

The Whistleblowers: Humanistic Education, according to Spiritual Teacher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986)



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Editorial Introduction

I wrote this article about 20 years ago for the late Professor Roland Meighan's radical education magazine *Education Now: News & Review* (no. 38, Winter, 2002), and it's also published in Stanbrook, 2002. It was quite obscurely self-published, and is not readily available today.

Many humanistic psychologists of my generation were greatly influenced by Krishnamurti (as I know from many a conversation over the years), and at least one writer has contributed a major academic study of K's highly sophisticated phenomenological psychology (Butcher, 1986). This short piece, reproduced here in its original form, can be read in conjunction with the review essay on humanistic education that will appear in the next issue, and is reproduced here as a critical commentary on the parlous state of mainstream schooling and education today, and the urgent need for an infusion of spiritual, humanistic values and practices into that ailing system.

It is almost half a century now since the great Indian spiritual philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (colloquially known as 'K') published his wonderfully wise little book *Education and the Significance of Life*; and it is a depressing commentary on the hegemonic ascendancy of a soulless 'modernity' that mainstream education today is in many ways just as limited and limiting of human consciousness development and as it was when K was at the height of his powers, tirelessly travelling the world and

spreading his message to the countless thousands of people who went to hear him speak.

K, then, in common with many spiritual sears, had much to say about education, and the way in which a one-sidedly intellectual, technique-fixated, over-prescribed educational environment profoundly damages the developing psyche of the child in a way that is scarcely understandable within the ideology of

modernity. Mass schooling systems were totally anathema to K, with their dysfunctional institutionalising tendencies, and their commonly surreptitious agenda of mind-less conditioning, cultivating conformity to conventional but deeply flawed societal, materialistic values whose uncritical reproduction cannot but lead to further human suffering, conflict and destructiveness. For K, the very institutions which claim to educate are actually doing the opposite: for by over-emphasising the intellect, they are actively *preventing* the awakening of true intelligence.

K believed the essential factor in education to be the relationship between teacher and pupil, which it is impossible to prescribe by following any programmatic method – with pupil and teacher being equal partners in an open dialogue. His radical individualism lays great emphasis on the deep and radical psychological change of the individual, which can only ever be a uniquely individual process and experience. Thus, for K, education and learning should be far more about *process* than about *content*; and he repeatedly emphasises the importance of *inner space* for deep reflection and experiencing – something which utilitarian, content-obsessed educational environments systematically neglect. Personal and spiritual maturity and, above all, *consciousness evolution* therefore lie at the core of K's educational philosophy: 'The self is made up of a series of defensive and expansive reactions, and its fulfilment is always in its own projections and gratifying identification'; and education should therefore set about freeing children from 'the ways of the self', which cause so much suffering, enabling them 'to be free and to flower in love and goodness'.

For K, there should be no system of punishment and reward-seeking, and no imposition of ideology within educational environments. The Krishnamurti schools, he said, 'are to be concerned with the cultivation of the total human being. These centres of education must help the student and the educator to flower naturally... – not merely a mechanical process oriented to a career'. And he writes of 'a free

inquiry into ourselves without the barrier of one who knows and the one who doesn't'; K was, of course, quite dismissive of hierarchy and authority as principles of learning, relating and being.

For K, then, it was a fundamental error for the educational process uncritically to embrace current 'old-paradigm', materialistic values and organisational principles: he asked, 'Is this what education is meant for, that you should willingly or unwillingly fit into this mad structure called society?' (echoes of Ronnie Laing here). For K (as for Rudolf Steiner with his notion of the 'Three-fold Social Order'), schools should be small and, above all, *independent of any centralised authority structures*; for if freedom and independence were missing in a school, it would inevitably become an institution for the perpetuation of the cultural conditioning of which he was so critical.

Above all, then, K was concerned to provide the basis for human growth and transformation, but without imposing any detailed system of beliefs or behaviours. And he could hardly have been clearer about the damaging and constraining nature of old-paradigm, over-intellectual, de-spiritualised orientations to life: 'We have been educated in a most absurd way.... A lot of information is poured into our heads and we develop a very small part of the brain which will help us to earn a livelihood. The rest of the brain is neglected.'

Compared with the globally burgeoning Steiner Waldorf education movement (with which they possess some significant commonalities), the Krishnamurti schools are still very small in number (Brockwood Park in Hampshire is the only school in the UK) – which might well be as K himself would have wanted; for he would probably not have wished any educational 'movement' to take his name, as, for him, any and every human 'institution' is saturated and distorted by dysfunctional power relations. There is certainly a wealth of insight and wisdom in K's educational writings; and when, in the future, our current toxic educational malaise is transformed into a spiritually mature,

truly human(e) approach to creating healthy learning environments for our children, K's educational writings will offer a rich mine of insight, sense and vision for us to draw upon.

About the contributor

Richard House edits *Self & Society* and its sister online magazine.

References

- Butcher, P. (1986). The phenomenological psychology of J. Krishnamurti. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 18 (1): 35–50.
- Stanbrook, P. (ed.) (2002). *The Whistleblowers*. Nottingham: Education Now Publishing.

Select Krishnamurti Quotations

- The learned man is stupid when he relies on books, on knowledge and on authority to give him understanding.... To understand *ourselves* is both the beginning and the end of education.
- Any form of education that concerns itself with a part and not with the whole of man inevitably leads to increasing conflict and suffering.
- Our whole upbringing and education have made us afraid to think contrary to the established pattern of society, falsely respectful of authority and tradition.
- If we lay all our emphasis on 'career' and 'profession', the freedom to flower will gradually wither. We have laid far too much emphasis on examinations and getting good degrees.
- These [Krishnamurti] schools have come into being not to turn out mere careerists but to bring about the excellence of spirit.

K's Educational Works

- Education and the Significance of Life*, Gollancz, 1955
- The Awakening of Intelligence*, Harper & Row, 1973
- Krishnamurti on Education*, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Chennai, 1974
- Beginnings of Learning*, Gollancz, 1975
- A Flame of Learning: Krishnamurti with Teachers*, Mirananda, Den Haag, 1993
- On Learning and Knowledge*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1994