I learn best. Therefore, though I have a plan for my classes, I am happy to change or redirect the focus if something interesting comes up. I wondered though if I was taking up too many of these teaching opportunities, and if this

*Recently, teachers at the Oak Grove School were asked to conduct ‘action research’ as part of the annual teacher evaluation cycle. In this article, High School ESL teacher Kristy Lee describes and thoughtfully reflects on an intervention she made in her classes, raising questions of order and freedom, and questioning conditioning on both sides.

was having a disruptive effect on the overall rhythm, expectations and materials covered in the class.

Laying down a structure

In preparing for my action research, I wrote a general plan of all the things I wanted to cover with the grades 9, 10 and 11 for the whole time period of this project. Additionally, I created a very detailed weekly schedule that included all the things we would cover, the length of time each activity would take and homework assignments. The following table, for example, was the plan for one Monday during the project.

Table: Plan for Monday

| | | | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11th | Journal write + read 15 Check in 5 Quiz 5 Idiom 5 Grammar Sheet 7 Conference sheet 5 HW 5 | 10th | Journal write + read 15 Quiz 10 Check in 5 Conference sheet 5 Idiom 5 Grammar sheet 10 HW 5 | 9th | Journal write + read 15 Quiz 10 Check in 5 Conference sheet 5 Idiom 5 Grammar sheet 5 Paragraph sheet 5 HW 5 |
| HW | Grammar sheet Idiom story in pairs | HW | Grammar sheet Idiom writing | HW | Grammar sheet Paragraph on Ojai |

Source: Author

My objective was to stay true to everything I had written down and in the order it was written down. Another objective was to repeat activities on set days, week after week. For example, journal writing and homework correction were everyday activities. Idioms and grammar sheets were covered three times a week on Monday, Thursday and Friday.

Settling into the structure

Initially I could see the students struggling with the enforced order, especially when I insisted on keeping them on topic much more than I used to. They did not all respond with enthusiasm to this change, as it was quickly implemented without any warning. Each class reacted

differently to this. The ninth graders really did not like the reduction in the freedom of their vocal expression. The tenth graders pretty much went along with it. It has two new students, which I believe was part of the reason. The eleventh graders were my hardest bunch. This class was hard to read at times. They were easy-going and talkative as individuals, but as a class they tended to be more reserved and uncommunicative. They went along with it but with a definite unvoiced reserve.

In the beginning I was doing much more monitoring and reminding to make sure they stayed on topic and focused. Interestingly enough, the number of times I would intervene in any given class began to decrease. In the ninth grade class it was quite a noticeable decrease. Near the end of this project my students would remind me or bring up things they had gotten used to covering during class, for example, idioms, if I had forgotten. Of course idioms were something they had fun with, so this was a popular activity. The students also began to know what we would be covering and as a result were more prepared and focused. One thing I found useful with the repetition was that they became faster with certain classroom tasks. For instance, grammar sheet corrections went quickly as they all had the format down and knew what to do without me prompting them. This was the same with 'in-class' editing. The ninth graders especially were getting faster and better at spotting mistakes. There was a heavy focus on editing during this time so improvements with timed 'in-class' writing and rewriting were noticeable.

Observing my own responses

What I found really interesting, more than these small behavioural changes in the students, was what came up for me. I noticed right away that I had over planned and had misjudged timings of some activities. Thus, I found myself getting frustrated at not being able to cover everything planned for the day. I also noticed that I felt more mechanical and less spontaneous when I kept referring back to the plan during class to make sure I was covering everything I needed. My feeling is that this might get better with time, but I also recognize that too rigid an attention to the plan blocks spontaneity. On days I did not look at the plan and worry about finishing everything, I felt freer and more engaged with the students.

One of the things I did before the experiment was to organize my binder with copies of all the material I wanted to cover for each class. This way I always had everything with me and could find things easily. As I had to move from one room to another, this actually was needed as I did sometimes forget a book in another class. This turned out to be a good model for the students. I also insisted on the students having their binder in order early on in the experiment and this helped them to stay more organized as well. I also noticed that I became more organized in getting work handed back early and having printouts ready and easily added to their folder. I found it was better if I hole-punched everything, though a part of me thinks these students, especially the older ones, should be able to organize their work and not lose it just because I forgot to hole punch a handout. But I have to admit that it made for less shuffling of papers and searching on the part of the students.

I realized that with the ninth grade class I had been going off topic more than I realized was helpful for them. In one sense it was good for their speaking practice and on the spot thinking, but on the other hand we ended up not covering as much new material, which they do need, especially with their grammar and writing. This showed me that I actually needed to focus on that class more. My objective was to empower them to self-direct themselves rather than wait for me. So I continually and strongly asked them to focus their energy during the first couple of weeks of this project. I figured once they got used to this expectation, they would do it more naturally unprompted.

Finding the balance between structure and spontaneity

My biggest struggle was with knowing what the right balance was between asking for order and focus and their freedom to influence the speed and movement of the class. I know that for many of them the 'ESL class' is where they feel most comfortable to engage and speak out. I wanted them to retain this and yet stay focused on the topic at hand. Another aspect I came to realize more strongly was that Oak Grove, and this class in particular, allows most of them to engage with teachers and their education in a radically different way from a style of learning where they are just asked to listen and obey. They had earlier been well initiated into this style of learning, so I wondered if there is much value to layering

in more control, since this is a system they already know well and perform well in. I also wondered if there would be the danger of them slipping into a mechanical way of doing things, without even realizing it, if the class structure was similar to what they had been used to.

It was just getting interesting when the project came to an end just before Spring break. I did not arrive at anything conclusive. My feeling though is that these changes are helpful and will benefit the students; but it needs to be tempered with spontaneity and freedom for both the students and myself. It shouldn't really be strongly one way or the other. But what is the best ratio? I realize that many factors play into this and it changes with each new class every year. These factors include the dynamics between the individuals, their comfort and familiarity with the place and the teachers, their social and cultural background; whether they had enough sleep the previous night, whether they are struggling with relationship issues. I really needed more time, a whole year ideally, to gather more information. I think this would be quite an interesting experiment to begin the next school year with.

A New Culture

The Religious Spirit and the Scientific Mind

GEETHA VARADAN



*... I want to talk about something which concerns the whole world, about which the whole world is disturbed. It is the question of the religious spirit and the scientific mind. There are these two attitudes in the world. These are the only two states of mind that are of value: the true religious spirit and the true scientific mind. Every other activity is destructive, leading to a great deal of misery, confusion and sorrow.**

In May 1959 the British writer, scientist and civil servant, C. P. Snow delivered the Rede Lecture at the University of Cambridge which he titled ‘The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution’. The theme of his lecture was the dangerously wide gap that had opened up between ‘scientists’ and the ‘literary intellectuals’ (whom he also referred to as the ‘traditional culture’). He spoke of the ‘gulf of mutual in-comprehension’, ‘hostility’, ‘dislike, but most of all ‘lack of understanding’ that existed and he blamed the literary élite for it. Several decades earlier, in the late nineteenth century, a similar debate had taken place

between Matthew Arnold, the poet and critic, and Thomas Henry Huxley, scientist and humanist.

The tendency for humans to polarize and dichotomize made the debates heated. F. R. Leavis, the distinguished critic, in a lecture a few months after Snow’s, disparaged Snow as someone who ‘doesn’t know what he means, and doesn’t know he doesn’t know’. Today Snow’s phrase, ‘two cultures’ has come to represent the divide that exists in the world, but when Snow used it, it was the reiteration of a debate that had been going on in academia for many years between science and the humanities.

*From: *Krishnamurti on Education*, Part 1: Talks to Students ‘On the Religious Mind and the Scientific Mind’, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1995, pp. 24–7

The debates referred to recall the parable of *The Blind Men and the Elephant*, used both by Jainism and Buddhism. In the parable, each blind man touches a part of what is in front of him—which happens to be an elephant—and describes the elephant in terms of his own experience. Though not explicitly stated in the parable, they are either unable or unwilling to move and feel another side of the elephant, and so they debate hotly about its true nature. The Buddha's words sum up the situation aptly:

*Some recluses and brahmanas, so called,
Are deeply attached to their own views;
People who only see one side of things
Engage in quarrels and disputes.*

Krishnamurti too points to the essentially fragmenting nature of thinking. He shows that thought operates in terms of the many, and not just two. But unlike the academics who do see the other side but who almost always end up taking one side over the other, Krishnamurti shows the inherent flaw of seeing 'sides'.

Culture according to Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti has said that culture, "is the only thing that matters in life." (3 January 1965, Madras) His usage of the word 'culture' adheres to its etymological origins. Culture (like the words 'cult' and 'cultivate'), he points out, comes 'from the root word *colere*'. *Colere* means 'to till' but also 'to protect'

and, 'to give attention (to a plant for example) in order to promote growth', and also 'inhabit'. Culture, for Krishnamurti, is thus not only great architecture, great literature, and great music. "A man who has great knowledge, a lot of money, a title, and who surrounds himself with beautiful things", he says "is nothing more than a man who is conforming to the pattern of society. And a man who conforms to society is a stupid man; he is not a cultured man at all." (22 January 1965, Rishi Valley)

Speaking about the schools he founded, Krishnamurti says, the children will "of course ... learn subjects, but that will not be the primary thing. The primary thing [will be] to cultivate their minds. This will be the position of the children as they grow up—from the age of seven till they leave the school." (2 December 1979, Rishi Valley) For him, culture "implies developing, understanding, the mind and the heart and the senses. And to cultivate one's mind and one's body requires extraordinary study, attention." (22 January 1965, Rishi Valley)

The connection of culture (*colere*) with the word 'inhabit' and, by extension, 'habitation', seems to point to Krishnamurti's usage of the word 'culture' as meaning "everything which is contained in the brain cells." (24 June, Brockwood Park, 1983) Culture is human habitation. The expression of one people's

habitation may differ from another people's habitation (and it is because of this that we speak of a 'culture of the east and a culture of the west', a 'culture of the sciences and the culture of the humanities'). Krishnamurti, however, indicates that human habitation is like bedrock. It is the same everywhere, for the things that fill the brain, the mind, and the heart are the same in all human beings. The mind-consciousness is a shared mind-consciousness.

Hence, for Krishnamurti, there are really no 'two' cultures, but only 'one' culture—a human culture, the culture of mankind. Unfortunately, as he points out, religions, societies and even educators 'have emphasized separateness' and called it 'individualism'. In a letter to the schools (dated 15 November 1978) he says that "a human being psychologically is the whole of mankind. He not only represents it but he *is* the whole of the human species ...". The tragedy, he said, is that none of us is truly an individual (in its root meaning of 'indivisible', 'whole'). None of us sees our 'oneness', that 'we are the world', and 'a part of nature'.

Right education and a 'new' culture

Krishnamurti sees right education as a solution to many problems that face the world. But unlike 'specialists', he does not see education in terms of just imparting knowledge—science-technology or

humanities-arts. Education is also not just a means for socio-economic change. It is not to produce a technological man. Education must be holistic, and non-divisive, for all the problems in the world stem from man's faulty relationship or rather non-relationship to other human beings and to nature.

He said (about three years before the historic Apollo 11 manned expedition to the moon in July 1969), "Man has been educated", and "he will probably go to the moon. He has lived under the sea for many days. He has invented the most extraordinary things: electronic brains that function much more rapidly than human brains. He has been able to cure diseases, help people to live more ...healthily, in better houses, enjoy themselves much more, travel the world in a few hours ... he has built extraordinary dams to hold water to irrigate the land, to bring about great prosperity for man", and "he has produced marvellous paintings, sculptures, buildings." But in spite of all these achievements, "apparently man has not been able to solve the question of ... how to live peacefully, happily with each other ... enjoying the beauty of the earth, the skies." (19 January 1966, Rishi Valley)

For Krishnamurti education is the means of bringing about a 'new' culture, a culture that is the natural flowering of

a true religious mind, a silent mind, a free mind, a mind that has great space and great love which is necessary for living and functioning in the world. It is only when there is this culture, he says, is it possible to “function logically, sanely, healthily in the world”. It is only then that “knowledge operates without being an end in itself” and without “bringing about more chaos.” (1 August 1971, Saanen)

Krishnamurti, like many philosophers, reminds us that, ‘the word is never the thing’, he has to use language. He often uses the *vianegativa*, a way of describing something by saying what it is not. In this instance, in using the word ‘new’ he does not do so in terms of something that is just added on, as a third and a fourth and so on. He uses this, perhaps, exclusively to point to an ‘only’ way, a ‘choiceless’ way. The ‘new’ culture is not just a synthesis or amalgamation, but a totally new development. Cultures that are compounds, layered, he said, in Rishi Valley on 11 November 1954, are, “not natural or native” and “poison ... the whole structure”. So we need a “culture which is totally new—something human”.

Silence and space are necessary for this new culture. And silence and space, for him, are somewhat synonymous. On 3 January 1965 in Madras, Krishnamurti said that culture, “is a response

out of silence. And when you are completely attentive there is space”. But it is important to see that, “space and silence exist only when there is love”. Silence, he pointed out, is not the pause between two noises, between two thoughts, just as peace is not the gap between two wars. A new culture, a culture of love and relationship, a culture of understanding and of peace, Krishnamurti says, is not possible if we live in silences that are the product of thought, and spaces that are shoddy, narrow and the result of isolation, of withdrawal. To build “thick walls around us” and then to want to change ourselves and, so, the world, is impossible. “It is like looking over the wall into another person’s garden.” (1 August 1971, Saanen)

The religious spirit and the scientific mind Krishnamurti’s perception is that all knowledge—whether scientific and technological or of the *belle lettres* as Matthew Arnold called the humanities—arts—is the same; it belongs to the realm of the known. Even all the religions of the world belong to the realm of the known. But in this knowledge-of-the-known realm, he differentiates between that knowledge-mind which is ‘scientific’ (in the sense of ‘seeing things as they are’) and that knowledge-mind which is non-scientific. And, then, there is, Krishnamurti points out, the other realm, which is the truly religious sphere.

Krishnamurti unfolds these two realms, when he speaks of two types of spirits, two types of minds that exist in the world and says that they are the only spirits-minds that matter. He says that the religious spirit contains the scientific spirit. Both move from 'fact to fact'. But the scientific mind does not necessarily have the long vision, and is limited as it is not one of love. The religious mind holds within it the scientific temper. The religious spirit is never utilitarian and cannot be traded in the market place.

For Krishnamurti, a cultured human being is one who has a mind with both spirits. He points out that emphasizing one or the other only leads to insensitivity, and that would destroy intelligence (for "the essence of intelligence is sensitivity"). If both the spirits (scientific and religious) marched hand in hand, then we would live intelligently, with love, cultivating the whole field. Though he does not explicitly speak of how we can get the two spirits to flow together, he does speak of "attention from moment to moment". That is the key: to look and to listen to everything and everyone, to look and to

listen with love. To look and to listen with love means to be free of the self. And to be free is to end the centre. But "to be free of the self is one of the most difficult things, because it hides under different rocks, under different trees, different activities." (24 June 1983, Brockwood Park) The self, he writes in a letter to the schools (dated 15 June 1979) "is like a shadow. It is never captured. It is always there, and it slips through your fingers, through your mind ... you corner it here, it turns up there."

Krishnamurti saw and described the prevalence of these two cultures—the scientific and the religious—and he went beyond. It is "the seeing of what-is and going beyond it [that] is intelligence. Intelligence is a total movement, like love. It is not fragmented, and that which is whole has a peculiar way of working in darkness with its own light. It is not dependent because it is a light to itself which nothing can destroy... unless you have this religious ardour the mountain appears insurmountable. If you have it, the mountain doesn't exist." (9 September 1970)

Book Review Section

MARK LEE



The World Within: You Are the Story of Humanity (2014)

J Krishnamurti

Krishnamurti Foundation America and Krishnamurti Foundation India

It is curious that so few of the books by J Krishnamurti are reviewed in the press and by the major book review magazines like the *New York Review of Books*. I asked the editor of *Leading Edge Reviews* why that was so and her answer pointed to one reason for the evasion of Krishnamurti by the popular press—Krishnamurti was difficult to understand and more difficult to categorize in a genre.

This new title, *The World Within*, brought out simultaneously this year by the Krishnamurti Foundation of America and the Krishnamurti Foundation India will surely be seen as an exception to that reasoning. It is a compilation of interviews that ordinary people had with Krishnamurti in the 1940s in Ojai, California, at a time when he was not giving public talks.

From the very first interview, only one page long, through to the last of the ninety interviews, the reader will be struck by the utter simplicity of the process, the logic, and the exposition of common human questions and problems. Krishnamurti handles the obvious issues like suffering, fear, conflict, and death directly, with refreshing candour and non-analytical compassion. He avoids the artifice of a psychiatrist or psychotherapist as he turns the questions back on the questioner so that revelation and understanding emerge effortlessly from the questioner. It is Krishnamurti's adroit opening up of a question to its larger human dimension that reveals the interconnectedness and co-origination of our fears, our loneliness, and little things like our unfinished thoughts.

More than half of the interviews end with Krishnamurti calling on the benediction of “the tranquillity of the eternal”, “the extinction of all desire”, and “In this stillness the timeless is realized”.

Educators and parents will find much to ponder in *The World Within*, because though Krishnamurti is in dialogue with adults here, teachers and parents face similar questioning from children at home and in school. If the adults there could similarly open up questions and problems without blame and guilt, then children could learn how to dialogue, explore, and enquire into real-life thought-feelings. It is worth a try. As is pointed out in the Foreword, “...readers in any era or on any continent can find themselves clearly and compassionately made plain”. Krishnamurti says, “If you know how to read that book which is yourself, then you know all the activities and brutalities and stupidities of mankind because you are the rest of the world.”

Curriculum As Meditative Inquiry (2013)

Ashwani Kumar

Palgrave Macmillan

Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry by Ashwani Kumar is a startling and novel book. In this world where curricula on fundamental issues in education change at a glacial pace and where the fundamentals of human psychology for educators are opaque in practical terms, Kumar’s book brings important and long overdue insight into education for transforming human consciousness. For eons ‘Know Thyself’ and ‘Who Am I?’ have been the exclusive province of philosophers, while confounding educators worldwide. Kumar draws inspiration from educator, author, and educational psychologist J Krishnamurti, who addresses these perennial issues in his major books on education and through the schools inspired by his teachings—six in India, one in England, and one in America. J Krishnamurti’s books on education include *Krishnamurti on Education*, *The Beginnings of Learning*, *Letters to the Schools and Education and the Significance of Life*.

In the Foreword, Dr Meenakshi Thapan (University of Delhi) states, “Through processes of self-reflection and self-inquiry, based on

constant awareness and observation, it is possible to bring about a change in consciousness and thereby in human relationships.” Kumar carefully sets the stage for change in educational curriculum by pointing to the obvious, “Our world is in crisis. Our ecology, the foundation of life on planet earth, is in danger due to our lack of concern for the impact of our actions on the fragile ecosystem. Peace on earth is also denied because of antagonistic nationalistic, religious, ideological, racial, and economic groups. What is it that lies at the root of this crisis? ... It is my understanding that most of our problems—psychological and collective—have their source in our consciousness, our very psychological nature.” That diagnosis could have been written a hundred or two hundred years ago, but as it pertains to the modern world, it is profoundly important. The consciousness of humankind is in serious peril of self-destruction. Kumar draws on the eloquent remedial work of Krishnamurti as also that of American educator James B. Macdonald, who lay out in detail what is needed to affect the consciousness of children in any kind of education setting, such that there will be a radical and systemic shift in perception and action in the next generation.

What Kumar discusses, with empirical rigour, in his new approach to curriculum are the themes of ‘consciousness’, ‘education’, ‘meditative inquiry’, and ‘on the nature of curriculum as meditative inquiry’. The Introduction to the last chapter summarizes the essence of his study.

I argued that human conflicts—individual and social—are deeply connected to the nature of human consciousness characterized by fear and insecurity, conditioning and image-making, becoming and psychological time, and fragmentation and conflict; and second, I discussed how contemporary educational institutions, being part and parcel of human consciousness, reflect and perpetuate the latter’s characteristic features. In this chapter I discuss the third principle: meditative inquiry. First, I analyze the limitations of thinking, analysis, systems, and authority in understanding and changing human consciousness. Then, I explain the meaning of meditative inquiry and its significance for psychological and social transformation.

Where in education psychology, school curricula studies, and academic literature do you find an approach to learning and education that covers

the whole of human consciousness? For that matter, Kumar's approach addresses the modern human learner regardless of nationality, race and sex, who is growing up in an environment characterized by disrespect, school violence, apathy, drugs, and peer-pressure? His is a defining treatise on what curricula for learning should be, could be, and must be, to save the youth of today from being just another generation of selfish, confused, ignorant and prematurely aged young adults.

The whole of Kumar's book is a challenge to the putative, traditional educational approach that put knowledge systems and the authority of the known at the core of all curricula. Karen Meyer, of the University of BC, Canada finishes her Afterword with, "...I am also grateful that such a provocative text now exists in educational research and inspires teachers and students to work together and imagine the world otherwise."

This book should be on the mandatory reading list of every teacher-training programme, every education psychology degree course, and for all secondary-school sociology classes. Perhaps if Palgrave (Macmillan) brings out *Curriculum as Meditative Inquiry* as a paperback it will have a wider reach and purchase. It certainly deserves that if it is to be taken seriously by policy makers and people who decide on curricular issues at all levels.

I would recommend this book to all who are serious about the learning process and are concerned with why most education institutions generally are failing to bring out integrated, sane, healthy student graduates capable of leading meaningful lives and caring for and loving others and the Earth.

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