
Research
Paper

March 2025

Interlinking Sustainable Democracy and Sustainable Education

A Roadmap for Reform

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International Centre For
Sustainability



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Summary

This paper sets out a conceptual approach to democracy and education which can contribute to positive educational reform in the UK, the USA and India by shaping innovative educational programmes. This approach, situated in more-than-human systems thinking, blends insights from the educational philosophies of Tagore and Krishnamurti with elements of civic republican political thought. This contributes to a philosophy of education and democracy that is both de-institutionalised and which decentres the individual and the colonial perspective.

This produces a way of thinking that emphasises the importance of education in preparing citizens to authentically engage with participatory democratic processes. Education is crucial in developing within citizens the character values and skills that facilitate this. Krishnamurti emphasises education directed towards producing social change – rather than the acquisition of information – and the importance of critical thinking and active listening. Tagore’s philosophy centres the connection of learners with communities and the natural world, a trait shared by ecological systems-thinking, to produce an awareness of current social and environmental challenges and a sense of community at local and global levels. This equips citizens to hold government to account within and outside formal political processes and reshape and regenerate democracies in crisis periods.

This conceptual approach also supports the emphasis on democracy in regenerative learning. Civic republican thought emphasises participation in decision-making as crucial for the all-round development of the individual. Krishnamurti views the participation of learners in co-creating the learning experience as essential for preparing them to operate in the world, whilst Tagore stresses the value of creating learning communities where people live and learn together. This enables exploration beyond disciplinary boundaries, blending the provision of information and ideas with creative experiences and more practically oriented community engagement.

The conceptual approach set out in this paper is valuable not only in its own right but can re-shape educational policy in the UK, the USA, and India. Each face different educational challenges, from state interference to the marketisation of Higher Education, and an over-emphasis on formal academic learning. This paper will signpost educational initiatives that can improve Higher Education for future research, including service-learning programmes, decentralised learning, alternative credentialing (including for projects directly related to the community and environment) and interdisciplinary approaches.



1. Introduction

Well-functioning democracies and education systems are crucial pillars of a cohesive and plural society that enables the holistic flourishing of human and more-than-human communities. However, across the UK, the USA and India, democracy and the education systems face internal and external challenges that operate in the shadow of a wider ecological crisis. This paper sets out a conceptual approach to democracy and educational philosophy – with particular salience for Higher Education (HE) – that can shape a range of educational innovations to solve these interconnected challenges. The approach it proposes is rooted in living systems thinking, drawing on the educational philosophies of Indian thinkers Jiddu Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore, and their synergies with civic republican political thought.

2. Current Challenges

Our world is said to be facing a 'polycrisis': it is not dealing with one independent problem, but a complex series of interconnected, interdependent and seemingly intractable challenges which lack a single cause or remedy. Three elements of the polycrisis will be highlighted here, for their relevance to crafting sustainable democracies and education systems.

They are:

1. The global ecological crisis
2. The challenges to democracy in the UK, the US and India.
3. The difficulties faced by HE institutions in each country.

2.1. The ecological crisis

The global ecological crisis consists of a series of interconnected issues that threaten human and more-than-human communities and ecosystems. This is usually thought to include the rapid increase in global temperatures due to greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity loss, land degradation through deforestation, pollution of air, water and soil, unsustainable food production, e-waste and fossil fuel dependence. Timothy Morton argues that the symptoms of this crisis lie in the presence of 'hyper-objects', "things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans".¹

These include climate change, nuclear radiation and the global biosphere, as well as social and economic forces contributing to these conditions.² The ecological crisis thus lies in the interactions across the network of hyper objects. Moreover, 'ecology', for Morton, is not about the study of 'Nature' or 'the environment': instead, it lies in recognising

¹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology at the End of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3.

² Timothy Morton, 99–100.



the radical interconnectedness of all systems (whether human or more-than-human), which make the boundaries between the human and the non-human almost irrelevant.³ The ecological crisis, therefore, is highly polycentric and interwoven with other issues in society that shape how humans view their place in the world.

2.2. The democracy crisis

There is growing evidence that trust in democracy is falling even in well-established liberal democracies such as the UK and USA. The UK has seen the eruption of long-standing concerns about immigration (in the riots of summer 2024), political 'sleaze' scandals at the centre of government and a growing failure to deliver basic public services well.⁴ The 2016 EU referendum created new political and social divides around the issue of EU membership, generating polarisation that erodes mutual respect and the willingness to cross political divides.⁵ As a result, British democracy fails to consistently deliver the common good, and its key institutions lack accountability and responsiveness to its citizens, who are increasingly disconnected from each other.

In the USA, distrust has grown against the backdrop of the first Trump presidency, which culminated in the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021 by his supporters following his defeat. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt have identified a progressive weakening of the unwritten democratic norms of mutual tolerance (that competing parties accept each other as legitimate rivals) and forbearance (restraint in the use of executive power) over the last four decades, fuelling deep political polarisation.⁶ This polarisation, according to Paul Kahn, reveals deep fissures in the USA's democratic system.⁷ Ahead of his second presidency, Trump has claimed that he would use executive power to reshape the US bureaucracy to pursue his own political agenda from the outset of his term in office, eroding the guardrails provided by a non-partisan governmental actor.⁸ The implications of Trump's policy programme are not limited to the USA: in addition to bringing a swift end to the Russia-Ukraine war, the prospect of the USA once again withdrawing from the Paris

³ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1–3.

⁴ Sam Freedman, *Failed State: Why Nothing Works and How to Fix It* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2024).

⁵ Sara B. Hobolt, Thomas J. Leeper, and James Tilley, 'Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of the Brexit Referendum', *British Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 4 (2021): 1476–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000125>.

⁶ Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future* (New York: Viking, 2018).

⁷ Paul Kahn, 'America's New Civil War', *Telos* 198 (2022): 125–40.

⁸ Samuel Garrett, 'Dictator on Day One? Trump's Grand Plans for the Federal Bureaucracy', *The Interpreter* (blog), 21 June 2024, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/dictator-day-one-trump-s-grand-plans-federal-bureaucracy>.



Agreement on climate change threatens more-than-human entities across the globe.

India is the world's largest democracy and is remarkable in having been so for most of its post-independence history. The only exception has been the 1975-1977 Emergency period, when the then PM Indira Gandhi imprisoned opposition leaders, suspended civil liberties and censored the press after she was barred from voting as an MP by the Supreme Court of India. However, there are also contemporary concerns about Indian democracy. India's notionally independent Election Commission appears to have been politicised, with allegations that it did not neutrally enforce the Model Code of Conduct during the 2024 General Election. These elections also saw religiously divisive rhetoric about Muslims from PM Narendra Modi and the continued mobilisation of voters around caste identity.⁹ The current challenges to democracy in India therefore consist both of threats to institutional guardrails, as seen in the US, and attempts to sow division amongst India's electorate.

These are but three of many examples: the EU's rule of law crisis has seen judicial independence eroded in Poland and Hungary, whilst questions might rightly be asked about the credibility of the election results in Rwanda, where incumbent President Paul Kagame is reported to have won around 99% of the popular vote.¹⁰ With all these examples taken together, the democracy crisis is one where political leaders have both weakened their accountability to their electorates to govern for the common good, and fostered disconnect amongst their citizens.

With all these examples taken together, the democracy crisis is one where political leaders have both weakened their accountability to their electorates to govern for the common good, and fostered disconnect amongst their citizens.

2.3. The crisis in higher education

Today, the typical outcome of HE – a degree – is principally valued for its ability to secure employment for the holder. However, in our view, HE systems are even more effective when emphasising the holistic flourishing of individuals and the communities they form. This includes both the skills and knowledge that enhance employability as well as those valuable for daily life and good citizenship. These elements are emphasised in the liberal arts model of education. In curricular terms,

⁹ On the latter, see Nalin Mehta, *The New BJP: Modi and the Making of the World's Largest Political Party* (New Delhi: Westland, 2022).

¹⁰ Danai Nesta Kumpemba, 'Rwanda's President Smashes His Own Election Record', *BBC News*, 16 July 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cnk413ze07lo>.



this encompasses broad, interdisciplinary learning across subjects, where theory is integrated with real-world practice, ethical and philosophical questions are explored and there is flexibility and freedom in academic choices, creating a personalised and student-centred learning experience. It focuses on critical thinking and problem-solving, the cultivation of adaptable and transferable skills, the ability to communicate well, and builds global and civic awareness. A liberal arts education thus prepares learners not only for employment but to navigate complexity and change in all aspects of their lives. HE on the liberal arts model can benefit individuals and society, democracy and the more-than-human world. However, the West and India face distinct challenges within their modern HE systems that adversely affect society at large and can perpetuate the ecological crisis in various ways.

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These challenges are most acute in the USA. In September 2024, the House of Representatives passed the End Woke Higher Education Act. If passed by the Senate (a distinct possibility following Trump's victory), this legislation, carried by a majority of House Republicans, would prevent public HE institutions from imposing restrictions relating to the time, place and manner of expressive activity such as protests. It would also prevent HE institutions from considering potential student counter-protests when deciding security costs for on-campus events and withholds federal funding if institutions do not comply with the legislation's requirements. Although the text of the Act suggests a content-neutral protection of free speech, the funding restrictions open the door for the state to curb academic freedom. The Act should be viewed in the context of the Stop WOKE Act in Florida, which prohibits schools and businesses in the state from teaching concepts relating to race, racism and privilege often associated with critical race theory. Imposing philosophical positions on students restricts the free exchange of ideas essential to democracy, to the detriment of critical thinking and mutual respect.

Tuition fees in HE in the USA are some of the highest in the world. Smaller institutions, which are often inadequately resourced to meet the increasing demands placed upon them by regional accrediting agencies and state and federal departments of education, are also struggling financially. More small colleges and universities have faced closure, merger, or consolidation in 2023 and 2024 than in recent history. This further exacerbates the challenges posed by government interference in HE, preventing opportunities for holistic learning.

The UK's HE sector is also facing financial issues. The cost of funding university places has increased in recent years, but without a proportionate increase in tuition fees for 'Home' (UK) students. Even the most recent increase in the fees cap from £9,250 per year (set in 2017) to £9,535 per year from the 2025-26 academic year falls below



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the cost of educating each student, which stands at over £12,000 per year.¹¹ Today, UK universities are increasingly dependent on international student fees for funding, which are often thrice the cost of Home fees. Visa data for 2024 indicates a slowdown in international student recruitment.



Figure 1.: St John's College, University of Cambridge

The Higher Education Policy Institute predicted in September 2024 that if the drop in visa applications continues, there could be 60,000 fewer students attending UK universities, reducing university income by £1.14 billion.¹² This creates significant uncertainty within the UK's HE sector, with the chief executive of Universities UK reporting that 70 universities (of around 160 in total) had begun to cut costs, with some courses due to close and both academic and non-academic jobs at risk.¹³ This both limits the opportunities for students to benefit from

¹¹ Richard Adams, 'English Universities Need Tuition Fees of £12,500 to Break Even, Analysis Finds', *The Guardian*, 5 September 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/sep/05/english-universities-need-tuition-fees-of-12500-to-break-even-analysis-finds>.

¹² George Blake, 'Reduced International Student Numbers Are a Much Bigger Problem than You Think', *Higher Education Policy Institute* (blog), 3 September 2024, <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/09/03/reduced-international-student-numbers-are-a-much-bigger-problem-than-you-think/>.

¹³ Richard Windsor, 'UK Universities: Why Higher Education Is in Crisis', *The Week UK*, 10 September 2024, <https://theweek.com/education/uk-universities-why-higher-education-is-in-crisis>.



higher education, and can impact the extent of the research produced by HE institutions.¹⁴

Although India's HE sector is one of the largest in the world, its quality does not yet match its scale. The Indian HE sector is highly regulated and largely government-controlled, with restrictions on the establishment of private universities. According to Jamshed Bharucha, government control has stifled innovation, such that the highest-quality institutions are autonomous ones (independent of government control).¹⁵ These include the Indian Institutes for Technology (IITs): in the QS World University Rankings 2025, the only two Indian universities in the top 200 are IIT Bombay (rank 118) and IIT Delhi (rank 150). Bharucha also notes a long-standing emphasis on rote learning which is challenged in India's 2020 National Education Policy (NEP).¹⁶ The NEP notes the importance of "conceptual understanding" and seeks to encourage "creativity and critical thinking", a "holistic education" and the building of character values including "courtesy, democratic spirit, [a] sprit of service", "liberty, responsibility, [and] pluralism".¹⁷ Government control in non-autonomous universities has led to a highly-regulated curriculum, with repercussions for academic freedom. Nevertheless, more recently, there has been a growth in autonomous institutions such as FLAME University and Ashoka University. The government is also more open to foreign universities setting up campuses in India; indeed, Deakin University in Australia and the University of Southampton already plan to do so. India's HE sector, like those of the UK and USA, has structural challenges, but is at a cusp where a pathway towards more liberal and holistic learning can be established.

3. Systems-Thinking: A Conceptual Approach

This section outlines the conceptual approach linking democracy and education that this paper puts forward. It is based on living-systems thinking: Tagore and Krishnamurti's philosophies are placed within a system that encourages participatory decision-making (drawn from civic republicanism) and is facilitated by it.

¹⁴ Tom Williams, 'New Cuts "hit World-leading Research" as UK Recruitment Woes Bite', *Times Higher Education*, 21 October 2024, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/new-cuts-hit-world-leading-research-uk-recruitment-woes-bite#:~:text=While%20the%20scale%20of%20the,greater%20staff%20and%20student%20discontent>.

¹⁵ Jamshed Bharucha, 'India's Realignment of Higher Education', *Daedalus* 153, no. 2 (1 May 2024): 138, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_02070.

¹⁶ Jamshed Bharucha, 139–40.

¹⁷ Ministry of Human Resource Development, 'National Education Policy 2020' (Government of India, 2020), 5.



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In systems thinking, a system is a set of interconnected elements that produce their own pattern of behaviour to realise a certain goal.¹⁸ Systems thinking involves observing, interpreting and engaging with phenomena in a manner that acknowledges their interconnectedness and interdependency. A well-functioning system can persist despite environmental changes ('resilience'), can evolve ('self-organisation') and is formed of multiple inter-related, coordinating and often semi-autonomous layers acting as parts and sub-wholes.¹⁹ Systems balance order and disorder within their environment through a series of regenerative feedback loops. Living systems thinking extends the focus of systems thinking beyond human actions to a more holistic and bio-integrated perspective in which humans and more-than-human actors can coexist.



Figure 2.:A person feeding a small parrot, highlighting human interaction with more-than-human communities.

Though built upon a foundation of biological and ecological processes, the relevance of systems thinking is not limited to biological and environmental sciences. It instead involves challenging existing political, social and economic paradigms and considering

¹⁸ Donella H Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, ed. Diana Wright (London: Earthscan, 2008), 2, 11.

¹⁹ Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (Hutchinson, 1967), 56–58.



more flexible, fluid and holistic relationships.²⁰ More-than-human systems thinking can be applied to circular and regenerative economic models (like Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics), to education (through forms of regenerative learning) and even democratic regeneration in the context of the climate crisis.²¹

In particular, the emphasis in all three approaches of cultivating skills, character values and social awareness through education create a baseline set of capacities that enable learners to participate in civic life during and after they have completed formal education.

Although democracies and HE institutions can be regarded as systems in their own right, they should also be viewed as interconnected and interdependent elements of a wider system. The goal of this system ought to produce a more cohesive, connected and plural society. This will enable the resolution of the polycrisis described above. The next two sections of this paper will explore two dimensions in which democracies and HE institutions are interlinked. Section 4 explores how Krishnamurti and Tagore's ideas of education, which bear similarities to regenerative educational practice, create the conditions for civic republican participation in democracy. In particular, the emphasis in all three approaches of cultivating skills, character values and social awareness through education create a baseline set of capacities that enable learners to participate in civic life during and after they have completed formal education. Section 5 discusses how civic republicanism's emphasis on participatory decision-making can be applied within HE on the regenerative approach to learning. This mirrors the emphasis in both Krishnamurti and Tagore's philosophies on co-created learning experiences and 'living and learning' communities that extend beyond human actors to more-than-human ones. This creates a positive feedback loop in which participation strengthens education, which in turn strengthens wider civic participation.

²⁰ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, 7–8.

²¹ James Tully, 'On Gaia Democracies', in *Democratic Multiplicity: Perceiving, Enacting, and Integrating Democratic Diversity*, ed. James Tully et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 351, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009178372.021>.



4. Education as the Basis of Sustainable Democracy

4.1. The importance of participation in sustainable democracies

A sustainable democracy is one which is resilient to external threats, and which can adapt to and evolve with changes in political circumstances, culture and the needs of society. The core of a sustainable democracy lies in the realisation of three principles: accountability of government to its citizens, participation in democracy, and civic education.²²

Participation in democratic decision-making sits at the core of civic republican political thought, as a pathway to the realisation of a common good. This has its roots in Aristotle's philosophy: he argued that the cultivation by individuals of virtues or 'excellence' (ἀρετή) in both their home and civic or 'political' lives enabled their all-round flourishing (εὐδαιμονία).²³ Contemporary liberal democratic systems, however, emphasise representation over participation. Individuals engage democratically by voting for representatives, granting them agency and self-government without compromising on their personal pursuit of the good. Civic republicanism sees participation as equally – if not more – important, today emphasising mechanisms such as citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting and referendums.

Participation is important to sustaining democracy in three ways. There is growing interest in exploring whether participatory democratic mechanisms can alleviate the current challenges to representative democracy, especially in the UK and Europe.²⁴ Drawing on inspiration from Ireland, Iceland and Taiwan, there have been several calls for the

²² Pravar Petkar, 'Accountability, Participation and Civic Education: The Roadmap Towards Sustainable Democracy?', International Centre for Sustainability, 28 August 2024, <https://icfs.org.uk/accountability-participation-and-civic-education-the-roadmap-towards-sustainable-democracy/>.

²³ Benjamin Miller, 'Aristotle on Citizenship and Civic Education: The Central Role of Political Participation', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education*, ed. Andrew Peterson, Garth Stahl, and Hannah Soong (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), 19, 23–24.

²⁴ For example, see Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020); Rasmus Ø Nielsen and Eva Sørensen, 'Citizens' Assemblies and the Crisis of Democracy', in *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies*, ed. Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh, and Yanina Welp (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), 129–40; Tim Hughes, 'Putting Citizens at the Heart of the UK Constitution', Insight Paper, Review of the UK Constitution (Institute for Government & Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 6 September 2023), <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/put-citizens-heart-constitution>.



introduction of citizens' assemblies in the UK, which bring together a randomly selected group of citizens to learn about, deliberate upon and produce recommendations for decision-makers on issues from town planning to abortion and assisted dying.²⁵ These proposals rest on a view that the current lack of trust in representatives, and the democratic process in general, can be alleviated by involving citizens more closely in the policymaking process, thereby giving them a greater say in the decisions that most affect them and re-establishing their trust in those processes. This is of twofold importance: it makes government decision-making more responsive to citizens and makes government more accountable to citizens, by offering new mechanisms through which citizens can scrutinise government activity. Participation thereby institutionalises a dialectical relationship between government and governed, extending the scope of democracy beyond periodic elections.²⁶

Both citizen participation in democracy and the education that facilitates it can also combat political polarisation. This is because participation, especially when paired with democratic deliberation, is oriented towards the realisation of the common good. Through confronting, discussing and resolving shared problems, democratic processes can emphasise what citizens have in common with each other whilst respecting their diverse perspectives and identities. Participation thus fosters a sense of a shared civic identity, restoring a common basis for engaging in social life, a sense of community and set of collective relationships between those with different, or even opposing, perspectives. This shared civic identity is a form of 'relationality' between citizens, just as the opportunities for accountability offered by participation are a form of 'relationality' between the citizen and the state.

Participation thus fosters a sense of a shared civic identity, restoring a common basis for engaging in social life, a sense of community and set of collective relationships between those with different, or even opposing, perspectives.

Participation also has intrinsic benefits for individuals, cultivating the knowledge, skills and character traits that Bernard Crick associates with active citizenship. He defines this as a skill practiced in civil society

²⁵ Miriam Levin et al., 'Citizens' White Paper' (London: Demos, 2024); Pravara Petkar, 'Citizens' Assemblies: Miracle Cure, or Much Ado about Nothing?', International Centre for Sustainability, 27 September 2024, <https://icfs.org.uk/citizens-assemblies-miracle-cure-or-much-ado-about-nothing/>.

²⁶ Martin Loughlin, *The Idea of Public Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85; Pravara Petkar, 'Situating the People: The Place of Constituent Power in the UK's Political Constitution' (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2024), chaps 7–8.



by which people can come together to promote or resist change.²⁷ Citizens' assemblies, for example, have an educative effect: their first phase involves expert presentations to provide all participants with a shared body of knowledge on the topic at hand. This develops political literacy, as citizens are engaging not only with the nuances of policy but the details of decision-making processes. Where participation engages citizens in listening to each other's opinions and advocating for their own views, their political efficacy – in particular their listening and reasoning skills – is developed, with benefits that also apply outside the political arena. The skills and knowledge developed through participation in democratic processes cultivate what Krishnamurti terms the 'the capacity to do things', which, when deployed, enables citizens both to realise their responsibilities to each other and become further motivated to take on such responsibilities.

4.2. Sustainable education provides the conditions for democratic participation

Despite the importance of participation to a sustainable democracy, it is not enough to provide *opportunities* to participate without ensuring that the necessary conditions for participation are established. Ideally, citizens should be self-motivated to participate in democratic processes and, given the importance of reasoning in deliberative participatory processes such as citizens' assemblies, should be equipped with the critical thinking, listening skills and social awareness to make the best use of those opportunities. This does not mean that citizens can only participate if they have the appropriate skills and motivation; this sets a very high – and idealistic – bar that is both difficult to realise in practice and tends towards an elitist or 'perfectionist' outlook.²⁸ There ought to be no formal bars on participation based on motivation, skill or education, but we ought also to recognise that it is unreasonable and unsustainable to expect widespread participation without ensuring the conditions for it.

Krishnamurti's educational philosophy is a useful basis for considering how to ensure the conditions for widespread participation. For Krishnamurti, the purpose of education is not simply to pass examinations and attain high marks to gain employment. Instead, education enables individuals to understand life and tackle the problems that exist in society around them.²⁹ Through education, individuals realise the freedom to live their lives as they choose and create a better society for all, without the fear that comes from barriers to questioning elements of the established social order.³⁰ Learning

²⁷ Bernard Crick and Andrew Lockyer, eds., *Active Citizenship: What Could It Achieve and How?* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 1.

²⁸ Geoffrey Hinchcliffe, 'Civic Republicanism, Citizenship and Education', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education*, ed. Andrew Peterson, Garth Stahl, and Hannah Soong (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), 58.

²⁹ Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Think on These Things* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 2–3.

³⁰ Jiddu Krishnamurti, 4.



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includes being able to constantly re-evaluate one's opinions when presented with contradictory evidence, emphasising free thought, open-mindedness and critical thinking.³¹ Learning also involves cultivating "skill in action", by which Krishnamurti means the development of the capacity to do things,³² and understand the thoughts and narratives that shape one's self-identity. This authentic self-understanding leads to freedom: individuals can define themselves independently of the conditioning of their social environment.³³



Figure 3: A class discussion.

Cultivating 'skill in action' through education develops within us the capability to respond to the challenges in our environment. We cannot reasonably expect citizens to participate in democratic processes without the motivation, skillset or necessary means; indeed, contemporary discussions on citizens' assemblies have raised the concern that participants will be a self-selecting group of those with the time, inclination (and often higher levels of education) to get

³¹ Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Beginnings of Learning* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1982), 36.

³² Jiddu Krishnamurti, 37, 40.

³³ Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Think on These Things*, 11–12.



involved.³⁴ Nor is it sustainable to have opportunities for participation without maintaining the conditions for that participation. In principle, this is because future generations are otherwise left to their own devices in developing the motivation and skills to participate, with no guarantee that they will in fact do so. The practical impact of this has become clearer in recent years, with a 2020 report from the Centre for the Future of Democracy at the University of Cambridge finding that in almost every region, satisfaction with democracy is in “steepest decline” amongst the 18-34 age group.³⁵ In order to realise and maintain the conditions for effective participation, education systems must equip learners with the skills and character values that facilitate this. Whilst democracies and education are each their own systems with their own specific goals, Krishnamurti’s philosophy indicates a linkage or node between these two systems – which is perhaps a system in itself – that has its own aims and shapes existing feedback loops and processes in the systems with which it interacts. The apparent linkage between democracy and education here can be compared somewhat to an ecological corridor that links different landscapes to the benefit of ecological systems in each one, whilst also acting as a regenerative system in its own right.

In order to realise and maintain the conditions for effective participation, education systems must equip learners with the skills and character values that facilitate this.

Given this synergy, there are three main sets of outcomes that educational programmes should provide to create the conditions for participation.

Outcome 1: Build the Skills to Engage in Democratic Processes

The first is that it should cultivate within learners the skills necessary to engage in democratic processes. As noted above, Krishnamurti emphasises critical thinking and active listening within his educational philosophy. This requires HE institutions to provide spaces within and outside formal course structures in which students can challenge each other’s ideas and listen to each other’s viewpoints. This can extend to collaborative research and the creation of environments where

³⁴ Eoin Carolan and Seána Glennon, ‘The Consensus-Clarifying Role of Deliberative Mini-Publics in Constitutional Amendment: A Reply to Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh’, *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 22, no. 1 (2024): 203.

³⁵ Roberto Foa and Andrew Klassen, ‘Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy’ (Cambridge: Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2020), <https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/youth-and-satisfaction-democracy/>.



students can disagree in a civil and agreeable manner.³⁶ One specific suggestion offered involves learners presenting each other's viewpoints.³⁷ Although framed in terms of a 'liberal education', which serves as another useful model for HE reform to meet the current challenges, this also echoes the *purvapaksha* tradition in ancient Indian logical debates, in which debaters must argue from the perspective of their opponent to fully understand their viewpoint before attempting to refute it.³⁸ These educational programmes foster the conditions in which effective democratic deliberation can take place.

Outcome 2: Cultivate Community Between Learners and Human Communities

The second of the three outcomes is cultivating a sense of community between learners themselves, and between learners and the human communities around them. An interview with Nancy Thomas, Senior Advisor to the President for Democracy Initiatives, points to the benefits of liberal education in creating community between students through HE classroom pedagogy, through means that facilitate interaction and idea-sharing between students.³⁹

Rabindranath Tagore's ideas on education extend this emphasis on community in two ways. Tagore started a school at Shantiniketan in Bengal in 1901, offering an alternative to the information-focused model in which he was educated, and which he eventually rejected. He drew on indigenous models of learning from ancient Indian forest schools and "medieval Buddhist learning centres", which facilitated a strong connection between learners and the human and more-than-human communities in which they are situated.⁴⁰ Thus, young students at Shantiniketan would be sent to serve their neighbours in the areas around them who were from different castes or religious communities.⁴¹ He also brought scholars from across the world to his Visva-bharati university to foster intercultural dialogue and learning

³⁶ Marilyn Cooper, 'The Crisis of Civic Despair', *Liberal Education*, Spring 2024, https://www.aacu.org/liberaleducation/articles/the-crisis-of-civic-despair?x-craft-preview=JTUQtNpyvB&token=gs6hXQ-vai7NbtF8ht5En-nwt0y2Zmn7&_zs=285pl&_zl=xRF03.

³⁷ Marilyn Cooper.

³⁸ Vaman Shivaram Apte and Arthur Anthony Macdonell, 'पूर्व Pūrva', in *Revised and Enlarged Edition of Prin. V. S. Apte's The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 1957, https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/app/sanskrit_query.py?qs=%E0%A4%AA%E0%A5%82%E0%A4%B0%E0%A5%8D%E0%A4%B5&searchhws=yes&matchtype=default.

³⁹ Marilyn Cooper, 'The Crisis of Civic Despair'.

⁴⁰ Kathleen M O'Connell, 'Freedom, Creativity, and Leisure in Education: Tagore in Canada, 1929', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (2008): 982–83.

⁴¹ Mohammad A Quayum, 'Education for Tomorrow: The Vision of Rabindranath Tagore', *Asian Studies Review* 40, no. 1 (2016): 11.



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that would overcome artificial national boundaries.⁴² Tagore was a critic of nationalism and the idea of a racially homogenous nation as the basis for the unity of a state.⁴³ In his view, an independent India should establish unity between diverse groups on the basis of a spiritually rooted common humanity.⁴⁴



Figure 4.: Tagore's Shantiniketan was situated away from urban areas in settings such as this.

Education – especially in the creative arts – would enable learners to realise their spiritual freedom;⁴⁵ on Tagore's perspective, drawn from the Upanishads, this involves experiencing one's reality as a manifestation of an eternal consciousness that also encompasses the more-than-human world. Tagore's education thus enables individuals

⁴² Mohammad A Quayum, 11; Dipannita Datta, 'Connecting Cultures: Rethinking Rabindranath Tagore's "Ideals of Education"', *Social Identities* 24, no. 3 (2018): 417.

⁴³ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1918), 99.

⁴⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, 99, 115.

⁴⁵ Alex Aronson, 'Tagore's Educational Ideals', *International Review of Education* 7, no. 4 (1961): 388.



to be rooted in their surroundings and also able to connect with the whole world around them.⁴⁶

HE institutions should accordingly work closely with the communities around them, as the University of Canterbury did in Christchurch following the 2011 earthquakes.⁴⁷ This must go hand-in-hand with cultivating cosmopolitanism in the wider HE sector, by making each country's HE offerings attractive to learners from other countries. India, in particular, must develop its HE sector accordingly. Regenerative learning is one way of achieving this, through its emphasis on de-institutionalised and distributed learning networks.⁴⁸ Regenerative HE would involve a transnational learning community created through interactions between different HE providers, where learners can take credited courses from multiple institutions within one degree programme.

Outcome 3: Connect Learners to More-Than-Human Communities

The third outcome is fostering a connection between learners and the more-than-human communities around them. This is a theme both of Tagore's educational ideals and of regenerative learning approaches grounded in more-than-human systems thinking. Tagore stressed what Quayum terms a "kinship with nature" as the one of the proper outcomes of education.⁴⁹ Tagore envisaged children directly engaging with nature, including playing with birds, swimming in water and climbing trees, and accordingly situated his Visva-Bharati university amidst nature and away from urban life.⁵⁰ This contact with nature is tied up with Tagore's spiritual philosophy: the aim is for learners to recognise their spiritual and metaphysical oneness with the more-than-human world. In practice, this mindset ought to make learners more aware of how they interact with and draw on the resources of the more-than-human world. This provides a foundation for greater ecological awareness, a necessity today considering the challenges posed by climate change. Regenerative learning systems offer practical means by which human interdependence with the more-than-human world can be better recognised by learners. Here, the content of regenerative learning is crucial: topics such as agroecology

⁴⁶ Sunil Banga, 'The Global Relevance of Tagore's Cosmopolitan Educational Philosophy for Social Justice in a Post-Westphalian World', *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 57 (2023): 616.

⁴⁷ Billy O'Steen, 'Service-Learning's Role in Promoting Active Citizenship and Unifying a Community', Vanderbilt University, 6 April 2022, <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/unity/2022/04/06/service-learning-roles-role-in-promoting-active-citizenship-and-unifying-a-community/>.

⁴⁸ Pavel Cenkl, 'What Do We Mean by "Regenerative"?', *Regenerative Learning Network* (blog), 27 September 2023, <https://regenlearning.org/2023/09/27/what-do-we-mean-by-regenerative/>.

⁴⁹ Mohammad A Quayum, 'Education for Tomorrow: The Vision of Rabindranath Tagore', 4.

⁵⁰ Mohammad A Quayum, 6.



and food systems, biodiversity, deforestation, waste and pollution, soil health and carbon capture should be included in HE curricula. This is supplemented by the regenerative approach's emphasis on interactive and experiential learning across disciplines. Together, these facilitate greater awareness of social, environmental, ecological and economic systems. This awareness of the material reality of the human and more-than-human worlds around us provides important background understanding of the challenges and issues that must be confronted in participatory democratic processes, and in conjunction with an understanding of human interdependence with the more-than-human world, shapes our ethical outlook on many of these issues.

These three sets of outcomes have been implemented in various ways, most obviously in smaller educational centres and colleges such as those inspired by Krishnamurti and Tagore, and HE providers such as Schumacher College in Devon, England and Prescott College in Arizona, USA. However, the benefits of linking democracy and education are intended to be widespread, extending beyond smaller institutions and communities to the whole of a democratic polity. This means that mechanisms are necessary by which to scale up the attainment of these outcomes to larger educational institutions and correspondingly, larger areas. Section 6 will explore further the innovations that might be made in HE practice to achieve this.

5. Participatory Democratic Culture in Regenerative Learning

5.1. Regenerative learning is grounded in a participatory democratic culture

Participation and practice-led learning

In regenerative learning, cultivating a participatory democratic culture is vital. Models of participatory, practice-led learning communities can be found among smaller-scale independent and progressive learning organisations, which can often provide alternatives to more traditionally hierarchical siloed structures of larger institutions. Underlying this approach is the vertical integration of 'participation' through classroom activities that foreground practice and application through transdisciplinary (or problem-based learning) to organisational structures and governance models.

With participatory governance involving students, staff and faculty from Student Union Board through the Board of Trustees, and a regenerative and transdisciplinary study programme design emphasising an experiential approach to ecological systems, human and more-than-human communities, and education, Prescott College in Arizona in the US is one possible model for an integrative educational model.



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Key to Prescott College's approach is a recognition that systems thinking, modelling, and design are core to a regenerative and democratic paradigm. Similarly, with an emphasis on practice both in its on-campus and online programming, the College's pedagogy seeks to reorient the binaries of epistemology and ontology and theory and praxis. Undergraduate internships, service learning, field courses, field campuses and global partnerships all support a diversified, place-based, and collaborative learning approach that foregrounds interaction (or intra-action and agency, as Karen Barad puts it).⁵¹

Similarly, holistic curriculum models at Schumacher College (in Devon, England) and colleges in the US including Sterling College (Vermont), College of the Atlantic (Maine), and Deep Springs College (California) among others offer a whole-systems learning approach that situates learners with/in human and more-than-human relationships by means of a place-based learning community with food growing, meal sharing, and care for community and environment alike.



Figure 5.: Several small HE institutions promote connections with more-than-human communities in their curricula.

⁵¹ Whitney Stark, 'Intra-action', *New Materialism* (blog), 16 August 2016, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/i/intra-action.html>



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Each a unique, small independent college, these schools create necessary space for student engagement with local communities and place-based, practice-led learning and participatory governance.

Although less specifically higher education organisations, Navdanya's Bija Vidyapeeth, or Earth University, in Dehradun and Bhoomi College in Bangalore are similarly exceptional whole-systems models of learning that underscore food systems as the basis of education. Founded in 1984 by activist and scholar Vandana Shiva, Navdanya in particular, has established itself as embodying 'Earth Democracy' through its engagement of advocacy, seed saving, food sovereignty, agroecology, and the principle of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (Earth Family). Bhoomi College's similar emphasis on food-systems-led learning at the intersection of democracy and learning places participant experience with place, community, and food production at the centre of the learning experience.

Internationally, in partnership between the UNDP's Conscious Food Systems Alliance, Prescott College, and a diversity of learning centres in Asia, South America, and Africa, the Local Leadership for Regenerative Food Systems initiative has developed a globally distributed curriculum across a learning network of centres of practice and learning to support an 'equitable exchange of knowledge and experience'. This facilitates the training of local food systems leaders around the world. By leveraging the power of locally connected practitioners and leaders to foster a democratic and international approach to skill sharing, this programme is positioned to be a model for collaborative curriculum development and delivery.

These educational environments go beyond mere knowledge transfer; they strive to develop active, engaged citizens who can work together to tackle complex societal challenges.

When students actively participate in democratic processes, education itself becomes a living system that evolves through their contributions, much like the principles found in more-than-human systems thinking, including interconnectedness, interdependence, holism, interspecies ethics, ecological awareness, regenerative processes, dynamic relationality, feedback loops, cocreation, collaboration and non-linearity. These educational environments go beyond mere knowledge transfer; they strive to develop active, engaged citizens who can work together to tackle complex societal challenges. By weaving democratic practices into the fabric of education, learners are invited to take part in decision-making processes, which fosters a sense of agency and responsibility.



Regenerative learning, Tagore and Krishnamurti

The regenerative approach to learning thus reflects both Krishnamurti and Tagore's visions of education. Krishnamurti's philosophy emphasises the cultivation of the freedom to live one's life as one chooses. This extends to the authority structure of educational institutions. In a school, there should not be a hierarchy where authority starts from the headmaster and filters down, but instead there should be a "feeling of absolute equality among all", with bodies such as student councils becoming critical for the self-government of the school.⁵² For Krishnamurti, student engagement in participatory governance within their educational institutions develops within them the skills and capacity for civic engagement in their societies at large. This does not mean that educational institutions designed around Krishnamurti's ethos become anarchic, however. According to him, order and cooperation within an institution ought to be realised through individuals recognising that they have responsibilities to each other and the wider world.⁵³ In other words, order is achieved in the absence of a formal structure of authority, in the manner of a more-than-human system. In the school setting, the absence of hierarchy is mirrored in Professor Sugata Mitra's Self-Organised Learning Environment (SOLE),⁵⁴ exposure to which may inspire students to seek out problem-based, non-hierarchical HE settings such as those modelled on Paulo Freire's educational philosophy.⁵⁵

Krishnamurti's idea of self-government within the school is mirrored in Tagore's thought. Tagore encouraged students to shape the daily life of their living environment, taking an active role in shaping and setting the rules: in this way, he emphasised the cultivation of self-discipline over discipline imposed through an authority structure.⁵⁶ Tagore's approach to education also foregrounds the need for learning communities. The notion of a learning community is in some ways a corollary of participatory governance, which is premised on a shared goal or set of common interests. Classes at his Shantiniketan institution were to be open-air, with a strong emphasis on the creative arts. This was not merely for relaxation or enjoyment but to create an ethical frame of reference for students and teachers alike as members of a

⁵² Jiddu Krishnamurti, 'Education and the Significance of Life: Chapter 5 - The School', J Krishnamurti, n.d., <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/chapter-5-school>.

⁵³ Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Beginnings of Learning*, 44–45.

⁵⁴ Sugata Mitra, 'The Self Organised Learning Environment (SOLE) School Support Pack', *Association for Learning Technology Blog* (blog), 27 February 2012, <https://altc.alt.ac.uk/blog/2012/02/the-self-organised-learning-environment-sole-school-support-pack/#gref>.

⁵⁵ See Kevin Kester and Hogai Aryoubi, 'Paulo Freire: Citizenship and Education', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Citizenship and Education*, ed. Andrew Peterson, Garth Stahl, and Hannah Soong (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020), 96–109.

⁵⁶ Christine Kupfer, 'Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Ideals and Experiments', The Scottish Centre of Tagore Studies, n.d., <https://scotstagore.org/rabindranath-tagores-educational-ideas-and-experiments-by-christine-kupfer/>.



shared community.⁵⁷ Shantiniketan was set up as a boarding school, which both allowed students to move freely around in a manner not possible in urban areas, as well as to create a focused learning environment and community.⁵⁸ Tagore's Shiksha-Satra school developed this further, creating a space for living and learning that was closely connected to the surrounding human communities: learning was organised around practical problems, such that students would cooperate with local villagers to improve their farming methods. This contributed to the development of the wider society through a culture of civic engagement.⁵⁹

5.2. Regenerative learning's participatory culture creates the conditions for civic participation

The emphasis on the unfixed nature of experience that underpins regenerative learning practice prepares learners to be active participants in civic life. Through co-creation of the learning experience via involving students in decision-making both at the institutional level and in respect of their own chosen programmes, regenerative learning promotes within students mutual respect, critical thinking and a commitment to a shared sense of common good. As discussed in section 4.2 above, these are the very skills and character traits that develop within students what Krishnamurti would term the necessary 'skill in action' to make changes in the world around them. In this way, the participatory culture of regenerative learning is another means of cultivating within HE institutions the conditions for learners to further engage in civic participation.

This has benefits for various elements of the polycrisis outlined above. In respect of the HE crisis, the regenerative approach can generate a culture shift within HE institutions: producing degrees that enable employability becomes one part of a holistic institutional purpose, rather than its sole aim. This in turn, as suggested above, works towards resolving the democracy crisis. With one of the central challenges at the moment a lack of trust in representative institutions, encouraging participatory decision-making within HE institutions enacts the type of participatory democracy and deliberation that can redress this at a smaller and more self-contained level. Within these participatory processes, the sense of a shared common good that is created goes towards building a sense of connection that can overcome the current ecological crisis.

By embracing a participatory democratic culture within an educational framework, HE providers can thus strengthen democratic institutions and equip learners with the skills and values so essential to addressing the intertwined crises of democracy, education, and the environment.

⁵⁷ Alex Aronson, 'Tagore's Educational Ideals', 388–89.

⁵⁸ Christine Kupfer, 'Rabindranath Tagore's Educational Ideals and Experiments'.

⁵⁹ Christine Kupfer.



6. Innovations in Higher Education

This paper has attempted to make the case for a regenerative and participatory approach to learning, owing to its benefits for holistic education and civic participation. This goes towards resolving the current polycrisis that encompasses ecological issues, a lack of trust in representative democracy, and challenges in HE in the UK, US and India. This section will signpost a series of educational initiatives that can realise the benefits of the systems approach set out in the preceding sections. Further research on the specific benefits of each initiative and the best design principles is required beyond the scope of this paper.

6.1. Remote learning

Remote learning, enabled by digital technologies, extends access to education beyond traditional geographic and institutional boundaries. It can offer a distributed, adaptable, and scalable model for delivering diverse, high-quality educational content to learners worldwide.

In a regenerative educational framework, remote learning supports equity by reaching underrepresented populations, networking across diverse groups, and can bridge disparities by offering modular, customizable courses that align with students' local contexts, site-based opportunities, and personal needs.

Learners can engage in virtual field trips, simulations, and embodied practice in local venues to explore interdependencies in human and more-than-human communities. Students in diverse locations can work together on shared projects addressing global issues, such as climate adaptation strategies or sustainable resource management. By combining digital delivery with local facilitators, learners can participate in hybrid models that integrate community-specific ecological and cultural knowledge.

6.2. Experiential education

Experiential education is a core element of regenerative learning practice and immerses learners in hands-on, real-world activities that bridge theory and practice. It encourages reflection, critical thinking, and skill development while fostering a deeper connection to a diversity of subjects. By placing students in dynamic, participatory environments, this approach nurtures systems thinking, ecological awareness, and civic responsibility.

Learners can collaborate with local stakeholders to restore habitats, implement renewable energy systems, or address food insecurity. Programs designed around specific bioregions help students understand local ecosystems, indigenous practices, and the socio-ecological challenges unique to those areas.

Experiential education cultivates agency, self-direction, and a sense of interconnection with the world. It positions students as active participants in solving real-world problems, preparing them for roles



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as leaders in sustainability and civic engagement. Furthermore, such experiences often result in stronger community relationships and long-lasting collaborative networks.

6.3. Service learning

Service learning (including ecological service learning) is a participatory, community-focused enterprise grounded in building relationships between students, institutions, and human and more-than-human communities. Through active engagement, learners come to better appreciate the relationships and processes that underpin ecological and civic engagement, including by understanding the role of both *global* human and more-than-human actors.



Figure 6: University students working on the Habitat for Humanity project.

When grounded in more-than-human systems thinking, service learning can also play a decolonial role, shifting perspectives on 'service' and re-imagining a more co-creative and process-based educational framework that bridges HE, community and lifelong learning. Studies show that service learning can cultivate "civic



professionalism".⁶⁰ This emphasises the importance of education in fostering civic engagement, a key theme on the conceptual approach set out above. Service learning in HE institutions can go towards crafting a more holistic approach to HE that counter-balances the current over-emphasis on employability.

6.4. Distributed learning

Distributed learning involves decentralising educational opportunities across various locations, formats, and communities. This approach allows students to access resources and participate in learning experiences regardless of their geographical or institutional affiliations. Distributed learning can leverage digital platforms to create collaborative spaces where learners engage across cultural, ecological, and disciplinary boundaries. In a regenerative framework, distributed learning embodies the principles of interconnectedness and inclusivity. Decentralising access fosters equity and invites participation from a diverse learner base, including underrepresented communities and offers providers opportunities to share and mitigate risk and cost. Practical examples include hybrid programs integrating local in-person mentorship with global digital content, multi-site co-taught courses, and de-institutionalised networks that support community-led learning hubs.

6.5. Project-based learning

Project-based learning (PBL) emphasises inquiry-driven, hands-on activities where learners tackle real-world challenges. By engaging in projects with tangible outcomes, students develop critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and interdisciplinary collaboration. In regenerative education, PBL connects learners with their communities and environments, encouraging solutions-oriented approaches to ecological and social problems. For instance, students might work on local water conservation initiatives, biodiversity mapping, or community food security programs. Such projects build systems literacy, bridging theoretical knowledge with practical applications. This approach also enhances student agency by allowing learners to take ownership of their projects, fostering a sense of purpose and responsibility. As a collaborative effort, PBL mirrors the participatory principles of democratic engagement.

6.6. Open education resources

Open educational resources (OER) democratise access to knowledge by providing free, reusable, and adaptable learning materials not located behind paywalls. These resources include textbooks, research papers, videos, and interactive modules, often distributed under

⁶⁰ Nicholas R Jordan, David A Andow, and Kristin L Mercer, 'New Concepts in Agroecology: A Service-Learning Course', *Journal of Natural Resources & Life Science Education* 34 (2005): 88.



Creative Commons licenses. Within a regenerative model, OER promotes inclusivity and reduces financial barriers to education, emphasising equitable access for a diverse audience. Moreover, the collaborative creation and adaptation of OER can be a participatory process, involving educators, students, and community members in knowledge production. This reflects the co-creative ethos of regenerative systems.

6.7. Microcredentials and stackable modules

Microcredentials represent smaller units of certification that validate specific skills or competencies, which can be 'stacked' to build toward more comprehensive qualifications. This modularity provides flexibility for learners to upskill or reskill in response to evolving needs across diverse sectors. From a regenerative perspective, microcredentials support lifelong learning and adaptability. They enable learners to engage with education incrementally, addressing immediate challenges while fostering long-term development. For example, microcredentials in renewable energy systems or climate justice advocacy can prepare individuals to tackle specific ecological crises. This approach can disrupt traditional degree-centric hierarchies by emphasising skills and competencies over formal credentials, democratising educational opportunities.

6.8. Transdisciplinary approaches

Transdisciplinary learning both interrogates and blurs traditional disciplinary boundaries, integrating perspectives and methodologies from multiple fields to address complex, systemic challenges. This approach encourages learners to engage holistically with issues that intersect ecological, social, and economic dimensions. In regenerative education, transdisciplinarity is vital for fostering systems thinking by combining insights and approaches from a range of disciplines to emphasise problem-based or solutions-oriented learning. Such integration mirrors the interconnected nature of real-world systems and fosters innovative collaborative approaches. Transdisciplinary approaches also encourage the co-creation of knowledge, involving stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, including indigenous communities, policy-makers, and scientists, thereby aligning with principles of equity and inclusivity.

6.9. Problem-based and system-based learning

Problem-based learning and system-based learning (SBL) focus on understanding and addressing complex challenges through inquiry and analysis. While problem-based learning emphasises solving specific, context-driven problems, SBL extends this by examining the broader systemic interactions that shape those problems. In a regenerative learning context, these approaches cultivate ecological literacy and resilience. For example, students tackling a local food insecurity issue might explore its connections to global supply chains,



soil health, and economic inequality, identifying leverage points for systemic change. SBL aligns with the regenerative principle of feedback loops by encouraging learners to recognise the cascading effects of interventions. This holistic approach ensures that solutions are not only effective but also equitable and sustainable.

7. Conclusion

This paper has set out a conceptual approach to democracy and education rooted in living systems thinking that brings together the educational philosophies of Jiddu Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore with civic republican political thought's emphasis on participatory decision-making. This approach views education as valuable both intrinsically, for the holistic development of learners, and instrumentally, to create the conditions that enable greater civic participation in democratic decision-making. Participatory decision-making within HE institutions further reinforces this. There are several educational innovations based on this conceptual approach that can be valuably implemented in HE providers across the UK, the USA and India. Further research and pilot projects are necessary on each of these to gauge how they might be designed and delivered most effectively in each context



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