

Krishnamurti on the Timetable

BILL TAYLOR



At the time, Andy was on a collision course with staff and in danger of being asked to leave Brockwood. He was rebellious, angry, failing to get work done and entirely lacking in the self-confidence required to remedy the situation. His tutor, having tried many things, decided to create a completely new timetable for him, one that involved many more 'hands-on' activities, at which he was good, but one that also required him to attend the Krishnamurti Class.

The Krishnamurti Class was still in its first term, having started in September 2002, partly in response to demand from a few students and partly out of a perceived need. The aim was to offer students in the School some direct and sustained exposure to Krishnamurti's teachings and the provocative questions and challenging insights contained in them. The format was simple: one 45-minute class a week, no homework, no advance reading. My colleague, Antonio Autor, and myself, would choose the text or video clip to be looked at and in the class we would allow plenty of time to pause for discussion while looking at the material with the students. Sometimes material was chosen on a topic suggested by students, always it was selected with a teenage audience in mind. The class was entirely voluntary.

Andy was, therefore, the exception. He hadn't chosen the class and he didn't wish to be there. It placed him in the company of a group of students that he would not generally choose to hang-out with and it required him to participate in an activity that he didn't wish to. It is important to understand that many students who attend Krishnamurti Schools know virtually nothing about the founder or his teachings upon arrival and some would prefer to keep it that way. They are attracted to the School because of the atmosphere, the setting, the opportunities it affords, but, for some, to exhibit an interest in Krishnamurti teachings would be tantamount to defecting to the enemy camp. The feeling of 'us and them' that conventional schools are so good at inculcating, reinforced by the fashionable rebelliousness of adolescence, means that the message is dismissed before it is heard.

When Andy did join the class, he added his chair to

the circle that is the weekly seating arrangement for our sessions. He chose a low chair, from the odd selection lining the walls; this allowed him to lounge and adopt an insouciant and indifferent air. He gazed at the ceiling or out of the window for most of the proceedings and declined to say a word for at least a month. However, the class went on around him and he could not help but hear the text as it was read out, the questions as they were raised and the responses of his fellow students and the staff. He was not required to formulate his own replies, not tested on his knowledge and not burdened with homework. He began to relax.

We were working mainly with text taken from the section entitled *For the Young*, in the Krishnamurti Reader (Publisher: Penguin Arkana). There are 24 parts to this section of the book, each one raising questions and concerns that the average teenager might never have been encouraged to explore seriously with others, let alone in a school setting. Andy listened as we read Krishnamurti's questions and sought to make them our own. Why go through the struggle to be educated? Is there such a thing as security? What does it mean to love? What does it mean to be free? What is the mind? Can the mind be free of habits and from creating habits? How does an idea come into being? What is simplicity? What is beauty? What is the difference between selfconfidence and confidence without the self? Whether it was the more intriguing 'confidence without the self', or its betterknown relation, it is hard to say, but by the second term Andy had begun to speak in the class. His contributions were generally short and perfunctory, but they were freely offered and were listened to with interest and respect by all present. As time passed he contributed more and more and began to engage with the text and the group in a manner that we could hardly have dreamt of in the first term. Other areas of his life in the School were also going better since his new programme came into effect. In the Krishnamurti Class the self-reflective, discursive format seemed to be growing on Andy and making him feel more at ease with himself and with the overall ethos of the School itself.

In its concerns and approach the class is intended to somewhat mimic the discussions Krishnamurti had

with the students when he visited Brockwood. From the beginning of the School in 1969 until his death in 1986, Krishnamurti was a regular visitor to Brockwood spending on average about four months of the academic year in residence. He met with students and staff at least twice a week and sought to ensure that there was a vital exploration of consciousness and human transformation at the heart of the School. Since his death, Brockwood has done many things to ensure these concerns are still central to what we are doing; the Krishnamurti Class is just part of a growing list of courses that have been offered in the School that are intended to do this.

We chose to call it a 'Class' and to timetable it in the heart of the academic day because we felt that it gave it a legitimacy that was called for and because it provided a mental activity that was counter but complementary to that required for academic study. Students are increasingly faced with heavy academic workloads, burgeoning timetables and examination pressures. To cope with this they have a tendency to become doggedly conservative in their tastes, giving their energy and attention where it will be of most benefit; which is generally understood to mean subjects for which examinations and good marks are essential. To 'tack on' at the end of the day activities that seek to encourage enquiry and self-reflection is to suggest they are of lesser importance and invites a lacklustre response from the students. In former years, on his arrival at Brockwood in the spring, Krishnamurti was infamous for cancelling examination classes so that students could meet him to discuss relationship, anger, responsibility and love.

In Andy's brief feedback on the class at the end of the year, he observed that although there had been 'a bit of force' involved in getting him to join the class in the first place, he had kept an open mind—not something we would have agreed with in the opening weeks! In the end, he concluded, "I really enjoyed it"! Andy made us re-examine the question of the 'use of force'. We had shied away from making the class compulsory because we didn't want to put students off the teachings before they knew what they were. There was already a compulsory course (Inquiry Time) in the School, which sought to explore serious psychological questions with all of the students, but this did not necessarily make any direct use of the teachings. The teachings, we felt, added another challenging dimension to any inquiry. It was our experience with Andy that made us decide that we should take that challenge to all of the students, regardless of their response. At the beginning of the next academic year we made the class compulsory.

We are now almost half way through our second year of running the 'K Class' as a compulsory element of our curriculum for all Brockwood students and we are able to assess the outcome a little better. We have not attempted to use many of the standard assessment tools—essay writing, testing and examination—for obvious reasons. Therefore our assessment is primarily based on student self-review and feedback and our own observation of the classes. We have been pleasantly surprised by the lack of opposition to the classes amongst the students and the positive nature of the feedback they have given us. Generally they have approached the classes without the resistance that Andy was displaying and have welcomed the opportunity to reflect on what Krishnamurti has to say and how it relates to their lives.

Reflecting on what the class had done for her, Eva (aged 17, from Germany), wrote: "[it] brought many questions up, it made me think about the world and how things Class brings up things that you wouldn't talk about with your friends, and it brings up questions that you need to think about the answer to." The students recognise that in the class something out of the ordinary is going on amongst themselves, as Daniel (aged 19, from Germany) wrote: "It is incredible to see 15 year olds talk or think about awareness or religion for example."

One of the things that can be striking about the classes is the atmosphere in the room. Atmosphere can be difficult to agree on and hard to pin down, but both teacher and student can generally sense when that curious combination of attention, interest, affection and inquiry are alive in a room. "Without a good atmosphere nothing can work out how we want it to" wrote Dasha (aged 16, from Russia). For the students the atmosphere seems to arise at least in part from the fact that they are released from the usual pressures of having to perform academically: "I like this class because it's the only one where I don't feel pressures of any kind; it's a free class where everybody can say what they think without fear of being right or wrong" says Manuel (aged 17, from Mexico). While Robbie (aged 18, from the UK), at first was concerned that the class was compulsory and that this would have a negative impact on the atmosphere, he later wrote ".....[I] feel the atmosphere inside classes is more relaxed and feel that it has a good effect in terms of the atmosphere of the School."

If the K Class is really going so well, is one class a week enough? Some students don't think so: "I would love to have Discussion, K Class and Inquiry Time more than once a week. If you only have maths class once a week

you won't get very far. It is the same with these classes" writes Kailyn (aged 15, from the USA). Some students would like to see a 'broadening' of the topic to include the work of other great 'philosophers'; while others have asked to learn more about Krishnamurti the man: "... how did he spend his free time; what were his hobbies, habits, activities and so on... because it is interesting to know the person from the other side, not as a great philosopher but as a human being" wrote Vitya (aged 19, from Russia). Other students have suggested a different emphasis. One whose upbringing has been in a family where Krishnamurti's teachings were introduced to them at a young age wants to see more open dialogue without reference to the teachings, because, as she wrote, "I feel that I am thinking of all that he is talking about and having it told to me is, I feel, a little frustratinghis books are there to point something out but when they have done so we should think for ourselvesand trust ourselves that we can do it" (Zoe, aged 16 from France).

Andy left the School at the end of that first year of the K Class, and we have not heard from him since. The same will probably be true of many of the students who currently gather in the oak-panelled Study, overlooking the South Lawn, in the circle at the K Class. But having heard the questions, having witnessed the beauty of the teachings, having felt the delight of inquiry, perhaps they too will start to think it out for themselves. "To trust ourselves that we can do it"!

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