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# Status Update on Fear Education: Jiddu Krishnamurti Teachings



R. Michael Fisher

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**Technical Paper No. 123**

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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First Edition 2021

Cover and layout by R. Michael Fisher  
ISOF Logo (original 1989) designed by RMF

Printed in Canada

The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

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## Status Update on Fear Education: Jiddu Krishnamurti Teachings

R. Michael Fisher,<sup>1</sup> Ph.D.

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### **Abstract**

This paper addresses, in a third of a series of works by the author on the status of Fear Education, particularly the work of the philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986). It appears little progress has been made, especially in the field of Education in terms of recognizing the unique nature and role of fear in shaping everything humans do—including the way they learn and create knowledge itself. The paper encourages others to join this mission for a better fear education for all.

### **Will We Admit This Fact?**

If we have no relationship with one another, there is fear.  
-Jiddu Krishnamurti<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Krishnamurti (1995), p. 76; from a lecture in Madra, 7 January 1979.

Although I have for 32 years critiqued the world's status in regard to something I simply call "fear education,"<sup>3</sup> I recently had an experience of re-visiting one of my 'old' favorite philosophers of education, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986), who taught a good deal about fear, knowledge, the self, and education.

I attended a 2021 online international conference entitled: "J. Krishnamurti and the Contemporary World Crisis." It had been decades since I had directly engaged Krishnamurti with emphasis, and it was intriguing to see that some Canadian and Indian educators were part of sponsoring this event. And thus, it seemed appropriate I get somewhat involved. I attended the Opening Panel presentations, all given by people with Indian background who were more or less experts on Krishnamurti<sup>4</sup> and one of whom was an expert on Krishnamurti schools/education utilizing Krishnamurti's teachings.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the relationship of Krishnamurti's teachings (i.e., eclectic spiritual philosophy) to current world crises, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, seemed a good combination to me. What were these people going to say about it? As I took notes from the panel presentations it was very obvious that the term "*fear*" (and/or: fear and desire, fear and greed) repeatedly were brought up; although, no extra detailed points were made on that specifically, until the end of the Q and A. In one case, the educational expert said that fear is core to several great problems of consciousness and society that Krishnamurti pointed to, and fear is what makes a great barrier to education and good "school culture" and relationships.

I was intrigued. So, after the panel members were finished, the chat line opened and I wrote the following to them all to comment and/or answer:

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes used interchangeably with fear management/education (FME); see for e.g., Fisher (2003, 2003a, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Ashwani Kumar (host), Nayha Acharya (host), Ravi Ravindra, Hillary Rodrigues.

<sup>5</sup> Meenakshi Thapan.

I have always found Krishnamurti's analysis of knowledge and self as dependent upon analysis of fear. Do we need a better "fear education" where, fear is not merely an emotion like all others?"

In today's growing climate and culture of fear, especially in education, it is worth publishing part of the transcript of these panel members re: the nature and role of fear—and, in regard to my question. Thapan, who has long been associated with JK and schools at the very end of her talk focused in:

I don't have much time; and I would have liked to speak about fear...It is one of the most debilitating factors that hinders individual's growth, and is actually the cornerstone of competitive schooling....Yet, how in the Krishnamurti schools we actually try to do away with this element....[cultivating instead] where there's an open quality of interaction [between teacher-student] without fear or prejudice; and this is based on an egalitarian rapport...dialogue is...at the core of such relationships....[creating a predominating nurturing atmosphere in schools] based on trust and mutual affection....<sup>6</sup>

Here, in this discourse we see *fear* is located as a factor (usually, thus, located as an emotion)—an important one nonetheless but yet still conceptually retained within this discourse formation I will call in this paper both—a *discourse on fear* and *fear factor* discourse (or classification). I raise these two concepts as basic to any fearanalysis of text, and one can contrast these two discourses with a *discourse of fear*<sup>7</sup> and a more complex notion of a *fear vector*.<sup>8</sup> But those are not of utmost important to ferret out in this paper.

In resonant and positive response to the above (quote), Kumar, an education professor (and host of the panel) said, "I ask students [in his classes] to write their fears down...". Here, we see the same emphasis on locating fear(s) as Thapan.<sup>9</sup> Now, at this point, the other

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<sup>6</sup> All conference excerpts are from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1isPbB-IXwo>

<sup>7</sup> See Fisher (2006), pp. 52-3.

<sup>8</sup> Fisher (2020).

<sup>9</sup> Thapan (2013) wrote the Foreword to Kumar (2013), as both of these educators pursue discussion with enthusiasm on the focus of consciousness at the heart of curriculum, *via* the "art of awareness and the process of centering" (Kumar's

host Nayha Acharya wanted to read my question (above) and added her own interpretation before turning it over to panel members. She added: “So, I think in other words, is there something special or particularly significant about fear, that we should shed light on?” And, this notion of “special” and “significant” of course warms my heart because of my own research on the topic. Thapan responded extensively:

Fear...does not allow us to interact, to engage, to learn, to understand, because one is actually trapped in a context, which maybe due to my imagination, due to my emotions...and that paralyzes me.

Note here that no positive mention is given for fear. It is being treated as a negative emotion only, by which there is a vast literature of many authors from diverse backgrounds who would make a finer distinction than the panel speaker. However, I believe JK also takes this largely negative attitude towards fear overall. Thapan, now focusing on specific fears (rather than fear itself) gives an example of JK’s re: an encounter with a cobra snake, and she challenges us not to be just victims to fear (or the cobra):

...there is fear, but how do you deal with that? Do you just sit there...looking at the cobra, or do you try to do something about it?

Clearly, this is about fears of any kind, but the snake example will do. And Thapan focuses on fear-response (flight-fight) behaviors of “do something” (i.e., rational-action-behavioral approach) to fear management. She is not bringing in any discourse about feelings, emotions, sensations or inner self-reflectivity as a way to manage

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terms). Thapan (2013) enters into the topic of fear in the same individualistic psychological way as in her panel presentation. She talks of the personal nature of such “meditative inquiry” (Kumar’s term) which for professionals is risky—she wrote, “There is a fear of ‘exposing’ the most intimate aspects of one’s being...as well as a fear of being accused of subjectivity in understanding social phenomena, Kumar confronts these fears by revealing precisely his inner journey [autobiographically]...” (p. xii). Kumar (2013) also shows the limited and reductionistic discourse (i.e., standard ‘scientific’ and psychologized disciplinarity) of his thought about fear(s) when he defines that “there are two kinds of fears: biological and psychological” and likewise, his definition of “fearlessness” (only mentioned once in his whole book) is very truncated (p. 157). See my critique of *psychologism*, as a hegemonic distortion of reality—and, of fear (e.n. 20, Fisher, 2003a, p. 22).

fear(s). Nor is she contextualizing the situation in learned/cultural contexts. It is an individualist discourse. She does want to situate everything on fear into the psychological category—that is, she constructs the discourse as a *psychology of fear* problem and solution—which, I have been critical of this tendency of educators to often follow such a Psychology hegemonic discourse patterning in their attempt to learn and talk about fear and interventions. It is not wrong or bad to do so, it is merely not expansive enough, not transdisciplinary enough, and rather tends to be reductionistic rather than holistic. Thapan continued:

So, I think if we can look at fear in the same way, as a psychological...I'm not [probably] saying this [very well, and she invites Hillary to maybe say it better]...but I just feel that fear is at the crux of much...our interactions, and unless we can do away with everything that creates that fear...we cannot have a meeting point...for any educational process actually to be successful...we cannot work [well] in that environment or that engagement through fear, which is often the case without even knowing it. [and in higher education contexts]... it [fear] is even greater [re: performance demands of the hierarchies and bureaucracies] They're working in an environment of fear.

It is important to note the shifting discourse somewhat here from the individual psychological to now a social phenomenon. Social, cultural and political fear is highlighted above. One of the more important parts of her discourse, I think, centers around how people in organizations, in societies, are trying to function well but are inhibited nearly all the time by fear in that environment—that is, in the culture and infrastructure. Which she intimates is so everyday, common, that it becomes ‘normalized’; as she says, it is “often the case without even knowing it.” Now, we are talking about a relationship to collective fear that is largely unconscious, that is the ‘water we’re swimming in’ and thus, it is embedded as a norm and is denied. She doesn’t mention “denial” and “dissociation” related to social fear but she at least points in the direction of the problematic of recognition of fear patterning. In other words, if one cannot even recognize it—what I call *‘fear’ without feelings*,<sup>10</sup> then how would one even correct the problem in the social level, but also in the psychological

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<sup>10</sup> See Fisher (2013).

individual level(?). This raises the problem of *adaequatio* of knowledge, knowing and understanding re: fear (and ‘fear’). Who will and how will... we as a species fix the Fear Problem when we don’t really see it in its full complexity. The issue is more than what Thapan called for earlier as *what are you going to do* about a confrontation of fear (or object of fear, like a cobra).

We are now in the problems of epistemology of knowledge of fear. Who is researching this depth dimension of the Fear Problem? I think Krishnamurti has offered some insights of great importance to the *epistemology of fear*—yet, I am guessing that is little picked up on. More what I see are interpretations of Krishnamurti’s philosophy and psychology that may be useful—but mostly for individuals. The ‘fear’ phenomenon, especially now in a highly mediated *culture of fear*, is quite beyond what Krishnamurti’s experience was in his lifetime and in his thought re: fear management/education. But that’s a whole other issue for another paper and time.

Back to Thapan’s concluding remarks re: professors in higher education and how are they going to deal with socially and emotionally distressed students that come to them. She said,

How am I going to deal with that(?); if I myself am trapped in the whole process of...dealing with fear, my own fears....[re: her own career in university and all the rejection and marginalization she experienced, especially because it was politically incorrect to study JK’s work in academia]....I simply didn’t care....If we just simply sit back, and give-in to our experience of fear...[and] be shaped by that, then one is trapped....You have to deal with that....only then can one deal with other[s]...[and] can you then deal with the understanding...if you’re engaging them in a dialogue about fear.

She switches from near total emphasis on personal fears, to the social fears of relationships in a context of institutional life—although, the latter is less emphasized compared to an individual perspective. But ultimately all her prescriptions for professors in these situations is to follow your own passion re: career choices and when encountering others’ distresses and fears, you have to be sensitive and understanding to the problems caused by fears, and mostly you have to



deal with (i.e., manage) your own fears first to have the clarity of mind to help others. This makes a lot of sense.

However, what is missing is the shift to fear and its relationship to knowledge about fear(s). Thapan misses that part of the intervention, though you can hear she brings in at the end that it is so important to engage with others (including students) “in a dialogue about fear.” Now, the epistemological question is, but what *adaequatio* is existent in, say a professor, to dialogue about fear—beyond merely dialoguing about fears as emotions? This emphasis, like a default program (conditioning), is exceedingly common, based on in my experience in general and my long study of fear texts. People don’t have a lot of critical literacy education about fear, so they fall back on mostly common words/discourse/ideas, as ways to at least address the fear factor/issue. We see this reliance on a psychology of fear framing when Kumar (host), another professional educator, responds to Thapan and my question to the panel:

[Michael Fisher was saying] Because in Krishnamurti’s thinking, fear is such an important part; should there be like a *fear education*? Krishnamurti was also...saying...the psychological structure of the society is corrupt...there is fear, there is becoming, there is conditioning...we may be completely bombarded by social pressures.... What I was saying to you Michael Fisher, I think, Krishnamurti emphasized there has to be an education of the psyche, along with any other education, and fear is an important part. So, we need to really focus on fear and all of the problems of the psychological structures, that are part of us and part of the society.

Kumar, thankfully and respectfully, addresses my question of concern and query, emphasizing the “need to really focus on fear”—but he immediately implants that focus, so-called, onto “and all of the problems of the psychological structures.” I see the same discourse thus appearing as with Thapan, and it is very common in general, that *fear* (as a topic) may be recognized as important but so are a lot of other topics—and, people generally don’t know why it is so important, or they haven’t figured out how to articulate it; and they typically avoid insinuating that *fear* should be given special treatment—as in, for e.g., my suggestion (which Nayha Acharya, the other host,

spoke explicitly): *“in other words, is there something special or particularly significant about fear, that we should shed light on[?].”*

Kumar doesn't address this nor does Thapan in terms of relative comparison to other factors of the psychological structures, etc. And, of course, I would suggest only a transdisciplinary approach would be adequate, in that it includes all disciplines that have discourses on fear or 'fear'—and, that combination will take the discussion to higher levels of complexity and organization, from the social to the spiritual (cosmic). Wouldn't it have been fun to have JK sitting there on the panel to respond to all this.

At this point the last two panel members are invited for any last minute “words of wisdom” (as Kumar asked). It was intriguing to me that I understood Kumar's question as referring to the entire Opening Keynote Panel session. The two panel members, interestingly, did not pick-up that, and focused on (and were attracted to) adding instead to the fear conversation going on, based on my question as a prompt. Clearly, that indicates they wanted to talk about fear and Krishnmamurti's work together in this brief opportunity as the session was wrapping-up. Ravindra, took a wide general philosophical and psychological lens to approach the topic. He said,

Based on both the remarks of yourself [Kumar] as well as Meenakshi [Thapan], it is important to see the very close relationship between fear and desire; they're not separated from each other.

This is a teaching offered. It is a re-translation, correction, of what Ravindra has picked-up as my reductionism in the calling for a special “fear education.” Certainly, a welcome and wise piece of advice, what is less common in my experience is to have people ask curiously about what “fear education” means to me, and ask if I had factored desire into the curriculum, etc. Sure, there was not time perhaps for this in the last minute. My point is, that this is a good example however, of a discourse as a teaching, which is delivered from a person's response to engaging my work on fear. In other words, people all have their opinions, and they are very quick to offer them, on fear. It is great at one level. However, at another level, I find too often that many already have their cup full and cannot take in any 'new

teaching' or even the guideposts to a potential new teaching on fear. They thus, like Ravindra, remain rather stayed and confident in their own teaching. It is unclear whether he was reproducing Krishnamurti's view on fear/desire or not. Equally, he made no particular effort to define fear as he was using it, he merely said that to know fear you have to know desire (which he briefly explained below), of which is so important in my work. Finally, he concluded,

Fear actually, largely arises that my desires may not be fulfilled. I would simply suggest to you [Michael Fisher], not to separate these two. If one is looking at oneself, sometimes it's better to look at what is it that I'm trying to accomplish, or achieve, or wishing for? The fear can be a consequence of that.

This is now being offered as a therapeutic intervention for fear management overall. In other words, Ravindra is saying that pragmatically speaking, one may be much more effective in making headway with people around the fear problems they have, if fear is put in the background, and desire in the foreground because it is more a positive thing to face and admit to. Fear as a direction of inquiry is not so positive comparatively, and/or it can scare people away from actually gaining insight into their fear(s). It's an interesting observation, and one would want to see further IF such a direction of approach is a good way to critically investigate fear itself. Because the focus above is again on individual psychological fears and desires.

Rodrigues is next, and he takes a Buddhist slant to discussing fear, and proclaims, that the messy mud of the lotus flower, is a good analogy for the fear (imperfection, ugliness, negative) of the love (perfection = Buddha mind, beauty, positive). In typical Buddhist nondual philosophy, this would be expected as an analogy in which to counterposition Fear *vs.* Love (dualism) into Fear *and* Love (nondualism). For Rodrigues such is a *good* answer to the problem—and, thus, likewise with Ravindra, there is a teaching and advice given, which boils down to a message to Michael Fisher that, 'no, there is no special need for fear education.' For that would be only ½ of the story, and ½ of the education we'd want for liberation—that is, like fear/desire or fear/love are *better* forms of teachings. I personally have found this kind of response from many Buddhists, E. and W. over the decades of promoting fear education. I find it interesting but

not very nuanced, dynamic, holistic, or adequate to the nature of the Fear Problem in the way I conceptualize it today in a postmodern world. One of the most basic curriculum elements of a good “fear education” (at least, at the higher grade levels) is: To define what in the heck is the Fear Problem of our species? And, how would we go about understanding it?

Rodrigues, like all the others (panel members and host) take a psychological individual framing on fear(s) as the way to go. He (Rodrigues) concludes,

...you need that mess...that mucky context for the lotus to grow from. We are a mess; our conditioned selves are fearful, desirous, all those things that we look out [there and say] “it’s so terrible about the educational institutions we’re in and so on. We are complicit in some sense; we’re both victims and agents. And the only way this can transform is if we work at understanding how those processes [e.g., fear and desire] play out within in us, in these contexts.

There’s the possibility of change by changing oneself...The mess of the world [i.e., fear problems] almost being necessary for this transformation to occur. Perhaps, it will never not get messy. And maybe that doesn’t matter....maybe we don’t want optimism, we want realism.

Messy/perfection, a dialectic, a Taoist-like complementarity—all framed in a philosophy of nondualism, which is offered for those who may be trying to be too optimistic and not realistic. I wonder what is realism? Again, I have heard this discourse many times. My interest is in how it is relevant to a good quality “fear education” (i.e., critical, holistic, integral)—which is *both* based on dualism (relative and messy world) *and* non-dualism (absolute and perfect world) and all that’s in between. How about that, does it sound exciting to explore?

I’m curious what other Krishnamurtian thinkers today have to say about this intervention on my part, to articulate, a special role of fear in the face of a global Fear Problem—on a scale of a “wicked

problem”<sup>11</sup> like (arguably) humans have never collectively had to face before—deeply existential—and with the entire extinction of our species—and, many other species—not far away—if things continue as they are. Yeah, to be euphemistic, there’s a lot of ‘messy muck’ to wade into!

What intrigues me, is that in all of the above discourses around my question, and prior to my question, that involved *fear*, it amazes me that there is a certain repetition *ad nauseum* almost in the patterns of thinking that surround fear. I keep waiting to hear more creative and perspectives/ideas about what an authentic and liberational ‘dialogue on fear’ would look like and sound like. Has anyone tried them? Krishnamurti certainly has—and, repeatedly, for example see his book *On Fear* (as a compilation of 30+ lectures as exemplars of a ‘dialogue on fear’—if not a ‘dialogue with fear’).<sup>12</sup> Now, that becomes particularly relevant, for example, when we listen to Krishnamurti himself on *fear* (and he is not merely addressing *fears* (as feelings/emotions) of individuals but *fear itself* as a motivating principle/perceptual lens/worldview/reality, etc.):

We ought to talk over fear together because that is part of our life, probably the major part of our life.

What is the cause of fear? Not the object that creates fear, not something the word evokes. You understand?

The word may bring about fear, the word *fear* may arouse fear, but when you have no word, but only observe the reaction that you call fear, what is the root of it? This requires a great deal of exploration, and one hopes that you are willing to go into this.

Fear is time. I am going to go into it. Fear is a movement in time.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Such a categorization is not for dramatic effect but is based on a good deal of scholarly and wise research from across disciplines (e.g., see Watkins & Wilber, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Krishnamurti (1995).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

A dialogue on fear, all of a sudden for Krishnamurti, is a deep-dive phenomenology of *fear/time*<sup>14</sup>—far beyond a discussion of individual psychological fears and/or desires *per se*. This is why I have always liked his radical work on fear, even though, I think it is still, on its own, inadequate for our times in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of its classic philosophical/psychological discourse reliance.<sup>15</sup> This quote, points to a curriculum direction for “fear education” if there ever is one someday, like sex education, or peace education, there ought to be a fear education for it is that foundational to self/knowledge/reality-making processes. Here Krishnamurti is saying, more or less, to start a dialogue on fear—a dialogue with fear—it is best to start a dialogue on/in/with time.

So what is it that I want humans to admit? And I mean, to really admit. Well, many things, but on top you can sense from this introduction here that I want us all to admit that *we may not know as much about fear, as we think we do*. Following my own thoughts, and many others on this, like Krishnamurti, the re-translation (dialectically) is *we may not know as much about ourselves and how we create knowledge, as we think we do*.

And, before I move on now to the more ‘formal’ update of Fear Education, I would posit that the most exciting area of my own research has been the exploration of a *Fearlessness Paradigm* for understanding fear/self/power/reality etc. But you will have to read up on all that in other places where I have written extensively on this (e.g., the

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<sup>14</sup> Krishnamurti is not the first philosopher to go down that tracking of the fear/time dialectic (e.g., see Heidegger’s *Being and Time*).

<sup>15</sup> This point I’m making is not merely to pit sociological vs. psychological in some simple binary, as Thapan had argued that Kumar (drawing heavily on Krishnamurti) focusing on consciousness “is not embedded in any kind of individualistic or self-centered engagement” (p. xii) and thus a turning away from the social sciences approaches to social reality. To be more accurate, my critique using the term “too psychological” refers specifically to an ontological-epistemological critique I draw upon from the work of integral philosopher Ken Wilber and his four quadrant (AQAL) model (e.g., see Wilber, 1995)—in this context, the focus of Kumar (and Thapan) as a discourse is overly Upper-Left Quadrant biased (i.e., a quadrantism *via* inner-subjective-individual perspective on methodology and reality expression)—at least that is how it comes across in my initial fear-discourse assessment here, which is arguably, not complete or fully adequate on a first reading.

Internet, a Google Scholar search). My vision is for a fearlessness-based curriculum research/inquiry and development that is adequate to counter the fear-based curriculum of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that now dominates everywhere—not just in schooling.

### Fear Education Update

Indeed, any updating of *fear education* that is truly emancipatory would do well to study J. Krishnamurti's legacy and those who have studied and taught his work. In the field of Education today, Ashwani Kumar is a young scholar with a great offering to this project in terms of his “meditative inquiry” to curriculum initiative—where, Krishnamurti (and James Macdonald) are given extensive treatment. However, further study would have to be done on Kumar's work to see if it is an advancement of *fear education*. That said, let me move on now to the notion of Fear Education (based on ‘Fear’ Studies<sup>16</sup>) and where it is at.

In late 1989, with co-founding of the In Search of Fearlessness Project on this planet, my main ambition was to re-educate humanity, including myself, on the basics of a high quality fear education, from a fearlessness context/paradigm. I felt this was the only way to truly radicalize the understanding of fear—and, of fear management/education. After my graduate studies at The University of British Columbia in Curriculum & Pedagogy, it was clear to me just how difficult it was going to be to get any good hearing and up-take by educators on my work. They simply, for the most part, didn't want to hear about “fear.” Interesting enough, that was a big part of my research alone, a point that JK makes in the quote above: *The word may bring about fear, the word fear may arouse fear*—and, Sardello in his excellent book on freeing the soul from fear, says pretty much the same thing, and he challenges us as leaders, educators, therapists, etc. to be conscious of our use of the word *fear* as an ethical issue.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g., Fisher (2006).

<sup>17</sup> “One of the great challenges in [teaching and] writing about fear is to avoid generating more fear by doing so” (Sardello, 1999, p. xvi). He is really talking about re-traumatization processes.

In discussion of an epistemology of fear in a postmodern era, my colleague Subba and I lay down many issues of concern about Sardello's and Krishnamurti's point—because, after all, how are we going to adequately teach fear education? Who is trained to do so? In Fisher & Subba we reiterated the *in-escapable* dilemma within fear education work:

[Fisher:] That's when I realized (as Sardello would likely agree) that to even talk about *fear* openly and for any longer period of time, *is fearful* to most and they'll avoid it—or they'll assert overly confident personal opinions [giving advice, when it is not asked for] about it (not inviting critique). I cite a relevant passage from an abstract (Fisher, 1995): Abstract [original ed.]: Defining 'fear' (is, or) could be one of the most important research agendas of the human sciences in the next century, because of its key role in oppression and liberation....The traditional definition of 'fear' [i.e., *fear* as merely an "emotion or feeling" is inadequate to a holistic understanding of the 'fear' phenomenon and has for too long kept 'fear' in the realm of private life and concerns.<sup>18</sup>

I won't go into this more, it merely sets a context for the problematic of fear education (or fear management/education). All along I have assumed to when people talk about fear, etc., they are already enacting a fear management movement, you might say. They are, unconsciously or not, trying to better manage fear. It is inherent. Beyond the larger argument for that assumption (theory), there is my point that suggests *humans are constantly trying to 'educate' (or propagandize) about fear*. There is a vast discourse competition to do this, with many ideologies, hidden or not so, behind the agenda of perpetuating knowledge about fear (and thus fear management). You could call this popular, informal curriculum re: fear. With that in mind, I then set out to assess "Fear Education" going on everywhere.

Based on this idea, then I undertake once in a while a kind of quick inventory or assessment of "fear education." To quickly update you: there is still no Fear Education anywhere in the world that has been formalized. There never has been one either. Humanity seems to

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<sup>18</sup> Fisher & Subba (2016), p. 68.



think it is not necessary. Leadership does not seem think much of this agenda either.

Going back to the finishing year of my dissertation work (2003), I did my first generic assessment: “Report on the Status of Fear Education.” This 30 pp. technical paper started with my going through many of the files I had collected from Education libraries where I was collecting any kind of text that used the word “fear.” The mega-boxes of these files have still not been assessed to this day, but I have a vision that someday some graduate student will come along and do something with them. I took a very small ‘random’ sample of the discourses and analyzed them to see what the “status” of fear-talk, and fear-teaching, that was going on in the field. The Abstract of that report is as follows:

This report offers the first known summary on the status of *fear education* in Western society, and probably in the world. The results of studying fear education for the past 13 years casually, and the last four years intensely, have shown that fear education is not yet an entity (or field) self-reflective, never mind critical of itself. Fear education is now as inadequate as sex education was 100 years ago. With such an important topic as fear (and fearless), it is concluded that the lack of systematic study of fear education itself, may be equally as much of a problem to healthy human global functioning, as fear is.<sup>19</sup>

Really, nothing much has changed. To note, I cited JK’s 1953 book *Education and the Significance of Life*, in this 2003 technical paper. What I have noticed over the last two decades or more, is the vast growth of “emotions education,” usually under the rubric of “social and emotional education”—and, that is thought by all educators I know, to be adequate enough to include any study of fear management. I heartily disagree and I think JK, if he was alive today, would as well. For a worthy read see Appendix VI, which was from an Israeli graduate student in the Faculty of Education responding critically to my “Letter to the President...” (Appendix V). She wrote to me after I put the letter up on the list-serve for the faculty, and she noted she had 27 years of teaching experience under her belt. She responded:

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<sup>19</sup> Fisher (2003a), p. 1.

I'm interested in many of the questions that you posed. I think you have a great idea there, in your "Fear Education," although I think the term should be different, Somehow, I tend to understand (maybe because English is my second language) that "Fear Education" is education FOR fear, rather than education that deals with how to build a world in which we will not need to fear... [etc.]<sup>20</sup>

I could make a long list of all the *resistances* I have encountered to my proposal of a universal Fear Education.

More recently (2020), I wrote another fear education status technical paper, "Fear Management and Education: Status of a Failing Relationship" which is pretty much a self-evident title, in terms of nailing down my critique ongoing. I'll quote a few passages from this paper before closing:

Abstract – Basically, for Ernest Becker, fear management is inevitable for all organisms; and cultural organisms have a really complicated fear management systems structuration. Cultures, like individuals, like educational systems of cultural reproduction, can do fear management well or really do it poorly—it all depends, on many things. Doing it unwell has severe consequences for life on this planet. The author has dedicated his educational career for 30+ years to this cause of finding the 'best' fear management/education (FME) possible. Terror Management Theory (TMT) is a great gift in this regard [see Ernest Becker]. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the current status of fear in educational discourses, in particular, the educators who advocate for TMT. He shows a 'gap' in the introduction of Beckerian educational philosophy/theory from the mid-60s-70s through to the current status of fear/terror management in the field of Education....<sup>21</sup>

Basically, this report is not telling a more advanced or exciting story about the status of Fear Education than the one in 2003, and, really, it is not much different than what I knew in late-1989. There is no real growth in Fear Education, other than my own work. This does not mean there are not some people in Education doing some good fearwork, here and there. In the same 2020 assessment, I begin with a couple of quotes, I think worth repeating as they set the stage for

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<sup>20</sup> Fisher (2003a), p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher (2020), p. 3.

my critique, my critical pedagogy/theory and my philosophy around fear in general:

Education need no longer be beholden to the powers that be.  
-Becker (1967, p. 243)

Especially since September 11<sup>th</sup> [2001], it seems our duty as citizens is to inform ourselves better as to the nature and causes of this [insane] “War on Terror” that the U.S. has led—what I [prefer] to call a “Fear Wars” program, which is likely to last a very very long time on this planet. It irks me that several powerful (well-educated) Western white male world political leaders have decided to control ‘fear’ by means of another world war. I cannot myself, see what theory of ‘fear’ they utilize to make their choices, nor inform the public of such theoretical frameworks and assumptions that go with it. I do not see them inviting us to examine their ‘fear’ policies and pedagogy [and governance], nor do they declare whom they have hired as their expert ‘fear’ consultants. Do you? - Fisher (2002, p. 1)<sup>22</sup>

### Walking Out on the Edge of the Edge

Of course a much larger paper would need to be written on all the resistances to the advancement of Fear Education. No doubt being an independent scholar and public intellectual and critic, has kept me from gaining funds and legitimation for this work. I really did ‘walk out’ on the worldly world of institutional-life long ago, not unlike what Jiddu Krishnamurti did as well. That sacrifice has had many consequences some positive and a good deal negative. It is simply hard to grow a field of study without that institutional support. Maybe someday that will change, but likely it will be long after I am dead and gone. But new students are slowly picking-up on how important and unique Fear Studies is. The advantage of being on the edge of the edge of thinking is that it is great creative fun, and a good deal of stretching of the imagination and thought occurs there.

I trust this paper will show my indebtedness to Krishnamurti’s work and all those keeping it alive long after he has left us. I think educators have a great role to play in this advancement of Fear Education,

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<sup>22</sup> Fisher (2020a), p. 4.

however, I'm less optimistic that as long as they work within the typical neoliberal institutions, in the midst of the 'Fear' Matrix itself—the oppression to really expand the fear imaginary is very very limited. However, collaborations across borders is probably the best way to go—and, so far, there's endless possibilities for that.

In the future, I wish to write, and/or or encourage others, to do a systematic study of “fear” in Krishnamurti's work and make that a comparative study with some others who have taught about fear for decades if not longer. There is much to be done to improve on the research behind the making of a quality Fear Education curriculum and designing the appropriate pedagogy to go with it. I look forward to the dialogues with those interested.

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