

THE INTEGRATED CURRICULUM AND THE PLACE(S) OF LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: NOTES FROM AN INDIAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

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Abstract

It has been often argued in New Literacy Studies (NLS) that beyond our ability to simply read and write in print, literacy broadly defined is no less than our ability to interpret and function in the world we live in, which includes everything from films, music, technology, food and sports to cultural practices and social mores. The places we inhabit in our social worlds and our everyday experiences in these places teach us to read our worlds and function according to our knowledge of our world. In the process we interpret and produce meanings through our actions. However, a principal criticism against schools at any level has been the failure to acknowledge and/or tap into students' learning in the world. Drawing on educationists and philosophers like Gruenewald, Jardine, Tagore, Dyson, and Bigelow, the paper argues that by neglecting students' everyday learning-in-the-world, schools perpetuate an epistemic violence on students by severing their school learning from their cultural life-world. As a result of which, schools often fail many students by turning formal education into something "unreal, heavy and abstract" (Tagore, 2009) for them.

As a corrective, then, the paper attempts to build a case for the need of a placed-based, integrated curriculum at all levels of schooling. Next, building on examples offered by India's eminent literati and educationist, Rabindranath Tagore's experimental model school in India and the widely emulated Foxfire program in U.S.A, both of which has much in common, the paper offers a vision for meaningfully integrating university education with students' lives in the most commonplaces of all places such as classrooms, canteens, hallways, cafeterias, homes, back yards and street-corners, among others. The paper supports its argument with two empirical examples from the author's academic life in an Indian university. The examples offer two real life incidents with great learning potentials that the author as a student had participated in, but only one of which being located on the curricular border-space of the mandated syllabus, could be integrated to the official curriculum by an enterprising teacher, while the other was restricted to the marginal spaces of school learning. The paper argues that while in the first case, the author and his peers' learning-in-the-world was successfully merged with his school learning, the latter was an opportunity lost to the tunnel-vision of academia. Not discounting its potential at the primary and secondary levels, the paper, therefore, argues that such integrations, when made possible, allows for university or *vishwa-vidyalay* (in Bengali it literally means a 'world school' or a 'universe school') education to become, true to its name, essentially universal by encompassing the students' social universe. In conclusion, the paper argues that it is important for educators and education researchers to pay attention to the local places of their students' lives in order to build bridges between the state mandated curricula and students' socio-cultural worlds, and also offers some ideas for attaining it.

Keywords: Integrated Curriculum, Places of Learning, Place-based Pedagogy, Informal Education, Indian University Education, Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Several scholars have advised teachers to pay attention to the funds of knowledge that students bring into the classroom from their various other social worlds (Alim, 2011; Dyson, 1993; Eshach, 2007; Moje et al., n.d; Moje et al., 2004; Moll et al., 1992; Vadeboncoeur, 2006). I interpret this to mean that the places in our lives and our experiences in these places teach us invaluable lessons, particularly how to read the world we live in which happens to be the definition of literacy in Alim's (2011) view. Yet many scholars have also pointed out how schools often, in practice, fail to acknowledge and tap into students' knowing-in-the-world (Moje et al, 2004; Dyson & Ganeishi, n.d; Dyson, 1993; Alim, 2011; Tagore, 2009). Indeed, some have even argued that far from acknowledging students' learning-in-the-world, schools often actually perpetuate an

epistemic violence on students by cutting them off from the pulse of their cultural life and learning (Gruenewald, 2003a; Bigelow, 1996; Tagore, 2009). This makes education “unreal, heavy and abstract” (Tagore, 2009) and causes disconnect (Dyson, 1993; Noddings, 2005) and *ennui* or boredom (Sidorkin, 2004) in students.

For alternatives, we may choose to look at such philosophers of education as Gruenewald, Jardine, Tagore, and Bigelow, who have all argued for a place-based, integrated curriculum. Gruenewald (2003a) argues, citing Heidegger, that places attune us to our “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962, cited in Gruenewald, 2003a), and are sites for negotiation of our cultures and our identities – “places, memory, experience, and identity are woven together over time” (p.625). Both Gruenewald (2003a) and Jardine (1990, 2006a, 2006b) stress that paying attention to the ordinary, the commonplace, and the (seemingly) unimportant is very important, and both of them are echoed in Tagore’s (2009) ideas of education.

Tagore’s philosophy of education had a spiritual dimension and was influenced by his Nature-centric perspective of life. Tagore (1933/2000) believed that all beings, animate and inanimate, and all knowledge come together as one in Nature. His ‘Nature’ is a creative and sustaining force, the only ‘Truth’ in the universe that has its own unique ways, which it teaches us through simple ‘life-lessons.’ In Tagorean (1940/2000) view, far less than being subservient to human knowledge of sciences and technology, ‘Nature’ is our best teacher and we all have our own place(s), among others, in ‘Nature’ because, as Wendell Berry (1983) puts it rather eloquently, “our knowledge of the world instructs us first of all that the world is greater than our knowledge of it” (Wendell Berry cited in Jardine, 2006a). Tagore’s idea of a ‘complete’ or ‘wholesome’ education stemmed from his belief that “each human is born conscious of one truth, which is the background to our knowledge of all other truths” (Peden, 1978, p.211). For Tagore (2009), then, “the object of education is to give [back] man the unity of truth” (p.95) that he is born with by helping him from childhood to “grow into [that] knowledge” (p.90). To “grow into knowledge,” one needs a nurturing ‘atmosphere’ or ‘environment’ and ‘freedom’ or ‘leisure’ to explore and experience the beauty and wonder of ‘Nature’ (O’Connell, 2008) – those little things in life of seemingly little consequence like watching blossoms bloom or observing a squirrel running up and down a tree. Tagore (2009) criticizes schools for robbing children of both their freedom and their environment: “We rob the child of his earth to teach him geography, of language to teach him grammar” (p.90). Schools not just rob children of their natural environment by holding them indoors when they should be out playing, but Tagore was also acutely aware of how schools fail to integrate with children’s social environment as well, “the schools in our country, far from being integrated to society, are imposed on it from outside” (p.113), and the sense of disconnect this produces in children: “The courses they teach are dull and dry, painful to learn, and useless when learnt. There is nothing in common between the lessons the pupils cram up from ten to four o’clock and the country where they live; no agreement, but many disagreements, between what they learn at school and what their parents and relatives talk about at home” (p.113).

In Tagore’s view this was no short of an epistemic violence perpetuated on children’s mind by teachers due to their disciplinary tunnel vision: “When we accept discipline for ourselves, we try to avoid everything except that which is necessary for our purpose; it is this purposefulness, which belongs to the adult mind, that we force upon school children” (p.108) [see also Jardine, 2006a, 2006b]. Therefore, when he established his own school, Tagore, in complete disregard for any curriculum, allowed his students to pursue their natural interests in learning. This idea of putting the child before the curriculum is also echoed in Dyson & Genishi (n.d).

Jardine’s (1990, 2006b) view of an integrated curriculum is also similar to Tagore’s in that he views curricular integration as the learner’s spiritual, sensory (embodied), and intellectual integration with the wonders of nature; but Jardine (1990) also views integration of knowledge as an awareness of the web of socio-historic inter-relationships between people and events in the world. Therefore, Jardine (1990, 2006a) proposes an integrated curriculum that would not only serve to make students aware of *their place* in places, but would also draw their attention to *their place* in the socio-historic processes in the world. Jardine’s (1990, 2006a, 2006b) vision of an integrated curriculum then, not only attempts to make visible the connection that exist between disciplinary fields but also the connections that exist between humans and their environment.

2. ARE ALL PLACES PEDAGOGICAL?

Appealing as it may sound, the notion of integration of knowledge might find novice teachers like me struggling to conceptualize a place-based, integrated curriculum in the practical context of their living and teaching. How does an integrated curriculum look? What does it entail? How to design it, implement it, or

teach it? Which places should be considered? These questions go largely unanswered in the literature, thereby, leaving the novice teacher interested in curricular integration in a conundrum.

Tagore (1933/2000) offers us one vision with his model school, *Vishwabharati*, in Shantiniketan. But such a model hamlet-school, tucked far away from the bustle of the city (that in Tagore's poetic-vision symbolizes all that is wrong with modern civilization) in the lap of nature in rural Bengal, might be a far cry from the realities that constrain the professional lives of many teachers. Moreover much has changed in his dream school since Tagore established *Vishwabharati* in 1918. Ironically, even the sheltered cove, his 'abode of peace' (*shantiniketan*), where he chose to build his school for the easy access to nature it provided to the students has changed drastically as expanding 'city-culture' stealthily, but steadfastly crept up on it, transforming Shantiniketan into a major tourist hub in West Bengal today.

Another example is provided by the widely emulated Foxfire program that began in 1966 in the Rabun Gap Nacoochee School in the heart of the Appalachia in northern Georgia (Hart, 1997). In the spirit of 'cultural journalism,' students in the standard English course of the school were encouraged to interview their community elders about a variety of things, including "planting time, ghost stories, poetry, songs, crafts, food, and even moonshining" (Noddings, 2005, p.64). Based on the interviews, the children wrote articles illustrating various facets of their Appalachian culture that were published in the form of magazines by the children for a wider audience.

Both Tagore's model school at Shantiniketan, Bolpur, and the Foxfire program banked heavily on the environmental resources and opportunities afforded by the respective locations of each school – rural places in natural surroundings that were evidently rich in unique local lore, history, and distinctive local cultures. But what if the school I taught in lacked natural environment? Can there really be wild places "in backyards, parks, empty lots, and schoolyards" as Noddings (2005) suggests? Are all places pedagogical? What of schools in places that are harder to conceptualize as 'unique places;' places whose history, culture and lore are less obvious and less tangible than Shantiniketan or the Appalachia – big, urban places with complex histories and sometimes no immediately apparent unique culture, located far from the loving embrace of nature; "urban settings where ... access to natural areas usually demands more time and planning" (Stevenson, 2008, p.355)? I am thinking of places like New York City, Istanbul and Kolkata. Is nature to be found in NYC or do we need to look elsewhere, like upstate New York maybe? What about the Central Park – does it or does it not count? Could we possibly comprehend Kolkata as *a place* (or a multitude of places, maybe?) in our imagination? Being in NYC or Kolkata, is it possible for us as learners and educators to have a uniquely meaningful and intimate relationship with the place(s) of our lives? Could such places like NYC or Kolkata be put at the center of our curriculum, and, indeed, at the center of our learning lives?

This dilemma of teachers in urban schools is noted by Gruenewald (2003b) who forwards a critical pedagogy of place arguing that the literature on "place-based education lacks a specific theoretical tradition" (p.3), and with its inordinate focus on the outdoor, the environmental and ecological, and the rural at the expense of the "urban, multicultural arena" (which is the focus of the critical pedagogues) causes place-based education to be "frequently discussed at a distance" (p.3) [For a criticism of Gruenewald, see Bowers, 2008]. On the other hand, critical pedagogy in its emphasis on the social and urban contexts often neglects the environment and ecology. Stevenson (2008) also criticizes critical pedagogy for often being too abstract and theoretical, besides being neglectful of places, to be of practical use to teachers: "A solely theoretical orientation that lacks practical guidance for educators" (p. 356). Moreover, much of the literature on critical pedagogy directs attention to places outside the academia – to the homes, communities, neighborhoods, and cities (e.g., Haymes, 1995), as if places and communities do not exist in schools, or assume a certain place-blindness in their theoretical abstraction as pointed out by Gruenewald (2003b) and Stevenson (2008) [for some examples of critical studies that both focus on school environment or communities in schools, and pay attention to places within schools, see Bettie, 2003; Collins, 2003; and McDonough, 1997].

We might instinctively feel drawn towards Gruenewald's (2003b) call for "a critical pedagogy of places" that attempts to pay attention both to issues of power in social relationships between people and to the places in our lives that are the sites of all our relationships and struggles, but that doesn't make our job any easier. We would still need to wrestle with the idea of an integrated, place-based curriculum in a place like Kolkata in order to make it work for us because even in proposing a marriage of critical pedagogy and place-based education, Gruenewald (2003b) doesn't offer us any concrete vision of what such a curriculum might look like. In any case, I think, part of the figuring out happens in wrestling with the idea, which is why this wrestling is important for me, and should be for anybody else trying to put an integrated, place-based curriculum in a real place. Even with an abundance of nature and local lore at Shantiniketan, Rabindranath

had to struggle to put his plan of the model school in practice, and he says he often had to deviate from his own ideals to concede to others' wishes: "I must admit that I have not been able to follow my own plan in every way. Forced as we are to live in a society which is itself tyrannical, and which cannot always be gainsaid, I was often obliged to concede to what I did not believe in, but what the others around me insisted on. Yet I always had it in my mind to create an atmosphere; I felt this was more important than classroom teaching" (Tagore, 2009, p.110) [Also see Aoki, 1986/1991, for a discussion of the struggles of teachers to dwell in-between curriculum-as-a-plan and curriculum-as-lived-experience].

Therefore, drawing on my five years' experience as a student in an Indian university in Kolkata, I have attempted to wrestle with the idea of a place-based, integrated curriculum to offer a slice of what it might look like in more commonplaces of places. Chiefly focusing on two of my major learning experiences, one of which I see as located on the curricular border and the other outside the official curricular space in Jadavpur University (J.U.), I have attempted to illustrate how, no matter where we are, there are opportunities to meaningfully integrate our school learning with the places in our lives. Further, it is also hoped that the paper will help to illustrate with real-life examples as to how, in Stevenson's (2008) words, "young people claim [ownership of] these authentic spaces and identities within a variety of places in and out of school," thereby reiterating an important question raised by Stevenson (2008) and others [for example, Weis and Dimitriadis, 2008, cited in Stevenson, 2008] "as to where 'education' happens" (p.355). Lastly, the paper argues for the need for educators to pay attention to the local places of students' lives for building 'bridges' (Eshach, 2007; Stevenson, 2008; Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010) between the mandated curriculum and students' lives – something that is often neglected by educators due to their restricted pedagogical tunnel-vision.

In the following sections of this paper, I would first offer, as mentioned above, two vignettes from my student life in J.U. that I now see with the advantage of hindsight as my attempt at understanding the meanings of two very important (and overlapping) places of my life – India and J.U. respectively. The first vignette is about my experience of working on a translation project (*A Season of Stories*, 2003) initiated by the students of Comparative Literature department with help and encouragement from a teacher, and which was partially integrated into the formal curriculum of the class. I see this learning experience as located on the curricular border of the school. The second vignette narrates my experiences of being a part of an entirely student led initiative to form a non-affiliated and independent student organization for the students of the Arts Faculty of the university without any active help or guidance from teachers. I view this learning experience as located outside the official curricular space of the university, and also as a missed opportunity for integrating students' learning outside the classroom with their learning inside the classroom.

In conclusion, drawing on the examples of learning-in-the-world detailed in the examples, I offer a vision for making a place-conscious, integrated curriculum to work within the existing academic climate of the university through employment of an *adda*-based pedagogy. This, I argue, makes provisions for the integration of students' classroom learning with their knowing-in-the-world without necessarily requiring an overhaul of the existing structures of higher education in India, which, for reasons beyond the scope of this paper, is extremely difficult to achieve, if not entirely impossible.

2.1. First vignette: a season of stories

It all began one Saturday afternoon as Sayantan Dasgupta (2003) writes in 'The Story So Far... (in fits and starts and eight different fonts),' the editorial piece for the book that was the fruit of our labor and love: "a story which began one November (or was it March, or September, perhaps?) Saturday afternoon in A2/23, a first-floor classroom in the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University" (p.9).

For me, and some others, it was one Saturday afternoon out of the ordinary. It's not like we never had Saturday classes before – sometimes when we fell a lot behind the syllabus, some professors would have us come in on a Saturday for 'extra classes' and we usually went, although grudgingly. However, this turned out to be different; not only did it become a weekly thing, every Saturday, every week, week after week, but it was *WE*, the students, who decided that is how it should be.

As the editorial says, the class was reading Modern Indian Short Stories and questions arose by the dozen: "What is 'modern'? What is 'Indian'? What is modern Indian short story...how do we know this is what modern Indian short stories are like ... Is this a typical modern Indian short story? Or, are we doing this because it is a 'different' story ... what conclusion can we possibly come to from ten stories ... and, Sayantanda, what about new stories" (pp. 9-10)? There was nothing particularly unique about the questions that arose in the class. What was different was instead of providing us with answers, as is customary; our teacher declared that he did not know the answers to our questions. However, he did encourage us to find

out on our own and also volunteered to be a part of our inquiry, initially by adding his own questions to our posse of questions. Since we were all Indians living in modern times and also had some familiarity with the genre of short story from our experiences of reading scores of them up until that point in our lives, we figured that we all had some ideas about the possible answers to our own questions. It was then just a matter of teasing out our implicit knowledge through dialogues and discussions and applying them to our readings. We also realized that ten stories were probably too few as a sample to understand the trends in the huge corpus of short stories in numerous regional languages of India. This was our first lesson of the class – this intimate realization of the complexities of our multilingual nation (which would have been hard to arrive at if our teacher answered our questions), even though we came in knowing that short stories are written in all major languages of India and that we will be reading several of these regional short stories in English translation.

So it was decided that we needed to explore further; read more stories than the syllabus prescribed; and to this end we established a (re)search committee which we named ‘The Forum for Indian Short Stories.’ This led us to our next problem – what exactly were we looking for or researching in these stories, each of which was, in essence, so very different from the other? After some initial discussions and fights, we agreed that we were looking for a ‘place’ called India in the stories, and that we were also looking for ourselves – our lives and our realities – in them. It was an effort led by the students from the fore and Sayantanda, our teacher, helped us articulate the questions we had and identify our challenges. Our biggest obstacle, we realized, was our syllabus. The syllabus specified ten stories as Annie often reminded us during the initial days of planning our course of action – “IT’S TEN REMEMBER?” (p.10); and, in any case, there wasn’t any time for more stories in the already reading-heavy course. So it had to be Saturdays – outside of regular class hours and the official school curriculum.

Through the Forum’s explorations of translations of modern Indian short stories, we learned not only about the genre and the politics of translation but we also learned about India and ourselves. We learned about the many languages of India and the diverse cultures of different linguistic groups; we also learned that despite the diversity and differences, there were commonalities and intermixing of cultures, mythologies and creation stories, religious views and of histories beyond the grand narratives of history we learned in grade school, that allowed us to name the stories we were reading as ‘Indian stories.’ We already knew much of these facts, figures and statistics from grade school, but we had never realized them as vividly as markers of our identities. We also learned languages (for instance, I learned to read Axomiya while translating a story for the project) and we learned to translate, to plan, design, and execute a translation project from scratch to finish. And, in the process, we learned a lot about each other and ourselves. The learning which took the form of this translation project and culminated (?) in a translated volume of modern Indian short stories collaboratively put together by all of us and published by the department (literally) took us places and taught us to ask questions about our relationships to these places. We dived into the dusty archives of the National Library in search of stories where I realized that I loved the smell of old, yellowed books and decided that I wanted to become an archive researcher after I graduated; we travelled all over the city, and sometimes outside (for example, I and a fellow student had to go meet a resource person in Palta – a place at the outskirts of Kolkata I didn’t even know existed, where my companion connected with the neighborhood she lived in as a child); I had to meet with our collaborators and translators at the university on Sunday afternoons, when I realized that the university seemed an entirely different place on weekends. At each of these points in our journey right from the start to the end, we all had many questions some of which our editor managed to capture succinctly in the editorial (using eight different fonts to capture the polyphony of voices), while others went undocumented – why should we italicize *bhasha*¹ words? If our readers were primarily English speaking Indians, wouldn’t they know when they come across a non-English word? “*Why on earth would you gloss ‘pativrata’ like this*” (p.11)? “THE TRANSLATOR WRITES, ‘BOTTU IS A VERMILLION MARK WORN ON THE FOREHEAD BY HINDU WOMEN OTHER THAN WIDOWS’. MY MOTHER DOESN’T WEAR ANYTHING LIKE THAT! ANY NON-INDIAN READER WOULD THINK ALL HINDU WOMEN WEAR SINDOOR AND SPORT A ‘BOTTU’... WHEN I READ ‘VERMILLION’, I HAVE TO TRANSLATE IT INTO ‘SINDOOR’ TO UNDERSTAND IT – WHY USE ‘VERMILLION’ AT ALL’” (pp.11-12) [Formatting retained as in the original]?

Posing these questions to each other, and to ourselves, while trying to find answers from the repertoire of our lived experiences and knowing-in-the-world helped us become aware of the cultural construct of ‘India’ in the stories we were reading, as also of the contested nature of such constructs. We came to realize that “not

¹ Bhasha words are Indic language (bhasha) words like *maa* (mother).

only is our experience of places mediated by culture, education, and personal experience, but places themselves are products of culture” (Casey, 1996, cited in Gruenewald, 2003a, p.626).

The point of this short vignette is that it is atypical of the formal higher education scenario in India – “we [are] doing this because it is a ‘different’ story!” Typically the questions that arose in class would have been answered (or brushed aside) in the class and the Forum would never have seen the light of day. Luckily for us, besides the ingenuity of our teacher that deserves mention, our interests in modern Indian short stories and translation of *bhasha* literatures into English intersected with the department’s current research and development agenda that included organizing translation workshops and seminars, and eventually establishing a school of translation studies within the department for research and translation of Indic literature. Our teacher, Sayantanda (who was a Ph.D. student in the department at the time), too, had research interests in translation studies and besides teaching Modern Indian Short Stories in Translation to our undergraduate class, he also taught a MA class in Translation Studies. All these intersectional ties and overlaps were instrumental for the success of the Forum. Not only did we receive encouragement and help in the form of advice, resources, and funding from the department, but, more importantly, the project received the departments’ explicit approval, even though unofficially in the beginning. This helped situate the Forum’s work, despite being only minimally related to the official curriculum, on the curricular boundary of the school, which, in turn, lent certain legitimacy to our time spent on the project as ‘schoolwork.’ For in their zealous attempts to keep students from spending too much time in ‘extra-curricular’ activities, which are seen as distractions for students’ learning, teachers and parents in India often have a tendency to throw the baby out with the bath water.

It is not like parents and teachers do not recognize the importance of ‘fun’ and ‘play’ in students’ lives. It is generally believed that such activities have some, if limited, benefits, which is why official curricular visions of higher education in India typically allow for such temporary lapses or *recess*, if you will, as ‘annual sports day’ or ‘annual fests.’ But these activities, like any outdoor activity as Bigelow (1996) points out, are considered “fun,” not learning – “real knowledge was ‘Egypt,’ arithmetic, report-writing, the Civil War – even ‘Indians,’ but in a ‘let’s name the tribes and make tee-pees’ kind of way” (p.15). Therefore, beyond the annual sports-day and the fest, beyond the ‘TV-time’ and the ‘recess’ – a word that itself connotes a “break” from ‘study’ or ‘work,’ students are repeatedly called upon to demonstrate the worth of their non-curricular, socio-cultural activities such as involvement in student politics or *adda* (a popular form of hangout in the region), or such projects located outside of the official curriculum as ‘little magazines,’ by the standards of “conventional measures in national, state, and local systems of education” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p.621).

Gruenewald (2003a) rejects this view of learning and argues that formal education is just a part of the larger cultural context of living in places (p.620). He further argues “as centers of experience, places *teach* us about how the world works and how our lives fit into the spaces we occupy” (p.621; italics in original). This argument, I think, finds ample support in the vignette above. Shortly after we started reading other short stories as part of the Forum’s initiative, we started questioning the politics of translating India (and by corollary, the politics of translating our own lived experiences). The questions that arose in the Forum’s discussions drew both from the texts we read and from our lives (“*Why on earth would you gloss ‘pativrata’ like this;*” “MY MOTHER DOESN’T WEAR ANYTHING LIKE THAT ... WHY USE ‘VERMILLION’ AT ALL;” etc.). Through this project of ours, we had unknowingly initiated what Gruenewald (2003a), around the same time, called “a rich and badly needed conversation about the relationship between the places we call schools and the places where we live our lives” (p.623). And yet, school is also one such place where we live our lives and my second vignette would attempt to illustrate how our lives in schools are also full of pedagogical possibilities.

2.2. Second vignette: FAS

My story of JU would be incomplete without an account of student politics there. Of all things, politics was probably the single issue that would have generated the biggest debate during my time there.² For every student invested in campus politics, there were many more who couldn’t care any less, especially in the Arts Faculty. This situation somewhat changed in my reckoning shortly after 2005, when Forum for Arts Students (FAS), an independent and non-affiliated student organization, was formed in the Arts Faculty and completely ousted SFI, the then state government backed student-wing of the Communist Party of India

² Parts of the first paragraph of this section is taken from my unpublished paper and blog-post, titled ‘Memories of my *alma mater*’ (see <http://ritamdutta.tumblr.com/post/42421950380>).

(Marxist), at the union two years later. Looking back at the incident that sparked an university-wide student protest (even from those who generally avoided political mobilizations), and subsequently led to formation of FAS, I see it (although I hadn't realized this then) fraught with rich implications for our relationship to and our subjectivities in places – in this case, our university, as also, I would argue, the State. It was one unfortunate incident that suddenly made us realize who we were in relation to these places and how our individual lives were connected via the places of our lives. So, then, who were we? We were, in this context, primarily students of JU and we identified the university, whether consciously or not, as 'our' place, our *sanctum sanctorum*. This was amply evident in the student outrage that broke out across the faculty divide-lines in the two campuses of JU following an incident early in the morning of 11th June, 2005, when police and paramilitary forces entered the JU main campus to forcibly disperse a group of Engineering students on a relay hunger-strike in protest against the expulsion of five engineering students. While there could have been, and I am sure were, several reasons for the student outrage at this incident (for instance, many engineering students could have interpreted the police action personally as an attack on a peer or friend, or, indeed, as an attack on the engineering community, defined by disciplinary affiliations), for many of us in the Arts Faculty, somewhat removed geographically, politically and culturally from the students of the Engineering Faculty, the cause of the outrage was a sense of violation of the *sanctum sanctorum* that we felt in the wake of the police action. Even those amongst us who did not feel particularly aligned with or supportive of the original issue that the students on hunger strike were demonstrating against or those who were not even aware of the hunger strike or the reason behind it, felt outraged at the thought that the police should have *entered* (and that the authorities should have allowed them to enter) the university in the middle of the night to forcefully disperse a lawful, democratic congregation of dissenting students. It was ultimately this sense of encroachment on our place, our 'land,' if you will, that made students from all parts of the university come together and connect as a community – suddenly we all seemed to have 'best buddies' and 'BFFs' in other faculties and departments where previously we had not known a single person.

But besides being students of the university, we were also young citizens of the nation. As citizens, the Constitution guarantees us the freedom of movement and the right of peaceful congregation at any place (barring a few) within national boundaries. Moreover, in the cultural worldview in India, even an adult undergraduate or graduate student is somewhat viewed like a child, an 'epistemic subject' (Sarangapani, 1999) whose primary concern is the pursuit after knowledge; student-hood, like childhood, is a period of 'becoming' mature. As such, students enjoy a special 'place' in society, like minors do. Barring violent or criminal activities, the government doesn't usually deploy police, far less the paramilitary, against students. The incident at JU in our understanding, therefore, violated our constitutional rights and our social privileges as students within our culture³. Further outrage was caused when the state government backed student union refused to join in the protests, leading us to question the *place* and the role of the union in the university.

In the end, it was the role played by the union that was instrumental in the formation of FAS. The dissenting groups of students who were divided on most issues in the wake of the police action in JU, all agreed on the need for a change in the political scenario in the campus. By and large, the leading sentiment was that since it was "our university" (joint leaflet circulated under the name 'General Students of Jadavpur University,' 2005), political parties such as the ruling CPI(M) in the state or other mother organizations (MO) extraneous to the university ought not to have any say in the affairs of the university, whether directly from outside or through their respective stooge student organizations (SO) in the student union.

Evidently then, the formation of FAS had its origin in our renewed understanding of the university as a place, and our feelings of ownership over "our university." This same realization also required of us that we fully understood our rights, responsibilities, and obligations that come with claiming ownership of any place. Since both the Engineering and the Science Faculties already had their non-affiliated student organizations, it became imperative that Arts Faculty too should not only have its own independent student organization but it should be organized and powerful enough to run for the election the following year and win it. And this was the pitch that we carried to the student voters in canvassing for FAS when it was finally formed and registered. Those of us who pooled in our efforts to build FAS realized that once the initial outrage dies out in the course of the year, it would be tricky to keep FAS on the track of election and win it because in the

³ While much of the cultural practices of students in Indian colleges and universities could be read as a response to and refutation of the cultural view of the 'student-as-a-child' Discourse, yet students are also often acutely aware of the privileges (for example, lenient treatment from law-enforcement authorities) that such a view affords them in certain situations and operate under such understanding.

already politically polarized environment of West Bengal at the time, most students, through their family's political affiliations and other obligations and relationships outside the university, were already leaning towards the existing union backed relentlessly by the state government. FAS was a nascent organization with limited (wo)man power, very little money, and no political backing. We realized that the only thing going for FAS at the time was that it was a non-affiliated and independent student organization by and for the students of "our university;" it was 'we' for 'us' and its *raison d'être* was to claim ownership of our lives in "our university." In our attempt to keep the indignation at the police action alive through documentaries, seminars, press-meets, and posters long after the initial knee-jerk reaction had settled down, FAS selectively drew from symbols from popular culture that similarly emphasized youth activism and claiming ownership of the places in our lives⁴.

Our understanding of taking ownership of "our university" was more nuanced than a simple slogan of "JU for JUites" (FAS leaflet, 2006) that FAS consciously tried to propagate. We realized that a culturally complex place like J.U contained smaller places within its boundaries such as Faculties, departments, schools, clubs, etc. FAS was an Arts Faculty-centric student organization largely as a result of circumstances, but we also realized Arts Faculty to be a distinct spatial entity within J.U. That we had some understanding of the ideologies that went into the making of Arts Faculty was evident when FAS organized a job fair exclusively for the students of Arts because J.U initially being a tech-school and still largely being helped with donations from its tech-alumni across the globe, the management had a particularly tech-centric view. Consequently, organizing job-fairs for its "second-class citizens of Arts Faculty" (FAS leaflet, 2005) had never occurred to the management even though J.U's placement cell was quite proactive in organizing placements for the engineering students. Our understanding of and engagement with campus democracy was essentially place-based and intrinsically connected to our lived experiences in our places in the Arts Faculty. Two issues on which FAS moved come immediately to mind in this context. One was the establishment of a 'volunteer writers' pool' for the blind students of J.U Arts and the other was the 'library movement' that FAS had initiated for the benefit of the 'evening scholars.'

Each year J.U admits several blind students under the "handicapped quota," most of whom join the Arts Faculty. Yet, despite this sizeable number of blind students on its roster, J.U till date does not have any provision to accommodate these students with special needs. During the annual exams (later semester exams), these blind students were allowed to bring in a peer as a 'writer' to the examination hall to write their exams as per their dictations to them. The "writers" had to be bonafide students of the same faculty (but could not be from the same department or subject-area) with a valid id card on person and the examinee

⁴ Rakesh Omprakash Mehra's superhit film, *Rang de Basanti* (literally, 'Color it Saffron' – one of the three colors of the Indian national flag), narrated the tale of 'Young India,' represented by a group of privileged and disaffected university students who were jarred out of their nonchalance one fine morning at the news of the death of their pilot friend killed in an attempt to fly an ill-maintained aircraft as a result of government money for maintenance of aircrafts being siphoned elsewhere. Initially, the youths approached the powers that be for redress but when it became clear that despite assurances nothing was going to happen, and the youths were in fact beaten away by the police from where they had gathered to protest, the young protagonists realized, in a radicalism-meet-Gandhi approach, that in order to see any real change in the world they needed to be the change and decided to take a very drastic step. The film was released early in 2006, shortly before the Arts Faculty Student Union election in which FAS ran for the first time. The memory of police lathicharge on campus in 2005 was still relatively fresh in our minds, as a result of which we immediately connected with the film. Just as in the film, a jarring incident in our immediate lives had charged up the previously nonchalant atmosphere of JU Arts and like in the film, the powers that be in JU Arts – the student union – did nothing for redress. Therefore, we realized, like the young protagonists of the film it was time for us, the students of JU Arts, to take a radical step, although not quite so drastic as in the film, to change the situation in campus. A very popular song sequence in the film showed the young protagonists creating graffiti on walls with cans of spray paint (a symbol of modern, westernized Young India?). Two nights before the Election Day, we decided to spray paint (even though spray paint was costly and we had limited budget) every available wall on campus with the slogan that was to become the motto of FAS in the years to come: "DARE TO DREAM, DARE TO DO ~ FAS." While I don't know if this had the intended effect on the student-voters (that is, if the symbol was decoded by the students the way we had hoped for), although it did seem to create a lot of excitement among students, what is important in this example is that it reveals our understanding of the importance of claiming ownership of our places, be it India or our university. This also illustrates how young people use popular culture to read (and sometimes re-write) their worlds.

was solely responsible for finding a “writer.” While students generally helped out whenever they could, it was on the whole an unorganized effort and the university management, it seemed, didn’t care. As a result, each year during exams, the blind students of J.U Arts were greatly inconvenienced, often having to desperately run around the campus for securing “writers” at the last moment. Realizing this to be an issue greatly affecting some students’ lives, FAS attempted to create a volunteer pool of potential “writers” and matched their schedules with that of the blind examinees.

Similarly, the university posed certain unique challenges for our ‘night scholars,’ who were mostly working-adults coming from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Although the university admitted several of these ‘night scholars’ to a handful of courses every year, it failed to provide them with the same infrastructure and resources that were available to its ‘day scholars.’ Although officially open from 10 AM to 9 PM, the university operated with minimal staff at night. Consequently the departmental libraries closed at 5 PM, and the main library downed shutter at 6 PM even though night classes were held till 9 PM. Even the elevators in the buildings were switched off at 7 PM, thereby greatly inconveniencing night students. FAS moved to keep the elevators operational till 9 PM and the libraries open till at least 8 PM. Eventually, after winning the election in 2007, FAS endeavored to establish a ‘union library’ at the Arts Faculty Student Union (AFSU) room and stocked it with newspapers, magazines and some of the most ‘frequently consulted books,’ generously donated by former students and teachers.

My point in narrating these vignettes is to illustrate how much place matters tangibly for campus democracy and, generally, in the lives of students. While the erstwhile student union mobilized on larger issues at the state, national, or even international level such as the Iraq war or the hanging of Saddam Hussein, FAS chose to primarily focus on the meaningful local issues. The message that FAS succeeded in bringing home to the students was that we needed to engage first with the immediate places of our lives if we wanted to change our world. This is echoed in Wendell Berry’s words: “unless one is willing to be destructive at a very large scale, one cannot do something except locally, in a small place” (Wendell Berry, 1992 cited in Gruenewald, 2003a, p. 634).

In his book, *Race, Culture, and the City: A Pedagogy for Black Urban Struggle*, Haymes (1995) illustrates how colonized Blacks “name and transform – or decolonize – their own geographical situationality” (Haymes, 1995, cited in Gruenewald, 2003, p.5). In many ways, I see FAS’ political struggles to implement key changes in the social world of the students of J.U Arts, succinctly captured in the slogan “looking to change the world of arts” on its logo, as attempts to “name and transform” the socio-political situation of students in the Art Faculty. While I fully realize that its own political interests in the campus motivated much of what FAS did or attempted to do, nevertheless, it doesn’t make moot the point that places in our lives make us who we are and shape our vision of the world. Therefore, it is imperative for all of us, but particularly for those of us engaged in education, to pay closer attention to the places in our and our students’ lives. The particular “pedagogical conditions” that led some of us to “critically interpret” the ideologies behind the control of the places of our lives within J.U Arts was created by the incidental occurrence of the above mentioned police lathicharge in campus and the subsequent role played by the elected student union. Those were powerful moments that forced students to sit up and pay attention. However, such pedagogical conditions could also have been established otherwise, and students could have been guided to a critical awareness of ownership of places in their campus by an attentive teacher.

I hope these examples have helped to illustrate how places in general are deeply pedagogical (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b) or in Basso’s (1996) words, how “wisdom sits in places.” Therefore, in the next section, I will attempt to wrestle with the idea of how my experiences of both the translation project and the formation of FAS contained several ‘teachable moments’ that could have potentially been integrated with the official curriculum of J.U Arts.

3. TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Both the translation project and my experiences with FAS have taught me to grapple with ideas of places (India and JU respectively in this case) and my identities in these places as an Indian, a student of JU, and a “FASist” (as we sometimes jokingly referred to ourselves). Just as certain questions related to the translation project made us aware of the ideological processes that go into creating a dominant image of India, certain amenities, or lack thereof, such as the lack of job-fairs for Arts Faculty students, the authority’s attempts to prevent students from congregating at certain places in the university at certain times by either banning students from such places (such as the Open Air Theatre on a regular day) or by tearing down the very places that students tend to congregate at [see, Dutta, 2013], or the lack of library access for the evening

students taught us about the hidden curricula that went into the making of the J.U we knew and inhabited. We also realized that to not do something about it was equivalent to being complicit to the very ideological processes. Gruenewald (2003a) argues that failing “to recognize that a place is an expression of culture and that it represents the outcome of human choices and decisions, that its present state is one of many possible outcomes” is akin to being “complicit in the political processes, however problematic, that stewarded these places into being and that continue to legitimize them” (p.627). It is this very hegemonic notion of J.U, presented to us as unproblematic, uncontroversial or inevitable, that FAS refused to accept. It is also this hegemonic view of India in the English translation of *bhasha* literature that we questioned during our translation project, although the languages of our protests in the two cases were different since one operated within the academic discourse of the official curriculum and the other within the popular discourse of student culture.

3.1. Curriculum vitae

As I see it, while I personally learned many a life-lessons from both of these experiences narrated above, and I suspect the same for my peers, there were many more opportunities for integrating our learning-in-the world from these experiences, and others like these that are beyond the scope of this paper, with our learning in the classroom. Some such opportunities of integrating students’ life-experiences and their learning-in-the-world with the school’s official curricula were tapped into to an extent by teachers like Sayantanda, thereby facilitating the construction of explicit knowledge among students, while others were largely missed. Let me briefly elaborate on just a few of these from the examples above.

It is evidently clear from both examples, separated in time and geo-spatial locations, that students had a deep and complex understanding of their relationship with the places in their lives. Much of this understanding was informed by our prior experiences and knowing-in-the-world. I knew that not “ALL HINDU WOMEN WEAR SINDOOR AND SPORT A ‘BOTTU’” because my mother didn’t and we had enough cultural knowledge to realize that translating *pativrata* simply as “a faithful wife” does not do justice to the story in question. And even if some of us back then would have been hard pressed to define ‘democracy’ in academic language, we knew that in practice it meant equal rights for everyone. Therefore, it wasn’t hard for us to realize that in a democratic campus, ‘day scholars’ shouldn’t receive preferential treatment over ‘night-scholars’ and that it was wrong for Arts students to not have the benefit of job-fairs that their peers in the Engineering Faculty enjoyed.

While we came upon such an understanding of ‘democracy,’ to give but one example, through the lived processes of claiming ownership of our lives in the campus, the students of political science among us were learning about democracy and other forms of governance such as oligarchy and dictatorship in class, the students of history were studying the Third Reich and the history of Fascism in Europe, the students of English were reading Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, the students of Bengali were reading Tagore’s *Gora*, and I, in comparative literature, was learning about the ancient *agora* of the Greek city-states – the birthplace of democracy in Europe. Looking back I see such possibilities for integration, so much inter-connections between our lived-experiences and our learning in the classrooms, such possibility for consilience that it makes me wonder why it never occurred to our teachers to attempt to build curricular ‘bridges’ (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010; Stevenson, 2008) between classrooms and the happenings of our lives outside the classroom. And yet, I don’t know if I could say that even in the absence of explicit connectors – these ‘bridges,’ our learning in and outside classrooms were not mutually informed (Moll et al., 1992; Dyson, 1993; Moje et al., n.d; Moje et al., 2004; Marsh, 2003). Looking back at these personal experiences of learning-in-the-world, it seems to me that students often start building ‘bridges’ inwards, towards their classroom learning from the outside but are often not even met half-way by teachers although teachers often dwell in unique positions to guide students “into paying attention to the meanings that we attribute to particular places, the ways that places shape our beliefs about culture and identity, and our roles as place makers” (Gruenewald, 2003a, p.639).

In participating in the political endeavors of FAS, we were essentially participating in complex processes of place-making, of investing our campus and our lives in the campus with meaning. Similarly, engaging with the politics of translating Indian *bhasha* short stories into English for an Indian readership helped us to reflect on the complexities of the meanings of Nation as a collection of places of our lives. While, in the latter case, the origin of our inquiry at the official curricular boundary (it all started with students questioning the validity of our understanding of Indian short stories in translation from reading just ten stories that *the syllabus prescribed*) somewhat facilitated integration – the building of ‘bridges’ outwards from the classroom towards students’ lives outside. Although, there were challenges that required a major part of our inquiry (the reading

of additional short stories beyond the ten stories prescribed in the syllabus, and the entire process of translating stories for our book) to be relegated to Saturday afternoons and cafeterias (and other such spaces outside the official curriculum), yet the distinct overlap of the students' interests with that of our teacher and the department's current research agenda afforded us some unique opportunities, namely a lot of encouragement, some resources, and a little funding. In other words, this means the timing of our project was good. The near perfect match between the then current activities of the department and the questions that evolved in our classroom lent certain validity to our proposed project in the reckoning of those who regulated students' learning within the official curricular world; and it also allowed certain leeway for integration to our instructor. Although credit is most certainly due to our teacher for his efforts in pushing the project through to fruition, and for giving up his Saturday afternoons, I don't know what would have happened if the question, "but, what conclusion can we possibly come to from *ten* stories," raised by Anwasha in class came at a different point in time (p.10). It is often comparatively easier for teachers to build 'bridges' from inside of the classroom to connect with students' lives outside when connections between students' interests and the curricular content becomes evident, than it is to build 'bridges' from the outside linking the classroom in absence of any apparent connection. In other words, it is relatively easy to steward students into project-based, experiential learning when students express interest in translating and the class is on 'Modern Indian Short Stories in Translation' or 'Translation Studies,' than it is to connect raging student unrest outside the classroom to discussions of democracy inside the classroom in an atmosphere of stoic calm. This is because the usual, non-permeable nature of our official school curricula does not normally allow for percolation of outside ideas and emotions into the classroom, no matter how much they are conceptually or experientially related to students' learning inside the class.

An integrated curriculum is essentially a *curriculum vitae* – a living, emergent, unfinished, and unfinalized, fluid entity consisting of lived experiences and teachable moments (Jardine, 1990, 2006b) that needs to be allowed to evolve (with facilitation from the teacher and enthusiasm from the students). It cannot be neatly captured in a syllabus that slices up the school year by weeks, weeks by days, and days by hours of specific content instruction, where "knowledge is cut up into disciplines, disciplines into subjects, subjects into units of study" (Ayers & Alexander-Tanner, 2010, p.36). Such syllabi tie a teacher down instead of freeing her; erect a "Berlin Wall" (Bigelow, 1996) between school learning and students' lives outside, and prevent the percolation of outside ideas and experiences. When a teacher enters a classroom armed with such a syllabus that attempts to document students' progress by benchmarks, she is already torn on the horns of dilemma between her fidelity to the syllabus and her efforts to put students before the curriculum.

4. Conclusion: An *adda*-based pedagogy for bridge-building

I have elsewhere proposed a model of *adda*-based pedagogy for connecting students' lives with their learning in classrooms. *Adda* is a cultural institution prevalent in Bangladesh and India, where people, students included, often spend a considerable amount of their free time in casual and unrigorous social conversation with peers, usually in public places like cafés or, more typically for students, in college canteens (Chakrabarty, 1999; Sen, 2011).

The usefulness of *adda* for our purpose lies in that it is, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (1999) writes, an "unrigorous social conversation" that distinctly lacks any agenda or purpose (Bose, 2010; Chatapadhyay, 2010; Gupta, 2010; Mitra, 2010) – that is, everything that an integrated curriculum aspires for and all that the official school curriculum is not. I see students' *adda* as a loosely organized forum, a social world of peers located in a "third space" (Bhaba, 1990) between home and the school where student-citizens come together with their newly acquired knowledge of democracy, of the Third Reich, of Fascism, of *Animal Farm*, *Gora*, or the Grecian *agora* and their experiences of living-and-knowing-in-the-world to discursively construct meaning of their lived experiences in (apparently unrelated) local contexts, such as, in my case, that of J.U. However, in my understanding, relationship (between people, contexts, subjects, experiences, and places, etc.) is one of seeing and making. *Adda* is the perfect mingling place for ideas, funds of knowledge, and lived experiences, where, in the process of *mélange* of knowledge, new understanding and wisdom are naturally produced. It is also where relationships (between people, places, memory, and knowledge) are established. *Adda*, then, provides educators the most congenial atmosphere for integration of knowledge acquired through classroom learning and lived experiences.

Keeping in mind the particular environment for integration of knowledge and production of wisdom (knowing-in-the-world) that *adda* provides, I have elsewhere proposed a hypothetical model school that subscribes to an *adda*-based pedagogy – a school where instead of class periods divided by subjects, we could have several different *adda* based on students' interests. Although I have noted elsewhere that such a

school is not entirely hypothetical, being similar to the ancient Greek gymnasiums and, closer to our times, to Tagore's model school, the particular educational climate that we currently live in makes it extremely difficult to put the idea of such a school into practice. However, that shouldn't deter educators from attempting to employ *adda*-based pedagogy within the official world of schools. If the syllabus must be our guiding angel, I propose that teachers mark out time for participating in students' *adda*, at least in their personal agendas, if school committees won't let *adda* be on the official calendar. Whether teachers invite students to hang out with them in classrooms (or in the teachers' lounge) during free times at school or they go out to hang with students in their *adda* after school (like our teacher Sayantanda often did), it is important for teachers to participate in their students' *adda* as their peers. The informal context and nature of *adda* as discussed above could provide teachers with opportunities to help students see the connections they might have already established unknowingly (and which often naturally surface in dialogues in *adda*) between their classroom learning and their lived experiences. Making the connections explicit could further lead students to critically re-view their experiences and learning.

A lot goes on in the cultural world of students in this third space between home and school as I hope my two examples above have provided a glimpse of. It is for this reason that paying attention to students' experiences in local contexts and allowing them the autonomy to take ownership of their learning lives are so important for teachers. But being moored to a 'school-centric curriculum' (instead of a student-centric curriculum), most teachers fail to surmount the 'Berlin Wall' (Bigelow, 1996) that their syllabi erect between their teaching and the rich pedagogical possibilities afforded by the cultural lives of their students outside of classrooms. While it might not be possible, or even practically advisable, for teachers to participate in all of the cultural events and activities of students in the campus, *adda* provides an informal dialogic space of a forum or a collectivity where these myriad cultural events of student-life naturally come together through narrative discourses. Therefore, it is important for educators to pay attention to and participate in student *adda* as it could potentially be an excellent 'research site' for educators to understand and connect with students' cultural lives outside classrooms. In conclusion, to echo Gruenewald's (2003b) idea of critical pedagogy of places, it is important not only to pay attention to the relationships between people (our students), but to see them in the context of their relationships to places (environment).

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